

Four Central Asian Shrines

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Four Central Asian Shrines

A Socio-Political History of Architecture

By

R.D. McChesney



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Cover illustration: 19th-century view of Gur-i Mir on a Samarqand postcard (courtesy of E. Paskaleva).

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Preface

This book is a much expanded version of the Yarshater Lectures on Persian Art delivered at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London in January 2017. The lectures focused on the architecture of four Central Asian shrines—the Gur-i Mir in Samarqand, the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa in Balkh, the Noble Rawzah of Mazar-i Sharif, and the Prophet's Cloak at Qandahar. The first shrine is in Uzbekistan today, the other three are in Afghanistan. I have dealt in different ways with all of these shrines in previous publications (see bibliography). In some cases, parts of the present work have only been slightly changed (the information on the exhumations at Gur-i Mir in 1941 was in a lecture published in 2003, for example). However, the chapters on the Noble Rawzah of 'Ali at Mazar-i Sharif and the Prophet's Cloak at Qandahar contain mostly new material.

In all four cases the approach to the shrine's architecture is through their social histories, the experiences of those responsible for first constructing then maintaining and renovating the shrines' buildings as well as those affected by the shrines—the pilgrims who visited them and others for whom the shrines represented a tradition worth maintaining or repurposing.

These four shrines share certain things in common, besides the obvious one of being pilgrimage destinations. They are all linked by roles played in their stories by one, two, three, or all four of these iconic historical figures: the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 AD); 'Ali, the son of Abu Talib (d. 661 AD), the fourth Caliph of the Sunnis and the first Imam of the Shi'is; Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389 AD), the founder of Naqshbandi Sufism; and Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i (d. 1501), a literary figure of Herat and writer in Chaghatay, the precursor of modern Uzbek. Three of the four shrines—Gur-i Mir, Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, and the Noble Rawzah of Mazar-i Sharif—are bound by a common neo-Chinggisid socio-political history extending over three centuries, the fifteenth through the seventeenth. For the last three centuries, three of the four shrines—Abu Nasr Parsa, Noble Rawzah, and Khirqat al-Nabi (Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak)—have shared a common political history, this time dominated by Durrani Afghans. The fourth, Gur-i Mir in Samarqand, experienced a very different trajectory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, succumbing to European imperialism and then subject to the consequences of the Soviet socialist experiment through most of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century has seen all four shrines caught up in the tumultuous repercussions of religio-nationalist movements which have greatly affected their architecture.

This book is an attempt to see architecture, specifically the architecture of sacred places, in a social context, and to understand its evolution and changes over time as reflecting changes in society and the changed meanings society derives from the architecture. An ever-present and guiding concern has been the problem of knowing where to place the limits on what constitutes the social context.

Acknowledgements

Particularly important to this book and without which it could not have been written are the works of three Afghan historians, all now deceased: Fayz Muhammad Katib Hazarah (d. 1931), author of the masterful and comprehensive history of Afghanistan, *Sirāj al-tawārikh*; ‘Aziz al-Din Wakili Fupalza’i (Popalza’i), author of numerous foundational works of Afghan history and at least one especially important to the study of the Shrine of the Prophet’s Cloak in Qandahar, *Tārīkh-i Khirqah-i Sharīfah-i Qandahār*; and Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada’i, whose research and the resulting slim volume, *Tārīkh-i Mazār-i Sharīf*, on the ‘Alid shrine, the Noble Rawzah, at Mazar-i Sharif, is something without which another work of mine, *Waqf in Central Asia*, not to mention the chapter in this book, could never have been written. All three historians had a profound respect for documentary evidence and their works have been of great importance for this study.

Photographs play an indispensable role here as well. Gülru Necipoğlu has noted with regards to the cultural milieu of the Ottoman sultan, Süleyman (r. 1520–66), that his “empire viewed from the lens of visual material presents a rather different picture from that of Ottoman sources, enabling readings that are not explicitly stated in texts.”¹ What is true for Ottoman history is equally true for the Central Asian history of the Timurids and their successors. For the purposes of this book, the visual medium of greatest significance to enabling new and different readings than provided by texts is photography. Sometimes actual texts are only available because they have been photographed. Despite the fact that the age of photography only covers the most recent 150 years of these shrines’ histories, without photographs many of the findings about the architectural development of the four shrines would not have been possible. My deep appreciation goes, therefore, to all those who willingly shared their own photographs, provided the photographs of others, or who through their own work led me to photographs and other visual artifacts I had not known about. My most heartfelt thanks therefore goes to the following: Shivan Mahendrarajah whose thorough photographing of the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in 2008 and 2015—both before and after the work of the Aga Khan Cultural Trust team radically changed this shrine’s appearance—provided an excellent basis for discussion of the changes. Dr. Mahendrarajah also provided superb photographs of the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif taken in 2008 and 2015 which could be compared with Bill Woodburn’s fine collection taken four decades earlier in 1972 and again in 2007. Both Dr. Mahendrarajah’s and Mr. Woodburn’s

1 Necipoğlu 2019, p. 115.

photographs were particularly good for showing some of the many monumental inscriptions that serve to document the evolution of the Noble Rawzah shrine. Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada'i published photographs of the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif as well as inscriptions, some that no longer exist. Another scholar who has photographed the Noble Rawzah, Reza Husaini, also has detailed knowledge of the shrine's history and he generously shared both his photographs and his transcriptions of those epigraphic programs that are still visible, for which I am immensely grateful. In light of recent restrictions on photography at the shrine, all these photographs of the Noble Rawzah now have special importance.

Others who contributed important photographs or in one case a video or pointed me towards them and to whom I am greatly obliged are Reza Kateb, Said Reza Kazemi, Anthony Lauricella, Jolyon Leslie, Phillippe Marquis, Charles Melville, Elena Paskaleva, Janet Roberts, Rolando and May Schinasi, Maria Subtelny, and Amin Tarzi. I am especially grateful for the encouragement of May Schinasi whose work on the history of Kabul has set a very high standard for historical scholarship on Afghanistan in general and to Elena Paskaleva whose work on the Gur-i Mir has led me to new Russian sources and to rethink my ideas about the site.

I also want to underscore the importance of the magnificent photography collection of the Phototheca Afghanica, a fund carefully curated, digitized, and made available to scholars throughout the world by its founder, Paul Bucherer-Dietschi. I am grateful to him and the Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanica, under whose auspices Phototheca Afghanica was created, for allowing me to spend a few productive days at its institute in 2017 and for being able to continually access photographs in the collection over the Internet.

Others who assisted me at critical points in the research with information, guidance, or advice on particular points are Devin DeWeese, Bernard Haykel, Jo-Ann Gross, Mehdi Khorrami, Ebba Koch, Corinne Lefèvre, Peter Magierski, Bernard O'Kane, and the late Aman Musaevich Tashmukammedov. To them all I offer thanks, however belated in some cases.

To Professors Doris Abouseif and Scott Redford I am grateful for the invitation to deliver the 2017 Yarshater Lectures on Persian Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and to the Yarshater Foundation for its funding of the lecture series and support for the publication of this book. I also wish to thank the Poullada Fund for Central Asian Studies for its generous contribution to the book's publication.

Lastly, the continual support and constructively critical readings of Constance McChesney, my meticulous copy editor, commentator, and spouse, have undoubtedly shaped this book for the better as has the careful reading of the editor of this series, Charles Melville. Words are hardly sufficient thanks.

Note on Transliteration

Foreign words will be italicized and transliterated according to the system of *The International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (for Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish) and the Library of Congress transliteration table (for Cyrillic). Foreign words and names occurring in quotations will be transliterated as will the titles of books. Personal and place names, however, unless in a quotation, will only be transliterated with diacritics in the index. Any words found as entries in either *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, or in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Ninth Edition, including hadith, sura, iwan, khan, madrasah, mullah, mihrab, and shah will not be transliterated, unless found in a quotation, as they are deemed to be in common use.

Some of my transliterations may be considered eccentric; for example the transliteration of the very common name "Shayr" meaning "lion."² The names Shayr 'Ali Khan and Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i will probably be more familiar to students of Turko-Persianate history as Shir 'Ali Khan or Sher 'Ali Khan and Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i. The words for milk (*shīr*) and lion (*shayr*) are spelled identically in the Perso-Arabic alphabet. Unless the words are furnished with vowel markers, which is almost never the case, the proper vocalization depends on context, which will tell us whether 'lion' or 'milk' is signified. In personal names, it's probably safe to say that the signifier *shīn-yā'-rā'* is never intended to be read as 'milk.' It is possible that the words for 'lion' and 'milk' (*shayr* pronounced like 'share' and *shīr* like 'sheer') were at times pronounced identically but we will never know. In any event, transliteration is the process of representing in one alphabet the characters of another, not how words that the characters represent were necessarily pronounced.³

2 See e.g., the indices to Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016 where the Shayr Ahmads, Shayr 'Alis, Shayr Dils, Shayr Guls, Shayr Jans, Shayr Khans, Shayr Muhammads, Shayr Shahs and Shayr Zamans number in the hundreds.

3 The diphthong vocalization 'shayr' for 'lion' is found in Neghat 1993, s.v. and "sher" in Shukurov et al. 1969, s.v. Both also give 'shīr' for 'milk.' These dictionaries cover the Persian language in the region in which the four shrines are located.

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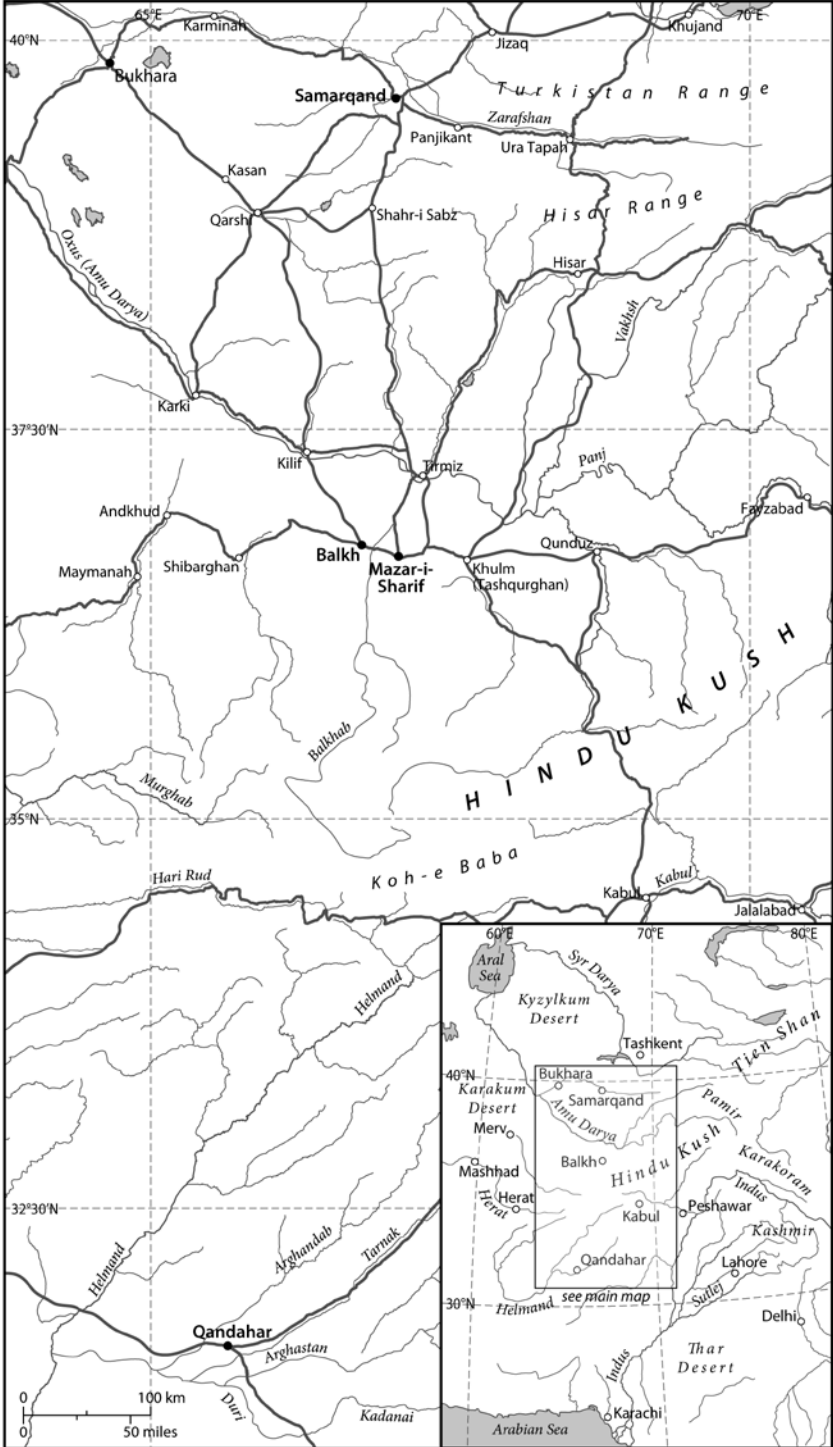
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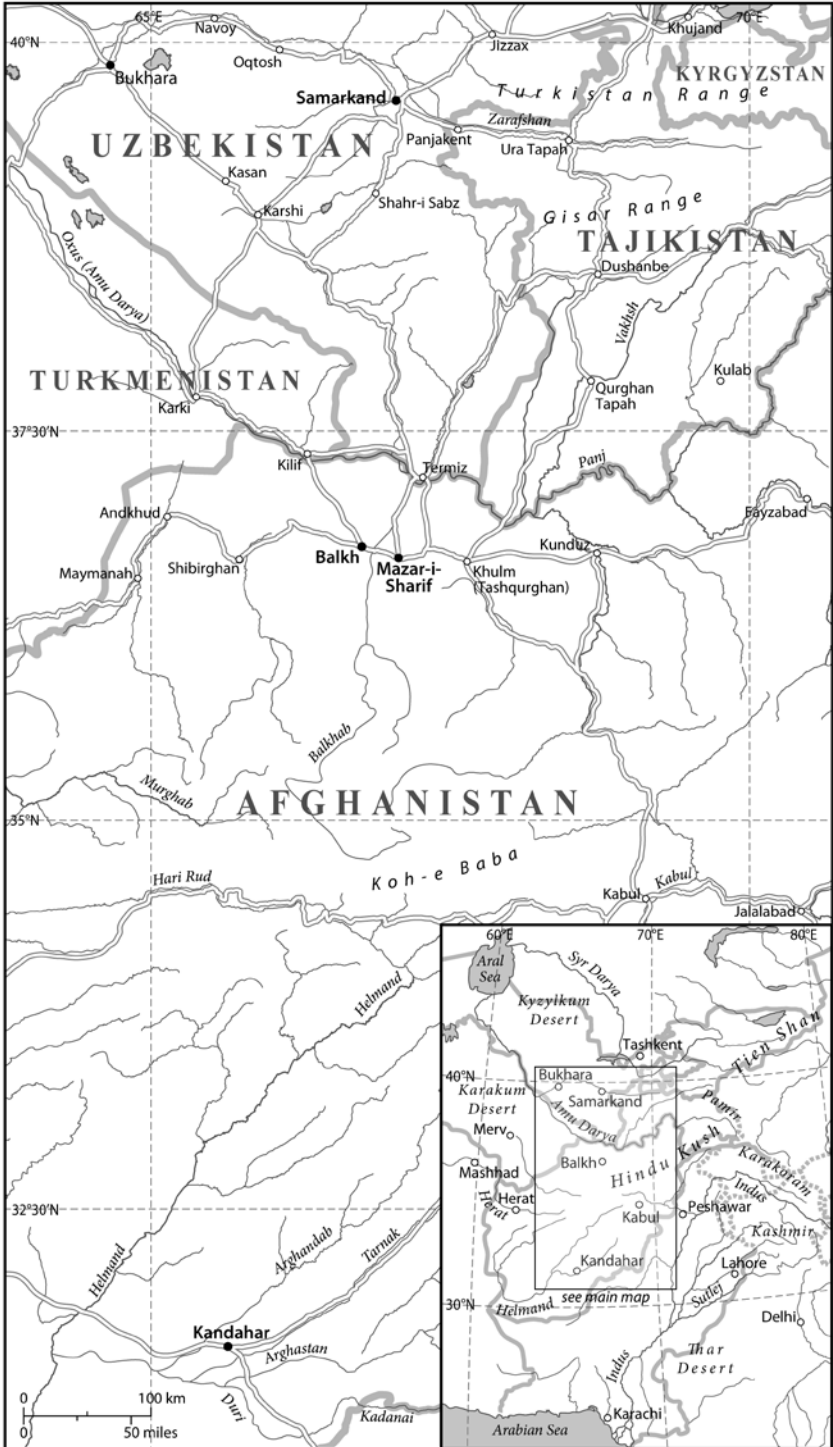
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MAP 1 The Axis of Shrines pre-1900



MAP 2 The Axis of Shrines post-1900

Introduction

Sacred places have historically helped to define the landscape of Central Asia and to form the mental maps of its inhabitants. Notable people or artifacts buried in its landscape and then commemorated by one or more permanent structures serve to sacralize a place and fix its sanctity in communal memory. The sacralization of space is an ongoing process with new sites created and older ones abandoned or reinterpreted. As new generations contemplate a sacred landscape they retell old stories and generate new ones in the search to find meaning for those now living at the site. To survive, sacred places must continue to inspire reflection and a commitment of resources to maintain any commemorative architecture and even sometimes to dramatically alter it; to encourage pilgrimage by promoting the site's benefits and so attract votive offerings; and to offer political capital in order to enlist the support of the ruling authorities.

As historians we search for the meanings of these sacred landscapes—why and for whom they were, or still are, sacred—in the stories recorded in texts and in the buildings that survive, whether in situ or in images. These stories are constantly in flux and evolving. Historians seek to organize the information conveyed in these stories and to some degree authenticate it and hypothesize its relevance for audiences often far removed temporally, culturally, and spatially from the places in question. But to the people who live with the shrines, the concerns of the historian may be of little significance and the stories that produce local meaning may be quite different from those the historian prefers. Much like local interpreters, academic historians find their own satisfying meaning in the written and visual material.

In the field of Islamic architectural history a primary approach has been to consider buildings, especially large public buildings—mosques, madrasahs, mausolea, hostels or lodges (*khānqāhs*), caravanserais—as exemplifying certain forms, techniques, materials, and functions. As for the people associated with those buildings, we know them mostly by inference, a mosque will have its staff and worshippers; a madrasah, its students, professors, and custodial staff; and a *khānqāh* its denizens and devotees. As far as those individuals are concerned, we are most likely to know the identities only of the powerful and wealthy who commissioned the buildings or their renovations and, in the case of shrine structures, for whom, or sometimes for what, they were built. Less commonly, we may know the names of the architects, engineers, and contractors. Rarer still is finding the names of the ceramicists, calligraphers, and painters who created the facades and interiors. Virtually unknown is any

sign of the workmen, any trace of the actual builders—masons, timber framers, carpenters, and unskilled laborers. And all these people only represent a building's construction or reconstruction phases.¹ What about the people who used the buildings, lived with them, found meaning in them, reproduced those meanings in written texts, oral poetry, and other audio and visual media, not to mention those responsible for the continual maintenance of these buildings?

Muslim mausolea-shrines are particularly evocative types of architecture for their universality in the Muslim regions of the world and for their heterogeneity. Robert Hillenbrand gives us a sense of the ubiquity of shrines and the surprising diversity of terminology used in naming them.² Issue might reasonably be taken, however, with the conclusion that the large number of terms was an expression of unease about the construction or existence of a mausoleum, that somehow mausolea “were not fully respectable” and that incorporating them within a large complex including mosques, madrasahs or other religious building provided them “with an odor of sanctity.”³ One might equally argue that the large number of terms represented the difficulty people faced in describing the ineffable. Like the blind men describing an elephant by touch, only limited aspects of what a shrine meant could be conveyed with a single word.

In the case of the four shrines to be considered here, not only are we concerned with the mausoleum or *gunbad* containing the sacred relic or relics but with the ensemble of buildings that formed and still form the entire shrine complex in three of the sites. There are good mundane reasons why building complexes developed around mausolea. These included the need to finance the permanent maintenance of the mausoleum and to provide a means to

1 See the table (Appendix 2) in Golombek and Wilber 1988, pp. 458–62 for a notable effort to compile what is known about the people who actually created the fifteenth-century architecture of Central Asia, not just those who sponsored it, the ones usually commemorated.

2 Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 255–60. The names he gives are: *turbah*, *marqad*, *qabr*, *khwabgah*, *madfan*, *qubbah*, *gunbad* or *gunbadh*, *astana*, *mashhad*, *mazar*, *rauda* (*rawza*) and *ziyarat*. To his extensive list I would add *ziyaratgāh* (for which *ziyarat*, more properly the act of homage itself, is an abbreviated form), *mazja*, *dakhmah*, *saghānah*, *gūr*, *gūrkhānah*, and *ḥazīrah*. In Persian sources, sharp distinctions are not always drawn between names for graves, the structures housing them, if any, and the sacred space created by the grave. The shrine of ‘Ali at Mazar-i Sharif is usually referred to now as the *rawzah-i mubārah* or by those more aware of the demands of Arabic grammar *rawzah-i mubārahah* (“blessed garden”) or *rawzah-i sharīf/ rawzah-i sharīfah*. Once the term *mazār-i sharīf* (“noble shrine”) came to be used for the city, then *rawzah-i mubārah* or *rawzah-i sharīf* (Noble Rawzah, as will be used here) would be the choice of descriptor when speaking of the sacred site of the tomb as defined by the low perimeter fence and entry gates.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 258–59.

promote the site in a way that would bring people to it down through the ages and encourage remembrance of both the interred saint and the patron(s) of the site for, by and large, those who made major architectural contributions to a sacred site wanted posterity to remember their names.

Shrines provide a place for the expression of an array of human hopes—hope for better personal health, for fertility, for wealth or at least economic sustenance, for social power, for the well-being of others, for triumph over one's enemies, and for sanctuary from oppression. Shrines represent certainty in an uncertain world where politics are in flux, especially when they are in violent flux. As such, in Central Asia at least, outside the family home, shrines appear as the most important component of the built environment. They range from immense structures dominating the landscape while creating an enclosed sacred space to simple mounds of stone marking the burial place of a saint, the site of a sacred relic, or a place touched by divine favor.

Social power in its varied forms coalesces around and is linked to shrines, one of many institutions giving social networks meaning and, through that meaning, power. In Michael Mann's construction, shrines and the people affiliated with them, in whatever capacity, represent both an ideological source of power and an economic one. Political figures, however self-important and self-aggrandizing, seek to partake of and exploit that ideological power through very public displays of deference to shrines. No Central Asian political leader from Timur (Tamerlane) in the fourteenth century to Atta Muhammad Noor in the twenty-first has been indifferent to the spiritual power of sacred spaces and saintly figures and how to identify with that sacredness, exploit it, and promote it. The outward display of reverence to a shrine may have been an expression of personal devotion but every politician must have expected, or at least hoped, that a public display of piety would evoke the approval of the society in which he functioned or at least signify his commitment to the tradition represented by the shrine, be it purely religious, ethnically-inflected, or arising from a regional, national, or transnational patriotism. This is as true in the world today as it was in the past, whether the shrine is that of an Unknown Soldier, Santiago de Compostela, the Virgin Mary, Lord Ram, an Indian sati, a Muslim relic or to any of the myriads of other sacred sites throughout the world. Whether those with political power believe in the efficacy of shrines as gateways to divine power, or even whether they believe in the divine, popular shrines demand their recognition and, at least, outward respect and deference and sometimes major investment. Shrines offer access to the popular will, and are understood to be potentially useful in times of political need.

All human endeavor is in some form political if we understand politics as the way in which resources are allocated, no matter what those resources

are, and political power as the ability to influence and control that allocation. Shrines believed to have some influence or even control over the distribution of resources are therefore an important part of the political matrix. Functionally, political power may be seen to be associated with the ruling elite as evidenced by the inscriptions still extant on all four of our shrines. Shrines may also be used to communicate political messages through their use as public forums for the articulation of policies of governance; that is, as sites where political leaders may perform their roles as religiously- and mystically-sanctioned authorities using the shrine as backdrop and context or as a place to assert their powers to regulate society. On the other hand, shrines may also enable resistance to official power by providing sanctuary to rebels and dissenters, and even in rare cases to be used as a base from which to lead an active opposition to oppressive authority. However shrines are exploited, the use of them demonstrates the political power they are believed to embody.

The shrines I will be considering have always been places of worship in the conventional Muslim sense of a venue for performing the five-fold daily prayers as well as the rituals associated with Friday congregational services. In today's world, the lone exception is the Gur-i Mir, in Samarqand, Uzbekistan, where another form of devotion, national patriotism, is encouraged. Its history before the twentieth century, however, like the others is as a site for Muslim ritual. The other three shrines, all in Afghanistan—the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum-mosque at Balkh, the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif, and the Prophet's Cloak (Khirqat al-Nabi) at Qandahar—continue to be places of worship and all also act as congregational mosques for Friday services. These are places where worshippers are regularly reminded of the personification of political authority, through the utterance of the name of the sovereign in the "Believers' invocation" (*du'ā al-mu'minīn*) in the homily (*khutbah*) during the course of the Friday service. At other times the shrine itself could be used as a canvas on which the powerful could inscribe the past, commemorate the present, and invoke the future through Qur'anic inscriptions calling for proper conduct (i.e., obedience to authority). All of the shrines now appear as architectural palimpsests, one polity overwriting its predecessor's claims to authority with its own architectural and epigraphical program. Elite figures exploited shrines for self-commemoration reinforcing the Believers' invocation to "obey God, obey the Prophet, and the first in command amongst you." (Qur'an 4:59)

The public discourse surrounding shrines in general and the particular shrines that form the subject of this book is dependent on the historical era, philosophical and ideological trends, and relevant economic and social conditions, all of which may be impossible to recapture and recount today except

in the sketchiest terms. The existence of shrines should tell us that a mystical belief in the power of saints, saintly artifacts, and sacred locales may not have dominated religious practice but it certainly had a profound influence on where people sought and still seek spiritual as well as physical succor.

1 Shrines and Religious Law

Shrines in Muslim regions of the world, like shrines in many other socio-religious contexts, have a contentious relationship with formal law, in the case of Islam with the Shari'ah and its interpreters. Much has been made of the legal evidence suggesting, especially to iconoclastic fundamentalists, that all such commemorative structures are illicit and deserve to be destroyed. The vast majority of Muslims, however, have been content down through the ages to find in other legal material (especially in the extensive hadith literature) justification not only for erecting such structures but actively using them as places of worship, if it was even felt necessary to provide such justification. There is certainly nothing in the sources that cover the shrines and mausolea of interest to us here that even hints at any misgivings on the part of patrons and builders about the licitness of what they were doing.

The relationship of funerary architecture to the Shari'ah has been analyzed by Thomas Leisten in tracing legal thought from the days of the Prophet himself, who was concerned with abolishing pre-Islamic funeral customs that were deemed to encourage devotion to something other than the one God. However, longstanding custom in much of the area that was converted to Islam meant that almost from the outset, Islam, like other world religions, had to find room, despite its developing law, for saint worship and the sacralization of certain spaces by saints. From several hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, Leisten summarizes the basic regulations that emerged governing burial including such things as maintaining the equality of Muslims in death and therefore the equality of tombs, no tomb to be larger or higher than another. The regulations found in the hadiths prohibited sacrificing at graves, and worshipping or even praying beside a grave.⁴ But the corpus of hadiths as interpreted later provided a legal basis for the erection of great funerary architecture as long as it was erected on private land, not in a Muslim cemetery which by legal definition was land that could not be owned.⁵ On the other hand, cemeteries could

4 Leisten 1990, p. 13.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

and did form around great shrines and so rendered the land they occupied sacred in turn.

Even the Prophet Muhammad, despite his efforts to put an end to saint worship and grave veneration, as reflected in his hadiths, became the object of saintly worship himself, his beard hair (“blessed hair” or *mū-yi mubārak* in Persian) and his Cloak (*khirqah*) providing the kinds of sacred relics that could be credibly found in more than one place, while his saintly body remained irremovably and unquestionably in Medina. The body of his son-in-law ‘Ali, on the other hand, is claimed to lie in many places. The fifteenth-century poet, scholar, and mystic ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami of Herat would express the issue of his burial site metaphorically, “the sun is one but its rays shine everywhere.”

Although the adherents of the Salafi strain of Muslim legal thought, particularly since the seventeenth century when Salafism was allied with military power in Arabia, have done their best over the years to eradicate saint worship and the veneration of sacred sites, in those areas like South and Central Asia where today there are many advocates of the Salafi way, shrines still seem to engender local Salafi respect and remain immune to its most iconoclastic tendencies. Nevertheless, tension remains between those who believe in the efficacy of saints and saint-worship and those who would suppress at least the outward manifestations of such belief.

2 Shrine Nomenclature

Unlike mosques, madrasahs or *khānqāh*-lodges, shrines and the funerary architecture associated with them may be known by a wide range of terms. As mentioned above, Robert Hillenbrand offers a very useful catalog of terms used around the Islamicate regions for the mausolea that are the focal point of all of the shrine complexes to be discussed here. Those terms sometimes describe the architecture common to major shrines, sometimes the state of the saint or saintly artifact, sometimes its attraction as a destination, and sometimes its effect on the devotee and pilgrim.⁶ For our purposes the terms most frequently used are: *gunbad* (for a domed mausoleum), *rawzah* (garden, as metaphor for Paradise), *dakhmah* and *saghānah* (tomb), *qabr* (grave), *gūr*, *gūrkhānah*, and *gūristān* (grave, tomb, cemetery), and, less commonly, *maqbarah* (tomb or cemetery) and *qabristān* (cemetery).

⁶ Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 255–60. See also Haase 1997.

3 Shrine Meanings

It is impossible to know what any given shrine meant to any one individual unless those meanings are articulated through recorded word or deed. Even then we have to allow for a writer's manipulation of meaning in order to convey to posterity a particular point of view. Nonetheless, it is probably safe to say that, in general, the architecture had to generate significant meaning and function, whether symbolic or practical, for the societies in which it was found, otherwise scarce resources would not have been spent on maintenance and preservation. That we can examine existing buildings whose origins go back, in two of the cases, more than 500 years and in one more than 600 years does not mean that they were built of exceptionally durable materials but rather that they were repeatedly repaired and even substantially rebuilt and that those with access to the needed resources made conscious decisions to allocate those resources to shrine maintenance and preservation. No building survives for long without continual maintenance as the photographic record of these buildings clearly shows. And the photographic record only covers the last 150 years or so of their existence.

4 Shrine Management

One of the less obvious, but critical, factors in shrine longevity is effective management. Anyone who has managed an institution or an organization no matter how small should be able to empathize with the administrators of shrine ensembles—the tomb buildings and their related structures. The need to protect existing resources and the continual search for new ones, negotiating with those more powerful over the management of those resources, coping with the conflicts created by external powers, and dealing with the internal contests that would periodically arise over control of the administration itself—these are all part of the politics of shrine management as they would be of any bureaucratic institution. In addition, weighing the different, often contending, priorities facing shrine managers, that is, whether to limit the costs associated with salaried personnel in favor of building maintenance or the reverse, appears often to have been made in favor of the human element. Major building investments seem to have depended on the intervention of political figures with access to taxes or other sources of revenue.

The intricacies of shrine management and the advantage of experience accruing to those who held the administrative positions led to the formation of family dynasties of administrators. These families, generation after generation,

administered three of the four shrines under discussion. For them one meaning of the shrine must have been their entitlement as managers and the apparent expectation of the family's tenure in that role down through time. One of the most prominent dynasties of administrators are the Ansaris of the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif whose longevity is measured not just in generations but in centuries, with the family record extending back more than 350 years. It became unthinkable soon after the shrine rediscovery and first appointments of its administration that anyone but an Ansari should have control of the shrine's management. Similar expectations governed the administrations of the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh and the management of the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar. In the former case, lineal descendants of the shaykh, the Parsa's, would control the shrine for centuries and may still do so today. In the latter case, descendants of the first chief administrator whose family name was Akhundzadah would be recognized by the political authorities as having an unquestioned right to succeed to control of the shrine's administration.⁷ The apparent exception to this descent-based pattern of succession are the administrators of the Gur-i Mir shrine in Samarqand whose administrative history is less easily followed. While here and there over time, the chief trustees are on occasion identified by name, there is no evidence of a single family controlling management of the complex. This is not to say that there wasn't such a family, just that evidence of it has not yet come to light.

5 Shrine Constituencies

Another aspect of the longevity of a shrine is its ability to attract a broad constituency, not just those who live in close proximity, but also those who are willing to travel long distances to perform the rites of pilgrimage. An even more remote constituency may be constituted of those who have only been able to imagine the shrine, being unable or unwilling to make a pilgrimage or pay respects in person, but who may be willing to support the shrine. In our own day, even non-Muslim populations, for instance North American and European ones, find meaning and are willing to allocate significant resources to maintain or even completely rebuild shrines. Recently in Afghanistan when

⁷ Besides these, there were the Juybaris of the Char Bakr shrine outside Bukhara, the Ahraris of the tomb complex of Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar in Samarqand, the 'Azizan at the tomb of Qasim Shaykh 'Azizan at Karminah between Samarqand and Bukhara, the Dahbidis of the shrine of Khwajah Ahmad Kasani west of Samarqand and undoubtedly many other such shrine families. See McChesney 1996, Chapter 3.

the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) of NATO sought projects to finance, in many places the local vote was often for mosque and shrine rebuilding. One example of a large shrine that was rebuilt with American aid is the Shah Maqsud shrine in Khakriz, a town about forty miles northwest of Qandahar.⁸ The German government also committed itself to shrine and mosque renovation and rebuilding as part of the “reconstruction” of Afghanistan and undertook a multi-million euro project of mosque and shrine restoration in the northern part of the country, as we will see in the discussion of the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine. For the American and German governments, which were outwardly committed to the policy of rebuilding Afghanistan, the religious meaning of these shrines was secondary. Rebuilding would employ local workers, empower those who provided the workers, and boost local economies. Such aid might, in turn, generate some goodwill for Western governments and perhaps counter the local messages of the malign intentions of foreign infidels. The northern Afghanistan project also had a quasi-religious component as one of the participants in rebuilding was the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which works to restore historic Muslim architecture.

6 Shrine Ceremonial

By their nature as gateways to the Unseen, shrines generally have some form of ceremonial etiquette required of the supplicant. This etiquette is somewhat obscured by the generic term *ziyarat* generally used to describe the ritual an individual performed at a shrine although different times and different places required their own ways to perform *ziyarat*. How one was to behave both physically and verbally or the behaviors to avoid are, on occasion, set out in writing by those who wanted to regulate the practice. A whole range of authors deplored or violently attacked the practice of any *ziyarat* at all. However, in Central Asia from the fifteenth to the twenty-first centuries such voices represent a decided minority.⁹ Attempts to regulate the practice of *ziyarat* only show how universal and diverse those practices were. It is impossible to say how uniform the performance of *ziyarat* was yet we know that certain elements seem

8 The work was done by local contractors with the financial and consulting support of a civil affairs group of the allied Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. A story is available on webarchive at <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/52504/holy-shrine-renovation-project-brings-afghan-district-back-life>.

9 Subtelny 2007, pp. 192–93 provides an excellent example in early sixteenth-century Herat of the dilemma for legal scholars of the phenomenon of shrine visitation and how at least one scholar made his peace with the practice.

to have been widely adopted. Imitating some of the practices associated with the hajj-pilgrimage to Mecca, for example, was one common element. This included circumambulation of the tomb or sacred artifact, the recitation of certain parts of the religious canon—the utterance of the *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*) and the *shahādah*, (there is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God), the performance of a certain number of *rak'ahs* or prayers, the recitation of specific Qur'anic verses a prescribed number of times, and promoting *ziyārat* as especially effective at certain times of the Islamic calendar.

At a shrine, one of the people in residence (*mujāwir*) would have had the duty of explaining to an uninformed visitor how to perform an appropriate *ziyārat*. For the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak we have the specific instructions for proper *ziyārat* laid out in a book on the shrines of Qandahar by Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Hasan Mawlawi Qandahari. His recipe was the performance of two *rak'ahs* with specific utterances, a *rak'ah* being the sequence of utterances and physical movements that comprise *namāz* or *ṣalāt* (the form of worship or prayer, as it is often called.) After the pronouncement of the *niyah* (statement of intention to perform the prayer) and the *takbīr*, the first *rak'ah* would begin, while standing, with recitation of the opening sura of the Qur'an (the *Fātiḥah*) and then fifteen repetitions of the first verse of Qur'an 97, "verily, we sent it down on the Night of Decree (or Power—*laylat al-qadr*)." This would be followed by fifteen more repetitions of the verse in the bending (*rukū'*) position; and fifteen more in each of the subsequent positions of the *namāz*—standing (*qiyām*), prostrate (*sajdah*), standing again, and kneeling back on one's heels (*jalsah*). The second *rak'ah* was the same as the first and was followed by the benediction of the utterance of the profession of faith (*tashahhud* or *shahādah*) and the *salām* (the salutation of peace—*salām 'alaykum*, the Persianized version of the Arabic *as-salāmu 'alaykum*).¹⁰

Although Qandahari does not prescribe it, it was also considered normative to distribute whatever votive offering (*naẓr*, pl. *nuzūr*, *nuzūrāt*) one could afford, as the Mughal emperor Babur did for the Gur-i Mir in Samarqand, as the Mughal Humayun is recorded doing at the Noble Rawzah when he led a campaign to Balkh in 1548, or as the Afghan amir Shayr 'Ali Khan did in 1864 when he was campaigning against a rival in Balkh and the later amir Habib Allah Khan did in 1907 when paying his respects at the shrine.¹¹ That these

10 Qandahari 1977–78, p. 143.

11 Zain Khan 1982, p. 139 for Babur; Bayat 1941, p. 110 and Bayat 2009, p. 46 for Humayun's *ziyārat* and for Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's see 'Abd al-Rahman Khan 1886, p. 34 and Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, vol. 2, p. 267. I am grateful to Ebba Koch for the Zain Khan reference.

moments were recorded for posterity underscores the political importance attached to such an act.

7 Shrine Functions: Feeding the Faithful

Shrines, especially major shrines, often provided more than spiritual succor. Three of our four shrines were reported at one time or another to have had *langar-khānahs* (soup kitchens) to feed visitors as well as staff. In one case, that of the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar, early *waqf*-endowment deeds specify exactly the kind and amount of edibles to be purchased with the income from the endowment and how and to whom food should be distributed. It is probably safe to say that the provision of food was a common element of the services provided at all the shrines. Besides Qandahar, where the indigent population was the beneficiary of food provided by the Durrani king Timur Shah's endowment, at Mazar-i Sharif, the Afghan amir, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901), ordered a *langar-khānah* built to provide food for those who would reside in the porticoed cells (*rivāqs*) he built at the same time. At the Gur-i Mir shrine complex in Samarqand the early seventeenth-century writer Sultan-Muhammad Mutribi Samarqandi describes a kitchen (*maṭbakh*) located in the *khānqāh*, and equipped, as shrine kitchens often were, with a large cauldron (*dīg*). The kitchen's stated purpose was to sustain the madrasah students and the staff of the complex and the denizens of the *khānqāh*.¹² Also, in describing the distribution of a large grant made by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) for the maintenance of his ancestors' mausoleum, the Gur-i Mir, Mutribi noted that money left over from building maintenance would provide for a number of other purposes among which was an early morning meal of a stew made of boiled cracked wheat, meat, butter, cinnamon, and herbs for an undefined clientele.¹³ According to Mutribi, the practice went on for some time. For the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine we have no direct evidence yet of a *langar-khānah* or of food being provided but the existence of a madrasah built as an adjunct to the mausoleum would have logically meant, as in the cases of Mazar-i Sharif, Samarqand, and Qandahar, a source of food at least for the students and staff.

¹² Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 22.

¹³ Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 25.

8 Shrine Functions: Providing Sanctuary

The practice of religious asylum or sanctuary (in Persian, *bast*) is ancient and found in many major religions. The idea that sacred space (*ḥaram*) extended an aura of protection over those who sought it was well-rooted in Islam.¹⁴ In Central Asia of the post-Mongol period the concept of sanctuary was both nuanced and never unlimited or absolute. In the case of the four shrines examined here, the evidence indicates that all holy sites could, in theory, provide sanctuary but it seems to have been sought more in one, the Cloak of the Prophet in Qandahar, than in the others. People chose to take sanctuary for many reasons but money and politics were often the main motives behind seeking sanctuary or “sitting *bast*.” Avoiding the payment of taxes or the repayment of debt were regularly cited as reasons for taking sanctuary while protesting government policy or seeking an escape from government punishment for alleged embezzlement and theft were also fairly common, in Qandahar at least. However, it is important to keep in mind that the sources of the information available to us tend to emphasize political matters and ignore more ordinary domestic issues such as spousal abuse, illicit romance, and family conflicts, all of which could well have caused a shrine to be used as sanctuary without a written record being created.

9 Shrine Functions: Healing Sickness and Disability

The grace or blessing of the intercession of a saint that could provide protection against physical danger included the ability, a discrete one, to cure disease. All of the shrines considered here offer some evidence that they were sought out when disease or disability threatened the life of an individual. But just as the Shrine of the Cloak at Qandahar developed a particular reputation for providing sanctuary, the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif became famous for its ability to effect cures for diseases and other medical conditions. After the Timurid rediscovery of ‘Ali’s grave in 1480, one source, written some four decades later, tells us that “when [people] heard the news of the discovery of the burial place of the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, they came from all over seeking cures for their illnesses.”¹⁵ Three-quarters of a century later, the miraculous curative powers of the shrine were again emphasized, “over the course of two months more than 1,500 of the blind, the lame and the

¹⁴ See Calmard 1989.

¹⁵ Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172.

halt, the paralytic, lepers, and amputees all were cured of their ailments.”¹⁶ In outbreaks of cholera, it was believed that prayers at the shrine could end the epidemic. In very recent times, the shrine administration reported cures for six cases of blindness, paralysis, mental illness, and nervous disorders “through the grace and beneficence of God and the miraculous powers (*karāmāt*) of Ḥaẓrat-i Shāh (‘Ali).”¹⁷ For an afflicted person, the best time to receive a cure is thought to occur during the Nawruz (New Year’s) celebration of Gul-i Surkh and especially at Jandah Bala, the raising of the banner on New Year’s Day and then its lowering forty days later. There is some evidence that Gur-i Mir also was thought, at least in recent times, to offer relief from physical ailments.

10 Shrines as Community Centers

These large shrines and others like them served their towns and cities as community centers, places where people could gather for relaxation, for cultural pursuits, to transact business, as well as to perform religious devotions. The eve of Friday (Thursday evening), the start of the holy day, was often a time for literary and religious gatherings. The Gur-i Mir in Samarqand and the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif are remembered for hosting festivals and fairs, sometimes, as in the case of the Gur-i Mir, descending into such rowdiness and unruly behavior that the public order was sufficiently threatened to warrant steps being taken by the authorities to regulate these gatherings.¹⁸

As a place to nourish both body and soul, to perform the rituals of the cult, to celebrate holidays, to conduct business, to seek respite from an arbitrary world, to find a cure for illness or to reverse infertility, and as a symbol signifying communal unity and harmony, a shrine center served its community in multiple ways.

11 Shrine Architecture

This book approaches the subject of the socio-political history of four Central Asian shrines by focusing on the architecture. Each shrine has survived at least a quarter of a millennium and three have stood for more than 500 years.

16 Warsaji 2010, p. 15.

17 Ansari 2012, pp. 25–26.

18 See below, chapter 1, p. 59.

Generation after generation has been born, grown up, and then passed away in the actual neighborhoods of these buildings or within their spiritual aura. What do we know about the influence that these buildings had on peoples' lives? But more to the point here, what do we know of the impact on the physical structures themselves of the people who considered the buildings important to their lives? In other words, how were these particular buildings, each a concentration of sacred space and a focus of spiritual yearnings, interpreted, exploited, and sometimes reinterpreted and altered by their devotees?

There are several other types of Islamic architecture—mosques, madrasahs (seminaries), and *khānqāhs*—that could equally well be examined for their social histories and social power but mausoleum-centered shrines, especially in Central and South Asia, seem to be more intimately involved in people's daily lives than other architectural forms. Moreover, the shrine complexes we will be considering all included, at one time or another, mosques, madrasahs, and *khānqāhs* besides mausoleums. Indeed, the mausoleum that forms the focal point of a shrine first emerges in one case as an adjunct to a madrasah and *khānqāh*. The Gur-i Mir ensemble, which began with a *khānqāh* followed by a madrasah years before the mausoleum was added, became a kind of template for shrine development so that no major shrine was seen as complete without a mosque, especially a congregational or Friday mosque, a madrasah-seminary, and a *khānqāh*-lodge or hospice, as was the case with the other three shrine complexes.

Each of the four shrines is characterized by at least one remaining major building, and in all four cases it is the mausoleum, although the historical record shows that at one time there were many more buildings at these sites that have not survived. The architecture of the mausoleum is a major focus of this book but even more central to the book are the people responsible for the architecture.

Architecture, the built environment, is a product of human intention. Although it is impossible to know with any certainty the personal motivation of historical figures, oftentimes the political and social circumstances surrounding the creation of a major piece of architecture provide insight into what the motivation might have been and what objectives the architecture was expected to meet. All those responsible for any given monumental building cannot be known since the available records generally memorialize only the sponsors or patrons. These were mostly, but not always, members of the ruling class. The actual architects, contractors, craftsmen, and laborers are only very rarely deemed worthy of commemoration in the written record. But there are important exceptions in the cases of the Gur-i Mir, the Noble Rawzah of 'Ali at Mazar-i Sharif, and the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar. For all three, builders are

identified and for two of them fairly extensive information is available about the builders as well as about painters and decorators.

Other people associated with a piece of monumental shrine architecture are those who lived with it. We know a good deal about such people. They were often not only those who looked to the architecture as a symbol of the sanctity of the site, made pilgrimage there, and sought to spend eternity as close to the saintly object of the shrine as possible, but were the people more mundanely affiliated with the survival of the architecture—the managers of the site, the janitorial staff, the students and staff of the affiliated madrasah, and other denizens of the shrine often known by the generic term *mujāwir*, individuals whose duties were rarely spelled out but which may be inferred from the information given for some of them.

12 Shrine Ecology

All four shrines depended for their long-term prosperity on the agrarian conditions of their regions whether directly from the rental income of properties controlled by the shrine or indirectly through gifts from donors derived from agricultural produce or rents. Needless to say, agrarian conditions depended on water. The Arid Zone, in which all are located, by definition receives less than ten inches of precipitation a year and, although some dry-farmed crops are possible, by and large a source of water other than precipitation is necessary for growing most commodities. All three of the regions in which the shrines are located—Samarqand, Balkh, and Qandahar—have rivers bringing snowmelt and springwater from the mountains to the plains where the shrines are found. In Samarqand the river is the Zarafshan, in Balkh the Balkhab, and in Qandahar the Arghandab.

Central to the prosperity of the shrines in these areas is the efficient canalization of the river water. It is not surprising therefore to find hydrological conditions recorded as a major concern at least in the cases of the ‘Alid shrine at Balkh and the Prophet’s Cloak at Qandahar. The Gur-i Mir at Samarqand and the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum are somewhat exceptional in that we know much less about those shrines’ direct dependence on agriculture than we do in the cases of the other two. While there is some evidence of the agricultural base of the *waqf* endowment for Gur-i Mir, we only have inferential evidence for the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine which comes from the *waqf* endowments of other later ensembles.¹⁹

19 See chapter 2, p. 175.

Many factors thus play a part in the longevity of these sacred places. Political interests, economic viability, administrative expertise, and private ambition and enterprise produced the many meanings attributed to these sacred places while the individual and communal meanings generated by these shrines came to represent a timelessness, a connection to an eternal divine will, making life more purposeful and bearable, generation after generation.

Gur-i Mir: The Timurid Shrine at Samarqand

1405–2016

1 Introduction¹

Gur-i Mir or Gur-i Amir? Today the mausoleum—and most focus is on the mausoleum itself because it and the massive entry gate are the only structures of the complex that survive—is widely known as Gur-i Amir (Tomb of the Amir), the name identifying it as the burial place of Amir Timur, the fourteenth-century warrior and empire builder. But when the name first emerges in the written record long after his death it is not as Gur-i Amir but as Gur-i Mir. That “Mir” did not refer to Timur, but to the holy man buried in the mausoleum, the man known as Mir Sayyid Barakah. In the Tsarist and Soviet periods when the tomb was conventionally referred to in writing as Gur-Emir, the Russian architectural historian, V.A. Shishkin, pointed out that the “Emir” in the phrase referred not to Timur, or even to Mir Sayyid Barakah, but to another holy man, one whose name does not appear until the nineteenth century and one who is mistakenly believed to be buried in the mausoleum, Mir Sayyid ‘Umar, the so-called “pseudo-‘Umar.”² Shishkin was partly correct. While the name “Gur-i Mir” did indeed refer to a holy man, a “mir” and not an “amir/emir,” that person was not “Sayyid ‘Umar” but the historically well-attested figure of the late fourteenth century, Mir Sayyid Barakah (d. 1404). We can be fairly certain of this because the name “Gur-i Mir” was in use already by the end of the sixteenth century long before there appears any identification of a “Mir Sayyid ‘Umar” with the tomb.³

It is not difficult to imagine how “Gur-i Mir” became construed as “Gur-i Amir.” When Russians heard the name Gur-i Mir uttered, which is the way they probably first encountered it, they assumed it referred to Amir Timur,

1 Some of this material is based on talks given at the Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University in 2003, at the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture Lecture Series Harvard in 2008, and as part of the Yarshater Lectures in Persian Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 2017. It also makes use of some of the material in McChesney 2003 which was an expanded version of the Indiana University lecture. The work here has greatly benefited from the suggestions and comments of Elena Paskaleva.

2 Shishkin 1946, p. 24, note 1.

3 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 20.

because he was buried there, and so they interpreted it as the homophone “Gur-Emir” in which form they first wrote it (see for example the 1905 publication *Mecheti Samarkanda*) and continued to write it. Yet others have understood that if the word Emir referred to Amir Timur, the name should properly be pronounced and transliterated in writing as “Gur-i Emir” as grammatical Persian would require. This small phonetic and alphabetic shift (from Gur-i Mir to Gur-i Amir) represents a major conceptual change in the meaning of the tomb-shrine, in particular for non-locals. The local community that revered Mir Sayyid Barakah would, in all likelihood, have been unaware and unconcerned about Russian pronunciations or interpretations and continue to refer to it as Gur-i Mir. In many Russian sources as well as some European works, the name “Gur Emir” has persisted.⁴ The use of Gur-i Amir in Golombek and Wilber’s magisterial 1988 work seems to have established it as a new standard but one not universally adopted.⁵ For my purpose here, because the name “Gur-i Mir” appears early as the name of the mausoleum, and because it accords with the similar-sounding “Gur Emir” I will use it throughout.

For historians interested in Timurid architecture, the Gur-i Mir represents a fundamental part of the architectural legacy of the fifteenth century, the Timurid age in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran. Its meaning has been extrapolated from its design, its component parts, its function, and its comparability to synchronically, functionally, or stylistically similar structures. That it had a social life, that it was an integral part of the communities and societies that drew meaning from it over time, has been more difficult to document. Yet how could a building like this survive more than 600 years without continual inputs from an involved and concerned society?

The mausoleum has dominated the skyline of Samarqand since it was erected more than 600 years ago. Its history has been a recurrent topic for writers addressing the history of the city and, especially since the late nineteenth century, researchers have struggled to answer the many questions its presence evokes. Who is actually buried there? How was the Gur-i Mir maintained? How was the building used and how did those functions change over the long term? What meanings were imposed on it and how did those meanings influence the architecture? Who supported it? What relationship does the building have to other nearby remains of buildings or no longer extant buildings described in

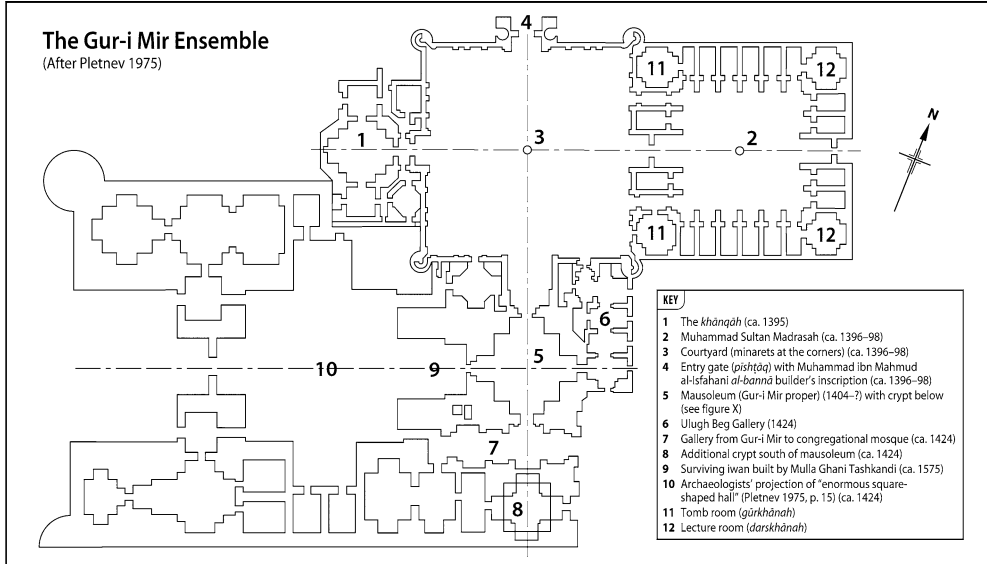
4 E.g., Pugachenkova and Rempel’ 1958, p. 119 ff; Kary-Niyazov 1970, pp. 196, 197; Pugachenkova 1983, p. 391; Voronina 1969, no. 52; Michell 1978, p. 262; and Blair and Bloom 1994, pp. 41, 46.

5 Golombek and Wilber 1988, cat. no. 29. Examples of recent usage of the name emphasizing Amir/Emir and rendered in correct Persian grammatical form (Gur-i Amir, Gur-i Emir) are Lentz and Lowry 1989, p. 388 and Koch 2006, p. 85.

texts? What were the intentions of those who arranged the burials in the Gur-i Mir or in other buildings making up the whole ensemble? These and other questions have engaged those who have seen the Gur-i Mir and particularly those who have attempted to explain it in words and images over the centuries.

We probably should assume that the desire to explain the tomb and the complex that surrounded it began at the time of its construction and has never abated. This is the evocative power of a major piece of enduring architecture. Certainly there are periods of time when historical interest in Samarqand and its monuments, or at least surviving evidence of that interest, is muted or non-existent, and then times when the tomb complex vigorously reemerges in the written record. Ever since the Russian Imperial Government occupied Samarqand in 1868 and then was succeeded by the Russian Soviet Government fifty years later, a high level of interest by governing circles—and thus the written and visual record of the building—has been continuous. In every generation since the middle of the nineteenth century, there have been scholars, politicians, tourists, and artists who have sought to understand and describe this great building. Although the amount of surviving textual and other material that relates to the mausoleum is, not surprisingly, much less for the centuries between its construction and Russian, Soviet, and now Uzbek control of it, what is available shows a continual interest in the complex among the generations that have lived with it, both for its spiritual and material importance. What follows is another attempt to understand the place of the tomb complex in the history of Samarqand as well as its role in international, if not global, history but especially its local meanings, as a shrine and pilgrimage destination, and as a social center for, and economic force in, the local community. We should think of it as a kind of ‘text’ on which political entities attempt to inscribe their ambitions and assert their power and, conversely, how resistance to those ambitions and assertions naturally develop and play out on the stage provided by this monumental building.

Its story, as it has come down to us, with all the accretions that more than 600 years of history have generated, is as much about temporal politics and societal needs as it is about the timeless commemoration of the figure of Amir Timur (Tamerlane) or the holy man buried with him, Mir Sayyid Barakah. The literary record for the history of the Gur-i Mir is relatively rich for the many centuries of its lifespan. Not every year, not even every decade, can be accounted for but almost every quarter century, every generation, produces a narrative of the people involved with the complex of which the mausoleum was a part. This chapter will present the architectural ensemble as an evolving organism and as a center of human activity, a place in which people invested economic and political capital. The survival of buildings like Gur-i Mir is far more plausible



PLAN 1 The Gur-i Mir ensemble (after Pletnev 1975)

and comprehensible if we consider its particular social value when other contemporary buildings, even those closely connected to it, were slowly turning to dust.

In the most recent past, the Uzbek government has made the Gur-i Mir a national shrine and anointed Timur, only one of the people buried in it, as the founding father of Uzbekistan, thus making his tomb story the official narrative. But as the written record shows, the site's story has not always been framed around Timur. Other figures interred in the mausoleum—Miranshah, Timur's second son; Ulugh Beg, a grandson; and the holy man Mir Sayyid Barakah—are revealed at different times as equally if not more important than Timur in producing the meaning of the tomb. A figure not even buried in the tomb, the so-called "pseudo 'Umar," at one point became a local focus of the tomb's meaning. Moreover, it was not always the tomb building, the Gur-i Mir itself, from which the local community derived its meaning. For much of its long life the complex, of which the Gur-i Mir was only a part, was important not because of the tomb but because of a madrasah-seminary that no longer exists but which was the principal focus of interest. The madrasah, through its endowment, owned and managed property in far-flung places. The income in turn supported maintenance of the madrasah. The madrasah then could offer a range of services and not least of all, provide paid employment locally. In fact for a long time, the whole complex was called "Muhammad Sultan's Madrasah"

after its founder, another grandson of Timur, and his designated heir-apparent. Had he not predeceased Timur by less than two years, it is more than likely the monumental building called “Gur-i Amir” today might never have been built. The Muhammad Sultan Madrasah now only exists in the form of its footprint marked by a modern low wall and imagined in sketches by twentieth-century archaeologists (Plan 1, no. 2). But at the time of the building of the mausoleum and for a long time afterwards it was unquestionably the most important building of the ensemble of structures that comprised the site in southern Samarqand.

2 The First Structures: *khānqāh* and madrasah

Today, as already noted, the Gur-i Mir mausoleum and an entry gate are the only buildings still standing of an architectural complex that in its first phase included a *khānqāh* lodge or hostel with a kitchen and a madrasah-seminary. The complex, including the mausoleum, began with construction, probably in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, of a quite modest and no longer extant *khānqāh*, a term typically used for a Sufi hostel and gathering place. Rediscovered by twentieth-century Soviet archaeologists, the *khānqāh* was a square building measuring about twenty-three feet on a side.⁶ Today, its excavated foundations, like those of the madrasah, are marked by a low wall. There is no written evidence yet as to who built it or when, although its presence in the ensemble would seem to indicate the same hand at work, either Muhammad Sultan’s or his grandfather’s. It has been associated with a cult of Suhrawardi shaykhs, devotees of the early thirteenth-century shaykh, Shams al-Din Kulal, who is buried at the Timurid necropolis in Shahr-i Sabz.⁷ This association arose from an intriguing spatial-spiritual relationship suggested by the alignment of the *khānqāh* with two mausolea situated along a north-south axis in Samarqand, the *khānqāh* standing at the southern end. Moving north along the axis, 133 yards away⁸ is the mausoleum (still standing) of a fourteenth-century Suhrawardi shaykh, Burhan al-Din Sagharji, sometimes called “Khwajah-i Ruhabad.” The building itself is now referred to as “Ruhabad (Abode of the Soul).” Somewhat farther north and anchoring the far end of the axis once stood the mausoleum and shrine of another Suhrawardi shaykh, Nur al-Din Basir, who died in 1249.⁹

6 Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 51 (Plan 1, no. 1).

7 Bartol’d 1916/1964, p. 434.

8 Voronina 1969, p. 34.

9 Bartol’d 1916/1964, p. 434.

He was known as the “Qutb-i Chahardahum” (“Fourteenth Pole or Axis¹⁰”). Nur al-Din Basir’s mausoleum was built inside Timur’s newly constructed citadel in 1371–72.¹¹ A late Persian source¹² offers a story in which Timur, in the throes of a difficult battle which he eventually won, had a dream about Nur al-Din and in gratitude for the victory built the mausoleum.¹³ But evidence that Timur sponsored the building is otherwise non-existent. It is probably best at this point only to raise the possibility that Timur might have ordered the building of the mausoleum in the confines of the citadel but its fate in the late nineteenth century and lack of mention in any of the available and more or less contemporary sources mean there is no other evidence yet that he did.

In 1877, half a millennium after the mausoleum was built, Eugene Schuyler, American envoy to the Russian court, visited Samarqand and provided a brief description of the tomb of the “Kutf-i-Tchirdani” (i.e. Qutb-i Chahardahum).¹⁴ There is also a photograph of it from about the same time as Schuyler’s visit.¹⁵ In 1878 the governor general, Konstantin von Kaufman, decided to reconstruct the Timurid citadel and found it necessary to raze the mausoleum “in consideration of [its] strategic nature.” It took two attempts to blow it up. In the first

10 *Qutb* (pole/axis) was used in Sufism as it was in astronomy to signify “a pivot around which something revolves.” Among Shi’i theologians *qutb* was equated with the meaning of “Imām.” In Sufism it was thought of as the “perfect man” and “the place of God’s appearance in the world at all times” (de Jong 1986, pp. 543–44). As it was elaborated by Sufi intellectuals the Pole was “the virtual center of spiritual energy on whom the wellbeing of this world depends” (Schimmel 1975, p. 200).

11 Muminov et. al. 1969, vol. 1, p. 238.

12 This is the work known as *Qandīyah*, originally written in Arabic with the title *al-Qand fi ma’rifat ‘ulamā Samarqand* (The Sugar Cone on the Scholars of Samarqand) by Abu Sa’id al-Idrisi (d. 1015) then translated into Persian at which time it developed an extensive second section written by someone else, perhaps a certain Sayyid Ahmad b. Mir Wali, probably in the late fifteenth or sixteenth century. See Stori/Bregel 1972, part 2, p. 1112.

13 Manz 2007, p. 193.

14 Schuyler 1876, vol. 1, p. 254.

15 *Turkestanskii Al’bom*, photograph 310 in “Chast’ Arkheologisheskaia” (Archeological Section) online at the Library of Congress. The *Turkestanskii Al’bom* was compiled in 1871–72 under the direction of the governor-general, Konstantin fon/von Kaufman. Naumkin 1992, p. 80 published this same photograph with the obviously erroneous date of 1897, seventeen years after the mausoleum’s destruction and wrongly attributed it to Ivan Chistyakov, a photographer with the Royal Archeological Commission. Chistyakov, who would only have been fifteen years old at the time the tomb was razed, was in fact in Samarqand in 1897. (Naumkin 1992, pp. 9–10 for Chistyakov’s biography.) Chistyakov probably owned photographs from the *Turkestanskii Al’bom*, which would explain how the photograph wound up in his archives. The actual photographer might have been either N.V. Bogaevskii or N.N. Nekhoroshev. (See catalog information (www.loc.gov/pictures/item/200670090) for *Turkestanskii Al’bom* at the Library of Congress website.)

attempt in June 1880, 125 pounds (3.5 poods) of gunpowder failed to bring it down. On the second attempt in August, by tripling the amount of explosive, the deed was finally done.¹⁶

It is unknown who the *khānqāh*'s builder was but Bartol'd favored Muhammad Sultan. His grandfather Timur's influence is strongly indicated, however, in light of the positioning of it in relation to the Ruhabad and Nur al-Din Basir mausolea.¹⁷ However, the soon-to-follow development around the *khānqāh* makes Muhammad Sultan the logical choice as patron of most of the ensemble, except for Gur-i Mir.

Muhammad Sultan was born in 1375. His father, Jahangir, Timur's second son and his first designated heir-apparent, died a year after Muhammad Sultan was born, and so, after he reached his seventh birthday, he came under the guardianship of his grandfather.¹⁸ We know that by 1386, at the still-tender age of eleven, Muhammad Sultan was with his grandfather in Iran and after the recapture of Tabriz that summer was named its governor (no doubt assisted by more seasoned counselors).¹⁹ Probably because he was the son of Timur's first heir-apparent and because he was also a favorite of Timur's, the amir designated him as his heir-apparent in preference to his surviving sons and other older grandsons.²⁰

If the *khānqāh* was built under the aegis of Muhammad Sultan then, in view of his youth, it was probably begun no earlier than the mid-1390s. By then he would have been old enough to have had enough campaign experience and booty to finance such a building. The fact that it was quite small may reflect the limited funds available to him at this point.

What is far better known is that sometime later in the 1390s builders and architects in Muhammad Sultan's or his grandfather's employ began work on an ensemble of buildings incorporating this *khānqāh* (Fig. 1.1). The lead builder apparently was a man whose name survives in an inscription over the main entry into the courtyard—Muhammad, the son of Mahmud al-Isfahani—his locational (*nisbah*) name al-Isfahani indicating a connection to that Iranian

16 See Veselovskii 1905, pp. VII–VIII.

17 Bartol'd 1916/1974, p. 75.

18 It was customary for princes to be removed from their mother's care and placed with a guardian and/or nurse. For Muhammad Sultan that was Qutlugh Tarkan Agha, a daughter of Taraghay. Timur's father, Taraghay, had died fifteen years before Muhammad Sultan was born and Qutlugh Tarkan Agha was under Timur's protection at the time of Jahangir's death. By the time Qutlugh Tarkan Agha died in 1383, Muhammad Sultan would no longer have been in her care (Woods 1990a, pp. 17, 29 for the death dates).

19 Manz 1989, p. 229.

20 Ibn 'Arabshah 1936, p. 31.



FIGURE 1.1 Inscription on inner entry gateway (*pīshṭāq*) with the name of the builder (*bannā*), Muhammad son of Mahmud al-Isfahani
R.D. MCCHESENEY, 1977

city. His occupational title *bannā* (builder) is also inscribed on the epigraph.²¹ Timur’s devastating campaign against Isfahan in 1387 might well have been

21 There are four terms commonly encountered in the identification of design and supervisory-level employees in the construction trade: *bannā*, *mi’mār*, *muhandis*, and *ṭarrāḥ*, very roughly equivalent to builder/contractor, architect, engineer, and draftsman/plan maker, although in fact we really know almost nothing about the actual job descriptions that would accompany these titles. It is quite possible that these titles were fluid and their use in a text depended on stylistic considerations. An attempt has been made for Mughal India (1526–1857), at least, to distinguish these names by their functions while admitting the possibility that there was much overlap. In the proposed definition, the *bannā* was a “master mason” of a “lower rank” to the *mi’mār* to whom was entrusted “the function of drawing up the *ṭarah* [*sic*, i.e. *ṭarḥ*, the plan].” He in turn was subordinate to the *muhandis* who “actually specified the proportions on which the *ṭarah* [*sic*] was based.” (See Juneja 2001, p. 50 citing Qaisar 1988). This representation of the relative statuses of these apparently three distinct occupations would seem to be highly influenced by the tendency to see social relationships from a peculiarly South Asian hierarchical perspective. If, among those categories singled out for textual mention, the term signifying the lowest status—that of *bannā*—did indeed apply to Timurid society in India, clearly none of the categorization and ascriptive hierarchy could be applied to earlier Timurid society in Samarqand. Had the *bannā* in late fourteenth-century Samarqand been of the low status Qaisar states that he was in India, it’s doubtful his name would have been so prominently displayed to the exclusion (as far as we know) of all others. Clearly the social meaning of these terms depended on the time and context.

the moment when this architect-builder Muhammad was transported to Samarqand.²² The prominence of the name is quite striking, if we assume that it has always been in the same location. No name of any other builder or architect associated with this complex has as yet come to light. Its survival is remarkable in view of the fact that the prince, Muhammad Sultan's, name is found only on his tombstone in the Gur-i Mir crypt with no indication there of his role as patron of the madrasah and *khānqāh*.²³

There is no way to know for certain that this cartouche with the name of the architect-builder is contemporary with Muhammad Sultan. So far the name has not been discovered in any surviving texts from the early fifteenth century as corroboration. However, the inscription was present no later than 1627 (and probably long before that) when the native Samarqandi, Sultan-Muhammad Mutribi, compiled his anthology of poets as a gift for the Mughal (Timurid) emperor, Jahangir (r. 1605–27). In his careful description of the site (see below) he quotes the inscription in the cartouche just as it appears today. But between 1404 and 1627 many hands had had the opportunity to introduce architectural changes to the mausoleum and the complex of which it was a part. It is also worth noting that despite the legibility of the cartouche with Muhammad al-Isfahani's name, at least as it appears in recent times, his involvement occasioned no comment from writers describing or commenting on the madrasah complex in the fifteenth century.

The Hungarian traveler, Arminius Vámbéry, whose work should be treated with some caution,²⁴ visited the complex in 1863 and rendered the part of the entry inscription in Arabic script as “*amal al-faqīr ‘Abd Allāh ibn Maḥmūd al-Isfahānī*” (the work of the humble ‘Abd Allah, son of Mahmud of Isfahan) when the actual inscription reads: “*amal al-‘abd al-ḍa‘īf Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-bannā al-Isfahānī*” (the work of the humble servant Muhammad, son of Mahmud, builder from Isfahan). How Vámbéry misread it is unclear. He correctly describes the cartouche as “written in white letters upon a blue

22 Binbaş 2016, pp. 37–38 for another example of Timur's deportation of Isfahanis with desired skills.

23 See Semenov 1949, pp. 48–51 for the transcription and translation of the inscription on Muhammad Sultan's tombstone.

24 For a comprehensive critique of Vámbéry's *History of Bokhara from the earliest Period down to the Present*, London 1873 (criticism also usefully applied to Vámbéry's *Travels in Central Asia* [Vámbéry 1865]) see the long and detailed demolishing of the work by V. Grigorief translated from the Russian and included as an appendix by Schuyler 1876 in vol. 2, pp. 360–89 (omitted in Geoffrey Wheeler's condensed edition [Schuyler 1966]). Schuyler also refers (p. 389) to another highly critical review of the work by Prof. A. von Gutschmidt in *Literarisches Centralblatt*, no. 19, 1873.

ground” so it could not have been obscured by dirt.²⁵ Perhaps by the time he came to write up his travels he had forgotten the exact words. Henry Lansdell, a Bible salesman who visited the Gur-i Mir between 28 September and 1 October 1882, gives the name as Vámbéry does, probably relying on the latter.²⁶

3 The Development of the Site

The evolution of the ensemble of buildings that eventually comprised the site, seems clear now from the work of the archaeologist, Igor Evgen'evich Pletnev, who examined the foundations of the Gur-i Mir and its masonry as well as other areas of the complex and believed that it evolved in the following way.²⁷ First came the *khānqāh*, whose date of construction, as we have said, is uncertain but most likely occurred late in the second half of the fourteenth century, perhaps as late as the mid-1390s if Muhammad Sultan was the patron. It was soon followed by a madrasah opposite and facing it, following the orientation of the *khānqāh* along an east-west axis, the two buildings comprising the initial phase of construction.

Next the madrasah and the *khānqāh* were united with walls, minarets, and a gateway which now bears the inscription with the name of Muhammad al-Isfahani. Perhaps this phase of walls, minarets, and a monumental gateway was Muhammad Sultan's plan or a plan created by the Isfahani architect-builder. It was a four-iwan (also known as a *chahār tāq* or *chahār ṣuffah* ensemble design) plan comprising a small square courtyard enclosed by high walls, each wall with an iwan or vaulted portico serving as a gateway at its midpoint on east-west and north-south axes.²⁸ The wall, whose height, according to Pletnev, matched that of the west façade of the two-storey madrasah, would have completely screened the one-storey *khānqāh* on its western side where a shallow iwan there, open at both ends, served as the entry to the *khānqāh*. Facing it across the courtyard was the madrasah whose arcaded façade, in

25 Vámbéry 1865, p. 248.

26 Lansdell 1885, p. 567 and Lansdell 1887, p. 222. Lansdell cites Vámbéry on another point relating to the tomb so it seems more than likely that he simply copied Vámbéry's errant reading of the inscription.

27 Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 51.

28 An iwan is "... a vaulted hall open at one or both ends, used either as an entry portal or facing a courtyard ..." (*The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*, Third Edition, Harmondsworth and New York, 1980, s.v., "Iwan"). Other terms, *ṣuffah*, often applied to a raised platform, and *tāq* were sometimes used as a synonym for iwan. See for example, Yazdi 2008, p. 1255; Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 470; O'Kane 1987, p. 388.

Pletnev's reconstruction, served as the eastern wall of the courtyard and whose two-storey frontage determined the height of the other three walls.²⁹ The northern iwan was planned as the main inner portal to the four-iwan design (an outer gateway on the same north-south axis is described by Mutribi in the early seventeenth-century, see below) and was oriented to align with Ruhabad, the mausoleum of Burhan al-Din Sagharji, and beyond it, on the same line, the mausoleum and shrine of Nur al-Din Basir. The southern iwan directly across the courtyard from the main inner portal at first either led to open ground or more likely was closed with a blank wall. Minarets were erected at the four corners of the complex, three of which were still standing at the end of the sixteenth century but only the ruins of two remained when Samarqand was conquered by tsarist forces in 1868. In Pletnev's view, madrasah, walls, iwans, and minarets were all designed and built at one time.³⁰

Whether the madrasah building was completed or not, we know it was in operation by 1400, according to one of the professors there, Mawlana Jamal al-Din Ahmad Khwarazmi (d. 831/1427–28). Sometime in the early 1420s, the Syrian captive of Timur, Ibn 'Arabshah, interviewed Khwarazmi for his biography of Timur. Ibn 'Arabshah either knew Khwarazmi from his days in Samarqand or had heard of him after both men had left Samarqand following Timur's death in 1405. The two men probably met for the interview on Ottoman territory, where Khwarazmi spent the last years of his life. The story that Khwarazmi told Ibn 'Arabshah is that he was teaching Qur'an at the madrasah of Muhammad Sultan when the latter was summoned to Qarabagh in Iran by Timur in the winter of 1399–1400.³¹ This would then be a terminus ad quem for the construction of the madrasah.

4 The Muhammad Sultan Madrasah Endowment

We have to assume it was while Muhammad Sultan was still in Samarqand before heading for northern Iran that he established a *waqf* endowment for the madrasah and *khānqāh*. It would cover maintenance of the buildings, the

29 See Pletnev's rendering of axonometric and plan views in Pletnev and Shvab 1967, pp. 53, 57. Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 22 would give the height of the wall as "forty *gaz*".

30 Pletnev 1965, Pletnev 1975, and Pletnev and Shvab 1967.

31 Someone's memory may have been a little hazy on this point. Yazdi 2008, p. 1111 has Muhammad Sultan arriving at Timur's camp in Qarabagh in early December 1401 and it does not take a year for a horseman to travel from Samarqand to Qarabagh (in present-day Azerbaijan). More likely he was summoned sometime in 1401. See Ibn 'Arabshah 1936/2018, pp. 324–25.

payment of student stipends, and the salaries of professors and other staff of both buildings, as well as the cost of operating a kitchen for the students, staff, and visitors. The *waqf* endowment is always referred to as the “*waqf* of the madrasah” but “madrasah” was a term of convenience for the entire complex. No endowment deed has survived, as far as we know, although detailed knowledge of the deed and its terms and perhaps a copy of the document itself still existed as late as the end of the seventeenth century and records were still being kept for the endowment as late as the 1870s.³²

As was typical of the time, the endowment included both agricultural and commercial property, binding real estate and commercial interests to the welfare of the complex. There is information about the endowment’s holdings in documents of the fifteenth century that gives some idea of the geographical extent of the endowment and the types of property in it. In an endowment deed dated January 25, 1470 for his own madrasah located in Samarqand in the Darb-i Suzangaran (Needlemakers’ Gate) quarter in the southernmost part of the city, the eminent Naqshbandi shaykh, Khwajah ‘Ubayd Allah Ahrar, listed some of the properties he was endowing that were located in Miyankal, a district midway between Bukhara and Samarqand.³³ Because an endowment deed had to define exactly the endowed property and this was usually accomplished by describing what surrounded it, we learn that one of the abutting properties was a village named Muzan and it belonged to the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah endowment.³⁴

Another endowment, a “mixed” one benefiting both Khwajah Ahrar’s madrasah and his descendants, included a warehouse (*tīm*) in Samarqand City which was located “between the (streets) of the coppersmiths, poultry retailers, and stuffed pastry (*sanbūṣah*) shops and the shoe-sellers’ warehouse.” On its western side, it was “partly bordered by a small eleven-room warehouse (*tīmchah*) part of which belonged to the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah endowment.” This latter endowment deed was issued by Ahrar no later than February 1490.³⁵ Although the evidence these provide is slight and no doubt very partial, it gives a sense of the range of real estate—rural agricultural land and urban commercial properties—owned and endowed by Muhammad Sultan and perhaps others for the benefit of the madrasah complex. The Indian campaign, the most likely source of his sudden wealth, ended at the very end of 1398 and

32 Maliha ms. 4270, fol. 296; Maliha 2011, p. 487.

33 On the location of Darb-i Sūzangārān see Sukhareva 1976, p. 203 (map).

34 Chekhovich 1974, p. 72.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 245. In McChesney 2003, p. 11, note 23, I gave the date incorrectly as 1546 for this reference to Muhammad Sultan’s endowment.

so Muhammad Sultan, on return to Samarqand, would have converted some of his takings into real estate which he could then have turned into a *waqf* endowment. It is possible, however, that the endowment was established in his name post-mortem (after 1403) just as a century later the neo-Chinggisid warlord, Shibani Khan's, endowment was established by his sister for his madrasah.³⁶ In the case of Muhammad Sultan's *waqf* endowment, if it was done during his lifetime and if it was dependent to some degree on the Indian campaign, therefore it had to have been established before he left Samarqand to join Timur in the winter of 1399–1400 from which he would not return to Samarqand alive. The endowment must have been very well funded and, over the long haul, been well managed for it would function for nearly five hundred years.

Thus by 1400, Muhammad Sultan's complex included a walled compound with a *khānqāh* on the western side, the northern side marked by a tall entry iwan, the eastern side mostly taken up by the facade of the madrasah and the southern side, mirroring the north with a large iwan, probably closed at its southern end. There was as yet no Gur-i Mir.

We turn now to the construction of the great funerary monument to be known eventually as Gur-i Mir along with the entry gateway all that remains today of the ensemble. What do we know about its construction? In an article first published in 1915, V.V. Bartol'd did an exhaustive study of the texts and his work still remains the starting point for understanding the building's creation and its purpose.³⁷ His interest seems to have been piqued by the 1905 publication of *Mecheti Samarkanda: Gur-Emir*, which contained historical commentary by N.I. Veselovskii, and by V.L. Viatkin's review of Veselovskii's work. Bartol'd's study was in large measure a response to those two works.³⁸

Bartol'd's exhaustive comparison of the sources available to him has for the most part stood the test of time. If it has any weakness from our perspective today it is that it does not offer a contextual analysis of the sources. For example, one of the principal contemporary writers, Ibn 'Arabshah, was in Samarqand at the time of Timur's death but was only fifteen years old and, more importantly, did not sit down to write his biography of Timur until more than thirty years had passed. Ibn 'Arabshah came to Samarqand in harsh and traumatic circumstances as an eleven-year-old prisoner from Damascus, having endured, along

36 Mukminova 1966, pp. 17 ff.

37 Bartol'd 1916/1964 and Bartol'd 1974. The translator in the latter edition characterizes the language of the article as "allusive and obscure" and notes that Bartol'd's terminology for funerary items was sometimes misleading. Although the translation has a number of mistakes, mostly minor, (some of which were noted in McChesney 2003, p. 3, note 5) it is an important resource for those who do not read Russian.

38 For Bartol'd's findings see McChesney 2003, p. 4.

with his mother and sister, a six-month march from Syria to Samarqand.³⁹ He would stay for the formative years of his adolescence, and developed his strong antipathy to Timur as a result of his own kidnapping and perhaps the treatment of his mother and sister as well, whose fates are unknown.⁴⁰ Moreover, when he wrote his hostile biography of the Central Asian warrior he was far removed from Samarqand and living under very different circumstances. No doubt he had stored some memories from the time of Timur's death and burial, but when it came to specifics, he had to look to others for information.⁴¹ He was certainly old enough to have been curious about the events surrounding Timur's death and burial and much emphasis should be placed on that section of his narrative.

On March 13, 1403, Muhammad Sultan died. He was in his twenty-eighth year.⁴² His grandfather, Timur, who intended to establish succession in the line of his second son, Jahangir, who had, like Muhammad Sultan, predeceased Timur, was particularly affected by his grandson's death and soon would designate another son of Jahangir, Pir Muhammad, a half-brother to Muhammad Sultan, as his heir. Had Timur wanted to develop the clan preserve of Shahr-i Sabz as a dynastic necropolis where Muhammad Sultan's father, Jahangir, was already buried as well as Timur's own father, Taraghay, he probably would have done so and had Muhammad Sultan buried there. But instead, in 1404, after temporary interment at Avnik in eastern Anatolia where the prince died, his body was disinterred, transported to Samarqand, and reinterred. Less than a year later, his grandfather, Amir Timur, also died.

Ibn 'Arabshah first says: "They buried him [Muhammad Sultan] in the sturdy *madrakah* known for his having built it and that [burial] was in the year 805/1403 and when God Most High destroyed his grandfather they buried him with [Muhammad Sultan] as will be mentioned later."⁴³ Ibn 'Arabshah then has Timur's corpse being brought back from Utrar [formerly Farab, a town on the Syr Darya or Jaxartes River in modern-day Kazakhstan] where

39 McChesney 2006, pp. 210–14.

40 Ibid., pp. 213 ff.

41 On his sources see Ibn 'Arabshah 1936/2018, pp. 4, 6, 23, 42, 91, 125, 168, 222–24, 314, 318, 344. Most of Ibn 'Arabshah's sources were oral ones but one book he refers to by title is the *Muntakhab*, the work of Mu'in al-Din Natanzi (the published versions of which only come down to Timur's death and say nothing about his burial or the Gur-i Mir nor for that matter anything about the death and burial of Muhammad Sultan.) (See e.g. Natanzi 2004 pp. 296–97. See also McChesney 2006, pp. 236–38 on Ibn 'Arabshah's writing Timur's biography.)

42 Manz 1989, p. 230.

43 Ibn 'Arabshah 1868, p. 288. For the Sanders translation of this passage see Ibn 'Arabshah 2018, p. 194.

he died in February 1405 and laid to rest “in the same place in which they had buried Mahomed [sic] Sultan, his grandson, in the college [madrasah] of his grandson.”⁴⁴

Hafiz-i Abru, another contemporary of Timur, writes in one of his works, “They transported the coffin (box-*ṣandūq*) of the Sovereign of the Face of the Earth to the Dar al-Saltanah, Samarqand and buried it in the *madrasah* of the Lord and Prince of the World, the late lamented heir-apparent, Prince (Amīrzādah) Muḥammad Sulṭān—may God illuminate his grave.”⁴⁵

As for another major fifteenth-century source cited for information on the Gur-i Mir, Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi (ca. 1370–1454), there are different views as to whether he ever visited Samarqand. The early sixteenth-century translator into Persian of Mir ‘Ali Shayr Nava’i’s *Majālis al-naḡā’is*, Muhammad Shah Qazvini, for example, reported that Ulugh Beg invited Yazdi to Samarqand but that he “eloquently declined the invitation.”⁴⁶ However, given the way Yazdi described the mausoleum in reporting the burial of Muhammad Sultan, he most likely did visit Samarqand at some point and if so certainly paid his respects at the mausoleum. In this passage he tells of Timur’s return to Samarqand in Muharram 807/July–August 1404 and his stopping at the house of the dead prince Muhammad Sultan where he ordered:

they construct a dome (*qubbah*) for his [the prince’s] illumined final resting place attached to the madrasah that a renowned architect (*mi‘mār-i himmat*) of this same prince had erected. In accordance with his command, in the forecourt of the *khānqāh*’s plaza (*dar pīshqāh-i sāḡat-i khānqāh*) and attached to the southern *ṣuffah*, they raised up a dome just like the heavenly sphere. They decorated its (interior) dado (*īzārah-ash*) with marble painted with lapis lazuli and gold and they excavated a subterranean crypt (*sardābah-i*) for the burial place of the deceased. They [also] tore down several houses which were in the vicinity and laid out a small paradisial garden.⁴⁷

44 Ibn ‘Arabshah 1936/2018, p. 244.

45 Hafiz-i Abru 1949, p. 31.

46 Binbaş 2016, p. 44.

47 See now *ibid.*, chapter 2, for a thorough recounting of what is known of Yazdi’s life, travels, and networks. For the quoted passage see Yazdi 2008, p. 1254. It is also translated in Bartol’d 1974, p. 76; compare Bartol’d 1916/1964, p. 438 and Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 262.

Concerning the disposition of Timur's body, Yazdi says, "they brought [it] to Samarqand to the domed resting place (*qubbah-i marqad*) and that night, he was buried, according to the requirements of the Holy Law."⁴⁸

A much later writer, Khwandamir, who seems to rely mostly on Yazdi except in this instance, refers to "the *khānqāh* of Amirzadah Muhammad Sultan, which was also the burial place (*maqbarah*) of the Felicitous Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction [Amir Timur]."⁴⁹

Another often-cited account is that of an observer contemporary with this period in Samarqand's history, Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, ambassador to Timur's court from King Henry III of Castile and León. Clavijo arrived in Samarqand in September 1404 and left in late November, a few days before Timur set out on his China campaign from which he would not return alive. Clavijo describes the place where Muhammad Sultan was buried as a "mosque" then as a "chapel" the first having been built according to him by "city authorities."⁵⁰ One has the sense, in light of the other sources, that what Clavijo was told about the structure later known as Gur-i Mir was an interlocutor's invention. There is nothing to suggest that Clavijo made any attempt to see and describe the site himself.

These sources with their different ways of referring to Timur's burial place—"the madrasah of Muhammad Sultan" (Ibn 'Arabshah and Hafiz-i Abru), a "chapel" (Clavijo), or a *qubbah-i marqad* (domed resting place in the forecourt of the *khānqāh* (Yazdi))⁵¹—were undoubtedly referring to the same structure but their different circumstances might help account for the difference in the terms applied to the structure. The fact that the ensemble of buildings, including the mausoleum, or at least the crypt, was known in Ibn 'Arabshah's time as "the madrasah of Muhammad Sultan" helps explain his usage. Yazdi, whose association with Samarqand is uncertain, seems to be describing a crypt near or at the southern iwan of the complex.

So we have the *khānqāh*, the madrasah, and the "domed resting place" all mentioned. Neither Bartol'd nor scholars since, with few exceptions, have paid much attention to the circumstances of the writers, preferring instead to see the texts as independent of their contexts. Moreover, for lack of evidence from contemporary sources, scholars have turned to much later sources (the late fifteenth-century 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi whose *Maṭla' al-Sa'dayn* was completed after 1470) or even the early sixteenth-century Khwandamir (whose *Habīb al-Siyar* in its various redactions was completed between 1524 and 1529)

48 Yazdi 2008, p. 1303.

49 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 3, part 3, p. 540.

50 Clavijo 2009, p. 243.

51 Ibn 'Arabshah 1868, p. 288; Hafiz-i Abru 1949, p. 31.

to fill in the gaps. It is quite possible, of course, that these writers had better information than earlier sources but failure to locate them in time and space and to reflect on the possible ramifications of their individual situations serves to shape the historical meaning.

Archaeological work has since done a great deal to unravel the initial sequence of construction of the Gur-i Mir. Pletnev, who published his work in the 1960s and 1970s, believed that the crypt was built much earlier than the present mausoleum, perhaps beneath a small mausoleum that stood a few meters south of the current one.⁵² He also based his findings on an examination of the foundations of the Gur-i Mir, the footings of the crypt, and the fact that the crypt extends out beyond the footprint of the mausoleum.⁵³ A mausoleum and crypt preceding the present one may have given rise to the story, told by Clavijo but generally dismissed in the scholarly literature, that Timur was dissatisfied with the mausoleum when originally constructed, ordered it torn down and a new one, the present one, built in the impossible time of ten days.⁵⁴ This tale bears a strong resemblance to a story in Yazdi about a similar turn of events at the great congregational mosque (also known as “Bibi Khanum”) which cost the architect there his life.⁵⁵

The whole ensemble became known variously as the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah, the *khānqāh* of Muhammad Sultan,⁵⁶ and Gur-i Mir, the latter name only emerging in the sixteenth century. At its moment of greatest development, probably by the late sixteenth century, the site was an ensemble of related buildings: a hostel (*khānqāh*), a college or seminary (madrasah), a Friday mosque (*masjid-i jāmiʿ*), a kitchen (*maṭbakh*), and a large mausoleum (*gunbad*), the last being the only structure that survives today along with a large entry gate. A great assembly hall was also planned in the first half of the fifteenth century and the

52 Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 52. Note that this collaborative study covered both Shah-i Zindah on which Shvab was the archaeologist and wrote the report and Gur-i Mir where Pletnev was responsible for the work and thus the report.

53 In June 1996, when renovations were underway for the celebration of the 666th anniversary of Timur's birth, this writer photographed the mausoleum and the courtyard to its south and southeast. At the time the courtyard paving had been removed and well beyond the footprint of the mausoleum a crypt was visible under the paved plaza. It is unclear whether this crypt is an extension of the crypt beneath Gur-i Mir or a separate one, perhaps the one shown on Pletnev's plan. (Pletnev, 1975, frontispiece, no. 9.)

54 Clavijo 1928, pp. 275–76.

55 Yazdi 2008, p. 1255.

56 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 3, pp. 539, 540.

foundations laid. Part of it may have survived in the large partially completed vaulted hall attached to the west side of the mausoleum.⁵⁷

Much discussion since Veselovskii⁵⁸ has centered on whether the bodies of Muhammad Sultan and later Timur were originally buried in Samarqand, in a place other than the mausoleum that was built and attached to the southern iwan of the madrasah complex. The hypothesis that perhaps both bodies were interred in another mausoleum, the Aq Saray, has been laid to rest first by the doubts raised by Bartol'd in 1915 about any "reinterments" other than that of Muhammad Sultan when he was moved from Avnik to Samarqand, second by the evidence that the Aq Saray mausoleum was not built until circa 1470,⁵⁹ and then finally refuted by Pletnev in his examination of the architecture of the Gur-i Mir crypt in the early 1960s.

What seems to be the case now is that when Muhammad Sultan's body was brought to Samarqand it was buried in a crypt built just beyond, and probably connected to, the south iwan of the complex by tearing out the blank wall on the south side (the back) of the iwan. It is possible but seems a little unlikely that the young Muhammad Sultan would have built a crypt for himself as part of the madrasah-*khānqāh*-courtyard project. More likely it was built by his grandfather in fulfillment of Muhammad Sultan's wish. Whether this crypt was considered a temporary solution or a permanent one, Timur very soon ordered work begun on the magnificent mausoleum, the Gur-i Mir, which survives to the present. Thanks to excavation work done in the 1920s to shore up the floor of the mausoleum, Pletnev, citing M.F. Mauer who was in charge of restoration work on the mausoleum at that time, was able to say that anomalies in the masonry showed that the Gur-i Mir was built over a crypt in which Muhammad Sultan had been buried,⁶⁰ a crypt originally intended only for Muhammad Sultan. His position in the crypt becomes the center point for orienting the mausoleum that Timur would order built.

Pletnev's work shows that the dimensions of the new mausoleum were constrained by the position of the south iwan the back of which was torn out to make as much room as possible and caused the plaza frontage of the iwan to become the first entryway into the mausoleum. The crypt, according to Pletnev, predated construction of the mausoleum over it, i.e. the mausoleum

57 See plan of Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 57 and Pletnev 1975, frontispiece. Pletnev attributes the massive assembly hall to Ulugh Beg.

58 Veselovskii 1905.

59 Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 270.

60 Pletnev and Shvab 1967, pp. 52–54.

that exists today, by many months.⁶¹ Later, the crypt would be expanded to meet the plans, probably those of another grandson of Timur, Ulugh Beg (r. at Samarqand 1409–49), to make the Gur-i Mir a dynastic necropolis to supersede the one at Shahr-i Sabz. Muhammad Sultan's tomb would still remain the center point of the mausoleum, however.

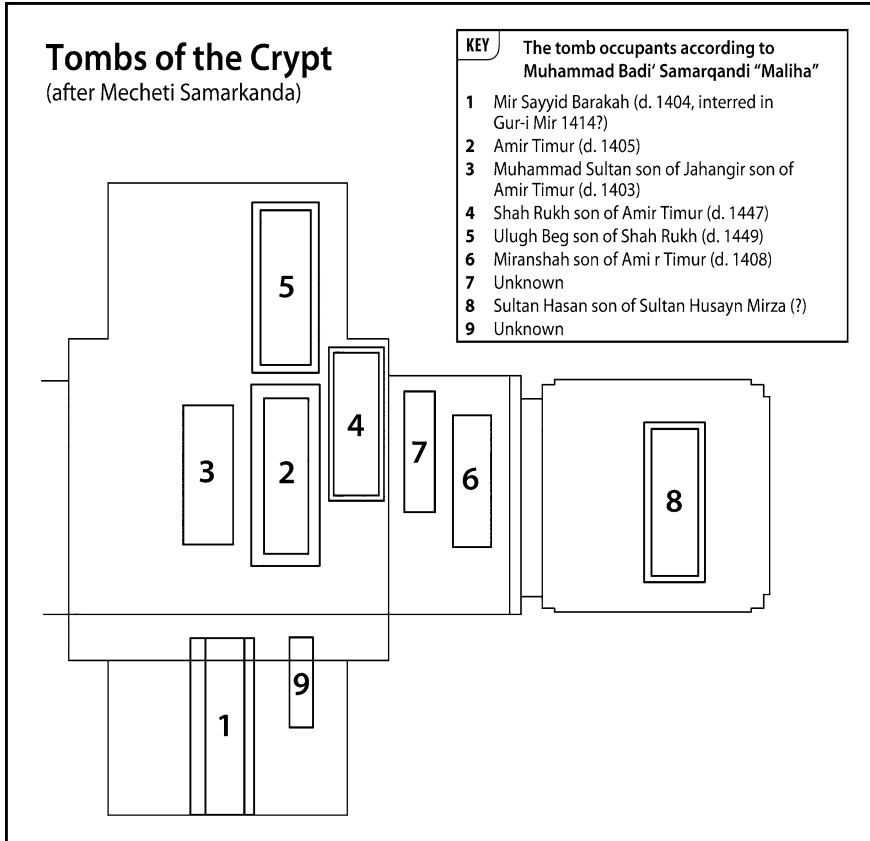
At the time of Muhammad Sultan's death in 1403, Timur may still have intended to be buried in Shahr-i Sabz where his father and Muhammad Sultan's father, Jahangir, were already buried, a necropolis that was largely his vision. However, when the time arrived, Timur had little say in the matter. Another grandson, Khalil Sultan, son of Miranshah, would oversee the burial of Timur in the crypt built for Muhammad Sultan. Khalil Sultan took control of Samarqand in 1405 and held it until 1409. How far along the construction of the mausoleum was in late winter 1405 it is now impossible to say unless new sources emerge.

5 Subsequent Burials

Today there are nine graves in the crypt of the Gur-i Mir with cenotaphs above them on the ground floor. The entire burial program is anything but clear. Only four, and possibly five, of the nine graves represented by tombstones can be positively identified by the inscription of their names on their tombs—Timur; his youngest son, Shah Rukh (d. 1447); and two grandsons, Muhammad Sultan (d. 1403), son of Jahangir, and Ulugh Beg (d. 1449), son of Shah Rukh. For a third son, Miranshah, who died at Tabriz, Iran in 1408 and was first buried there, there is also a tombstone with an inscription identifying it as his burial place but some fifteenth-century sources say he was buried in the Timurid necropolis at Shahr-i Sabz.⁶² A sixth grave, the one that initially established the mausoleum

61 Pletnev in Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 54, believed that Timur ordered construction of the great mausoleum over the crypt "a few years" after Muhammad Sultan's death and burial. The "few years" is impossible since Muhammad Sultan died in March 1403 and wasn't buried at Samarqand until a year later (Yazdi 2008, p. 1232) when the order for building the mausoleum was issued and Timur died less than a year after that. The exact chronology is now impossible to determine but the mausoleum was probably not completed, although the crypt existed, when Timur died in February 1405 and his body brought back to Samarqand from Utrar.

62 This is one of many confusing elements about the burials. 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi, who completed his chronicle *Maṭla' al-sa'dayn wa majma' al-bahrāyn* sometime after 1470, says Miranshah was killed near Tabriz and buried there. His bones were later disinterred and brought back and buried at Kash (Shahr-i Sabz) (Bartol'd 1974, p. 86). From this, Bartol'd concluded that Shahr-i Sabz was still seen as the Timurid necropolis. Then,



PLAN 2 Tombs of the crypt (after *Mecheti Samarkanda*)

as a shrine, belongs to Mir Sayyid Barakah, a somewhat mysterious figure, well-attested in contemporary sources as being a major influence and advisor to

for reasons unknown, it is thought the body was reburied in Gur-i Mir but when is not at all clear. John Woods, in research for his forthcoming *The Timurid Aristocratic Order*, found evidence that Shah Rukh brought Miranshah's body to the Gur-i Mir after 1414 (personal communication, September 2017). In the early 1950s M.E. Masson believed that "his reburial at Samarkand can scarcely predate the reign of Abu Sa'ïd" (r. 1451–69) (Masson and Pugachenkova 1978–80, Part 2, p. 129) The fact that a tradition regarding his burial at Shahr-i Sabz was still alive towards the end of the fifteenth century and was accepted as true by Mir Khwand, author of *Rawzat al-ṣafā*, who finished his work by 1495, seems odd. It is certainly clear that the descendants of Miranshah, most notably the line that became the Timurids of India (better known as the Mughals) never showed any doubts that Miranshah was buried in the Gur-i Mir. I have found no record that they patronized the Shahr-i Sabz site.

Timur but whose origins and Sufi connections remain controversial.⁶³ Neither his cenotaph nor his tombstone have inscriptions but the position of his cenotaph and his tomb in the crypt at the head of the other cenotaphs establishes whose it is. The occupants of the other three graves remain unidentified, although one, that of the so-called “pseudo-Sayyid ‘Umar,” has an inscription but it does not identify the occupant of the grave.⁶⁴

For other burials, Hafiz-i Abru (d. 1430) tells us that Aka Biki (Agha Begi), daughter of Muhammad Sultan and a first-cousin and wife of Ulugh Beg, died on 7 Muharram 822/3 February 1419, and was buried in the “*gunbad-i madrasah*” of Muhammad Sultan.⁶⁵ İlker Evrim Binbaş believes this referred to the Gur-i Mir but given the way the word *gunbad* (domed room or building, especially a tomb room) is applied by contemporary sources, it is uncertain where she was buried.⁶⁶ The term could have referred as well to one of the domed corner rooms of the madrasah proper where, during archaeological excavations, it became clear that the southwest corner room of the madrasah was used for burials.⁶⁷ The term *gunbad* was also used for the domed mausoleum itself as were the words *dakhmah*, and *qubbah*. Timur, for example, is described by Yazdi as being buried, as noted above, in the “*qubbah-i marqad*,” the “dome of the resting place” which we know as the existing mausoleum, the Gur-i Mir.⁶⁸ In the early seventeenth century, Mutribi refers to the mausoleum as both *gunbad* and *dakhmah* and also calls the domed corner rooms of the madrasah *gunbads* “beneath which are the tombs (*gürkhānahs*) of the Chaghatay princes”⁶⁹ and perhaps at least one princess, Aka Begum/Biki, the daughter of Muhammad Sultan and wife of Ulugh Beg mentioned above. Or perhaps Aka Begum is in one of the unmarked graves of the Gur-i Mir.

It has been generally accepted, citing Bartol’d or the translation of Bartol’d, that the half-brother of Muhammad Sultan, and Timur’s second designated heir-apparent, Pir Muhammad Sultan, was also buried in Gur-i Mir.⁷⁰ But Bartol’d unfortunately gives no source for the information. Except for Bartol’d’s

63 See Muminov and Babadzhanov 2001 and DeWeese 2017.

64 Semenov 1947.

65 Hafiz-i Abru 1993, p. 704.

66 Binbaş 2016, p. 280.

67 Mutribi *Nuskhah*, p. 22 mentions the madrasah as having “two lofty domes” used as *gürkhānahs* (tombs) and twentieth-century excavations uncovered burials in the north-western and southwestern *gunbads*, two of the domed corner rooms of the madrasah. (Pletnev 1981, p. 64) Mutribi also uses the term *gunbad* to describe the building that housed the kitchen for the complex (Mutribi *Nuskhah*, p. 22).

68 Yazdi 2008, p. 1303.

69 Mutribi *Nuskhah*, p. 22.

70 See for example, Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 260 and Bilbaş 2016, p. 280.

unsupported assertion, there is no evidence yet that Pir Muhammad was buried in Gur-i Mir, although the authoritative studies of Golombek and Wilber and Binbaş both follow Bartol'd or at least the 1974 translation of Bartol'd. In fact, there is no evidence, though much conjecture, as to who is buried in the other four graves.⁷¹

To sum up: Amir Timur, the warrior-king, had conquered a vast region of the middle part of Asia stretching from Anatolia and Syria to northern India. He had chosen as his successor a grandson, Muhammad Sultan, the son of Jahangir, Timur's second son. But as one of the inscriptions on the Gur-i Mir once noted "man proposes, God disposes" (*al-'abd yudabbir wa Allāh yuqaddir*),⁷² Muhammad Sultan predeceased Timur in 1403. In the summer of 1404 Timur came to Samarqand and ordered a large mausoleum erected beside the madrasah which Muhammad Sultan had already built and endowed by 1401. Timur's purpose appears clear, to honor a beloved grandson and inter him next to Muhammad Sultan's own foundation. It is possible that this was a wish of Muhammad Sultan himself, that he not be buried in the family plot at Shahr-i Sabz. Bartol'd made the convincing case that Timur himself planned to be buried in Shahr-i Sabz at the family cemetery where his father, Taraghay, and other relatives were buried.

In mid-February 1405⁷³ on a campaign to conquer China, Timur fell ill and died at Aq Sulat near Utrar in what is now Kazakhstan, some 300 miles by road

71 Some of the names of those purportedly buried in Gur-i Mir, besides Pir Muhammad, and for which there is no corroborating evidence are: 'Abd al-Latif, son of Ulugh Beg and three other sons of Ulugh Beg [Schuyler 1876, pp. 252–53]; a certain Shah Khwajah [Aleskerov 1976, p. 134]; Sultan Hasan, son of Sultan Husayn, a grandson of Timur, buried to the left of Ulugh Beg [Malihā ms., fol. 296b]; Kumar Inak, "a minister" and Attum 'Umar "a minister" [Brandenburg 1972, p. 134]; 'Umar Shaykh [Pugachenkova 1968, p. 81 and Knobloch 1972, p. 130 who relied on Pugachenkova]; (Mir) Sayyid 'Umar [Bartol'd 1974, p. 85 as well as Umniakov and Aleskerov 1958, p. 43 and idem 1967, p. 61]; Said [*sic*—Sayyid] Mir Omar; some female members of Timur's family; and members of Shah Rukh's family as well as Timur's descendants or friends [Lansdell 1885, pp. 567–69 and Lansdell 1887, p. 222]. A sign at Gur-i Mir today accounts for all the tombs by adding the names of "Sayid Umar [the pseudo 'Umar], Abdulla Mirza (d. 1420), [and] Abdurakhman Mirza (1421–32)" but where this information came from is unknown.

72 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 22.

73 Writing in 1414, Natanzi 2004, p. 297 dates Timur's demise to the evening (*shab*) of the fourteenth of Sha'ban 807/February 15 [or 16], 1405. Various manuscripts of his work also include the weekday *chahār shanbah* (Wednesday) although the fourteenth of Sha'ban was a Sunday. This is the date that can be clearly read on his nephrite cenotaph *laylat al-rābī'ah 'asharah min Sha'bān sanah saba' wa thamān-mī'ah*. (See Semenov 1948, facing p. 57 [facsimile inscription], p. 57, [transcription] and p. 58 [translation]). Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, finishing his work in Shiraz in 1424–25 under the supervision of a grandson of Timur, Ibrahim Sultan, dates his death "the evening of Wednesday (i.e., Tuesday evening,

from Samarqand. He thus died less than a year after ordering the building of the mausoleum. It may not have been Timur's wish to be buried in Samarqand but the choice obviously was not his. His body was returned to Samarqand and interred in the crypt of the new mausoleum, which was probably still under construction. For the next four years, during which Khalil Sultan had control of Samarqand, there was a struggle to succeed him. Finally in 1409, with the other contenders dead or rendered hors de combat, Shah Rukh, his youngest son, had himself recognized as successor. Shah Rukh, however, kept his capital in Herat and named his son, Ulugh Beg, to govern Samarqand on his behalf.

With Shah Rukh's rise to preeminence and Samarqand in the hands of his son, the mausoleum gradually took on a new meaning, that of dynastic necropolis, a place where the power of Timurid rule could be celebrated through the glory of monumental architecture. Up to this point, if Timur had had a similar vision of a place where monuments would attest to the power and glory of his rule then Shahr-i Sabz, centered as it was in Barlas clan territory, was certainly the place. However, Shahr-i Sabz was relatively isolated compared with Samarqand and whereas Samarqand commanded both the north-south and east-west international routes, Shahr-i Sabz was only on the north-south route out of Samarqand heading towards Balkh, Kabul, and India. In any event, Timur had long since decided on Samarqand as his primary fixed capital—although given his peripatetic career he spent little time there—and had turned it into an imperial center by the import of captured peoples—scholars, artisans, and commoners alike—and by inaugurating an enormous triumphalist building program.

Although Timur may have envisioned a thousand-year rule of a Chinggisid-Timurid dynasty with Samarqand its capital, his plans, laid out in his last will and testament, that Pir Muhammad, the eldest son of Timur's eldest son, 'Umar Shaykh, succeed him, did not survive his death.⁷⁴ Khalil Sultan, a grandson of Timur and half-brother of Muhammad Sultan, proclaimed his succession to

since the day began at sunset), the seventeenth of Sha'ban 807/February 18, 1405." (Manz 1989, p. 231 uses Yazdi's date). The nephrite block carved as Timur's cenotaph and brought back from eastern Turkistan by another grandson, Ulugh Beg, in 1424 was inscribed at that time or shortly thereafter. It has been suggested that the number of the day of the month (*al-rābi'ah 'asharah*-fourteen) was a mistake for "Wednesday" (*yawm al-arba'ā*) but this seems unlikely since it would leave the *'asharah* (the -teen of fourteen) unexplained. Although Natanzi and the cenotaph opt for the evening of the fourteenth of Sha'ban (February 15), Yazdi and most later writers chose the evening of the seventeenth of Sha'ban (February 18) a date generally preferred by most modern scholars as well (Woods forthcoming, Manz 1989, p. 231.)

74 For the best analysis of what Timur might have thought about the future of his empire see Woods 1990b, especially pp. 113–17.

Timur and named a son of Muhammad Sultan as the “Chinggisid” khan, the nominal head of state.⁷⁵ It is possible that the vision of the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah complex with its new monumental mausoleum as commemorating the continuing power of the Chinggisid dispensation maintained by the Jahangirid line of the Timurid house was first promoted by Khalil Sultan in the few years that he had control of the capital. The genealogy linking Timur to Chinggis Khan inscribed on Timur’s tombstone might have been accomplished in those four years. But the same genealogy on his cenotaph could not have been done for another twenty years, when Ulugh Beg brought back the nephrite block from East Turkistan.⁷⁶ It seems much more likely, though by no means certain, that the two genealogies were inscribed as part of a single vision, that of Shah Rukh or more particularly of his son, Ulugh Beg.

It is Ulugh Beg then who has come to be seen as the person under whose aegis the site began to be cultivated as a dynastic necropolis in which the message of Timurid power allied with the Chinggisid mandate of world rule could be enshrined and promoted. The mausoleum site was to be a tangible symbol of Timurid authority and would perhaps provide a center of loyalty for the many branches of the Timurid family that were forming with the arrival of each new generation. Ulugh Beg undertook several enhancements of the mausoleum—some of which were never fully realized—perhaps acting on the advice of his father or even his mother, Gawhar Shad, who herself was busy at this time building monuments in Herat and Mashhad that would commemorate Timurid glory.

6 Sanctification of the Mausoleum

An important element in the Timurid vision for a dynastic necropolis was the presence of a saintly figure. This was first realized at the Timurid necropolis at Shahr-i Sabz which entombed Shaykh Shams al-Din Kulal, a revered Suhrawardi shaykh, along with members of the Timurid house including Timur’s father, Taraghay, and his eldest son, Jahangir, in the 1370s. Half a century later, Shah Rukh developed a local dynastic necropolis outside Herat at the Gazurgah shrine of the Hanbali mystic ‘Abd Allah Ansari (d. 1089). In Bukhara, in the sixteenth century, a necropolis for the Jani-Begi Shibanids would take shape at the burial place of Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), founder of the Sufi confraternity, the Naqshbandis.

75 Ibid., p. 114.

76 Ibid., p. 85.

The physical proximity of mundane to spiritual power is a conventional mode of political life especially so in late medieval and early modern Central Asia: the two aspects—the coercive power of organized violence on the one hand and the perceived ability to muster even more powerful divine intervention on the other—tended to be mutually reinforcing. Sometime after 1405, the corpse of a holy man named Mir Sayyid Barakah (d. 1404), an obscure figure at one time identified with Andkhud (now Andkhoy, a town in northwestern Afghanistan and his first burial place), was moved to Samarqand and interred in the mausoleum with Timur and Muhammad Sultan. It is not clear whether it was Khalil Sultan who transferred the saintly body during his four year regime (1405–9) or Shah Rukh and Ulugh Beg after 1409 though it is generally thought to have been the latter. No contemporary or even near-contemporary evidence exists for the reinterment. The fact that Mir Sayyid Barakah was disinterred from Andkhud suggests the hand of Shah Rukh since Andkhud would have been under his control rather than his rival Khalil Sultan's in the period between 1405 and 1409.

It is by no means evident why Mir Sayyid Barakah was chosen. That he had a sufficient backstory establishing his ties to Timur⁷⁷ and had been buried at Andkhud, which made him handy for disinterment by Shah Rukh, were probably factors. It has recently been suggested that he actually originated from Kasbi, a settlement in the vicinity of Qarshi (aka Nakhshab and Nasaf) some 102 miles southwest of Samarqand⁷⁸ in present-day Uzbekistan.⁷⁹ More recently still, it has been shown that the shaykh's origins cannot be conclusively determined one way or the other but that what is important about him is the prestige he acquired because of Timur's acknowledgement of his spiritual power.⁸⁰ By some accounts, Sayyid Barakah was a holy man whom Timur had encountered either in the vicinity of the Oxus River where the former presented him with a drum and banner or when he was besieging Balkh in 1370. Timur was supposed to have said he owed his victory at Balkh to Mir Sayyid Barakah. The sayyid was reported to have been the amir's constant companion

77 For a concise and thorough account of those relations see DeWeese 2017.

78 Kasbi is found on the Bartholomew "India-Pakistan-Ceylon" map (scale 1:2,780,000) at about 65 degrees east latitude and 39 degrees north longitude.

79 Muminov and Babadzhanov 2001. In the geographical section of his work, under the entry for Nakhshab, the mid-seventeenth-century writer Mahmud b. Amir Wali says, "One of the villages of Nakhshab is Kasba which calls to mind a paradisiacal garden. In that village lives a family of sayyids who are called the 'Mir Haydari sayyids.' Uzbek rulers strive to forge relations with inhabitants of this village" (Mahmud b. Amir Wali 1977, p. 80).

80 DeWeese 2017, p. 141b.

from then on.⁸¹ The purpose of interring such a figure would seem to have been to universalize the mausoleum's meaning as a portal to the divine and so perhaps insure its future against decline, or worse, the disappearance of Timurid power and prestige, which might threaten the very existence of the building. Moreover, there was possibly another religious aspect, that of exorcising unwanted phantoms. Shah Rukh is remembered as having purged the interior of the tomb of the military symbols, Timur's bejewelled "weapons and equipment," that Ibn 'Arabshah had described.⁸² Interring a Muslim saint there would enhance its Islamization.

The burial of Sayyid Barakah created a structural problem for the mausoleum. Up until his burial, access was through the southern iwan or *suffah* of the ensemble which had become the north and main entry of the mausoleum. Because it was believed that Timur wished to be below or at the feet of Sayyid Barakah and Timur's position in the crypt (and thus the cenotaphs above on the ground floor) was already fixed, Sayyid Barakah had to be to his north and in Pletnev's words, "in connection with this [placement of Sayyid Barakah's tomb] access through the south iwan [of the plaza] became awkward."⁸³ Therefore, whether under Khalil Sultan or, as is generally believed, under Ulugh Beg, who succeeded Khalil Sultan at Samarqand, the north entrance to the mausoleum was closed up and an enclosed corridor or gallery along the east side was added as a new entryway. Pletnev connects the installation of Sayyid Barakah's tomb in the crypt and his cenotaph on the ground floor to the moment that the new entryway was constructed, which is generally thought to have been after Khalil Sultan's ouster in 1409.

More than a decade later Ulugh Beg also brought the nephrite block back from his 1422 campaign in eastern Turkistan that was inscribed and mounted on the ground floor above Timur's tomb in the crypt. Local memory of Ulugh Beg's work at the site caused his name to become so closely associated with it that even Mutribi, a man proud of Samarqand and of his knowledge of its history, writing two centuries later, even attributes Muhammad Sultan's madrasah to Ulugh Beg.⁸⁴ It is probably fair to say that in the memories of the people of Samarqand Ulugh Beg loomed so large that even if he was not the person directly responsible for any work done on the Gur-i Mir mausoleum if asked who built Gur-i Mir, they would likely have named him.⁸⁵

81 Ibid. pp. 140a and 141a.

82 Pletnev 1967, p. 55.

83 Ibid.

84 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 22.

85 A modern scholar (Shaw 2011, p. 44) has attributed to Ulugh Beg the still-standing "arched, tiled gateway" into the formerly-walled courtyard but provides no source.

7 Ulugh Beg's Enhancements of the Tomb Complex

We begin with the assumption, therefore, that most of the changes to the madrasah tomb, the *qubbah* or *gunbad*, occurred during Ulugh Beg's long tenure in Samarqand (1409–49) when the most concentrated effort was expended to produce a suitable dynastic necropolis. Whether it was his vision or his father, Shah Rukh's, cannot be said with any certainty. Had the vision been fully realized it would have been a remarkable monument of commemoration with generation after generation of Timurids being buried in its ever expanding crypt. It was to be a symbol of unity aimed at the many contentious members of the Timurid house, the tomb inscriptions asserting Timurid loyalty to the Chinggisid cause. These inscriptions would be a message directed toward the Turco-Mongol military elite of the time, whose support was always necessary for any Timurid figure with pretensions to rule.

There is no evidence yet that the mausoleum served as an object of pilgrimage during Ulugh Beg's time. This certainly does not mean that it did not have that kind of appeal, only that the evidence of it is lacking. Nor do we know what restrictions Ulugh Beg as governor of Samarqand might have placed on access to the cenotaphs and crypt of the Gur-i Mir. Later governors of Samarqand would attempt to regulate access. It is also uncertain as to whether the space that would be called a congregational mosque by the end of the sixteenth century was already so designated in the fifteenth. The complex as a whole remained centered on the madrasah, one of whose corner rooms would probably have served as a mosque for the students, faculty, and staff. The madrasah's appeal was to an elite class of scholars and aspiring intellectuals and would have been seen to further Islamic knowledge. But there was also a group of people associated with the complex whose aspirations were more mundane: the employees who handled the routine housekeeping at the complex—sweeping, including dealing with night soil; general cleaning; and tending to the lighting and furnishings.⁸⁶

86 The madrasah would have required a nearby latrine and had there been one it might have been mentioned in the endowment charter. The madrasah of Subhan Quli Khan in Balkh provides a good example of what would have been an obvious necessity, if one not usually mentioned, a toilet (*mustarāḥ*) located close to where people congregated. In Balkh, it was built outside one of the walls of Subhan Quli's madrasah and mentioned in the *waqf* deed. (See McChesney 2001, p. 111, figure 4.)

8 The Administration of the Complex

One of the intriguing aspects of the madrasah-*khānqāh*-mausoleum complex is the absence of evidence that an hereditary family of administrators emerged, as happened with the other three shrines discussed here as well as at other nearby shrines like Gazurgah at Herat, Chahar Bakr at Bukhara, and the Ahrari shrine in Kamangaran, Samarqand. Someone had to manage the ensemble's resources—its endowment, the votive offerings of pilgrims, and rental income from property—and in the other three cases here—at Balkh, Mazar-i Sharif, and Qandahar—appointment of a manager often led to hereditary succession to that post and the network of family members filling the bulk of the available salaried positions. Although the other shrine examples would suggest the strong likelihood of a single family emerging as “rightful” administrators, I have found no evidence of this yet for the Gur-i Mir complex.

Furthermore, through the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century, unlike the other shrines, there is little indication of any interest in a Sufi confraternity adopting the site, although the *khānqāh* may have continued to operate as a Suhrawardi center. Competing now with the Suhrawardis were the Naqshbandis, a relatively new confraternity. The Naqshbandis became dominant in Samarqand thanks to the charismatic figure of ‘Ubayd Allah Ahrar (d. 1490 AD). Despite the fact that his influence spread to Tashkent, Bukhara, Kabul, and Herat, his cult center was Kamangaran near the Needlemakers' Gate (Darb-i Suzangaran⁸⁷) on the south side of Samarqand and included a madrasah and mosque complex, the site of Ahrar's grave today.

9 The Madrasah and the Mausoleum

Muhammad Sultan's madrasah remained the focal point of the site and, supported by its endowment, continued to thrive for centuries. In his memoirs, Zahir al-Din Babur, the last Timurid to hold Samarqand, gives us a sense of its importance towards the end of the fifteenth century, over a hundred years after its founding. The two published English translations of this passage, Annette Beveridge's and Wheeler Thackston's, shift the emphasis slightly between tomb and madrasah. Beveridge writes:

87 Sukhareva 1976, map on p. 203 shows the location of all the 18th-century gates of Samarqand. Note the gate just west of Darb-i Suzangaran which she names the Khwajah Ahrar Gate suggesting this was closer to his necropolis. Its date is unknown.

His [Timur's] own tomb and those of his descendants who have ruled in Samarkand, are in a College, built at the exit (*chaqar*) of the walled-town, by Muhammad Sultan Mirza, the son of Timur Beg's son, Jahangir Mirza.

She then felt compelled to add this note. "Babur's wording suggests that in his day the Gūr-i-amīr was known as the Madrāsa [*sic*]."⁸⁸ In his translation of Babur's passage, Thackston puts the emphasis on the madrasah rather than the tomb:

Temür Beg's grandson, Jahangir Mirza's son, Muhammad-Sultan Mirza, had a *madrasa* constructed in the gateway to the outer wall of Samarkand. The tombs of Temür Beg and all of his descendants who ruled Samarkand are there.⁸⁹

Babur did not mean they were actually buried inside Muhammad Sultan's madrasah, but rather that the whole complex was known as "Muhammad Sultan's Madrasah." Thackston's translation better follows the original here, that the tomb was in, or part of, the madrasah built by Muhammad Sultan, Timur's beloved grandson. Babur, who was in Samarqand in 1500–01, though under siege for most of the time, would certainly have known precisely where the bodies were buried.

In any event, the madrasah, its finances, and its administration were central to the well-being of the complex. The mausoleum was no doubt politically important but it was the madrasah that provided the site with its primary economic and social significance. Its administrators used its substantial endowment to hire staff, pay stipends and salaries, and maintain the entire site. Beveridge's interpretive note suggests how the survival of the mausoleum and the disappearance of the madrasah affected and transformed the meaning of the site in the eyes of later observers.

After the burial of Ulugh Beg in the mausoleum in 1449, the last known Timurid to be interred there, the impression we are given by the silence of the sources, is that the tomb for a time recedes somewhat from public discourse, at least as far as any surviving textual evidence is concerned. Not to say that there was any diminished interest in it locally. However, materials from the fifteenth century (Natanzi, Hafiz-i Abru, Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, Ibn 'Arabshah, Mirkhwand, and 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi) only show interest in its

88 Babur 1922, p. 78 and note.

89 Babur 1996, p. 84 [fol. 46a]. The Chaghatay text is in the Mano edition, Babur 1995, p. 70, lines 10–13.

early period, in the burials and the construction of the building. On the other hand, is there any reason not to assume that what is recorded for later times concerning the maintenance and use of the site is but a continuation of what was taking place in the latter half of the fifteenth century, the madrasah functioning, the endowment being managed, people being attracted to the entire site as visitors to the *khānqāh* or as students and faculty to the madrasah? It is possible that for the period 1409–49 and perhaps for some time thereafter the mausoleum itself was treated as a Timurid preserve and casual visitors or pilgrims seeking the blessing (*barakah*) of the aptly-named holy man buried within were not welcome to enter it. Students, teachers and others associated with the madrasah may have had access but again this is just speculation. It is not until the early sixteenth century, in a record from the early seventeenth century, that we find clues to how the mausoleum was being used.

10 The Neo-Chinggisid Revival

In 1512, Zahir al-Din Babur, the last Timurid figure of any stature in Transoxiana, having briefly retaken the city from the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibaniids, finally abandoned Samarqand for good and ended Timurid rule there. The Abu'l-Khayrids, unlike the Timurids, could credibly claim agnatic descent from Chinggis Khan, and thus a right to the Chinggisid khanate, while the Timurids had to display a symbolic “khan” who had direct descent from Chinggis Khan as a front for their own political authority. For the next quarter millennium or so Samarqand would be governed by two neo-Chinggisid dynasties, first the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibaniids (1501–1599) and then the Tuqay-Timurids (1599–ca 1737).

However, Babur figures in one, possibly two, late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century incidents involving the Gur-i Mir shrine. One concerns his brief recapture of Samarqand in October 1510. In his memoir he writes, “Entering through the gate [the context indicates the Turquoise Gate (*Fayrūzah Darwāzah*) on the east side of the city] I proceeded straight to the madrasah and khanaqah and sat down under the *khānqāh* entryway (*tāqī*).”⁹⁰ At the time, there were at least two madrasah and *khānqāh* complexes either of which might have been the one to which he was referring: the madrasah-*khānqāh* of the Gur-i Mir ensemble and the madrasah-*khānqāh* ensemble built by Ulugh Beg in circa 820/1417–18 on what is now called the Rigistan of Samarqand. Like the Gur-i Mir *khānqāh* that *khānqāh* has not survived but the madrasah still

90 Babur 1996, p. 121; Babur 1995, vol. 1, p. 124; and Babur 1922, p. 133. The two translations differ considerably here and the Thackston one (Babur 1996) seems better.

stands.⁹¹ Entering through the Turquoise Gate, it would have been about the same distance for Babur to go either to the Ulugh Beg madrasah and *khānqāh* ensemble or to the one of Muhammad Sultan.

The second episode is one Babur does not mention in his memoir. According to Sultan-Muhammad Samarqandi, whose nom de plume was Mutribi, Babur had issued a decree attempting to regulate certain types of activities that took place on the Gur-i Mir grounds. Mutribi's life spanned the last third of the sixteenth and the first third of the seventeenth century and he surely knew any stories that had developed around Babur's intermittent regimes in Samarqand. Without providing any chronology, Mutribi writes that Babur decreed that during the celebrations of 'Id al-Fitr (Breaking the Fast) at the end of Ramazan, and at Nawruz (New Year's Day), men and women of Samarqand could gather for four days "each week" [of the festivals] at the site, (which Mutribi calls "Gur-i Mir") and "every artisan and craftsman of Samarqand could also come and display and sell his wares."⁹² This sounds very much as if the site had been long established as a gathering place, perhaps too much so for Babur, the direct descendant of two of the people—Timur and Miranshah—buried there. His decree may not have been to initiate new practices but to regulate those that were taking place. These semi-annual four-day fairs went on after Babur finally departed Samarqand in 1512 and continued until 1585 (see below), says Mutribi.⁹³ If true, and there's no reason to doubt it, then the reported decree depicts the site, with a focus on the mausoleum, as a landmark attraction in the city of Samarqand, no longer the private preserve of the Timurid clan, if it ever had been.

11 The Abu'l-Khayrid Shibaniids and the Timurid Legacy: 1501–99

What Mutribi, our main contemporary source, tells us about the response of members of the Abu'l-Khayrid house to the Timurid architectural legacy in Samarqand is as follows: for the most part, the Shibaniids who governed the city treated the Timurid architecture with deference and respect. The clan certainly had a high regard for the memory of Amir Timur, the "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction" (*ṣāhib-i qirān*),⁹⁴ as did contemporary politicians

91 Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, pp. 263–65.

92 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 20.

93 Ibid.

94 The conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. See D. Pingree, "Qirān" *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* New Edition, 5: 130–31.

elsewhere.⁹⁵ The written record that has survived from the entire Abu'l-Khayrid period shows that the members of the ruling clan and their amirid supporters found enough significance in Timurid buildings, commemorative or otherwise, to undertake their repair and maintenance. Like later conquerors of Samarqand, the Timurid edifices could be treated as trophies that testified to Abu'l-Khayrid political and military superiority. However, there is no direct evidence yet that documents any Shibanid contributions to the Gur-i Mir complex.

Muhammad Shibani Khan (d. 1510) made Samarqand his appanage center for the period 1501–10 while contending with Babur for control of it. He is credited in general terms by the Iranian transplant Ruzbihan-i Khunji, who completed his book, *Mihmān-nāmah-i Bukhārā* (Bukharan Guest Book) towards the end of 1509, with ordering the renovation and reconstruction of existing *khānqāhs* and madrasahs in Samarqand.⁹⁶ Again, the term “madrasah” would still have embraced the entire complex of which Gur-i Mir, the mausoleum, was a part.

After Muhammad Shibani Khan, his uncle, Kuchkunji Khan, held Samarqand as his appanage and as capital of the entire khanate from 1514–30. Kuchkunji is also praised in general terms by a contemporary, Zayn al-Din Wasifi, for his restoration and renovation work on Timurid buildings and specifically for work he did to maintain and renovate “the madrasah and *khānqāh* of the auspicious martyred sultan, Ulugh Beg Gurgan.”⁹⁷ Here it seems to be the Rigistan complex that is being referred to. The construction of both buildings is mentioned by Hafiz-i Abru during Ulugh Beg’s lifetime and by ‘Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi writing towards the end of the century.⁹⁸ Ulugh Beg’s madrasah, built 1417–1421, survives to this day on the west side of the Rigistan. The *khānqāh* was sited directly opposite the madrasah more or less on the present site of the Shayrdar (Shirdar) Madrasah (1619–36). These two buildings formed an area that Mutribi calls Ulugh Beg’s “*bayn al-ṭāqayn*” (“between the two arches”) referring to the two entry iwans (*pīshṭāqs*) of the madrasah and *khānqāh* which defined two sides of a plaza.⁹⁹ A reconstruction of the area as it would have been at the beginning of the sixteenth century somewhat foretells the

95 Khunji 1963, p. 301 depicts Shibani Khan’s great banquet on Nawruz 914/March 1509, at Kan-i Gil, the garden-palace area east of Samarqand, as a conscious reenactment of Timur’s great banquet-cum-engagement party held at Kan-i Gil in 1404. The political legacy of Timur in the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran has been the subject of several studies (e.g. Quinn 1998, Manz 2002).

96 Khunji 1963, p. 306.

97 Wasifi 1961, vol. 1, pp. 47–48.

98 Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 265.

99 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 81.

Rigistan as it appears today. Where the Tilla Kar Madrasah (1646–circa 1660) now stands would have been a caravanserai built by Ulugh Beg, the income from which would support his madrasah. To the south stood the final piece of architecture defining the plaza, the enormous Friday mosque built by the Timurid amir, Alikah Kukaltash, one of Shah Rukh's principal amirs.¹⁰⁰

Kuchkunji is also credited with refurbishing and installing a new pulpit (*minbar*) at Alikah Kukaltash's mosque.¹⁰¹ It is important to note that Mutribi, perhaps to appeal to the Mughal emperor Jahangir to whom he intended to present his book, *Nuskah-i zibā-yi Jahāngīr*, divides his work into two parts which he labeled “lineages” (*silsilahs*), the first on the Chaghatay sultans (the Timurids) and their poets whose works still circulated after a century of Shibanid rule, and the second, on the “Uzbekiyah” sultans (the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids) and the poets and scholars of their time. This latter silsilah he subdivides into two parts each of which he calls a “stratum” or “generation” (*tabaqah*) the first of which included “the sultans who were related to the great family” (of the Timurids) and the scholars who lived during their times. By this group he had in mind the Kuchkunjid Abu'l-Khayrids who, fittingly, held Samarqand as their appanage after 1510. Kuchkunji's maternal grandfather was Ulugh Beg himself. Kuchkunji's father, Abu'l-Khayr Khan, had taken to wife Rabi'ah Sultan Khanum, a daughter of Ulugh Beg, who was seized as a prize after a moderately successful Shibanid campaign against the Timurids in Transoxiana in 1451 and Kuchkunji Khan seems to have shown every regard for the legacy of that branch of his family.¹⁰²

However, in the early sixteenth-century sources we hear nothing specifically of the Gur-i Mir itself. (The first recorded reference to it by that name does not come until early in the seventeenth century from Mutribi.) There is one tantalizing reference by Wasifi in a line of poetry in his section on Kuchkunji's work on the restoration and preservation of the Timurid buildings of Samarqand. Wasifi, at Samarqand and later at Tashkent where he completed his memoir in either 1531 or 1538,¹⁰³ writes:

During his [Kuchkunji Khan's] reign, he thoroughly [restored] the elegance and beauty of the madrasahs, *khānqāhs*, *ṣawma'ahs*,¹⁰⁴ mosques, and shrines (*biqā'-i khayr*) that in former times had fallen into disrepair.

100 Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1958, pp. 127–28 estimated the mosque's enormous size as 60 by 90 meters.

101 Maliha, *Muzakkir*, ms. 58, fols. 242b–43a; Raqim, fol. 116a–b.

102 Bregel 1985, p. 332.

103 For the earlier date see Stori/Bregel 1972, p. 1124; for the later date, Subtelný 1984, p. 139.

104 According to Dihkhuda, s.v., (citing *Ghiyāṣ al-lughāt* et. al.) a *ṣawma'ah* (pl. *ṣawāmi*), is “a place of worship for Zoroastrians and Christians the top [or roof] of which is tall and narrow [a spire?]; and (citing Jurjānī) a place of worship (in general).”

[One of these was] the madrasah and *khānqāh* of the martyred felicitous sultan, Ulugh Beg Gurgan.

Sultan Ulugh Beg's *gunbad* has a strong foundation / Its interior touches the outer world.¹⁰⁵

Again the question arises: which *gunbad* is Wasifi referring to? The context is a discussion of work done on Ulugh Beg's "madrasah and *khānqāh*" but although the madrasah had corner domed rooms, there was no central *gunbad* and the use of it alone strongly suggests a domed tomb. If we take "Sultan Ulugh Beg's *gunbad*" to mean his tomb then it seems likely, in light of all the work that Ulugh Beg had done to modify the Gur-i Mir complex, Muhammad Sultan's madrasah and *khānqāh* was the "madrasah and *khānqāh*" that Wasifi may well have had in mind rather than Ulugh Beg's own ensemble on the Rigistan. In any event, whether Kuchkunji did work on the Gur-i Mir or not, his concern for maintaining Timurid buildings is well-established and correlates well with the fact that he was a grandson, cognately, of Ulugh Beg and a great-great grandson of Amir Timur.

The poet and anthologist Mutribi Samarqandi gives us the most detailed description of how the Gur-i Mir fared in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. His importance as a recorder of the social history of Bukhara and Samarqand in the half-century between 1572 and circa 1626 is difficult to overstate. His account of the Gur-i Mir, as he says people call it, deals with the complex during the period beginning with the reign of Sultan Sa'īd, a grandson of Kuchkunji who ruled Samarqand from 1552 to 1572 and continuing through the first two decades of Tuqay-Timurid rule, to 1627 or so.

Mutribi was born in 1559 in Samarqand, spent his early years there, and attended *maktab* with a son of the Kuchkunjid Sultan Sa'īd before going off to Bukhara where he studied under a number of scholars.¹⁰⁶ He considered one in particular, Khwajah Baha al-Din Hasan "Nisari," to be his principal mentor and master. Nisari was a Naqshbandi shaykh and the dean of Bukharan poets in the eyes of Mutribi who provides numerous anecdotes about him. For his part, Nisari, writing circa 1566 in his own anthology of poets, *Muzakkir-i Aḥbāb*, provides little information about the Timurid architecture of Samarqand except to refer to Ulugh Beg's observatory, and to say that his tomb was in Samarqand

105 *Gunbad-i Sultān Ulugh Beg ān-kih hast andar asās / andarūn-i saṭḥ-i ān bīrūn-i ālam-rā mumāss* (Wasifi 1961, vol. 1, p. 46).

106 For other teachers of his and the disciplines he studied (*siyāq*, *kalām*, and *naqsh*—accounting shorthand, theology, and painting) see Shukurzadah 2002, p. 844.

but to say nothing about the tomb itself.¹⁰⁷ This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that Nisari's home was in Bukhara and his civic loyalties were focused there. While Mutribi spent much of his life in Bukhara as Nisari's disciple his loyalties were always to Samarqand, which he considered his *mawṭin* (homeland).¹⁰⁸ Both men were exemplars of the Arabic maxim "love of homeland is half of faith" (*ḥubb al-waṭan niṣf al-īmān*).

After Nisari's death in 1597, Mutribi traveled to Balkh and Badakhshan collecting material for his own anthology of poets. Two of his collections have since been published, *Tazkirat al-shu'arā* and *Nuskah-i zībā-yi Jahāngīr* (also known as *Tārīkh-i Jahāngīrī*). It is the latter, a revised version of the first and planned as a gift for the Mughal emperor, Jahangir (r. 1605–27), that contains the most information on the Gur-i Mir in the sixteenth century. In 1625, now in his late sixties, Mutribi left Bukhara where he had been living and headed for India, accompanied by his son. He hints that he was making the journey to some degree in conjunction with an embassy about to be sent by the Bukharan khan, Imam Quli (r. 1611–41), and headed by the Juybari Naqshbandi shaykh, Khwajah 'Abd al-Rahim, son of Khwajah Sa'd al-Din Juybari. But mostly he wanted to present his work to Emperor Jahangir, no doubt in hopes of a reward. Without providing a date, Mutribi says he visited 'Abd al-Rahim in Bukhara and suggests that it was 'Abd al-Rahim who urged him to go to India. After he left, he stopped for two months in Balkh where the embassy under 'Abd al-Rahim caught up with him. He then went on ahead of the embassy and, he says, he was able to inform Jahangir of its imminent arrival.¹⁰⁹ According to his own chronology, he would have arrived in Lahore sometime around the end of January 1627 for he tells the emperor in his record of their first meeting, which he says was on 9 Jumadi II (1036/25 February 1627), that he had been waiting for a month to see him.¹¹⁰ Aside from one other meeting, the sixth, he does not record any dates for his meetings with the emperor, for each of which he gives a précis and composes verses. He says their sixth meeting occurred at the weighing of the emperor for the distribution of charity on his lunar birthday¹¹¹ which in the Hijri year 1036 would have corresponded with December 7, 1626.

107 Nisari 1969, pp. 44–46.

108 On patriotic sentiments in this period see Subrahmanyam 2014.

109 Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 212–13.

110 Mutribi *Conversations*, pp. 17, 18.

111 Jahangir 1999, p. 256. Jahangir's lunar birthday was the seventeenth of Rabi' al-Awwal. His solar birthday was 31 August. The lunar and solar weighings took place close to those dates. See e.g. the lunar weighing in 1618 on 24 Rabi' al-Awwal.

This would have been before Mutribi, according to his own dating, had his first meeting with Jahangir.¹¹²

Since Jahangir's own memoirs do not go beyond May 1624, he could not himself have recorded Mutribi's visit. Muhammad Hadi, the continuator of Jahangir's memoirs, who does record the arrival of Khwajah 'Abd al-Rahim from Bukhara, never mentions Mutribi. After being greeted with fanfare when he reached Mughal Kabul,¹¹³ the Juybari shaykh 'Abd al-Rahim was given a royal welcome at Lahore as much, if not more, for the spiritual tradition that he represented than for any diplomatic role.¹¹⁴ Mutribi, too, as we have seen, records the anticipated arrival of the shaykh. In the account of his thirteenth meeting with Jahangir he notes that the emperor invited him to accompany the court on its annual move to Kashmir for the summer months and reportedly said to Mutribi, "we are just waiting for the arrival of 'Abd al-Rahim Khwajah Juybari."¹¹⁵ At their next meeting Mutribi extemporizes an encomium to 'Abd al-Rahim and at their nineteenth meeting, the emperor reportedly tells Mutribi that he has met with the illustrious shaykh and envoy from Imam Quli Khan.¹¹⁶ Since the imperial retinue had not yet left for Kashmir these meetings between Jahangir and Mutribi were taking place in all likelihood, if they were taking place at all, probably during February and March of 1627.

Mutribi is now particularly remembered for these many sessions with the padishah, which only he seems to have recorded. They appear as a *khātimah* (conclusion or appendix) to the anthology of poets, *Nuskah-i zibā-yi Jahāngīrī*, and certainly were added to a manuscript of the work after the presentation of a copy of the *Nuskah* to Jahangir, if indeed such a presentation was actually made. As Mutribi claims, Emperor Jahangir asked him why he had waited so

112 One cannot help but have lingering suspicions about the reliability of Mutribi's claim to have had these meetings with Jahangir and whether the stories he tells about them bear any relation to reality. On the other hand, the visit of the Bukharan embassy from Imam Quli Khan headed by Khwajah 'Abd al-Rahim Juybari, with which Mutribi goes to some lengths to associate himself, is well recorded in Mughal sources besides Muhammad Hadi (see e.g., Mu'tamad Khan 1865, p. 286 and Lahawri 1866–72, vol. 1, pp. 232–33). Further, I am told by Dr. Corinne Lefèvre that the visits of other famous travelers to the Mughal court such as the English envoy, Thomas Roe, also cannot be corroborated in Mughal sources. Whatever the truth about Mutribi's sessions with Emperor Jahangir, what he records about the Gur-i Mir and about the social life of Samarqand during his lifetime certainly seems plausible and is to some degree corroborated by his Bukharan contemporary, Hafiz-i Tanish, at least for the details about political figures.

113 Jahangir 1999, pp. 451–52.

114 On Imam Quli's diplomatic relations with Jahangir, see Burton 1997, pp. 163–64, 170, 199.

115 Mutribi *Conversations*, p. 56.

116 *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80 and *idem*, *Nuskah*, pp. 307–08.

long after arriving in Lahore to present himself and he claimed he was still working on completing the book. Mutribi refers late in the work to the year in which he was writing as 1035 (October 3, 1625–September 21, 1626) so most of it must have been written before arrival in Lahore.¹¹⁷ Mutribi may have presented something to the emperor, but we only have his word for it. It seems highly unlikely however that he could have presented it to the emperor in its completed form including the *khātimah*. In his précis of their twenty-first meeting Mutribi quotes Jahangir as saying, “Every day Fasih Khan reads one section of your composition (*taṣnīf*) to us. Hearing [it] is a great pleasure for us.”¹¹⁸ But we are uncertain which composition is being referred to, the *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā* or its reworked version, the *Nuskah*, in some incomplete form.

In any event, as regards the Gur-i Mir, Mutribi must have wanted to offer up a positive picture of the tomb of Jahangir’s ancestors, Miranshah and Timur. Miranshah, Timur’s third son, was the great-grandfather of Babur, founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, who in turn was Jahangir’s great-grandfather. At the same time, Mutribi writes as if he wanted to impress on the emperor the constant need for money to support the endowment of the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah complex, including the tomb. In his record of their meetings, Mutribi says that Emperor Jahangir twice turned the discussion to the Gur-i Mir.¹¹⁹ On the first occasion, the emperor asked about Timur’s nephrite cenotaph, how black its color was, and whether it might be “black gold.” On the second occasion, he inquired about the cost of renovating the mausoleum and promised to send 10,000 rupees.¹²⁰

Mutribi’s account is of considerable interest, even if the meetings were wholly a product of his own imagination. First, as mentioned above, it focuses on how members of the Kuchkunjid Abu’l-Khayrid line that inherited Samarqand as their appanage portion considered themselves continuators of the cultural traditions established in Samarqand by the Timurids.¹²¹ We should assume that casting things this way was done with the sensibilities of Jahangir in mind.

117 In writing the biography of a Samarqand Naqshbandi shaykh, Khwajah Abu’l-Hashim Dahbidi, Mutribi notes “today, which is the year 1035 he is still alive and is 66 years old.” (Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 212). Thus the bulk of *Nuskah* was completed before he traveled to India even though he tells Jahangir that he was writing it while waiting to meet him.

118 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 309. Cf. the translation in Mutribi, *Conversations*, p. 70. It should be noted that although the Persian text edition consistently spells the name of the mausoleum Gur-i Mir, the translator renders it Gur-i Amir. (See Mutribi *Conversations*, pp. 22, 87.)

119 Subrahmanyam 2004, pp. 57–63 and Mutribi *Conversations*, pp. 23 and 87.

120 Mutribi *Conversations*, p. 87. Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 313.

121 Welsford 2013, pp. 226–29 offers an interesting interpretation of the Kuchkunjid “appropriation” of Timurid-Samarqandi folkways citing the maternal links of the clan as one motive and using the same material (Mutribi) as is cited here. But it is also worth raising

Mutribi makes a point of emphasizing the fact, as noted above, that Kuchkunji, one of the sons of the founder of the Shibanid line in Central Asia, Abu'l-Khayr Khan (1412–68) by a daughter of Ulugh Beg, was devoted to the Timurid legacy in Samarqand. Because of his lineage, Kuchkunji especially honored his maternal grandfather's architectural legacy in Samarqand as did his own lineal descendants there, who would hold Samarqand as their appanage from 1514 to 1578 and according to Mutribi see themselves as conservators of the Ulugh Begid-Timurid tradition in Samarqand, especially the cultural and architectural legacy.

The Kuchkunjid with the longest tenure at Samarqand, Sultan Sa'id, a grandson of Kuchkunji, held the region from 1552 to 1572 except for one year (1569–70) when his cousins from Bukhara briefly drove him out and looted the city.¹²² Mutribi recorded a story about him and the Gur-i Mir, one he uses as an example highlighting the spiritual power of the shrine, specifically the power of the spirit of Mir Sayyid Barakah to punish those who failed to show his grave site respect as well as to reward those who showed it appropriate reverence.

In the story, sometime just prior to, or early in, 1568 the commander of artillery for Sultan Sa'id, a man named Mir Tulak, in a state of inebriation aimed his harquebus (*tufang*) at the gold finial on the dome of the Gur-i Mir. Despite his unsteady state, he managed to hit it, knocking off 150 *misqāls* (some twenty-one ounces) of its gold, according to Mutribi. The Gur-i Mir was a rowdy place at this time and the damage to the finial may not have been the first caused by drunken carousing. Babur's earlier effort to regulate gatherings at the tomb was perhaps motivated by damage caused to the shrine. Although no punishment was forthcoming from Sultan Sa'id, it would be the spiritual power (*rūḥānīyat*) of Sayyid Barakah that exacted a poetic revenge.

It was the custom of the "Chaghatay" [i.e. Timurid] *pādshāhs*, says Mutribi, to tie a cow on the hill where Ulugh Beg's famous observatory was located as a target for gunnery practice. In Timurid times, this artillery exercise customarily took place as part of the New Year's (Nawruz) Day celebrations, those very celebrations that Babur had tried to regulate. Because Sultan Sa'id felt a strong attachment to the Timurid house, or so the story goes, he ordered the practice revived and on New Year's Day in March 1568, he rode out to the observatory to see Mir Tulak demonstrate his prowess with artillery. The gunner fired thirteen times at the cow, terrifying it but without hitting it. Finally, an exasperated Sultan Sa'id said, "You have one more shot and that's it." So Mir Tulak

the possibility of Mutribi's self-interest in emphasizing to Jahangir the Kuchkunjid clan's conservation of Timurid architectural legacy in Samarqand.

122 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 71.

carefully loaded the cannon with gunpowder and inserted the stone projectile. As he was about to put the match to the fuse, he decided to check and make sure that the stone was firmly seated in the barrel. As he did a spark from the match fell onto the fuse igniting the charge and, as Mutribi puts it, the explosion “carried Mir Tulak off into the sky in such a way that all they ever found of him were scattered bits.”¹²³ Mutribi says that he himself was present when the accident occurred and must therefore have been about nine years old. It would have been the kind of entertainment particularly enthralling to a young boy. Providing the moral lesson in later life, he writes that Mir Tulak’s fate was due to the spiritual power of Mir Sayyid Barakah punishing the desecration of his tomb.¹²⁴

For the Mughal Timurids of India, however, Mir Sayyid Barakah was only of peripheral interest. Their concern was the graves of their ancestors, Timur, and his son, Miranshah, through whom their line descended. From Babur to Awrangzib there is a steady record of donations to the Gur-i Mir from every emperor but Humayun. At the conquest of Agra in May of 1526, it was recorded that Babur sent votive offerings “to the custodians of the mausoleums of Khurasan and Samarkand.”¹²⁵ The mausoleum of Samarqand could only have been the Gur-i Mir. Babur’s own recollection in his memoirs is that some of the loot from the conquest was sent to “various relations in Samarkand ...” and as votive offerings “to holy men belonging to Samarkand ...”¹²⁶ all in all most likely to the benefit of the tomb and those responsible for its well-being.

During the time of Kuchkunji’s grandson, Sultan Sa’id, Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Jahangir’s father, “was accustomed to send annually elephants and gold to Samarqand”¹²⁷ and later, in 982/1574–75, after Sultan Sa’id’s demise, Akbar sent “one elephant [and] money (*fil zar*)”¹²⁸ for the renovation (*ta’mir*) of the tomb (*dakhmah*) of the Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction.”¹²⁹ Here we have to trust that Mutribi was accurately reporting or attempting to report what Akbar had contributed. Certainly Jahangir, the intended recipient of his book, would have known or could easily verify what his father Akbar had

123 Ibid., p. 24.

124 Ibid.

125 Zain Khan 1982, p. 139.

126 Babur 1922, p. 522 and idem, 1996, p. 353. See also Bada’uni, vol. 1, p. 443.

127 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 20.

128 Ibid. The text reads “*yak fil[-i] zar*” (one gold elephant or one elephant of gold) but in light of the next use of this phrase by Mutribi (on p. 69), though inverted, it is much more likely that the conjunction “and” [*wa*] was omitted either in the writing or editing here and the phrase should be translated as given.

129 Ibid.

actually sent on behalf of the tomb. As a specific example of these annual rites, Mutribi relates a story about a “Mahmudi” elephant that Akbar sent a few years earlier, in 979/1571. It was particularly memorable because the elephant went berserk in Samarqand, killed four of its handlers, then smashed through a city gate and galloped back to India.¹³⁰ Including this information in the *Nuskhah*, which, after all, is an anthology of poets and only tangentially related to the poetic prowess of Sultan Sa‘id, seems more to be a fairly transparent ploy, even if true, to encourage Jahangir to continue the tradition that Mutribi says was established by Babur, his great-grandfather.¹³¹

When Sultan Sa‘id died in 1572, he was succeeded by a cousin, Jawanmard ‘Ali Khan, another grandson of Kuchkunji. He was in charge of Samarqand when the reported “elephant and money” arrived from Emperor Akbar for renovation and restoration work on Gur-i Mir.¹³² If we can trust Mutribi here the diplomatic ties between Samarqand under Sultan Sa‘id and Jawanmard ‘Ali and Agra under Akbar were frequent and friendly.

Although far removed in space from the Gur-i Mir complex, successive Timurid (Mughal) rulers of India seem to have kept its welfare constantly in their thoughts and on occasion allowed it to influence their foreign policy. Much has been made of the dynasty’s continuing attachment to the patrimonial lands (*mamālik-i mawrūṣī*) of Transoxiana and the irredentist shape it gave their foreign policy.¹³³ Babur, the last of Timur’s descendants and political

130 Ibid., pp. 69–70. Welsford 2013, p. 229 says that the practice of sending elephants and money stopped as a result of this incident and cites the same passage in the published text but Mutribi does not say that the practice stopped. If it did, it could not have been for more than three years.

131 The usual sources for Akbar’s reign (Abu’l-Fazl, Nizam al-Din Ahmad, Bada’uni) have proven unusually resistant to providing evidence from the Mughal side that would corroborate Mutribi’s stories. One would think that annual gifts of money and elephants to Central Asia might have garnered some attention by those recording every move of the emperor. The only slight suggestion of a connection is the farewell audience Akbar granted Khwajah ‘Abd al-Shahid, a grandson of the great Naqshbandi shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Ahrar. After seventeen years in India, ‘Abd al-Shahid wanted to return to Samarqand to die and be buried beside his grandfather. Although Akbar reportedly tried to convince him to stay in India, ‘Abd al-Shahid was adamant and returned home. What makes this coincidentally interesting is that the audience and the khwajah’s return occurred in 982/1574 the same as one of the years in which Mutribi says Akbar sent gold and elephants. (Bada’uni, vol. 3, pp. 65–66; Abu’l-Fazl, vol. 3, pp. 109–110.) So far no evidence has come to light that Akbar’s father Humayun sent any votives to Samarqand. However, the record of his visiting the Noble Rawzah at Balkh and presenting its custodians with votive offerings suggests that had he been able to, he would certainly have done the same for his ancestors’ tomb at Samarqand. (Bayat 1941, p. 110 and Bayat 2009, vol. 2, p. 46 [translation]).

132 Mutribi *Nuskhah*, p. 20.

133 See e.g., Foltz 1996, 1998; Richards 1993, pp. 110, 132–33; Markovitz 2002, p. 103.

heirs in Transoxiana, was finally driven from Samarqand and the ancestral lands in 1512 and eventually went on to establish the family's political fortunes in Afghanistan and Northern India. But the self-identity of the dynasty rested, in large part, on its Central Asian origins. The nostalgia Babur records for the natural environment of Central Asia, for the oases and the desert, is sublimated by his first successors, Humayun and Akbar, in the struggle to maintain a place in India and then in the expansion of the dynasty's control first over northern then central India. In his own memoirs, Jahangir, son of Akbar, mentions at least once his plan to retake the ancestral lands abandoned by his great-grandfather but he never managed to organize a campaign.¹³⁴ His son, Shah Jahan, on the other hand, did succeed in sending an army across the Hindu Kush that took Balkh but could only hold it for a year.¹³⁵

The condition of the ancestral graves could never be ignored, nor was it politically or psychologically possible, apparently, to use the magnificent tomb-sites of Timur's descendants who died and were buried in India (although Humayun's did become a dynastic necropolis) as surrogates for the Gur-i Mir. Perhaps this was because the Samarqand tomb not only contained Timur's remains but also those of his son Miranshah through whom the Indian dynasty connected itself to the great warrior-king and its sense of political legitimacy. While Mir Sayyid Barakah held little apparent meaning for the rulers in Delhi, the state of Timur's and Miranshah's tombs was of continual concern.

Mutribi wanted to play on this sentiment. Jahangir was expected to think longingly of the homeland (*waṭan-i ma'lūf*) and the "patrimonial or protected lands" (*mamālik-i mawrūsī* or *mamālik-i mahrūsah*) centered on the burial place of Timur and Miranshah. Stories of desecration, like Mir Tulak's damaging the finial, or other displays of disrespect for the tomb, undoubtedly had already made their way to India and may well have been dramatized in the retelling. Whether they played much part in the decisions made by Mughal rulers about funding the ancestral tomb site is an open question. Once sent, it was impossible to control how the money was spent except by the implied threat that should stories reach India that the money was being misused, the funds might well dry up.

We are told that in 982/1574–75 Akbar intended the money to go specifically to the tomb not to the whole complex, but Jawanmard 'Ali Khan spent it on refurbishing the madrasah building, the courtyard (*muḥāwaṭah*), the minarets, and the pool.¹³⁶ What was left over after that he first earmarked for the

134 Jahangir 1909–14, vol. 1, p. 89.

135 See Foltz 1996, pp. 49–61.

136 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 20.

stipends of teachers, students, Qur'an memorizers, and the custodian of the complex. Mutribi tells us the money was also used to provide a daily meal of *harīṣah*—a stew of boiled cracked wheat to which meat, butter, cinnamon, and herbs could be added—served after the early morning prayer and recitation of Sura Yasin (Qur'an 36). Finally, any remaining money was used to buy candles for lighting the interior of the tomb and oil for its lamps.¹³⁷

This certainly sounds as if the money was placed in the hands of the madrasah administration to disburse according to the terms of Muhammad Sultan's *waqf* endowment and it would be more than logical for any funds coming to benefit the tomb to be managed in this fashion. As described by Mutribi and later by another Samarqandi writer, Maliha, Mughal money seems to have been consequential to the survival of the madrasah. On the other hand, in comparison with the lakhs (100,000s) often mentioned as being distributed as gifts at the imperial court, the amount Jahangir is reported to have sent, 10,000 rupees, the same amount Mutribi claims that he mentioned would be needed for renovations, was relatively paltry. But perhaps it was not so meager in terms of expectations in Samarqand.

Even after the Kuchkunjid clan was finally ousted from Samarqand in 1578 by a cousin-clan, the Jani Begid Abu'l-Khayrids of Bukhara under 'Abd Allah Khan, the son of Iskandar Khan, they responded to the Timurid cultural legacy in various and mostly constructive ways, perhaps honoring their tenuous link to the Timurid house through Abu'l-Khayr's 1451 marriage to Rabi'ah Sultan Begum, the great granddaughter of Timur.

Late in 1578, 'Abd Allah Khan, having earlier established his control over Samarqand, appointed his brother, 'Ibad Allah Sultan, to govern it.¹³⁸ 'Ibad Allah Sultan held Samarqand until 1586 when he was assassinated.¹³⁹ It was during his tenure that Akbar's annual donation reportedly stopped and for a while thereafter Mutribi, our lone source, provides the somewhat contradictory information that when the money dried up sultans no longer took any interest in the place even though at the time he wrote he knew of Jahangir's 1620 contribution (see below). Perhaps he was thinking only of Jani-Begid interest in the complex.¹⁴⁰

137 Ibid., p. 25.

138 Hafiz-i Tanish IOL, fol. 233a and Hafiz-i Tanish 1983–89, vol. 2, p. 229.

139 Hafiz-i Tanish IOL, fol. 460a.

140 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 25.

12 Gur-i Mir as Community Center

In the meantime, the madrasah-*khānqāh* complex, including the Gur-i Mir mausoleum, continued to be the venue for popular gatherings as well as for performing the five daily prayers. By the early seventeenth century at least, one of the buildings was serving as a congregational mosque for Friday worship. But the site was clearly more than just a venue for fulfilling religious duties. Mutribi's report of Babur's attempt to impose some order on the commercial and festive activities that had come to be associated with the grounds of the tomb during Nawruz and 'Id-Fitr represents his view of some of the other ways that the place was used, at least through 'Ibad Allah Sultan's time.

After 'Ibad Allah Sultan was killed (1 Ramazan 994/16 August 1586), Mutribi tells us that 'Abd Allah Khan took control of the madrasah's *waqf*, raised a good deal of outside money himself, and "worked to shore up and repair that holy place" and so "made it better than before."¹⁴¹ 'Abd Allah Khan also appointed a young son of 'Ibad Allah Sultan to take his father's place and named an Uzbek amir, Hajji Bi *atālīq*, of the Durman tribe to serve as his governor.¹⁴² Hajji Bi was an erudite man and a patron of writers; one of those whom he patronized was Mutribi. He offered prizes for distinguished work and also maintained a library that he allowed the city's poets to use.¹⁴³ Mutribi obviously thought very highly of him. But by the time of Hajji Bi's governorship, the four-day semi-annual gatherings at the Gur-i Mir had gotten out of hand again and become rowdy to the point that people would, as Mutribi tells it, drop all inhibitions (*tark-i adab*), probably because they were intoxicated, and climb up on top of the tomb for the sheer excitement (*bi-jihat-i tafarruḥ*). We assume that by "the top of the *dakhmah*" was meant the flat roofed sections of the building and not the dome which would have been very difficult to scale without scaffolding or ladders (Fig. 1.2). As a consequence of the unruly behavior of the crowds, Hajji Bi banned the fairs that Babur had attempted to regulate and ordered that "from now on people shall not congregate in this place" and so, Mutribi says, the practice was discontinued "until our own day."¹⁴⁴ During the rest of 'Abd Allah Khan's life (d. 1598) the madrasah and the tomb prospered, according to Mutribi, but in the years after his death it languished for a time, at least in terms of receiving outside support.¹⁴⁵

141 Ibid.

142 Hafiz-i Tanish 10L, fol. 461b. See also Szuppe 1999, p. 107.

143 Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 183–185. Also, Szuppe 1999, p. 107.

144 Ibid., p. 21.

145 Ibid.



FIGURE 1.2 Figure standing on the roof of the Gur-i Mir to the right of the dome
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However, people apparently continued to press for public access to the tomb site for *ziyārat* or they simply ignored the restrictions. Under the Tuqay-Timurids, the neo-Chinggisid family that succeeded the Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrids in 1599, Mutribi notes:

Recently Nadr *diwan-begi*, who now [in the 1620s] is governor of Samarqand, has said that people may gather every Tuesday in that blessed place on condition that they do not climb on top of it just for fun (*bi-tafarruḥ*). If they disobey, they should immediately be thrown off that very place.¹⁴⁶

Other Timurid monuments in Samarqand also attracted people seeking excitement. The Bayn al-Taḡayn, the plaza between Ulugh Beg's madrasah and *khānqāh* on the Rigistan, was described as a place frequented by prostitutes (*khabiṣahs*).¹⁴⁷ In 1598, the short-lived khan of Bukhara, 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan, the son and possible poisoner of his father, 'Abd Allah Khan, reportedly destroyed the Bayn al-Taḡayn, against the advice of his religious advisors. If he did, it was just Ulugh Beg's *khānqāh* that suffered destruction, the madrasah remaining untouched.¹⁴⁸ But this may also have been the time when the Alikah Kukaltash Congregational Mosque, on the southern side of the plaza, disappeared. There is another later source on the destruction of the Alikah Kukaltash Mosque but both accounts place the destruction at about the same time (see below p. 80).

Another popular site was the ruined Ulugh Beg Observatory which had a reputation as a haunted place. The adventuresome were dared by their friends to go into the subterranean part at night and leave some memento. One of the poets whom Mutribi profiles took up the dare but in the dark snagged his cloak on a nail when leaving. He thought he had been grabbed by demons, promptly suffered a heart attack, and died on the spot.¹⁴⁹

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid., p. 81.

148 While acknowledging that the prince was a strict adherent of the Shari'ah, Mutribi describes 'Abd al-Mu'min as being "of delicate constitution (*nāzik-i ṭab' wa bārik-i mizāj*) who imposed on people the harshest of penalties for the smallest of offenses." He then proceeds to report the deadly purge 'Abd al-Mu'min launched against his uncles and cousins and the amirs of his father until other amirs decided they had seen enough and assassinated him only six months into his rule. Mutribi *Tazkirat*, pp. 139–40.

149 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 81.

13 Mutribi's Description of Gur-i Mir

As mentioned above, in 1599 the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanid house was eliminated in Central Asia by the Tuqay-Timurids who also claimed descent from Chinggis Khan through their eponym, a grandson of Chinggis. With no marital connection to the Timurids, their interest in caring for Timurid monuments is less marked, by Mutribi at least, who lived through the dynastic change. This lack of interest in Timurid architecture is particularly true for the later Tuqay-Timurids, 'Abd al-'Aziz Khan (r. as "great khan" 1651–81) and his brother Subhan Quli Khan (r. 1681–1702) for whom Bukhara and Balkh far overshadowed Samarqand in importance. The picture that Mutribi paints of the complex is largely how it appeared under early Tuqay-Timurid rule. His description and Maliha's at the end of the seventeenth century, when taken together, give some idea of the fate of the Gur-i Mir during the Tuqay-Timurid era (the seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century).

Mutribi refers to the mausoleum by the terms *gunbad* and *dakhmah* and writes, "people know it as Gur-i Mir."¹⁵⁰ As already noted, this seems to be the earliest recorded instance of the name. The tomb is located, he writes, on the south side of the city in a place known as "Chaqaq-i Samarqand," the same name given by Babur a century earlier, *chaqaq* meaning an area adjacent to a city gate and moat.¹⁵¹ It is approached from the north, the city side, and one enters the walled-in precincts through a gateway:

First, [appear] a gate and a *gunbad* (domed tomb).¹⁵² One enters through the gate and an open spacious courtyard or enclosed area (*muḥāwāṭah*) appears in which there are fruit and non-fruit [shade] trees. On your left hand is a Kawṣar-like pool (*ḥawẓ*) filled with fresh water.

This outer gateway and the reservoir or pool no longer exist but a satellite image of the shrine area today provides some clue to the space he might have

¹⁵⁰ For Mutribi's survey of the grounds, see *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21–24.

¹⁵¹ "Chuqur," in modern Dari Persian pronunciation, see Neghat, *Dari Persian-English Dictionary*, means "ditch or pit." Thackston in Babur 1996 translates it "gateway" while Beveridge, *Bābur-Nama*, uses "exit." The reference to a moat or dry ditch at the exit through the city walls is what gave the district its name. The term also appears in the toponymy of Balkh and refers to a moat, see McChesney 2001a, p. 204.

¹⁵² Welsford 2013, p. 227 translates this as "As you come in and past a dome you see a broad courtyard filled with trees." The Persian is somewhat elliptical ["*ibtidā darwāzah wa gunbadī chūn dar āyand muḥāwāṭah* (editors of the Persian text equate this to *muḥawwāṭah*) *wasīlī zāhir mīshawad mushtamīl bar ashjār ...*"]. It's not clear exactly how to interpret the first four words. Does the *gunbadī* refer to a domed tomb, the expected meaning? If so, it appears there was a mausoleum at or near the first gate.



FIGURE 1.3 Satellite image of Gur-i Mir grounds. Gur-i Mir domed building lower right; Khwajah Ruhabad, the domed building upper center
GOOGLEEARTH

been referring to (Fig. 1.3). This first courtyard is particularly important for the kinds of communal activities that he associates with the shrine, the fairs and holiday celebrations. He then goes on to reveal what a person would see upon stepping through this first gateway:

when people enter the precincts there is an arch (*tāqī*) directly in front of them (Figs. 1.4 & 1.5), high, tiled (*kāshī-kāri*), and with painted (*mun-aqqash*) inscriptions on it. On the inscription (*kitābah*) of this arch has been written [the following verse]:

The blackness of your threshold is the beauty mark of the next world/
This is the Garden of Eden, enter it and be eternal.¹⁵³

153 *Āy sawād-i dargahat bar rū-yi dawlat khāl-i dīn / hadhihi jannāt-i 'Adan fa-adkhu lūhā khālidīn*. The verse is from the eleventh-century Herati mystic, Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari



FIGURE 1.4 19th-century view of the *ĩāq* on a Samarqand postcard
COURTESY OF E. PASKALEVA



FIGURE 1.5 21st-century view
E. PASKALEVA, 2015

Beneath this verse, above the threshold of the gate, one finds written in *naskh* script in white tile (*kāshī saḥīd*), “the work of the humble servant, Muḥammad, son of Mahmud, builder from Isfahan (*‘amal al-‘abd al-za‘īf Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-bannā’ al-Isfahānī*).” (see figure 1.1)

The verse is no longer preserved, although it was also recorded by Maliha seventy-five years later (see below, p. 92), while the builder’s information remains intact. The inscription now on the back surface above the builder’s inscription, begins “God, Most High said” and then Sura 15 “al-Ḥijr” verses 45–46, which conveys a very similar meaning to the no-longer extant verse. “Truly the pious will be amidst Gardens and watersprings / (They will be told) Enter therein in peace and security” followed by the non-Qur’anic “God speaks truly.” This is one of the rare ceramics on Gur-i Mir that appear to be early if not original. The epigraphy continues on both flanking sides, perpendicular to the panel with the builder-architect’s name, but it cannot be read from available photographs. Moreover, given the extensive installation under the Uzbek government of new inscriptions with different messages it is uncertain that the verses of “al-Ḥijr” still remain.¹⁵⁴

Mutribi then continues:

Beneath the inscription is a two-panel (*dū ṭabaqah*—double-door) high gate its surface covered with a sheet of polished steel and engraved panels. On the surface of the top of the right-hand panel has been inscribed ‘the one reliant on [God] the King of the Devout’. Similarly, on the left hand panel is inscribed “Amīr Tīmūr Gūrgān.’ At the two gatepost pillars (*bāzū*) of this gate they have set up two high platforms (or daises—*ṣuffahs*) of clear polished white stone.

Neither doors nor *ṣuffahs* have survived. Mutribi again:

Adjacent (or connected) to this gate, a sublime mosque was built in which every day people perform the five daily prayers. During the reign of Bāqī [Muḥammad] Khān, Khwājah Ghanī Tāshkandī, who was a descendant of His Excellency Pole of Mankind, Khwājah [‘Ubayd Allāh] Aḥrār, built a high and spacious iwan (Figs. 1.6, 1.7. & 1.8) connected to the mosque on the qibla side where people (now) come every Friday for the performance

and recalls Qur’an 16:31 “Gardens of Eden which they will enter and beneath which rivers flow.” I’m grateful to Mehdi Khorrami for locating the source of the Persian verse for me.

154 See Paskaleva 2013b, pp. 148–49.



FIGURE 1.6 Surviving fragment of Ulugh Beg's great audience hall or the iwan of Khwajah Ghani Tashkandi?

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of the Friday worship service. This building is still [ca 1625] in good repair and this practice [Friday worship service] is still going on in it.¹⁵⁵

This short passage raises a number of questions in light of conventional understandings of the mausoleum. In the first place, the grounds, the area contained by a fence (*muḥawwaṭah* or *muḥāwaṭah*) were much more extensive on the north side than the present configuration would suggest. From the context it is also difficult to know precisely what is meant by the mosque to which Mutribi refers. The plan derived from Pletnev (Plan 1) shows a structure (unnumbered) on the northwest corner of the Gur-i Mir and attached to the south side of the courtyard wall in the general area Mutribi refers to, as do late nineteenth-century photographs (see e.g., figure 1.6 the structure directly behind the minaret). The fact that Mutribi distinguishes between the mosque where people perform the five daily prayers and a congregational mosque for the Friday service indicates two different structures. His positioning the iwan, on the “mosque’s qibla side,” would make either the *gunbad*, the Gur-i Mir proper, as the mosque or the unnumbered structure on Plan 1 and in the photograph. The iwan itself he then designates as

155 Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 20–22.



FIGURE 1.7
Surviving fragment of
Ulugh Beg's great audience
hall or Tashkandi's iwan?
R.D. MCCHESENEY, 1977



FIGURE 1.8
Side view of the great
audience hall fragment.
Note figures in lower right
corner for scale
R.D. MCCHESENEY, 1977

a Friday mosque. Later on he seems to refer to the mausoleum (*gunbad*) itself as the mosque (see below).

The remains of the iwan, hitherto identified vaguely as “seventeenth century”¹⁵⁶ has had no function attributed to it nor has any person been hitherto identified as responsible for its construction. Pletnev proposed that it is all that remains of Ulugh Beg’s grand plans for expanding the site on the southwest side. (Plan 1, no. 9) The fact that Mutribi says (in 1624 or 1625) that it is still in good repair suggests it had been built many years before. He confidently names the builder Khwajah Ghani Tashkandi and the builder’s ancestry.

It is also significant that he identifies the builder as a descendant of Khwajah ‘Ubayd Allah Ahrar.¹⁵⁷ Should this be taken as a sign that the iwan might have been planned as a gathering space not just for Friday prayer but also for *zīkr* ceremonies and other gatherings of the Naqshbandi followers of Ahrar? Mutribi provides two references for Khwajah Ghani (‘Abd al-Ghani?) Tashkandi, one in *Nuskhah* where he is credited with having composed an obituary chronogram for Mutribi’s own master, the Naqshbandi shaykh, Nisari, and in *Tazkirat al-shu‘arā* where the subject of the identical chronogram is an entirely different Sufi shaykh.¹⁵⁸

There is an unspoken but implicit issue here concerning the spiritual aura surrounding the holy man, Mir Sayyid Barakah, buried in the tomb with Timur, and that is what his affiliations were, if any. Mutribi portrays his aura (*rūḥāniyat*) as powerful but without reference to a spiritual lineage. There is some possibility that he was a Yasawi while the dominant Sufi confraternity by the early sixteenth century at least was Naqshbandi, represented by the Juybaris of Bukhara; the Ahraris of Samarqand, Tashkent, and Herat; and the Parsa’is of Balkh. The Mir Haydaris, of whom Mir Sayyid Barakah was an early fifteenth-century representative, seem to have been a locally important affiliate of the Yasawi confraternity headquartered in the town of Kasbi, Qarshi province.¹⁵⁹ The dominance of the various Naqshbandi groupings seem to

156 Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 260b.

157 Ibid.

158 Mutribi *Nuskhah*, pp. 134–35 and idem *Tazkirat*, p. 737. The chronogram “*shaykh bā kamāl*” “lord of perfection” produces the date 1014, rather than the 1004/1595–96 that Mutribi wrote out just before citing the chronogram. In *Tazkirat*, however, Mutribi says in an entry written down in “the months of one thousand and thirteen (1604–5)” that “Ghani” wrote the obituary chronogram, “*shaykh bā kamāl*” for “Ḥaẓrat-i Khwājah Dahbidi” (*Tazkirat*, p. 737). He obviously intended the chronogram to produce the year 1014 in both cases.

159 Welsford 2013, pp. 213–14. Welsford credits Ashirbek Muminov and Bakhtiyar Babadzhanov’s tacit acceptance (Muminov and Babadzhanov 2001, p. 28 and note 2) of Jürgen Paul’s suggestion that Mir Sayyid Barakah was a Yasavi and then, taking the evidence from *Bahr al-asrar* (cited earlier) that Kasbi was a town of Mir Haydari sayyids, he plausibly

be echoed, if that's the right word, by a widespread silence about Mir Sayyid Barakah in the texts emanating from the Bukhara-Balkh-Samarqand region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and possibly due to an uncertainty about where to place him in the universe of Sufi affiliations.

If we take as representative of this silence Mahmud b. Amir Wali's description of Samarqand written in the 1630s, in a lengthy section on the city and its tomb-sites, the only ones he deems worth mentioning are the tombs of Qusam ibn 'Abbas better known as the "Living Shah" (Shah-i Zindah), Nur al-Din Basir (destroyed in June 1880), Khwajah 'Abdi Darun, Khwajah 'Abdi Birun (both latter mausolea still extant in modern times), Yusuf Hamadani, and Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar.¹⁶⁰ Neither the Gur-i Mir nor Mir Sayyid Barakah get any mention. Mahmud was writing only a decade or so after Mutribi and if there had been an established cult of Mir Sayyid Barakah one would have expected him to mention it. It is possible that because of the preeminence of Naqshbandi practices and Naqshbandi-inspired patronage, whatever loyalties the tomb of Mir Sayyid Barakah may have generated, they did not rise to the level of his writerly notice.

We now return to Mutribi's detailed portrayal for Jahangir of the Timurid complex:

When you enter through this gate [the gate that now stands as the entry to the complex] another enclosed courtyard (*muḥawwaṭah*) appears. It is square and the walls of it are quite high, approximately forty *gaz*.¹⁶¹ The width of it is about the same dimension. On three corners (*rukṅ*) of it there are three minarets; one lacks the muezzin's platform (*guldastah*). On its 'throat' (*gulū*) is inscribed in ceramic tile "man proposes but God disposes" (*al-'abd yudabbir wa'llāh yuqaddir*). The other two minarets each have the muezzin's platform. On the sides of the *guldastahs* is written in white tile "God: there is none His equal and none to worship but Him" (*Allāh wa lā siwāhu wa lā yu'badu illā iyyāhu*). To embellish the minarets they have written in tile in blue and white script within [separate] panels (*darūn-i naqshah*) 'O Living One, O Eternal One, O Generous One, O Merciful One' (*yā ḥayy yā qayyūm yā karīm yā raḥīm*). On the left hand side of this courtyard [as one enters] a door and an anteroom or

concludes, though sources are silent on this, as far as I know, that the Mir Haydaris were Yasavi.

160 Mahmud b. Wali 1977, pp. 53–55.

161 The *gaz* at the time would have been a little more than 30 inches. See Davidovich 1970, p. 113. "Forty *gaz*" would thus have made the walls 100 feet high. The number "40" with all its mystical connotations should simply be taken as Mutribi's way of saying "many."

vestibule (*dihlīzī*) appear. When one enters [through] it, there is a madrasah which Sultan Ulugh Beg Gurgan [*sic*] built. It has a double dome (*dū āshyānah*)¹⁶² and a four-*iwan* [interior] courtyard each (*iwan*) covered with *kāshī-kārī* (tile work) and inscriptions.¹⁶³ On the inscription panels (*kitābah-hā*) of the *iwans* (*tāqāt*) they have written the Victory (*innā fataḥnā*, [Qur'an 48:1]), *'amma*, and *tabāruk* Suras [of the Qur'an].¹⁶⁴ There are some sixty cells in that (madrasah). On two axes of it they have constructed two lofty domes (*gunbad*) beneath which domes are the graves (*gūrkhānah-hā*) of Chaghatay [i.e. Timurid] princes.

On the right hand side of this enclosure (*muḥāwaṭah*) there is a gate. In it is a *gunbad* which serves as the kitchen for this mausoleum (*dakhmah*) and comprises numerous rooms. In that kitchen there is a great cauldron in which food is cooked daily for the poor, the personnel (*mujāwīrs*) of the tomb, and the students of the madrasah. In the forepart (*pīshgāh*) of this courtyard above the head(s) of the padishahs is an *iwan* (*tāq*) which is a mosque [i.e., Gur-i Mir]. People perform their prayers there. Attached to this *tāq* is a door and a spacious anteroom (*dihlīz*).¹⁶⁵ Along its length are four dome chambers and when you enter, in the forepart of this anteroom on the right hand side there is a two-storey high door made of *shamshād* wood (boxwood¹⁶⁶) (Fig. 1.9). It is completely inlaid with ivory and ebony (*'aj wa ābnūs*) and gilded and polished so that the eye is dazzled by gazing on it. On the right hand panel (of the door) is written "O, Opener of Doors" (*yā mufattiḥ al-abwāb*) and on the left

162 The meaning of *dū āshyānah* is not entirely clear here. *Āshyān*, *āshyānah* has the literal meaning of nest or roof and figuratively, home, abode. See Dihkhuda 1993–94, s.v. for numerous examples of its use for birds' nests or other lodgings. Dihkhuda defines "*dū āshyānah*" as a type of tent (*naw'ī az khaymah wa chādūr*) as does Steingass. Here I would tentatively choose "double-roof" or "double-dome" meaning that the domes of the madrasah were double ones like the dome of the Gur-i Mir, that is to say an interior dome for the ceiling covered by a much higher dome serving as the roof. (See Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, pp. 113–14.) Mutribi is thus using the term *dū āshyānah* here to describe the building technique used for the domes, i.e. a "*du āshyānah* madrasah" meaning one whose domes were of the double type.

163 The typical design for the four sides of an interior courtyard, three of the four vaulted archways leading to rooms and the fourth being the interior of the main gateway.

164 It is unclear to me which verses those last two names signify. The word *'amma* does not appear in that form in the Qur'an according to the concordance of 'Abd al-Baqi 1945. There are five instances of a derived form of it in the Qur'an. The word *tabāruk* appears in seven suras.

165 This is the addition to the Gur-i Mir known as the "Ulugh Beg Gallery."

166 Neghat 1993, s.v.

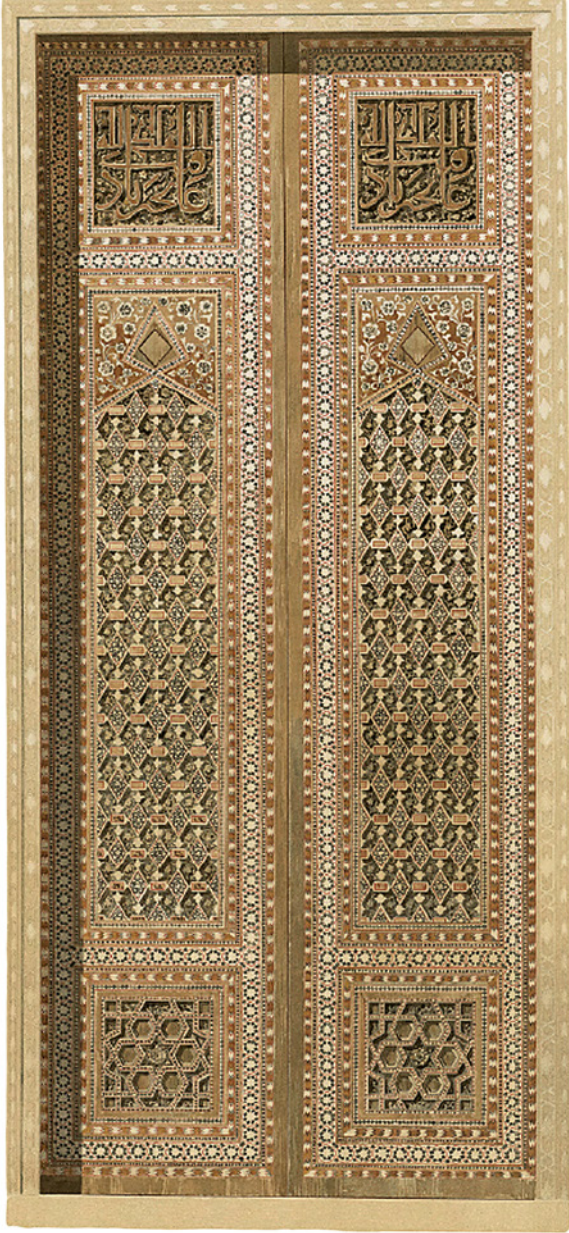


FIGURE 1.9 Gur-i Mir *shamshād* door (after Mecheti Samarkanda: Gur Emir, 1905)

hand is “O Causer of All Things” (*ya musabbib al-asbāb*). They installed two marble steps outside this door. When you enter (through this door), in the middle of the holy illumined mausoleum you see a carved fence (*panjarah*) of clear white polished marble. The [interior] perimeter of this illumined mausoleum is a *chahār-ṭāq* design (four shallow vaulted niches). In the foremost niche they have placed the Word of God that belonged to the Amir al-Mu’minin, [the third caliph] ‘Uthman—May God be pleased with him—on top of a Qur’an stand. The (Qur’an) is a codex (*maṣḥaf*) in Kufic script in the form of a very long [i.e. horizontally elongated] book (*safīnah-i tūlānī*). Still today the bloodstains of the noble and excellent caliph—May God be pleased with him—remain on the verse (Qur’an: 137) “God will suffice (for) you (against) them.”¹⁶⁷ In front of the tomb of Amir Barakah are four boxes containing the [thirty canonical] parts (*ajzā’*) of the Qur’an. The area inside the *panjarah*-fence is completely filled with [containers of?] gilded sections (of the Qur’an) which the late Mirza Muhammad Sultan, the grandson of the “Lord of the Conjunction (Amir Timur)” copied out himself in *ṣuls* script using gold ink (*āb-i zar*). He wrote these out, proofed them, sprinkled the pages with gold dust, marked every five and ten lines, prepared the title cartouches (*lawḥ* pl. *alwāḥ*), ruled the margins, and made the leather binding, all with his own blessed hand. He [also] set up an endowment (*waqf*) for the holy mausoleum. The decoration of the walls (*ṭirāz-i jidrān*) of this pure and holy site is of gilded pieces of *qāsh* stone. The floor is of white marble and the ceiling is painted with gold and lapis lazuli paint. Beyond that and all around are skylights (*tābdān*) of colored glass. When one enters through the door [from the Ulugh Beg gallery], on the left hand [is] the door to the crypt. No one knows what the interior [of the crypt] is like. Atop this mausoleum, they erected a ribbed dome (*qubbah-i rukhdār*) (Fig. 1.10). It is completely covered in blue tile (*kāshī rangah*) and is extremely lofty and strong. No one anywhere has indicated that there is anything else like it in terms of its decoration and extraordinary beauty. Around it, in white tile Kufic script, is written over and over “Everlasting life belongs to God” (*al-baqā lil-lāh*). Above this script in a “subtle pen” (*qalam-i khafī*) in green (blue) color is (written) “Power is God’s; grandeur is God’s” (*al-qudrah lil-lāh al-‘aẓīmah lil-lāh*¹⁶⁸). On the very top of this

167 The context of the verse is Muslim relations with Jews and Christians and the bloodstains to ‘Uthman’s assassination while reading the Qur’an.

168 This inscription is no longer visible. Instead the repeated phrase “al-ḥamdu lillāh” appears.



FIGURE 1.10
Ribbed dome (*qubba-i rukhsār*) of
the Gur-i Mir
R.D. MCCHESENEY, 1977

dome they have affixed a large lantern (*qandīl*) [or finial] of pure gold so that its rays are reflected for a great distance.¹⁶⁹

This detailed description of the whole complex as Mutribi recalled it comes in the section of the *Nuskah* entitled “The First Lineage: The Chaghatay Sultans and the Poets of their time.” As noted above, although the work is technically an anthology of poets, the thematic structure of the work to be presented to Jahangir gives preeminence to the lineage of the Chaghatay (Mughal) sultans and only after them the lineage of the Chinggisid sultans who happened to have control of the shrine at the time Mutribi was writing. Furthermore, Mutribi inserts this long description immediately after describing one of Emperor Akbar’s donations of elephants and money for the upkeep of the place.

¹⁶⁹ Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 22–24.

The passage is of great importance for establishing the presence of an outer district of the complex to the north of the present-day entry gate, the *pīshṭāq*. It also provides a size for the madrasah of sixty cells and the fact that the two large corner rooms on the west side were also used as tombs for the offspring of the Timurid rulers. Also the *khānqāh* is no longer identified as such but is called a “kitchen” (*maṭbakh*).

14 Soliciting Mughal Patronage

Despite Mutribi’s generally positive depiction of Samarqand, the burial place of Jahangir’s forebears, the emperor must have been aware that the Timurid shrine was not in the best condition. Again we must rely solely on the testimony of Mutribi. According to him, during one of their last meetings Jahangir asked him how many rupees would be needed to renovate the Gur-i Mir. Mutribi replied that “if you want to do the right thing, then send 10,000 rupees. Otherwise, 5,000 rupees would be useful.” Jahangir reportedly then said he would send the 10,000.¹⁷⁰

This would not have been the first time that Jahangir sent money. In his own memoirs he writes that in February 1621 he sent 10,000 rupees to the Tuqay-Timurid ruler in Bukhara, Imam Quli Khan, for Samarqand by the hand of the Bukharan khan’s own envoy, Mir Barakah Bukhari [no known connection to Mir Sayyid Barakah].¹⁷¹ Only half was to go to the tomb complex, however. He wanted the other 5,000 rupees to be given to Khwajah Salih Dahbidi, “who like his ancestors prayed for the welfare of the [Mughal] dynasty.”¹⁷² The Dahbidis were a Samarqand-headquartered Naqshbandi confraternity with a network extending to Chinese Turkistan.¹⁷³ Their founder was the “Makhdum-i A’zam” (Greatest Master) Ahmad-i Kasani (d. 1542), a second generation follower of Khwajah ‘Ubayd Allah Ahrar and a mentor to several of the Abu’l-Khayrid Shibanid leaders.¹⁷⁴ The Dahbidis shared honors with the Ahraris as the dominant Naqshbandi branches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Samarqand. The first 5,000 rupees of the 1621 donation

170 Ibid., p. 313. For a variant translation see Foltz 1998, p. 87.

171 Jahangir 1909–1914, vol. 2, p. 196 and Jahangir 1999, p. 357. See references in Burton 1997, index, to “Mir Birkah, Mughal envoy [*sic*],” p. 643.

172 Jahangir 1999, p. 357.

173 McChesney 1996, p. 83.

174 On the Makhdum-i A’zam see Fletcher 1984. On his shrine at Dahbid, McChesney 1996, p. 83.

“were for distribution among the officials and residents at the blessed tomb of His Majesty Sahib-i Qiran [Amir Timur].”¹⁷⁵ Mutribi tells us that the task of distributing those funds in Samarqand was put in the hands of the abovementioned Juybari shaykh, Khwajah ‘Abd al-Rahim Juybari and his older brother, Taj al-Din Hasan. Already in 1620 Jahangir had sent 30,000 rupees to the two men whom he calls “the leading holy men of Transoxiana” in exchange for their having sent him a fine walrus tooth.¹⁷⁶ The Juybaris were the dominant Naqshbandi branch in Bukhara and particular favorites of Jahangir. Mutribi himself only describes the money brought back from the Mughal court by Mir Barakah Bukhari in 1620 as “a large sum” and says that it was entrusted to the two Juybaris. Seeing their remit as being a little broader than that stipulated by Jahangir, the two Juybari shaykhs “undertook to rebuild some of the places of that blessed site.”¹⁷⁷ So if we can credit Mutribi, the Bukharan shaykhly family of Juybaris played something of a role in Samarqand at least with the maintenance of Timurid-era buildings, thanks to Mughal-originated funds.

No mention is made of the madrasah, per se, which was perhaps because to Jahangir “Gur-i Mir” meant the whole complex and he surely would have been aware, when the first version of *Nuskah* brought by Mutribi was read to him, of how money sent by his father had been used mainly for salaries of officials at the complex, including the madrasah. In reporting this exchange with the emperor, did Mutribi know about the contents of Jahangir’s memoirs so that he was aware of the earlier 10,000 rupees or was it just common knowledge in Samarqand once the money arrived and was distributed? While we have no reason to treat this story as apocryphal which would leave us open to questioning all of Mutribi’s work as the product of an overactive imagination, it is of interest that his suggested amounts of 10,000 and 5,000 rupees are identical with Jahangir’s record of the amount given to Mir Barakah Bukhari six years earlier. Mutribi therefore presumably knew how much had been sent earlier and may have been reluctant to ask for more. Perhaps the actual amount was not known but to a Central Asian writer “10,000” might have seemed like a very large amount. Since that number recurs frequently when it comes to Mughal

175 Jahangir 1999, p. 357.

176 Jahangir 1909–14, vol. 2, p. 166.

177 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 25. See also Islam 1979–82, pp. 234–35 for a letter from Jahangir to Mir Barakah Bukhari circa December 1622 praising him for his report and for carrying out all his instructions with the exception of not yet having disbursed the gift “to the pious ‘Abd al-Rahim [Juybari] in Balkh.” This then would seem to confirm what Mutribi’s account suggests, i.e. that the Juybari family was chosen by Jahangir to distribute the funds in Samarqand despite the fact that they were Bukharans.

donations to the tomb complex either it was exact or perhaps we should think of it as simply signifying a large sum of money.

Mughal solicitude for the tomb began with Babur (r. 1526–30), of whose donation Mutribi seems to have been unaware, and continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century though I have found only a few instances actually recorded of Mughal remittances on behalf of the Gur-i Mir. These are the gold and elephants or elephant loads of gold sent by Akbar in the latter half of the sixteenth century; the “10,000” rupees that Jahangir sent in February 1621 by the hand of Mir Barakah Bukhari; and the 10,000 rupee amount Jahangir supposedly sent on the recommendation of Mutribi in 1627 only months before he died. Besides frequent diplomatic exchanges with their political counterparts in Bukhara and Balkh, the Mughals in the seventeenth century maintained close ties, i.e. funneled money to, the leading shaykhly families of Samarqand and Bukhara, the Dahbidis and Ahraris in Samarqand and the Juybaris in Bukhara and often welcomed them to India with lavish gifts and grants.¹⁷⁸

Shah Jahan, during the first year of his reign (1628), showered money and promotions on relatives, friends, officers, and officials.¹⁷⁹ Then, in that same year and less than a year after Mutribi’s reported visit to India, he sent a gift of various valuable commodities worth 1.5 lakhs of rupees to Imam Quli Khan in Bukhara with a separate donation of 20,000 rupees for the Gur-i Mir.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps this money represented the second 10,000 promised by Jahangir and 10,000 of Shah Jahan’s own funds.

It is not, by any means, out of the question that quantities of rupees were sent far more frequently than was ever recorded. The existing record of dispatched donations, while spotty, shows a certain consistency from the time Akbar came to the throne until late in Shah Jahan’s son, ‘Alamgir Awrangzib’s, reign, in other words a period of nearly two centuries, and strongly indicates a lasting Mughal commitment to the necropolis of its ancestors.

There are significant gaps in the record. From the late 1620s to the 1650s no record of the Gur-i Mir has yet appeared. As noted above, one of the best sources for the history of Central Asia, Mahmud b. Amir Wali’s *Baḥr al-asrār*, written in the 1630s, has nothing to say about the tomb, or the madrasah for that matter. Interest in the shrine on the part of the Mughal emperors has to be inferred from the fact that Shah Jahan in 1646 launched a major campaign

178 See Foltz 1998, chapters 3 and 5 especially.

179 Inayat Khan 1990, pp. 18–22.

180 Kanbu 1967, vol. 1, p. 262. Inayat Khan 1990 makes no mention of the gift.

to recover the patrimonial lands but only succeeded in capturing Balkh; and then only managed to hold the region for a year before it became too costly in terms of lives and treasure after which the Mughal forces beat a retreat to safer confines south of the Hindu Kush mountains.¹⁸¹ This was the last Mughal attempt to regain control of the patrimonial lands and the family tomb in Samarqand.

15 'Alamgir Awrangzib and the Gur-i Mir

The late seventeenth-century record of Mughal support for the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah and the Gur-i Mir comes from at least two sources, one Mughal and one Central Asian. The Mughal source was Muhammad Kazim, the son of Muhammad Amin. The latter was better known as Amina-yi Qazwini, a munshi in Shah Jahan's secretariat, and was the author of a work covering the first ten years of his reign.¹⁸² Muhammad Kazim thus had an excellent literary pedigree and was hired by Awrangzib in the first year of his reign (1658) to serve as his own private secretary. He was later commissioned by Awrangzib to commemorate his reign and, as his father had done for Shah Jahan, Muhammad Kazim wrote a chronicle of its first ten years.¹⁸³ Following an illustrious career in royal service, Muhammad Kazim died at Delhi in 1681.¹⁸⁴

Muhammad Kazim relates that in the first year of Awrangzib's reign, the chief trustee (*mutawallī*) of the Gur-i Mir, or, as Muhammad Kazim styles it, "the luminous *mazār* of the grand amir and greatest *khāqān* whom all sultans obey[ed], His Majesty the Lord of the Conjunction," had come from Samarqand and "during these felicitous days paid homage at the throne and was presented with a gift of 4,000 rupees."¹⁸⁵ Although dated only to the month Zi Qa'dah the described event probably took place late in 1068 or sometime in August 1658. We presume this was a gift for the shrine not a personal gift to the *mutawallī*, whose name, Mir Rahmat Allah, is only found in Muhammad Kazim's *Ālamgīr-nāmah*. Then some nine months later, in 1659, Mir Rahmat

181 For modern accounts of this campaign see Foltz 1996, pp. 49–61 and Burton 1997, pp. 231–53.

182 Storey, vol. 1, pp. 566–67.

183 Ibid., pp. 585–86.

184 Ibid.

185 Muhammad Kazim 1865–73, p. 271.

Allah returned to India and this time was given 8,000 rupees.¹⁸⁶ We may safely assume that the *mutawalli* of the Gur-i Mir would have provided first-hand information about the condition of the mausoleum and madrasah and the needs of the complex. We have no information how long after 1660 these donations lasted. We hear no more of Mir Rahmat Allah.

The Central Asian source on Gur-i Mir in the latter part of the seventeenth century and on Mughal support for the shrine was a native of Samarqand, Muhammad Badi‘, who adopted the pen-name Maliha. Born about 1640, Maliha was the son of a mufti and teacher at the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah. Maliha spent the first thirty years of his life under his father’s tutelage. His lifelong passion was poetry and like Mutribi he too became an anthologist. After his father died, he spent three years traveling, most of it in Iran to visit his idol in Isfahan, Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi, whose anthology of poets was famed at the time.¹⁸⁷ On his return to Samarqand Maliha compiled an anthology which he says was in imitation of Nasrabadi. But Maliha’s work goes far beyond Nasrabadi’s format of the simple presentation of a poet’s name, basic data, and a few lines of his poetry. Like Mutribi’s anthology Maliha’s becomes a detailed social history for Iran and Transoxiana, especially for Bukhara and Samarqand.

16 Maliha on the Gur-i Mir

Muhammad Badi‘ also writes extensively about the Gur-i Mir and thus in many ways provides an updating of Mutribi’s description. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between the two works because of the time that has lapsed and intervening events. Maliha grew up and wrote in a very different environment and with a much bleaker view of the conditions of life around him in Samarqand than those that Mutribi described to Jahangir. In the 1670s and 1680s Samarqand was suffering both from the plundering raids of Khivan Chinggisids and from an economy in crisis. Anushah Khan, son of Abu’l-Ghazi Khan (ruler of Khwarazm from 1644–63 and a Chaghatay historian), succeeded his father and reigned from 1663–1687. He attacked the Bukharan khanate three times in the 1680s.¹⁸⁸ Foiled twice at Bukhara

186 Ibid., p. 476.

187 See McChesney 1990, pp. 58–68.

188 For a synopsis of the various accounts of Anushah Khan’s campaigns, see Burton 1997, pp. 331–35.

by Subhan Quli Khan, ruler there from 1681, he set his sights on the lightly defended Samarqand and in July 1684, the town surrendered to him. His forces then proceeded to plunder the place.

Within four months, he and his men withdrew to Khiva leaving Samarqand in a state of desolation. But, according to our Samarqand loyalist Maliha, worse was to come. In a section of his anthology subtitled “Strange Occurrences” (*min al-gharā'ib*) the injury to Samarqand was compounded when Subhan Quli, by now the Bukharan khan, harshly punished the Samarqandis for allowing Anushah Khan to enter the town without putting up any resistance. In the words of Maliha:

[Subhan Quli] ordered executions, issued invoices (*barāts*) allowing seven years worth of taxes to be collected in one year, let loose the Yuz Uzbeks to collect the taxes and fines [for not resisting the Khivans], and as if this were not enough, usurped for the state property that had been private since the days of the [seventh-century] caliph, 'Uthman. By these sorts of things even if many centuries were to pass, matters could not be put right.¹⁸⁹

He then concludes:

Now, which is 1103/1691–92, so much devastation has befallen the city that there is simply no building activity (*khānah-i ābādān namībāshad*). Most of the madrasahs and mosques have been turned into wine bars and beer halls. If this is happening in the city center, what is there to say about outlying areas?¹⁹⁰ And what will now happen? God save us from the evil of this tribe!

Maliha's personal experience—he returned from Iran in 1682 and was in Samarqand during the Anushah Khan takeover and for the aftermath—had a profound effect on his historical perspective. Seventy years earlier, Mutribi, as we noted above, praised the Jani-Begid Shibanid khan, 'Abd Allah, and his top amir, Qul Baba Kukaltash, for the work they did in refurbishing and maintaining Samarqand's infrastructure and the Timurid buildings there in particular. Maliha, while continuing to commend Qul Baba Kukaltash, depicts 'Abd Allah not as a builder and preservationist but as a destroyer of Samarqand

189 Maliha 2011, p. 481.

190 Ibid., p. 482.

monuments. He pays particular attention to the Alikah Kukaltash congregational mosque built on the Rigistan which was still functioning in his day and which he described as the largest mosque he had ever seen before he went to Isfahan.¹⁹¹

In direct contrast to Mutribi, Maliha asserts that when the Abu'l-Khayrid Jani-Begid 'Abd Allah Khan son of Iskandar Khan came to the throne in Bukhara he worked hard to promote it as the capital at the expense of Samarqand. He built many fine buildings but rather than caring for the Timurid buildings of Samarqand, as Mutribi had described him doing, the khan "prohibited the use of a single brick" to be used on buildings in Samarqand. Moreover, and here Maliha radically departs from Mutribi, in order to show Shibanid antipathy for the "Chaghatay sultans," wherever there was a great "Amir Timuri building" he claims that 'Abd Allah Khan would try to destroy it. One of the buildings he razed was the *masjid-i jāmi'*, the Friday mosque, by which he must have meant the Alikah Kukaltash mosque, since he also refers to the *masjid-i jāmi'-i Tīmūrī* (known as the Bibi Khanum Mosque today) without accusing 'Abd Allah of causing it any harm.¹⁹² One has to keep in mind that all this destruction attributed to 'Abd Allah Khan would have happened a full century before Maliha actually wrote. Damage to the Alikah Kukaltash mosque might well have been the work of 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan, 'Abd Allah Khan's son, as suggested by Mutribi.

Maliha then says that 'Abd Allah Khan appointed Qul Baba Kukaltash governor of Samarqand, and the latter, to his master's displeasure, turned his attention to rebuilding the Alikah Kukaltash mosque. He was only able to continue the rebuilding, says Maliha, by simultaneously sponsoring the building of a large madrasah in Bukhara—at Lab-i Hawz, a building still standing today.¹⁹³ Maliha also claimed that the Saray Mulk Madrasah (which he calls "Madrasah-i Khanum") which stood opposite the entry to the great Bibi Khanum Mosque was so destroyed by 'Abd Allah that only the domed tomb, the *gūrkhānah*, remained standing.¹⁹⁴ This story is perhaps more a reflection of the age and the evolving image of 'Abd Allah Khan than a credible representation of historical reality. Maliha probably saw what remained of the madrasah a century after 'Abd Allah Khan's time and heard a plausible

191 Ibid., p. 523.

192 Maliha 2011, p. 524 for the Timurid buildings in Shahr-i Sabz that Maliha accuses 'Abd Allah Khan of destroying.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid., fol. 246a. See Golombek and Wilbur 1988, vol. 1, pp. 254–55 on this building.

story explaining its ruined state. There is no evidence that he was aware of Mutribi's work.

Given the fact that Mutribi, on the other hand, was writing only a quarter of a century after 'Abd Allah Khan's death and the collapse of the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids in Transoxiana, he had nothing to fear from criticizing the regime and it is difficult to believe he would not have mentioned some of this, i.e. Qul Baba's governorship in Samarqand, his building efforts, the Alikah Kukaltash Mosque and its purported destruction and rebuilding, and the destruction of the Saray Mulk Madrasah. And Qul Baba was someone whom Mutribi had known well. On the other hand, because Mutribi was presenting this text to the Mughal ruler Jahangir it is possible that he would have wanted to temper any negativity in the depiction of his home town lest the emperor conclude that any money sent there would be wasted. There seems little reason, however, to credit either Maliha's condemnation of 'Abd Allah Khan or his praise of Qul Baba Kukaltash. There is a question too as to whether Qul Baba Kukaltash ever governed Samarqand. The *Sharaf-nāmah-i shāhī* (or *'Abdallah-nāmah*), written at the end of the sixteenth century, which tracks Qul Baba's career quite closely, provides no evidence that he was ever appointed governor there. Moreover, Mutribi knew Qul Baba Kukaltash personally and had been the object of the latter's patronage. Yet he says nothing of a Qul Baba governorship of Samarqand.¹⁹⁵

The story of Gur-i Mir that Maliha presents as happening in his own day—and he offers a very compelling tale—is mainly one of fraud, corruption, and blasted hopes.¹⁹⁶ It has three distinct parts, all three of which are important for understanding both the psychological and the material meaning of the complex at the time, the end of the seventeenth century. The first relates the origins of the complex quite differently from what has been narrated up to this point; the second deals with financial aspects of the madrasah; and the third is a detailed walk-through of the complex, much like Mutribi's, three-quarters of a century before.

195 Mutribi *Nuskhaḥ*, p. 127 gives one reference connecting Qul Baba to Samarqand saying that in 1598 after 'Abd al-Mu'min came to the throne, he arrested Qul Baba in Samarqand and put him to death there.

196 Maliha, like Mutribi, consistently refers to the tomb as Gur-i Mir, not a shortened form of "Amir" (signifying Timur) but what is clearly a conscious reference to Mir Sayyid Barakah. In one place he names them together as "*Ḥaẓrat-i Mīr wa Janāb-i Ṣāhibqirānī*" (i. e., Mir Sayyid Barakah and Amir Timur, Maliha 2011, p. 490).

17 The Gur-i Mir Creation Story according to Maliha

During the reign of Amir Timur there were two brothers in Samarqand, both holy men (*ʿazīzān*) and sayyids. One was Mir Sayyid Barakah and the other was Mir Sayyid Abu'l-Khayr. Amir Timur was a devotee (*mu'taqid*) of both. However, he heard rumors of wrongdoing on their parts from their enemies and ordered them out of his kingdom. Abu'l-Khayr set off on the pilgrimage to Mecca leaving his family and dependents with his brother Mir Sayyid Barakah. Timur then had a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him and told him he had erred grievously in allowing Mir Abu'l-Khayr to leave and admonished him not to let Mir Sayyid Barakah go. Timur then asked Mir Abu'l-Khayr to return home but he refused. So Amir Timur extended the hand of discipleship to Mir Sayyid Barakah, who came to exert great influence over him. When Mir Sayyid Barakah passed away, Amir Timur "built a *gunbad* called Gunbad-i Gur-i Mir" as a final resting place for him.¹⁹⁷ Timur, Maliha says, is also buried there at the feet of Mir Sayyid Barakah.

Maliha then proceeds to describe the layout of the tombs. His orientation is based on his perspective while standing at the head of Mir Sayyid Barakah's cenotaph. Timur is buried at the feet of Mir Sayyid Barakah. To Timur's right, Shah Rukh is buried; to his left is Sultan Muhammad Mirza, the owner (*ṣāhib*) of the madrasah. At Timur's feet lies Mirza Ulugh Beg on whose right side lies Miranshah Mirza and in the niche to the right of these "kings and sovereigns" lies Sultan Hasan b. Sultan Husayn Mirza.¹⁹⁸ He does not mention the two small unmarked cenotaphs to the right of Mir Sayyid Barakah (nos. 7 & 9 on Plan 2). Except for the occupant of the tomb in the niche, Maliha's description accords with the known layout based on the tomb and cenotaph inscriptions (Plan 2).

This is obviously quite a different origin story for the mausoleum than the one provided by fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century sources and is an indication of the evolution of the tomb's local meaning. Gur-i Mir was first established as a dynastic necropolis, but as time passed its dynastic commemorative aspect remained important only to those with a general political interest in the figure of Timur as model warrior and leader and more specifically to the

¹⁹⁷ Maliha 2011, p. 486.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 485–87. Each of the interred in the crypt directly below was laid on his side facing the qibla (west). Maliha makes only one apparent mistake. He says the niche is to the left of Ulugh Beg when from his perspective the niche was to the right. Today, the shrine custodians identify the occupant of the niche-tomb as "Sayid Omar."

Miranshahid line, the Mughals of India, whose political legacy was tied to two of those buried in the Gur-i Mir, Timur and Miranshah. A sense of inadequacy about their inability to care for and protect the sacred site fed a yearning among the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mughal padishahs to recover the patrimonial lands. Locally, however, the meaning of the place centered on the madrasah and the opportunities it offered. Up until this point, the importance of the figure of Mir Sayyid Barakah is harder to discern and was certainly not the meaning of the Gur-i Mir for the Mughals. Maliha's account now brings the figure of Mir Sayyid Barakah to the fore.

18 Maliha on the Economic Meaning of the Shrine

The second part of Maliha's story focuses on finances. In his interpretation of events, Muhammad Sultan had built a madrasah-college (*dār al-'ilm*) which he endowed with *waqfs* sufficient to provide for its professors, students, Qur'an memorizer-reciters, *mujāwirs*, custodians, and cooks, and for food and supplies, as well as to cover anticipated future inflation. When Central Asia passed to the neo-Chinggisid Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids from the Timurids and then to the Tuqay-Timurids, the importance of the madrasah faded, probably a sign of declining revenues, until by 1677 no one was going to the madrasah and even the group of people—he specifically names the *yārān* (devotees) from Kulab and Hisar who lived there and were known for persisting through thick and thin—had moved back home.¹⁹⁹ He thus gives 1677 as a point at which, despite Awrangzib's contributions, the madrasah was virtually bankrupt and could not pay stipends.

Although he does not mention it again Maliha has already stressed the devastation wrought on Samarqand by invasions of the Chinggisid Uzbeks of Urganj/Khwarazm in 1671 and again in 1684. Efforts by Uzbek governors of Samarqand to rebuild the madrasah had had mixed results. Maliha identifies a certain Nayman Uzbek amir, 'Abd al-Karim, the son of Khusraw Bi, who was a patron of the arts and made an effort to rebuild the mausoleum and madrasah, meaning to replenish its finances, but to no avail. Then in 1100/1688–89, a successor to 'Abd al-Karim Nayman, Khushikah Bi of the Yuz tribe, also raised money and, Maliha says, invested it in an effort to refurbish the complex.²⁰⁰ Whether his efforts resulted in a reinvigoration of the site and a reopening of the

199 Ibid., p. 487.

200 Ibid., pp. 487–88.

madrasah, Maliha does not say, but he uses this as a lead-in to the story of main interest to him, the restoration of Mughal involvement.

19 Maliha on Further Mughal Involvement with Gur-i Mir

‘Alamgir Awrangzib, a son of Shah Jahan and emperor of India from 1658 to 1707, had been mindful of the situation at the Gur-i Mir mausoleum-madrasah site for some time, indeed almost from the moment he took the throne from his father. In 1659, he answered a letter that the khan of Bukhara, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Khan, had sent to his father, Shah Jahan, the year before. From this point on a continuous series of diplomatic exchanges would have provided a steady stream of information to the Mughal imperial court about the state of the mausoleum and the madrasah.²⁰¹

The first explicit sign of the emperor’s concern for the Samarqand mausoleum of his forefathers comes during his war with Prince Dara Shukuh over the succession to their father Shah Jahan in 1658–59. As noted above, this was the moment of Awrangzib’s first two financial contributions to the maintenance of the tomb and madrasah. The next recorded show of concern for the tomb complex comes in March of 1685, in the wake of one of the many forays of the Khwarazmian ruler, Anushah Khan, into the Bukharan khanate.²⁰² To Maliha the months-long plundering of Samarqand in 1684 (which he dates however, to 1686) by the Khwarazmians and then the rapacious punishment inflicted on the city at the orders of his own khan was an unmitigated disaster so that when he was writing in 1100–3/1688–92 it appeared that the city would never recover. All this despoliation must have affected whatever assets the madrasah and the Gur-i Mir still possessed, not to mention reducing the revenues from any pilgrimage activity. There can be little doubt that this news would have reached the ears of Awrangzib.

201 See Burton 1997, pp. 274 ff and index under ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Khan for an excellent and detailed record of the diplomatic exchanges and the ever-changing political conditions surrounding them. Also Islam 1982, vol. 2, index entries for ‘Abd ul-‘Aziz Khan and Subhan Quli Khan.

202 Burton 1997, pp. 294–336 *passim*. Burton presents the disparate source material on the several invasions of Anushah Khan; sometimes these were at the invitation of the khan of Bukhara, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Khan, to help him fight his brother, Subhan Quli Khan, who was khan of Balkh until 1681 when he succeeded to Bukhara. She mentions Maliha (Muhammad Badi‘ Samarqandi) as one of her sources but other than one very brief reference does not seem to have made much use of his work and does not include it in her bibliography.

In the spring of 1685, Awrangzib dispatched an envoy to Balkh, a certain Wafadar Khan, better known by his title Zabardast Khan. This was more than twenty-five years after his first two donations given to the shrine's *mutawallī* Mir Rahmat Allah (see above) and it is not unlikely that other donations were made in the interim. According to the Mughal historian, Saqi Musta'idd Khan, who provides us with the date for this latest donation but was mistaken about the destination, the mission carried gifts for Subhan Quli Khan who was not at Balkh but was now khan at Bukhara, his brother, 'Abd al-'Aziz Khan, having abdicated in 1681.²⁰³ Saqi says nothing about the tomb but he does mention that one of the gifts was 10,000 rupees, a familiar Mughal donation amount for the tomb, without saying what it was intended for.

Maliha provides considerable detail to explain the 10,000-rupee gift. In his biography of the poet Khwajah Abu'l-Ma'ani, Maliha explains that when Zabardast Khan came to Bukhara, which he dates to 1099/1687, Subhan Quli Khan appointed Abu'l-Ma'ani as "news-writer" (*wāqī'ah-nawīs*) for the envoy. Zabardast Khan was probably well equipped with his own secretarial staff and Abu'l-Ma'ani's job was no doubt to report to the khan on Zabardast Khan's activities while in Bukhara. Maliha goes on to say that Zabardast Khan was carrying 10,000 rupees, not for Subhan Quli Khan as Saqi Musta'idd Khan seems to imply, but for the "resident mujawirs" (*sākinān-i jiwār*) of the Gur-i Mir. Maliha also states that Awrangzib commissioned Zabardast Khan to distribute the money, but when the envoy asked Subhan Quli Khan's permission to go to the tomb of Timur in Samarqand it was refused and Khwajah Abu'l-Ma'ani was sent with the rupees instead. He was supposed to report back who was eligible and get Zabardast Khan's approval before actually disbursing the funds.

Providing a foretaste of what was to come, Maliha writes that "avarice (*ṭam'*) spread through Samarqand" and a great clamor arose with people coming in crowds to the government house (*dawlat sarāy*) where Abu'l-Ma'ani was staying. The latter at first wrote down the names of everyone who came, "the humble, the noble, beggars, and the impoverished" and then asked the chief judge of Samarqand, Qazi Mirak Shah, to notarize the list with his seal. He would then take the list back to Zabardast Khan for his approval. But the judge refused to notarize the list on the grounds that Abu'l-Ma'ani's idea of who was eligible for the money was badly flawed. People now began to lose hope that they would be recipients of any of the largesse and so began to

203 Saqi Musta'ad [Musta'idd] Khan 1986, p. 156. See also Islam 1982, vol. 2, pp. 284–86 and Burton 1996, p. 341 for more on Zabardast Khan's embassy and its other goals.

disperse. Eventually, Abu'l-Ma'ani distributed the money to the professors at the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah and the Qur'an reciters at the Gur-i Mir and then returned to Bukhara.²⁰⁴

Apparently, Emperor Awrangzib was sufficiently pleased with the way this donation for the Timurid necropolis had been distributed and continued to send funds to Samarqand. The next recorded occasion was some five years later and, like the mission headed by Zabardast Khan, led to a number of problems, again involving the distribution of the money. This time our author, Maliha, was personally involved. He relates that at Awrangzib's court there was a high-ranking courtier named Sayyid Ughlan, who served as an intermediary for Central Asians attempting to gain access to the emperor and was a conduit for information about the region. Mughal sources confirm the presence at Awrangzib's court of such a person, a man who had begun as a tutor and then was appointed Examiner of Petitions and Superintendent of the Diwan-i Khass, the private audience chamber of the emperor.²⁰⁵

According to Maliha, Sayyid Ughlan repeatedly spoke to the emperor of the ruin of the Gur-i Mir complex and so in the thirty-fourth year of Awrangzib's reign, (that is 1690 or 1691 but the context suggests no later than 1690), Awrangzib sent an order to finance officials at Kabul to open the treasury there and disburse to a reliable person, whom he would name, a specific sum of money. He calls the money a votive offering (*nazr*) for the tomb. The money was to be a twelve-rupee per diem stipend (*mu'āf*) for people working at the madrasah and tomb. What Awrangzib appears to be doing is replenishing Muhammad Sultan's original endowment for his madrasah although, as will be seen, the terms of the endowment that were available to him did not correspond to what some Samarqandis at least understood those stipulations to be. It also appears from Maliha that he intended this as an annual charge on the Kabul treasury.

This was a major change in policy on the part of Awrangzib. Instead of the usual 4,000 or 10,000-rupee donation to be distributed however the bearer

204 Maliha 2011, pp. 354–56.

205 See Saqi Musta'ad Khan 1986, pp. 146 and 158 for the career appointments of Sayyid Ughlan. The author says he was given the title "Siyādat Khān" (p. 158) and came from "Wilāyat" which Jadunath Sarkar, the translator, interprets as "Persia." But "Wilāyat" (the Province) was one of the terms used at the time in Mughal India for Central Asia (see Digby 2001, passim) and reflected the idea that it was really a province belonging to the Mughals, part of their patrimonial lands. Saqi Musta'idd says nothing to corroborate any of Maliha's account, however. Samsam-ud-daula 1979, vol. 2, pp. 876–77, 961 provides a full biography of Siyadat Khan Sayyid Ughlan (Oghlan) describing his role at court and noting that he died of plague in 1697.

saw fit, the emperor is portrayed by Maliha as attempting not only to control the amount of the grant, which would have been considerably less than 10,000 rupees annually and perhaps reflected the reduced financial resources of the empire; he also wanted to determine how the money was allocated. It is worth noting that no money was earmarked for building maintenance. Maliha vocally condemns the new terms, mostly because of the choice of the chief trustee (*mutawallī*), a friend of Sayyid Ughlan who had passed on rumors of the tomb's poor condition.

By Maliha's lights, the designated trustee, a man named Mulla Wali, was completely untrustworthy and unqualified from several standpoints. First, he was neither a native Samarqandi nor educated there, having been born and raised in Ura Tapah, a town well east of Samarqand. Secondly, Mulla Wali had never seen the endowment deed for the madrasah and did not know its stipulations, therefore would not know how the madrasah staff was compensated under its terms. Maliha adds parenthetically that his own father was an expert and presumably more qualified to be the trustee of Awrangzib's funds but he had died in 1080/1669–70. But thirdly and worst of all, Mulla Wali had already proven himself corrupt as the chief *mutawallī* of the Shibani Khan Madrasah in Samarqand, a position from which he had been dismissed.²⁰⁶

All to no avail. Mulla Wali recommended himself to Awrangzib by virtue of a document with the seals of the emperor's forefathers that showed that his father had been delegated to carry out certain unspecified matters in Pashahgar, a place near Ura Tapah, and that the authority granted his father was his by hereditary right. So in June of 1690 Mulla Wali arrived in Kabul and collected one year's worth of the subsidy (*wazīfah*) for the shrine, some 4,380 rupees, if we go by the authorized twelve-rupee per diem and a fiscal year of 365 days, slightly less if based on the Hijri year of 354 days. It is quite possible that additional money was appropriated for building repair and maintenance since this was the issue that had prompted the emperor's action, but it was the distribution of stipends that turned out to be controversial and what Maliha was principally concerned about.

Mulla Wali arrived in Samarqand on 16 March 1691 and, just as in the case of Khwajah Abu'l-Ma'ani six years earlier, he created an uproar as desperate Samarqandis struggled to prove their right to a share in the money he was bringing. After assembling all those who held room-stipends (*hujrah-dārs*) at the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah, he showed them Awrangzib 'Alamgir's order "with the lion seal" in which it was stipulated that four professors

206 Maliha 2011, pp. 488–89. On the Shibani Khan "double" madrasah and its endowment, see Mukminova 1966.

(*mudarrises*), four Qur'an memorizers (*huffāz*), two shaykhs, two chief custodians (*farrāshbāshīs*) and thirty-two students were the named beneficiaries. Maliha, to demonstrate that Mulla Wali was unqualified and that the endowment terms that he read off were not based on the original *waqf* deed, then enumerates the terms of Muhammad Sultan's *waqf* as evidence that he, at least, was more qualified than Mulla Wali when it came to Muhammad Sultan's original endowment. That charter provided for four professorships, Maliha claims, just as Awrangzib's order specified, but fifty-eight room-stipend holders rather than thirty-two. Mutribi also says that Muhammad Sultan's *waqf* stipulated two students per cell, nine Qur'an memorizers (instead of four), ten custodians (rather than two), as well as a general servant (*khādīm*), one *shaykh* (not two), and one *mujāwir*. All in all, Mulla Wali's version of the endowment deed provided money for forty fewer positions than what Maliha claimed the endowment deed actually stipulated. Maliha implies that had Awrangzib known the true number of stipendiaries it would have meant a larger withdrawal from the Kabul treasury. To add the final proof to his claims, Maliha writes, "Anyone who doubts this should know I have copied this directly from the *waqf* deed itself."²⁰⁷

Within a year, Maliha reports that Mulla Wali was not only acting as chief administrator of the madrasah and its endowment but had also appointed himself to one of the four professorships, for which, Maliha believed, he had no qualifications. In addition, he had committed so many acts of malfeasance that Maliha could not possibly relate them all. One example, to show that Mulla Wali was nothing but a self-serving fraud, was that he had taken the amount of rupee stipends for students from Kabul to Bukhara where he invested some of it in Indian goods which he then sold for goods from Iraq. In Samarqand he only paid out part of the stipend and offered the remainder in the form of cheap cotton cloth (*karbās*) from Miyankal. He also offered as in-kind payments high quality fabric (*qumāsh*) from Kabul at an inflated valuation. His own profits were increased by the fact that he carried a decree from Awrangzib allowing him to pass through Mughal customs posts without having to pay duty. Maliha also enumerates other examples of Mulla Wali's perfidy—how he broke faith with those whom he had promised to give one of the room-stipends at the madrasah and how he solicited bribes from people who hoped for the positions of professor, shaykh, and Qur'an memorizer. It is not out of the question that Maliha was one of those slighted. The fact that his father had been a mufti and a professor at the madrasah and that Maliha

²⁰⁷ Maliha 2011, pp. 492–93.

had gained the position of mufti on his father's death may have meant that he should have assumed the professorship as well.

In short, Mulla Wali's tenure was extremely contentious and only ended when he died in mid-April 1692, a little more than a year after he met with the stipend-holders at the madrasah. Maliha gives no hint as to what happened to the position or the Mughal subsidy thereafter.²⁰⁸ One can imagine that Awrangzib would not have been pleased when he heard the fate of his emissary.

Maliha's account seems designed to show the incompetence of Mulla Wali and that he himself would have made a much better appointment. What is particularly noteworthy from his version is the fact that as late as the 1690s the madrasah was still the focus of interest for its financial role, whatever the 1677 date meant as far as the cessation of its operation was concerned. The decline in the number of room-fellowships at the madrasah from sixty in Mutribi's time (fifty-eight according to Maliha) to thirty-two in Maliha's indicates a reduction in the ability of the endowment to fund those stipends, not necessarily a reduction in the number of actual dormitory rooms in the madrasah. Given the likelihood that the building was essentially the same as the one erected by Muhammad Sultan at the end of the fourteenth century, the room-fellowship (*hujrah*) would have now funded students for only half the number of rooms.

Showing a strong sense of civic loyalty, Maliha makes it clear that he believed only a native and educated Samarqandi knew best how the money should be distributed. He is also ashamed at the behavior of his fellow townsmen in their undignified clamoring to establish their rights to a share of the funds. One of these importuners he mentions by name, the imam of the Tilla Kar Madrasah, Hafiz Wafay, the son of Hafiz Baqa Shawdari (Shawdar was a suburb of Samarqand). This imam produced old documents bearing the seals of earlier sultans attesting to his being a descendant of Mir Sayyid Barakah and claimed that he should have the stipend of one of the shaykhs of the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah.²⁰⁹

This is the second element of Maliha's account that allows for a comparison with Mutribi and points to a relatively depressed economy in the Samarqand region. It also indicates a reduction in the value of the madrasah's endowment and its apparent dependence on Mughal funds. Both Mutribi's and Maliha's accounts show the dilemma faced by the Mughal emperors. However much they may have wanted to see the mausoleum of their forebears maintained and to fund the endowments that supported the madrasah and by extension the mausoleum, they simply had no control. Their only leverage was the threat

208 Ibid., p. 493.

209 Ibid., p. 492.

of withholding funds, which would have defeated the purpose. So, as far as the very fragmentary evidence allows us to see, the Mughal emperors, despite their inability to control or audit the use of the funds, did continue to send money on what we should perhaps assume was a fairly regular, if not annual, basis. As noted above, this was the case for nearly two centuries from the time of Babur when Samarqand was in the hands of Kuchkunji, Timur's great great-grandson, almost to the end of the reign of Awrangzib while Samarqand was subject to Subhan Quli Khan.

After Awrangzib's reign (d. 1707) no evidence has been found to suggest that successor Mughal padishahs kept up the practice. But the evidence, as was said earlier, being as spotty as it is, should not blind one to the fact that there was continual activity at the Gur-i Mir—pilgrims coming and going, students and faculty populating the madrasah for a time then moving on and being replaced, and a staff whose purpose was to husband the sources of income and keep the physical infrastructure maintained as well as resources allowed.

Maliha's account, found in only one of the many manuscripts of his work, shows a still dynamic, if diminished, operation. Pletnev's assertion that Muhammad Sultan's ensemble of madrasah, *khānqāh*, and mausoleum was "abandoned and forgotten" and so quickly began to disintegrate at the end of the seventeenth century is too categorical and needs to be modified in light of the preceding.²¹⁰ By all accounts the economy of Central Asia at the end of the seventeenth century was in deep recession. Maliha's own story of the fate of Samarqand after the Khwarazmian raids is indicative of a general economic malaise affecting the region and the rise in internecine fighting over resources. However, we know the endowment of the Gur-i Mir would still be in operation a century later, as we will see below.

From one source, written a century later, we find corroboration of both the longstanding and widely-known interest of the Mughal court in the condition of the tomb of their ancestors and how local memory of that interest still animated the people of Samarqand. James Baillie Fraser, who traveled in Khurasan in 1820–21, reported information about the Gur-i Mir given him by a "Meer Izzul Ollah":

the servants of the tomb are very poor; until the time of Mahomed Shah, they used to receive from the court of Dehlee assistance in money; but since then that source has been stopt; and they expressed to the native traveller above alluded to ["Meer Izzul Ollah"], an earnest wish, that if any descendants of the house of Timoor yet existed in India, they should

²¹⁰ Pletnev and Shvab 1967, p. 60.

be made acquainted with the melancholy situation of their ancestor's mausoleum, and its servants, at Samarcand.²¹¹

The "Mahomed Shah" Fraser refers to is no doubt the grandson of Bahadur Shah, Mughal emperor from 1707 to 1712, whose name was Rawshan Akhtar, and who was given the regnal title Muhammad Shah (r. 1720–48).²¹² The chaotic succession period after the death of Bahadur Shah was probably the time when all remittances from Delhi to the staff of the madrasah and the Gur-i Mir as well as any other beneficiaries of Mughal largesse dried up.

20 Maliha's Guide to the Architecture

The third element of Maliha's account is a tour of the grounds of Gur-i Mir much like Mutribi's, only some seven decades later and, as mentioned above, apparently written without knowledge of Mutribi's work. He is attempting to show that he knows the place far better than his nemesis Mulla Wali. His own credentials included the facts that he and his ancestors had all been Qur'an-reciters (*sipārah-khwānān*) at a shrine on his street (Guzar-i Bustan-i Bala) and his father had held a professorship as well at the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah. He then goes on to describe the complex as if one were approaching it from the Ruhabad mausoleum to the north.

In the southwestern section of Samarqand midway along (*bayn-i*) Aq Saray Street (*guzar*) is the shrine (*mazār*) of Ḥazrat-i Shaykh Burhan al-Dīn Sāgharjī who is famous as "Khwājah Rūḥābād." In the *rāst bazār* (place where the shops are) of Ahmad Sultan Street they erected a domed mausoleum (*gunbadī*) which on its four sides has an iwan (*ṭāq*). The entrance to the [Ruhabad] shrine is through the iwan which faces south and its length (distance?) is one *na'rahwār* [1/6th of a farsakh or half a mile]. Master [engineers—*ustādān*] have laid out a main street (*shāhrāh*) and designed it with mirror-like stones. On the qibla (west) side of the street, there is a parish mosque (*muṣallā*); its walls are of brick and its roof of wood. On [the street's] east side is an open space (*ṣaḥn*) with an Iram-like pleasant lawn (*chaman*) and a pool for the thirsty

211 Fraser 1825, Appendix B, p. 99. On James Baillie Fraser and his recognition as an expert on Persia see Wright 2001.

212 Richards 1993, pp. 272–73.

which makes Kawthar and Zamzam jealous. In the preserve (*ḥarīm*²¹³) around the pool are many fruit and shade trees whose shadows are brilliant like the sun (?). At the terminus of this road opposite (facing) the entry arch (*tāq-i dar āmad*²¹⁴) is an anterior arch (*pīshṭāq*) whose blue glazed tile work (*kāshī*) competes with the stars of the arch of heaven. Its medallion (*shamsah-ash*) is equal to the medallion of the fourth dome of the blue sphere (of heaven), and its cornice (*shurfah-ash*) is like the lapis-colored cornice of the arch of heaven. The buttresses (*ṣuffah-hā*) of its entry's two sides are of marble and alabaster (*marmar wa rukhām*). Beneath the mighty arch is a gate of pure steel which opens before the visitors to this place like the door of good fortune (*dar-i dawlat*) ... Its epigraph is one single line:

The blackness of your threshold is the beauty mark of the next world /
This is the Garden of Eden, enter it and be eternal

After enjoying the outside, one steps into a place whose sanctified atmosphere makes the Ḥaram (at Mecca) look bedraggled and the pleasant scent of its joyful breeze puts to shame the odor of Iram.

Its length [of the courtyard] is the same as its width. On its western side, which faces the madrasah, a *khānqāh* building would (once) have come into view (but) today even the foundations are missing. At the four corners of this agreeable place are minarets each of which is a finger of wonder which tower over the domed mausoleum of the Ḥaẓrat-i Mīr (Sayyid Barakah) and the Ḥaẓrat-i Ṣāhib Qirānī (Timur). On the south side (of the courtyard) which is opposite the entryway they had installed a pillar of high-grade steel taller than a man with a ball on top of pure gold (or, a spiral-shaped pillar taller than a man made of high-grade steel plated with pure gold?) and brilliant like the sun. Part of the lofty entryway to this spacious and solid (*ustuwār*) mausoleum is a door next to this courtyard. Its grillwork windows compete with the the windows of Paradise. On either side of this iwan entryway are doors, one of which in olden days was the entrance to this noble sacred spot (*buq'ah-i sharīf*) and which today is closed up. The one who did this was the auspicious *khāqān* Ulugh Beg Mirza. The building of the (new) entrance was in 827 (AH/1424 AD). The way in which these paradise-dwelling *khāqāns* and *sultāns*, whose place is heaven, are arranged in this luminous resting

213 An *ḥarīm* is an area usually around a water source that legally cannot be owned, a kind of public right-of-way. (See McChesney 1991, pp. 186–87.)

214 Here he is referring to the closed-up vaulted entry to the mausoleum itself.

place in the crypt is exactly as [the cenotaphs are] on the floor above. They are all of *qāsh* stone except for the stone of the Sahib-i Qiran, which is nephrite stone (*yashm*) and is not of *qāsh* like the stone of the courtyard of the mausoleum. The auspicious martyred sultān (Ulugh Beg) has installed this same stone (*qāsh*) all around the graves [as the tomb's dado]. At the head of that shrine is a place for reciting the thirty parts of Qur'an calligraphed by the late Muhammad Sultan. In olden times ten Qur'an memorizers were engaged (in the recitation). Today (only) four are assigned.

In this sublime place is (a copy of) the Word [of God] belonging to the Commander of the Believers, Ḥaẓrat 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān [the third caliph, d. 656 AD]—May God be pleased with him—written on parchment (gazelle skin). While he was reading it, they martyred him and the traces of his blessed blood are still visible. There are many graves of *sultāns* and *amīrs*, who were the children and grandchildren of the Ṣāhib-i Qirān, as well as his close associates, both male and female, in close proximity to this mausoleum as are the traces (ruins) of buildings without number. May God cause the clouds with the rain of mercy and forgiveness to fall on the graves of the aforementioned *sultāns* and on the rest of the Muslim, men and women, and the Believers, men and women, Amen. And the Lord of the worlds through His mercy, most merciful of the merciful.²¹⁵

Maliha notes that next to the mausoleum were buried many “men and women of the sultans, amirs, children, and grandchildren of Timur.” Here he is referring to the madrasah building and notes that two of its four *gunbads*, whose windows overlooked the courtyard were used for burials (*gūrkhānahs*). The other two on the east end of the madrasah served as lecture halls (*darskhānahs*).²¹⁶ Unlike Mutribi, he seems to have had access to the crypt or at least to information about it and was able to describe the exact arrangement of the cenotaphs above the corresponding graves.

In the seventy-odd years between Mutribi's and Maliha's descriptions, some major changes had appeared in the complex. The outer gate which Mutribi mentioned seems to have disappeared as has the *gunbad* that he described as

²¹⁵ Maliha 2011, pp. 489–91. This is an intricate text and I am grateful for the suggestions of Mehdi Khorrami as to its meaning. Yahya Gulyamov, the first scholar to note the importance of this text and to whose work Galina Pugachenkova and other scholars referred, gives only a brief précis of it (see Gulyamov 1948, pp. 150–52).

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

being in the enclosed area inside this outer gate. The landscaping of the pool, trees, and lawn was still intact, however. Maliha, while copying out the same line of poetry inscribed on the great *pīshṭāq* entryway, fails to mention the cartouche with the builder's name. Nor does he follow Mutribi's example and describe the arrangement of the cenotaphs although he does note that they exactly mirrored the location of the graves beneath.

There were other changes as well. Mutribi only mentioned three minarets, Maliha has four. Did the finances of the shrine allow for the rebuilding of what was probably a fourth minaret in Muhammad Sultan's or Ulugh Beg's original plan? The kitchen described by Mutribi which replaced the *khānqāh* has completely disappeared in the interim, another sign of declining revenues and a shrinking endowment. The site is remembered by Maliha, not as a kitchen, but as the former *khānqāh*. The most puzzling new element in his account is the reference to the "(spiral-shaped?) pillar of high-grade steel taller than a man with a gold ball on top" that stood on the south side of the courtyard directly opposite the *pīshṭāq* entryway.²¹⁷ No source before or since has mentioned anything analogous to this pillar. It suggests nothing so much as the steel pillar that stands in front of the façade of the prayer hall of the Quṭb Mosque in Delhi.²¹⁸ Where the Gur-i Mir pillar might have come from and who oversaw its installation are unknown. Maliha provides no clue.

21 The Few, Mostly Silent, Eighteenth-Century Sources

The relative richness of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources stands in marked contrast to the few available for the eighteenth. For whatever reasons, perhaps because no great controversies arose or because the available resources were so reduced from the travails of the late seventeenth century that they were no longer worth fighting over, we have very few sources that refer to the Timurid complex in the eighteenth century.

One source dating from the first half of the eighteenth century, the Iranian Muhammad Kazim's *Ālam-ārā-yi Nādirī*, treats the Gur-i Mir as the focus of an attempt to appropriate the political meaning of Amir Timur. This attempt is detailed in the famous if somewhat ambiguous story of Nadir Shah Afshar's alleged removal of the nephrite cenotaph that Ulugh Beg had installed over Timur's tomb in 1425. Nadir Afshar, an Iranian warlord who rose to prominence

217 Maliha 2011, p. 490. The Persian is: *az qāmat bulandtar mīli nihādah-and az fūlād-i nāb wa bih šūrat-i khum (kham?) az ṭilā gūṛ tartīb dādah-and.*

218 See Flood 2009, p. 147, figure 78.

in the political turmoil following the Afghan capture of the Safavid capital, Isfahan, in 1722, saw himself as a latter-day manifestation of the militant spirit of Timur, including adopting the Timurid style “*Şāhib-i Qirān*—Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction.”

In 1740²¹⁹ his forces captured Bukhara and Samarqand and from Samarqand he reportedly ordered the removal of the nephrite cenotaph from the ground floor of the tomb. V.V. Bartol'd, who has provided the most thorough study of the episode, surmised that Nadir Shah wanted to incorporate the nephrite stone into a building in Mashhad and then changed his mind.²²⁰ Muhammad Kazim, whose lengthy history of Nadir Shah Bartol'd described as the fundamental source for his career, seems to connect the removal of the stone to Nadir's desire to make Kalat-i Nadiri, a naturally fortified place some ninety miles north of Mashhad, his own imperial center. Muhammad Kazim writes:

Previously, Lutf 'Ali Khan [Nadir Shah's half-brother] was ordered to remove and transport from Samarqand to the 'sacred ground' (*arż-i aqdas*)²²¹ the stone from Amir Timur's tomb and a pair of doors from the Madrasah-i Khānum.²²² After the completion of this service, when the world-seizing Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction saw that stone and those doors, he pondered on them for a time and then recited the *Fātiḥah* for the soul of Amir Timur and said, “Today I have the world in the palm of my hand. He (Timur) made the stone of his tomb from nephrite (*yashm*). We fashion a mail shirt of steel and another of red gold, inlaid with precious stones and from nephrite we will construct the floor and the dado (*farsh wa izārah*) of [our] mausoleum (*gunbad*).’ Immediately with the agreement of the governors and officials of the provinces it was decided that, stage by stage, the stone and the doors should be transported from the sacred ground to Bukhara and from there according to the command of Abu'l-Fayz Khan [Nadir Shah's anointed Chinggisid

219 For a summary account of the conquest see Avery 1991, pp. 41–43.

220 Bartol'd 1921/1966, vol. 4, p. 238.

221 *Arż-i aqdas* (Holy Land) strongly implies the city of Mashhad, site of the tomb of the Eighth Imam, but Muhammad Kazim seems to be using it here in a wider sense to include Kalat-i Nadiri whose proximity to Mashhad allowed him to treat it, particularly since it was to be Nadir Shah's imperial center, as part of the “sacred ground.” Muhammad Kazim 1965, vol. 2, fol. 286.

222 On fols. 266b and 282a Muhammad Kazim calls this building “the *masjid-i jāmi'* known as *madrasah-i khānum*.” Bartol'd took this to refer to what is now known as the Bibi Khanum Mosque but it is possible that it could have referred to the Saray Mulk Madrasah which stood opposite Bibi Khanum (the *masjid-i jāmi'*). See Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, p. 254.

sovereign of the khanate of Bukhara], they should be taken to the “Dar al-Saltanah” Samarqand and restored to their rightful places.²²³

Bartol'd was uncertain as to the reason why Nadir Shah should first have the cenotaph and the doors removed and brought to Mashhad (or Kalat-i Nadiri) and then order them to be returned to Samarqand. The point of the narrative seems to be that while Nadir Shah had the power to dispose of Timur's legacy, his own might and access to resources surpassed even that of the great amir, and he could magnanimously return these trophies of war once he had actually taken possession of them. To further assert his having surpassed Timur in terms of glory, while Timur only had a cenotaph of nephrite, his own tomb would have the entire floor and dado made of nephrite and so he had no need for Timur's cenotaph. The more ambiguous element is the meaning behind the reference to body armor. Should we understand that Muhammad Kazim wants to convey the idea that Nadir Shah believed it was more important to allocate his resources to the military rather than to a commemorative funerary object? Bartol'd, too, seemed unclear as to the reason for including this in the short account but found it interesting that among the gifts presented to Nadir Shah on his taking Bukhara in 1740 were items said to be Timur's sword and iron breastplate and Chinggis Khan's helmet and mail shirt.²²⁴

The story of Nadir Shah's theft and return of the cenotaph and doors provided a local explanation for the fact that the cenotaph was broken. However, there is no evidence that transporting the stone led to its fracturing, although it was apparently in one piece when it was taken [Muhammad Kazim twice refers to it as “one piece of nephrite” (*yak pārchah-i yashm*²²⁵)]. Whatever the case, the inscribed tradition of the breaking of the stone and blaming Nadir Shah for his removal of it, has continued more or less unaltered.²²⁶

A recently published work, *Tuhfat al-Khānī*, gives a hint of the Gur-i Mir's continuing local political significance if only as a sign of nostalgia. In 1753, the Bukharan Manghit leader, Muhammad Rahim Khan (r. 1747–58), with a group of courtiers, set out from the Samarqand citadel heading south to pay his respects at the tomb of Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar, the tombsite by this time with the most potency. En route, the author tells us that the party:

223 Muhammad Kazim 1965, vol. 2, fol. 286b; the stone and doors are mentioned previously (fols. 266b, 282a). Each reference has been transcribed and translated by Bartol'd 1921/1966.

224 Bartol'd 1921/1966, p. 242.

225 Muhammad Kazim 1965 vol. 2, fols. 266b, 282a.

226 Masson 1948.

came to the tomb of the Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction, the one who has taken refuge in God's mercy, Amīr Tīmūr Gūrgān, and they called to mind the soul of that world-conquering *pādshāh* by reciting the Fātiḥah. They then continued on to the shrine (*mazār*), the alighting place of light, of the mentor of the guides (Aḥrār) and there bowed down and humbled themselves, seeking blessings of victory from the soul of that saint, and performed a circumambulation of his enclosed grave (*ḥaḏīrah*).²²⁷

The contrast at this time between the significance of the two shrines could hardly be clearer and may help explain the silence of the available sources about the Timurid necropolis. To the chronicler of the Manghit ruler, Mir Sayyid Barakah as a source of spiritual power was of little, if any, consequence.

There is another story about the Gur-i Mir related in a very late eighteenth-century Lucknow work, *Tārīkh-i Husayn Shāhī*, that to some extent corroborates the diminished status of the Timurid mausoleum. The point of the story is to emphasize the religiosity of the Manghit ruler of Bukhara, Shah Murad Beg (r. 1785–99), cousin of the abovementioned Muhammad Rahim Khan, although the story echos an older one about the gold finial on the tomb. According to the author, Imam al-Din Husayni, “they took down the gold *qandīls* which were on the tomb of Timur, sold them and distributed (the proceeds) to the ulema saying ‘this is a sinful innovation (*bid‘at*) and it is a wasteful extravagance to put gold on the top of a grave.’”²²⁸ Attitudes had changed since the late sixteenth century when Mir Tulak suffered divine retribution for damaging part of the gilt finial (see above p. 54).

22 Nineteenth-Century Interpretations: Indigenous and Colonial

The nineteenth century brings a new group of narratives, some arising locally and others accompanying the arrival of representatives of Christian cultural and national interests. Two local interpretations appear for the first time in written form about 1830 although they probably circulated orally well before that. One is the legend that Shah Rukh removed Timur's body from the tomb.

²²⁷ Karminagi 2015, p. 309.

²²⁸ Imam al-Din Husayni ms., p. 213. The word *qandīl* (or *qindīl*) is usually defined as candelabra or chandelier but here, except for the fact that it is given in the plural, it would seem to refer to the finial or architectural lantern atop the grave. The use of the preposition “on” (*bar*) instead of “in” (*dar*) points to something on the outside of the domed tomb. But there was only one such finial, unless the small domes on the Ulugh Beg Gallery also had finials at the time, and thus the use of *qandīl-hā* begs the question of whether inside chandeliers were meant.

Here too we see the again-privileged position of Mir Sayyid Barakah and although the Gur-i Mir is still associated with Timur, it is the holy man tradition that is placed at the center of the story. The second new accretion to the narrative line is the “fact” of the burial of the so-called “pseudo Sayyid ‘Umar, the son of Amir Kulal” a “fact” re-emphasized today by the identification of one of the tombs as his on the plan of the tombs that greets visitors to the Gur-i Mir. The source for both additions to the story is Abu Tahir Samarqandi, writing after 1251/1835–36:

The *mazār* of Ḥaẓrat-i Mīr Sayyid Barakah is inside Samarqand and beneath the domed tomb of Amīr Tīmūr. The Ḥaẓrat Sayyid came from the province of Kirmān to the province of Balkh. He rendered spiritual (*bi-bāṭin*) assistance to Amīr Tīmūr and as a result he was able to conquer Balkh. Amīr Tīmūr brought him to Samarqand. At the time he brought the sayyid to Samarqand, Amīr Tīmūr had come to see the madrasah of Pīr [*sic*] Muḥammad Sulṭān. He built for himself as his own burial place a lofty *gunbad* all of marble and nephrite to the west of that madrasah. On the north side of the *gunbad*, he laid out a lofty madrasah and in the courtyard a sublime *chahārbāgh* [terraced garden]. After the sayyid's death, (Tīmūr) brought his body from Māzandarān and laid it inside the dome and decreed that his own resting place should be below the feet of the sayyid. When, with three lakhs of mighty troops on his last campaign intending to conquer Khitāy he alighted at Khān Kildī Beg, one of the districts of Turkistān, en route to Utrār and there died, they brought his corpse in five days to Samarqand and interred it at the feet of the Ḥaẓrat Sayyid in a marble coffin. From Utrār to Samarqand is seventy *farsangs*.

It has been reported that during the time of Shāh Rukh Mīrzā, it was heard that he came from Harāt to Samarqand and removed his father's corpse from that place and buried it elsewhere out of fear of the enemy. Sulṭān Shāh Rukh, Mīrzā Mīrānshāh, Muḥammad Sulṭān, and Ulugh Beg, all of them, are interred inside the dome of the tomb of Amīr Tīmūr Gūrgān. The *mazār* of Ḥaẓrat Sayyid (Mīr Barakah) manifests spiritual blessing (*wāẓiḥ al-barakāt*). On the west side, within the *gunbad* and atop a raised platform is the tomb of Mir Sayyid ‘Umar b. Ḥaẓrat Sayyid Kulāl. His *mazār* emanates light (*ẓāhir al-nūr*). Atop the *gunbad* of the *dakhmah* of Amir Timur there was a gilded cupola (*qubbah-i az ṭilā*) which during the turmoil of some ill-starred governor was taken away and lost.²²⁹

229 Abu Tahir Samarqandi 1952, pp. 26–27. This story has echoes of Mutribi's account of Mir Tulak shooting at and damaging the gold finial on the dome and of Imam al-Din Husayn's story of the removal of the gold finial(s) (*qandil-hā*).

Abu Tahir's account is worth some consideration because it shows how far what came to be believed about the Gur-i Mīr had diverged from the earliest sources. Almost every "fact" he relates about the mausoleum is a fiction when compared with Timurid sources—the account of Sayyid Barakah's importance to Timur, the madrasah of "Pir" Muhammad Sultan, Timur's burying Sayyid Barakah, then Timur being buried after his death while on campaign to China at the feet of the sayyid, the existence of a tomb of Mir Sayyid 'Umar in the Gur-i Mir, and the removal of Timur's body.

The story of Shah Rukh's removal of the body is a new one in the surviving literary tradition and perhaps the phrase "it was heard" (*shunūdah*) immediately following "it was reported" was Samarqandi's way of distancing himself somewhat from all the legends that had accrued. While Maliha, more than a century earlier, had said the Gur-i Mir was built for Mir Sayyid Barakah, Abu Tahir's understanding is that Timur built it for himself, contrary to Timurid-era historiography which says Timur built it for Muhammad Sultan. Sayyid Mir Barakah returns to being a crucial element but his *mazār*, sanctified locus as the object of pilgrimage, is encompassed by the whole structure which is still identified as the tomb of Timur.

Abu Tahir introduces, apparently for the first time in the written record, the figure of Mir Sayyid 'Umar, the son of Sayyid (or Amir Sayyid) Kulal. This new element tends to reinforce the return, if it had ever gone away, of the local significance of a holy man tradition. In effect, the spiritual capital of Gur-i Mir was doubled by the addition of another iconic figure, no matter how "pseudo." Since Abu Tahir does not mention the presumed Timurid Sultan-Hasan, son of Sultan-Husayn, perhaps we are to understand that Mir Sayyid 'Umar is now the occupant of the tomb that Maliha had assigned to the unidentified Sultan-Hasan. This, at least, is how the present administrators of the Gur-i Mir see it.

Bartol'd doubted the tradition of Sayyid 'Umar that Abu Tahir connected with Gur-i Mir but does add that he was the alleged fourth son of Sayyid Amir Kulal.²³⁰ This perhaps represents a tenacious survival of the Suhrawardi tradition at Samarqand in the face of the overwhelming predominance of the Naqshabandi confraternity headed by 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar and his disciples. Semenov, who deciphered the complete inscriptions on the tombstone of the grave of the alleged Sayyid 'Umar, found only praise of God and a recitation of His qualities. The stone is undamaged and has no missing segments. There is no name indicating who is interred beneath it. A.A. Semenov, no doubt from Abu Tahir, notes there was a Sayyid 'Umar, fourth son of Sayyid Kulal, and an early sixteenth-century source has him dying in 803/1401–2 but being buried

230 Bartol'd 1916/1964, p. 85.

in Bukhara.²³¹ There is some thought that the Gur-i Mir in the nineteenth century was hemmed in by a quarter inhabited by potters who made Sayyid ʿUmar their patron saint and may have done a good deal to embed that figure in local minds as a resident of Gur-i Mir.²³²

23 Under Tsarist Russian Administration

About thirty years after Abu Tahir wrote his work, a new political era began in Samarqand with its occupation by troops of the Russian tsar in May 1867. From here on we are presented with an entirely new narrative thread and way of commemorating and celebrating the Gur-i Mir. The new tradition interpreted the tomb not as dynastic symbol nor as sacred ground, but as a trophy of the Russo-Christian victory, to the greater glory of All the Russias, and as a token of Russo-Christian civilizational superiority.²³³ This shift in meaning has important consequences for the building proper. Whereas Maliha, writing almost two centuries earlier, pays some attention to the issue of building maintenance and restoration, singling out for praise those who made efforts to repair and restore, his main concern is for the livelihoods of those whose well-being was linked to the income of the complex. Abu Tahir Samarqandi's interest is expressed only in terms of the spiritual importance of the building. He seems to have been unaware of the endowment and the people supported by it.

The spiritual importance of the building and the pilgrim traffic it generated probably accounts by now for much of its economic significance rather than any attraction as the site of Timurid burials. The *waqf* endowment, about whose terms Maliha speaks with such authority and concern, lost much of its economic significance over the course of the eighteenth century. The first evidence we have of the financial condition of the *waqf* endowment is late. In 1886, the Russian governor-general ordered all *waqf* deeds be produced for inspection on pain of the forfeiture of title to the property. According to one source, 1,695 documents were presented for Samarqand *oblast* (province) alone.²³⁴ Another somewhat earlier source analyzing that same survey but using different categories and administrative divisions said that Turkestan as a whole had 2,909 separate *waqf* foundations of which 297 were in Samarqand.²³⁵

231 Semenov 1947 and Bartol'd 1916/1964, p. 86, note 188.

232 Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1958, p. 121 column b.

233 For other reflections on how the Russians might have perceived their prize see Shah 2011, pp. 44–47.

234 Mordvinov 1899.

235 Emel'yanov 1887.

But the author was referring here to the *uezd* (district) of Samarqand rather than the province, the *uezd* being the city and its suburbs. One of these *waqfs* was the Gur-i Mir *waqf*.

The survey, conducted between 1882 and 1884 and published in 1886, noted that the 1882 income of the Gur-i Mir was 238 rubles produced by 332 *tanābs* (approximately 160 acres or 64 hectares) of land. In comparison with other endowments, the reported income (and thus the extent of the endowment) was very modest. In contrast, the endowment for Khwajah Ahrar's Samarqand establishment at Kamangaran, then a suburb of Samarqand and the site of his grave and now part of the city, included twenty-four villages (*qishlāqs*) totalling 9,835.25 *tanābs* (some 4,900 acres) producing an annual revenue of 8,686 rubles. The *waqf* for the early seventeenth-century madrasahs on the Rigistan of Samarqand, Shayrdar and Tilla Kar, which were built over some buildings of Ulugh Beg and endowed by their builder, the amir Yalangtush Bi Alchin, controlled twenty *qishlāq*-villages totaling 6,033 *tanābs* (about 3,000 acres) and 13 grist mills and produced a total annual income of 6,595 rubles.²³⁶ In comparison to these foundations, the Gur-i Mir *waqf*, what was formerly called the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah *waqf*, was poor indeed and yet had greater infrastructure to maintain. It is not surprising then that the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah and the *khānqāh* had completely disappeared and that the Russians found the mausoleum in a seriously dilapidated state. The reduction of the endowment holdings reflected in the Russian survey would have meant the madrasah would long ago have ceased to be able to fund fellowships for students or pay professors.

The Russian written record seems principally concerned with the need to rebuild, restore, and preserve the mausoleum, all that now physically survived of the complex. By now Gur-i Mir is identified and used as a mosque. Russian writings of the tsarist period reveal little of the interests of the local community whose livelihoods or spiritual lives may have been in some way tied to the building. Yet there must have been some permanent staff remaining and administering the much reduced *waqf*.

Despite the silence of the available sources, we should assume that the tomb building, whether visited in order to pay homage to Amir Timur, Miranshah, Ulugh Beg, Mir Sayyid Barakah, the "pseudo" Sayyid 'Umar, or anyone else

236 These figures are based on research in the Uzbek State Archives carried out by Aman Musaevich Tashmukhammadov who served as my official mentor (*rukovoditel'*) during my stay in Tashkent 1976–77. He generously shared his notes with me when I was unable to obtain permission to work in the archives.

thought to be buried there, continued to be seen locally as a sanctified place at which a specific ritual was the norm.

There is more evidence of the tomb ritual, like that mentioned above in the case of the Manghit ruler Muhammad Rahim Khan, in the diary of a member of the late nineteenth-century Bukharan elite, a qadi/*qāzī*, Muhammad Sharif Sadr-i Ziya. On taking up his appointment as qadi of Shahr-i Sabz in 1909, Sadr-i Ziya stopped in Samarqand en route to Shahr-i Sabz from Bukhara. He mentions three things that he did in Timur's old capital: first he visited and stayed overnight with a colleague; then he paid homage at Shah-i Zindah seeking its blessing; and finally he "conveyed to the great Amir, the Conqueror of the World, Ṣāhib-Qirān Amīr Tēmūr Gurgān the Fātiḥah prayer."²³⁷ Although he does not specifically say he went to Gur-i Mir to recite the Fatihah for Amir Timur, it certainly would have been the logical place and since recitation of the Fatihah was a customary component of a *ziyarat* performance it would be the kind of activity a visitor would do there as a way to honor the interred.

Aside from this en passant kind of reference, there is a void in the indigenous record from the tsarist Russian era or the early Soviet for that matter, or at least no such writings have yet come to my attention. The researcher is therefore disproportionately dependent on Russian colonial literature for textual material. The colonial literature is rich but needs always to be read with some awareness of the context within which it was produced and the perspective of those who produced it.

The Russian imperial approach to Gur-i Mir takes its most memorable and enduring form in the 1905 St. Petersburg publication of a large volume under the patronage of Tsarina Alexandra entitled *Mecheti Samarkanda*, part 1, *Gur' Emir' / Les Mosquées de Samarcande*, fasc. 1 *Gour-Emir* (St. Petersburg, 1905) in which the mausoleum is literally deconstructed, each of its decorative and architectural elements carefully measured, reproduced in hand-tinted architectural drawings, and published in an oversized volume that must have cost a small fortune to produce. In a way this production was part of the meaning the Russians attached to the building—it was a trophy and an objet d'art to be universally appreciated for its singular architectural and artistic features and to be protected and preserved as such. The title of the book "Mosques of Samarkand," calling the building "Gur Emir" and referring to its being the first part or fascicle meant there was a plan to publish further volumes on other mosques. But none ever were forthcoming. One recent scholar has interpreted the issuance of the volume by the Society of Amateur Archaeologists with the financial support of the Imperial Archaeological Society as a way both to

²³⁷ Sadr-i Ziya 2004, p. 251.

encourage Tsar Nicholas II to make funds available for the Gur-i Mir's preservation but also to further "the narrative of central Asian civilization as a grand but fallen star whose decline after the sixteenth century had practically mandated Russian tutelage in aesthetics and preservation."²³⁸

Within five years of the tsarist occupation of Samarqand, Russians were turning their attention to restoration of the tomb complex,²³⁹ particularly as major earthquakes made maintenance and repair even more urgent. Over the first forty years of Russian occupation, there were at least three sizeable and destructive temblors affecting Samarqand: one in 1868 centered in Tashkent of 6.5 magnitude on the Richter scale, another in 1897 centered in Ura Tapah with a magnitude of 6.7, and a particularly destructive one in 1907 centered in Qara Tagh, western Tajikistan, magnitude 7.8.²⁴⁰ After the earthquake of 1897²⁴¹ there was a spate of publicity about the need for work to repair earthquake damage, but finding sufficient funds was a problem. Beginning in 1902, the newspaper *Turkestanskije Vedomosti* carried numerous articles on the pressing need for restoration. But there was not yet much congruence between the meaning generated by the Gur-i Mir for the local Russian authorities and the policies of those who controlled the necessary funds. The publication of *Mecheti Samarkanda* was aimed in part at increasing the constituency for preserving the mausoleum complex as objet d'art and museum piece but it does not appear to have had the desired effect.²⁴² It would be nearly twenty years before the government, now Soviet, would take up restoration of the Gur-i Mir as a government responsibility.

24 Under Soviet Administration

At the beginning of the Soviet period (1918–1991), official word was issued regarding the architectural legacy of the Russian empire. On October 5, 1918, Lenin signed a decree which "declared monuments of olden times, works of

²³⁸ Shaw 2011, pp. 46–47.

²³⁹ See Kaufman's order of 1872 reported in *Turkestanskije Vedomosti* 1872 no. 16.

²⁴⁰ Borjian 1996, Tables 42 and 43. Schuyler 1876, vol. 1, p. 328 dates the 1868 earthquake to April 4th.

²⁴¹ Borjian 1996 says the 1897 quake occurred on 17 November.

²⁴² It is not clear exactly what work was done on the Gur-i Mir before the Soviet era. Shaw 2011, p. 47 says that the Circle of Amateur Archaeologists managed to save the dome from collapse and to shore up the floor of the mausoleum (the ceiling of the crypt) but gives no source for the information.

art and architecture to be the property of the people.”²⁴³ The decree became the guiding document for setting out the program to determine whether buildings had artistic or historic significance. In 1921, the Council of Peoples’ Commissars for the Turkestan Republic decreed, “in view of the important scientific uniqueness of the old Muslim architecture, these works [of restoration] will be directed to preserving and restoring these monuments in recognition of the extraordinary [importance] and the urgency ...”²⁴⁴

The matter of preservation took on a different cast with the creation and national delimitation of the Central Asian republics and the rise of a new academic-political movement called “regionology” (*kraevedenie*).²⁴⁵ *Kraevedenie* encouraged the regionally focused study and preservation of monuments of historical interest as part of the Sovietization of local culture, in order to bring “greater glory” to the people. In 1924, the first Soviet administrative units in Central Asia—the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Bukharan People’s Republic, and the Khorezmian People’s Republic—were dissolved and national delimitation created a new group of republics with presumed national identities. In November 1924, the first conference on *kraevedenie* was convened in Uzbekistan with the aim of establishing an Uzbek national identity congruent with the new Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.²⁴⁶

The protection of historic monuments was an important element in the development and expression of this national identity. In Tashkent, in 1921, a committee was formed of archaeologists and ethnologists called the *Turkestanskii Komitet po Delam Muzeev i Okhrane Pamyatnikov Stariny*,²⁴⁷ or *Turkomstaris* for short, the Turkestan Committee for Museums and the Preservation of Ancient Monuments, under the chairmanship of V.L. Viatkin. Its goals were to identify and protect worthy historical artifacts and sites.²⁴⁸

National delimitation recast the committee’s name as *Sredazkomstaris* (Central Asian *Komstaris*) with similar jurisdictional authority as *Turkomstaris*. In 1928, *Sredazkomstaris* was superseded by *Uzkomstaris* whose jurisdiction was now restricted, as the name implies, to the republic of Uzbekistan²⁴⁹ In Samarqand, the local affiliate, *Samkomstaris*, founded in 1920, took

243 Muminov 1969–70, vol. 2, p. 390.

244 *Ibid.*, p. 391.

245 Baldauf 1992.

246 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

247 Muminov 1969–70, vol. 2, p. 391. Shaw 2011, p. 50; Paskaleva 2019, p. 189.

248 For an excellent and thoroughly-researched survey of the Soviet archaeological work see Paskaleva 2019, especially pp. 188–201.

249 Paskaleva 2019, p. 192; Azzout 1999, p. 165 dates the change to 1930.

responsibility for the registration and preservation of Samarqand's monuments.²⁵⁰ According to a recent study, the general objective of Bukharkomstaris, Bukhara's local committee, was to preserve and restore "the material expression of the culture of the proletariat."²⁵¹ Presumably, Samkomstaris had the same goal. Under the Turkestan administration of the pre-Soviet period, efforts to "preserve and restore" were dependent on the individual initiative and limited financial resources of the governors-general. In Samarqand under the Soviets, Samkomstaris provided an institutional approach to restoration work on the Gur-i Mir but as an institution whose work was rooted in an ideological interpretation of the structures on which it chose to focus.²⁵² The Gur-i Mir met the cultural and political requirements for preservation, perhaps, not so surprisingly, because of the longstanding Russian interest in the building.

In mid 1920, in one of the first major acts of the newly formed Samkomstaris over forty million rubles were allotted for restoration work on Gur-i Mir.²⁵³ In 1922, nearly 25,000 rubles alone were spent on repairs of the dome.²⁵⁴ In 1924, coinciding with national delimitation, the abolition of the Bukharan Soviet Republic and the Turkestan Soviet Republic, and the formation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, funds were to be used to perform an archaeological survey and to stabilize the building.²⁵⁵ The Samkomstaris was in charge of the project and the money was used to reinforce the floor above the crypt with girders as well as to do other work on the subterranean part of the structure.²⁵⁶ The supervisor of the engineering work was Mikhail Fedorovich Mauer. Shortly thereafter a spate of publications began to appear about the building and the ongoing work, most notably by the thirty-four-year-old I.I. Umniakov and the twenty-seven-year-old M.E. Masson, both of whose careers would be linked to the building for some time to come.²⁵⁷ According to Charles Shaw,

250 Paskaleva 2019, p. 188; Muminov 1969–70, vol. 2, p. 391 provides a full list of the members when Samkomstaris was formed as well as those commissioned to do Samkomstaris's work.

251 Muminov, vol. 2, p. 391.

252 For an overview of the archaeological and restoration work done in the early and mid-twentieth century by Russian and Soviet scholars see *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 381–408.

253 Paskaleva 2019, p. 188.

254 *Ibid.*

255 Masson 1926a.

256 Umniakov and Aleskerov 1967, p. 62.

257 Masson 1926b; Umniakov 1926, *idem* 1928, *idem* 1929. Ivan Ivanovich Umniakov (1890–1976) held the title "scientific colleague" (*nauchnyi sotrudnik*) in the Sredazkomstaris (see Miliband 1995, vol. 2, p. 522). Azzout 1999, p. 165 says that he had been the "head of Turkomstaris." Mikhail Evgenevich Masson (1897–1986) seven years younger than

“The Soviet preservation and reinterpretation of the Gur-i Amir proceeded in two primary registers: for locals who witnessed the physical transformation of the site, and for citizens throughout the Soviet republics who learned about it in newspapers, film reels, glossy guidebooks, and tourist brochures.”²⁵⁸ To this we should add the local workers and artisans and the Russian specialists with whom they worked. Many of the local artisans had long-term career interests in the tomb and the specialists would gain fame through their publications.

This appears to have been the time (late 1920s or early 1930s), when the tomb was given a magnetic scan to see if Timur had been buried in a steel coffin, as only one early source, Ibn ‘Arabshah, had reported. Ibn ‘Arabshah was in Samarqand when Timur was buried, and later (in 1436 or so) wrote that a skilled metalworker from Shiraz was commissioned by Khalil Sultan, Timur’s first successor at Samarqand, to craft a steel coffin for the “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction.”²⁵⁹ Although ostensibly in a position to have been an eyewitness, it was probably a story he heard later when he came to write his biography of Timur. The magnetic scan revealed no metal nor did the 1941 opening of the tomb and exhumation of Timur’s skeleton indicate that he had been buried in anything other than an “ebony” coffin, which Ibn ‘Arabshah also mentions. By referring to a “steel coffin” (*tābūt min fūlādh*) was Ibn ‘Arabshah simply mistaken or perhaps he had a complicated allusion in mind playing on the Turkish word “*temir*” meaning iron?

As for the mausoleum, maintenance and restoration work continued through the 1930s and into the early 1940s. Umniakov and Aleskerov report that in the late 1930s, Mauer was still at work on the tomb, engaged at the end of the decade in several small “excavations” at the remains of the entrance portal. These excavations confirmed that the minarets which no longer stood at the mausoleum (the last one collapsed in 1903) were erected earlier than the mausoleum but at the same time as the madrasah, *khānqāh*, and the entrance portal.²⁶⁰ The film *Gorod Samarkanda*, shot in June 1941, shows the dome

Umniakov may have just finished his studies at the Turkestan Oriental Institute when he joined the survey in 1924. Another scholar whose work from the period is important was Boris Zasytkin who published at least two long articles about the Gur-i Mir in the journal *Voprosy restavratsii* in 1926 and 1928.

258 Shaw 2011, p. 44.

259 Ibn ‘Arabshah 1986, p. 408 for the Arabic; Ibn ‘Arabshah 2018, p. 244 for the “ebony coffin” from which he was later transferred to the “steel coffin,” p. 245. When the coffin was exhumed in June 1941 the wood was identified as *archah*, pine or cedar (see Semenov 1948, p. 51 and Yuri Bregel’s note in Bartol’d (Barthold) 1916/1964, v. 2, p. 445). For the context in which Ibn ‘Arabshah was writing, see McChesney 2006, especially pp. 236 ff.

260 Umniakov and Aleskerov 1967, p. 63.

completely enclosed in scaffolding which meant that restoration of the dome and its tile was still in progress then.

25 The Disinterments: Finding New Meanings

The late 1930s were a time of immense social upheaval and state-sponsored terror overlapping with profoundly dangerous struggles to define and establish national identities to match the territories defined by the national delimitation. The issue of national identity—and in this case Uzbek identity—and what its proper components were in such areas as linguistics, literature, and cultural heritage, became literally a matter of life and death.

One of the controversial subjects of the identity struggles was the figure of the fifteenth-century Herati politician, patron, and litterateur Mir ‘Ali Shayr (Shir) Nawa’i (Navoi), a figure who is also linked to the ‘Alid shrine at Mazar-i Sharif. One of the unforeseeable outcomes of the contest over his role in the formation of Uzbek identity was the disinterment of the bodies of Timur and four of his near relatives—Miranshah, Muhammad Sultan, Shah Rukh, and Ulugh Beg—from the crypt of the Gur-i Mir. It seems likely that had the struggle over Mir ‘Ali Shayr Nawa’i’s meaning turned out other than it did, the tombs would never have been disturbed.

Nawa’i was well-known as a writer of Chaghatai or old Turkish, the language that was to be the basis of the Uzbek language. It thus was his literary opus and the significance of those works to an Uzbek identity that was at issue. Any actual connection of his with Samarqand was brief, but the struggle to interpret him and his relevance to the larger process of defining what constituted an Uzbek literature became entangled with the meaning of the Gur-i Mir as it related to Uzbek national identity.

Nawa’i’s literary legacy as interpreted in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union is a complicated subject that has been addressed by Edward Allworth and William Fierman.²⁶¹ Here it is enough to summarize some of the debated issues and the events to which they led.

The early drive to define what properly constituted one aspect of the identity of the Uzbek people—its literature—happened to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Nawa’i’s birth in 844 on the Muslim lunar calendar (1440–41 AD). The 500th anniversary (according to the Hijri [lunar] calendar) corresponded to 1926 on the Gregorian calendar. In February of that year, the anniversary of his birth was observed at the All-Union Turkological Congress

²⁶¹ Allworth 1964, especially chapter 8, and Fierman 1991.

in Baku but plans to organize a celebration came to nothing.²⁶² For a period of ten years or so afterwards, Nawa'i was demonized by critics as a reactionary feudal figure and as the author of works which in Allworth's words, "indicated class aspirations and could not be called classless works or pure art."²⁶³

However, for reasons not entirely clear,²⁶⁴ that view underwent a sea change in the late 1930s and by the end of the decade not only had Nawa'i emerged as the "father of Uzbek literature" but in 1938 plans were made to celebrate the 500th year of his birth, this time according to the Christian calendar (i.e. in 1941). A Jubilee Committee was named to develop and carry out various projects in conjunction with the celebration and one of the approved ones was the unsealing of some of the tombs in the Gur-i Mir and the exhumation of the bodies for study. Why the disinterments should have been considered appropriate to the goals of the Jubilee Committee is not at all apparent. Allworth, who was interested primarily in the literary overtones of the jubilee celebration identifies two somewhat redundant objectives of the jubilee committee—(1) "to obliterate nationalistic attitudes as well as the negative Soviet interpretations of previous years and then to provide a new, acceptable basis for including Navaïy [*sic*] as an approved element in Soviet Uzbek literary history"²⁶⁵ and (2) "to provide a Marxist basis for using Navaïy and his works in Uzbek literary history."²⁶⁶ There is nothing here to suggest the relevance of opening Timur's tomb as part of the jubilee celebration, except perhaps the goal of "obliterating nationalistic attitudes" which for the people of Samarqand certainly might have also encompassed Islamic sentiments about such things as funeral rituals and the sanctity of the dead.

The goal of constructing an approved Uzbek identity might reasonably have included establishing an historically authentic Uzbek physical appearance. Although never explicitly stated, it seems clear that one of the objectives of the exhumations was to establish what Uzbeks looked like in the past, by putting actual faces on the progenitors of the modern Uzbek nation. The reconstruction of a physical type had its political constraints like everything else. One has to remember that the purges that peaked in 1937 and 1938 were still going on and that permission for such a public and potentially controversial and inflammatory activity as opening (and in many eyes desecrating) the graves of some

262 Allworth 1964, p. 84.

263 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

264 Allworth 1964 in a long footnote (p. 81) attributes the reversal of direction on Nawa'i to "a reaction against the historiography of the previous decade (i.e. the 1930s) many of the practitioners of which had by then been denounced as 'nationalists'."

265 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

266 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

of the most famous people ever to have been buried within the confines of modern Uzbekistan would have required the highest level of approval and in 1938 this would of course have been Joseph Stalin.

A salutary example of Stalin's role when it came to the interpretation of the figure of Timur is found in the late-1930s world of Soviet cinema. In Marxist ideology and public discourse, Timur was a reactionary feudal lord but for Stalin he may have been a role model. In 1939, the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein had just finished work on *Alexander Nevsky* and was planning a new project, the title for which was *The Great Fergana Canal* (*Bol'shoi Ferganskii Kanal*). The film was to celebrate completion of that immense irrigation project in the Fergana Valley or, in Eisenstein's vision, the victory of water over sand through the agency of progressive mankind. In collaboration with Pyotr Pavlenko, who had also worked on the script for *Alexander Nevsky*, a proposal for the film was drafted and completed by August 1939. In July Eisenstein wrote Sergei Prokofiev and asked him to compose the film score for the movie (Prokofiev had also written the score for *Alexander Nevsky*). Eisenstein later described the project in his memoirs:

I conceived the film about the Fergana Canal as a triptych about the struggle for water. [Part One] Central Asia in a blaze of flowers thanks to the amazing irrigation system constructed all those years ago. [Part Two] In Tamerlane's fratricidal conflicts and expeditions man's control over water is destroyed. Sand overruns all. The poverty of the sandy wastes under the tsars. The fight for one more cup of water from the waterways where once there had been a perfect irrigation system. And [Part Three] finally the miracle of the first collective feat—building the collective farms in Uzbekistan—[and] the Fergana Canal which was an unprecedented project in terms of scale and brought wealth and prosperity to socialist Central Asia.²⁶⁷

Eisenstein traveled to Uzbekistan in August 1939 and shot test takes in the Fergana Valley and Samarqand until the end of October. But as it quickly turned out, his vision of Timur was diametrically opposed to the view of the one whose good opinion he most needed for the project to move forward. Eisenstein's relations with Stalin have been portrayed as, at best, unpredictable and always tense. Stalin seems to have disliked Eisenstein personally but approved of much of his work. Herbert Marshall, the editor of Eisenstein's memoir, *Immoral Memories*, suggests that with regard to the film on the Fergana

267 Eisenstein 1995, vol. 4, p. 658.

Canal, Stalin may have identified with Timur partly because of the similarity of their physical disabilities (Timur's crippled right arm and leg and Stalin's disabled arm), and partly because Stalin admired Timur's military prowess and reputation for ruthlessness just as he admired Ivan the Terrible's.²⁶⁸

Whatever the case, Eisenstein was not permitted to make the film. Later, in a discussion on the use of color in film, Eisenstein refers to the "amputation of my Tamerlane" and would write, "for reasons not revealed to me, the shooting of the first panel of the triptych was cancelled the very day before we were to begin work."²⁶⁹ He lays the blame at no one's feet but given the times, one has to suppose that cancellation of the project was at Stalin's behest.

There may have been some connection between the plans of the Jubilee Committee and the cancellation of the film project. Once plans to open the tombs and exhume the bodies were approved perhaps it was felt that the simultaneous release of a film that treated Timur as reactionary villain would have proved extremely awkward. Or perhaps one needs no more reason than that Stalin did not want Timur presented as a retrograde figure in such a popular medium as the cinema.

That the film was never made did not mean that posterity was denied Eisenstein's perspective on Timur. Besides what his memoirs reveal, Eisenstein also left sketches he made for his film's story boards (Figs. 1.11 & 1.12). Two of them are an Eisensteinian imagining of the construction of a circular tower, the Manar-i Kalan in Bukhara, in which live victims are shown being led up a ramp in shackles to be executed and used as building blocks.²⁷⁰ This seems to be based on a story from Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi's *Ẓafarnāmah* according to which Timur ordered 2,000 victims at Isfizar to be laid like building blocks while still alive into the shape of a tower and buried in stones and mortar.²⁷¹

Once the Jubilee Committee's plans for opening the tombs were approved, a government commission was appointed for the actual exhumations and to conduct related studies—historical, anthropological, paleographical, architectural, and preservationist. The commission included eight official members, one ex-officio member, and an "honorary" member. It was accompanied by a five-member film crew, a journalist from *Pravda*, a still photographer, and a staff of perhaps half a dozen. The full members were: Tashmukhammed Niyazovich Kary-Niyazov (Qari-Niyazi) (1897–1970), who headed the commission;

268 Eisenstein 1983, p. xiii.

269 Eisenstein 1995, vol. 4, p. 658.

270 Two of these sketches are in the collection of the Fondation Daniel Langlois of Montreal, Canada. I am grateful to Prof. Peter Chelkowski for bringing these to my attention and to the Fondation for permitting their reproduction.

271 Cited in Barthold 1963, pp. 39–40. Also Yazdi 2008, pp. 532–33.



FIGURE 1.11

Sergei Eisenstein's view of Timur's tower of bodies. A sketch of the construction of Manar-i Kalan, Bukhara for storyboarding his film *Bol'shoi Ferganskii Kanal*



FIGURE 1.12

"You shall build this tower on the roof of the big mosque in Bukhara or on the left roof of the Registan in Samarkand so as to get the trick result of enormous height of Timur's Tower." Sergei Eisenstein sketch for storyboarding the *Bol'shoi Ferganskii Kanal*

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov (1873–1958), an orientalist who was an expert on Nawa'i, an historian of Central Asia, an art historian, and a specialist in epigraphy; Vasilii Afanas'evich Shishkin (1894–1966), an archaeologist and architectural historian serving on the commission as corresponding member from the Uzbek Academy of Sciences; V.N. Kononov, a conservator from the Hermitage Museum; Boris Nikolaevich Zasytkin (1891–1955), an architect and art historian; Yahya Guliamov, a young art historian (born 1908) and probably Shishkin's student; Lev Vasil'evich Oshanin (1884–1962), an anthropologist and chair of the department of anthropology at Central Asia State University (SAGU—later Tashkent State University and now the National University of Uzbekistan); Mikhail Mikhailovich Gerasimov (1907–1970), a forensic anthropologist and sculptor; and an ex-officio member, Hadi Zarypov, the scientific

secretary to the Navoi Jubilee Committee and a specialist in Uzbek literature. The honorary member was Sadr al-Din Aini (1878–1954), the “father of Tajik literature,” who lived nearby in Samarqand and, judging by his prominence in the film and photographs of the commission, was treated, for all intents and purposes, as an official member. The commission’s work was covered by M.I. Sheverdin, a journalist from *Pravda*, and I.P. Savalin, the still photographer. The film crew or brigade included Nikolai Kim, the brigade leader; the cameraman, Malik Kaiumov; and three assistants—Arif Tursunov, Kazem Mukhamedov, and Pavel Marshalov.²⁷²

It was a famous group, several of whose members (including the cameraman, Malik Kaiumov) either already had, or went on to have, illustrious careers in their respective fields. Four of the members—Kary-Niyazov, Gerasimov, Oshanin, and Semenov—deserve particular notice for their contribution to the new formulation of the mausoleum’s official commemorative significance.

Called “the great Russophile”²⁷³ Kary-Niyazov seems to have epitomized Foucault’s “complicitous subaltern” in his readiness to adopt and interpret the language and culture of the colonizer. Or perhaps, it was his father, a cobbler, who decided that his son’s best path in life would be to hitch his wagon to the Russian star. Born in 1897,²⁷⁴ Kary-Niyazov was sent by his father to a Russian school and when he graduated became a translator in a Russian court.²⁷⁵ After the revolution he and his wife opened the first Uzbek Soviet School in Fergana then moved a year later to Khuqand to organize another school. Six years later he and his family moved to Tashkent where he entered Central Asia State University (SAGU) to study mathematics and physics. In 1928, still

272 The names of the members have been compiled from several sources including Aleskerov 1976, p. 142; Gerasimov 1971, pp. 129–30; Kary-Niyazov 1955, pp. 230, 236–37; and the credits of the unreleased film *Gorod Samarkanda*. I am grateful to Janet Roberts for obtaining a video copy of the twenty-minute film from the cameraman, Malik Kaiumov, and am particularly grateful to him for his willingness to share it. Parts of the film were more recently used in the Russian television documentary “Proklatie Tamerlana” (Tamerlane’s Curse), RTR 2003 and issued as a DVD under the same title.

273 Fierman 1991, p. 249. Today, Kary-Niyazov is commemorated by a center called the Scientific-Methodological Center for the Legacy of Academician Qori-Niyozov. It was established in 2007 to promote the study of mathematics. The website http://kary-niyazov.uz/e_kary-niyazov.html has a biography of him with all the positions he held. There are no references to any of his political activities during the Stalinist period and the opening of the tomb in Samarqand is passed over with only a brief mention.

274 Information about his life may be found in Kary-Niyazov 1970. He is not included in Miliband 1975 or Miliband 1995 so he did not enjoy academic status as an orientalist (*vostokoved*).

275 For a synopsis of his career see Fierman 1991, pp. 249–51, from which I have taken the details presented here. See also Sievers 2003, pp. 256, 262, 264, 265, and 268.

a student, he became the first Uzbek to lecture in Uzbek at an institution of higher education. He took an active part in the *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) process, translating approved Russian books into Uzbek, and was rewarded by being appointed the first Uzbek to hold the title of professor at SAGU. He joined the Communist Party in 1930. During the purges he denounced a series of leading literary and academic figures as bourgeois nationalists and/or counterrevolutionaries some of whom, like Abdulrauf Fitrat, did not survive the denunciation. In 1938, the same year that the Jubilee Committee was formed, he was chosen to head another commission, this one to oversee the change of alphabet from Latin to Cyrillic. That work was completed by 1940 and as a result of it and his loyalty to the party he was appointed deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Uzbek Republic in 1940 and made a full member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan that same year.

The choice of Kary Niyazov to head the commission to open the tomb made a good deal of sense. Although he had written on various aspects of the history of science, by the time the commission was established he was more a political than an academic figure. He was a well-established party member, although he too seems to have been briefly disgraced in 1940 for failing, as head of an education commission, to train an adequate number of Russian teachers for Uzbek schools.²⁷⁶ But his career had very shortly recovered and he had enough of an academic reputation to justify his appointment as head. Gerasimov mentions him in the course of his own description of the commission but only as the chief administrator and apparently without any research agenda of his own to pursue.²⁷⁷

Mikhail Gerasimov was by 1941 a very well-known figure primarily because of the popular fame he enjoyed for his work first in crime-fighting and then in the field of history and national culture. His controversial²⁷⁸ specialty was reconstructing the appearance of long-dead individuals from the shapes of their skulls (hence the title of his own memoir *The Face-Finder*). His early reputation was acquired by assisting the police in solving old murder cases. He would examine the skull and then sculpt the face of the victim thus helping

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

²⁷⁷ Gerasimov 1971, p. 129.

²⁷⁸ The issue is well beyond my capability at this point to add anything meaningful. Long before Gerasimov began his career, the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) demonstrated that physical features are quite plastic and that any attempt to reconstruct appearance from a skull is more art than science. See the Wikipedia article “Franz Boas.” On a recent grappling with the problem of realistic facial reconstruction on the basis of skull alone see Hayes 2016.

with identification. He went on to build his reputation by reconstructing the facial features of great historical figures of the Russian past. He later became the model for the pathologist in the novel, later the film, *Gorky Park*.

Gerasimov provides the only account of what each member of the commission was responsible for in the exhumations and their aftermath:

The removal of the gravestones, the recovery of textiles and bone fragments as well as their preservation was undertaken by me. Fabrics and wood were preserved by V.N. Kononov. V.A. Shishkin dealt with the archaeological side of the investigation and he also was responsible for the complete report on the results of the work done. A.A. Semenov studied and deciphered with extraordinary exactitude the inscriptions on the stone slabs over the graves as well as the writing on the memorial stones over the tombs in the upper chamber of the mausoleum. L.V. Oshanin assumed the task of examining the bones from the anatomical and anthropological point of view.

The expedition produced a detailed photographic record of the whole operation and this was done by the photographer, I.P. Savalin. The filming was undertaken by Koyumov [Kaiumov] under the direction of N.A. Kims [*sic*-Kim].²⁷⁹

Lev Oshanin, chair of the department of anthropology at Central Asia State University, was in charge of the skeletal remains after they were removed from the tomb. Whereas Gerasimov's unstated role was to create a face for each of the skulls exhumed, Oshanin's was to examine and categorize the racial type of each skeleton. His own research was mainly concerned with establishing racial types by skull measurements taken in the field. His principal study was translated into English in 1964 and concluded that in the main the Uzbeks and Tajiks of his day were of the "brachycephalic Europoid race of the Central Asiatic Interfluvial region."²⁸⁰ While compelling to Soviet scholars working under the doctrine of ethnogenesis, racial typing had long since been mostly

279 Gerasimov 1971, pp. 130–31.

280 Oshanin 1964. The section on his study of the Gur-i Mir skeletons is fairly brief (vol. 3, pp. 38–39) and his classification of the skulls provides a sample of the kind of conclusions he drew. "In the cranium of Timur predominate the characters [characteristics?] of the South Siberian Mongoloid type. The cranium of his son, Shah Rukh, falls completely within the type of the brachycephalic Europoid race of the Central Asiatic Interfluvial Region. To this same type, but with an admixture of Mongoloid characters, are attributed the crania of Timur's grandsons, the famous astronomer Ulug Beg, and Muhammad Sultan."

abandoned by anthropologists elsewhere in favor of the cultural analysis of peoples and societies.

Semenov's work was much more straightforward. A superbly equipped paleographer and orientalist, he was a prolific and wide-ranging scholar.²⁸¹ His job was to decipher and publish all the extant inscriptions on the tombstones. By the end of the decade he had done so in three articles.²⁸²

The contribution of one other member of the commission, the then-junior art historian, Yahya Guliamov, is noteworthy. He is the first modern historian of architecture to have made use of the material in Maliha's *Muzakkir al-aṣḥāb* about the Gur-i Mir.²⁸³ Despite the fact that he summarized and omitted some of the more difficult passages, nonetheless his work encouraged some Soviet and foreign scholars to refer to Maliha's important description of the Gur-i Mir. Guliamov was the first to have recognized its importance and apparently the only one to actually have read it.

The motives behind the exhumations and everything connected with them remain a matter of debate. As publicly stated in the Soviet sources the reasons given for exhuming the five bodies seem trivial without larger and unspoken forces behind them. First, the link with Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i is tenuous if not non-existent. None of the figures exhumed were his contemporaries. He was barely six years old when Shah Rukh died and eight when Ulugh Beg was assassinated. He was in Samarqand on two occasions, once, perhaps, as a result of banishment from Herat. Otherwise Herat was both his native city and the place he spent all of his life.²⁸⁴ Several sources provide ostensible reasons for the tomb exhumations but none of these mention any connection with Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i. So the jubilee committee had something else in mind than adding to the body of literature and lore on Nawa'i.

In 1946, Shishkin explained in print what he believed were the reasons behind the exhumations:

The fundamental task of the expedition was to bring to light new historical facts connected with the personality of Timur whose name invoked terror among people near and far and around whose tomb legends had already sprung up and [to bring to light new historical facts connected with the personality of] his grandson, Ulug Bek, one of the greatest scholars of the fifteenth century, combining [the study of] astronomy with

281 For his biography and publications see Litvinskii and Akramov 1971.

282 Semenov 1947, idem 1948, and idem 1949.

283 Guliamov 1948.

284 For a full account of Mir 'Ali Shayr's life see Subtelny 1990.

forty years of governing Mawarannahr. The expedition was restricted to fulfilling the straightforward task of discovering by detailed study the interment of Timur and the members of his family.²⁸⁵

With greater hindsight, Gerasimov wrote:

The expedition was entrusted with the following task: to open the graves of the Timurids, to ascertain the circumstances of the interments (so as to confirm or to check information available from documentary sources); to throw light on burial ritual, to undertake anthropological investigations into the mortal remains, and finally to establish documentary portraits of the Timurids from their skulls. Among other things proof of the blood relationship between Timur and Shah Rukh was to be sought.²⁸⁶

He is the only one to mention this last objective and he does not say how it was to be accomplished. Given the unanimity of written sources about Shah Rukh's blood relationship (as son) this could hardly have been considered an unresolved question.

Kary-Niyazov, the head of the commission, only offers one explicit motive for the expedition in a book that he published in 1955. "One of the important objects (of opening the tombs) was anthropological study of the skeletons, in particular (to verify) the historical information that Ulugh Beg was killed with a sword."²⁸⁷ None of the other available writings of his produces any information on what he thought the other "important objects" of the exhumations were.

By the 1960s, a rationale for opening the tombs began to coalesce, perhaps in part to respond to lingering doubts about the wisdom of removing the bodies. In the guidebook to Samarqand's monuments, co-authored by Ivan Ivanovich Umniakov, the same Umniakov who had worked for years on the Gur-i Mir, and Yuri Nikolaevich Aleskerov and published in 1967, there is a summary of the findings of the commission, and, by implication, the questions that confronted the commission included:

- a) Was Timur really lame?
- b) Did Ulugh Beg die, as the sources have it, by decapitation?
- c) Did Shah Rukh really remove Timur's body from the tomb and bury it elsewhere?

²⁸⁵ Shishkin 1946, p. 24.

²⁸⁶ Gerasimov 1971, p. 129.

²⁸⁷ Kary-Niyazov 1955, p. 236.

- d) Were the remains in the tombs those of the people actually named on the tombstones?
- e) Was Muslim funeral ritual followed?
- f) Had the tombs been opened before?
- h) Were the bodies of Timur and Muhammad Sultan reinterred in Gur-i Mir from another site?

Citing the work of Shishkin,²⁸⁸ Umniakov and Aleskerov summarized his answers to these questions as follows:

1. The individuals named on the tombstones were those buried in the graves. Thus Timur had not been moved. Also the head of the body in Ulugh Beg's tomb had indeed been severed by a sharp instrument.
2. The similarity of Muhammad Sultan's and Timur's tombs indirectly confirmed their having been moved from another place where they had been buried and their simultaneous reburial in the Gur-i Mir. (This conclusion would prove to be unfounded.)
3. The burials followed Muslim ritual.
4. The exhumations showed that the Timurid graves had possibly been opened before but the remains had not been disturbed.²⁸⁹

In the background one senses a rising chorus of questions about the need for the disinterments. Certainly none of the objectives as recorded would seem to justify the exhumations nor were the findings in any way unexpected. In 1976, Aleskerov published a new edition of the guidebook and his tone now sounds defensive:

In June of 1941, an archaeological expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR undertook the study of the Timurid tombs of the Guri Emir. The scholars decided to unseal the sarcophagi *neither out of idle curiosity nor to create a sensation* [emphasis added]. An urgent need had arisen to test by archaeological methods the authenticity of the historical facts of the life of the cruel conqueror and, in particular, of his brilliant grandson—the great astronomer Ulughbeg, facts reflected in the pages of the historical chronicles and subsequently overgrown with a variety of legendary fantasies.²⁹⁰

288 Probably his "Guri-Emir," *Nauchnye Trudy Tashkentskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* n.s. vol. 232 *Istoricheskie Nauki*, v. 47 (1964), pp. 3–73, a work not available to me.

289 Umniakov and Aleskerov 1967, pp. 63–64.

290 Aleskerov 1976, p. 134.

However, as early as 1948 Semenov told a quite different story, describing the great hubbub that surrounded the opening:

Hordes of correspondents from the national and local press, newspaper and magazine staff, writers, artists, actors, and cinematographers, representatives of party, government, and community organizations, coming in expectation of sensational discoveries and possible finds, showed extraordinary interest in the commission and its work.²⁹¹

There can hardly have been any question that in this most secretive and closed of societies at the time, the unsealing of the tombs in the Gur-i Mir was to be a very public event. A journalist from *Pravda* sat with the commission and on the day following the opening of each of the tombs, a breathless report would appear in the national *Pravda* and in the local *Pravda Vostoka*. It all tends to belie Aleskerov's insistence that this was sober scientific work.

Although Aleskerov provides no clue as to what the "urgent need" was, he did expound a bit on the "fantasies" that had overgrown the historical "facts." One of these, as he explained it, was an (unnamed) historian's categorical assertion that Shah Rukh, on hearing of his father's death had hurried to Samarqand from Herat, taken the body from the marble tomb, and carried it off to some unknown place to protect it from enemies. Aleskerov does not identify his source but the story is the same one that originated with Abu Tahir Samarqandi, author of the *Samarīyah*, who only mentioned it as hearsay. He then writes, "Another even more fantastic conjecture circulated with regard to the martyr of science, Ulugh Beg" without explicitly stating what that "fantastic conjecture" was. It is possible however to make a reasonable guess as to what the issues might have been from his sentence, run-on as it is, that immediately follows:

The researchers wanted to find out whether the information in the chronicles was true that the great scholar, astronomer, and mathematician of the middle ages, the free-thinker and subverter of obscurantism [i.e., Ulugh Beg], was mercilessly beheaded by an assassin hired by a council of spiritual fathers of the Islamic church headed by the reactionary shaykh, Khwajah Ahrar, whose descendants even in our time live at the mausoleum built near Samarqand over the grave of the real murderer of

291 Semenov 1948, p. 49.

the creator of the celestial tables which even up to now have not lost their scientific significance.²⁹²

Certainly implied in this strongly worded statement is the existence of a current of public opinion that abhorred the unsealing of the tombs, a sentiment that was probably even stronger at the time of the exhumations, thirty-five years before publication of Aleskerov's rebuttal. And the reference to those "who even now live at the mausoleum built near Samarqand over the grave of the real murderer," an unambiguous reference to the descendants of Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar and the cult center around his tomb, seems an extraordinarily incendiary remark to include in a guidebook to the city. The need to defend the work of the commission at such a late date and in such strong language would also seem to indicate a residue of resentment arising out of Muslim feelings about grave desecration. One "fantastic conjecture" that Aleskerov may have been alluding to is the one that asserted that the inscription on Timur's tomb contained a curse against anyone who should disturb it (see below).

26 Portraying Sadr al-Din Aini's Role

Aleskerov characterizes the work of the commission, not surprisingly, as purely scientific, to investigate and resolve questions about the accuracy of certain historical facts while Shishkin spoke of discovering "new historical facts." This narrative of scientific progressivism required a foil, a credible representative of the local people who, perhaps misled by ingrained religious belief, could be brought to see the light by logical fact-based reasoning if persuaded by someone they respected. It may be too obvious a choice, but the foil for the scientific expertise gathered at the Gur-i Mir for the unsealing of the tombs, the interpreter of these events for the people of Samarqand, was Sadr al-Din Aini, the acclaimed "father of Tajik literature." If not to be used as a foil, at least his very visible presence in film, in photographs, and in print, and thus his implicit acquiescence in and approval of the project would provide a certain legitimacy to the exhumations. He was a highly-regarded figure, and in his own way, like Kary-Niyazov, an instrument (as a Samarqandi), perhaps a more reluctant one than Kary-Niyazov, of Soviet policy on Tajik and Uzbek identity. Yet unlike Kary-Niyazov he was not a Russophile, or at least made no overt effort to be mistaken for one. Perhaps because he was not seen to identify too closely with

292 Aleskerov 1976, p. 140.

Russians, he could be the commission's sounding board for public opinion and could communicate to the public the reasons why the commission was disinterring these bodies. In his memoirs Kary-Niyazov uses Aini to make a point about the power of science over religion (i.e., superstition). He sets the scene in the courtyard of the Gur-i Mir where the skulls of Timur and Ulugh Beg have been placed on a table for examination, a moment captured in the film *Gorod Samarkanda*:

The writer, Sadr al-Din Aini, who lived in Samarqand not far from the Gur-i Mir and would sometimes visit the mausoleum during the expedition's work, was interested in our findings.

One day he found Prof. Oshanin and me in the courtyard of the mausoleum examining the two skulls of Timur and Ulugh Beg which lay on the table in front of us. Casting a casual glance at them he asked,

'Whose skulls are these?'

'One is Timur, the other is Ulugh Beg,' I answered.

'Which is which,' Aini inquired, with growing curiosity.

'Which do you think?' I responded.

'Who can tell? Even in the case where one of two skulls is that of a scholar and the other of an ordinary person, it's impossible to tell them apart. So how is it possible when both are kings?'

'You're absolutely right, teacher,' I said smiling, 'but one of them was illiterate and the other a great scholar.'

'But unfortunately even in that case it's impossible to determine which is which,' Aini remarked.

'Such is nature's inflexible rule from which no one is exempted. It's too bad that this is man's inevitable end,' I exclaimed.

'Nature is being very unfair here,' said Aini.

'Perhaps so. But the laws of nature are complex and many of them are still unknown to us. Despite the fact that mankind has achieved great success in studying the laws of nature, what it has accomplished is still just a drop in the bucket.'

'You're absolutely right,' agreed Aini.²⁹³

The dialogue, surely imagined, depicts Aini as a bit thick yet amenable to the power of Kary-Niyazov's superior reasoning. Aini, who himself wrote a lengthy memoir, never referred to this episode in any of his published writings even though he appears in the film and photographs of the exhumations. It is

293 Kary-Niyazov 1970, pp. 206–7.

difficult now, nearly a half century after Kary-Niyazov and Aleskerov wrote, to believe that their versions explaining the opening of the tombs would likely be composed today let alone published. The tomb site of Khwajah Ahrar, who as late as 1976 was represented as the epitome of the black forces of reaction, was already being rehabilitated before 1991, the end of the Soviet era. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, formerly neglected religious sites—Baha al-Din Naqshband's tomb complex at Qasr-i 'Arifan on the east edge of Bukhara and the Juybari necropolis at Char Bakr—had also become the objects of political patronage and the locus of new commemorative interpretations and rehabilitations.

The explicit objectives given by Gerasimov and others, when viewed sixty years after the fact, seem trivial if not absurd, yet in the context of the time and the struggle over Uzbek identity perhaps it is not unreasonable to suggest that there were other motives than those stated, ones more closely linked to the “face-finding” project. Certainly there was a need, in light of continuing resistance to the ridiculing and destruction of religious culture, to assert the power of Marxist “science” over “superstition.” There is evidence that the Gur-i Mir may still have been an active object of *ziyarat*-pilgrimage. Edith Mannin, who traveled to Samarqand in the mid-1930s, wrote in describing the tomb, “Tall standards and horses’ tails such as hang against the dark walls of the Shahkh Zinda [*sic*] here rise above the tombstones in this dark vault indicating the resting place of saints.”²⁹⁴ Exhuming the bodies and subjecting their remains to analysis would be an act which could establish the power of science over religious belief. It is worth noting, however, that the commission, or whoever decided its plan of work, hedged its bets somewhat and did not, for whatever reasons, disturb the graves of Mir Sayyid Barakah or the alleged “Sayyid ‘Umar.”

The mere removal of the Timurid bodies must have been seen by locals as at least a display of callous disregard for local culture if not an actual attack on Islam itself. In Soviet eyes religious reactionaries (specifically the Naqshbandi shaykh, Khwajah Ahrar, and his followers) were responsible for the murder of Ulugh Beg. Already by the time of the tomb opening Ulugh Beg had emerged in the Soviet reframing of the past and in the creation of Uzbek identity as an indigenous standard-bearer for historical progress and for the superior power of scientific reasoning. Kary-Niyazov, who himself wrote a biography of Ulugh Beg, voices this clearly, thus the significance of proving and giving dramatic physical confirmation to the fact that Ulugh Beg was executed by decapitation, which could be blamed on religious fanaticism.

294 Mannin 1937, p. 312.

27 The “Curse”

As mentioned above, Aleskerov’s claim that the commission’s purposes was “not to create a sensation” rings somewhat hollow. The event was photographed, filmed, and closely covered by the press. The articles were published immediately in *Pravda*. The film, however, was never released. Two days after the opening of Timur’s tomb, the German army invaded the Soviet Union and all plans for the jubilee ended. The analysis of the skeletons, nevertheless, continued, the bones in Tashkent and the skulls in Moscow.

This brings us to the story of the curse. Among the inscriptions on Timur’s tomb was said to be one that promised a huge catastrophe to anyone who disturbed it. On June 20, 1941, Timur’s grave was opened and his remains removed.²⁹⁵ On June 22nd the German Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union with all the consequent horror that that invasion brought to the land of those responsible for the tomb desecration, in the eyes of those who came to believe in the curse. The problem for the historian is that with all the meticulous work that’s been done on transcribing and translating the inscriptions no such curse, or anything resembling one, has ever been found. However, lending some credence to the story of the curse is the near simultaneity of the return of the skeleton for reburial in 1942 with the Soviet victory at the battle for Stalingrad which became a major turning point in the Soviet Union’s ultimate success in repelling the German invaders and securing its territory.²⁹⁶

In 2003, Russian television took up the case with a program called “The Curse of Tamerlane” (*Proklatie Tamerlana*) only this time it was not one of the inscriptions, which had all been published, but “a book” in which the curse is found. A sober-looking turbaned scholar holding a book on his lap tells of the existence of such a book containing the curse. According to the film, the book was shown to the commission members but they refused to pay any heed. The book is not identified. The film gains some credibility with commentary from Malik Kaiumov, one of the film crew that shot the raw footage called *Gorod*

295 Gerasimova 2004, p. 305. The daughter of Mikhail Gerasimov believed that at the very moment her father was removing Timur’s skeleton, the radio announced the beginning of the war.

296 Shaw 2011, pp. 54–55. In addition, a sidebar to the curse story relates that when the skulls were being flown to Moscow for Gerasimov to reconstruct the faces the airplane carrying them circled the capital several times and thus gave the city protection against the German army, which was never able to breach that mystical defensive wall. According to Elena Paskaleva who has studied the papers of Oshanin who examined the bones in the winter of 1941–1942 in Tashkent, the bones never left Uzbekistan. The skulls of Timur, Shah Rukh, and Miranshah, however, were sent to Gerasimov in Moscow (email communication 31 August 2020).

Samarkanda, by now in his late seventies or early eighties, although he himself does not seem to endorse the idea of such a book. So the curse lives on and demonstrates the way in which the local community could express its feelings about what took place at Gur-i Mir.

28 The Role of Ethnogenetic Theory in the Gur-i Mir Disinterments

There was another ideological motive for the opening of the tomb, one closely connected to the struggle to define Uzbek identity. Just as there were multiple currents of thought that influenced the early meanings attached to the building, in 1941 a powerful idea that was percolating among intellectuals was the theory of ethnogenesis, a theory that would soon become scholarly dogma. In ethnogenetic theory, specific peoples or nationalities could be historically linked and identified with certain territories. Thus the modern Uzbeks were the direct descendants of people who had always lived on the land of Uzbekistan.²⁹⁷ Connected to the theory was the validating role which anthropology was to play in literally “fleshing out” (this was Gerasimov’s task) those historical people who were to be known as Uzbeks.

It is probably no coincidence that Gerasimov wrote his master’s thesis on ethnogenesis, that Oshanin, chair of the anthropology department at Central Asian State University (SAGU, later Tashkent State), would become a major force behind the spread of the theory into all corners of Uzbek scholarly life, and that Aleksandr Iur’evich Yakubovskii (Iakubovskii), a well-regarded historian of the Mongols and perhaps the most influential promoter in 1941 of ethnogenetic theory, happened to be in Uzbekistan at about this time. In early 1941, he reportedly gave a seminar at the Academy of Sciences in Tashkent and published a brief work devoted to the ethnogenesis of the Uzbeks in the same year.²⁹⁸ These two things, the seminar and the booklet, are said to have had a major impact on the subsequent direction of the study of the region’s history and literature.

How did the opening of the tomb fit into the ideas that were circulating about “Uzbeks” and their origins on the land now called Uzbekistan? There is a section in one of Kary-Niyazov’s works where he seems to draw a direct connection between the historical interpretation of the Uzbeks, Yakubovskii’s arrival

²⁹⁷ On the role of ethnogenesis in shaping the history of an “Uzbek” people see Subtelny 1994.

²⁹⁸ The 19-page work was entitled *K voprosu ob etnogeneze uzbekskogo naroda* (On the question of the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people), Tashkent, 1941 and was published in a parallel Uzbek edition. See Bregel 1995, p. 1167.

in Uzbekistan, and the opening of the tomb as an anthropological exercise in the service of ethnogenetic theory. The intent of the passages is not entirely certain (on the surface it reads like a catalog of Soviet scientific achievements) but that he associates these things in his mind is suggestive of their relationship to each other.²⁹⁹ Gerasimov's work to reconstruct the facial appearance of Ulugh Beg, Timur, Shah Rukh, and Miranshah, however inexact the science of such reconstructions may be considered today, had a place then in buttressing the theory of ethnogenesis by grounding it in a visual representation of a physical type with which people might identify.

Certainly the potential for deriving new meaning from the tomb intersected in some way with the Soviet government's need to provide new approaches to interpreting history other than those it confronted in the extensive indigenous historiography of Central Asia.

29 Architectural Restoration

Restoration work on the Gur-i Mir went on right through the war and the Soviet government appropriated substantial sums of money for it.³⁰⁰ In 1943, the restoration budget for Samarqand was a million rubles with 860,000 of that allocated to Gur-i Mir.³⁰¹ Work continued uninterrupted after the war. On the ground, along with the embedding of the curse story in local memory, contention was growing among the restorers as to what was the proper approach to take in restoration. As Oleg Demchenko and Elena Paskaleva have shown, there were two competing schools of thought: one was advocated by Boris Zasytkin, the lead restorer, and one of the members of the Government Commission that opened the tombs. His view was that the work should follow traditional methods and techniques and only use modern technologies when necessary. The other, advocated by his student and colleague, Konstantin S. Kriukov, who took over as lead restorer after Zasytkin's death in 1955, believed that only the outward appearance of a monument mattered and to ensure against earthquake damage the frames and skeletons of buildings, which would not be visible,

299 Kary-Niyazov 1955, pp. 230, 236.

300 Muminov, 1970, vol. 2, pp. 390, 400. Muminov also catalogs other architectural restoration work going on in Samarqand, pp. 399–400. He too lists the activities that the Navoi jubilee committee was scheduled to carry out but does not mention the tomb openings perhaps because his focus was on preservation work or perhaps as an Uzbek and Muslim by culture if not practice it was an embarrassing episode.

301 Shaw 2011, p. 57.

should be of reinforced concrete. His way prevailed and proved effective when Tashkent was hit by the devastating earthquake of 1966 that destroyed most of the city but left the Kukaldash Madrasah there untouched. Its dome had been recently reconstructed in reinforced concrete, and the entrance iwan had been given a reinforced frame.³⁰²

Since the war, the work to keep Gur-i Mir up-to-date or, as Shaw described the work, to “buff” the building³⁰³ in order to maintain a good appearance for tourists and visiting Muslim dignitaries, led to three major restoration efforts, first in 1970 for Samarqand’s jubilee celebrating 2,500 years of the city’s continued existence; second, to mark the 600th anniversary of the birth of Ulugh Beg in 1994; and third, in 1996, to celebrate the 660th anniversary of the birth of Tamerlane. Until 1966, according to I.M. Muminov, two million rubles were appropriated annually for restoration work on all Samarqand monuments, but mainly on Gur-i Mir, Ulugh Beg’s madrasah on the Rigistan and his observatory, and the seventeenth-century Tilla Kar Madrasah, all places singled out as tourist sites.³⁰⁴ How many million *sum* were spent on the post-independence jubilees in 1994 and 1996 remains to be discovered.

The symbolic value of the Timurid-era buildings only grew in political and economic importance with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of Uzbekistan as an independent country. Suddenly, there was no longer controversy over the figure of Timur. He now became the father-founder of Uzbekistan. To celebrate him and his era, Soviet-style jubilees served the purpose well but now those celebrations focused solely on an Uzbek heritage for which the Timurids and their works continued to be even more crucial.

The jubilee celebrations of Ulugh Beg’s birthday anniversary and the anniversary of Timur’s birth all meant major restoration efforts (Fig. 1.13). To prepare the mausoleum for the celebration of Timur’s birth, for example, two of the minarets were rebuilt, the interior of the mausoleum was completely refurbished and repainted in red and gold. A large chandelier was hung, the simple white mortar cenotaphs were replaced with marble ones, and the courtyard was repaved (Figs. 1.14 & 1.15). Gone is the dark interior and official, at least, commemoration of Mir Sayyid Barakah, except for his name on the crypt plan. Timur and the tomb stand alone and are found as iconic images of national identity spread over different realms of daily life from food packaging to the currency (Fig. 1.16 a, b, & c).³⁰⁵

302 Demchenko 2011, pp. 72–73 and Paskaleva 2015, p. 421.

303 Shaw 2011, p. 58.

304 Muminov 1970, p. 434.

305 On the changes made at Gur-i Mir in honor of Timur see Paskaleva 219, pp. 198–99.



FIGURE 1.13 Reconstructing the minarets and renovating the dome for 660th Jubilee of the birth of Timur in 1996
R.D. MCCHESENEY, 1996

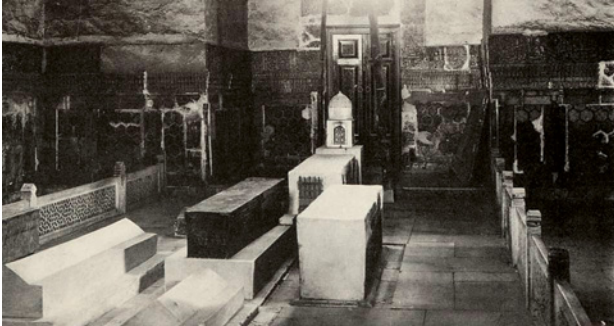


FIGURE 1.14 Interior view of the Gur-i Mir (1886)



FIGURE 1.15 Interior view of the reconstructed Gur-i Mir
C. MELVILLE, 2001

Despite the reduction of the figure of Mir Sayyid Barakah from the revered saint who drew pilgrims to his tomb from near and far to being merely a kind of devoted chaplain to Timur, the idea that the mausoleum still possessed spiritual power has not abated though the identity of the “saint” has changed. A *New York Times* article from Samarqand published in November 1997 and entitled “Tamerlane the Tender Inspires Uzbekistan” quoted Amrillo Abdullaev, the head custodian of the Gur-i Mir, on the mystical power that radiated from the crypt. “I used to have all kinds of trouble with my back and legs, but in this place I can feel a powerful spirit working to cure me. I have new strength. It could be that Timur’s power is still working.”³⁰⁶

30 Conclusion

Of the shrines being considered here, the Gur-i Mir has had the most uncharacteristic history for a shrine, marked as it was, by the disruption and radical change created by the Russo-Christian conquest and colonializing of

³⁰⁶ Kinzer 1997.



Gur-i Mir on ten-sum note



Timur on Shopping Bag

Timur Tea (chai)

FIGURES 1.16 A, B, AND C Uzbek money, tea label, and shopping bag celebrating Amir Timur and Gur-i Amir
R. MCCHESENEY

Transoxiana. Neither the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh, the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif, nor the Shrine of the Prophet’s Cloak at Qandahar experienced anything comparable to the effects on both their architecture and their local meaning of the modernity imposed first by Tsarist Russian and then by Soviet Russian and post-Soviet Uzbek policies to reinterpret the public meaning of Gur-i Mir.

From the standpoint of architecture and architectural innovation, Gur-i Mir represents a pioneering approach to major public projects. As Golombek

and Wilber have written, “The importance of this complex is that it represents the earliest standing evidence for ensemble planning that was to become so popular in the Timurid period and later.”³⁰⁷ Indeed, our other three shrine ensembles find their architectural model in Gur-i Mir. Whether the complex was consciously planned or whether it evolved into what came to be seen as a plan by the time Ulugh Beg had set in motion his ideas for the place, there should be no doubt that the founder-patrons of the other three shrine centers—Mir Mazid Arghun of the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh City, Sultan-Husayn Bayqara of the Noble Rawzah near Balkh, and Timur Shah Durrani of the Prophet’s Cloak at Qandahar—all thought in terms of a central commemorative tomb with associated madrasah, mosque, and *khānqāh*, all supported by endowments.

307 Golombek and Wilber 1988 p. 261.

Centering a City (1): The Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa Shrine at Balkh

1 Introduction¹

The Greater Balkh region is home to the next two shrines, the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh City and the Noble Rawzah, the shrine of the fourth Sunni caliph and first Shi'i imam, 'Ali the son of Abu Talib, at Mazar-i Sharif, some twelve miles to the southeast of Balkh City. Both of these shrines were modeled on the way in which Gur-i Mir evolved and both date to the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The two shrines also share the same ecological context on which both depended for their economic well-being.

The entire region of all four shrines is designated an arid zone because it receives less than ten inches of annual precipitation. The average precipitation for Balkh is a mere seven inches.² The Balkh plain, which stretches north from the foothills of the Kuh-i Baba, a westward extension of the Hindu Kush, to the banks of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) is made agriculturally possible by an elaborate irrigation network known as the Hazhdah Nahr (Eighteen Canal) system. The irrigation network dates back to the Bronze Age (the first third to the first half of the second millennium BC³). The system's source is the Balkhab or Balkh River, a northward-flowing waterway whose headwaters are in the Band-i Amir lakes of the Hindu Kush mountain range about 135 miles south of Balkh. The lakes are in turn fed by snowmelt and rainfall. The river supports a relatively sparse population along its narrow, precipice-lined course through the mountains before it emerges onto the Balkh plain, where it sustains hundreds of villages between Aqchah to the west and Mazar-i Sharif and the Abdu

1 This chapter is a revised and substantially updated version of "Architecture and Narrative: The Khwaja Abu Nasr Parsa Shrine" a two-part article that appeared in *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*, volumes 18 (2001), pp. 94–119 and 19 (2002), pp. 78–108.

2 <http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/natural-resource-management/weather>. For people who live in temperate zones it is difficult to comprehend the importance of this number. I live along the Kennebec River, the largest river in the State of Maine. The Kennebec Valley on average receives forty-four inches of rain annually and seventy-five inches of snow equal to another seven or eight inches of rain. Cycles of drought never significantly affect the river's flow.

3 Fouache et al. 2012, p. 3416.



FIGURE 2.1 GoogleEarth image of Balkh City, inner city and citadel, the Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum located at 9 o'clock on the hub of the radiating street pattern

Pass to the east. Its flow, measured at a point about twenty miles southwest of Mazar-i Sharif, ranges from some 150 cubic meters per second during the peak period in June and July to a low of around twenty cubic meters per second.⁴ For the people of Balkh province today, as in the past, it has always been absolutely critical to manage that modest resource very carefully. There is evidence that at one time a large canal existed to bring water south from the Amu Darya (Oxus River) where the Qunduz River joined it. An attempt in the early seventeenth century to restore that canal failed despite mustering

4 Mack and Chornack 2011, p. 283. Balland 1989, p. 597, provides flow rates for the Balkhab from the late 1960s. Again, for comparison, the Kennebec River, which drains half of the State of Maine, flows at a rate of more than 9,000 cubic meters per second where it reaches the ocean and that flow is year-round.

“300,000 workers” to reexcavate it. At that time it had the name “Nahr-i Fakhir” (Magnificent Canal).⁵

Seen from space (Fig. 2.1), the historic importance of the oasis and city of Balkh becomes clear. This was a major city in the past with extensive outer defensive works, estimated by one observer as seven miles in length. The outer wall, its line still visible and parts of it still intact, extends from the northwest corner of the inner city walls on an irregular loop to a point on the eastern wall of the inner city. The line of the outer wall encloses an area of nearly four square miles now mostly in agriculture but in the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries AD, at least, a bustling suburban sprawl of garden-estates, caravan-serais, shrines, mosques, palaces, residential compounds, orchards, and farms.

Within this seven-mile ring is an inner city, itself surrounded by massive walls forming an irregular circle punctuated by bastions and gates. At the southeast corner of the inner city stood the citadel (*arg* or *bālā ḥiṣār*), now appearing as a heavier mass in the inner city wall and from the ground as a slightly higher point in the inner city wall (Fig. 2.2). In a 1977 aerial photograph, appearing as a blue dot at the center of a hub-and-spokes street pattern and amidst the evidence of ancient ruins, stands a great mausoleum, the building now linked with the name of a fifteenth-century Sufi shaykh, Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa (d. 865/1460–61).

The mausoleum has been very recently restored, one might fairly say substantially rebuilt, a sign of its recognized importance both to the local population and to a wider world. In contrast to the Gur-i Mir with the varying accounts of its origin, there is a good deal of information about the origins of the Balkh building and the first centuries of its administration. Although Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa is the person most closely associated now with the building he is not actually entombed within it but is buried in a raised platform (*ṣuffah*) in the forecourt of the mausoleum. What evidence we have points to the mausoleum being conceived and constructed as a family mausoleum, like the Gur-i Mir, and only members of the builder’s family buried in it. In texts contemporary with its construction, it is a celebrated mid-fifteenth-century Timurid general, Mir Muhammad Mazid of the Arghun people, who built the original mausoleum at the site of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa’s grave.

The building’s longevity and its existence today hinge on the belief, despite contrary evidence, that the mausoleum was built for the Naqshbandi Sufi saint, Abu Nasr Parsa. This belief had a great deal to do with the ability of his descendants, who came quickly to be seen as the rightful administrators of the site, to maintain control of the site, generation after generation down to the present.

⁵ Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 215b.



FIGURE 2.2 Aerial photo of Balkh City
D. DWINELL, 1977

The architectural development of the site with madrasah, mausoleum, funerary platform, and, most likely a *khānqāh*, reflects the design of the Timurid complex at Samarqand. The enduring sacred legacy of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa was undoubtedly a factor in the durability of the architecture which in turn depended on the ability of its Parsa'i administrators to continually promote the sacred meaning of the Parsa legacy and to attract pilgrims and thus the necessary income to maintain the building as well as the Parsa'i's social, and at one time political, position. In the case of this shrine, we have almost no information about a *waqf* endowment, although there would certainly have been one.

In more recent times, the architecture itself has inspired various interpretations by outsiders. In the autumn of 1886, the Afghan Boundary Commission camped just outside Balkh. The commission, made up of Afghan, British, and Russian members, had just completed surveying and demarcating the boundary between the lands subject to the emirate of 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901) in present-day Afghanistan and territory then inhabited by Turkmen tribes but under the authority of Russian colonial administrators (now the independent country of Turkmenistan). Three of the British members of the commission, Major P.J. Maitland, Captain W. Peacocke, and Major C.E. Yate, took the opportunity to visit the ancient urban site of Balkh and ride among

what remained of its once substantial but by then largely vanished monuments, including the most impressive one, the Parsa mausoleum. Another member of the commission, C.L. Griesbach, photographed the ruins. The first three men would later record their visits and impressions of the large commemorative structure. Their reports so markedly differ from each other in terms of details noted and conclusions drawn that it is difficult to imagine that they visited the building at the same time, perhaps even the same day, or that they might have shared their observations with each other at the end of the day.

Perhaps the strangest difference between their accounts lies in their recollections of the epigraphy program of the building. None of the men mentioned the very large and visible inscriptions that covered the drum of the dome and the façade of the entry iwan. Yate asked “some bystanders” whether there were any inscriptions “in the building.” He was told what he considered an incredible story about there having been an inscription but that it had been stolen by the English. Peacocke on the other hand noticed the builder’s inscription mounted just above the arch of the entry iwan. When he asked “the resident mullah” what it said, he was told it said that the building was built by ‘Abd Allah Khan “550 years ago.” He dismissed the information on the basis of the alleged date, knowing that ‘Abd Allah Khan had died less than 300 years before.⁶ Maitland, not impressed in the slightest by the building, which, he said, “was never worth going very far to see” dismissed the epigraphy as “several Arabic inscriptions in huge letters in the tile work, which do not help the artistic effect.”

Their case in a way is typical of the narrative legacy of the site down through time. The existence of many stories and interpretations of the meaning of Abu Nasr Parsa’s shrine has made the structure a durable repository of meaning, a kind of palimpsest in masonry, which, like any palimpsest, was altered by the narrative attached to it at different times. The variety of stories is reflected in the many terms by which the site or specific buildings at the site are referred to. The site is usually called a *mazār* or *ziyāratgāh*, a place which one visits to pay homage to a saint or sacred object and to seek fulfillment of a wish. The funerary platform in which the named saint is buried along with subsequent generations of his family (it now holds sixteen graves, or at least sixteen cenotaphs⁷) is called alternately a *ṣuffah* or *ḥaḏīrah*, the former term having as one of its meanings a platform or dais and the latter term generally meaning an

6 For more on the interpretations of the building by the three English officials see McChesney 2002, pp. 80–83.

7 As shown in a photograph of the restored platform (AKCS Report, p. 38). According to Muhammad Ibrahim “Khalil” who recorded now vanished tombstone inscriptions in the early 1940s, there were only 11 graves. (Khalil 1944, p. 45.)

enclosure or fenced-in funerary area open to the sky. The mausoleum building itself is most often referred to as a *gunbad*, a term often applied to mausolea. At some point, certainly by the late sixteenth century, the mausoleum came to be used as a mosque and acquired the name “Masjid-i Sabz” (Green [or Blue] Mosque) by which name it is known today.

Changes to the building and the connection of those alterations with the meaning attached to it become abundantly clear once photography appears on the scene. The photographic record begins in 1886 (see figure 2.17 below) with the visit to Balkh of the abovementioned C.L. Griesbach, a geologist and British member of the Afghan Boundary Commission, who was later hired by the Afghan amir, ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901), to survey his domains for mineral wealth.⁸ From 1886 on, the degree of physical change to the complex captured by the photographic record leads one to conclude that the preceding four hundred years of the building’s existence probably saw similarly dramatic change partly recorded in writing but lacking the impact of the photograph. The building was an organic entity evolving over time in step with changing conditions and the different interpretations of those with the resources, political and financial, to make changes to it.

The mausoleum, which has drawn the most attention because of its monumentality and not least, as in the case of the Gur-i Mir mausoleum, because it has survived, was not conceived and did not develop as a stand-alone building but as part of a complex most of which has long since vanished leaving only the large edifice and the funeral platform in front of it as reminders of the cult center that emerged in the outer city of Balkh in the late fifteenth century. This is particularly important to keep in mind today in light of the major reconstruction of the site that the shrine underwent between 2011 and 2014, reifying the meaning of the structure as mosque.

In 2011 a large team of specialists and laborers under the auspices of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) with financing from the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany surveyed the existing structures and then began a three-year, multimillion-euro effort with several goals: 1) to restore and stabilize the mausoleum and the two modern wings that had been serving as the local mosque, 2) to rebuild the funerary platform in front of it, 3) to rehabilitate the area to the east of the mausoleum/mosque as a park, and 4) to rebuild a tomb within that park said to be that of the tenth-century poetess Rabi’ah al-Balkhi. The team, as we will see, based its restoration policy for the building

⁸ Album of photographs by C.L. Griesbach in the Alkazi Collection of Photography, Sepia International, Inc, 43 Ovington Square, London, album no. 96.28.0001.

on its condition in 2011, on a review of the available history of the site, and on the present meanings the local community attached to it.

2 The Fifteen-Century Origins

As noted above, two fifteenth-century personalities are associated in the literature with the building of the mausoleum. The first of these is the specific eponym, the above-mentioned Abu Nasr Parsa, son of a celebrated Naqshbandi figure, Khwajah Muhammad Parsa. The second figure is Mir Mazid Arghun, a military administrator and, according to at least two accounts of that time, the builder of a family mausoleum and an “enclosing” or “embracing” madrasah or seminary (*madrasah-i muḥīt*). Although not built for Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, the mausoleum was deliberately sited adjacent to his grave to take advantage of the sanctity of the site. Abu Nasr’s actual grave, which then would stand in the forecourt of the mausoleum, soon dominated the meaning of the whole site to the point that some would identify the mausoleum as Abu Nasr’s burial place or even as the burial place of his much more celebrated father, Khwajah Muhammad Parsa (d. 822/1419–20).⁹ For a time, from the late fifteenth until the mid-sixteenth century, Mir Mazid was credited with building the mausoleum at the grave of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa. But after the sixteenth century, his name disappears from the literature and is only revived by modern scholarship.

3 Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa

Abu Nasr Parsa is a somewhat puzzling figure. Among the more prominent riddles for us is why he was buried in Balkh at all, how he and Mir Mazid Arghun came to be linked, and how he acquired the saintly reputation that either inspired the construction of a sizeable mausoleum at his tomb or, possibly, inspired later generations to attribute exclusively to him a mausoleum actually built for someone else.

⁹ As late as the 1960s, the Afghan government itself mistakenly represented the mausoleum in an official publication (*Afghanistan News*, no. 71, vol. 6, July 1963, p. 19, a publication of the Royal Afghan Embassy in London), as “the mausoleum of Khwaja Mohammad Parsa.” Khwajah Muhammad Parsa was actually buried in a cemetery in Medina. *The Kabul Times Annual for 1967*, p. 101 also called the mausoleum “the Kwaja [*sic*] Mohammad Parsa mosque.”

Abu Nasr came from a prominent Bukharan shaykhly family very closely tied to the emerging Naqshbandi interpretation of the Sufi Way and not connected in any particular fashion with Balkh. The first of the family to take or be given the name “Parsa,” which would identify the lineage down through the ages, was Khwajah Muhammad of the illustrious and long-celebrated Hafizi family of Bukhara.¹⁰ He played a major role in establishing the ascendancy of the teachings of Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 791/1389) at Bukhara¹¹ and himself left an illustrious scholarly legacy there.¹² Khwajah Muhammad Parsa was Abu Nasr’s father and either was himself a wealthy man or attracted wealthy patrons, for he left several cultural institutions in Bukhara associated with his name including a renowned library and scriptorium (*kitābkhānah*), a madrasah, and a mosque.¹³

Khwajah Muhammad brought distinction to the family not only because of his position as a principal disciple of Baha al-Din Naqshband—the early sixteenth-century biographer of the order, Fakhr al-Din ‘Ali Safi, called him Baha al-Din’s “second *khalifah*”¹⁴—but also from his role as king-maker in early Timurid history. Quoting Safi’s *Rashaḥāt-i ‘ayn-i ḥayāt*, V.V. Barthold casts Khwajah Muhammad as a leading partisan of Amir Timur’s youngest son, Shah Rukh, in his battle against his nephew Khalil Sultan for control of the Timurid state after the death of Timur in 1405, but later as an antagonist of Shah Rukh’s son, Ulugh Beg.¹⁵

Khwajah Muhammad passed away in the Hijaz not long after completing the hajj-pilgrimage in 1420 and was buried at Medina where his tomb became an object of veneration for pilgrims from Central Asia. Safi locates the tomb “near the noble dome (mausoleum) of the Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the Faithful) ‘Abbas.”¹⁶ An early eighteenth-century source referred to the platform as standing “behind the dome of ‘Abbas and Imam Hasan”¹⁷ in a graveyard known today as the Baqi‘ Cemetery, a sought-out site for elite burials. At least three major Central Asian political figures, the Tuqay-Timurid khans

10 On Khwajah Muhammad Parsa’s name and lineage see Subtelny 2001 p. 84, note 21.

11 See Algar 1991, p. 225b and Algar 1993, p. 934b.

12 See Subtelny 2001.

13 Late eighteenth-century copies of documents pertaining to the endowments (*awqāf*) of these three institutions are kept in the Uzbek Central State Archives in Fond I-323, documents 55/13 (madrasah), 55/14 (*kitāb-khānah*) and 1291/16 (mosque).

14 Safi 1911, p. 57.

15 See Barthold 1963, vol. 2, pp. 72, 115–16.

16 Safi 1911, pp. 62–63.

17 Salim, fol. 201b. The ‘Abbas referred to here was the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and the eponym of the ‘Abbasid dynasty of caliphs.

Imam Quli (r. 1611–1641), his brother Nazr Muhammad (r. 1641–1651), and Nazr Muhammad's son, 'Abd al-'Aziz (r. 1651–1681), are buried there.¹⁸

The Parsa family remained prominent in Bukhara for centuries after Khwajah Muhammad's death. Managing the library/scriptorium, hospice, and madrasah kept the family in the forefront of the city's cultural life and income from their property holdings gave them a firm financial base.¹⁹ We begin then with an established elite family whose history of intellectual leadership in Bukhara can be traced back to the early ninth-century legal scholar Abu'l-Hafis al-Kabir, a disciple of the great jurist, Muhammad al-Shaybani (d. 189/805).²⁰ Muhammad Parsa and his son Abu Nasr had behind them the weight of centuries of unquestioned local prestige.

Of Parsa property in Balkh, however, there is as yet no known record and how the family came to be so intimately connected with the city is not at all clear. Khwajah Muhammad is not known to have spent any time in Balkh but by the middle of the fifteenth century his son, Abu Nasr, was clearly a figure of some importance there. Perhaps he was sent to Balkh by his father to spread Naqshbandi teachings.

However, in clear contrast to his father, Abu Nasr was not much celebrated as an intellectual figure in his own time. His later renown may have derived as much from the magnificence of the building that seemed to commemorate him as from his own achievements. In addition, it appears that the memory of his father came to be conflated with the memory of him, a memory kept very much alive by the building. The fact that his father was buried in a distant land perhaps encouraged the commingling of the two lives.²¹

18 Ibid.; also Muhammad Yusuf Munshi ms., fol. 71a.

19 There are at least two references to property owned in Bukhara by individuals who were either direct descendants of Khwajah Muhammad Parsa or sufficiently closely linked to use the name Parsa. In the Juybari archive of property transfer documents which date to the third quarter of the sixteenth century, three sons of a certain deceased "Hazrat-i Sayyid Parsa" sold a parcel of land to a Juybari in 1568. See E.E. Bertel's [F.B. Rostopchin], *Iz arkhiva sheikhov Dzhubarī*, Leningrad 1938, document no. 157. At approximately the same time another sale document provides evidence that a leading member of the Balkh branch of the family, 'Abd al-Wali Parsa, was still a property owner in Bukhara. See Egani and Chekhovich 1984, p. 105. Document no. 101 is a sale document, to be dated no earlier than 1533, which names a bordering property, a caravansary, as belonging to Jan Khwajah the son of Abu Nasr. The eponym "Parsa" is not given but this individual should be identified with the *shaykh al-Islām* of Balkh, 'Abd al-Wali (also known as Khwajah Jan Khwajah, d. ca. 1587) the son of Khwajah Abu Nasr 11 (see below).

20 Subtelny 2001, pp. 82–91.

21 Subtelny 2001, p. 85, note 24.

For someone who looms as large in later writing and lore as Abu Nasr does, there is surprisingly little contemporary information about him and what there is comes from two genres—hagiography and chronicles—that tend to run on non-intersecting paths. The stories about him arising from the hagiographical literature sprang from the pen of the great man of letters, ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 898/1492). In his work on Sufis and Sufism, the *Nafahāt al-Uns*, Jami gives the original text on Abu Nasr which is then more or less taken verbatim and sometimes embellished by those coming after him. In addition, there are references in two late fifteenth-century annalistic accounts to two episodes of political intervention/mediation, a common narrative function for a figure deemed saintly. These comprise almost the sole evidence for the existence of the man, aside from the great monument built at his grave.

4 The Hagiographical Tradition

Writing in the years 1476–79, less than two decades after Abu Nasr’s death, Jami recounts a very brief story about him. After devoting some four pages to extolling Khwajah Muhammad Parsa, he gives Abu Nasr’s entry little more than a paragraph, about half a page. Moreover, the account says virtually nothing about Abu Nasr but continues the story of his father and touches on a subject dear to Jami’s heart, the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabi:

After him [i.e. Khwajah Muhammad], in his place [was] the fruit of his fine tree, Khwajah Hafiz al-Din Abu Nasr Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Muhammad b. al-Hafiz al-Bukhari—the mercy of God Almighty (be on them)—who attributed [his knowledge of] the foundations of the sciences of the Shari‘at and the regulations (*rusūm*) of the (Sufi) Way to his great father. He (Abu Nasr) passed him in negating existence (*naḥy wujūd*) and in liberality towards the existent (*wa baḥl-i mawjūd*)²² but they were much alike in concealing and disguising their state (*satr-i ḥāl wa talbīs*) so it was never obvious that they had ever set foot on this (Sufi) path. He²³ knew something of the sciences of this group (*tā’ifah* [referring

22 In the seventeenth-century manuscript of the *Nafahāt* that I consulted (personal collection), the wording is “*dar naḥy wujūd-i kār wa baḥl-i mawjūd az way guzarānīdah*,” fol. 191a. In the edition of Safi 1911, p. 63, who clearly copied it from a manuscript of the *Nafahāt*, the wording is “*dar naḥy wujūd wa baḥl-i mawjūd kār az ishān guzarānīdah*.”

23 The Persian uses the third person plural “they”, a common usage when referring to a person of distinction. For the translation the third person singular is used although Jami may have had something else in mind by the use of the plural.

to the Sufis]), in fact of all sciences, and if he were asked a question he would say “let me consult a book.” He would open a book and it would be at the very place that addressed the question, or one or two pages either side. One day at an assembly mention was made of Shaykh Muhyi al-Din al-‘Arabi—God sanctify his secret—and his works. [Abu Nasr] quoted a saying of his father’s “the *Fuṣūṣ* is the soul and the *Futūḥāt* is the heart” (*fuṣūṣ jān-ast wa futūḥāt dil*); he [Abu Nasr] also said, “Whoever thoroughly knows the *Fuṣūṣ* his desire to follow the Prophet—peace be upon him—is greatly strengthened.” He [Abu Nasr] died in 865/1460–61 and his grave (*qabr*) is in Balkh.²⁴

Jami’s account has some ambiguity and may reflect an ironic intent. The use of the third person plural, while perfectly appropriate for an individual to whom the writer wishes to show respect, can be construed to embrace both father and son. The reference to “concealing the state” may have been a commentary on the family’s material wealth or simply an articulation of the topos of concealing true inner need [of God—*faqr*] with a veil of worldly riches. Only the obituary and the quoting of the aphorism uttered by Khwajah Muhammad refer unambiguously to Abu Nasr. The uncanny ability to know where to find a passage in a book is also attributed to Khwajah Muhammad.²⁵ However, the addition of the phrase “or one or two pages either side” tends to dilute the achievement when it’s ascribed to Abu Nasr.

A noted diarist and contemporary of Jami, ‘Abd al-Wasi‘i Nizami Bakharzi (d. 909/1503–4), underscores the problem for memorializers of finding distinctive virtues in Abu Nasr. He too tells the story of Abu Nasr’s repeating the bon mot about Ibn al-‘Arabi that was attributed to Khwajah Muhammad, whom he calls “a compendium of the truth of all that lies between knowledge and act.” Through an Arabic epigram Bakharzi finds only a single virtue in Abu Nasr and that is that he followed in his father’s footsteps—“the best of sons imitates his illustrious forebears” (*khayr al-walad al-ḥurr yaqtadī bi-abāihī al-ghurr*).²⁶ No one had to fall back on such a chestnut when memorializing Khwajah Muhammad.

Thus, from these two contemporaries, recording literary and intellectual accomplishment, Abu Nasr receives only the relatively lukewarm commendation of being the recipient of his father’s many virtues. Khwajah Muhammad

24 ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Nafahāt* ms., fol. 191a. The references are to two of the works of the influential Andalusian-born Sufi thinker, Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240), *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah*.

25 See Subtelny 2001, p. 91.

26 Bakharzi 1992, pp. 94–95.

Parsa, author of *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, a compendium of the words of Baha' al-Din Naqshband, and a commentary, famous in its day, on Abu Hanifah's work on rational theology, *al-Fiqh al-akbar*,²⁷ seems to be the real subject of all the entries on his son, Abu Nasr. No books or other writings worthy of mention, no wonders performed, or even memorable good deeds appear to have been attributed to Abu Nasr in the hagiographical literature of his time. Apparently he was not someone who occasioned much comment except for the accident of his birth, at least when viewed from the perspective of intellectual achievement. Nor is it easy to see from these texts why a great mausoleum would have been erected to commemorate him. And although the mausoleum had been built by the time these men wrote, no mention is made of it.

Another contemporary, Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i (d. 906/1501) also mentions Abu Nasr in his anthology *Majālis al-nafā'is* but notes him only in conjunction with the fact that a poet and life-long resident of Balkh, Sayyid Kamal Kajka'²⁸ (var: Gachkuli,²⁹ Kajkuli³⁰) composed a clever elegy (*marṣiyah*) commemorating Abu Nasr's death, each line forming one or more obituary chronograms.³¹ Khwandamir (d. ca 941/1534–5) repeats the same story:

The Royal Intimate Amir Nizamuddin 'Ali Sher has written in his *Majalisu'n-nafayis*, 'Among the most marvelous of Sayyid Kamal's poetry that I have seen is the threnody on Khwaja Abu-Nasr Parsa, in which some hemistiches are chronograms for the khwaja's death, some whole lines are chronograms, and in other lines three or four chronograms can be found—and all this without the meaning suffering in the slightest.³²

The last early hagiographical source is Fakhr al-Din 'Ali b. Husayn "Safi's" *Rashaḥāt* account which repeats Jami nearly verbatim (with appropriate credit given) then diverges somewhat to relate a story told by a certain Pir Khalat, "an attendant at the tomb (*āstānah*) of Khwajah Muhammad Parsa" in Medina. This story also mingles the legends of father and son. At Herat (where Safi heard him) Pir Khalat tells how he had heard Abu Nasr once recite some verses composed by Khwajah Muhammad Parsa. Without saying anything more specific about Abu Nasr, Safi then goes on to say that Pir Khalat related to him and others in the congregational mosque of Herat stories of the virtues

27 On the commentary and its fame see Subtelny and Khalidov 1995, p. 223a.

28 Thus in Nawa'i 1944b, p. 207.

29 Nawa'i 1944a, p. 34.

30 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4: pp. 103–04.

31 Nawa'i 1944b, p. 207 and Nawa'i 1944a, pp. 34–35.

32 Khwandamir 1994, p. 407.

(*shamā'il*) of both Khwajah Muhammad Parsa and his son. He concludes the entry with another verse composed by Khwajah Muhammad and then gives the obituary of Abu Nasr. He seems to be the source of the chronogram (used by Khwandamir as well) that has been cited to help explain the purpose of the mausoleum and the question of Abu Nasr's burial in it.

The Great Khwajah Abu Nasr is he / whose resting place (*takyah gāhash*)
is eternity,
Since his secret has always been with God / so his obituary date is "God's
secret."³³

The sum of the numerical value of the letters in "God's secret" (*sirr-i khudā*) produces the date 865 (1460–61).³⁴ Although Safi's biographical entry is supposedly for Abu Nasr, it is mostly devoted to Abu Nasr's father, Khwajah Muhammad (who had already been given six pages of his own).³⁵

One is thus left with a distinct impression of his near-contemporary hagiographers struggling to find something to say about Abu Nasr and being forced to fall back again and again on material from the life of his father. On the other hand, Abu Nasr was born into one of the most illustrious families in Bukhara; he seems to have been his father's choice as his intellectual heir; and the mere fact of the obituary chronogram, even if the context in which it is cited does not focus on him, indicates a person of considerable prestige.

Another near-contemporary, Khwandamir, though living and writing his chronicle well into the sixteenth century, falls more into the camp of the hagiographers, providing the barest outline of Abu Nasr's life and shedding hardly any light on Abu Nasr's standing among his peers. Like Jami and Safi, he gives Khwajah Muhammad a lengthy biographical entry and then almost as an afterthought, writes:

33 *Khwājah-i a'zam Abū Naṣr ankih shud / takyah gāhash masnad-i dār al-baqā // Sirr-i ū chūn bā khudā paywastah būd / z-īn sabab tārikh shud 'sirr-i khudā'.*

34 Safi 1911, p. 64. The reading of the word *takyah* in this chronogram was taken by Golombek and Wilber 1984, vol. 1, pp. 295 and 297 as a key to understanding the function and purpose of the building. The context here would seem to indicate that its use is metaphorical. I have not found instances of the use of *takyah* as an architectural term in the fifteenth or sixteenth century Central Asia where its usual meaning is "bolster" or "cushion." Even as late as the second half of the nineteenth century, a *takyah-khānah* was a rest house. (See 'Abd al-Rahman Khan ca 1886, p. 122.)

35 Safi 1911, p. 63.

After Khwaja Muhammad Parsa's death, his son, Khwaja Hafizuddin Abu-Nasr Parsa, who was known for his knowledge and practice, took his father's place and surpassed him in asceticism and spiritual poverty. His death occurred in 865 (1460–61), and he is buried in Balkh.³⁶

Khwandamir then adds Safi's obituary chronogram, as noted above.

Although all the sources most contemporary with him seem to depict Abu Nasr as little more than the repository of his father's virtues, the assessment of him as a saintly/scholarly figure turns much more favorable with the passage of time. In 1640, by which time the Parsa family held a dominant social position in Balkh, the Mughal prince, artist, and scholar of Sufism, Dara Shukuh (1615–59), composed his famous hagiography of Sufis, *Safīnat al-awliyā*, in which entries are given for both Khwajah Muhammad Parsa and Abu Nasr. But in contrast to Jami's, Safi's, and Khwandamir's portrayals, father and son are given virtually equal treatment—separate entries and almost the same amount of text—slightly less than ten lines in the 1884 Kanpur edition of the *Safīnat al-awliyā* for Khwajah Muhammad and slightly more than seven lines for Khwajah Abu Nasr. Dara Shukuh repeats the *Nafahāt al-uns* description of Abu Nasr as a disciple and student of his father and then adds material not included in earlier accounts: It is a tale of Abu Nasr's accompanying his father on the hajj-pilgrimage (for which there is no contemporary evidence) and of the bedside scene in which Dara Shukuh puts these words in Abu Nasr's mouth:

When my father took deathly ill, I was not [at first] at his bedside. When I came I turned his face towards me so that I could look at it. He opened his eyes and smiled and I was greatly moved. I placed my face against the sole of his foot and he drew up his foot.³⁷

Dara Shukuh may have intended this story as a way to burnish Abu Nasr's image although what he hoped to convey through this tale is not particularly clear; perhaps he simply wanted to suggest that the father was recognizing the son as his equal and not required to show such obeisance or perhaps it was a rebuttal to the way in which Abu Nasr had been memorialized by his contemporaries. Dara Shukuh may have been adding his own small embellishment to make the narrative legacy better accord with the popular reputation that Abu Nasr enjoyed by the mid-seventeenth century.

36 Khwandamir 1994, p. 353.

37 Dara Shukuh 1886, pp. 79–80.

It should also be noted that Dara Shukuh was writing at a time of intense Mughal/Timurid irredentist interest in Balkh and the other formerly Timurid lands. Whether this influenced in any way his account of Abu Nasr is impossible to say. Still his father, Shah Jahan's, desire to recapture the Timurid patrimonial lands of Trans- and Cisoxiana and his invasion and occupation of Balkh in 1646 must be considered part of the political environment within which Dara Shukuh was writing.

5 The Historiographical Tradition

If Abu Nasr's reputation among his hagiographers was that of a well-born but generally undistinguished intellectual figure, contemporary chronicle writers indicate that he enjoyed great esteem in the political arena. Both 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi and Mu'in al-Din Isfizari, two late fifteenth-century chroniclers (the latter perhaps relying on the former) suggest the dimensions of Abu Nasr's leadership role in Balkh in the middle of the century and why that role might have led to patronage of his tomb site.

He twice appears as a mediator in the struggles between Timurids after the deaths of Shah Rukh in Khurasan in 1447 and Ulugh Beg in Transoxania two years later. He is identified by 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi as *shaykh al-Islām* of Balkh, and as the leading spokesman for the people of Balkh during the later years of his life.³⁸

Particularly noteworthy in all contemporary and near-contemporary accounts is the palpable silence on the subject of the mausoleum at Abu Nasr's gravesite. That he was buried in Balkh seems to have been widely known but that he was entombed in or adjacent to an elaborate mausoleum, a work of architecture comparable to Timurid mausoleums of Samarqand, Kash (Shahr-i Sabz), and Herat, either escaped notice or was a subject they did not feel moved to address. Invariably the term used for his burial place by his contemporaries and those who quoted them is *qabr*, simply meaning grave, implying nothing particularly architectural and adding some weight to the conclusion that the mausoleum complex was not built for Abu Nasr but rather was located close enough to his grave to share in its blessedness and any benefits that arose therefrom.

38 Samarqandi 1941, vol. 2, pt. 3, p. 1055. For details of the two episodes see McChesney 2001, p. 95.

6 Mir Mazid Arghun and His Connection to Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa

The mausoleum complex was originally the work of one of the leading military men of the second half of the fifteenth century, Amir Sayyid Jalal al-Din Mir Mazid Bahadur Arghun (d. ca 1470). According to his contemporaries—Samarqandi, Mu‘in al-Din Isfizari, and ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, all writing within twenty years of his death—Mir Mazid was a high-ranking military figure.³⁹

Much of his military career took place in Iran but Isfizari and Samarqandi note his being sent to Balkh in early 865 (late 1460) by his then overlord Sultan-Abu Sa‘id to serve “as administrator and protector (*zābiṭ wa mustahfiẓ*)” of the region according to Isfizari, or as Samarqandi says, simply “to find out what was going on there.”⁴⁰ The appointment to Balkh, whether as protector of the region or simply as fact-finder, does put him in the right place at about the right time to have encountered Parsa, although their personal association, if any, must have been of brief duration, since Abu Nasr died that same year.

The mausoleum was not the only major project that he undertook following Abu Nasr’s death in 1460–61. The Arghun amir also constructed a garden estate (*chahārbāgh*) at Balkh, a project of sufficiently regal proportions that when Sultan-Husayn Bayqara, ruler of Herat from 1470 to 1506, came to Balkh in the winter of 1490–91, many years after Mir Mazid’s death, he made the “Chaharbagh-i Amir Mazid Arghun” his headquarters.⁴¹

There are only two texts that I am aware of, apparently representing independent traditions, that link the names of the two men and suggest any connection between them. One is the *Ma‘āsir al-mulūk* of Khwandamir, written at the very end of the fifteenth century, and the other is the *Majma‘ al-gharāib* of Sultan Muhammad b. Darwish Muhammad, a native of Balkh writing about sixty years after Khwandamir. Neither text offers unambiguous evidence that Mir Mazid and Abu Nasr were personally acquainted, although their lives and their spheres of activity did briefly overlap. There is a good deal of contemporary circumstantial evidence, however, to suggest that even if Mir Mazid did not know the shaykh well he might have wanted to align himself with the posthumous figure of Abu Nasr by becoming his commemorating patron.

Writing sometime just before 903/1497, Khwandamir attributes to Mir Mazid the construction of two buildings adjacent to the grave of Khwajah Abu Nasr:

39 For details of his career see *Ibid.*, pp. 96–98.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

41 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 19.

One of the *sultān-i saʿīd* (Sultan-Abu Saʿīd's) amirs, Amir Jalal al-Din Mazid Arghun, built a spacious structure (*ʿimārat-i wasī*) and a madrasah at the head of the sacred shrine (*bar sar-i mazār*) of the refulgent and saintly Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa—May God sanctify his secret!—so that that noble sanctuary would greatly prosper and the income of its endowments would flourish.⁴²

The text suggests that Khwajah Abu Nasr's grave had already become a pilgrimage site (a *mazār*) at Balkh and that the Arghun amir then built a "spacious structure," and a madrasah-seminary. The wording is a little ambiguous. Was Mir Mazid's ensemble of mausoleum and madrasah meant to enhance the financial well-being of the shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa and its endowments or was the placement of the buildings intended to insure their own fiscal welfare and augment their endowments? Since it would have been the custom, as Muhammad Sultan had done in Samarqand, to endow the madrasah with a foundation to support the salaries of professors, student stipends, and building maintenance, the latter sense would seem the more likely way to understand Khwandamir. I have not found any information on an endowment other than this single reference. No date is given for Mir Mazid's work by Khwandamir but the next work provides one.

The second text, the *Majmaʿ al-gharāʾib fī bayān al-ʿajāʾib waʾl-kawākib waʾl-nawāʾib* (The Compendium of Marvels on Wonders, Celestial Bodies, and the Turnings of Fate)⁴³ amplifies Khwandamir's summary description of Mir Mazid's buildings. The work was written in the 1560s by a Balkh native and an official of the judiciary, Sultan-Muhammad (d. 10 Muharram 981/13 May 1574), the son of Darwish Muhammad. Sultan-Muhammad held the post of mufti at Balkh as his father had before him. His work includes elements of cosmography, geography, history, autobiography, and the urban topography of Balkh and Bukhara and was based on sixty separate sources which are cited in various places in the text.⁴⁴

In the *Majmaʿ* text, the building is so strongly linked to the name of Abu Nasr Parsa that the reader might reasonably conclude that it was built for him. The text is very brief:

42 Khwandamir 1993, p. 171.

43 Sultan Muhammad Balkhi ms. no. 1494. For other mss. see Storey 1927–1958, vol. 2, pt. 1, pp. 135–37.

44 For a full description of the work see Tagirdzhanov 1962, p. 395.

The buildings of the illustrious shrines (*‘imārāt-i mazārāt-i fayz anwār*) of that Excellency, the Pole of Poles, Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, were built under the patronage of (*bi-ihitimām-i*) Mir Mazid Arghun in 867 (1462–63).

The *Majma‘* text then goes on to relate what would seem to be its main point, the work undertaken at the site by a certain “Hazrat-i Khudawandi:”

The surviving lofty mausoleum (*gunbaz*, i.e., *gunbad*) and the structure of the madrasah enclosing that shrine were cared for by the Excellent One, Guide of the People of the Region, the Sublime Shaykh al-Islam, Hazrat-i Khudawandi—May God extend his sublime shadow. Later, through the divinely bestowed good fortune of the constantly guiding and caring Hazrat-i Khudawandi a madrasah [was built] of baked brick comprising numerous rooms, large cells, and [provided with a source of] daily income to the south of the Mazar Road and west of the Khiyaban Road near the shrine and holy resting place, and he endowed that madrasah with his private property—May God bestow on it an abundance of benefits.⁴⁵

In Sultan-Muhammad’s description of Abu Nasr Parsa’s shrine Khwandamir’s “spacious building” (*‘imārat-i wasī*) becomes a “lofty mausoleum” (*gunbaz-i ālī-āsār*) and we are given a precise date for its construction, within two years of the death of Abu Nasr Parsa. The text also reaffirms the presence of a madrasah, called here “the surrounding or embracing madrasah” (*madrasah-i muhīt*) (Fig. 2.3) a term suggesting a structure which a 1916 panoramic photograph seems to depict.

The wording of the rest of the section provides the unsurprising information that the shrine complex had, in the preceding century, been subject to the ravages of time and it was now being restored and renovated by a man called “Hazrat-i Khudawandi” about whom more below. In addition a new madrasah has been added near the shrine precincts with an endowment. The author’s use of the plural “shrines” (*mazārāt*) in referring to the site of Abu Nasr Parsa’s grave suggests its transformation into a cemetery with multiple sites worthy of *ziyārat*. These were most likely the tombs of the three or four generations of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa’s descendants by now interred there, one of which, the grave of Abu Nasr’s son ‘Abd al-Malik, is specifically referred to as a pilgrimage destination.⁴⁶

45 Sultan Muhammad Balkhi, ms. no. 1494, fol. 16a–b.

46 Isfizari 1959–60, vol. 1, p. 156.



FIGURE 2.3 Early twentieth-century panorama of Balkh City showing Parsa shrine (upper right) and its “encircling madrasah.” Arch (*pishtāq*) to its left is what remained of the Subhan Quli Khan Madrasah

O. VON NIEDERMAYER, 1916

In the 1470s, Samarqandi also wrote of the *gunbad* built by the Arghun amir at Balkh and he provides a motive for Mir Mazid’s building and it is not to commemorate Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa. Under the events of 869/1464–65 at least one manuscript of Samarqandi’s chronicle says that Mir Mazid’s brother, Amir Sayyid Asil al-Din, died in Herat in that year and that Mir Mazid performed the funeral rites for him there. He then escorted the body to Balkh where he interred it in the *gunbad* he had built for his father, Pir Muhammad.⁴⁷ The death of his father would explain the date 867/1462–63 for building the mausoleum, in all probability a simple domed structure, not the elaborate building seen today. Major changes would come late in the sixteenth century.

If we take elite Timurid funerary practice as the model then it is reasonable to conclude, despite the very slight documentary record, that Mir Mazid built a mausoleum intended for his family at the grave of Abu Nasr Parsa. This would have conformed to Timurid funerary practice as exemplified by the Timurid necropolis at Kash (Shahr-i Sabz); the Gur-i Mir in Samarqand; and Shah Rukh’s ensemble, the Gazurgah at Herat.⁴⁸ Given the desirability of having a

47 Samarqandi 1941, vol. 2, pt. 3, p. 1292, note.

48 For Shahr-i Sabz see Pugachenkova 1980; for the Gazur Gah burials see Golombek (1969).

holy man associated with the site and perhaps because of a fleeting personal acquaintance with Abu Nasr, Mir Mazid, newly arrived in Balkh, chose the site of Abu Nasr Parsa's grave as an appropriate place for a family necropolis. He built a mausoleum—probably not the one that still stands, although the original may be hidden beneath later additions—buried first his father and then his brother in it and probably also left instructions for his own burial there.⁴⁹

Thus, Khwandamir and Sultan Muhammad provide the narrative evidence linking the historical figure of Mir Mazid Arghun, one of Sultan Abu Sa'id's principal generals, with the somewhat more obscure Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, the son of a major star in the Naqshbandi firmament. Abu Nasr appears to have enjoyed a great post mortem enhancement of his reputation thanks to the mausoleum built not for him but to secure the advantage of his sanctity.

Despite the fact that Sultan Muhammad's work proved relatively popular down through the nineteenth century and was frequently copied, his is the last local source, until the twentieth century, that credits Mir Mazid with sponsoring the mausoleum construction. In other words, the story continued to be preserved through repeated copying of the *Majma'* but no other writer appears to have picked it up and breathed new life into it. As far as I can tell, the name Mir Mazid loses most local significance. Whatever his plans for a durable family necropolis, they did not survive him. From the mid-sixteenth century on, the story of the mausoleum becomes linked to the name of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa and by extension those who preserved and profited from his memory.

Whether it was the building itself or the fact of Abu Nasr's burial in front of it or a combination of both, it is clear that the site exerted a spiritual attraction from very early times; not, perhaps, as magnetic as the precincts of Baha al-Din Naqshband's tomb at Qasr-i 'Arifan in the eastern suburbs of Bukhara or that of 'Abd Allah Ansari at Gazurgah in the suburbs of Herat or the shrine of 'Ali b. Abi Talib east of Balkh at Khwajah Khayran, later Mazar-i Sharif. Nonetheless, it became a place of *ziyārat*-pilgrimage and a desirable place to be buried. How desirable we can judge from one early case. A high religious official (*ṣadr*) at Herat, Mirak Jalal al-Din Qasim, the son of Mawlana Shams al-Din Muhammad Amin, made known his wish to be buried at the Parsa shrine and when he died in Herat on the fifteenth of Sha'ban 900/11 May 1495 his body was transported all the way to Balkh to be buried next to Abu Nasr.⁵⁰ Other burials of

49 Lisa Golombek visited the crypt in the course of her research leading to her work on the Timurid shrine at Herat and stated that although a crypt exists, "the mausoleum of Parsa contains no tomb whatsoever" (Golombek [1969], p. 115).

50 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 205.

prominent figures are recorded for the first half of the seventeenth century⁵¹ and we should assume that the mounds of graves visible in photographs of the early twentieth century show the enduring attraction of Abu Nasr's grave site as a burial place. The eradication of that cemetery in the 1930s and its current use as a public park has obscured its historic role.

7 Consolidating and Perpetuating the Parsa Tradition at Balkh: The Office of *shaykh al-Islām*

The office of *shaykh al-Islām* is crucial to understanding the longevity of the shrine and the family that administered it. 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi in the 1470s identifies Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa as *shaykh al-Islām*, presumably of Balkh. Writing in the 1630s, Mahmud b. Amir Wali confirmed that Parsa family members had held the office from the first half of the fifteenth century.⁵² They would continue to hold it for some time to come although use of the title seems to disappear in the eighteenth century. As Shiro Ando proposed, the title could refer to the highest religious authority responsible for oversight of Shari'ah law, putting the office in charge of courts (qadis and muftis) and the religious police (the *muhtasibs*) or it could refer to the chief administrator of a shrine and its endowments.⁵³ In many cases the same person might have served both functions simultaneously, perhaps deriving his income from the endowments he managed and his moral and political authority as overseer of the implementation of Shari'ah law. There is little doubt that in the way Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa is depicted in our sources, it was in the former capacity alone that he served as *shaykh al-Islām*, that is as the highest religious authority with supervision of the administration of Shari'ah as his domain. Obviously, since the existence of a shrine would await his demise, he had, as far as we know, no function as a shrine administrator. The income that supported him likely came from the properties the family held in Bukhara and any inheritance from his father. After his death in 865/1460–61, the office passed on, generation after generation, to his direct descendants.⁵⁴

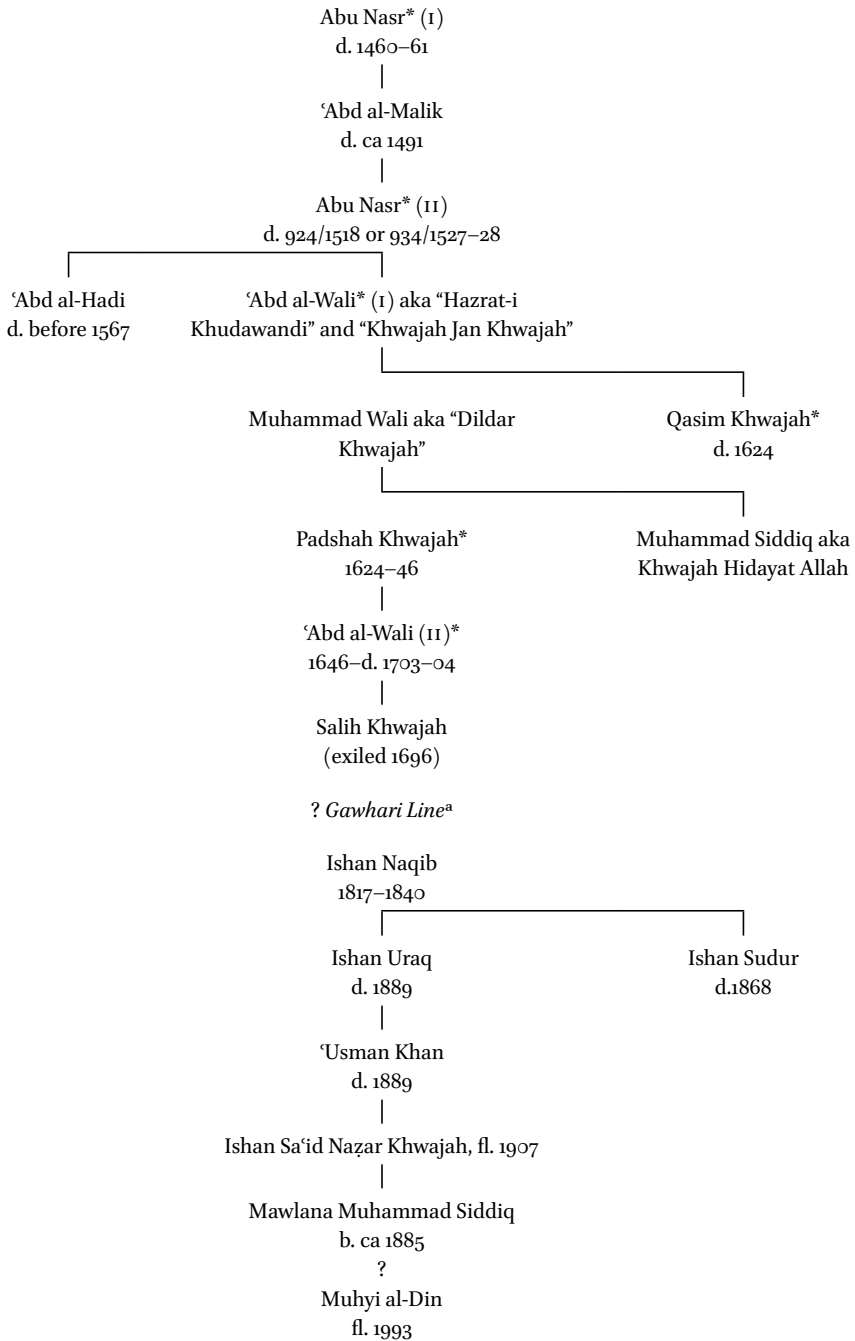
51 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms 575, fols. 346b, 347a.

52 Samarqandi 1941, vol. 2, pt. 3, p. 1055 and Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 286a.

53 Ando 1994.

54 On the representatives of each generation down to the end of the seventeenth century and their involvement in local and regional politics see McChesney 2001, pp. 102–07.

TABLE 1 Parsā genealogy



* Shaykh al-Islam.

a After Lee 1996, Appendix 4, vii.

The members of each generation who filled the role of *shaykh al-Islām* or proved in some way worthy of being recorded in a written record have already been described in some detail.⁵⁵ Here I limit myself to some of the highlights of Parsa family history as examples of how shrine management and the office of *shaykh al-Islām* created social power.

Khwajah Abu Nasr's son and successor was Khwajah 'Abd al-Malik who is most famous for his own *mazār*, mentioned by Isfizari as one of the three "prospering shrines with abundant incomes and endowments of this district [Balkh] whose like are perhaps not to be found elsewhere," the other two being the shrines of Khwajah 'Akkashah (a reputed contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad) and Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa.⁵⁶ Isfizari's book was written in 1492 and it is likely that the tradition that the *mazār* should only be identified with Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa had not yet taken root and that his son, 'Abd al-Malik, was sufficiently noteworthy to have his tomb singled out as a pilgrimage site. 'Abd al-Malik's grave therefore should be one of those in the platform that survives much altered in the forecourt of the Mir Mazid mausoleum and madrasah. Or perhaps there were two separate graves, Abu Nasr's and 'Abd al-Malik's, and since we have no early reference for the *ṣuffah*, the funerary platform, each grave drew pilgrims. It appears that 'Abd al-Malik was as celebrated in his own time as his father had been. But only Isfizari mentions 'Abd al-Malik's grave as a *mazār* and his information is not repeated by any subsequent source. Whatever tradition arose around the grave of 'Abd al-Malik was soon subsumed into the overarching legacy of his father.

That the whole complex—mausoleum, madrasah, and Parsa'i burial platform—should then have come to be permanently known as "the shrine (*mazār*) of Abu Nasr Parsa" may actually have been due as much to the grandson and namesake of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa as to the grandfather. The second Abu Nasr Parsa, son of 'Abd al-Malik, is much more prominent in the historical record, and figures among the intelligentsia of Bukhara as well as Balkh. He owned agricultural land and commercial property in Bukhara but apparently lived in Balkh. Khwandamir provides the intriguing information that Abu Nasr II was also an authority on Mongol history and was Khwandamir's source for his account of the Chinggisid siege, capture, and sack of Balkh.⁵⁷

55 Ibid., pp. 103–07, 112–14.

56 Isfizari 1959–60, vol. 1, p. 156.

57 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 3, p. 38. Khwandamir was in Balkh between the years 1514 and 1520 and probably received his information verbally from the second Abu Nasr Parsa who as far as is known left no writing of his own about the Mongols.

One of Abu Nasr Parsā II's sons, 'Abd al-Hādī, was celebrated for his poetry in Nisari's *Mudhakkir al-ahbāb*, an anthology of Bukharan versifiers who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century. The work was completed in 1567 by which time 'Abd al-Hādī Parsā is described as deceased.⁵⁸ A much later source describes him as "the builder of the lustrous resting place (*marqad*) containing his forefathers" in 1552.⁵⁹ This would seem to refer to the funerary platform in front of the mausoleum since that is where his forefathers were buried. We might take this as the date of the original *ṣuffah* built to contain the preceding three generations of Parsā's. But in this as in many similar texts we should allow for the possibility that the whole site was considered the "resting place" of 'Abd al-Hādī's forebears and the work he did was actually on the mausoleum which by now had stood for nearly 100 years and was no doubt in constant need of maintenance.

Following 'Abd al-Hādī, who was deceased by the mid-1560s, his brother 'Abd al-Walī, known as "Hazrat-i Khudawandī" and "Khwajah Jan Khwajah," succeeded to the office of *shaykh al-Islām* of Balkh. He died in 1587.⁶⁰ Among other things he is remembered for, as noted above, is the addition of another madrasah to the mausoleum-madrasah complex established by Mir Mazid Arghun and for doing renovations on the mausoleum. The area around the mausoleum and funerary platform had also begun to be a magnet for madrasah-building with at least four endowed madrasahs in operation near the mausoleum by the end of the sixteenth century—Mir Mazid Arghun's "encircling" madrasah, 'Abd al-Walī's madrasah, a madrasah built by the amir Kamal al-Din Qunaq in the 1530s, and a madrasah built no later than 1584 by 'Abd Allah Khan, the Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrid khan at Bukhara.⁶¹

'Abd al-Walī is a very prominent figure in Balkh and Bukharan politics of the second half of the sixteenth century and is well documented in the written record. In 1559, the Jani-Begid then at Balkh, Pir Muhammad Khan (d. 974/1566), wanted to move his capital from Balkh to Bukhara, newly acquired by his nephew, 'Abd Allah son of Iskandar. When the latter agreed, Pir Muhammad named two men to take charge of the city. One of them was Khwajah 'Abd al-Walī, who was not yet *shaykh al-Islām* at Balkh but living in Bukhara and no doubt supervising the family properties there.⁶² Best known as "Khwajah Jan

58 Nisari 1969, pp. 320–21.

59 Raqim, fol. 139b.

60 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 332b for the date of his death.

61 McChesney 2001, pp. 109–110 and McChesney 2001a, pp. 202–203.

62 Hafiz-i Tanish 1983–89, pt. 1, p. 241. The published edition only covers Shibanid history up to 1579. For the last eight years covered by Hafiz-i Tanish, I used the India Office Library ms. no. 574 designated here as Hafiz-i Tanish (10L). The properties, land and a

Khwajah,” he appears repeatedly under that soubriquet in the pages of Hafiz-i Tanish’s *Sharaf-nāmah-i shāhī*, a Bukharan-centered chronicle written for ‘Abd Allah Khan. According to Hafiz-i Tanish, ‘Abd al-Wali had a dream of the future greatness of ‘Abd Allah. The dream occurs at a critical time in the internecine struggles of the Jani-Begid Abu’l-Khayrid clan that eventually brought ‘Abd Allah to the fore and is used to explain the shift in Parsa’i support from the Pir Muhammad branch of the Jani-Begids that had held Balkh and briefly Bukhara to the up-and-coming family of Iskandar another son of Jani Beg and in particular his son, the most prominent Central Asia warrior-politician of the last half of the sixteenth century, ‘Abd Allah Khan.⁶³

Further evidence of the prominent role of ‘Abd al-Wali in the political struggles of the Jani-Begid Shibanid clan came in the spring of 1572, when ‘Abd Allah attempted to seize the town of Tirmiz from the Jani-Begid branch that held Balkh. After a bitter and destructive siege, the Jani-Begid ruler of Balkh, Din Muhammad, sent ‘Abd al-Wali to negotiate the surrender of Tirmiz, the terms for which ‘Abd Allah accepted “because of the abundant faith and the perfectly sincere feelings he held for the great family and mighty clan of Khwajah Parsa.” ‘Abd Allah then gave a feast in honor of ‘Abd al-Wali and permission to return home (presumably to Balkh).⁶⁴

We next hear of ‘Abd al-Wali in Sha‘ban 985/October–November 1577 at the circumcision of ‘Abd Allah’s son and heir-apparent, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, at Bukhara. Hafiz-i Tanish devotes six pages to the ceremony yet only two of the shaykhly dignitaries present, the head of the Juybari family, Khwajah Sa‘d Juybari “Khwajah Kalan Khwajah,” and ‘Abd al-Wali Parsa “Khwajah Jan Khwajah” are mentioned by name.⁶⁵ ‘Abd al-Wali’s being chosen for this ceremony and being one of only two whose names were memorialized are evidence that he was known to and respected by ‘Abd Allah Khan. The latter had emerged after 1556 as the most ambitious and powerful of the Jani-Begids, and, acting in the name of his father, the reigning khan, Iskandar son of Jani Beg, had conquered Balkh from a cousin in 1573. Sometime after the conquest and probably by 1582 ‘Abd Allah Khan commissioned the construction of a madrasah in the Chaqar Khwajah Parsa quarter with a *waqf* endowment. The fact that he had the madrasah built in the quarter of the *mazār* named for ‘Abd al-Wali’s great-grandfather is more evidence of a connection or at least

caravanserai, are documented in records found in Bertel’s 1938, p. 421 and by Egani and Chekhovich 1984, p. 105.

63 Hafiz-i Tanish 1983–89, vol. 1, p. 183 (Russian translation), fol. 81b.

64 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 102 (Russian translation), fol. 161b (Persian text).

65 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 186, f. 206b.

a sincere regard for the Parsa'i family.⁶⁶ However, it would be his son, 'Abd al-Mu'min, who would forge the closest ties and make the greatest investment in the shrine itself.

'Abd al-Wali's most dramatic appearance in Hafiz-i Tanish's work comes when he organizes the people of Balkh to withstand an attempt by the Timurid ruler of Badakhshan, Shah Rukh Mirza, to take Balkh from the Jani-Begids in early June 1579. Hafiz-i Tanish highlights the role of 'Abd al-Wali and his sons, Dildar Khwajah and Qasim Khwajah, in rallying the citizens of Balkh to successfully defend their city.⁶⁷ There are at least three more occasions on which 'Abd al-Wali is given a prominent place in Hafiz-i Tanish's narrative of events. There is little question that of all the Parsa'i *shaykh al-Islams* 'Abd al-Wali appears as the most prominent one in terms of his activities in the political sphere.⁶⁸

8 The Architectural Transformation of the Shrine

For the history of the Parsa'i shrine at Balkh, 'Abd al-Wali's most important relations were with 'Abd Allah Khan's son, 'Abd al-Mu'min, who was sent to govern Balkh in 1582. Hafiz-i Tanish's final mention of 'Abd al-Wali Parsa has him riding east from Balkh to Khulm in late May 1586 to welcome 'Abd al-Mu'min back after the latter's campaign in Badakhshan.⁶⁹ Hafiz-i Tanish leaves little doubt that he believed 'Abd al-Wali was the leading civilian figure in Balkh during the thirty-year period before 1587, when his chronicle concludes. 'Abd al-Wali's prominence indicates close relations with 'Abd al-Mu'min and those relations help explain the latter's major changes to the architecture of the shrine site.

One later report of 'Abd al-Mu'min's connection with 'Abd al-Wali Parsa comes from a source written several decades after 'Abd al-Wali's death. That

66 One of the villages listed in the late seventeenth-century Raqim as being irrigated by the Shahi Canal is called "Abd Allah Waqf" (see Salakhedinova 1970, p. 224). The listing of the canals and the villages on them was found in only two of the twenty-five manuscripts of *Tārīkh-i Rāqimī* examined by Salakhedinova. It is possible that this "Abd Allah Waqf" might have pertained to the endowment for his madrasah, which is the only known building project of his in Balkh. Coincidentally perhaps, with the disappearance of his great madrasah, the name 'Abd Allah Waqf also disappears from the record. See McChesney 1991, p. 41, note 66. However, a late nineteenth-century listing of the villages watered by the Nahr-i Shahi still included one named "Abd-ul-Wakf" (see F.B. [Fayz Bakhsh] 1971, p. 5).

67 Hafiz-i Tanish (IOL), fol. 261b.

68 See McChesney 2001, p. 106.

69 Hafiz-i Tanish (IOL), fol. 453b.

source is the *Baḥr al-asrār*, a memorial to the neo-Chinggisid dynasty of the Tuḡay-Timurids. Its author, Mahmud b. Amir Wali, introduces the connection in a story about events of 1587. In that year ‘Abd Allah Khan, having brought most of Transoxiana under his control, set his sights on the conquest of Safavid Khurasan. He summoned ‘Abd al-Mu’min with the Balkh army to join him to besiege the city of Herat but, according to Mahmud b. Amir Wali, ‘Abd al-Mu’min only left Balkh for Khurasan once he had the blessing of the region’s notables, four of whom he names, the first being ‘Abd al-Wali, “Khwajah Jan Khwajah.”⁷⁰

It is not difficult to imagine that the teenaged ‘Abd al-Mu’min (born in 1568) and his advisors would have wanted to have good relations with city leaders like ‘Abd al-Wali Parsa. Nor is it difficult to imagine that ‘Abd al-Wali, in the interests of the welfare of the people of Balkh not to mention the shrine of his forebears, would have sought the good opinion and support of the Jani-Begid prince in return. No doubt at an appropriate moment, ‘Abd al-Wali might have suggested using some of the funds under the Jani-Begid’s control for refurbishing the Parsa’i shrine. Or from the prince’s perspective, a sign of his own power and importance would be the construction or reconstruction of monumental public buildings, a perspective expressed in the oft-repeated Arabic maxim, “our works commemorate us” (*āṣārūnā tadullu ‘alaynā*). The mausoleum was not linked now to the legacy of Mir Mazid Arghun, its builder, but to that of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, memory of whom had completely eclipsed that of the Arghun amir. Moreover, the mausoleum may have been seen as a way for the prince to articulate his own political ambitions.

Until recently, all the sources of information that spoke of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s work on the shrine were thought to be late, although some earlier ones refer to comparable kinds of renovations done by him at other sites. In 2000, thanks to the keen eye of Professor Bernard O’Kane, any argument about ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s construction work at the shrine complex was rendered moot. In closely examining a photograph taken by art historian and intrepid traveler Robert Byron in 1934, Professor O’Kane discovered the partial remains of the now no-longer extant but once rather prominent shield-shaped cartouche containing an inscription located prominently just over the peak of the arch of the grand entryway, the *pīshṭāq* or iwan of the mausoleum. This was the inscription Peacocke, a member of the Afghan Boundary Commission, noticed in 1886 but for which he was unable to obtain a satisfactory reading. Under a

70 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 1375, fol. 248b.

magnifying glass, O’Kane was able to read the name ‘Abd al-Mu’min Khan and the date 1005 AH (1596–97) on Byron’s photograph.⁷¹ That inscription was lost in an earthquake of 1949 (see below).

The earliest textual information about ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s architectural patronage of the shrine, other than the inscription, is found in an early eighteenth-century work, *Tārīkh-i* (or *Tazkirah-i*) *Muqīm Khānī*. Describing the construction of a madrasah in Balkh by its ruler, Subhan Quli the son of Nazr Muhammad, who held the region from 1651–81, the author says that the madrasah stood “facing the main entryway of the *mazār* of Khwājah Abū Naṣr Pārsā which was built by ‘Abd al-Mu’min Khan” (emphasis added).⁷² The author, Muhammad Yusuf Munshi, who lived in Balkh, was himself able to refer to the 1596–97 inscription recently rediscovered by Professor O’Kane, for the work of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, which was already a century old by the time he wrote. The question remains: how much of the building does Muhammad Yusuf’s text refer to? Was he suggesting the entire mausoleum was to be attributed to ‘Abd al-Mu’min or simply the great iwan entryway?

Writing in India about thirty years after Muhammad Yusuf Munshi, Hajji Mir Muhammad Salim added his own perspective on ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s addition to the shrine:

Among the works created through the patronage of ‘Abd al-Mu’min that remain as memorials to him, are a *ṭāq* (the entry arch) and a *gunbad* (the dome) both sheathed with blue tile at the shrine of Hazrat Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa—may his grave be sanctified—the like of which travelers to every corner of the world have never witnessed before either in terms of monumentality or beauty.⁷³

Salim seems to have believed that ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s work encompassed the entire building and was a major reconstruction of the shrine with the mausoleum’s dome and *pishtāq* entryway both included in his rebuilding. Reconstructing existing buildings was very much in keeping with the kind of work more contemporary sources attribute to ‘Abd al-Mu’min at Balkh. One of the larger projects attributed to him, besides the Balkh mausoleum, was the addition of a large domed annex to the shrine of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib

71 O’Kane 2000, fig. 14 and pp. 132–33.

72 Muhammad Yusuf Munshi ms., fol. 126a and Muhammad Yusuf Munshi 1956, p. 184.

73 Salim ms., fol. 155a–b.

southeast of Balkh which doubled the size of the original fifteenth-century shrine building.⁷⁴ (See the next chapter.)

By the end of the sixteenth century, the textual evidence paints a fairly detailed picture of the building and the complex around it as well as the social position of the family associated with it. At the center of the complex was the mausoleum ascribed to the first Abu Nasr Parsa, recently reconstructed by ‘Abd al-Mu’min, with a massive new entryway. By now the aura of Abu Nasr Parsa had come to dominate completely the meaning that was attached to the building. Any associations with the name of Mir Mazid, his father, or brother for whom it seems to have originally been built had been forgotten, at least in the surviving literature from this period.

Although Salim, who as far as we know never visited Balkh, attributes to ‘Abd al-Mu’min a complete reconstruction of the building, certain questions still remain. Did he simply add the tile revetment and the massive entryway with the spiral quarter columns and two-storey angled rooms connecting it to the existing “encircling” madrasah or did he completely replace the Mir Mazid mausoleum with one of his own? O’Kane believed that Mir Mazid’s mausoleum may have been torn down and completely replaced.⁷⁵ He believes ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s plan, though never completed, was to create a four-iwan structure.

9 The Emerging Window

However, there may be some slight physical evidence that the original mausoleum was left in place and ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s plan was simply to expand it by adding iwans on four sides, only one of the iwans being completed. The evidence that some of the preexisting building survived and was incorporated into ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s reconstruction appears in the blank wall of the entry iwan. The recently restored area in 2014 gives a nearly but not quite accurate picture of the original 1597 plan. In 1596–97, the entire façade of the blank wall of the iwan was covered with tile for decorative, didactic, and, perhaps, political purposes (Fig. 2.4). The central space of the wall holds twenty-five identical square decorative panels arranged in five rows of five. Each panel is framed by the phrase “*al-ḥamdu lillāh*” (praise be to God). Surrounding the twenty-five inner panels is a monumental inscription of the first half of Sura 17, verse 84. At the base of the iwan are four large panels, which, judging from photographs,

74 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. no. 575, fol. 318b. O’Kane 1987, p. 256 and O’Kane 2000, pp. 130–47. For other architectural interventions of his see McChesney 2001, p. 107.

75 O’Kane 2000, p. 136.



FIGURE 2.4 AKTC mausoleum-mosque restoration with *suffah* of Parsa'i burials in the foreground

S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

are perhaps three feet high by four feet wide, and each contains the phrase “*al-mulk lillāh.*” (Sovereignty belongs to God.) Two are visible in figure 30; the other two are set at right angles on the flanking short walls.

Before the twenty first-century restoration work, a sequence of photographs shows that there was a window behind the blank wall of the iwan that the late sixteenth-century tilework completely covered. In the photographs of Niedermayer (1916) and Byron (1934) (Figs. 2.5 & 2.6) the tilework has gaps here and there due to the ravages of time but is unbroken by any window or other aperture in the wall. However, in a photograph taken in 1952 (Fig. 2.7) the erosion of more tile has brought a grilled window into view. By the 1960s the window is fully revealed (Fig. 2.8). It is clear that there was no provision for a window in ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s design of the tile work and the window was covered by the armature supporting the tile panels. This then puts somewhat in doubt the theory that ‘Abd al-Mu’min razed the Mir Mazid structure and built an entirely new mausoleum in 1597. It seems highly unlikely that a window would have been

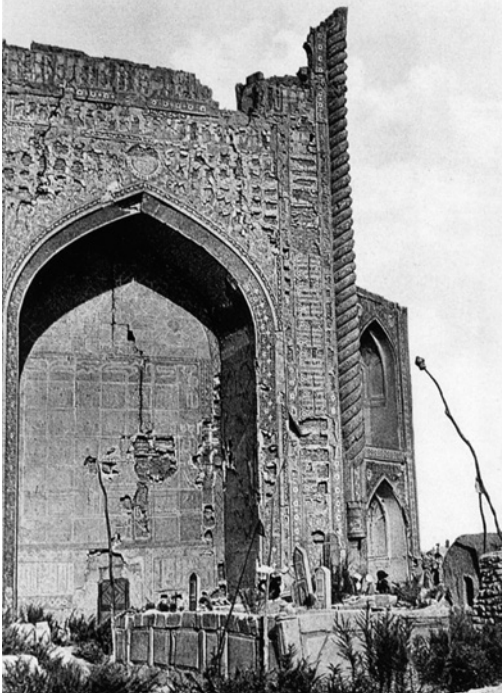


FIGURE 2.5
Early twentieth-century view from
the east of the mausoleum with
burial platform (*suffah*) in the
foreground, no window showing.
O. VON NIEDERMAYER, 1916

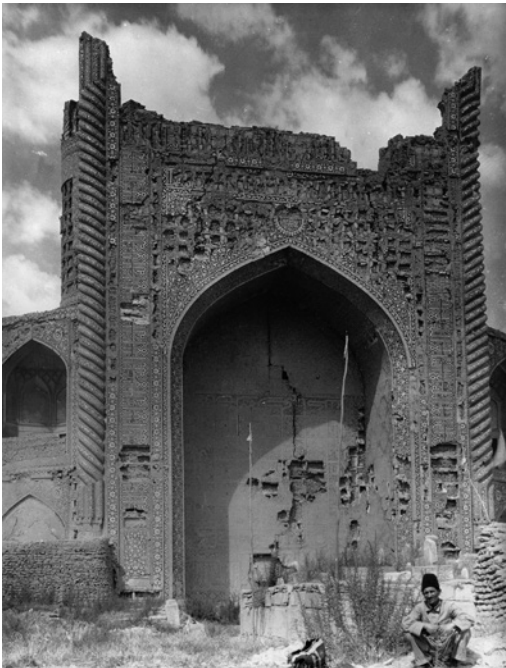


FIGURE 2.6
Mausoleum *pīshṭāq*; note
shield-shaped inscription above
the pointed arch and miscellaneous
structures to the left and right of
the burial platform, no window
showing.
R. BYRON, 1934



FIGURE 2.7
Grille window begins to show in
blind wall of the *pīshṭāq*
H. FRUMKIN, 1954



FIGURE 2.8
Grille window emerges from the
blind wall of the *pīshṭāq*
M. KONISHI, 1967

placed in new construction where the inscription was to go or a window would have been included and then covered by tile. Today, the restoration has reintroduced and expanded the window (see figure 2.4), despite the fact that it disrupts the symmetry of the tile and the epigraphic program and moreover was not evident on the earliest photographs of the building.⁷⁶

10 The Epigraphic Program: The Political Implications

Besides the question of the extent of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s reconstruction effort, it is worth drawing attention to the political meaning that ‘Abd al-Mu’min might have been trying to convey in his selection of inscriptions for the building, not to mention the font size of the ones meant to deliver the message. There is no way now to know whether he or his architect or even ‘Abd al-Wali Parsa chose the texts but, as patron, the Jani-Begid prince must at least have approved them.

As mentioned above, his father, ‘Abd Allah Khan, launched a campaign to retake Khurasan from the Safavids in 1587 with Herat captured in 1588. ‘Abd al-Mu’min played a major role in the campaign and was to play a leading role in subsequent years in the capture of Mashad, Nishapur, and Sabzawar. When the spoils came to be divided he asked his father to give him Herat and control of Khurasan. But his father refused and chose to bestow the region on Qul Baba Kukaltash, his favorite Uzbek amir. ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s disappointment and resentment at the choice would be reflected in his brutal treatment of Qul Baba a decade later, after his father died and he assumed the khanly throne.⁷⁷

That deep and bitter resentment may also have been expressed through the epigraphic program chosen for the Parsa shrine, completed just a year before ‘Abd al-Mu’min became khan at Bukhara. Originally, there were several bands of inscriptions on the building, most of which survive on the drum of the dome and on the iwan. It seems likely that the top of the entryway also contained an inscription but it has long since disappeared. We assume these are to be attributed to ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s original rebuild of the mausoleum and were not added later.

Two of the bands encircle the drum just below the decorative stalactite (*muqarnas*) transition zone to the dome itself (Figs. 2.9 & 2.10). Both were texts that are repeated as many as four times. The upper band has survived mostly intact

76 Although the work of the twenty-first-century archaeologists and architects who were involved in the most recent restoration work might have noticed any anomalies in the architecture that would have settled the question, nothing is noted in the final narrative report of their work.

77 Welsford 2013, pp. 39–40.



FIGURE 2.9 Epigraphic band on the drum of the dome as seen from the south
R. SCHINASI, 1970



FIGURE 2.10 Epigraphic band on the drum of the dome as seen from the north
R. SCHINASI, 1970

but the lower one has undergone so many restorations [the latest restorers estimated there have already been six collapses and reconstructions of the dome] yet what it was originally may still be determined. I am unaware that any attempt has been made to read and publish the inscriptions from early photographs and compare them with what has been restored over the years. So this should be considered a preliminary effort to identify and explain the possible implications not only of the inscriptions on the drum but those on the iwan entryway.

Robert Byron's photographs of the dome, though not the earliest, are the best for seeing details of it in its twentieth-century prerestoration state. When he and Eric Schroeder photographed the building in the 1930s half the dome was missing and the entire western quadrant of the dome as well as the top of it and its bands of epigraphy were severely damaged.⁷⁸ Byron's photograph shows that both bands on the drum still preserved the beginning of the inscriptions *qāla rasūl allāh ṣalla'llāh ...* ("The Messenger of God—on him be [peace] and prayers—said ...") This incipit indicates that what followed was an hadith, one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Another of Byron's photographs, showing more of the southwest part of the dome, reveals a few more bits of the damaged inscription. These early photographs show the two bands were inscribed in different calligraphic styles, the upper a square almost floriated Kufic, the lower a monumental *naskh* or *ṣulṣ* script (Fig. 2.11).

Twentieth-century restorations seem to have preserved the original hadith in the upper band fairly intact. Repeated at least four times around the drum is *qāla rasūl Allāh ṣalla'llāh 'alayhi wa sallim: al-dunyā sā'at^{un} fa'jal-hā tā'at^{an}* (The Messenger of God—peace be upon him—said: Life [the world] is but an hour, so do it [spend that hour] in obedience).⁷⁹ Without straining the speculative faculty too much, the hadith does seem to contain a sentiment that could well have been inspired by feelings of repressed anger. If it was 'Abd al-Mu'min who chose this hadith, or at least approved it, he might well have had in mind the fact that, despite his own wishes, he had to obey his father when it came to the assignment of Herat and Khurasan to Qul Baba Kukaltash in 1588.

The inscription in the lower band, perhaps originally repeated four times, has undergone so many restorations that it is now only partly intact. The original inscription was: *qāla rasūl Allāh ṣalla'llāh 'alayhi wa 'alā ālihi wa aṣḥābihi*

78 See the Eric Schroeder photograph in O'Kane 2000, p. 133.

79 I am grateful to Professor Bernard Haykel for identifying this hadith for me. He pointed out that the architect had substituted the synonymous "fa'f'al-hā" ("do it," i.e., obedience) for "fa'j'al-hā" (also meaning "do it"). Professor Bernard O'Kane also identified another instance where this hadith was used in an architectural epigraph, in an early fifteenth-century madrasah in Cairo. See Ibrahim and O'Kane 1988, especially p. 263. They label it a "spurious" hadith, that is, one not found in the canonical books of hadith.



FIGURE 2.11
Upper epigraphic band on the drum as seen
from the southeast
R. BYRON, 1934



FIGURE 2.12
View of the condition of the two epigraphic bands and
the dome as seen from the southeast
R. BYRON

wa sallim: man banā masjid^{an} lillāh banā Allāhu lahu bayt^{an} fi'l-jannat (The Messenger of God—prayers and peace of God be upon him and upon his Family and Companions—said: Whoever builds a mosque for God, God will build for him a house in Paradise).⁸⁰ One of Robert Byron's photographs of the southeast quadrant of the dome from 1934 shows ... *Allāh* then two indecipherable letters, then a gap in the masonry then *qāla rasūl Allāh* then broken masonry, then what looks like *'alā l-d* (Fig. 2.12) ... The twentieth-century restorations, including the 2013–14 work of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (Fig. 2.13), resulted in the following [backslashes are added to separate the components]:

80 This is a tentative reading and may be modified by more careful scrutiny of the photographic evidence.



FIGURE 2.13 Drum inscription viewed from the southeast
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

*qāla rasūl Allāh ṣalla'llāhu 'alayhi wa 'alā ālihi wa aṣḥābihi wa sal-
lim | man banā | [small window intrudes] | [qā]la rasūl Allāh
ṣalla'llāhu 'alayhi | baytan fi'l-jannah | ṣadaqa rasūl | qāla rasūl Allāh*
(The Messenger of God—peace and prayers of God be upon him, his
Family and his Companions—said: whoever builds [small window] /
the Messenger of God said: house in Paradise, the Messenger spoke the
truth / the Messenger of God—peace and prayers of God be upon him,
his Family [and his Companions]—said).

The hadith in the lower inscription also has a band of the *shahādah* (the profession of faith—*lā ilāhā illā'l-lāh muḥammad rasūl allāh*—there is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God) in a much smaller script repeated around the drum just above the large hadith inscription.

This hadith has fewer obvious political implications and may be simply a statement of the function of the building as well as an expression of the self-congratulatory sentiments of the patron. If we assume that the full hadith was what 'Abd al-Mu'min chose in the 1590s to decorate the drum of the dome then it seems reasonable to conclude that he either intended the mausoleum

to be a mosque, or it was already being used as a mosque, as seems more likely. It should be noted though that the one rather late source that links the building to ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, Muhammad Yusuf Munshi, calls it a *mazār* (shrine) rather than a *masjid* (mosque). It is never quite certain that when the word *mazār* is used whether it refers to the mausoleum, the *ṣuffah* in the forecourt, the whole site including the mausoleum and the funerary platform, or just Abu Nasr Parsā’s actual grave on the platform. But of all the possible uses, the structure’s service as a mosque seems to have been its most consistent function. Certainly by the mid-twentieth century foreigners had learned that the name of the building was “Green Mosque” or “Blue Mosque” and its use as a mosque continues to the present.⁸¹

Of equal interest to the inscriptions on the drum of the dome are the inscriptions on the *pīshṭāq* or entry iwan which might be read with much the same double-edged meaning as the upper inscription on the drum. The main inscription in very large square Kufic is part of Qur’an 17:84, “The Night Journey” (*Sūrat al-Isrā’*). In the Arberry translation this is rendered: “Say: Every man works according to his own manner” (*qul: kullu ya‘milu ‘alā shākilatīhi*) The remainder of the verse (not included in the inscription) reads: “but your Lord knows very well what man is best guided as to the way.”⁸² A modern English interpretation of the verse is “Say (O Muhammad—peace be upon him—to mankind) ‘Each one does according to *shākilatīhi* (i.e. his way or his religion or his intentions), and your Lord knows best of him whose path (religion) is right.’”⁸³

This verse might well have seemed to ‘Abd al-Mu‘min to strike just the right ambiguous note, being open to interpretation either as a reluctant acknowledgement that “father knows best” that the “way” of his father in this circumstance has to be accepted and “the Lord knows best” or it may be interpreted, again without straining credulity too much, as a rebuke to his father for not acknowledging that he, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, would have been the right person to receive charge of Khurasan and its capital, Herat. In case an observer should miss the very large inscription on the blank wall of the iwan, it was also repeated

81 McChesney 2002, p. 91. None of the sources mentioned in either Ball 1982, pp. 48–49 or Golombek and Wilbur 1982, p. 296 have published the inscriptions on the mausoleum. I am grateful to Jolyon Leslie for forwarding to me a screen shot from an Autocad file of the present state of the inscriptions. The Autocad file confirms what can be seen in a series of photographs taken by Shivan Mahendrarajah just before and just after the restorations. I am grateful to both for their invaluable help.

82 Arberry 1964, p. 283.

83 Al-Hilali and Khan 1996, pp. 526–27.

at the very top of the minarets set just behind the iwan screen. The message could then be seen from a long way away as one approached the building.

In an earlier work, I had raised what seemed possible scenarios, that the choice of texts might have either been the architect's ironic comment on 'Abd al-Mu'min's penchant for revetting old buildings with blue tile, or perhaps a subtle critique of raising the giant iwan to mask a simple Timurid-era mausoleum.⁸⁴ But these seem less appropriate in light of another fact. What is most intriguing about Sura 17, verse 84 and the form of its architectural presentation and something I had not been aware of when writing the earlier piece is that the inscription is virtually identical to the great panel inscription on the Gazurgah shrine of 'Abd Allah Ansari in Herat, not just in content but in format as well (Figs. 2.14 & 2.15). The text of Sura 17, verse 84 is repeated in a square frame square around a central panel made up of twenty-five small decorative panels (at Balkh five rows of five). At Herat, the five-by-five format is slightly different with the central small square (third row, third square) surrounded by rectangles equal to two of the squares so that in total there are only twenty-one panels instead of twenty-five.⁸⁵ At Balkh each of the twenty-five panels contains a frame of script around a central roundel with the words in square Kufic script *al-ḥamdu lillāh subḥān allāh ta'ālā* (Praise be to God; Glory be to God) the same as at Herat. The Herat panels contain as well the names of the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali) repeated in the roundels of the group of five squares and an invocation of praise to God in the four inner rectangles. Crowning the Herat panel is an epigraphic band in *naskh* script from the Qur'an showing the end of Surah 24, verse 40 and all of verse 41. The band appears to be the continuation of a cornice band of Qur'an that may have encompassed the building. In light of what was going on at the time the near-replication of the Gazurgah panel, which 'Abd al-Mu'min surely had seen for himself during his campaigns to Herat and Khurasan in the late 1580s, hardly seems coincidental. It is almost as if 'Abd al-Mu'min was determined that if he could not take possession of Herat he would at least have something to remind him of it and the slight he believed he had suffered at the hands of his father. His vindictiveness is an element of his character that emerges from the biographical record and ultimately led to his demise.

There is one other large inscription on the iwan, *al-mulk lillāh* (kingship belongs to God) (see figure 2.15). Though a common enough phrase, it gains

84 McChesney 2002, p. 94.

85 Modern images of the Herat panel located on the east iwan of the Gazurgah shrine are found in monochrome in Golombek 1969, Figure 110 and Golombek and Wilber 1988, Figure 174; in a full color image in Ball 2008, plate 127; and Lentz and Lowry 1989, p. 87.

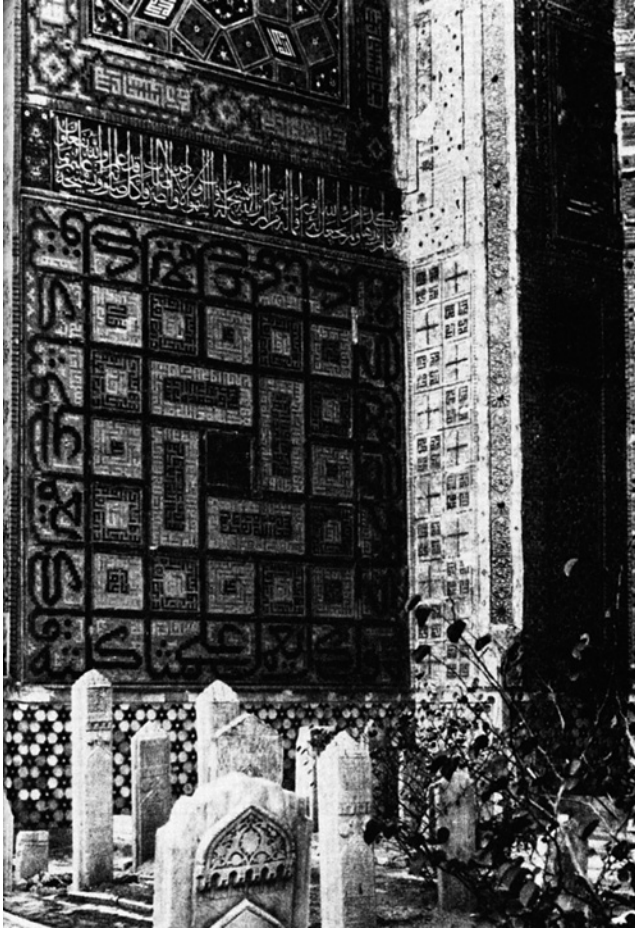


FIGURE 2.14 Inscriptions at Gazurgah, Herat
R. BYRON, 1934

a certain resonance in light of political circumstances. Thus, it would seem to lend itself to at least two interpretations: first as a subtle remonstrance (“remember it is God who has supreme authority, although you, ‘Abd Allah Khan, may think you do”) and, on the other hand, it may be taken as just a simple acknowledgement of where authority ultimately rests with no other implied meaning. Technically, the phrase is not Qur’anic but it calls to mind several Qur’anic verses emphasizing God’s supreme authority, and, in particular, that He bestows it on whomever He wishes.⁸⁶

86 See e.g. Qur’an 2:107, 2:247, 2:251, 3:26.



FIGURE 2.15 Epigraphic panel, blind wall of the *pīshṭāq*
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

Of course there is no way to know that it was ‘Abd al-Mu’min himself who chose the hadiths and the Qur’anic verse. But the monumental size of the inscriptions, which could have easily been read from a distance, and the possible way those inscriptions might have been understood first by the resentful prince himself and secondly by all those who knew his circumstances point to their being deliberately chosen and presented in large and easy-to-read format to express the grudge he bore his father and at the same time to articulate his filial duty to obey and accept, however reluctantly, paternal authority. The epigraphs on the Balkh mausoleum would not necessarily be seen as disrespectful, rebellious, or inflammatory. But they could be read as a sign of his

estrangement from his father and at the same time as a self-serving demonstration (for the moment) of filial submission.

11 Politics and the Shrine in the Seventeenth Century

The end of the sixteenth century was marked by major political changes in the region. The Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanid dynasty whose political highpoint was reached during the khanate of 'Abd Allah Khan, son of Iskandar Khan, collapsed when he died in February 1598. His son and successor, 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan, the renovator of the Parsa'i mausoleum, was assassinated in August that year. Subsequent struggles among minor Abu'l-Khayrid contenders led to the emergence, with strong amirid backing, of another neo-Chinggisid clan, the Tuqay-Timurid. The clan established itself first in Bukhara and Samarqand, then managed to take Balkh in 1601 from a Jani-Begid backed by the Safavid Shah 'Abbas I, and finally consolidated its hold over the region by turning back a Safavid army.⁸⁷

The result of Tuqay-Timurid dominion was the emergence within a decade of Bukhara and Balkh as the centers of a dual khanate under the brothers Imam Quli Khan and Nazr Muhammad Khan. As eldest the former was styled "Great Khan" and governed from Bukhara, by now the capital, having completely supplanted Timurid Samarqand. Nazr Muhammad held Balkh as an independent appanage although both men seemed to have enjoyed good relations. Half brothers, both were the sons of Din Muhammad Khan, Nazr Muhammad by an Imami Shi'i woman from Mashhad and Imam Quli by an Arlat woman.⁸⁸

The three years of political turmoil culminating in Tuqay-Timurid ascendancy had no apparent effect on the Parsa'i family. 'Abd al-Wali (Khwajah Jan Khwajah) had two sons that we know of, Dildar and Qasim. Dildar, the eldest, does not seem to have inherited the office of *shaykh al-Islam*, a conclusion supported by the absence of the title from the tombstone inscriptions found on the *ṣuffah* where his name appears. However, there are two decades between 1587 and 1606 about which we have no information as to the holder of the office. 'Abd al-Wali is last mentioned in 1587 and Qasim is first cited in 1606–7 as incumbent in the office.

The earliest reference to Qasim Khwajah as *shaykh al-Islām* has him welcoming Nazr Muhammad to Balkh in that year when the latter is sent there by

87 For a detailed treatment of this period see Welsford 2013.

88 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 286a.

his uncle the khan, Wali Muhammad.⁸⁹ Qasim Khwajah was thus presumably aware of the political maneuvering which soon led Nazr Muhammad, under the influence of his amirs, to join forces with his brother against their uncle.

Later, Qasim Khwajah also appears in the text record in a reprise of the role first played by his father, that is, helping organize the defenses of Balkh against outside attack. After the overthrow and death of Wali Muhammad in 1611, the latter's son, Rustam Muhammad Sultan, took up the gauntlet for the rights of the Walid line of the Tuqay-Timurids. Forced out of Tuqay-Timurid territory he accepted the protection of Shah 'Abbas I and, in the same year that his father was killed, he was given a force of Qizilbash troops which he led as far as the walls of Balkh. Nazr Muhammad had already left the city to help his brother, Imam Quli Khan, fend off Qazaq attacks on Samarqand and had put a Qunghrat amir in charge of Balkh. When Rustam Sultan arrived at Balkh, the force mustered to attack him included the Qunghrat amir and his men as well as "shaykhs, scholars, nobles and notables led by Qasim Khwajah the *shaykh al-Islām*; laborers (*kasabah*) and craftsmen (*arbāb-i ħiraf*) led by Pir Muhammad Arbab; and [the people of] the rest of the outlying districts and the nomadic populace accompanied by their leaders."⁹⁰ Rustam Sultan was stopped and withdrew with his Qizilbash backers. This was the second time in about thirty years that a citizen defense led by a Parsa'i shaykh and other local figures had rallied to defend Balkh against outside forces.

Mahmud b. Amir Wali tells us that Qasim Khwajah enjoyed close ties to Nazr Muhammad until his death in 1624–25, and was repeatedly consulted by the Tuqay-Timurid khan.⁹¹ Muhammad Amin Bukhari says that when construction began on Nazr Muhammad's own madrasah Qasim Khwajah was given the honor of laying the first brick.⁹²

12 The Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa *mazār* as Cultural Center

Nazr Muhammad Khan's madrasah, built sometime around 1612, indicates another role played by the Parsa shrine and its administrators, the ability to attract cultural investment in the shrine district, which by the seventeenth

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., fol. 191a.

91 Ibid., fol. 286b.

92 Muhammad Amin Bukhari ms., fol. 95b. For details on the madrasah which stood opposite the 'Abd Allah Khan Madrasah and whose entry iwan was designed to tower over the entry of the latter "by several *zar*'s" see Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 214a–b.

century was named after the shrine and called “Chaqaṛ-i Khwajah Parsā.”⁹³ Stand-alone madrasahs or as components of a complex of mausoleum, mosque, khanaqah, and cemetery or some combination of those elements were a favored form of patronage because they typically were founded with an endowment to support their operations and ensure their longevity. All this meant the linking of income-producing properties to the institutions associated with a shrine. These interlocking interests created natural constituencies whose well-being was closely tied to the welfare of the endowed institution. In addition a certain level of administrative experience was associated with the cultural center that would have encouraged further development.

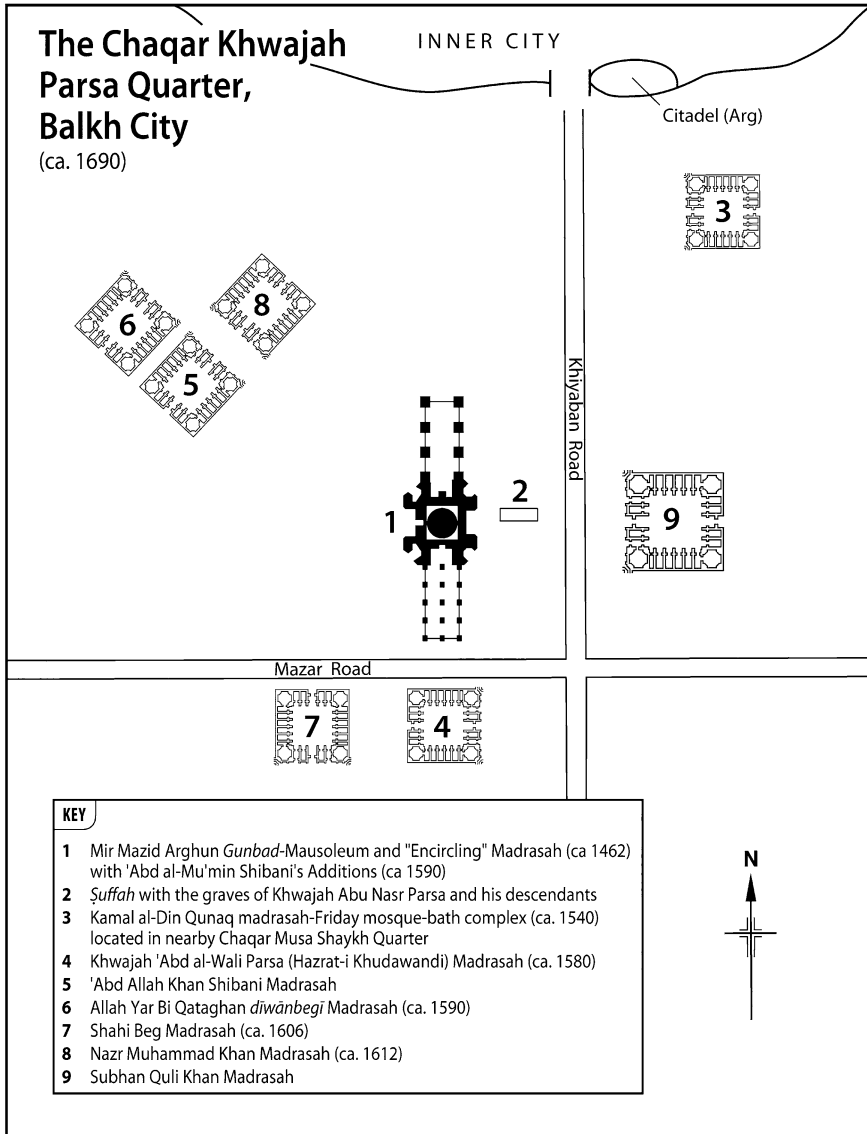
Already the madrasahs built near the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsā ensemble included the madrasah built by ‘Abd al-Walī Parsā, the “Hazrat-i Khudawandī;” the nearby complex of madrasah, mosque, and bath built by the amir Kamal al-Dīn Qunaq before 1540 and located in Chaqaṛ Musa Shaykh just north of Chaqaṛ Khwajah Parsā; ‘Abd Allāh Khan’s madrasah built before 1584; and Nazr Muḥammad’s own madrasah built exactly opposite and slightly larger than ‘Abd Allāh Khan’s, both latter madrasahs situated in the Chaqaṛ Khwajah Parsā quarter. Other madrasahs built in the period 1584–1684 and either in Chaqaṛ Khwajah Parsā or adjacent to it were the Allahyar Bī Qataghan Madrasah and the Shahī Beg Kukaltash Madrasah. Allahyar Bī was one of Nazr Muḥammad’s leading amirs. Shahī Beg (or Shah Beg) had been sent by Nazr Muḥammad’s uncle, Walī Muḥammad Khan (r. 1605–1612), to accompany Nazr Muḥammad when he was first sent to Balkh and to serve as his *atāliq*, a kind of “father-figure” meant to control or at least monitor a prince’s activities on behalf of the ruler. As Walī Muḥammad’s representative in Balkh, Shahī Beg proved so unpopular with amirs loyal to Nazr Muḥammad that he was assassinated in or around 1609–10.⁹⁴ However, in those four years he managed to build and endow a madrasah. It may not have been particularly well-endowed and did not apparently exist for very long. We only know of it from a reference to someone who taught there before 1635.⁹⁵ Its location is unknown but if Shahī Beg followed what others had done he would have built his madrasah in the outer city and somewhere in the vicinity of the Abu Nasr Parsā shrine.

Another madrasah of the early seventeenth century was built by Allāh Yar Bī, a Qataghan amir, who held the title *dīwān begī*. His madrasah was built next to ‘Abd Allāh Khan’s sometime before 1616 and its endowment reportedly

93 On the meaning of *chaqaṛ* see above, p. 62 and note.

94 On his madrasah see Mahmud b. Amir Walī ms. 575, fol. 365b and *ibid.*, fol. 182b for the account of his murder.

95 *Ibid.*, fol. 365b.



PLAN 3 The Chaqar Khwajah Parsa Quarter, Balkh City (ca 1690)

supported two professors, a *khaṭīb*, and several Qur'an memorizers/reciters.⁹⁶ Later, as we will see in the next chapter, among other things in the Balkh region the great earthquake of 1956 destroyed the "Madrasah-i Diwanbegi," which may well have been Allah Yar Bi's.

96 McChesney 2001, pp. 110–11.

Finally, the last of the great madrasahs, a very small part of which still remains and served as a focal point for the 2011–14 reconstruction of the site, was one built by Subhan Quli Khan, construction on which was probably complete no later than 1686.⁹⁷ The madrasah was built to face ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s grand entryway to the Parsa mausoleum. Ground was broken on April 26, 1660 in the presence of “great shaykhs and scholars” although no Parsa’i is mentioned.⁹⁸ It was an enormous madrasah of some 150 rooms on two floors. This was the last of the known madrasah projects for the area around Abu Nasr’s shrine.

Of these madrasahs we have endowment deeds for the Kamal al-Din Qunaq Madrasah dated to 1540 and one for the Subhan Quli Khan Madrasah dated to 1694. The latter’s endowment provided funding for a staff of twenty-four including the chief trustee (*mutawallī*), four professors (*mudarrises*), a librarian (*kitābdār*), thirteen Qur’an reciters (*huffāz*) eight of whom were part-time, an imam, a muezzin, a barber, and two custodians. It also included provisions for up to 298 students (two to each of the 149 student rooms).⁹⁹ Otherwise we have only general references to the endowments established by the builders of the other madrasahs except in the case of Nazr Muhammad. His had a large endowment, though no deed has survived, including a library of 2,000 volumes and salaries for a librarian, an administrator (*mutawallī*), and three professors. For his madrasah we also know the names of the architects and builders—Mir Qasim, Ustad Hajji, and Ustad Nur Muhammad,¹⁰⁰ the date work began on it—Sha‘ban 1021/September–October 1612,¹⁰¹ its architectural components in general terms—arches and cloisters (*tāqāt wa riwāqāt*), its plan (four corner lecture rooms, a mosque [probably the southwest corner room where the mihrab would have been], and cells, i.e. rooms for students) and that it had lapis lazuli decoration, and was covered with ceramic tile (*kāshī kārī*).¹⁰²

With completion of construction of Subhan Quli Khan’s madrasah by 1686 the great madrasah-building era that began with Kamal al-Din Qunaq’s madrasah-mosque complex before 1540, centered around or near the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine, came to an end. After that no records of any major public works in Balkh City have yet come to light.

It should be reiterated that some madrasahs were identified at different times as mosques. Mosque and madrasah were not exclusive categories. It was

97 McChesney 2001, p. 111.

98 Salim ms., fol. 269b.

99 McChesney 1991, pp. 133–35. On the dating of the endowment charter for the Subhan Quli Khan Madrasah see Davydov 1960, p. 83.

100 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 214a–b.

101 Muhammad Amin Bukhari ms., fol. 95b.

102 McChesney 2000, p. 110.

not uncommon for any large building with covered open space to be used as a congregational mosque, or for madrasahs like the mid-seventeenth-century madrasah of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Khan in Bukhara or Nazr Muhammad Khan’s in Balkh to have a large room used as a mosque. The Abu Nasr shrine mausoleum itself with its large open interior and its “encircling madrasah” thus probably also served as a mosque from its earliest days. It seems to have been functioning this way when ‘Abd al-Mu‘min selected the epigraphic program for it in the 1590s and, as noted above, has continued to serve as a mosque down to the present.

Until at least the end of the seventeenth century, the Abu Nasr Parsa complex was the cultural focal point of the city and of a prosperous residential and madrasah district with markets lining the main avenue (*khiyābān*) on which it stood. Madrasah, mosque, and the Parsa commemorative burial platform all generated traffic and attracted commercial activity. Some indirect confirmation of this phenomenon may be seen in photographs of the Rīgistan in Samarqand during the late nineteenth century that dramatically show the interaction of culture and commerce.¹⁰³ In the case of the Subhan Quli Khan madrasah in Balkh we know the land in front of it along the Khiyaban, the main north-south route through the city, was reserved by the endowment deed as being “at the disposal of the madrasah’s administrator as a place where people assemble and a market is held.”¹⁰⁴ Although there is no record, we can assume that the market extended along both sides of the broad avenue (some 200 yards wide) that ran from the Naw Bahar Gate in the outer wall of the city to the southern gate of the inner city, and thus directly in front of the Abu Nasr Parsa complex.

Besides being an economic stimulus, the shrine also served as a site for weekly gatherings. Muhammad Tahir Balkhi, writing in the 1640s, tells us that “every Thursday afternoon, following the noon prayer, mystics (*‘arifān*), scholars (*fāzilān*), Sufis (*sālikān*), ulema, poets, and others gather on those auspicious grounds to perform *ziyārat*.”¹⁰⁵ His mentioning scholars and poets indicates other activities held on Thursday afternoons, the kinds of poetry competitions and scholarly debates that are well-attested at the Char Bakr shrine outside Bukhara and we assume were common at Balkh as well. In good weather, these sessions could be held anywhere on the more than seven acres of grounds of the shrine but in inclement weather the mausoleum was a large sheltered space for such gatherings.

103 Naumkin 1992, pls. 68, 70, 71, 73, and 79.

104 McChesney 2001, p. 111.

105 Muhammad Tahir Balkhi ms., fol. 18a.

For women, too, shrines offered a sanctuary outside the home. In light of the well-known importance today of shrines to women as a place where they may gather to socialize and, if need be, to issue a personal appeal for divine aid in resolving individual problems such as infertility, abuse from spouses or in-laws, and their children's health, it is not unreasonable to think that in earlier times women might have had their day of the week in which the shrine would be off-limits to men.

From the standpoint of politics, the thirty-year period from the ouster of the Tuqay-Timurid Wali Muhammad Khan by his nephews, Imam Quli and Nazr Muhammad in 1611, until Imam Quli's voluntary abdication as grand khan at Bukhara was a fairly calm one. There is little reason to think that the Parsā'i family, as holders of the office of *shaykh al-Islām*, did not enjoy the same prestige and status as they had during the preceding two centuries. In 1641 however, Imam Quli, afflicted by failing eyesight, elected to step down and set off on the pilgrimage to Mecca. For the next ten years, a new political equilibrium had to be achieved first with Nazr Muhammad as khan at Bukhara, an unsuccessful experiment in the eyes of the king-making Uzbek amirs, and then with his son, 'Abd al-'Aziz as khan and Nazr Muhammad back at Balkh but under pressure to abdicate from the throne there by another son, Subhan Quli.

Into this situation the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan sent an army in 1646 to recapture his Timurid patrimony and gain control of the Gur-i Mir, the burial place of his Mughal ancestors Miranshah and Timur. The invaders, led by Shah Jahan's sons, Murad Bakhsh and Awrangzib, only managed to capture Balkh and hold it, at considerable cost, for about a year (1646–47), briefly driving Nazr Muhammad off the throne before having to abandon all plans for retaking the lands north of the Hindu Kush, let alone those of Transoxiana.¹⁰⁶ Later, after the Mughal forces retreated back across the Hindu Kush to Kabul and Subhan Quli did succeed in gaining full control of Balkh from his father and his nephew Qasim Muhammad, he and his brother, 'Abd al-'Aziz at Bukhara, replicated the pattern of rule established by their father and uncle, with Balkh and Bukhara more or less equal political entities and governed independently. Their fraternal relations, however, were far less amicable than those of their father and uncle.

As for the Parsā'i family, Qasim Khwajah died in 1624 and his son-in-law and nephew, Padshah Khwajah, succeeded him as *shaykh al-Islām* a decade and a half before the political crisis erupted. Padshah Khwajah was a son of Muhammad Wali better known as Dildar Khwajah who, as far as we know, had never been *shaykh al-Islām*. and it seems likely therefore that Qasim Khwajah,

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the Mughal occupation see Foltz 1996.

Dildar's brother, had no eligible male children to succeed him. On the other hand, Dildar Khwajah was a person of some consequence. According to Mutribi, a poet named Ma'sumi Bukhari, who worked as a scribe in one of the markets of Bukhara, had compiled a collections of his own verses, "the preface (*dibāchah*) of which was an acrostic (*muwashshah*)¹⁰⁷ based on the name of Dildar Khwajah, son of 'Abd al-Wali Khwajah Parsa."¹⁰⁸ Dildar Khwajah could well have been the actual patron to whom Ma'sumi was dedicating the diwan and thus a significant figure.

Like his uncle and grandfather before him, Padshah Khwajah played a prominent part in khanate politics. In 1632, while Nazr Muhammad still ruled Balkh, Padshah Khwajah was part of a force under 'Abd al-'Aziz, Nazr Muhammad's eldest son, sent to Maymanah and Andkhud to put a stop to Qizilbash violations of the agreement which Nazr Muhammad and the late Shah 'Abbas I (d. 1629) had reached over the borders of the two kingdoms.¹⁰⁹ Three years later he was a member of a delegation sent from Balkh to chastise 'Abd al-'Aziz for an unauthorized incursion into Safavid territory and to escort him back to Balkh to face his father's wrath.¹¹⁰ The last reference to Padshah Khwajah is in conjunction with Grand Khan Imam Quli Khan's ceremonial trip to Balkh in 1639, two years before his abdication. During his visit, Mahmud b. Amir Wali tells us the Bukharan khan visited the homes of three dignitaries, two of them Uzbek military leaders and the other Padshah Khwajah, "where he distributed gifts to the attendants of the *shaykh al-Islām*."¹¹¹

Thanks to Mutribi we have a rather winning portrait of Padshah Khwajah. Mutribi, on his way to India in 1626 in hopes of a meeting with Emperor Jahangir, stopped in Balkh where he says he had the honor of meeting Padshah Khwajah and found him:

a man of placid countenance and open and cheerful in his dealings. He befriends and is kind to all his peers and we find him to surpass his father [Muhammad Wali aka Dildar Khwajah] in terms of his good qualities. Outwardly, he is generous and cultivates the path of affection with people of virtue (*ahl-i faẓl*). I was honored to make his acquaintance (kiss his hand) in Balkh and he was very attentive to me. It was as if he had known me for years and he asked me all about myself.¹¹²

107 This, according to Browne 1964, vol. 2, pp. 44–45.

108 Mutribi *Nuskah*, p. 162.

109 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 207b.

110 Ibid., fol. 226b.

111 Ibid., fol. 269b.

112 Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 234–35.

During this period, an incident occurred which is evidence of the continuing line of the Parsa'is in Bukhara as well as Balkh and also a possible sign that the Balkh branch had now emerged as the more powerful and influential of the two. The incident involves a man called "Mawlana Khwajah Muhammad Parsa'i" who was born in Bukhara but came to Balkh sometime in the 1620s and was appointed to a stipendiary position (*furjah*) at an unnamed madrasah. For reasons unclear, he was dismissed from that post and, at the time the record was written down, was "content with being a *shaykh* at the Abū Naṣr Pārsā *mazār*."¹¹³ It is difficult to know what to make of this. Here being a "*shaykh* at the Abū Naṣr Pārsā *mazār*" seemingly did not mean an administrative position and may simply have meant the right to a daily living allowance and lodging. For this Parsa'i family member at least, Balkh apparently offered a better opportunity than was available at any one of the institutions in Bukhara associated with the Parsa name.

Padshah Khwajah was succeeded by his son, a namesake of Padshah Khwajah's grandfather, 'Abd al-Wali. The succession occurred sometime between 1639–40 and 1646. In the latter year, which marked the invasion and brief occupation of Balkh by Mughal forces, 'Abd al-Wali II, who was also known as "Hazrat-i Ishan," was reportedly forcibly taken by Awrangzib to his headquarters.¹¹⁴ We are told nothing of what transpired and Mughal sources provide no information about the incident. It is probably safe to assume that the Mughal leaders wanted to win over the civic notables or at least get a sense of where they stood and Padshah Khwajah would have been a prime target.

After the occupation ended with the withdrawal of Awrangzib and the Mughal army in late autumn 1647, one of Nazr Muhammad's sons, Subhan Quli, eventually gained full control of Balkh and held it for the next three decades until 1681, during which he began work on his great madrasah opposite the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine. 'Abd al-Wali II had clearly not compromised himself during the Mughal occupation. He was admitted to the new appanage khan's inner circle, and married one of Subhan Quli's sisters, Shamsah Begum, by whom he had a son, Salih Khwajah.

In 1696, the story of the family takes a decidedly new turn, one that may account for the difficulty in finding information for the line in Balkh after 1700.

¹¹³ Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 367a.

¹¹⁴ Salim ms., fol. 253a. In McChesney 2001 I dated 'Abd al-Wali II as fl. 1680. Since finding Khalil 1944 I would now revise that and provide Khwajah 'Abd al-Wali II with an obituary date of 1115/1703–04. In all likelihood, Salih Khwajah was never *shaykh al-Islām* as I had indicated, p. 113. In rechecking the sources cited there was no such specific mention and I must have inferred it from the fact that he was mentioned as the son of the second 'Abd al-Wali.

The shrine complex appears to have continued to be managed by a line with the Parsa'i gentilic but it may have been a different line of the family altogether. The fate of the Abu Nasrid Parsa'is may have hinged on what happened in 1696.

As I have proposed elsewhere, the end of the seventeenth century saw greater Uzbek tribal identification with particular regions of the Tuqay-Timurid state and the gradual erosion of the authority of the neo-Chinggisid Tuqay-Timurid khanate.¹¹⁵ For the various Uzbek tribal groupings—Durman, Ming, Qataghan, Manghit, etc.—the presence of a neo-Chinggisid figure to legitimize their territorial claims remained a kind of constitutional requirement. In many ways, this period is a reprise of the time preceding the rise of Timur in the second half of the fourteenth century in terms of the imbalance in political power between those who held it but could not fully exercise it [the amirs] and those who lacked it but were its only legitimate wielders [the neo-Chinggisid khans and princes]. In this political calculus, Balkh had come to be seen as the rightful seat of the heir-apparent (*walī-‘ahd*, *qa‘l-khān*, or *tūrah*). Whoever was installed at Balkh was understood to have a presumptive claim to the khanate and the Uzbek amirs affiliated with him in an advantageous position to claim control of sub-appanages.

In 1681, when Subhan Quli succeeded his brother ‘Abd al-‘Aziz as paramount khan and moved to the capital, Bukhara, his sister Shamsah Begum, wife of the *shaykh al-Islam* ‘Abd al-Wali (II), stayed behind in Balkh to manage her household in her palace in Chaqar Khwajah Parsa. She was clearly a forceful woman, for her household is described as being one of the city's centers of political power. When Subhan Quli wished to eliminate a rebellious twenty-six year old son, Abu'l-Mansur Sultan, at least one source has him call on his sister to help him get rid of the prince.¹¹⁶

Shamsah Begum's children had no claim to neo-Chinggisid authority in the eyes of the king-making amirs but because of her personal authority and the exigencies of the time, the combination of Parsa'i and cognate Chinggisid ancestry represented by her son, Salih Khwajah, must have had some appeal, at least momentarily, for the Uzbek amirs. In opposition to the wishes of Grand Khan Subhan Quli, who apparently hoped to unite Balkh and Bukhara under his khanate and reduce the status that Balkh had enjoyed since the days of his father and uncle, the leading Balkh amir, a Qataghan, is reported to have simply installed Salih Khwajah Parsa'i as the Chinggisid heir-apparent in 1696. His tenure as heir-apparent, such as it was, lasted only a year, until Subhan Quli acceded to the wishes of the amirs and appointed an authentic agnate

115 McChesney 1991, chapter seven.

116 Salim ms. fols. 299b–300a.

Chinggisid, his own grandson, Muhammad Muqim. When that happened, the same amir who had installed Salih Khwajah sent him into exile in India.¹¹⁷

This did not mean the end of a Parsa'i presence and administration of the shrine. We simply have less evidence in the eighteenth century, due to the end of the neo-Chinggisid mandate thanks to the conquest and occupation of the region first by the Iranian warlord Nadir Shah Afshar in the late 1730s and then by the army of the Durrani Afghan chieftain, Ahmad Shah, following in Nadir Shah's footsteps in the 1750s. The century also witnessed a dramatic increase in the Turkification of the landscape around Balkh as Qalmaq and Qipchaq Turks with their flocks and herds appear more frequently in the written record adding pastoralist pressures on the agricultural land sustaining the Uzbek Turks and the Persophone ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

The apparent lack of local sources for Balkh, except those produced under Iranian or Afghan patronage, leaves us with a sense of the region around Balkh becoming somewhat peripheral to world history. The sort of wealth and power that had produced great architectural patronage like the various madrasah projects or the great palace complex in Balkh built by Nazr Muhammad Khan¹¹⁸ signaled diminished economic conditions for the entire region including present-day Afghanistan, eastern Iran, Transoxiana, and northern India.

After the relative abundance of material on Abu Nasr Parsa's shrine for the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, with the Parsa family playing a major and highly visible role in the social and political life of the region, the silence of the eighteenth-century sources on the shrine comes as something of a surprise. Some early eighteenth-century narratives do speak of the shrine, but only regarding events prior to 1696. Yet the period between 1696 and 1747 has no shortage of memoirs and political narratives covering the last years of the Chinggisid house of the Tuqay-Timurids, the subjugation of the region by Nadir Shah Afshar, claimant to the Chinggisid and Timurid mantle of world-conqueror, and the rise of a new imperial power, the Durrani Afghans, under a former general of Nadir Shah's, Ahmad Khan. Nevertheless, one is hard-pressed to find any information at all about the Parsa'i shrine complex not to mention information on the family that had managed it for two and a half centuries.

Evidence that the family did not in fact disappear may be found in the simple survival of the shrine complex while all around it other madrasahs were vanishing completely as their resources were either plundered or rising costs

117 See McChesney 1991, pp. 158–59 for more details of this episode. The accounts vary widely in terms of information provided and emphasis.

118 See McChesney 2009.

and stagnant revenues meant maintenance fell by the wayside. It is uncertain when all the other great structures of the Parsa district succumbed to the ravages of wind and weather or whether they were dismantled for use elsewhere as is mentioned in the case of Subhan Quli's madrasah (see below), but the survival of the shrine complex is one piece of evidence for the continuance of the Parsa'i family. Other evidence attesting to the survival of the family through the eighteenth century is the emergence in the nineteenth century of a lineage calling itself "Gawhari-Parsa'i,"¹¹⁹ whose link to the last documented *shaykh al-Islām*, Khwajah 'Abd al-Wali II, is unknown.

In part, the disappearance of the Abu Nasrid Parsa'is from the written record may have been due to changing political circumstances, and in part to a developing global economy which rendered the region increasingly marginal, thus reducing the surplus resources available to elites like the Parsa'is and their patrons. We have no way of assessing things at this point but the kind of problems Samarqand faced in the 1680s from Khwarazmian raiding may also have played a role in the Balkh region. Certainly the place of the Parsa'i family in local politics would have been affected in some way by the events of the 1690s. At that time, as power in the khanate was becoming more and more concentrated in the hands of the Uzbek amirs and the role of the Chinggisid rulers was becoming increasingly nominal and symbolic (again a process perhaps stimulated by economic conditions), the Parsa'i family became directly involved in the struggles waged by the Uzbek amirs to promote their own candidates for the khanly throne.

It is not as if there is no documentation of events at Balkh in the decades leading up to Nadir Shah's conquest of the region. It is possible to trace the political leaders of Balkh and their amirid supporters through the legal confirmations added to the *waqf* charter of the 'Alid shrine at Mazar-i Sharif covering the period 1709–1738 as well as through some later Bukharan chronicles.¹²⁰ With the gradual decline of the power of the Chinggisid house and the entrenching of these Uzbek warbands in certain regions, Balkh became less the center of what is now northern Afghanistan (the region between the Hindu Kush—Kuh-i Baba—Paropamisus Range in the south and the Oxus River in the north) and more a contested region. Political power was divided among several, often warring, centers, the main ones being Qunduz under the Qataghan Uzbeks in the eastern part of the former Balkh appanage; Maymanah, in the western

119 See Lee 1996, Appendix IV, p. vii.

120 See McChesney 1991, chaps. seven and eight. In addition, for a thorough exposition of the political events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in northern Afghanistan, see Lee 1996.

part, under the Ming Uzbeks; and Bukhara under the Manghit Uzbeks to the north. For the better part of a century and a half these three clan organizations remained in control of their respective regions and were rivals for what lay between them, notably Balkh itself and the nearby and growing shrine center of Mazar-i Sharif. As the power of these Uzbek organizations waxed and waned there were opportunities for other groups and individuals with executive experience to emerge dominant. I have dealt elsewhere with the emergence of the chief administrator of the 'Alid shrine at Mazar-i Sharif as a local political force and will return to that subject in the next chapter. The scant evidence suggests that the manager of the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine also came to face the same challenges and enjoy the same opportunities to take and exercise local power.

The Iranian forces of Nadir Shah Afshar first invaded the area in 1737 and occupied Balkh for ten years. I have found no information on the effect this might have had on the shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa. Nor is there information yet on how the Iranian withdrawal in October 1747 and the resurgence of the Ming and Qataghan rivalry interspersed with periodic attempts by the new Afghan empire to project its power northwards had an impact on the Parsa'i shrine and its administration. A campaign in 1751 first established an Afghan claim to the region around Balkh. The Manghit government in Bukhara in turn asserted that Bukhara had historic rights to the region south of the Oxus River. Then in 1768, according to one probably apocryphal story, a direct confrontation between Afghan and Bukharan forces led to the establishment of the Oxus River as a boundary between the two jurisdictions, an agreement, however, if such there was, that had to be continually reasserted by the Afghan side.¹²¹

It is only in the early nineteenth century with the emergence of a figure styled Ishan Sayyid Naqib (or "Ishan Naqib," or "Ishan Sayyid Parsa Khwajah Naqib" as named by Sayyid Muhyi al-Din Gawhari [Parsa'i], an informant cited by Jonathan Lee¹²²) that the Parsa'i family returns to the historical record. Ishan Naqib was appointed governor of Balkh in 1817 by the Manghit amir of Bukhara in one of the moments when Bukhara had managed to reclaim some control of the region south of the Oxus. Lee's informant assured him that Ishan Naqib was a member of a "Gawhari" line of Parsa'is whose center was "Qasan near Qarshi."¹²³ Yet his informant, in constructing a genealogy, begins it with an apparently fictitious founder named Mir Haydar Qutb al-Din. This Mir Haydar

121 See Noelle 1997, pp. 71–72. See also chapter four below.

122 Lee 1996, p. 119; *ibid.*, Appendix 4, vii provides a genealogy of the Gawhari *ishāns* as reported by Sayyid Muhyi al-Din in 1993. See also Noelle 1997, pp. 78–79 for a synopsis of the struggle for control of Balkh between 1817 and 1849.

123 Lee 1996, p. 119.

married the eponymous “Gawhar, a daughter of Timur Lang” a daughter who was never recorded, at least under that name, in the *Mu‘izz al-ansāb*, the official Timurid genealogical record, or in early Timurid sources.¹²⁴ Perhaps the informant was thinking of Timur’s famous daughter-in-law, Gawhar Shad, the wife of Shah Rukh. Whatever the case, Lee’s informant provides no credible link between the Timurid-era founder and the early nineteenth-century figure, Ishan Naqib, from whom he traces his descent.

Nonetheless, the genealogical link to Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa continues to be asserted and recognized, however constructed. For about twenty years Ishan Naqib ruled Balkh as an independent principality like those of Mazar-i Sharif, Qunduz, and Maymanah in the same period. Although he was deposed by the Bukharan amir in 1840 his son Ishan Uraq retrieved some of his father’s power and remained a force in the city at least until the decisive absorption of the region in 1849 by the Afghan state centered in Kabul.¹²⁵

Even if unseated as the political authorities of Balkh, the Parsa’s clearly continued to enjoy social preeminence and along with this, one is probably safe to assume, wealth in land and commercial property connected with the family’s management of the shrine as well as the collection of shrine income, whatever form it took. We can be fairly certain of this because of what took place in the autumn of 1907.

At that time, the Afghan amir, Habib Allah Khan (r. 1901–19), was then nearing the end of a tour of the country that he had begun in early May. His itinerary took him from Kabul south to Ghazni and Qandahar, then west to Farah and Herat and north to Maymanah, Balkh, and Mazar-i Sharif, and then back to Kabul. On September 22nd he reached Balkh, performed the rites of *ziyārat* at the shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa and then “awarded a permanent annual pension of 100 rupees cash and two *kharwārs* by Kabul weight of wheat to Ishan Sa‘id Nazar Khwajah, a descendant of the khwajah [Abu Nasr Parsa], and a [one-time] gift of 100 rupees cash to members, young and old, male and female, of his lineage.”¹²⁶ Thus, it is quite clear that the family’s position, or at least the “Gawharid” branch of the family, was still firmly established in Balkh and its members continued to enjoy the fruits of their connection to the shrine into the twentieth century.

124 See Woods 1990.

125 McChesney 1991, p. 233. Noelle 1997, p. 79 gives the obituary as 1838. Ferrier 1857, p. 208, who traveled through Balkh in 1845 identifies its ruler as “Ishan Suddour” probably to be identified as the brother of Ishan Uraq.

126 Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, vol. 4, p. 1159.

Even if it cannot be proven yet that these early twentieth-century Parsa'is were directly linked to the line that managed the shrine until at least the end of the seventeenth century, the fact that the name Parsa survived the turbulence of the late eighteenth–early nineteenth-century contest between Bukhara and Kabul for control of the region certainly encourages the idea that the shrine and the family retained an unbroken connection down through the years even if unremarked by the keepers of official records, or at least of those records that have survived.

13 Photography and the Shrine

As mentioned earlier, photography, a new technology for representing the mausoleum/mosque and establishing its perceptible condition at a specific time, begins in Balkh in the summer of 1886 with the photographs taken by Charles Ludorf Griesbach of the Afghan Boundary Commission. Photography reveals clues to the meaning of the Abu Nasr Parsa sacred site otherwise unobtainable from texts, including the epigraphic program. The photographic record from 1886 onward shows the mausoleum building specifically, and the site generally, in a gradual, occasionally sudden but in any event constant, state of change, change produced by natural events (freeze-thaw cycles and seismic activity) and by man-made change produced by new intentions for the site. The specific photographic record available to this writer dates to 1886, 1916, 1925, 1934, 1943, 1952, 1962, and 1967. Then from the 1970s to the present the shrine has been photographed countless times.

Elsewhere I have analyzed the process of physical change mainly in terms of the mausoleum/mosque itself, not the entire site.¹²⁷ In what follows the focus will be on the funerary aspect of the site and on what the photographs show of people at the site, how the living are seen to make use of it, to the limited extent that those uses can be inferred from the images.

14 The Parsa'i Memorial *şuffah*

The sacred focal point of the site for the public has been the funerary platform containing the remains of Abu Nasr Parsa (d. 865/1460–61) and several of his descendants. The number of *şuffah* burials as indicated by tombstones has been reported variously over time. When Muhammad Ibrahim Khalil

¹²⁷ McChesney 2002, pp. 93–104.

published his report on the *şuffah* in 1944 there were eleven tombstones.¹²⁸ In 1974, Akhror Mukhtarovich Mukhtarov counted twelve marble tombstones but he believed they had only recently been assembled from around the city. He thought that when the site was visited in 1922 by another Soviet scholar, M.G. Vecheslov, there was only one tomb in front of the mausoleum.¹²⁹ But this could not have been correct. The photo of the funerary platform by Oskar von Niedermayer in 1916 (see figure 2.6) plainly shows three standing tombstones on the *şuffah* and the rubble of several fallen stones between them. Mukhtarov states that only two stones that he himself saw bore obituary dates, 1115/1703–4 and 1332/1913–14 and cites local residents as claiming that Muhammad Gul Khan [Mohmand], a Pashtun supremacist assigned as special envoy (*raʿīs-i tanzīmīyah*) to oversee the development of “New Balkh” (see below), had deliberately effaced all the other epigraphs.¹³⁰ After the latest restoration of the platform by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, there are two separate but attached *şuffahs*, one lower than the other (Fig. 2.16). A recent photograph taken from high on the mausoleum, perhaps from the scaffolding used in restoring the dome, shows eighteen tombs or at least sarcophagi, twelve in the upper *şuffah* and six in the lower.

Besides the funerary platform as necropolis, the early photographs show that by the late nineteenth century the forecourt of the mausoleum had developed into an extensive cemetery where those who wished could be buried in proximity to the Parsaʿi saint or saints. The sanctified area was defined by a wall that must have been periodically rebuilt, perhaps constantly expanded, until the 1930s when it was permanently removed. The earliest photograph (Fig. 2.17) of the mausoleum shows one axis of the wall, in a somewhat ruined state, punctuated by arched gates, extending eastward from the north corner of the mausoleum (Figs. 2.18 & 2.19). In 1925, A. Foucher’s photographs show the southern wall in a very ruined state and a small section of the east wall (Fig 2.20). An image published in the 1935 *Sālnāmah-i Kābul* in which the mausoleum is misidentified as that of Khwajah Muhammad Parsa, shows a much restored northern portion of the wall extending beyond the picture’s frame (Fig. 2.21). In a photo taken by Ella Maillart in early 1935 we see that a renovated wall is turned back towards the unfinished north iwan. The southern alignment of the wall is quite different. There in the early 1930s, before Muhammad Gul Khan began to transform the

128 Khalil 1944.

129 Mukhtarov 1993, p. 60. Mukhtarov was referring to M.G. Vecheslov, “Arkehologicheskie pamiatniki Afganistana,” in *Afganistan: Sbornik statei*, Moscow, 1924, a work I have not been able to find.

130 Mukhtarov 1993, p. 4.



FIGURE 2.16 Funerary *suffah* from above
AKTC, 2014

grounds, the eastward extending portion of the cemetery wall sprang from a low building with a small dome at its western end, itself protruding at right angles from the mausoleum and effectively blocking the ground level iwan on the southern chamfered section of the mausoleum (Fig. 2.22).

Only Foucher's 1925 photograph (figure 2.18) shows any part of the eastern wall (that part of the wall farthest away from the mausoleum where it turned and ran parallel with the mausoleum's façade) connecting the northern and southern walls, so it is impossible to tell how far to the east of the mausoleum the cemetery extended. In any event, the image shows that the cemetery was not contained by the wall.

Although the photographers were focusing on the mausoleum, a few of the early images give a sense of the local importance of the cemetery. In the Foucher image (figure 2.18), eroded mounds of graves running parallel to the front of the mausoleum spread out from the southern wall and one of them stands out, a white sepulcher appearing to be marble, marking the grave of an obviously important or at least well-off figure. Given the pristine appearance of the tomb, one would guess that it was installed not long before the 1925 photograph was taken (see figure 2.19).

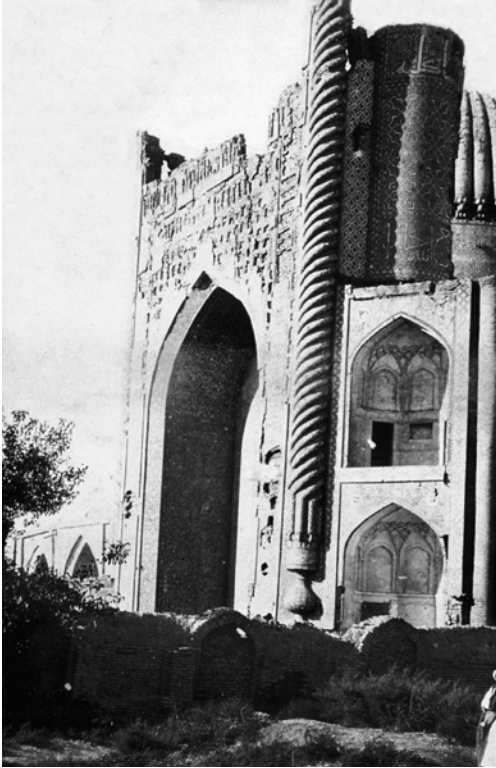


FIGURE 2.17
Gunbad from the north
C. GRIESBACH, 1886

The cemetery does not seem to have extended southwards into the area directly in front of the three-bayed annex we have been referring to as part of Mir Mazid's "encircling madrasah" (called a mosque by Khalil¹³¹). Two photographs taken about a decade apart, Niedermayer's in 1916 and Foucher's in 1925, do show, however, how the enclosing wall was expanded and rebuilt during this time and moreover that it did not enclose part of the cemetery (Fig. 2.23). Oskar von Niedermayer's image shows the wall, in excellent condition, running parallel to the three-bayed annex (the *madrasah-i muḥīt*) and springing from a point on the wall at right angles to the mausoleum-mosque some ten or so yards from the main building. The ground outside the wall is untended, rubble-strewn, and sporting eight or ten shrubs which appear to be wild sage brush or some other form of artemesia (Fig. 2.24). Foucher's photograph, nine years later, then shows that that wall has been removed and a new wall constructed, still parallel with the three-bayed annex but now perhaps thirty or thirty-five yards away from

131 Khalil 1944, p. 45. It is of interest that Khalil, the exact date of whose visit to the shrine is unknown but must have been sometime in or near 1944, refers to the mausoleum as a *khanqaḥ* and the annex, the "encircling" madrasah, as a mosque.

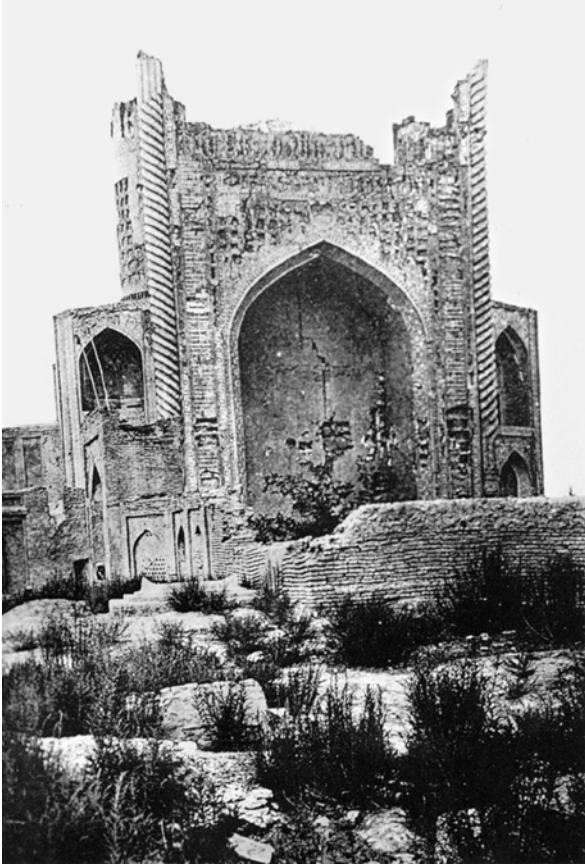


FIGURE 2.18 East façade, note fine sepulcher to the left of the wall
A. FOUCHER, 1925



FIGURE 2.19
Detail of marble sepulcher
A. FOUCHER, 1925



FIGURE 2.20 North wall; note structure projecting from southeast corner of the mausoleum
SĀLNĀMAH-I KĀBUL, 1934



FIGURE 2.21 North wall and northwest iwan prior to leveling of area surrounding the mausoleum and its “encircling madrasah;” the dome now apparently rebuilt
E. MAILLART, 1937



FIGURE 2.22
View of the complex from the south prior to leveling of the cemetery and the outbuildings
R. BYRON, 1934



FIGURE 2.23
Southern wall extension
enclosing part of the cemetery
O. VON NIEDERMAYER, 1916



FIGURE 2.24 New wall configuration
A. FOUCHER, 1925

the building. Moreover, the land now enclosed has been turned into a garden with trees planted and the ground, though uneven, appears well-tended. In the background is that low domed building emerging at right angles from the chamfered section of the mausoleum screened in by the then-extant wall in figure 2.24. Beyond it, though out of view, is the *şuffah* and surrounding graves in the forecourt of the mausoleum. All of this wall-building activity shows continual investment in the site.

This then is the way in which the whole complex had evolved by the 1930s from its origin as the gravesite of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, buried there in 1461. First, within a decade of the khwajah's death, his site had become a pilgrimage destination. To share in the sacred aura surrounding his grave, Mir Mazid Arghun built what he intended to be a family mausoleum with a madrasah adjacent to the grave of Abu Nasr Parsa. The site then remained as Mir Mazid and the descendants of Khwajah Abu Nasr intended. As far as is known only Mir Mazid's father and brother, and possibly Mir Mazid Arghun himself, were ever interred within the mausoleum.

At the end of the sixteenth century the mausoleum underwent a major reconstruction leaving it with its present configuration. Its sacredness remained a powerful attraction promoted by successive generations of Parsā'i shrine managers. Subsequent burials of some Parsā'i family members were located in a funerary platform that was created at some unknown time to hold the saint's remains and those of some of his descendants. As a holy site, it also attracted more burials. The cemetery that developed was first apparently contained by a perimeter wall but then expanded well beyond it. When European visitors found their way to the shrine beginning early in the nineteenth century and then became frequent visitors in the early twentieth century, this was the way the site presented itself, an imposing mausoleum with an extensive cemetery on its eastern side partially contained by a perimeter wall. At least one outbuilding, of unknown provenance and purpose and attached to the southeast corner of the mausoleum, appears in photographs of Byron and Foucher (see figures 2.23 and 2.24).

15 Reshaping the Site: Introducing Modernity

All was about to change. The 1930s were a time of political reconstruction and social engineering in Afghanistan, or plans for the same at least. In 1928–29 the Afghan political system had suffered a severe shock with the seizure of Kabul, Qandahar, and much of Afghan Turkistan by a Tajik warlord, Habib Allah Kalakani, and the declaration of his emirate.¹³² The tumultuous nine months of his reign in 1929 and its aftermath proved particularly destructive to Kabul, where the main struggle between Tajiks and Durrani Afghans was carried out. In October, at the end of the nine months, Kalakani was captured and executed and the Tajik areas of Afghanistan north of Kabul were immediately open to the reconquering Durrani who plundered and pillaged in revenge. The suppression of all resistance, real or imagined, led to the sending of a special envoy (*ra'īs-i tanzīmīyah*) to the Balkh region, the interior minister and Pashtun chauvinist, Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand, a man remembered by Balkh locals in the 1970s as “a second Genghis Khan.” He brought with him policies that would dramatically reshape the sacred site of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsā.

One change in the political fabric came when the restorer of Muhammadza'i Durrani sovereignty in Kabul, Muhammad Nadir Khan, in a sign of the role he envisioned for himself, was proclaimed “shah,” recalling Persianate ideas

¹³² See Fayz Muhammad 1999 and idem 2019, *Memoir of the Revolution*.

of absolute autocracy rather than “amir,” the Islamic caliphal title (*Amīr al-muʾminīn*, commander of the faithful) a title that evoked more corporate and consultative rule. Besides repairing the damage done by both Kalakani’s regime and by his own forces in ousting and punishing the Tajiks, Nadir Shah had grand development plans both for Kabul and the other urban centers of Afghanistan.¹³³ He had spent his first eighteen years in India until 1901 when he returned to Afghanistan and most of the 1920s in France, first in Paris as Afghan envoy and then in semi-retirement on the Côte d’Azur, and so he was well acquainted with European ideas and examples of modern urban planning. Moreover, he had the nearby example in Iran, if he needed one, of Reza Shah (r. 1921–41) changing the faces of Mashhad, Isfahan, and especially Tehran by putting his own modernist and nationalist stamp on them. In those places the urban plans were drastically altered with new road schemes of broad straight geometrically-aligned streets plowing through the old parts of the towns or creating ring roads around city centers and isolating them.¹³⁴ In Afghanistan, Muhammad Nadir Shah, working with considerably fewer resources, tried to create a “New Kabul” overlaying Dar al-Aman, the failed urban experiment of his predecessor, Amir Aman Allah Khan.¹³⁵

The redevelopment of Balkh, which so profoundly affected the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine, was apparently Muhammad Nadir Shah’s first experiment in modern urban redevelopment outside the capital, although he himself was assassinated (in 1933) before he could see any of its results. Like the work done in Iran, much of the physical geography was reshaped with the bulldozer or its oxen-powered equivalent to create a geometry of concentric streets radiating out from a central focal point (see figure 2.1). That point was to be the Abu Nasr Parsa *ṣuffah* and mausoleum.

By the early 1930s Afghan policy-makers had radical ideas for reshaping the Abu Nasr Parsa site and the socio-political role it should play. Balkh was to be redeveloped as the birthplace and cradle of the Aryan peoples, a much-promoted race in the 1930s.¹³⁶ The “cradle of Aryanism,” would rise again like the race it symbolized and the focal point for urban life would be a piece of monumental architecture, reflecting the grandeur of the Aryan past. Of all the known historical sites and remains of earlier times certainly the mausoleum site blessed by the presence of the saint Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa was the most

133 See Schinasi 2017, especially pp. 150–58 on the destructiveness of the Kalakani period and its aftermath on Kabul and pp. 172–74 on some of Muhammad Nadir Shah’s development plans for “New Kabul.”

134 dePlanhol 1968, pp. 446–49; Fisher 1968, p. 70.

135 Schinasi 2016, pp. 172–74.

136 See McChesney 2002, pp. 85–89.



FIGURE 2.25 The mausoleum with cemetery, enclosing walls, and outbuildings all leveled

R. FRYE, 1943

intact and readily appropriable. In order to transform the shrine from being mainly a mosque, a place to honor the saints buried there, and a favored local burial place into the center and heart of a “New Balkh,” the cemetery was now erased, work initiated by Muhammad Gul Khan. We have no record that the interred bodies were reburied elsewhere or even that the fine marble sarcophagus seen in Foucher’s 1925 photograph (figure 2.19) was preserved.

The area in the forecourt of the mausoleum had been a prized burial place for some 470 years for locals and for others who considered Balkh their native home and the Parsa’i family as their spiritual mentors and guides. It was now leveled, leaving only the *şuffah* containing the remains of the Parsa’is as a memento (Fig. 2.25). An important photograph taken by Richard Frye in 1943 shows the results of the destruction of the cemetery and the removal of the building that extended east from the mausoleum as shown in Byron’s photo (figure 2.22). The opened-up and smoothed-over area now became the Public Gardens (*bāgh-i ‘umūmī*) of Balkh, an identity that was further ensured with the recent redevelopment of the park by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.¹³⁷ In addition, a grave

137 AKCS Final Report (Garden).

attributed to a tenth-century poetess, Rabi'ah al-Balkhi, was discovered there in 1964 and a tomb constructed.¹³⁸

The reimagining of the meaning of the shrine in the 1930s in many ways echoes 'Abd al-Mu'min's refurbishment and reinterpretation of the shrine in the 1590s. Here too, the work was dictated by forces outside the shrine, not by the shrine's caretakers and administrators. In the 1590s, one has the impression that 'Abd al-Mu'min's work had the approval of the Parsa'i family and was not intended to displace the saintly tradition and replace it with some new meaning. On the other hand, in the 1930s the involvement of any local elements is nowhere evident and if the preserved memories of the disruptive and displacing policies of Muhammad Gul Khan are at all accurate then the shrine had become an object disconnected from any personal or family claims. Henceforth government policy would now determine how the shrine would be presented and interpreted.

Another change to the site which Frye's snapshot records is the rebuilding of the outer dome. Restored and retiled, the dome is also now topped with a large metal finial, a characteristic feature of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Afghan public architecture. The restoration of the dome was a major undertaking. The photographic record after 1886 shows that fully half of the dome had completely collapsed. It was not just a matter of making an existing structure weather-tight. The reports on the restoration work carried out in the 1970s by the Archaeological Survey of India (see below) make no mention of any earlier restoration or even of older and newer sections of the dome. It is not impossible that the entire standing part of the outer dome (approximately half of the structure) had first to be torn down before the dome could be rebuilt and that what was standing when the most-recent renovation was undertaken was largely the work of the second half of the 1930s, after Byron's visit. The great *pīshṭāq* however remains essentially the same as it appears in earlier photos except for a somewhat more eroded tile revetment but with 'Abd al-Mu'min's 1596–97 commemorative cartouche still intact in Frye's photo.

The shrine now became the centerpiece of the urban plan devised by Aryan- and nationalist-minded officials in Kabul. The bitterness that Persian-speaking residents of Balkh expressed to Akhror Mukhtarov in 1974 was probably due as much to the development schemes of the Muhammadza'i government in Kabul, which cleared away a cemetery of great significance to the community,

138 Dupree 1967, p. 93. Mukhtarov 1980, p. 87 for an image of the mazar of Rabi'ah Balkhi as it appeared in 1974 and *ibid.*, p. 86 and Mukhtarov 1993 for a skeptical account of the discovery. Aga Khan Cultural Services did a major rebuilding of the site. The image in the AKCS Final Report (Garden), unnumbered p. 13 (bottom left image) shows the site as it appeared to Mukhtarov in 1974 ten years after the discovery. On that same page the top image shows the new tomb as constructed by AKCS.

as to any Persophobia on the part of Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand, who, by virtue of his role as agent of the government, became the focus of local anger.

Particularly noteworthy about the complex during this period was the survival of the three-bay annex on its south side, what Khalil identified as the mosque while referring to the mausoleum itself as a *khānqāh*, which suggests something of its use for Sufi ceremonies, *ẓikr* and eulogies for the saint and the Prophet Muhammad. The structure is three bays long and two deep. Khalil estimated that the ‘mosque’ was 200 to 300 years old but provides no evidence. He also wrote that what he calls the *khānqāh* was built during the time of ‘Abd Allah Khan ‘Uzbek’ and that his son ‘Abd al-Mu‘min ‘repaired’ it (*tarmīm kardah*) in 1080/1669–70, the attributions and dating clearly inaccurate. The medallion with the actual date and patronage attribution while still in place in 1944 may not have been legible from the ground and moreover, may have faded from local memory. Nonetheless, Khalil’s other observations about the funerary platform are invaluable, despite his problems with the deeper history of the place.

16 The *ṣuffah* Tombs and Their Inscriptions

Khalil is the only known source for the inscriptions that survived on the tombstones of the funerary platform when he visited in the 1940s. Although it is not always clear whether he is referring to tombstones that stood upright at the head of the many sarcophagi (as they appear in Niedermayer’s, Foucher’s and Byron’s photographs as well as in the recent reconstruction) or were horizontal slabs atop the sarcophagi, in either case, almost none of what he records survives today on the burial platform.¹³⁹

By 1944, there were changes to the *ṣuffah* that included replacing the old platform with a new one of fired brick. Khalil describes the platform as “two meters high” clearly not the old *ṣuffah* visible in the Niedermayer, Byron, and Frye photographs. The old platform with the marble side panels that are shown in those photographs and still visible, though caked with dirt and obviously crumbling in Byron’s 1934 photo, survived at least another decade. Frye’s 1943 photograph (figure 2.25) still shows the old *ṣuffah* in a somewhat more decrepit state than in Byron’s photo. Photographs from 1952 onward show the entirely rebuilt *ṣuffah* made of fired brick.

Khalil’s identifications of the tombs begin with the one immediately east of the “*khānqāh*” [i.e., the mausoleum] and on the western side of the “funerary

¹³⁹ Khalil 1944, pp. 45–47.

platform (*maqbarah*).¹⁴⁰ The grave was a sarcophagus with marble sides and a marble lantern (*chirāgh-dān*) at its head. It had a stone slab covering it with a partially effaced inscription. Khalil was unable to make anything out of the first line of text but in light of the more or less standard way tombstones were worded, the first line of the Arabic epigraph would have been “this is the grave of” (*hadhā marqad ...*) followed by honorifics preceding the deceased’s name. On the second line a name was clear—Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa. There followed a missing segment and then the words “and their [i.e. his] wives (*wa azwāji-him*).” Besides the interesting question as to whether the same grave or adjacent unmarked ones were those of females, a point that Khalil does not comment on, he was uncertain whether what was missing before Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa’s name was another name, that of a son or even a grandson or simply honorifics. The third line provided a partial date, “... in [the year of] four and ... and nine hundred.” By that date Khalil knew that it could not be the first Abu Nasr, who died in “five and sixty and eight hundred” (865/1460–61). He seems not to have been aware when he wrote the article that the first Abu Nasr had a grandson and namesake who flourished in the early sixteenth century and is most likely the occupant of the grave. Thus the missing number could have been a 2 for 924 (1518) or 3 for 934 (1527), which would accord well with the period during which Khwajah Abu Nasr II flourished (see above). We have no corroboration elsewhere of his obituary date but since the latter’s own son ‘Abd al-Hadi died in 959/1552, either of the obituary year dates 924 or 934 would be appropriate for the father.

The second sarcophagus lies next to the first and was similarly faced on four sides and top with marble slabs. The stone slab on top had Qur’anic verses, which Khalil does not reproduce, and he then transcribes:

This is the grave of Hidāyat Allāh, Scholar of the Law and of Sufism (*‘irfān*) Haẓrat Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Khwājah, son of the Follower of the Path of Truth and Certainty ... Haẓrat Khwājah Muḥammad Wali, known as Dildār Khwājah.¹⁴¹

The last line of the verses inscribed around the four sides of the sarcophagus is a chronogram producing the date 1056/1646 for Muhammad Siddiq’s death. As we earlier suggested, Dildar Khwajah, whose given name was Muhammad Wali, did not inherit the office of *shaykh al-Islām* which went to his brother Qasim Khwajah. The two were sons of the previous *shaykh al-Islām* of Balkh, ‘Abd al-Wali, better known as Khwajah Jan Khwajah. Qasim Khwajah held the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 46.

post until his death in 1624. There is nothing in the epigraph to indicate that Muhammad Siddiq held the post of *shaykh al-Islām* after the tenure of his cousin Padshah Khwajah but the inscription does emphasize his scholarly credentials both in the holy law, the Shari'ah, and in Sufi theosophy.

As Khalil locates it, the tomb next closest to the mausoleum, contains the body of the founder of the Balkh line of the Parsa'is, the first Abu Nasr, the man to whom the whole site as pilgrimage destination is now ascribed. Only in this one case does Khalil mention the relative size of the sarcophagus, it being a large one (*ṣandūq-i kalān*). He gives the inscription as:

This is the grave (*marqad*) of the Pole of the Pious, the Summa of Shaykhs and Saints, the Compassionate, the Magnificent Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa, who died in 865.¹⁴²

The fourth grave in Khalil's order has an inscription which gives the deceased's name as Khwajah 'Abd al-Wali and the obituary date 1115/1703–4. This was probably one of the two stones with legible dates noted by Mukhtarov in 1974. The other stone that was seen by Mukhtarov but not by Khalil, was dated 1332/1913–14, lending some support, perhaps, to Mukhtarov's assertion that sometime before his visit stones were assembled on the *suffah* that came from other parts of the city. It would seem highly probable that this 'Abd al-Wali was the son of Padshah Khwajah and thus the father of Salih Khwajah. If so and he was not a third 'Abd al-Wali, then the episode involving Salih Khwajah occurred while his father was still *shaykh al-Islām*.

Khalil's research suggests a pattern of arrangement of the sarcophagi on the *suffah* which the recent restorations do not reflect (see figure 2.16). He writes that "above the fourth grave there is a grave in a second row (*layn-i duwwum*) which has a highly worked headstone of which half is broken off."¹⁴³ The reference to a second row would indicate that the first three sarcophagi were adjacent to each other with no other sarcophagi at their heads or feet but now the pattern changes and resembles what the recent restoration work has produced. In that arrangement only one stone coffin stands separately and that is the one closest to the mausoleum. Khalil gives the five lines of verse inscribed on the broken stones of this fifth sarcophagus. The verses commemorate the name of Khwajah Siddiq Parsa'i, son of Dildar Khwajah, and provide the obituary date 1056/1646–47. This is the same person whose body lies in the second sarcophagus. Since we cannot now see the actual stones there is no way to state with any certainty what happened to the sarcophagus of Khwajah [Muhammad]

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Khalil 1944, p. 47.

Siddiq. It would appear on the surface that the stones from one sarcophagus became separated and reassembled into another. Khalil himself has nothing to say about the anomaly nor is it clear that he noticed it.

The sixth and final tomb on which any of the inscription was legible by 1944 bore the name Khwajah ‘Abd al-Malik [the Second], son of Khwajah Abu’l-Khayr, son of Khwajah Muhammad Baqi Parsa’i. Khalil found no legible date. Neither the father nor grandfather can yet be identified and this could well be a collateral line to the line of Parsa’is descended directly through ‘Abd al-Malik, the son of Abu Nasr Parsa I, i.e. those who inherited the office of *shaykh al-Islām*. Or perhaps this Khwajah ‘Abd al-Malik is from the line of the Mawlana Khwajah Muhammad Parsa’i who came to Balkh in the 1620s (see above).

In all these cases, it must be added that there is no way of verifying that the inscribed stones were contemporary with the deaths of those identified. Unfortunately, the amount of reconstruction that has taken place during the twentieth century makes it difficult to say anything with certainty about the original tombs and inscriptions.

17 Postwar Changes to the Mausoleum

After Richard Frye’s visit in 1943, there were two significant seismic events that may account for the destruction at the site causing substantial damage to the mausoleum but not affecting the three-bay annex (the madrasah or mosque, depending on the source). On March 4, 1949, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake in the Hindu Kush, which was called “one of the most severe in the present (twentieth) century,” caused considerable damage to the entire northeastern part of the country but little loss of life.¹⁴⁴ It may have been that that earthquake collapsed a good part of the entry iwan screen destroying it down to the tip of the arch and causing the loss of the 1005/1596–97 medallion with the inscription commemorating the work of ‘Abd al-Mu’min. It could still be seen in Frye’s 1943 photograph (figure 2.25) but had disappeared by the time Helène Frumkin photographed it in 1952 (Fig. 2.26).

A photo published in 1959 but clearly taken before 1956 and showing the south end of the complex and the intact madrasah-mosque gives a sense of how the local population made use of the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa mosque-shrine.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Balland 1996, p. 629a.

¹⁴⁵ The photograph appears in Flinker and Klimberg 1959 and was reproduced in McChesney 2002, p. 101 (Fig. 14).



FIGURE 2.26 Collapsed *pishtāq* screen, shield with inscription now missing, intact madrasah iwans still intact (almost hidden to the left)
H. FRUMKIN 1952

It was taken at a time when the sun was low in the sky and shadows were long on the ground. It shows some twenty men, two men standing and perhaps addressing a group of some fifteen men squatting against the south-facing wall of the mausoleum annex, apparently enjoying shelter from the north wind and the warmth of a winter sun. Clearly the grounds surrounding the mosque are a place for gatherings. Two other men are walking past, one with a load on his back. Perhaps the ones squatting are workmen taking a lunch break. Leaning against the front wall of the southeast corner of the mosque there is a long ladder with twenty-five rungs visible and set at a very shallow angle. Someone has been restoring brickwork on the upper part of the southern wall. Perhaps the two men standing and facing the group of squatters are not talking about work but are discussing some religious or civic matter with them. There are any number of possible reasons for a noontime alfresco discussion group using the sun-warmed south wall of the shrine as a backrest. This part of the building would not last much longer.



FIGURE 2.27 Intact southern cloister viewed from the southwest
D. WILBER, 1951

18 The Second Catastrophic Event

On June 9, 1956, another even more destructive earthquake of 7.3 magnitude occurred at the relatively shallow depth of 60 kilometers. Its epicenter was just 120 miles south of Balkh at Sayqan.¹⁴⁶ The quake caused enormous damage to buildings and other infrastructure in the immediate region and an untold number of deaths.¹⁴⁷ The available information only reports serious destruction in the northern Hazarahjat, but that was not far from Balkh. While Frumkin's photograph and one taken in 1951 by Donald Wilber (Fig. 2.27) show the annex madrasah/mosque still standing, all photographs that can be securely dated after June 1956 show that the madrasah/mosque section had

146 Balland 1996, p. 627a.

147 Local newspapers or the Kabul press would surely have reported this earthquake. This writer has not yet been able to access these. The *Sālnāmah* for 1335/1956–57 reports the earthquake and the arrival of Turkish Red Crescent medical assistance but no details on damage.



FIGURE 2.28
Post-1956 earthquake showing
collapsed section, missing
cloister seen from the south
DR. GREMLIZA, 1967

been completely destroyed leaving only a jagged remnant of one of the domes where it attached to the mausoleum (Fig. 2.28).¹⁴⁸ The nature of the destruction indicates a sudden cataclysmic event rather than a deliberate razing of the building. It also showed how vulnerable buildings were because of construction techniques that did not take into account the seismic activity for which the Balkh area was noted. In the next chapter we will discuss in more detail the June 9, 1956 earthquake and its destructive effects in nearby Mazar-i Sharif.

19 Tourism and the Shrine

Another way the shrine was to be exploited by the government was to encourage foreign tourists to come and see it. The period from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s was Afghanistan's high-water mark as a tourist destination (Fig. 2.29). The year 1967 was designated by UNESCO as the "International Year of Tourism"

¹⁴⁸ Although the cover of *Afghanistan News* vol. 2, no. 13 September 1958, an English-language publication of the Royal Afghan Embassy in London, still shows the arcade to the south, the date the photograph was taken is not given but certainly predates June 1956.



FIGURE 2.29
Tourist poster celebrating UNESCO
Year of Tourism, 1967

with, as it turned out in Afghanistan's case, the unintentionally ironic slogan "Tourism—Passport to Peace" (Fig. 2.29). Afghanistan received UN support and a whole series of lovely posters printed in Japan to promote its nascent tourist industry. Afghan policymakers were encouraged to believe that tourism, beyond the traffic created by pilgrims to sacred sites, would be a permanent and profitable sector of the country's economy. The Parsa shrine was one of the dozen or so landmarks of the country promoted as a tourist destination, particularly for what was thought would be its ability to attract visitors to the northern part of the country, an area historically neglected by the Kabul government. The shrine's presentation to a tourist audience apparently determined how it was restored. Perhaps the south wing with its simple natural stucco surface and pointed arches was thought to be of little interest to tourists or too expensive to restore. Whatever the reason, it remained unrestored until the 1980s. At that time, the replacement building was added without tourist sensibilities in mind.

There also may have been local pressure on the governor and through him the central government in Kabul to stabilize the mausoleum/mosque and keep it from collapsing in the event of another earthquake. Whether because of touristic or local concerns, the Kabul government persuaded the Government



FIGURE 2.30
Patching of armature by
Archaeological Survey of India
T. LITTLE, 1996

of India to send an Archaeological Survey of India team led by R. Sengupta which worked from 1975–77 mostly on stabilizing the dome, repairing large cracks that had opened in the building, and filling with mortar the voids created where the tile revetment had fallen from its armature. In a report on the work Sengupta wrote, “The cracks on the external high dome were causing anxiety about the safety of the structure. Hence urgent repair work to save the structure had to be undertaken early at the request of the Government of Afghanistan.”¹⁴⁹ The published accounts of the work which appeared in reports for the years 1975–76 and 1976–77 are extremely brief. Fortunately, the photographic record is more revealing. Sengupta was methodical about taking “before” and “after” photographs.¹⁵⁰ From these and other pictures it is clear that maintenance and restoration work was continuous. The mausoleum was a fragile building vulnerable to the erosive effects of wind and rain and, of course, the periodic temblor.

149 Sengupta 1979, p. 128.

150 Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 2, pls. 132 and 133. Sengupta’s images reproduced there are of the mausoleum prior to the conservation work.

Much of the work done by Archaeological Survey conservationists is not visible from the outside. Three brick arches were constructed on the underside of the outer dome to support it. Brickwork at the back of the screen above the gallery was replaced and much of the brickwork was repointed. The most visible evidence of Sengupta's work is the mortar used to patch the voids in the revetment of the great *pīshṭāq* (Fig. 2.30). Before restoration the unusual armature on which the tile panels were hung had been exposed wherever the tiles had fallen away (see figure 2.8). Following restoration the armature was no longer visible.

20 After 1973

The 1956 earthquake might be considered a suitable metaphor for the politics of the country after 1973, signifying the vulnerability of the political institutions to violent disruption. In that year the king, Muhammad Zahir Shah of the Yahya Khayl Muhammadza'i Durrani clan, after a reign of forty years was ousted by his cousin, Muhammad Daoud, who declared Afghanistan a republic. His own tenure ended violently in 1978 with the establishment of a "democratic" republic which ushered in a period of civil war, still ongoing in many respects. The civil war was marked by a nine-year invasion and occupation by Soviet forces (December 25, 1979–February 1989) trying to buttress the democratic republic. In 1992, the democratic republic was overthrown and replaced by an Islamic republic made up of jihadist forces unable, as it turned out, to get along with each other in order to create a working government. Ultimately, the groups came to be dominated by the forces known collectively as the Taliban. In 2001–2, following the events of 11 September, allied American and European forces, under the umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, invaded and occupied the country and embarked on a project of "reconstruction" which ultimately would have a dramatic impact on the Balkh shrine.

21 Abdur Rashid Dostum and the Shrine

From 1975 to 1977, when the Archaeological Survey of India carried out its work, until 2013, whatever work was done at the shrine seems to have been carried out at local initiative. In the early 1980s, Balkh came into the hands of Abdur Rashid Dostum, a man at first supporting the Soviet army with his militia and then as an ally, for a time, of Najib Allah, the last head of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. For nearly twenty years, until 1997 when he fled in the face of a Taliban onslaught, Dostum controlled Balkh Province. Judging



FIGURE 2.31 Abdur Rashid Dostum's mosque addition (early 1990s) replacing the earthquake-destroyed cloister of the "encircling madrasah"
B. WOODBURN, 2007

by the way he represents himself, he was and still is today first and foremost chief of the faction called the Islamic National Front (Junbish-i Milli Islami) of Northern Afghanistan and secondly a defender of Uzbek interests in Afghan politics. He has made little effort to cultivate the image of a devout Muslim (Fig. 2.31). Perhaps as a way to generate popular support in a time of enormous uncertainty and show his concern for Islamic institutions, he added an unattractive but functional masonry addition to the mausoleum on its south side to serve as a mosque replacing the demolished adobe brick annex. Besides

replacing the demolished mud brick annex, he added a matching annex on the north side and seems to have “modernized” the *suffah* with new brick construction. However, as we will see, he found the ‘Alid shrine at Mazar-i Sharif, where he had his capital, a more compelling place on which to leave his mark.

Dostum lost control of Balkh and Mazar-i Sharif to Taliban forces in 1998, but when the Taliban were ousted by the Northern Alliance with the help of the United States in late 2001, he returned to take control of the area. Then, in 2004, a Tajik militia led by Atta Muhammad Noor, a former ally, drove Dostum out of Mazar-i Sharif and Balkh. Noor maintained control until 2018 and although he sponsored work at the ‘Alid shrine of Mazar-i Sharif, we have no information that he was committed at all to maintaining the Parsa’i site. Dostum’s single story cement mosque, built sometime in the 1980s remained the most recent architectural reconfiguring of Mir Mazid’s mausoleum complex until 2011.

22 Modern Preservation Policy at the Shrine

The most recent change to the architecture of the shrine came about due to the institutionalization in Afghanistan of a policy of historic preservation, first formally articulated in the region with respect to the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif (see next chapter). In 2011, a team of experts sent by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture arrived in Balkh to assess the condition of the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine and propose a plan of restoration and stabilization.¹⁵¹ After surveying the site and taking measurements, the team submitted a plan to the German Foreign Ministry through its embassy in Kabul with a request for funding. On April 19, 2012, Ajmal Maiwandi, the chief executive officer of the AKTC together with the German ambassador to Afghanistan signed an agreement in which the Trust would organize and carry out the work to restore the shrine and the German government would foot much if not all of the bill. This was not a new commitment of German taxpayer funds to the rebuilding of Balkh province. Already in 2009, they had constructed an airport runway and “health care facilities.”¹⁵² But this was perhaps the most expensive project so far funded by Germany.

The AKTC explains one of its core principles as “the protection and safeguarding of a country’s historic sites in a sustainable manner and with the full support and involvement of the local community and institutional partners.”

¹⁵¹ What follows is drawn from AKCS Report (Shrine).

¹⁵² Mukhopadhyay 2014, p. 123.

The language is inflected with the evocative words and phrases that appeal to a modern funding source. But which historic moment does one choose to privilege and enshrine? Is it a moment chosen by the community involved, by the project's patrons, or by historians? In this case, it appears that the community, which still wanted the site to continue to be a mosque, and the evidence provided by historians (Professor Bernard O'Kane is mentioned) were the primary determinants.¹⁵³

The AKTC team that came to Balkh had just finished work in Herat involving three major projects: restoration of the Ikhtiyar al-Din Citadel; renovation of Gazurgah, the shrine of 'Abd Allah Ansari; and improvements to the sanitary system of the old city of Herat. These projects could not have taken place without large financial commitments from societies that had no obvious stake in the condition or historic meaning of these buildings except the universal good of historic preservation, the apparent hope of generating some goodwill towards themselves as donors, and as a way to contribute to the consensual policy of "reconstructing" the country.

Talks were held in Balkh with the provincial governor, Atta Muhammad Noor; an unnamed mayor of Balkh City; and leading citizens (also unidentified). The ambiguous phrase "leading citizens" begs certain questions. Were these the mosque officials and shrine caretakers? Were they individuals who claimed Parsa'i descent and thus had certain hereditary rights to any revenue flows directed at the shrine complex? Were they Sufis, that is, Mujaddidi Naqshbandi Sufis for whom the shrine and its mosque would have been a center of religious activity, study and *zikr* circles and the like? Were they local scholars? Atta Muhammad Noor, who was proud of his intellectual interests and outlook, was known for surrounding himself with ulema much like earlier rulers of Balkh had done. Or were these leading citizens simply the militia leaders who exercised power under the eyes of Noor? The project report does not identify them.

After lengthy negotiations, it was agreed that the team could demolish the modern mosque addition built by Dostum and replace it. In their design for rebuilding, they would attempt to replicate what the earliest photographs showed of a three-bay arcaded structure on the south side of the mausoleum. The team also decided to add a matching north wing to the mausoleum, for which there is no photographic evidence, following what Dostum had done by adding his single-storey cement mosque to both sides of the mausoleum. Demolition of the mosque began in May 2012. Over the course of the following eight months of 2012, some 200 skilled workers and 600 laborers were

153 O'Kane 2000, pp. 130–147.



FIGURE 2.32 Rebuilt cloisters by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture to replace the Dostum mosque
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

employed on the site. The final report explains the new north wing by stating that it would provide “much needed buttressing support for the adjacent shrine.” They apparently were aware of the earlier photographs showing only a south wing. In striving to create a durable structure, it is possible that the team may have thus revived something of the plan recorded by Sultan Muhammad Balkhi in the sixteenth-century of an “embracing” or “encircling” madrasah. However, the team clearly noticed something that indicated to them that two structures had originally flanked the mausoleum.¹⁵⁴

The entire project was completed in 2014 and marked by a great celebration. But any goodwill or gratitude for the German government’s financing of the multimillion dollar restoration project was muted. If anything, the work that was done only inspired requests for more money for historic preservation. In October of 2016, a press release issued by Balkh Province’s chief of information and culture for the Department of Historic Monuments claimed that there were now 120 historical monuments and sites in the province in need of reconstruction. In listing the countries that had supported historic reconstruction,

¹⁵⁴ Jodidio 2017, p. 268.

the press release named “America, Turkey, Norway, and Holland.” Germany, which appears to have spent more money in Balkh province than any other government, went unrecognized.¹⁵⁵

In 2013, another agreement was signed with the German government that encompassed the restoration of what was now the public gardens, formerly the cemetery in front of the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine, that extended between the shrine and the surviving entry arch of the Subhan Quli Khan madrasah. In the restoration plan, the entry arch was envisioned as the eastern gateway to the park rather than the western and main entry to the madrasah. The park restoration also included a new monument for the tenth-century (AD) poetess, Rabi’ah Balkhi, who is promoted as a symbol of national literary achievement and whose purported burial place, as already noted, was only discovered in 1964.¹⁵⁶

Thus the shrine’s story in modern times. As a once-great urban center, Balkh has had, by all accounts, a continued history of crucial regional importance. Many of the public structures that made up the cityscape (baths, caravanserais, palaces, mosques, madrasahs, *khānqāhs*) exist now only in the textual record, any material remains have long since been dismantled or buried. (The outlines of some of these buildings, long vanished from the inner city of Balkh, may be seen in figure 2.2.) The shrine is a major exception because of the meaning it has generated for the communities that lived with it and worked to maintain it whenever resources allowed. The constant attention to its condition, attention that resulted in major changes to it over time, symbolizes the importance of the built environment, especially those buildings imbued with universal cultural meanings (sainthood, ethnicity, and recently tourism).

The political, social, and economic decline of Balkh City had many causes but none perhaps so significant as the emergence and growth of another sacred center twelve miles to its southeast, in what is now the city of Mazar-i Sharif. The discovery of the tomb of the fourth Sunni caliph and the first Shi’i imam, ‘Ali, the son of Abu Talib (d. 40/661), caused that site to gradually supplant Balkh not only in serving as the economic and political center of the region but also as the most important sacred site of the region.

155 See online <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/27563-balkhs-historical-sites-in-need-of-reconstruction> and <http://afghanspirit.com/balkhs-historical-sites-in-need-of-reconstruction/>.

156 Dupree 1967, p. 93.

Centering a City (2): The Noble Rawzah of Mazar-i Sharif

1 Introduction

The city of Mazar-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan is today the third largest city in the country, the capital of Balkh Province, and the economic and administrative center for all of northern Afghanistan. It plays the same role that Balkh City, twelve miles to its northwest, played for centuries. Its very name—Mazar-i Sharif (Noble Shrine)—reflects the fundamental importance of the shrine of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib to the city’s development and to its role in present-day Afghanistan. Moreover, the shrine itself has followed an uninterrupted path as a spiritual and community center since its rediscovery and founding in the fifteenth century. In contrast, the nearby Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh City, as seen in the previous chapter, was reconfigured in the late sixteenth century in response to the political aspirations of the region’s then ruler and retooled again in the middle third of the twentieth century as the “cradle of Aryan civilization” to be a symbol of Pashtun nationalist aspirations and the focal point for developing a “New Balkh.” Later it was rethought as a tourist attraction while still maintaining its function as a mosque and, to an unknown degree, as pilgrimage destination.

The Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif, on the other hand, while it cannot be said to have been unaffected by the modernist ideas transforming Balkh, never had to bear the psychological burden of being the “cradle” of anything. It evolved more naturally as the popularity of the shrine and the patronage lavished on it by successive generations of politicians slowly drew attention (and business) away from Balkh City. The failure of the Aryanist project to remake Balkh as a viable national center was no doubt due to the fact that Mazar-i Sharif had long since become the commercial and political center as well of northern Afghanistan, or Afghan Turkistan as it was known (Figs. 3.1 and 3.3). Today, bird’s-eye views of the city (Figs. 3.1 and 3.30) show the shrine, surrounded by its sacred precincts, as the very heart of the city. However, its present grand scale masks its ancient origins in a village known as “al-Khayr” and later as “Khwajah Khayran.”



FIGURE 3.1
Satellite image of Noble Rawzah,
Mazar-i Sharif
GOOGLEEARTH, BEFORE 2017

2 The First Origin Story

There is an age-old tradition dating back at least to the mid-twelfth century AD that the final resting place of Caliph or Imam ‘Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, is at a village variously called al-Khayr, Khayran, or Khwajah Khayran, about twelve miles southeast of Balkh City and more than a thousand miles from where he was assassinated in Kufa, Iraq in 661 AD. The origin of the story that ‘Ali was buried in what is now northern Afghanistan is, to no one’s surprise, lost in history’s familiar mists. For most Muslims, ‘Ali’s burial site is Najaf, Iraq near Kufa where he was slain, but many sites claim the honor of hosting his burial. A quatrain composed by the fifteenth-century poet and mystic, ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, was inscribed on the south gate of the Mazar-i Sharif shrine (Fig. 3.2) and captures the sentiment that the spirit of ‘Ali is not confined to one place:

They say that Murtaza ‘Ali is in Najaf / Come to Balkh and see the House
of Nobility,
Jami, say [it is] neither Aden nor Bayn al-Jabalayn (Damascus) / The sun
is one and its light shines everywhere¹

¹ See also Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 34.



FIGURE 3.2 Verses of ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492) on South Gate (Dar-i Ihram)
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2008

How ‘Ali’s body reached the Balkh region and wound up at the site now the center of the city of Mazar-i Sharif has proven to be a durable myth. In one modern version, at the order of the Sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Sadiq (702–765 AD), the body of ‘Ali was secretly placed on the back of a white camel, some say by the legendary figure of Abu Muslim, and left to wander where it wanted. Where it finally stopped (or dropped dead) that was where the Fourth Sunni Caliph and First Shi‘i Imam ‘Ali was to be buried. This turned out to be the village of al-Khayr or Khwajah Khayran near Balkh.²

What little textual evidence there is indicates that the site of al-Khayr was one of the Balkh region’s ancient sacred sites.³ Muhammad Salih Warsaji Farkhari, writing a “seventy-shaykhs” hagiography in the 1590s, reflects some of the legendary aura of al-Khayr’s sanctity as well as the confused narrative

2 Ibid., pp. 18–20 for a modern version of this story. Various traditions arose as to how ‘Ali’s body was transported from Iraq to Balkh, most centering on the figure of Abu Muslim and a “white camel.” A late fifteenth-century version had the Fifth Shi‘i Imam, Muhammad Baqir, rather than the Sixth instructing Abu Muslim to move the body from Kufa so it would not be desecrated by ‘Ali’s enemies. (Lari 1971, pp. 19–21). This story was transformed in at least one other popular version to explain the arrival of the body of another saint, a companion of ‘Ali, and his burial in southern Afghanistan (see below, pp. 327–28).

3 Azad 2013 on Balkh as sacred landscape, especially pp. 12–18 and chapter 2.

linked to it. His fifty-fourth shaykh, Ahmad b. Husayn, a Hashemite descendant in the eighth degree of the Prophet Muhammad's clan of 'Abd al-Muttalib, died in 217 AH (832–33 AD) According to Warsaji:

his resting place is outside the village of Khwājah Khayrān which is now named Mazār-i Sharīf. On its west side, Aḥmad b. Qumāj [a Saljuq governor for whom see more below] who was the amir of Balkh built a domed mausoleum (*gunbad*) out of fired brick over his grave which still exists today.⁴

Warsaji wrote this with no apparent sense that some clarification might be needed in light of what he had already written in the introduction to his work about the discovery of 'Ali's remains at the village of Khwajah Khayran, the consequent visit to the site by Sultan Sanjar, Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj's liege-lord, and Sanjar's building a "lofty structure" (*'imārat-i 'ālī*) there.⁵ How did the mausolea of Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj for the Hashemite shaykh and Sultan Sanjar's for 'Ali just happen to be in that small village? And how did Warsaji know the *gunbad* which still stood in his time (late sixteenth century) was that of the ninth-century Hashemite shaykh? More to the point, can Warsaji or any of our other sources really be trusted for the facts they provide other than as evidence of a strongly held belief, developed over centuries, that 'Ali was buried at this site near Balkh? Warsaji, after all, has some claim to credibility as a native of Farkhar, a district some 260 miles east of Balkh by road, and as a scholar deeply interested in Balkh's religious history. Nonetheless, he is the only source to identify two *gunbads* at Khwajah Khayran.

Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada'i, a student of the shrine's history, provides a partial answer to the question of the site of the mausoleum of the Hashemite Ahmad ibn Husayn. Among the famous people buried at or near the Noble Rawzah he lists the Hashemite with two variant genealogies, who is known to pilgrims as "Khwājah Āhūjūsh" and "Khwājah Ābjūsh," and locates the site one kilometer away from the shrine in the qibla direction (west-southwest of the Noble Rawzah).⁶

As far as is known now, the earliest textual evidence that 'Ali's body was secretly brought to Balkh and buried there is in a travelogue by an Andalusian,

4 Warsaji 2010, p. 68.

5 Ibid., pp. 13–15.

6 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 96.

Abu Hamid al-Gharnati (1080–1170 AD), who apparently was told the story between 1153 and 1155 AD. In his account, the tomb had only been discovered some twenty years before, in 1135. The grave was located, he writes, in a village called al-Khayr thirteen miles to the southeast of Balkh City.⁷ He tells the reader that some of the village's most prominent citizens dreamt that the Prophet Muhammad appeared to them and indicated where 'Ali's body was to be found. The place was excavated and a tomb was found along with an inscribed piece of masonry. A mausoleum was then built and an epitaph inscribed on stone was suspended in its mihrab. al-Gharnati calls it a *labīnat ḥamrā* which could be translated as “red brick” or “red earthenware tablet.” The inscription reads: “this is 'Ali, may God honor him!, the one who loves the Prophet,” (*hādhā muḥibb al-nabī 'Alī—karrama Allāhu wajhahu*).⁸ al-Gharnati heard the tale from an unknown interlocutor since he himself bypassed Balkh on his extensive travels. Thus his report is ultimately hearsay though rather detailed hearsay. Had he visited Balkh himself he might actually have had something to say about Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj's or Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum for 'Ali.⁹

The shrine seems not to have attained much more than local significance, if that, for the next 350 years.¹⁰ In the meantime, the Balkh region was beset by nomadic invasions, the most serious being the Mongol assaults in the 1220s. The effects of the Mongol invasions would remain burned in the memory of the people of the region to such a degree that even today the ruins of Balkh City are blamed on the Mongols, notwithstanding the fact that the city

7 al-Gharnati 1925, p. 145.

8 See McChesney 1991, pp. 26–36 for a more detailed account of the tomb discovery and redicover.

9 On his itinerary see Lévi-Provençal 1960, p. 122.

10 The Afghan historian, 'Abd al-Ḥayy Habibi, wrote an article in 1961 (Habibi 1961, p. 48) about the mid-sixteenth century geographical work referred to in the previous chapter, *Majma' al-gharā'ib fi'l-'ajā'ib wa'l-kawākib wa'l-nawā'ib* citing an unidentified manuscript and said that the author, Sultan Muhammad Balkhi, dated the buildings at the shrine to 686 AH (1287 AD), that is, some two centuries before the “rediscovery” of the shrine in Sultan-Husayn Bayqara's time. But the manuscripts of this work vary considerably when it comes to the date. The Tashkent University ms. (inv. no. 09/903) gives the date 680 AH (1281–82 AD) while a copy at the Tashkent Abu Rayhan Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, no. 1494, gives 867 AH (1462–63 AD) Orthographically, the differences between “hasht-ṣad” (800) and “shash-ṣad” (600) are fairly slight and depending on the hand could be easily confused. There is little reason at this point to give credence to a date in the seventh/thirteenth century.

was a vibrant, at times booming, metropolis during the centuries following the Mongol conquests and only began to succumb, after the eighteenth century, to competition from the shrine town, site of the Noble Rawzah, to its southeast.¹¹

I am aware of only one written account touching on the shrine and dating to between al-Gharnati's account and the Mongol irruption. A Syrian who wrote a guide to pilgrimage sites on the eve of the Mongol invasions makes a casual and dismissive reference to al-Khayr as said to be the site of the final resting place of the Caliph 'Ali.¹² After the Mongols, there are two centuries for which there is no known information. Ibn Battutah, whose travels brought him through Balkh in 1333 found Balkh City more or less deserted although the countryside around seemed populated to him. He was struck by the many sacred sites, the tombs of such notables as "Ukkashah ibn Mihsan of the Asad tribe, a Companion of the Apostle of God;" the site known today as Khwajah 'Akkashah; the tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel; and the house and *khānqāh* of the mystic Ibrahim b. Adham.¹³ He mentions these were outside the city of Balkh which makes it clear that the city, defined by its walls, then included only what is now considered the inner city and citadel. The present outer walls, which defined a newer city in the post-Mongol period, would not be built until the late sixteenth century.¹⁴ There was not a hint, or at least Ibn Battutah remembered none, that the Caliph 'Ali was buried within a day's journey of Balkh. If the story had been in circulation during his visit we might have expected his sensitive antennae for sacred sites to have picked it up. It would surely have been remarkable news to the Moroccan traveler and might well have induced him to spend an extra day or two investigating the story. If we believe the late fifteenth-century sources, the Mongols apparently disrupted the transmission of the story so completely that the 'Alid tomb had to be discovered all over again.

11 Warsaji, who ascribed the first mausoleum to Sultan Sanjar, explained its disappearance by blaming the Mongols not so much for destroying it but just for the general havoc they wreaked, and because the bricks "fell prey to weather and neglect" and crumbled into what became referred to as Tall-i 'Ali ('Ali's Hill) until the late fifteenth-century rediscovery. See Warsaji, 2010, p. 15.

12 al-Harawi al-Mawsili 1953-57, p. 77.

13 Ibn Battutah 1971, vol. 3, pp. 553, 571-73.

14 See Barthold 1968, p. 78 for the walls of Balkh in the pre-Mongol Muslim era.

3 The New Origin Story: The Late Timurid Rediscovery

Al-Gharnati's account, or one very much like it, was reportedly known to a fifteenth-century scholar in "the province of Afghanistan" who brought it to the governor of Balkh in 885/1480–81 and the tomb was again found thanks to nocturnal visions, this time ones a local religious figure experienced after doubting the revelations of the al-Gharnati account. The holy relic was found in a mausoleum (*gunbad*), presumably a very modest one or one buried over time, in the village by then known as Khwajah Khayran.¹⁵ In both the earlier and later discovery narratives there are common themes: a reputable figure, either through a discovered text or a dream sequence, testifies to the existence of the 'Alid tomb; he meets with the doubt of another particularly well-established scholar who then undergoes a vision, in the earlier case a persuasive dream and in the latter a violent nightmare, in both cases leading the skeptics to recant. The tomb is forthwith discovered and made permanent with commemorative architecture. The similarity of the stories suggests the site never lost local significance and the discovery story was likely transmitted down through the intervening generations.

By the time of the 1480–81 rediscovery of the shrine, or reinvigoration of the shrine story, the red plaque or brick had disappeared and a white marble tombstone had come to light with a similar, but not identical, inscription to the one al-Gharnati cited, providing some evidence that over time the tomb had been cared for, and that the red tablet or brick had been replaced with something more durable and esthetically pleasing, perhaps not long after the initial discovery in 1135 (Fig. 3.3). In 1977, Lisa Golombek published a description of the stone. She found that the inscription on it, as read by Khwandamir, writing in the 1520s, followed closely the inscription on the stone held today at the shrine and she concluded that it was the same stone as the one uncovered in 1480.¹⁶ She also suggested that based on the style of calligraphy the stone must date from the first half of the twelfth century and may have been ordered when the

15 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 95 identifies the eponymous "Khwājah Khayrān" as a certain "Sayyid 'Abd Allah Zarbakhshī Khwārazmī" but provides no further information about the figure or the source identifying him.

16 Golombek 1977, pp. 340–41. It should be noted that there are two photographs of the stone (Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 26 and Golombek 1977 (plate xvii)). The former shows the lower quarter of the stone that was missing when Golombek photographed it. She noted that two pieces were missing, undoubtedly the two that show in Kuhgada'i's image. The missing pieces are in any case illegible, at least in Kuhgada'i's photograph. Kuhgada'i, on the other hand, cropped out the top part of the stone and the first line of text as shown in Golombek's photograph.



FIGURE 3.3
Twelfth-century tombstone
marking the grave of 'Ali b. Abi
Talib (d. 661)
AFTER L. GOLOMBEK 1969

tomb was discovered to replace the original inscribed brick that hung in the mihrab of the mausoleum. The stone has resided ever since in the Treasury at the Noble Rawzah.

4 Initial Shrine Construction

Khwandamir, who, as was noted in the preceding chapter, spent some time at Balkh consulting with the second Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa about Mongol history, summarizes in a few words projects at the rediscovered shrine that must have taken years to accomplish. He wrote that Sultan-Husayn Bayqara, the Timurid ruler of the region, hurried to Balkh from Herat on news of the rediscovery and ordered that “an immense and high dome” be built over ‘Ali’s grave. It was to be of the familiar four-iwan—four-*suffah* or four-*tāq* design (much like ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s apparent plan for the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine.¹⁷)

¹⁷ See O’Kane 2000, p. 143.

Sultan-Husayn also called for the construction of facilities clearly meant to support the main shrine building. These included *buyūtāt* (a vague term that could mean anything from workshops to outbuildings of any kind), a *bāzār* (usually a double row of attached shops or stalls creating a street between them that was sometimes covered), and a bath.¹⁸ These facilities would provide income to support the shrine, as well as services for its staff and visitors, and although Khwandamir does not specifically say so, they would have been donated as an endowment (*waqf*).

Works written in Balkh more than a century later added the names of the architect-builders of the domed building, the father-son team of Mawlana Sabz, architect-builder (*bannā*) and his son, Kamal al-Din. The son would adopt the pen-name Banna'i (or Bina'i) for the poetry that would bring him great fame.¹⁹

Although Khwandamir presents the construction as quickly completed, as if all of it was accomplished at the moment Sultan-Husayn made his appearance in Balkh and gave his orders, the late sixteenth-century source, Warsaji, and an anonymous source of apparently mid-nineteenth-century provenance more realistically describe the building of the shrine mausoleum as taking some fourteen years.²⁰

18 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172.

19 McChesney 1991, pp. 32–33. Babur 1922, p. 286 translates the father's name as "Ustad Muhammad *Sabz-banā*," and in a note the translator explains *sabz-banā* as meaning a "good builder, an architect." Babur 1996, p. 223 omits the word *sabz* altogether from the translation, rendering the name Ustad Muhammad; while Babur 1995 (the text), vol. 1, p. 279 renders the name as "Ustād Muḥammad Sar Bannā" (or Binā). Post-Timurid writers would either ascribe the building to "Mawlānā Bannā" apparently having in mind the poet Kamal al-Din Banna'i son of the builder (Muhammad Tahir Balkhi, ms. p. 86) or "the father of Mawlana Banna'i" (Mahmud b. Amir Wali, ms. 575, fol. 318b = idem 1981, p. 77) or "Ustad Muhammad Khan *mi'mār*" (Kuhgadā'i, p. 35, note 1, citing Mahmud b. Amir Wali but without any further details of manuscript, volume, or folio number).

20 [*Tārīkh-i mashāyikh-i Balkh*], fol. 15b and Warsaji 2010, p. 18. It's worth a note of caution here about Warsaji's work as it comes down to us. There are two editions, *Haftād mashāyikh-i Balkh* (aka *Tārīkh-i mazārāt-i Balkh*), published separately by two men who had worked together on a third publication of the work, a version serialized in *Bidār*, a newspaper published in Mazar-i Sharif. See preface to Warsaji, n.d. The second version is missing Warsaji's own introduction found in Warsaji 2010 which is critical to dating the work and also for the information about the 'Alid shrine.

5 Administrative Configurations

Just as Khwandamir compresses all the development activity into what seems a mere instant of time, he also reduces the number of people appointed on Sultan-Husayn's behalf to just two names and an unspecified number of agents when dozens, perhaps even scores, of people must have been involved. The first person he mentions is Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan Andkhudi, a relative of (Mir) Sayyid Barakah, the holy man reburied in Gur-i Mir who gave the Samarqand tomb both its name and a hoped-for sanctity. Sultan-Husayn Bayqara appointed Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan *naqīb* of the new shrine.²¹ The second name Khwandamir mentions is Shams al-Din Muhammad, whose lineage went back to the famous ninth-century Khurasan Sufi, Abu Yazid Bistami. Shams al-Din Muhammad, who had "come to the Dome of Islam Balkh from Kabul and Ghaznin" with the book revealing the location of 'Ali's tomb, was given the position of *shaykh*. In addition to the two named individuals, Khwandamir adds that Sultan-Husayn also appointed a group of "trustworthy agents" (*'amalah-i amīn*) "to administer the votive and endowment income."²²

Muhammad Salih Warsaji, writing some seventy years after Khwandamir and in turn followed by the anonymous author of the provisionally named mid-nineteenth-century *Tārīkh-i mashāyikh-i Balkh*, not only presents a somewhat more plausible time frame for the construction work (fourteen years) but a more credible (though surely arbitrary) figure for the number of professionals and others brought in not just to manage the financial affairs of the shrine but also to maintain and develop its assets. Warsaji asserts:

[Sultan-Husayn] freed 100 sayyids and 100 slaves and assigned [them] to serve [the shrine] and then he settled the *tawliyat* [chief trusteeship] and oversight of the endowments (*waqf-ṣahābat*) on Sayyid Taj al-Din Andkhudi—on him be God's mercy—who was one of the descendants of

21 The office of *naqīb*, or more completely *naqīb al-ashraf* (head of the Association of Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, the *sayyids*) is a long-standing one in Islamic history whose basic role in the Arab world has been ascertaining and authenticating claims to sayyidhood or descent from the Prophet with all the attendant privileges (see Morimoto 2012). Of particular interest for Balkh, however, is the meaning of *naqīb* as found in the *Baḥr al-asrār* (Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms 575, fols. 387b–388a) for which see DeWeese 1995, where a military-ceremonial role is also performed by a *naqīb* and the position is seen as the hereditary right of descendants of Sayyid Ata, a fourteenth-century saint of Yasawi lineage (on whom see DeWeese 1994, p. 105 and *passim*).

22 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172.

Amir Barakah-i Andkhudi [i.e., Mir Sayyid Barakah, the holy man buried in Timur's tomb in Samarqand].²³

The anonymous author of [*Tārikh-i mashāyikh-i Balkh*], slightly altering Warsaji's story, has Sultan-Husayn moving 100 households of "the great khwajahs of Herat" to the shrine and also "100 slaves [*ghulām*] to serve there."²⁴ Except for shifting responsibility from Khwandamir's "trustworthy functionaries" to Sayyid Taj al-Din and use of the favored number '100', these accounts tend to corroborate Khwandamir. The anonymous source is also sufficiently different from Warsaji to suggest an independent narrative. Finally all three (although Khwandamir only by inference) point to Herat as the source of the expertise in accounting needed to manage the endowments and the actual or anticipated revenue from votive offerings.

The accounts of the shrine over time consistently connect Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan and Sayyid Mir Barakah (or Mir Sayyid Barakah—d. 806/1403–4), the saint interred in the Gur-i Mir, to Andkhud although the relationship of the two men is not always said to be the same. Khwandamir, for example, says Sayyid Taj al-Din was "a relative" (*az jumlah-i aqribā*) of Sayyid Mir Barakah while Warsaji, seventy years or so later, calls him "a lineal descendant" (*az awlād*). The genealogy of the other key figure, Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad or Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad "Miskin" also undergoes change presumably to meet changing sentiments. Khwandamir has him a descendant of Shaykh Abu Yazid Bistami (d. 938 AD) while Warsaji calls him "a lineal descendant" of Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari (d. 1089 AD). Much later, in the middle of the twentieth century, Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada'i would unconvincingly attempt to link Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad "Miskin" (fl. 1480) to Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari (d. 1089) in only three generations.²⁵ This connection became important for establishing the genealogical credentials of the Ansari family, who claimed legitimate authority over the administration of the shrine, although the generally accepted genealogical link to Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari would shift from Shams al-Din Muhammad "Miskin" to Sayyid Taj al-Din Abu'l-Hasan, the *naqīb* whose grave is actually at the shrine.

Although there is not a great deal of evidence, there is some reason to believe that the shrine administration was headed, and would continue to be headed, at least through the end of the sixteenth century, by the *shaykh* and *naqīb*. It is possible that over time these positions became more honorary than

23 Warsaji 2010, p. 19.

24 [*Tārikh-i mashāyikh-i Balkh*] ms., fol 15b.

25 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 100, note.

operational though still compensated monetarily. Until the early seventeenth century no other title is associated with appointments to the administration of the shrine. After the 1630s the titles *shaykh* and *naqīb* disappear as administrative titles to be replaced by *mutawallī* (trustee). In 1889, the then ruling amir of Afghanistan, ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, took the non-operational title *mutawallī-bāshī* (chief trustee) for himself and left the chief operating officer with the title *amīn*.²⁶ Ultimately, sometime in the twentieth century, the holder of that position was given or assumed the title *raʿīs* (head, chief) which is the title of the chief executive officer of the shrine today.²⁷

It now is clear from the work of Maria Subtelny that Sultan-Husayn Mirza Bayqara had in mind not just recognizing the sanctity of the Khwajah Khayran site as the burial place of the fourth caliph and first imam in the Sunni and Shīʿi traditions respectively but that he also planned major reinvestment in the agricultural economy of the Hazhdah Nahr irrigation system for the entire province of Balkh, of which the Shahi Canal, dedicated to the shrine, was just one element. Three documents contained in compilations of model documents more contemporary with the Timurid activity around the ‘Alid shrine indicate that Sultan-Husayn’s involvement with the development of the shrine and most importantly the capital assets of its endowment lasted for more than two decades.²⁸ From these documents we know that he appointed other people than the aforementioned *shaykh* and *naqīb* to oversee the productive assets of the endowment. One such individual was a courtier from Herat, Pahlawan Darwish Muhammad. He was made responsible for agricultural development in the area served by the Nahr-i Shahi, the principal component of Sultan-Husayn’s endowment.²⁹

Sultan-Husayn had plans for the Hazhdah Nahr system as a whole, not just for the canal endowed to the shrine, the Nahr-i Shahi. At this time, he named another functionary from Herat, Qiwwam al-Din Abu’l-Qasim of the Herat *dīwān*, the finance administration, and gave him responsibility for agricultural management, and “all matters related to irrigation.”³⁰ Although the letter of appointment for him is undated, the year Bars Yil (the Year of the Tiger in the duodecimal cycle of years) is mentioned, indicating in all likelihood, the solar year 1482–83.³¹ The letter of appointment was issued after the shrine discovery

26 McChesney 1991, pp. 299–300.

27 Ansari 2012, p. 47.

28 The following draws on Subtelny 2007, pp. 212–220.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 217–18.

31 Between the tomb rediscovery and the death of Sultan-Husayn Bayqara in 1506, Bars Yil would have been the name of the solar years 1482–83, 1494–95, and 1506–07. It seems

in 1480 and sometime before 1482–83 for it foresees completion of the work and payment being made for the work completed in that year. Qiwam al-Din was ordered to devote his energies to building or rebuilding what the document calls a *kārīz*. The term is often used interchangeably with *qanāt* to refer to a subterranean irrigation channel, but here it was seemingly intended to mean the Nahr-i Shahi since that was the canal of interest to Sultan-Husayn. At the expiration of Qiwam al-Din's contract he was to be paid "the sum of one thousand Kapaki dinars and a quantity of 100 *kharwārs* by legal weight of 'half-and-half' grain [half wheat, half barley] from the legal revenues of the government of Balkh."³² Judging by the stipulations for his compensation, Qiwam al-Din's work was seen as a one-time assignment, not a permanent position.

In another manual of sample Timurid documents, the *Sharaf-nāmah* of 'Abd Allah Marwarid, there is an undated letter of appointment for Darwish 'Ali Kukaltash, the brother of Sultan-Husayn's close advisor, Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i, to develop the irrigation potential of another of the Hazhdah Nahr system's waterways, the Nahr-i Fayzabad.³³ As far as we can tell, neither Pahlawan Darwish Muhammad, Qiwam al-Din Abu'l-Qasim, or Darwish 'Ali Kukaltash are ever mentioned again in connection with the shrine, its administration, or the Hazhdah Nahr irrigation network.

The record of a fourth appointment to the shrine by Sultan-Husayn, one not directly related to economic development, comes in a document issued sometime after 1480. Notice is given in a letter written to his eldest son, Rashid al-Dawlah wa'l-Din Haydar Muhammad, and "the amirs of the government, those affiliated with the noble threshold (the shrine), imperial officials, and functionaries of the financial department of the Dome of Islam Balkh" that "Khvajah Nasir al-Din Ziya al-Mulk al-Jami [al-Tirmidhi], whose lineage went back to 'Ala al-Mulk Tirmidhi and through him to Shaykh Ahmad of Jam [d. 1141 AD], had been appointed to a professorship (*tadrīs*) at the shrine."³⁴ No mention is made of a madrasah as one of the buildings ordered by Sultan-Husayn but the appointment of a *mudarris*-professor is evidence that the shrine was expected to perform that function, perhaps within the walls of the tomb building or in one of the unidentified outbuildings (the *buyūtāt*). This would accord with the general pattern that we see, at least from early Timurid

most likely the appointment would have been made soon after the tomb rediscovery and the establishment of the endowment and therefore in 1482–83 (see also *ibid.*, p. 218, note).

32 Nizami Bakharzi 1978–79, pp. 278–79.

33 This information was brought to my attention by Maria Subtelny in a personal communication of August 31, 1992. She discovered it in Marwarid's work, see Roemer 1952, p. 79.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 130–31.

times, of shrine centers also having a madrasah, as well as a *khānqāh*-hostel, a gathering place with accommodations for members of Sufi confraternities, as already noted in the cases of Gur-i Mir and the Balkh shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa.

Crucial to the survival of the shrine and its prosperity were the mid-level bureaucrats and accountants subsumed under Khwandamir's general rubric "trusted agents" named to administer the shrine and appropriate and distribute the income from its endowments and from other income such as votive offerings.

For the kinds of positions that such an administration might have included we have a much later listing of the officials at the shrine in an 1889 *farmān* of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan in which he sets forth how the Afghan government perceived the shrine's administrative structure. In that year there were 108 paid personnel at the shrine including the staffs of the *amīn*, the chief official; the *nāẓir* or auditor; the *ṣandūqdār* or treasurer; the *farrāsh-bāshī*, head custodian; the *kilīdār*, keeper of the keys; the *muḥarrīr* and *nawīsandah*, records keepers; the religious officiants (imams and muezzins); the *darbāns* (door men); and *chandals* (sweepers).³⁵ Although the size of the administrative staff had probably expanded in the 400 years since the 1480 rediscovery, all these essential functions—revenue collection and financial controls, records-keeping, security, building maintenance, and control of access—would have been required as soon as the shrine was built and income began to flow. We simply do not have any of the names of these first functionaries except for the half dozen mentioned above.

Within less than a century, however, one group had emerged as the mainstay of the administration and found its progenitor in Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan. This group emerged from the "trusted agents" of Khwandamir, the "100 sayyids and 100 slaves" of Warsaji, or the anonymous author's "100 households of khwajahs from Herat," in other words, a faceless anonymous group of professional accountants. By the late sixteenth century a family dynasty of managers calling itself "Ansari" had risen to the top of this group.³⁶ Maria Subtelny

35 McChesney 1991, pp. 299–305. It is worth comparing this to the nine officials listed as the current administration in Ansari 2012, p. 47: 1) *ra'īs* (chief executive), 2) *mu'awīn* (deputy chief executive), 3) *khaṭīb* (in charge of ritual), 4) *mushāwir-i iḥrāzī* (retention consultant? human resources?), 5) *mudīr-i muḥāsabah* (director of accounting), 6) *mudīr-i fannī* (technical director), 7) *mudīr-i farhangī* (director of education), 8) *kitābdār* (librarian), and 9) *mas'ūl-i mūziyūm* and *taḥwīldār* (museum director and assets manager). Presumably, each of these officials has a number of assistants.

36 Warsaji, p. 19 already identifies Abu'l-Hasan Ansari, a figure later given fuller shading in a document issued in 1079/1668–69 (see McChesney 1991, p. 139), as appointed by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara himself. Warsaji calls him the eldest son of "Shaykh Shams al-Din Miskin" who in turn was a descendant of the eponym, Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari. The

has proposed that some of these anonymous agents may have been affiliated with the shrine of Gazurgah at Herat honoring the Hanbali mystic, ‘Abd Allah Ansari (d. 1089 AD) hence the family name. In her analysis, she emphasizes the importance of training in accountancy for the efficient running of any government or non-governmental organization like that of a large shrine and suggests that the Ansari shrine at Herat served as a kind of early modern “business school” from which Sultan-Husayn could draw his administrative cadres.³⁷

Through Sultan-Husayn’s appointments, as recorded by the earliest sources, he assembled men representing three of the most important spiritual lineages in Khurasan, with a marked mystical or Sufistic bent—descendants of Abu Yazid Bistami, Sayyid Barakah Andkhudi, and Shaykh Ahmad-i Jami and latterly to include a lineage claiming descent from Khwajah ‘Abd Allah Ansari and one from Sultan Mawdud-i Chishti.

Another thread of mysticism woven into the sacralization of the site was the legacy of the founder of what became the dominant Sufi confraternity at Balkh, that of the Naqshbandis. At least as early as the end of the sixteenth century, it had become part of the site’s lore that Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) himself had made pilgrimage to the site, about a century before its Timurid rediscovery. There, it is said, he waited to perform the *ziyarat* ritual until he had completed three *chillahs*—forty-day periods of fasting and retreat. He reportedly fulfilled the *chillahs* in the *naqqārah-khānah* (drumhouse) attributed to Sultan Sanjar, one that had disappeared by Timurid times, but, according to Warsaji, was rebuilt in the late fifteenth century by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara himself and became identified with the south gate, the Dar-i Ihram.³⁸ This story of Baha al-Din Naqshband’s visit, very much alive today, should perhaps be associated with the renaming of the congregational mosque extension to the original mausoleum by ‘Abd al-Mu’min Khan (see below) as “Gunbad-i Khanqah” (Sufi Lodge Dome) from “Gunbad-i Kharij” (Outer Dome) and “Jami’i Astanah” (Threshold Congregational Mosque). In addition, the entire site became famous as a *qadamgāh* (a place visited by a saint), that saint being Baha al-Din Naqshband, thereby enhancing its spiritual importance for the Naqshbandi groups that have used it up to the present time for their gatherings and *zikr* rituals. [no. 2 on Plan 4]

anonymous nineteenth-century [*Tārīkh-i mashayikh-i Balkh*, (fols. 15b–16a)] conveniently provides the genealogy of Abu’l-Hasan back to ‘Abd Allah Ansari but in only five generations, hardly enough to cover the 475 years from the death of the Herati mystic to Abu’l-Hasan’s own reported (but only by Warsaji) appointment by Sultan-Husayn.

37 Subtelny 2007, p. 218.

38 Warsaji 2010, p. 18 and the anonymous ms. [*Tārīkh-i mashāyikh- Balkh*], fol. 20a.

To sum up: by the end of the fifteenth century the shrine's administration and associated officials comprised *naqīb*, *shaykh*, mid-level officials, a *mudarris*-professor, supervisors of the Shahi and Fayzabad Canals, and a manager of Balkh's agricultural development linked to the general improvement of Balkh's irrigation system. In terms of its finances, the shrine would be the beneficiary of rents and fees from lands irrigated by the Shahi Canal, from the marketplace shops set up by Sultan-Husayn next to the shrine, from the bath and workshops (*buyūtāt*), and any votive offerings brought by pilgrims. There is evidence, as we will see, that this administrative structure and the form of its finances, augmented now and then by new capital assets donated to its endowment, have lasted for centuries.

6 Assets and Endowments: The Nahr-i Shahi, Its Rehabilitation and Administration

In an arid environment where precipitation averages less than ten inches a year and the main source of water is a single small river fed by snowmelt and only usable through canalization, the need to exploit that water efficiently is obvious. Therefore, as Khwandamir has it, Sultan-Husayn endowed the shrine with a large trunk canal, the Nahr-i Shahi, (Shahi Canal or Royal Canal) or at least a large share in its water. Like the other information he gives about the foundation of the shrine, his note about Sultan-Husayn Bayqara's canal endowment is too concise to be very informative. "[Sultan-Husayn] made an endowment (*waqf*) of one of the trunk canals (*anhār*, plural of *nahr*) of Balkh, which is now [in the 1520s AD] called 'Nahr-i Shahi' (Royal Canal)."³⁹

Seventy years after Khwandamir, Warsaji describes the Nahr-i Shahi endowment somewhat differently, writing, "[Sultan-Husayn Bayqara] diverted 100 *zawj* of water from the Balkh River, gave it the name 'Nahr-i Shahi' and made it an endowment for the shrine."⁴⁰ The *zawj* or "pair" (of oxen) was an arbitrary amount of land that a team of oxen could cultivate in a year. In nineteenth-century Afghanistan, the *zawj* was equivalent to 60 *tanābs* or about 30 acres.⁴¹ Thus, according to Warsaji, by this diversion, Sultan-Husayn provided enough water for the irrigation of some 3,000 acres or an area of more

39 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172. See Subtelny 2007, p. 216 on the name "Nahr -i Shahi."

40 Warsaji 2010, p. 19.

41 McChesney 1991, p. 178.

than four square miles.⁴² Khwandamir's account implies that a canal already existed and because of the work done on it by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara its name was changed to Nahr-i Shahi. Warsaji, on the other hand, seems to indicate that a new canal was created with water rights sufficient to irrigate the equivalent of 3,000 acres. This water, or rent or sale of it, would be perhaps the main income producer, for a time at least, after the founding of the shrine. Although its dimensions in the fifteenth century when it was either excavated or refurbished are unknown, by the late nineteenth century it measured twenty feet wide at its upstream end with a depth of about three feet.⁴³ At that time, it carried its water for some twenty-two miles, from its head at Pul-i Imam Bakri to the village of Gur-i Mar about ten miles beyond the shrine. On modern maps the shrine itself is situated about halfway along the canal.⁴⁴

There is other evidence that the canal, or at least its bed, actually predated the Timurid rediscovery of the tomb; in fact it might have been as old as the twelfth-century discovery, for a seventeenth-century source attributes the Nahr-i Shahi to the Saljuqid, Sultan Sanjar (r. 1118–1157) and says that the work being done after 1480 was bringing it back into full operation after years of neglect.⁴⁵ Another indication is that the villages on the Nahr-i Shahi that can later be identified as part of the endowment lay east of the shrine at the furthest extent of the canal, e.g., the village of Qal'ah-i Qul Muhammad. Sultan-Husayn's project might then be explained as a reexcavation and extension of the canal with an additional 100 *zawjs* worth of water shares. Kuhgada'i seems to favor that scenario. In a note citing Warsaji and a work by a certain Muhammad Murid entitled *Hujjat al-bayzā* for the information that Sultan-Husayn Bayqara endowed the shrine with 100 *zawjs* of water and then named the canal "Nahr-Shahi," Kuhgada'i adds:

the *waqf* charter of Sayyid Subhan Quli Khan, the *pādshāh* of Balkh, states that Sultan-Husayn Mirza [Bayqara] actually reexcavated a canal called Nahr-i Khizrābād originally dug by Sultan Sanjar to provide water

42 For further discussion of the *zawj* and *ṭanab* see, *Ibid.*, p. 281. The *ṭanāb* and *jarīb* were roughly equal. For a discussion of the *jarīb* see note 564 below.

43 Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, p. 174.

44 Soviet General Staff 1:200,000 entitled "Mazar-e Sharif" and the US map included in Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, sheets IV-7-B and IV-8-A.

45 This information was contained in the 1079/1668–69 manshur issued by Subhan Quli Khan (see McChesney 1991, p. 40 and following note). Another vestige of Sultan Sanjar in local memory is the survival of his name in a garden (*chahārbāgh-i Sanjarī*) at the shrine (see Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 37) and the belief that Sanjar is actually buried at the shrine (see below pp. 233, 303–04).

for the noble shrine. Sultan Sanjar had endowed it on the shrine but with the passing of time and the calamitous events that had occurred it had been abandoned.⁴⁶

In fact, in his 1079/1668–69 confirmation decree for the endowment of the shrine, Subhan Quli Khan does not mention the name Nahr-i Khizrabad. However, he does state that Sultan-Husayn rebuilt the canal that was first established by Sultan Sanjar and made a *waqf* endowment of the shrine.⁴⁷ Warsaji's reference to the 100 *zawjs* of water diverted from the Balkh River and Sultan-Husayn Bayqara's then renaming the canal "Nahr-i Shahi" corresponds with Subhan Quli's later assertion and the theory that one and the same canal, perhaps called first Khizrabad and then Shahi are being described.

It is worth noting, though it is uncertain what to make of it, that neither the Khizrabad Canal nor the Fayzabad Canal mentioned earlier are listed by Hafiz-i Abru in 1420 as being among the canals of Balkh.⁴⁸ One reason for this might be that when Hafiz-i Abru drew up his list both canals were defunct and so badly eroded as to be useless for irrigation. It is also possible that they were simply known by different names in 1420.

7 The Shrine under Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrid Auspices: The Kistan Qara Sultan Family and the Two Vanished Mausolea

In 1526, the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids, direct descendants of Chinggis Khan and thus with a better claim on the Chinggisid khanate (not to mention a better fighting force), drove the last of the Timurids out of Balkh. Kistan Qara Sultan, an Abu'l-Khayrid of the Jani-Begid clan who led the force against Balkh, received the region as his appanage and ruled it until his death in October 1544, although according to one contemporary source he had suffered incapacitating dementia for the preceding three years.⁴⁹ He was succeeded by his son Qilij Qara Sultan, who held Balkh for "a year and a half plus seventeen days" until an uncle took it from him by force.⁵⁰ Balkh must have flourished under Kistan Qara Sultan if we take his known building projects and those of his leading

46 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 36, note 5. Kuhgada'i also calls Warsaji's work *Tazkirat al-mashāyikh* rather than *Haftād mashāyikh*.

47 McChesney 1991, pp. 140–41.

48 See Hafiz-i Abru 1991, pp. 25–26.

49 Muhammad Yar 2006, pp. 184–185.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

amir, Kamal al-Din Qunaq, as evidence.⁵¹ What interests us here is the relationship of Kistan Qara Sultan's family to the 'Alid shrine, twelve and a half miles and a good half-day's ride southeast of the political center, Balkh City.

After Kistan Qara Sultan and his family passed from the scene, if one approached Sultan-Husayn Bayqara's shrine building from the south along the road that came to be called the "Khiyaban" (avenue or boulevard), the traveler would have first encountered a pair of magnificent mausolea flanking the road perhaps a quarter of a mile south of the south entry to the shrine area (Fig. 3.4). As Professor Bernard O'Kane has described these two mausolea in detail and provided the photographs of Robert Byron and Eric Schroeder who visited Mazar-i Sharif in 1934 and 1936 respectively, there is no need to repeat his excellent analysis of them. I would only add here the two texts that he refers to from the 1630s description of Mahmud b. Amir Wali. The first of Mahmud's references appears in the section devoted to the genealogy of the Tuqay-Timurids genealogy and to a daughter of Mangqishlaq Khan, the great-great grandfather of Nazr Muhammad, who commissioned Mahmud to write the work in which these descriptions appear:

Eventually, the aforementioned Tursun Begi Sultanum was married to Kistan Qara Sultan son of Jani Beg Sultan and from her came into existence Jan Qara Sultan and Qilij Qara Sultan. That veiled one, having died before the sultan (i.e., Kistan Qara Sultan), according to her last will and testament, was buried in the Gunbad-i Kabud (Blue Mausoleum) which is situated south of the resting place of Hazrat-i Amir [‘Ali]—make God ennoble his face—that she had ordered built during her own lifetime.⁵²

Later in the work, in his lengthy description of Balkh, Mahmud writes:

Around the sides and periphery of the blessed *rawzah* [the 'Alid shrine] are located many sublime holy sites (*biqā'*) today. One of them is the *ḥazīrah* "cloaked in God's mercy and forgiveness" of Āyum Bibī, the veil of chastity and modesty, sister (*hamshīrah*) of Ḥazrat-i khilāfat-makānī

51 On Kamal al-Din Qunaq and his projects in Balkh see McChesney 2001a. Kistan Qara is most famous for a "royal bath" (Raḳim fol. 116b) and a palace (*imārat*) inside the citadel (ibid., fol. 127a) but there were probably other projects he was involved in during the eighteen years of his rule, including work on, and an endowment for, a congregational mosque attributed to Sultan-Husayn Bayqara (Sultan Muhammad Balkhi ms., fol. 16b).

52 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. no. 575, fol. 38a. Although Persian makes no gender distinction in third-person pronouns the context makes it clear that it is Tursun Begi Sultanum and not Kistan Qara Sultan who is the subject here.



FIGURE 3.4 Two Jani-Begid mausolea just south of the South gate of the Noble Rawzah
R. BYRON, 1934

[Nazr Muhammad Khan]. Another is the lofty dome of the paternal aunt [in fact, the great-grandaunt, Tursun Begi Sultanum or Khanum] of that *ḥaẓrat* [Nazr Muhammad Khan], [and a wife] of the harem of Kistan Qara Sultan, son of Jani Beg Sultan. In accordance with its being the sultanic resting place, it is known as Gunbad-i Kistan Qara Sultan. These two burial places are located at the feet of that saint [‘Ali], the first at the time of entering at the south gate on the right hand⁵³ side of the avenue (*khīyābān*) and the second on the left side.⁵⁴

As O’Kane has pointed out, the Gunbad-i Kabud of the first text would thus seem to be the same as the Gunbad Kistan Qara Sultan of the second. According to Mahmud, both the *ḥaẓīrah* and the mausoleum were occupied, if not actually built, by women as the second text suggests. If it were not for the use of the term *ḥaẓīrah*⁵⁵ we might have here the earliest description of the two mausolea shown in Byron’s 1934 photographs. Although *ḥaẓīrah* usually refers to an

53 The editor of Mahmud b. Amir Wali 1981, p. 78 mistranscribes *yamīn* (right-hand) as *hamīn* (the same, the very).

54 Mahmud b. Amir Wali, ms. no. 575, fols. 318b–319a = Mahmud b. Amir Wali 1981, pp. 77–78 but one should be aware that the latter has many transcription errors.

55 Golombek 1969, pp. 101–20 for a full discussion of the meaning and historical usage of the term *ḥaẓīrah*.

enclosure or fenced in area for graves that is open to the sky, Mahmud may be using the term here in the more generic sense of funerary enclosure to avoid repeating the word *gunbad*. A 1934 photograph taken by Robert Byron shows that the walled area of the Gunbad-i Kistan Qara standing on the right hand side of the avenue (when facing north) that separates the two mausolea and leads to the south gate of the shrine included some thirty grave sites. Perhaps such an area might have been referred to as an *ḥaẓīrah* by Mahmud.⁵⁶

Kuhgada'i, who did his research at the shrine circa 1944, provides additional information about the royal women buried at the shrine, although it is unclear from his work exactly where they were buried. Some of the information may derive from surviving tombstones. These are the women named: Tursun [Begi] Sultan, wife of Kistan Qara, and Jahan Sultan, a daughter of Kistan Qara, perhaps the person to be identified with the woman called by C.E. Yate who also made an effort to describe the mausolea in 1886 as "Kansh."⁵⁷ Other elite women, unrelated to the Jani-Begids, would be buried in what Yate called the women's mausoleum, notably a wife or daughter of the Tuqay-Timurids of Balkh, Yate's "Sharifah Sultan," whose obituary he gives as 1619 AD. Since Yate converts the actual tombstone date from the Hijri year in which it would have been inscribed to its common era equivalent, the actual date would have been either 1028 or 1029 AH and so might well be identified with Mahmud's Ayum Bibi, the sister or milk-sister of Nazr Muhammad Khan.⁵⁸ Kuhgada'i also records the burial of a member of the harem of the Balkh ruler, Nazr Muhammad, 'Ajab Nigar Khanum, who was not buried in one of the Jani-Begid mausolea but, according to Kuhgada'i, who presumably was using Mahmud b. Amir Wali as a source, was buried "between the Masjid-i Khwājah Khayrān and the *rawzah-i sharif*."⁵⁹

Although nothing remains today of these great mausolea, in one of the small mausolea (nos. 9, 10, 11 on Plan 4) attached to the west side of the Gunbad-i Khanqah (no. 2), besides the stones for the people buried there, at one time there were remnants of several other tombstones. A student of the shrine, Reza

56 O'Kane 2000, figure 2.

57 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 94. On that same page Kuhgada'i has an undated photograph of what appears to be the Kistan Qara Sultan mausoleum which he labels "the ruins of the Sanjar Tomb (*dakhmah-i Sanjar*) called by some the 'Sultan's Tomb' and by others 'Blue Mausoleum' (*gunbad-i kabūd*).⁵⁷ What is interesting about it is that the mausoleum appears to be in somewhat better condition than the Eric Schroeder photograph (fig. 3 of O'Kane 2000). If Kuhgada'i was the photographer in the early 1940s that would suggest that the later destruction of the mausolea was more likely due to seismic activity than to nationalist fervor.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. and Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 319a.

Husaini, could read on one of them, the name “Tursun,”⁶⁰ quite possibly that of Tursun Begi Sultanum/Khanum, wife of Kistan Qara Sultan and builder of at least one of the mausolea. It is thus quite possible that some broken tombstones are all that remains of the once-magnificent mausolea that stood south of the Noble Rawzah, the ruins of which Robert Byron and Eric Schroeder photographed in the 1930s.

It seems most likely that the mausoleum containing the body of Kistan Qara Sultan, alternately known as Gunbad-i Kabud (Blue Mausoleum), Gunbad-i Kistan Qara Sultan, and improbably, “Sanjar’s tomb (*dakhmah*)” and which stood on the left-hand side of the Khyaban as one approached the Noble Rawzah from the south, was built at the order of Kistan Qara’s wife, Tursun Begi Sultanum for herself sometime before 945/1538–39. The builder and date of the other structure, possibly containing the body of Ayum Bibi, the sister or more properly ‘milk’ or foster sister of Nazr Muhammad Khan, cannot be determined at this point. It may well have been contemporary with or built not long after Tursun Begi Sultan’s Gunbad-i Kabud, therefore in the 1540s or 1550s and though containing the body of Ayum Bibi was certainly not built by her. However, we should probably dismiss Yate’s assertion that the two mausolea were gender-specific since there were women in both.

By placing the tombs in close proximity to the ‘Alid tomb along the avenue that formed the main approach to the shrine and its south gate, the Dar-i Ihram, the Kistan Qara line of the Jani-Begid Abu’l-Khayrids, despite the fact that their own administrative center was in Balkh City, signaled in a visible way the family’s commitment to one of the saintly traditions of the region, perhaps already the preeminent one. Both mausolea lasted, though in ruinous state towards the end, for nearly 400 years. The photographs from 1934 and 1936 show the buildings seriously dilapidated but more or less intact. Since then only Kuhgada’i’s photograph of 1944 remains as a record. After that there is no trace of them.⁶¹

8 The Administration of the Shrine under the Jani-Begid Abu’l-Khayrids

The *shaykh/naqib* administration established by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara in the 1480s was still in effect under Kistan Qara Sultan. There is a record of Kistan Qara’s appointment in 944/1537–38 of Mir ‘Abd Allah Tirmizi as *naqib* at the

60 Personal communication from Reza Huseini July 17, 2019.

61 An aerial photograph of the shrine taken in 1977 faintly shows two piles of rubble at the approximate location of the two mausolea (see figure 3.30).

shrine.⁶² But then thirty-five years later, we begin to see some change in the functions of the *naqib* and the organization of the administration and for the first time the *tawliyah*, the office of the *mutawalli*, is mentioned. When the Jani-Begid ‘Abd Allah Khan, the son of Iskandar Khan, took Balkh from a cousin in 1573, he performed a ceremonial circumambulation (*tawāf*) of the Noble Rawzah and conferred “the esteemed office of *shaykh al-Islām*, the *tawliyah*, and the *shaykh*ship of that blessed site and sacred *rawzah* on ... Ḥasan Khwājah *naqib*.”⁶³ Here the wording suggests that *shaykh* and *shaykh al-Islām* were seen as distinct offices. However, the appointment of Hasan Khwajah seems to have been a purely ceremonial one which was perhaps only an assertion of the right of the victor to control the appointment. It is clear that Hasan Khwajah was not expected to be on site and actively head the administration. Instead, the appointment was probably to make him the recipient of whatever compensation attached to those three positions as reward for his service. His whole career, aside from this one appointment, has him serving as *naqib* on the military campaigns of his patron, ‘Abd Allah Khan. He seems to have had no time for running a complex operation like the ‘Alid shrine.⁶⁴ And despite numerous references to his career in the main sources of the second half of the sixteenth century, there is no information that he ever set foot in the Balkh region again.

On the other hand, it was not simply a routine campaign for ‘Abd Allah Khan to bring a disobedient rival to heel. As noted in chapter two, Balkh was a major prize and he clearly wanted to leave some permanent form of self-commemoration. Sometime after 1573 and probably before 1582, at which point he gave Balkh to his son, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, as his appanage, ‘Abd Allah ordered a large madrasah built in the “Chaqar Khwajah Parsa” (see Plan 3, no. 5) district of Balkh and established an endowment for it.⁶⁵ This suggests some commitment to the city, even though Bukhara was his capital, as well as a political desire to leave a very visible mark.

62 Raqim, fol. 126b. Raqim (Rosen) gives the date 945.

63 Hafiz-i Tanish (10L), fol. 198b; also Hafiz-i Tanish 1983–89, vol. 2, fol. 193a–b, Russian translation pp. 162–63. As noted above DeWeese 1995 proposed that the function of *naqib* had largely become or had been for a long time a kind of religio-military one, a sort of political commissar.

64 There are more than a dozen references to Hasan Khwajah *naqib* and the many campaigns of ‘Abd Allah Khan in which he took part. See e.g., Hafiz-i Tanish (10L), fols. 156a, 169b, 172a, 221b, 236a, 242b, 264b, 296b. See also the index to volume 2 of Hafiz-i Tanish 1983–89 for many more references.

65 See note 395 above.

9 'Abd al-Mu'min Sultan's Remaking the Shrine

The first record of major rebuilding at the 'Alid shrine relates to the work of the Jani-Begid 'Abd al-Mu'min, 'Abd Allah Khan's son and ruler of Balkh from 1582 to 1598. We are already familiar with one of his works in nearby Balkh City, the renovation of the Mir Mazid Arghun/Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum. As noted in the previous chapter, 'Abd al-Mu'min appears to have been a rather unsavory character. A contemporary, Mutribi Samarqandi, portrayed him as a marauding delinquent at the age of eight, taking advantage of his father's authority to terrorize the people of Bukhara. Later Mutribi sees him developing into a vicious and sadistic murderer as an adult.⁶⁶ Most other sources of the period or of the next generation seem to feel he received his just deserts when he was assassinated by his own amirs a mere six months after succeeding his father as khan at Bukhara. But based on his patronage, there may have been more dimensions to him than he is otherwise remembered for.

As was also noted in the previous chapter, 'Abd al-Mu'min's motives for embarking on extensive architectural work in the Balkh area included rivalry with his father and a desire for self-commemoration. These motives went beyond their expression through architecture; he also sponsored a literary work that contributed to the religious history of Balkh. There existed a genre of cataloguing the seventy most famous religious figures that had been born, lived, or were buried at Balkh, by which was meant the greater Balkh area or Balkh Province. Each generation could choose its own seventy, within limits. 'Abd al-Mu'min wanted to add his name to those associated as authors or patrons of that tradition and so commissioned Muhammad Salih Warsaji Farkhari "to compile a brief treatise on the great men (*akābir*) of Balkh."⁶⁷ Muhammad Salih was an established scholar from the town of Warsaj in what was then Farkhar District.⁶⁸ The modern editor dates the work to 1003/1594–95.⁶⁹ But he cites no source nor does the date appear anywhere in the work, at least in the two published versions.⁷⁰ On the other hand, it is a reasonable approximation for a date coming as it does three years before the end of 'Abd al-Mu'min's tenure at Balkh. Warsaji himself says that 'Abd al-Mu'min commanded him to write it because he knew Warsaji's reputation as an expert in the field of hagiography.⁷¹

66 Mutribi *Nuskah*, pp. 126–28 and Mutribi *Tadhkirat*, pp. 139–40.

67 Warsaji 2010, p. 6.

68 Today, Farkhar and Warsaj are small towns about twenty-five miles apart in Takhar Province and some 250 miles by road east of Mazar-i Sharif.

69 Warsaji 2010, p. 5.

70 Ibid. and Warsaji n.d.

71 Warsaji 2010, p. 6.

Warsaji gave no title to his work, which came to be called, among other things, *Haftād mashāyikh-i Balkh* [Seventy Shaykhs of Balkh]. This genre of biography or hagiography was modeled on the thirteenth-century *Fazā'il-i Balkh*. To emphasize to his readers Balkh's primacy as sacred ground, Warsaji explains the traditional epithets accorded Balkh: *umm al-bilād*⁷² (mother of cities), *qubbat al-Islām* (dome of Islam), *jannat al-arḍ* (earthly paradise), and *khayr al-turāb* (sacred soil).

By this commission, 'Abd al-Mu'min added his name to the list of patrons and benefactors of Balkh's historic claim to be sacred ground—Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj, Sultan Sanjar, Sultan-Husayn Mirza Bayqara, Mir Mazid Arghun, Tursun Begi Sultanum, Kistan Qara Sultan, and Kamal al-Din Qunaq. Perhaps he hoped to ensure that he would long be associated with Balkh's sacred traditions and would gain the respect and admiration of those who lived in Balkh at the time. It is somewhat ironic that when the member of the Afghan Boundary Commission, Capt. W. Peacocke saw 'Abd al-Mu'min's work on the Mir Mazid Arghun mausoleum in Balkh City, he was told by someone at the site that it was the work of 'Abd Allah Khan, 'Abd al-Mu'min's father, the man against whom he had struggled for at least the last ten years of his life and at whom his epigraphic program at the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa site in Balkh City seems to have been aimed.

As was the case with the Mir Mazid Arghun mausoleum, 'Abd al-Mu'min wanted to leave his mark on the Noble Rawzah. The first information we have about his plans for it comes from Mahmud b. Amir Wali writing some thirty-five years after 'Abd al-Mu'min's death.⁷³ However, the more contemporary Mutribi, who would have known of 'Abd al-Mu'min's work, especially since he traveled to Balkh in 1626 and spent some time there, says nothing about any project of his at the Noble Rawzah. According to Mahmud b. Amir Wali:

Afterwards [after the 1480–81 rediscovery], he (Sultan-Husayn Bayqara) assigned the father of Mawlānā Bannā'i to lay the foundation of that durable structure. Today the dome which rises over the illumined resting place (of the saint) brings to mind that most auspicious builder. As for the outer dome, which today is known as the 'Threshold Congregational Mosque,' (*jāmi'-i āstānah*), it was completed under the aegis of 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan.

72 "Umm al-bilād" was perhaps meant to recall Mecca's epithet, "umm al-qura" (mother of villages).

73 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 318b = *idem* 1981, p. 77.

The configuration, though not the size, of the main shrine building as it is today reflects its state after ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s work, that is, two large attached domed halls (see Plan 4, nos. 1, 2), the northernmost hall the work of Sultan-Husayn Bayqara’s builder, Mawlana Sabz (Ustad Muhammad), father of Banna’i the poet, and the southern one ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s addition. There is good reason, however, to think that the overall size of the two was still much smaller after the second hall was added than it is today (see below). The southernmost hall, the structure added by ‘Abd al-Mu’min was also known as Gunbad-i Kharij “the outer gunbad.”

As regards its exterior, we know that ‘Abd al-Mu’min had a marked proclivity for applying tile (*kāshi-kārī*) to the surfaces of his buildings but he may not have insisted on it in this case. If we can believe the mid-twentieth century work of the foremost student of the history of the shrine, Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada’i, the Jani-Begid prince coordinated his building with the color scheme of the existing mausoleum leaving it with a plain stucco exterior that was whitewashed annually.⁷⁴ It would not be covered with ceramic tile for almost 300 years.

Sacred sites always had powerful resonance in the political sphere; an individual seeking to leave an enduring legacy knew that spending on durable architecture on sacred ground would add luster to his claim to power, provide enduring effects well beyond the patron’s lifetime, leave behind a good name for him, and, not incidentally, give him better standing in the world to come.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the site of the ‘Alid shrine had become not just a sufficient but a necessary place to fulfill the desire for self-commemoration and a good and righteous reputation. Beginning with the two great mausolea of the Kistan Qara Sultan family, the ‘Alid shrine becomes the preeminent place for architectural commemoration and display in the Balkh region, almost completely eclipsing Balkh City with its many saintly sites, not least the Abu Nasr Parsa ensemble.

10 Wali Muhammad Tuqay-Timuri’s Projects

Following the sixteen-year rule of ‘Abd al-Mu’min and a two-year interregnum, the next Balkh leader to commit himself to the Noble Rawzah was Wali Muhammad Sultan, later khan, a member of the Tuqay-Timurid family, which succeeded the Abu’l-Khayrid Shibanids at the very beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1601, he and his brother, Baqi Muhammad, led a force from

74 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 38.

Bukhara to Balkh and took it from the last of the Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrids. Wali Muhammad then took command of the Balkh region as his appanage. Like earlier regional administrators he continued to make Balkh City his headquarters, even while pouring resources into the 'Alid shrine twelve miles away.

Wali Muhammad would rule Balkh for five years until the death of his brother, Baqi Muhammad, in 1014/1605–06, at which point he went to Bukhara to claim the khanate seat for himself. Like 'Abd al-Mu'min he too was interested in self-commemoration, allying himself with local religious traditions, and giving architectural expression to the Tuqay-Timurid claims to the neo-Chinggisid khanate that had been held for nearly a century by the descendants of the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids, and in Balkh by the descendants of Abu'l-Khayr's grandson Jani Beg.

During the five years that Wali Muhammad Khan governed Balkh, he devoted his commemorative architectural initiatives to the Noble Rawzah exclusively, both as a symbol of his devotion as a Sunni to the 'Alid legacy and as a way to surpass and even efface the work of his predecessor, 'Abd al-Mu'min. He would pay homage to the figure of 'Ali and at the same time give concrete expression to the Tuqay-Timurids' rise to dominance by literally topping the work of 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan with his own.

It was not simply megalomania that drove Wali Muhammad. Like any other newly ascendant warlord, despite having his own loyal contingent of amirs, who were mostly associated, however, with Bukhara, he would have wanted and needed to encourage service if not feelings of loyalty from local notables and opinion-makers. He would also have needed the cooperation of those people who understood how the area was administered, taxes assessed and collected, and the Hazhdah Nahr irrigation system managed and maintained, as well as those who controlled whatever fighting forces might have been available. His choice of the 'Alid shrine for his patronage simply underlines its importance in the greater Balkh region by that time and the influence of those associated with it, either as administrators and staff or as devotees and *mujāwirs*. Among the *mujāwirs* was probably a *du'ā-gū*, a professional worshipper who earned his living by performing prayers for the disabled and others too busy to take the time.⁷⁵ Other *mujāwirs* were likely the Qur'an-reciters (*ḥāfiẓ* pl. *ḥuffāẓ*) whose skills were always in demand—funerals, holiday celebrations, building dedications, and the combatting of epidemics all created demand for Qur'an recitation. When a major cholera epidemic struck the Kabul area in the summer of 1903, for example, the governor of Afghan Turkistan paid fifty rupees

75 For a late nineteenth-century example of a salaried *mujāwir* at the Noble Rawzah, who described his own function as being a *du'ā-gū*' (see Khafi 1957, vol. 2, pp. 165–66).

to *ḥuffāz* at the ‘Alid shrine to “recite the entire Qur’an as a means of promoting the health of the royal essence” (in this case Amir Habib Allah Khan).⁷⁶ The *mujāwirs* no doubt also included the docents who guided neophyte visitors around the shrine, pointed out the tombs of the famous, showed them the proper way to perform *ziyārat*, and offered advice on accommodations and meals in the city. People like Bibi Ma‘sumah (see below) and Sayyid ‘Abd al-Samad, the son of Sayyid Ibrahim (see below), both of whom were instructors of Naqshbandi teachings, were probably also considered *mujāwirs* if they performed instruction at the shrine. Wali Muhammad would have wanted to impress favorably all such people by a show of regard for the shrine.

11 Expansion of the Double-Hall

The project of Wali Muhammad Khan that had by far the most impact on the architecture of the shrine and the way it appears today was a major expansion of the two connected buildings that comprised the core of the shrine, the Mawlana Sabz-Banna’i structure over the ‘Alid tomb and ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s “Threshold Congregational Mosque.” Although there is no way at this point to assess what part of the fabric of the building today exactly represents Wali Muhammad’s work, what we can say is that his efforts, combined with ‘Abd al-Mu’min Khan’s addition of the Threshold Congregational Mosque some two decades earlier, completely transformed the original building. In the words of an author writing about a generation after Wali Muhammad:

he ordered that that building be redecorated (*tazyīn farmūd*), its height [raised to] approximately thirty *zīrā’* [some sixty feet] and its area be [expanded to] one *jarīb* [about 20,000 square feet].⁷⁷

There is considerable ambiguity in this brief and, it should be said, unique text. Immediately preceding it is a description of the original building with its unusual anti-seismic foundation ascribed to “the father of Mawlana Banna’i, a man known as Mawlana Sabz.”⁷⁸ So the words “that building” might reasonably be thought to refer only to the tomb building, the Gunbad-i Haram, and not the mosque addition of ‘Abd al-Mu’min. But since the two buildings were already attached when Muhammad Tahir Balkhi wrote and were approximately

⁷⁶ Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 4, p. 843.

⁷⁷ Muhammad Tahir Balkhi, ms. pp. 86–87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

equivalent in height, we may assume that he was referring to the entire structure while attributing it, partly incorrectly, to Banna'i's father, for he says nothing in his text of any work sponsored by 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan. Nor do we know the original dimensions either of Mawlana Sabz's structure or of 'Abd al-Mu'min's addition. At this point it is probably impossible to determine them in light of all the later accretions. Nonetheless, what Wali Muhammad did clearly impressed the author, himself a civic-minded citizen of Balkh. And Muhammad Tahir's information was passed on and remembered, though in distorted form. More than a century later, Hajji Mir Muhammad Salim speaks of the same building dimensions that Muhammad Tahir gives (one *jarīb* in area and thirty *zirā'* in height) but attributes them to the original work of the builder whom he calls "Mawlana Banna'i."⁷⁹ The enlarged domes would undergo more work in the late seventeenth and then again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

12 The *Chahārbāgh*

Mahmud b. Amir Wali, who devotes a section of his work to describing the city's physical features and the contributions of his patron, Nazr Muhammad Khan, also notes work by Nazr Muhammad's uncle, Wali Muhammad, although he only writes about the park (*chahārbāgh*). There may have been a certain delicacy in the matter requiring some discretion on his part since Nazr Muhammad, his patron, and his patron's brother, Imam Quli, reigning khan at the time Mahmud was writing, had driven Wali Muhammad from the khanaqate throne and killed him in battle. It might not have been considered good form to be too laudatory about the deceased khan's accomplishments. Since Mahmud, did however, credit Wali Muhammad with the design and laying out of the park, perhaps his failure to mention the expansion of the shrine building was a simple oversight.

About the surrounding park that Wali Muhammad commissioned, all the sources that speak of it are more or less in agreement. It was 100 *jaribs* in circumference, that is 900 meters or more than a half mile a side and was laid out "around the holy *rawzah*."⁸⁰ The new *chahārbāgh* seems to have absorbed

79 Salim ms., fol. 181a.

80 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fol. 319a = idem 1981, p. 79 Although the *jarīb* was generally used for areal measurement and was equivalent to one-half of an acre or one-fifth of a hectare, it was also used for linear measurement, as here, and was equivalent to 60 *gaz* or *zar*'s so that a *jarīb* (areal) was 60×60 *gaz*. For the size of the *gaz* in Timurid architecture I use the 60–60.6 centimeter equivalent as explained by O'Kane 1987, pp. 34–35.

some smaller earlier gardens. The name of one, Chaharbagh-i Sanjar, named after its purported founder, the twelfth century Sultan Sanjar Saljuq, survived into the twentieth century.⁸¹

Wali Muhammad's park was designed with terraces or lawns (*chamans*) and so was named "Hazhdah Chaman" (Eighteen Terraces) perhaps an allusion to the irrigation system of Balkh, the Hazhdah Nahr (Eighteen Canals) system. Today the *chahārbāgh* that surrounds the shrine precincts is called "Bagh-i Huzur" (Royal or Court Park) and the name "Hazhdah Chaman" is preserved in an adjacent street. The park was memorialized for Wali Muhammad by a certain Mirza Kichak Juzjani. Juzjani had been appointed a *mudarris* and *shaykh al-Islām* of the shrine by Wali Muhammad. He composed the chronogram *jannat-i s̄ānī* ("a second Paradise"), which produces the date 1014/1604–5. Mahmud b. Amir Wali writes, "Today [this chronogram] is inscribed in clear script on the arch (*tāq*) of the Darwazah-i Nazargah (the west gate)."⁸² The gate Mahmud was referring to no longer exists. Muhammad Tahir Balkhi adds that Wali Muhammad also had a pool called Hawz-i Zarak constructed within the grounds of the *chahārbāgh* perhaps to rival another tank there, a structure also attributed to the twelfth-century Sultan Sanjar.⁸³

From the latter source we learn that by his time (the first half of the seventeenth century) the shrine had long since become a site for community gatherings and for festivals and fairs that lasted weeks at a time, thus fulfilling one of the primary functions of a shrine, to be a magnet attracting people to worship, to celebrate, and to engage in business. By midcentury, there were times during the course of a year—"the ten days of 'Āshūrā [at the beginning of Muharram], the month of Rajab, and the Gul-i Surkh season [a forty-day period beginning on New Year's Day (Nawruz)]"—when, according to Muhammad Tahir Balkhi:

people from near and far gather on the blessed plaza bringing votive gifts of gold, silver, and jewels to that sacred threshold and to offer to those who dwell at that blessed place. They bring their gifts as intercession with

A *chahārbāgh* of "nearly 100 *jaribs*" around would presumably have meant 25 *jaribs* a side, or some 900 meters. Photos of the shrine show an immense park in the same place where Wali Muhammad is said to have built it but it appears much smaller today, about 350 meters per side (according to the measuring tools on GoogleEarth).

81 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 37.

82 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. 575, fols. 318b, 352b = idem 1981, pp. 79, 250. See also McChesney 1991, p. 89.

83 Muhammad Tahir Balkhi ms., fol. 17b and (RAS) ms. p. 87.

that sublime figure [‘Ali]. At the threshold, the blind regain their sight and those afflicted with disease are cured.⁸⁴

This is not the first source to associate miraculous cures with the shrine. Such phenomena were already described by Khwandamir almost two centuries earlier but it shows that the curative power of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib has remained constant in people’s perceptions of the shrine and continues down to the present day.⁸⁵

13 The *Khiyābān* from Balkh City

Besides his work at the shrine itself, among Wali Muhammad’s contributions to the pilgrimage economy of the shrine was the development of a shaded avenue running between Balkh City and the shrine. The *khiyābān* was designed with shade trees planted all along it and small water channels running on either side of the road to water the trees. There were occasional small tanks for passersby and their animals and rest areas for travelers along the twelve miles of roadway.⁸⁶ Some fifty years after Wali Muhammad, his grandnephew, Subhan Quli Khan, renovated the avenue.⁸⁷ Nothing of it survives today, as far as we know, although there is an old road seen on Soviet General Staff maps and the US intelligence map published by Ludwig Adamec that may represent the *khiyābān*’s alignment.⁸⁸

However, it is important to keep in mind that although Mazar-i Sharif is today the demographic, political, economic, and cultural center of the entire region between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus River, prior to the nineteenth century, it was Balkh City that served these functions. The *khiyābān* might therefore be seen as auguring a different future, opening a symbolic pathway for those functions to slowly gravitate towards the shrine center.

84 Ibid.

85 Lee 1996 and Ansari 2012, pp. 32–35.

86 Muhammad Tahir Balkhi ms., fol. 17b and RAS ms. p. 87.

87 Muhammad Yusuf Munshi ms., fol. 126b; idem 1956, p. 184.

88 Ibid. Also Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, sections IV-7-B and IV-8-A and the Soviet General Staff (*General’nyi Shtab*) 1:200,000 series, maps J-42-XXV and J-42-XXVI. The route most likely to have followed the alignment of Wali Muhammad’s *khiyābān* proceeds east-south-east out of the center of Balkh City and enters Mazar-i Sharif from the northwest rather than the main route now which heads due south out of Balkh to link up with the main road west to Aqchah and Shibarghan and east to Khulm, which enters Mazar-i Sharif from the southwest.

Wali Muhammad also made a *waqf* endowment for which a somewhat detailed record exists, donating a number of villages, lands, and apparently the state revenues from certain areas to augment the income of the shrine.⁸⁹ Part of Wali Muhammad's deed, the part listing the endowed properties, is contained in a confirmation decree issued in 1668–69 by Subhan Quli Sultan, the same grandnephew who rebuilt his avenue between Balkh and the 'Alid shrine.

Wali Muhammad's public works projects and his endowments are a sign of his interest both in the economic well-being of the shrine and in advancing his own political control of the region. He may also have thought that his brother Baqi Muhammad would be khan for a long time and therefore Balkh would be his appanage for an equally extended period. Certainly the work he did at the Noble Rawzah would have strengthened his position locally, established his religious credentials, and so perhaps have drawn the favorable opinion of the area's religious scholars, administrators, and Sufis. These were the constituencies that provided the links between the agricultural and commercial sectors and the state and helped ensure a regular and predictable flow of the revenues on which the ruling class depended. But Wali Muhammad's time there lasted only five years before Baqi Muhammad died and he left Balkh for Bukhara.

14 Qasim Muhammad Khan's Project

There is no record that Nazr Muhammad Khan, Wali Muhammad's nephew whom he had sent to rule Balkh when he assumed the khanate at Bukhara, expended any efforts on the Noble Rawzah. His biographer and chronicler, Mahmud b. Amir Wali, makes much of his other projects: investments in irrigation improvements, hunting lodges in the rural areas of Balkh, and a great madrasah in Balkh City situated to face and designed to surpass the 'Abd Allah Khan Madrasah in size (see Plan 3, no. 8). He would hardly have failed to mention work undertaken at the Noble Rawzah during the thirty-six years of Nazr Muhammad's first regime there (1606–1642).

In the midst of inter-Tuqay-Timurid strife that occurred with the abdication of Imam Quli Khan in 1641, the emperor of India, Shah Jahan, dispatched a Mughal army to the region, as noted above. It captured Balkh and the surrounding region and held it for about a year (1646–47) before abandoning it and returning home. In the aftermath, the struggle among the Tuqay-Timurid contenders for supremacy resumed, during which Sayyid Qasim Muhammad (d. 1657), a grandson of Nazr Muhammad Khan, briefly gained control of Balkh.

⁸⁹ McChesney 1991, pp. 91–93 for details of the endowment.

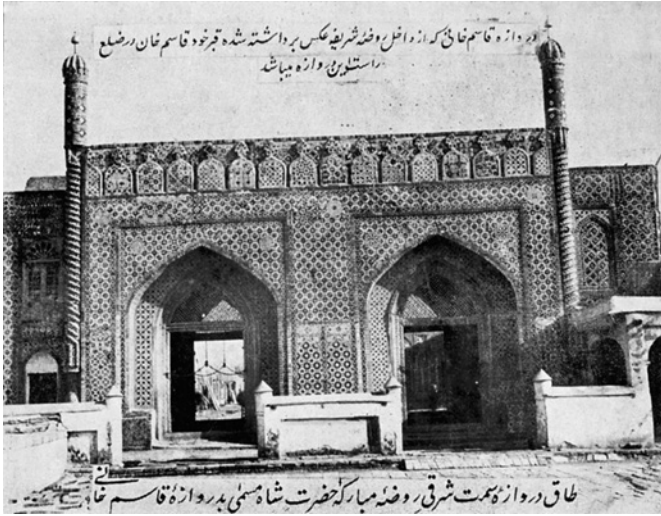


FIGURE 3.5 East Gate (Darwāzah-i Qāsim Khānī)
N. KUHGADA'Ī, 1946

He did, however, have enough time to make the Noble Rawzah an object of his own patronage and left a mark still named in his honor today, the east gate, the Qasim Khani Gate (Fig. 3.5 and no. 5 on Plan 4). After ordering it be built, he instructed that he be buried just south of it or in the southern part of it.⁹⁰ There is no information that his gate replaced an earlier one. The fact that the Qasim Khani Gate is by far the smallest and most modest of the four gates somehow symbolizes the turmoil of the time in which it was commissioned and the slender resources available to do the kind of monumental work that his predecessors had accomplished. As mentioned, Qasim Khan's tenure was brief, perhaps no more than three or four years, and he was killed (ca 1070/1659) in a struggle with his uncle, Subhan Quli.

15 Subhan Quli Khan's Dealings with the Noble Rawzah

After defeating his nephew, Sayyid Muhammad Qasim, Subhan Quli, a son of Nazr Muhammad, governed Balkh from 1651 to 1681. Although Subhan Quli devoted all his known regional architectural patronage to Balkh City, building

90 Kuhgada'ī 1946, pp. 96–97 citing *Tārikh-i akābir-i dīn*, a work not available to me.

a monumental madrasah there for which the deed of endowment⁹¹ survives as do remnants of the entry iwan (now incorporated into a public park), his interest in the Noble Rawzah is shown in his work rebuilding his great-uncle's *khiyābān* and in a remarkable document (*manshūr*) he issued at the request of the *mutawallī* of the shrine, Hajji Mirza Muhammad Ya'qub Ansari (Fig. 3.6).⁹² Subhan Quli took an obvious interest in the Noble Rawzah's fiscal well-being and in 1079/1668–69 issued the decree (*manshūr*) mentioned above summarizing the endowments and reaffirming the jurisdictional rights of the shrine administration based on, we presume, the administration's presentation of proofs—both written and oral.

The document had other purposes than the obvious one of reconfirming the rights of the shrine administration. It was a work of chancellery art, one meant to impress by the beauty of its calligraphy, its elaborate format, its painted surface, and the royal emblems (*tūghrā*) and seals with which it was embellished. It was also a living document; successive rulers of Balkh would be asked to review it at changes of political administration and confirm and, if necessary, restate the fiscal rights of the shrine. These reconfirmations appear in its margins and the seals of witnesses and judicial officials over the years fill the space left at the end (Fig. 3.7).

For Subhan Quli it was also an opportunity to emphasize his credentials as a descendant of Chinggis Khan and thus his rightful claim to political sovereignty, at least in Balkh. It should be noted, though, that Subhan Quli's lineage, as it is presented in the document, raises questions today, although apparently it did not at the time.⁹³ Part of his credential-establishing is a long boast about the countries and cities “conquered” and ruled over by him, conveniently omitting any reference to his Tuqay-Timurid predecessors and the relatively

91 The endowment deed (*waqfnāmah*) for the madrasah is translated and analyzed by Davydov 1960.

92 The original is now held at the Arshif-i Milli (National Archive) in Kabul. Its contents have been analyzed elsewhere (see McChesney 1991, chapters 4–8).

93 As part of the lengthy prologue to the main purpose of the document, Subhan Quli has his lineage traced back to Chinggis Khan (Kuhgada'i 1947, p. 54 of the facsimile of the document and p. 63 for the transcription). The genealogy itself does not wholly conform with Subhan Quli's own elaborate seal which has a lineage back to Chinggis Khan and appears in the margin at the beginning of the document (see Kuhgada'i p. 63, note 1) nor with the genealogy given by his own father's court historian, Mahmud b. Amir Wali. Subhan Quli replaces the family's Juchid eponym Tuqay-Timur b. Juchi b. Chinggis Khan with the eponym of the rulers of sixteenth-century Central Asia, Shibān b. Juchi b. Chinggis Khan, namesake of the Abu'l-Khayrid Shibānids. At this point it is difficult to see what prompted the change.



FIGURE 3.6 (Detail) Waqf Confirmation Scroll dated 1079/1668–69
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

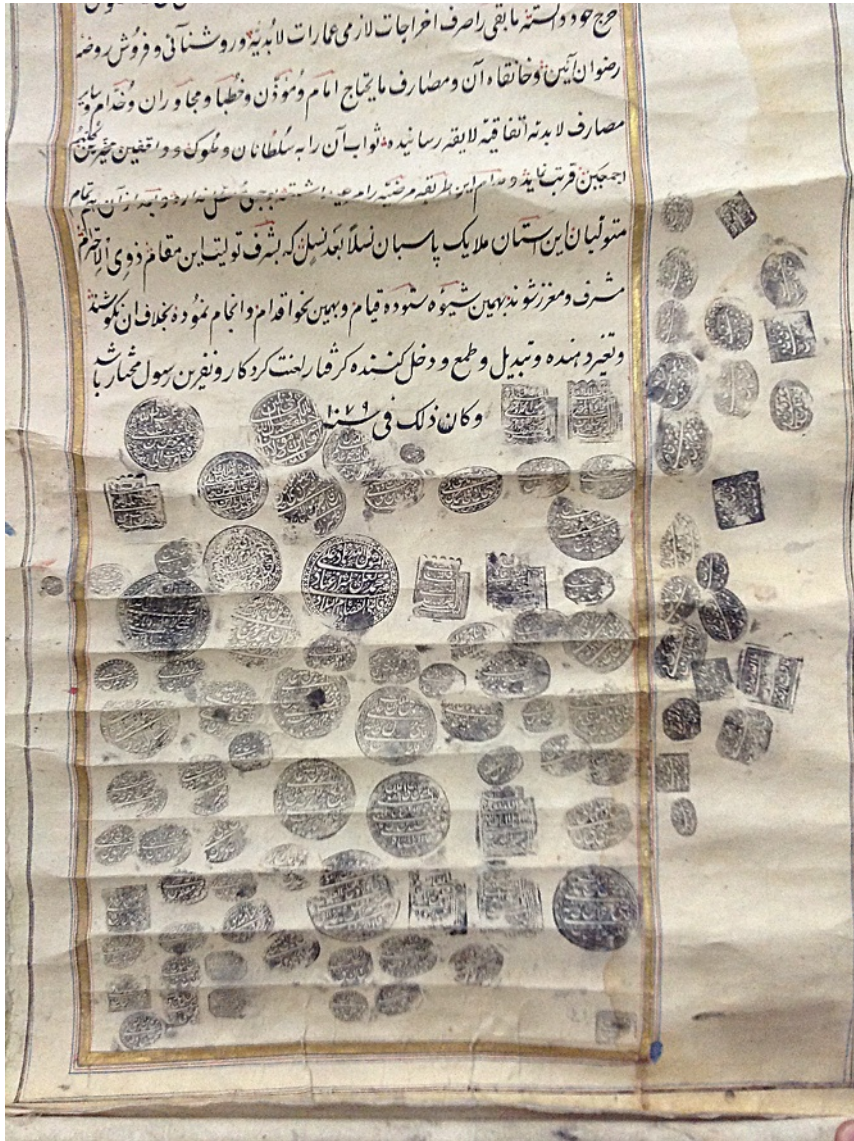


FIGURE 3.7 (Detail) Seals on Waqf Confirmation Scroll of 1079/1668–69
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

stable condition of the khanate at the time his brother and he came to power at Bukhara and Balkh.⁹⁴

The *manshūr* remained the working charter of the Ansari administration for more than a century as the seal imprints at the end of the document show. Most have no date but of those which do, the most recent seal impression bears the date 1191 (1777–78),⁹⁵ a century and a decade after the decree's promulgation. Furthermore, after the late eighteenth century, there is an unbroken history of Ansari administration right up to the present.

16 The Ansari Lineage

The document also formalized and validated the right of the Ansaris to be the chief executives as well as to occupy most, if not all, of the paid positions at the shrine. In the 1668–69 confirmation decree, Subhan Quli Khan approaches the issue as if it were a well-known fact that the Ansaris had an unquestioned hereditary right through a powerful lineage that went back agnately to the eleventh-century Khwajah ‘Abd Allah Ansari, the occupant of the Gazurgah shrine, and cognately to another major saint of the Herat region, Sultan Mawdud-i Chishti, whose shrine is just east of Herat. The Ansari position was foreshadowed by an earlier source, Warsaji, who in the 1590s names Abu’l-Hasan Ansari as Sultan-Husayn Bayara’s appointee to the trusteeship (*tawliyat*) of the shrine, the same name that appears in the 1668–69 decree as the founder of the family. None of the known late Timurid-era sources that describe Sultan-Husayn’s appointments, however, make any reference to an Abu’l-Hasan Ansari to corroborate Warsaji’s information. Nonetheless, if Warsaji is correct, within a century of the shrine’s founding the family had emerged as preeminent and located their Timurid origins in the figure of Abu’l-Hasan Ansari. Abu’l-Hasan Ansari then comes to be identified with Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan Ankhudi, and is said to be buried at the Noble Rawzah in one of the *riwāqs* of the Treasury (no. 7 on Plan 4). Khwandamir wrote that Sultan-Husayn Bayqara appointed Taj al-Din as *naqīb* of the shrine in 885/1480–81 and he was then said to have been either “a relative” or “lineal descendant” of Mir Sayyid Barakah, holy man of the Gur-i Mir.

As Maria Subtelny has persuasively suggested, it is quite possible that the Ansaris emerged not as a lineal descent group at all. The name “Ansari” may

94 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 55 (facsimile), pp. 63–64 (transcription).

95 Ibid., pp. 67–68 for Kuhgada’i’s transcription of the legible seals.

have originally been an ascriptive term for those functionaries recruited from the Ansari shrine in Herat and “over time, the hereditary nature of their administrative positions at the Noble Rawzah transformed the professional designation into a family name. Moreover, once they constituted a descent group, the Ansaris asserted their claim to be descended from ‘Abdullah Ansari himself.”⁹⁶ Today, a spokesman for the shrine, himself an Ansari, writes:

Sultan-Husayn (Bayqara) transferred to Mazar-i Sharif 100 families of the descendants of Khwajah ‘Abd Allah Ansari who were trained in Herat in trust administration (*tawliyat*) to be responsible for the management (of the shrine), to secure its good order ... and look after the cleanliness and upkeep of the sacred site (*haram*). Over the course of the last 500 years, the *qawm-i Anṣār*, who are the descendants of those first *mutawallis*, have undertaken to serve the blessed threshold of the Ḥaẓrat-i Shāh (‘Ali).⁹⁷

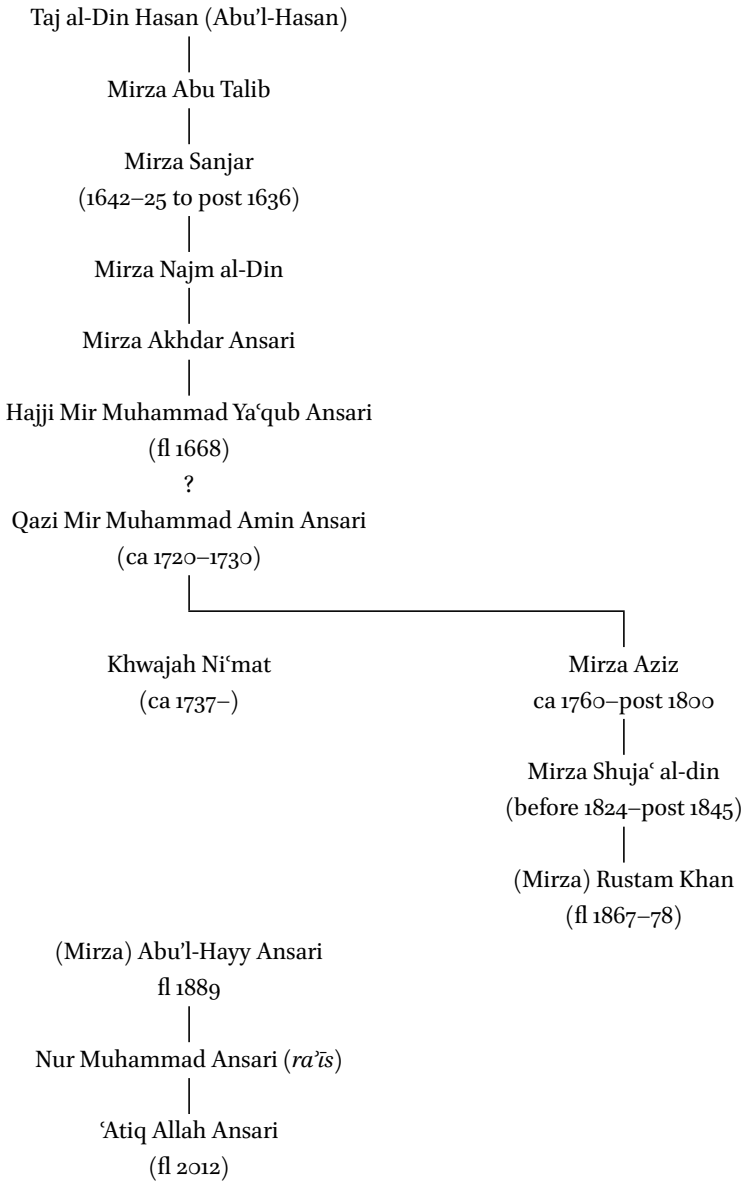
The Ansari lineage, wherever and whenever it originated, was and remains today a powerful element of continuity, coherence, and tradition in the history of the shrine.

Given the long tenure of the Ansaris, as generation succeeded generation, it is not surprising that contention should have arisen, if not with every period of transition at least at many of those times. Struggle over the substantial resources of the shrine and the chance to concentrate control of them in one’s own descent line of the Ansari clan would seem to be entirely predictable. There is tangible evidence, the ramifications of which are not yet fully understood, that at least one such struggle occurred and led to a break in succession. In the middle of the eighteenth century a certain Khwajah Ni‘mat Mirza Ansari was succeeded by Mirza ‘Aziz Ansari, apparently a brother, after which two lines emerge, the ‘Azizis and Ni‘matis, both with claims on the resources of the shrine.⁹⁸ For some 130 years the two descent lines maintained rights to receive emoluments from the revenues of the shrine and perhaps to hold official positions as well, with the ‘Azizis dominant and in charge of the *tawliyat*, the chief trusteeship.

96 Subtelny 2007, p. 218.

97 Ansari 2012, pp. 26–27.

98 See McChesney 1991, pp. 255–56.

TABLE 2 Ansari Mutawallis^a

a This is a very tentative genealogy, based on Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 100 note; and McChesney 1991, pp. 250–51.

17 Later Tuqay-Timurid Work on the Shrine

The last record we have of Tuqay-Timurid architectural work at the shrine is a project undertaken by Muhammad Muqim (d. 1707) a grandson of and eventual successor to Subhan Quli at Balkh. In 1704 an earthquake collapsed the dome of the Gunbad-i Khanqah, the part of the building attributed to ‘Abd al-Mu’min and expanded by Wali Muhammad a decade or so later. At the time Muhammad Muqim repaired it, ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s name had been forgotten and Muqim’s chronicler attributes the building to Sultan-Husayn Mirza Bayqara.⁹⁹ The reconstruction, assigned to a man named Khwajah Faqir, the *diwānbeḡī*, might well have affected the height of the dome. Today, the dome of the Gunbad-i Khanqah is clearly smaller than the dome of the Gunbad-i Haram both in diameter and height. It is not clear who is responsible for this. The two domes would be repaired at least once more before they took on their present appearance. Despite the chronicle of Muhammad Muqim being the last source to record Tuqay-Timurid architectural patronage, we know from the marginal additions to the 1668–69 decree that the Tuqay-Timurid princelings at Balkh successively reconfirmed the terms of the shrine’s endowments seven times thereafter: in 1709–10, 1711, 1712, 1719, 1721, 1736, and 1738 and might well have undertaken repairs of the shrine.¹⁰⁰

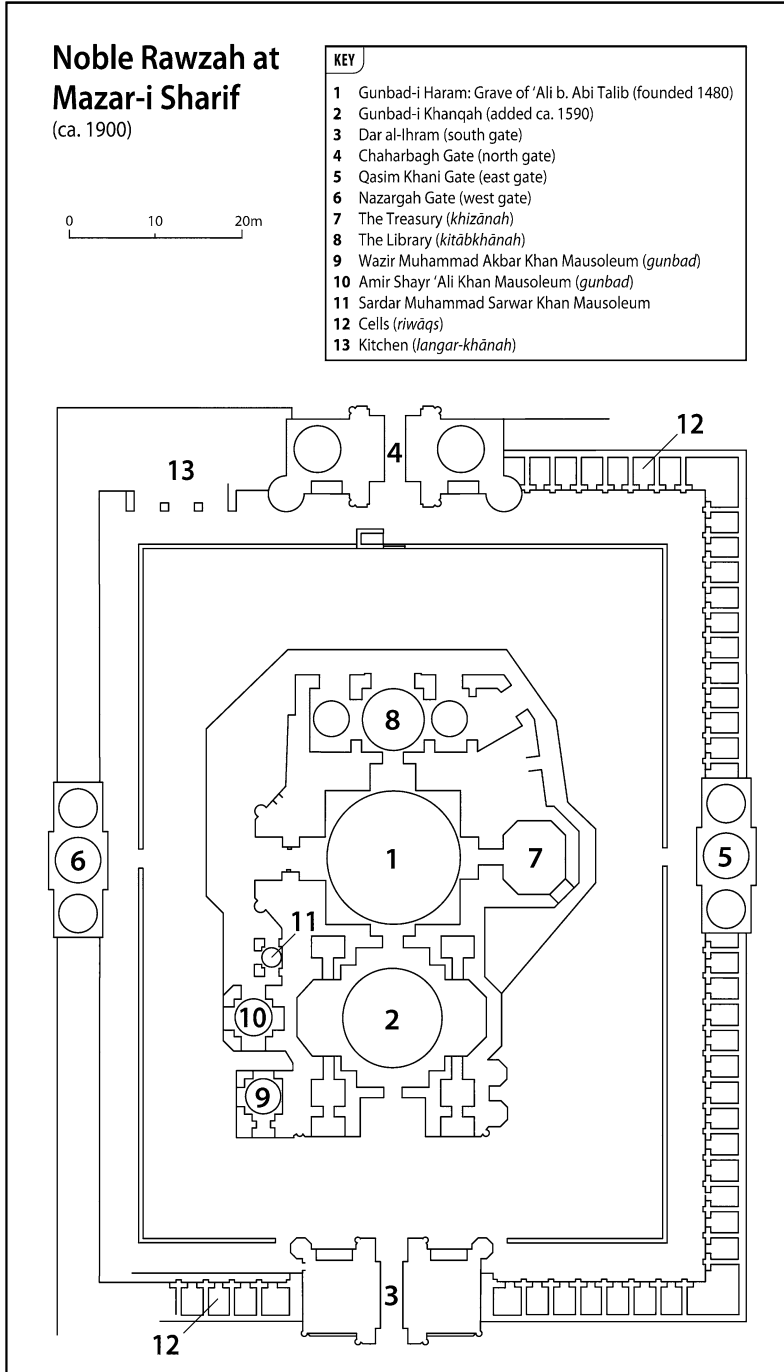
By the end of the seventeenth century the complex comprised the central double-hall building expanded by Wali Muhammad Khan, a southern gate perhaps still including a drumhouse (*naqqārah-khānah*); an east gate, the Qasim Khani Gate, the north gate or Chaharbagh (Park) Gate, and a small west gate, referred to by Mahmud b. Amir Wali but no longer extant. There is a small gate shown in a photograph (mislabelled “Kandahar”) taken in the 1920s that leads into what appears to be a park-like area. The doorway is on the extreme left edge of the photograph and was situated on the west wall. If it was the gate on which the chronogram commemorating the building of the *chahārbāgh* was inscribed there is no way to tell, since that gate disappeared long ago.

18 The Afsharid Decade, 1737–47

The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were dominated by several major changes in political culture that deeply affected the shrine. One was the waning of the Chinggisid dispensation or what has been called the Chinggisid

99 Muhammad Yusuf Munshi ms., pp. 168–69; idem 1956, pp. 225–29.

100 For details see McChesney 1991, pp. 173–97.



PLAN 4 Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif (after R. Stuckert, 1945)

constitution, a way of rationalizing elements of Chinggis Khan's law embodied in the *Yasa* with the Muslim way contained in the *Shari'ah* of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰¹ One governing precept was that the proper sovereign, the khan, must be an agnatic descendant of Chinggis Khan. The Abu'l-Khayrids and Tuqay Timurid claimants had credibly been Chinggisids while the Timurids were not and so had maintained for a time a figurehead Chinggisid khan.

What brought a swift end to a system that was on the decline since the death of Subhan Quli in 1702 was a military blow, the Iranian Nadir Shah Afshar's conquest of the region, and the occupation of Balkh by Afsharid forces from 1737 to 1747. The Afsharid period swept away what was left of loyalty to the agnate heirs of Chinggis Khan. In Balkh as elsewhere, the so-called "Uzbek" military, the amirid class, emerged by default as the political authorities but without a common leader, or even a token one. The Balkh region—what is now northern Afghanistan—developed into a series of petty emirates—Maymanah, Shibarghan, Aqchah, Balkh, Mazar, Qunduz—each seeking to protect its own small patch while striving to seize control of the resources of its neighbors. In Maymanah, the Ming Uzbeks embedded themselves. In Qunduz it was the Qataghan Uzbeks who predominated and also added their name to the region they controlled. Balkh and Khwajah Khayran (by now Mazar-i Sharif), however, showed their legacies as sacred sites and rather than an Uzbek amir the communities in those two places looked to two Sufi lineages, the Parsa'is in Balkh and the Ansaris at the 'Alid shrine, for political leadership. For nearly a century these families wielded on-again-off-again sovereignty over their regions.

One consequence of the Afsharid occupation was a popular uprising against the Iranians centered on the shrine. This brief rebellion highlighted the paradoxical position of the Ansari family as both dependent upon a state for protection of their rights and at the same time trying to present to the public an image of the shrine as symbolizing divine justice and, most importantly, as a place of sanctuary against oppression. In popular lore, the figure of 'Ali is the epitome of heroism. He is the "Victorious Lion of God," the title that appears on the early tombstone. Swords were often emblazoned with the inscription "there is no braver youth than 'Ali and no sword but Zu'l-Faqar" (the name of his sword). He stands for "courage, deliverance from oppression, defense of the weak, and, through the holy site where he was buried, intercession with the Almighty God."¹⁰²

The leader of the anti-Iranian uprising was called, rather suggestively, "Rasul" (Messenger, the distinctive title of the Prophet Muhammad). He and

101 Ibid., p. 176 and idem 2000.

102 McChesney 1991, p. 211.

his followers took over the shrine and used it as their headquarters to resist the Iranian occupiers. When Nadir Shah sent reinforcements to suppress the revolt, the shrine administrator, who had had little choice but to acquiesce to Rasul's presence, showed his true colors and managed to detain the rebel and then turn him over to the Iranian authorities.

This episode is dealt with in more detail elsewhere¹⁰³ and is only mentioned here to draw attention back to the multiple meanings the shrine represented to its various constituencies: the wielders of power (including the leaders of the opposition to Iranian rule), who recognized the shrine as a vehicle for rallying and maintaining public support; the shrine's staff, who depended on it for their livelihoods; and ordinary citizens, who imagined it as a powerful symbol of the community of believers of which they were a part and through whose collective power oppression could be resisted and eventually overcome.

19 The Advent of the Durrani Afghans

When the Iranians departed, the status quo ante was briefly restored. But then another, ultimately dominant, ethno-national group known as the Durrani Afghans emerged from the ashes of Nadir Shah Afshar's brief but influential imperial dream to make its presence felt in the region. At about the same time, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Manghit Uzbeks in Bukhara began to act on their ambitions for control of the larger Oxiana region—the southern part, Cisoxiana, generally known as Balkh, and the northern area, Transoxiana, as Bukhara. As far as the people of Balkh were concerned, ultimately it was the Durrani Afghans who came to predominate although for most of the century (1747–1849) after Nadir Shah Afshar died, Durrani Afghans and Manghit Uzbeks and their local allies both competed for control of the Balkh region.

The multi-ethnic Afghan armies—Hazarahs, Qizilbash, Turkmens, Tajiks, as well as Pashtun Afghans—were mostly successful in waging repeated plunder campaigns in north India and eastern Iran. In what is now northern Afghanistan, alliances, tributary arrangements, and attempts by the Durrani Afghans, only moderately successful, to install their own governors set the pattern for the contest with the Manghits prior to the full implanting of Afghan authority in 1849 with the establishment of a permanent governor in Balkh City.

¹⁰³ Ibid., chapter nine.

20 **The Mujaddidi Naqshbandis at the Shrine**

The Durrani military successes in the Balkh region also facilitated the rapid spread of a Sufi confraternity with which the Afghans came to be closely allied, the Mujaddidi Naqshbandis. The eponymous founder of the Mujaddidi confraternity was Shaykh Ahmad of Sirhind (1564–1624 AD), known as the “second renewer [of the religion] (*mujaddid-i s̄anī*),” the first being the Prophet Muhammad. His disciples and followers made his home town, Sirhind, a center for the propagation of his teachings about Naqshbandi Sufism. Sirhind, a town in the Punjab, is strategically located on a major highway, the Grand Trunk Road, midway between Ambala and Ludhianah. For centuries the Grand Trunk Road has been the commercial thoroughfare linking Calcutta (Kolkata) in the east with Rawalpindi in the west, some 1,420 miles away. In 1763, in the wake of the turmoil in Mughal India caused by the conquest and plunder of north India by Nadir Shah Afshar in 1739 and then the subsequent seven Indian campaigns for booty and conquest by his general, the Afghan Ahmad Shah Durrani, “the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi *pirs* and their disciples fled Sirhind in waves.”¹⁰⁴ Many moved northwest into Afghanistan and Central Asia where Mujaddidi missionaries had already had success implanting the teachings and practices of Shaykh Ahmad.¹⁰⁵

The evidence of Mujaddidism at the ‘Alid shrine is found in the tombstones of those who died and were buried there as well as in the transformation of the popular way of referring to what had been known as the “outer dome” or the “threshold congregational mosque,” into the “domed Sufi lodge” (Gunbad-i Khanqah), the part of the building erected by ‘Abd al-Mu‘min Khan between 1582 and 1598 and then expanded by Wali Muhammad Khan between 1601 and 1606.

Mujaddidi leaders would come to be a major social and political force in Kabul from the late eighteenth century onward and especially in the first three decades of the twentieth century, but their history in other towns and cities in earlier centuries is only now beginning to be closely studied.¹⁰⁶ Among the most durable funerary evidence of the Mujaddidis that we have is for several members of the family of Khalifah Sahib of Dar al-Aman (d. June 1854), a descendant in the twelfth degree of a certain Khwajah Badi‘ Khurrami.

104 Ziad 2017b, p. 110.

105 On the teachings and practices as they were propagated into Afghanistan and Central Asia see Ziad 2017b, pp. 118–122.

106 One scholar tackling this task now is Prof. Waleed Ziad (see bibliography). One should not overlook earlier work done by ‘Aziz al-Din Wakili Fufalza’i. See especially his *Timūr Shāh Durrāni*, vol. 2, pp. 677–85.

The latter's home region, Khurram, is a district of Aybak, a stopping place (*manzil*) southeast of Mazar-i Sharif on the Mazar—Kabul road. It is impossible at this point to identify “Dar al-Aman” (Abode of Safety) as it was a not uncommon nickname for a town of spiritual significance. It seems clear that Khalifah Sahib-i Dar al-Aman had his base in Mazar-i Sharif and it is possible that the term *dār al-amān* referred to Mazar-i Sharif itself. Evidence for it being his family's center are the tombs of his sons and grandsons surrounding him in what Kuhgada'i calls a separate plot or graveyard (*qabristān*). When Kuhgada'i visited Mazar-i Sharif in the 1940s this family plot was located just outside the perimeter fence (*iḥāṭah*) of the 'Alid shrine. At that time it contained four generations of the agnate descendants of Khalifah Sahib. Within its confines, besides individual graves there were, and perhaps still are, a small mausoleum (*utāq*) and an aboveground rectangular sepulcher (*dakhmah*) containing one or more graves. In all, Kuhgada'i names ten members of the family in the one plot: Khalifah Sahib himself, five sons, two grandsons, and two great-grandsons. Only two obituary dates are given, one for the *khalifah* himself of Ramazan 1270/June 1854 and one for a son, Padshah Khwajah, of 1336/1917–18.¹⁰⁷

Another notable Mujaddidi figure buried at the shrine was a woman variously referred to as “Bibi Amah Ma'sumah, the niece of Shah Safi Allah Sahib-i Mujaddidi;”¹⁰⁸ “Bibi Ma'sumah, the daughter of Shah 'Ata Allah Bukhari;”¹⁰⁹ and “Bibi Sahiba, niece of Safiullah.”¹¹⁰ Abu'l-Asfar al-Balkhi (d. 2018), a resident expert on the shrine, says her mother was the daughter of the “Hazrat-i Ma'sum-i Sani” (the Second Infallible) who is identified by 'Aziz al-Din Wakili Fufalza'i as a man named Shah Ghulam Muhammad.¹¹¹ Abu'l-Asfar al-Balkhi describes her as instructed in *zīkr* first by her father and after his death by her uncle, Shah Safi Allah Khan. She became a *khalīfah*¹¹² of the latter and was licensed by him to lead *zīkr* circles. At some point she left Bukhara and came to Mazar-i Sharif with her two sons, Miyan Ziya al-Haqq and Muhammad Fazl

107 Kuhgada'i 1946, pp. 97–98.

108 Ibid., p. 97. Waleed Ziad has also devoted a section of his dissertation (Ziad 2017a) to this woman.

109 al-Balkhi ca 1999, pp. 206–07. Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 95.

110 Ziad 2017b, p. 111.

111 Fufalza'i 1967, vol. 2, p. 678.

112 *Khalīfah* (caliph), which has the semantic sense of successor or deputy, in Sufism is sometimes used for a high-level initiate who is authorized to propagate the teachings and practices of a given Sufi organization, its “path” or “way” (*tariqah*).



FIGURE 3.8 Open *riwāqs* of the Treasury annex on the Gunbad-i Haram (right side of the image)

R. MCCHESENEY, 1968

Allah. According to al-Balkhi, the latter was the author of *‘Umdat al-maqāmāt* a well-known work on Mujaddidi Sufism.¹¹³

Bibi Ma’sumah died in Balkh on 12 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1218/13 July 1803¹¹⁴ and enjoyed a very privileged spot for interment. Kuhgada’i says she was buried in the “second *riwāq*” of the shrine but does not say how the *riwāqs* (the iwans or vaulted niches) of the shrine were numbered or even what the first *riwāq* might have been. al-Balkhi says she was buried in the “little dome” meaning the Treasury annex (Fig. 3.8). Today, two of the exterior facades of the polygonal Treasury are open *riwāqs* and have tombs centered in them, one of them, Kuhgada’i’s “second *riwāq*,” is that of Bibi Ma’sumah. The other *riwāq* is said now to house the grave of Sayyid Taj al-Din (Abu’l-)Hasan Andkhudi, the first *naqīb* appointed by Sultan Husayn Bayqara in 1480–81 and seen as the founder of the Ansari line of *mutawallīs* (Fig. 3.9).¹¹⁵ Robert Byron’s 1934 photograph of the shrine shows a

113 Shah Muhammad Fazlullah, *Umdat al-maqāmāt*, Hyderabad, Sind: Nu‘mani Publishers 1355/1936, cited in Ziad 2017a, pp. 281 ff.

114 Balkhi ca 1999, p. 206.

115 Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172. I am grateful to Reza Husaini, a native of Mazar-i Sharif, for providing information about Sayyid Taj al-Din Hasan’s and Bibi Sahibah’s burial locations as well as those of several other graves.



FIGURE 3.9 Closed *rivāqs* of the Treasury annex

R. BYRON, 1934

rather different configuration of the outer wall of the Treasury with the *rivāqs* completely closed up.

21 The Shrine under Afghan Auspices

It is clear that the Durrani Afghan government in Kabul, which would begin to take full control of Cisoxiana (Afghan Turkistan) by the middle of the nineteenth century and hold it until the Sawr Revolution of 1978, was already committed to the sacred tradition of Mazar-i Sharif. The Durrani's ties to the Mujaddidis may have stimulated their devotion to the shrine and certainly reinforced it, but their connection to the area went back to Ahmad Shah's time (r. 1747–72). This, despite the fact that their political center was hundreds of miles away, first in Qandahar and then in Kabul.

In one of his efforts to secure control, or at least increase his influence, in the greater Balkh area, Ahmad Shah Durrani of the Saduza'i clan, ordered construction in 1165/1751 of a great fortress at Khulm (also known as Tashqurghan) some fifty miles east of Balkh. The strategically-located town was set at the juncture

of the main routes to the east, linking Balkh with Qunduz and Badakhshan, and to the south, connecting it to Kabul and beyond. The citadel required ten years to finish, no doubt reflecting the ebb and flow of Afghan campaigning against the Mangit Uzbeks of Bukhara who also claimed the region, and its completion was credited to Ahmad Shah's second son, Sulayman Shah.¹¹⁶ At the time Ahmad Shah sent the *farmān* first ordering construction, according to 'Aziz al-Din Fufalza'i, he also commanded Prince Sulayman to go and "sweep the dust from the threshold of Hazrat 'Ali with [one of] my eyelashes."¹¹⁷ Ahmad Shah's son and successor Timur Shah (r. 1773–93) and his son Zaman Shah (r. 1793–1801) kept up the tradition of periodic gestures of support for the shrine.

22 The Muhammadza'i Durrani Patrons 1849–1919 and the Iconic Figure of Wazir Akbar Khan

It is the Muhammadza'i Durrani Afghans who most completely adopted the shrine, added their mark, and were largely responsible for its present appearance. They replaced the Saduza'i as the predominant Durrani clan in the 1820s. Their interest is first given symbolic meaning with the burial at the Noble Rawzah of the Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan, second son of Amir Dust Muhammad Khan, in 1847. His mausoleum, not built until almost fifty years after his death, is today a very prominent structure on the west side of the Gunbad-i Khanqah (see Plan 4, no. 9 and figure 3.12).

Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan, or simply Wazir Akbar, is an 'Ali-like figure in Afghan mythology—heroic, chivalrous, and destined to rule Afghanistan, until his untimely death. He proved his military skills in defeating an invading Sikh army in 1837. Then, after his father surrendered to a British invading force in the First Afghan War (1839–42), he remained in the country leading the resistance and earning the title *ghāzī* (holy warrior). When the British army was finally forced to withdraw from the country after three years in Kabul and Qandahar and suffered a near-total massacre of the force retreating from Kabul, Wazir Akbar was praised for his protection and kind treatment of the officers and women that were held as hostages, eventually releasing them to safety. In 1847, four years after his father returned to power, Wazir Akbar died either of poison or natural causes in Jalalabad. He was buried, as he is said to

116 The extent of the remains of the citadel are shown in Dupree 1967, figure 25. See also Dupree 1977, pp. 379–80.

117 Fufalza'i 1967, vol. 2, p. 302.

have requested, at the 'Alid shrine, a long way from Jalalabad. One has to think that in prescribing the place, if he did choose it, for the place of his burial, he was intent on aligning his own legacy with that of 'Ali, the "Victorious Lion of God." If the choice were his father Amir Dust Muhammad's, we might see it as a very powerful expression laying claim to a Muhammadza'i stake in the fate of the shrine and by extension the area to be known as Afghan Turkistan. In a sense his burial became an opening wedge, planting, as it were, the Afghan flag in Turkistan years before full Afghan authority could be established there. His burial shows an early commitment on the part of the Durrani Afghans, in this case, the Muhammadza'i Durrani, to the shrine tradition of 'Ali and to its paramount place as sacred symbolic space in the north. From this time forward, the Muhammadza'i Durrani would make a political fetish of the shrine treating it as an object on which to lavish extravagant public reverence.

The Afghans would refer to the area between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus (Amu) River as "Afghan Turkistan" for the next century as if it were a separate country under Afghan rule, as perhaps it was. Cut off from the Afghan capital by a formidable mountain barrier and blocked a large part of every year from communicating with the south by snow-clogged passes, the region had a history of cultural and political connection, whether at war or in peace, to the oases of Bukhara and Samarqand on the other side of the Oxus. The Afghans had to overcome the long cultural and political affiliation with Transoxiana and find ways to encourage or force the people of the region to turn their gaze southwards.

The Lesser Balkh region, defined by the Hazhdah Nahr canal system, had a recent history of independence or at least autonomy under the protection of a regional power that also had to be overcome. Ever since the Saduza'i Durrani Afghans first intervened in the region in the second half of the eighteenth century and eventually showed that they were militarily superior to their main rival, the Manghit amirs of Bukhara, the *mutawalli* of the shrine accepted the status of willing Afghan ally. For a time as the Saduza'i Afghans and the Manghit amirs of Bukhara jockeyed for influence in the Balkh region, the chief trustee of the shrine enjoyed full local control, eventually showing his preference for the Afghans. In Imam al-Din Husayni's history of the Saduza'i Durrani, a book completed in Lucknow in October 1798, Mirza 'Aziz, identified as the *mutawalli* of the shrine at the time of Zaman Shah (1793–1801 AD) is listed among the Afghan ruler's top supporters with the honorific "lord of rank and regiment" and as one of Zaman Shah's "commanders and right-hand men."¹¹⁸

118 Imam al-Din Husayni ms., p. 382. The reference to Mirza 'Aziz is included in the chapter "An Account of the Amirs and Supporters of His Majesty [Zaman Shah] and the Heroes and Braves of the Army," *ibid.*, pp. 354 ff.

It was not until 1849 that the Muḥammadza'i Durrani government in Kabul was fully committed to the slow and uneven process of turning Afghan Turkistan and its increasingly prominent cultural and economic hub, Mazar-i Sharif, into a fully dependent province with an Afghan sardar appointed from Kabul as high governor.¹¹⁹ The governor was supposed to be answerable to Kabul or at least as accountable as the communications technology of the time would permit. In fact, given the distance and geographic isolation of Afghan Turkistan from Kabul with the Hindu Kush making communication during the winter months virtually impossible, the region was seen more as being on a par politically with Kabul and as an appanage which was bestowed as a reward on a senior Muhammadza'i. Balkh's first governor, Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan, was the third son (of twenty-seven) of Amir Dust Muhammad Khan.

Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan died in 1266/1849–50 and was buried at the Noble Rawzah soon after he arrived as the newly-appointed Muhammadza'i governor. Amir Dust Muhammad Khan then named his eldest son, Sardar Muhammad Afzal, as Muhammad Akram's replacement with orders to pacify and consolidate the Greater Balkh region including all the small emirates that had arisen since the Iranian occupation a century earlier.

In 1268/1851–52, Muhammad Afzal summoned his own nine-year-old son, 'Abd al-Rahman, from Kabul. According to 'Abd al-Rahman, who many years later authored a memoir about this period in his life, a year after his arrival in the north his father decided to abandon Balkh City and make Takhtah Pul, a village about halfway between Balkh City and the Noble Rawzah, the provincial center. Balkh, 'Abd al-Rahman claims, was too far from the shrine for his father, who was accustomed to spend every Thursday night and Friday there performing the rituals of *ziyārat* and Friday worship. Apparently the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum-mosque did not satisfy his spiritual needs. 'Abd al-Rahman also tells us that another reason for his father quitting Balkh was

119 Precise chronology is often difficult to establish. The generally accepted date by Afghan sources for the conquest of Balkh on behalf of the amir in Kabul is 1265/1848–49 but the months of 1848 are winter months and the campaign would therefore have most likely occurred in 1849. An accessible English account of the consolidation of Kabul's control over Afghan Turkistan is Talbot Wheeler's "Memorandum on Afghan Turkestan" written in 1869 (see Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, pp. 18–36). On, p. 19 Wheeler gives 1850 as the date of the conquest. Wheeler also has the first Kabul sardar-governor of Balkh, its conqueror Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan, rule until his death in 1853 when Sardar Muhammad Afzal Khan, Dust Muhammad's eldest son, was sent to replace him. But 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's memoir ('Abd al-Rahman Khan 1886, p. 3) says in 1268/1851–52, when his father, Muhammad Afzal was already governor, he was summoned by him to Balkh. A detailed version of events from a Kabul perspective, often at odds with Wheeler's, can be found in Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2 (see index under the names of the towns in Afghan Turkistan).

because it was “an old city with an unhealthy climate.”¹²⁰ Talboys Wheeler casts the sardar’s motives in more Machiavellian terms asserting, without giving any specifics, that the people of Mazar-i Sharif were so “refractory” that Muhammad Afzal “took possession of the place”¹²¹ by which he means Mazar-i Sharif itself. But Wheeler’s assignment of motive makes no mention of Takhtah Pul, which Muhammad Afzal turned into his administrative center over the course of three years, according to his son.¹²² Wheeler may not have been utterly wrong in his analysis, however. It might well have been the case that the Ansari shrine administration, which had enjoyed considerable independence over the decades since Ahmad Shah’s time by adjusting to the consequences of Afghan hegemony, was seen as an obstacle to Afghan control of the shrine and therefore was “refractory.”

There is some evidence that Muhammad Afzal Khan also wanted to leave his mark on the shrine. When C.E. Yate visited Mazar-i Sharif with the Afghan Boundary Commission in 1886, he did not enter the main building but was told by the commission’s Persian secretary, Mirza Khalil:

that the inside of the domes of the shrine are painted in imitation of the tile-work said to have been originally put up by Sultan Husain Baikrar (*sic*), which painting is said to have been done by an artistic *moulvi* in the time of Sirdar Muhammad Afzal Khan.¹²³

The final move of the Afghan administrative center from Takhtah Pul to Mazar-i Sharif took some time. As late as the mid-1860s, on the very eve of Muhammad Afzal’s being himself declared amir in Kabul, Takhtah Pul was still the place at which armies were mobilized for campaigns. It continued to be the administrative center of the Greater Balkh region until 1869.¹²⁴

120 ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan 1886, p. 4.

121 Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, p. 21.

122 ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan 1886, pp. 3–4. Sultan Mahomed Khan 1900, a partial and poor translation of ‘Abd al-Rahman 1886 omits the year date, saying only “In the year of Hijra, when I was nine years old ...” vol. 1, p. 1.

123 Yate 1888, p. 214.

124 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, p. 264. See Adamec 1972–85, vol. 4, pp. 555–56 for a description of Takhtah Pul and map section IV-8-A to see its proximity to the northwest of Mazar-i Sharif on the road to Balkh.

23 The Projects of Na'ib Muhammad 'Alam Khan

The outward appearance of the entire shrine complex today is largely the work of two late nineteenth-century figures, a Barakza'i Afghan named Na'ib Muhammad 'Alam Khan, and Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, the son of Muhammad Afzal Khan. Na'ib Muhammad 'Alam Khan held the office of high governor (*nā'ib al-hukūmah*) of Afghan Turkistan under Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan (r. 1863–66, 1868–79) until his death in Kabul in 1874 from an infected broken leg caused when he was kicked by a horse.¹²⁵ He had held the post since 1868, during which time he devoted considerable energy to remaking the shrine, and in 1869 he moved the administrative center the five miles from Takhtah Pul to Mazar-i Sharif. His reason seems to have been at least in part to be on site to supervise his plans for the renovation of the shrine.

Under Muhammad 'Alam, the appearance of the shrine was utterly transformed for the third time. Although the technique of *kāshī-kārī*, covering surfaces in ceramic tile had long been used in Balkh City and in Mazar-i Sharif at the two Jani-Begid mausolea, it is generally believed that the exterior of the 'Alid shrine building, the double halls of the Gunbad-i Haram and the Gunbad-i Khanqah, was a white-washed stucco, the surfaces annually renewed with "white mud in which fragrant herbs were mixed."¹²⁶ Given the long experience at Balkh with tiled exteriors on major public buildings, the fact that the Noble Rawzah remained unadorned with tile seems somewhat difficult to believe but as we will see in the next chapter, there is another analogous case. The exterior of the shrine of the Cloak at Qandahar was for a long time maintained as whitewashed stucco—for which there is a photographic record—before being covered with tile in the second half of the twentieth century.

In any event, when Na'ib Muhammad 'Alam Khan was summoned to Kabul, where he died, he left a ceramicist named Ustad (Master) Sami' Khan Samarqandi to perform the work of covering the shrine with ceramic tile. Ustad Sami' Khan was an apprentice from the ceramic workshops of Balkh City. His Samarqand origins must have also been an inspiration to him with its many magnificent examples of tiled buildings such as Gur-i Mir. At Mazar-i

¹²⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 336.

¹²⁶ Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 38. It is unfortunate that Kuhgada'i provides no source, either written or oral, for this critical information. Elsewhere he does give sources (though generally without provenance and never with page references).

Sharif, he proceeded to hire and train locals as his own apprentices in a school (*maktab*) that he opened.

Over the course of four years Ustad Sami‘ Khan and his apprentices worked at covering the 20,000 square foot shrine with tile. To begin, they erected two outer domes over the two main domes to protect the domes beneath from snow and rain. Kuhgada‘i adds that “the aforementioned [outer] domes were to be higher than the iwan (the southern entryway) and the balustrade in order to be visible.” The balustrade, however, was not yet added (see below). The *ustād* then tiled the exterior of these two newly-built outer domes with turquoise-colored tile.

After tiling the Gunbad-i Haram and the Gunbad-i Khanqah, Ustad Sami‘ went on to revet at least parts of the south and north gates, the Dar-i Ihram and the Chaharbagh Gates, respectively.¹²⁷ Kuhgada‘i adds in a footnote that in his own day (the 1940s) “the tile work of the now-deceased Ustad Sami‘ still remains on the two outer domes and their plinth¹²⁸ and on one surface of the southern gate, the part facing in towards the shrine.”¹²⁹ Afterwards, Ustad Sami‘ did “enamel work” (*mīnā-kārī*) around the plinths of the domes and then left his apprentices to complete the project in order to make the hajj-pilgrimage. Kuhgada‘i says that Ustad Sami‘’s workshop produced more than 700 distinct types of tile.¹³⁰

Besides sponsorship of work on the shrine building itself, Na‘ib Muhammad ‘Alam Khan built and endowed a thirty-three room madrasah.¹³¹ Part of the income-producing endowment was a fifty-six room caravanserai in Mazar-i Sharif. In 1886 when members of the Afghan Boundary Commission visited Mazar-i Sharif, they heard a story that materials for Na‘ib Muhammad ‘Alam

127 Kuhgada‘i 1946, p. 38, note 3. A tradition developed that Na‘ib Muhammad ‘Alam Khan actually built the southern and eastern (the Qasim Khani Gate) gates but this is certainly incorrect (Ansari 2012, p. 15). Refurbishing and tiling seem to have been the governor’s sole contributions to the southern and northern gates.

128 Kuhgada‘i 1946, p. 38 note 3, uses the term *payrāzah* a typographical error for *payzārah* (see *ibid.*, p. 42, line 6) defined in Neghat 1993 (but not found in either Dihkhuda, Haim, or Steingass) as a “plinth or socle” both of which terms refer to a projecting base beneath a column or other superstructure. Whether in this case the term refers to the low drums from which the domes rise or a base beneath the drums is unclear from existing photographs.

129 Kuhgada‘i 1946, p. 38.

130 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

131 McChesney 1991, p. 271.

Khan's madrasah had been scavenged from the ruin of Subhan Quli Khan's great madrasah.¹³²

Muhammad 'Alam Khan's successor, Shayrdil Khan "Luynab" (Great Deputy) like him a Barakza'i Afghan, continued the tiling project, redoing the revetment of the Chaharbagh Gate in 1877 the year he died. That work was only a few years after Ustad Sami' reportedly completed it. Shayrdil Khan's work was commemorated with an inscription on the upper part of the gate.¹³³ He added other inscriptions around the shrine commemorating his and others' works. One of them memorialized the construction of the two large outer domes by Ustad Sami'. Kuhgada'i reproduces six lines of poetry in this inscription that yield the date 1287/1875 for completion of the outer domes.¹³⁴

24 Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's Projects

On August 28, 1878, Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan, was dealt two devastating blows. On that day he received an ultimatum from the English government in India: If he did not formally agree to allow a mission headed by an Englishman to set up residence in Kabul, the British would have no choice but to invade and forcibly establish one. Recent Russian moves in Central Asia had made the English exceedingly nervous and they felt it absolutely necessary to have an official envoy who was English at the Kabul Court. As the story goes, on the very day he received the ultimatum he also received word that his beloved sixteen-year-old son and latest heir-apparent, 'Abd Allah Jan, had died of a fever. What made the death of 'Abd Allah Jan harder to bear was the fact that he was the second of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's sons designated as heir-apparent who then suffered an untimely death. Reportedly in a state of extreme mental anguish, the amir failed to respond to the British ultimatum, turned Kabul over to another son, Muhammad Ya'qub Khan, and set out for Mazar-i Sharif hoping to rally troops there to resist the English and perhaps to attract Russian support. Neither hope was realized and on February 22nd, 1879, at the age of 57, he died in Mazar-i Sharif and was buried at the shrine.

In the year and a half following Shayr 'Ali Khan's death, Afghanistan reverted to a familiar state—invasion by the English and the recognition of a puppet amir, Muhammad Ya'qub Khan, son of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan; an immediate and strong resistance mounted by jihadi forces; a singular defeat of an English

132 Yate 1888, p. 197.

133 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 38, note 3.

134 Ibid., p. 39, note.

army this time near Qandahar on 27 July 1880; and the frantic search by the British to find and anoint a putatively friendly ruler. This coincided neatly with the plans of Sardar 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, nephew of two former amirs (Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan and Amir Muhammad A'zam Khan) and the son of another (Amir Muhammad Afzal Khan), thus someone, but not the only one, with good qualifications for the emirate. Among his political assets was that he had served in a variety of roles in Afghan Turkistan in the 1850s, most notably as governor of Tashqurghan during his father's high governorship, and had a good deal of support there. He had also vigorously fought in support of his father's and then his uncle, Muhammad A'zam Khan's, ultimately futile struggles in the 1860s with Shayr 'Ali Khan. For his dogged opposition to Shayr 'Ali Khan, 'Abd al-Rahman was twice forced into exile, the first time a short and difficult stint in Bukhara. The second time, he lived more comfortably in Samarqand as a pensioner of the Russian government for ten years, a time well spent building alliances among the many in Afghanistan disaffected by Shayr 'Ali Khan's regime. In 1879, he was ready to exploit the situation caused by the amir's death and the instability and uncertainty created by the British invasion.

After assuming the throne at Kabul with British support in July 1880, it took some time for the new amir to secure his position. He first was challenged by his cousin, Sardar Muhammad Ayyub Khan, another son of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan. That same month an army under Ayyub's leadership and comprised of the Herat garrison of regular troops and various local militias attracted by the prospect of plunder routed a British force west of Qandahar near the village of Maywand (or Maymand) and so made Ayyub a credible claimant to the throne. In Ayyub's influential propaganda, 'Abd al-Rahman was nothing but a British lackey. But then, in a fight at Qandahar in September 1881, 'Abd al-Rahman defeated his cousin, drove him into exile, and then ruthlessly purged all his family members, officials, and supporters as well as those of Muhammad Ayyub's father, the late Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan.

What led to 'Abd al-Rahman's personal involvement with the Noble Rawzah was another rival claim to the emirate. In 1887, a cousin of the amir's, Sardar Muhammad Ishaq Khan, who then held the high governorship of Afghan Turkistan for the amir, refused a summons to Kabul and put himself, from the standpoint of the amir, in a state of rebellion. Muhammad Ishaq's father and 'Abd al-Rahman's uncle, Muhammad A'zam Khan, had been amir briefly (1867) and Muhammad Ishaq was encouraged to think that he had as much right to the throne as his cousin whose father, Muhammad Afzal Khan, had also only been amir for a short time (1866). After considerable provocation from relatives and local supporters, Ishaq allowed himself to be declared amir and set out on a campaign to take Kabul and depose 'Abd al-Rahman. In late September 1888,

however, his forces were crushed by 'Abd al-Rahman's and he fled across the Oxus River to safety and permanent exile in Russian Samarqand where he eventually died. In a somewhat ironic twist, he was buried next to the grave of the great fifteenth-century Naqshbandi figure, Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar, the same holy site that had been much visited for spiritual inspiration by his cousin and nemesis, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, during his exile there in the 1870s. 'Abd al-Rahman would even claim that he had removed a flag from the grave of the saint that would become a talisman of his good fortune.¹³⁵

Muhammad Ishaq Khan's defeat prompted 'Abd al-Rahman to make the long journey from Kabul to Mazar-i Sharif to deal with the supporters of the rebellion. He arrived in Mazar-i Sharif on December 24, 1888 and would stay there until July 10, 1890.¹³⁶ While there, he took revenge on Sardar Muhammad Ishaq Khan's supporters and family. His actions were reportedly so horrific¹³⁷ and so notoriously public as to occasion a note of protest from the viceroy of India.¹³⁸ Among those executed were said to be 120 *mujāwirs* at the shrine.¹³⁹ It is out of character that he would have felt any remorse about his punitive acts; his reply to the viceroy certainly shows none. It is also probably unlikely that 'Abd al-Rahman would have been seeking atonement for his deeds in the attention he now gave to the Noble Rawzah.

For the nearly twenty months that the amir remained in Mazar-i Sharif, he would concentrate on reshaping the shrine both architecturally and

135 In the section of Sultan Mahomed Khan 1900 (vol. 1, p. 162) that corresponds with 'Abd al-Rahman Khan 1886, 'Abd al-Rahman says that he had a dream in which Khwajah 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar advised him that if he took the highest flag from his tomb when he returned to Afghanistan he would be victorious. I photographed Sardar Muhammad Ishaq Khan's tombstone at Ahrar's funerary platform (*ṣuffah* or *dakhmah*) in 1977.

136 According to Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, p. 616, the amir left Kabul on 25 October 1888 and reached Mazar-i Sharif two months later. His departure after an eighteen-month stay is recorded on p. 692. The trip back took only twenty-six days (p. 684). It is vividly described by Dr. John Alfred Gray who was with the amir in Mazar-i Sharif for most of the latter's time there (see Gray 1895, chapter 20 for an account of the return trip).

137 Gray was hired by the amir in 1889 as his personal European physician (he also consulted and was treated by two *hakīms*, practitioners of Yunānī medicine). He joined the royal entourage in Mazar-i Sharif in the spring of 1889 only to hear from another Englishman in the pay of the amir, his geologist, C.L. Griesbach, of the terrible things that had been done to men and women alike at the amir's orders as punishment for their alleged part in the rebellion. In his book, Gray searches his conscience in order to justify his work to preserve the health of a man who, in English eyes, had done monstrous things (*ibid.*, pp. 160–61).

138 See Lee 1996, Appendix IX. The viceroy's protest is on pp. 644–45 and the amir's cool response on pp. 645–47.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 640 citing a report from Robert Warburton, Political Officer in the Khyber.

administratively. His only articulated motive for his initiatives there is contained in a *farmān* that he issued on 23 July 1889.¹⁴⁰ In its preamble he takes Qur'an 32:22 as his proof text: "Whosoever honors the signs or symbols of God (*sha'ā'ir Allāh*), that is truly from the piety of the hearts." He then asserts that the shrine is the best sign (*nishānah*) of the power of Islam and therefore he has drafted a series of items dealing with how the income and appropriations of the shrine should be administered.

In the *farmān* he sets out a detailed budget and a list of the personnel of the shrine. The details covered the salaries and stipends of almost 300 people. If we think of the dependent families involved this means that perhaps as many as 1,500 Mazaris, or some 10% of the estimated population of the town at the time, directly relied on the income of the shrine, not including all the merchants, innkeepers, and service people who earned a living from pilgrimage traffic. A few of the named recipients listed are noted as "Bukhara-gone." Whether this means they simply happened to be in Bukhara on business during the time of troubles or had managed to escape before the period of retribution began is unclear. Despite its detail, the document itself begs numerous questions. Were the named high officials of the shrine all new appointees? If not, is it possible to imagine that prominent Ansaris were not among those at least tacitly supporting Muhammad Ishaq Khan and thus now vulnerable to the amir's drastic retribution? Who was included among the "120 *mujāwirs*" that the amir was said to have executed? Can one imagine that no Ansaris were among them? Did the amir take advantage of the apparent 'Azizi-Ni'mati division in Ansari ranks (see above p. 249) to give 'Azizi Ansaris the dominant role after Muhammad Ishaq's attempted coup was suppressed?¹⁴¹

One can understand the amir's desire to bring the administration under his control. The shrine executives had long been powerful political and economic figures in the region. That the amir would want to bring them to heel was obvious given his record of responding with force to any perceived challenges to his rule. Kuhgada'i (without naming a source, however) has the amir entering the shrine and addressing its staff. He quotes the amir's speech verbatim which, even if entirely based on hearsay or simply creative invention, does sound like something the amir might have said under the circumstances. In the speech, he refers to a vow that he made when he was under his father's thumb in the 1850s that if he ever came to power he would name himself chief trustee (*mutawallī-bāshī*) of the shrine without monetary compensation and

140 Facsimile and transcription of the *farmān* in Kuhgada'i 1946, pp. 72–76.

141 See McChesney 1991, pp. 307–11 for the relative positions of 'Azizis and Ni'matis at the shrine according to the *farmān*.

would expect all matters to be henceforth referred to him.¹⁴² For the remainder of the time he was in Mazar-i Sharif, all matters were no doubt referred to him. Afterwards, once he was back in Kabul, any oversight would have had to be entrusted to his high governor.

The self-appointment was one of the symbolic gestures by which he sought to identify himself and his reign with the well-being of the shrine. Another, reportedly, was to take the image of the “blessed mosque,” by which he meant an image of the shrine building’s southern entry iwan, as the logo of his regime.¹⁴³ Shayr ‘Ali Khan had used a pair of lions as logo, one extending its paw to the other. What might seem obvious to us today in the pair of lions, one standing for Shayr ‘Ali himself, whose name means ‘Ali the Lion, extending a paw to the British lion, might not have been his intent at all. In fact he may have been trying to symbolize the connection of his legacy with that of the “Victorious Lion of God” ‘Ali. ‘Abd al-Rahman obviously wanted something more visibly and unambiguously Islamic.

25 The *Salāmnāmah*

Along with his exhortation to the assembled staff of the shrine and his issuing a *farmān* setting out the reorganization of its finances, ‘Abd al-Rahman also added a very public and permanent, or so he hoped, assertion of his authority in a *salāmnāmah* which the amir asked his religious advisor Mawlana ‘Abd al-Ra’uf Kakar Qandahari to compose. The *salāmnāmah* was an invocation, entirely in Arabic, of the repeated phrase “peace be upon—*salām ‘alā ...*” followed by the object of the preposition ‘upon.’ Perhaps it was produced in part to express his desire for political peace after the suppression of his cousin’s abortive effort to claim the emirate, but mostly it would seem to emphasize his own attachment to the shrine, already indicated by his promise to make the entry iwan the logo of his regime and his naming himself chief trustee of the shrine. The effect is also to create a powerful sense of the alliance of interests of the amir and the saint buried at the shrine.

Kuhgada’i and ‘Abd al-Qayyum Ansari both reproduce the text of the *salāmnāmah*. Ansari, in fact, prefaces his book with it:

Peace be upon you O brother of the Messenger; peace be upon you, O husband of the lustrous virgin [Fatimah]; peace be upon you, O lord of every

¹⁴² Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 71.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 42.

Believer, male and female; peace be upon you, O one who bestowed favor and security on the village of Khayrān in the land of Balkh; peace be upon you, O one whom God sanctifies among his saints; peace be upon you O one whose enemies God is enemy to; peace be upon you, O one whom God renders victorious; peace be upon you, O one for whom God forsakes those who forsake (you); peace be upon you, O gate of knowledge; ...

and twenty-five more “peace be upon” phrases celebrating the virtues and attributes of the entombed saint, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib and, by association, those of the amir himself. The *salāmnāmah* concludes with:

... In accordance with the word of the amir, ... ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khan, son of the late Amīr-i Kabīr, Amīr Afzal Khān, son of the deceased Amīr Dūst Muḥammad Khān Afghān Abdālī Muḥammadzā’ī, shāh of Afghānistān and Turkistān, in the months of the year 1306, one thousand three hundred and six, (1888–89) this gracious order is established.¹⁴⁴

The *salāmnāmah* was inscribed on two copper plates, each about three feet long by eighteen inches wide and mounted on either side of the entry door leading from the Gunbad-i Khanqah into the second domed hall, the Gunbad-i Haram.¹⁴⁵ It can hardly be missed by anyone entering the tomb chamber and so commemorates the late amir for every visitor who stops to read it. The plates still hang there today.¹⁴⁶

26 Architectural Investments: The Three Small *gunbads*

What is more difficult to understand and what is not mentioned in the amir’s speech to the shrine staff is what motivated him to engage in substantial construction and renovation work during the lengthy period he stayed in Mazar-i Sharif beyond a natural self-commemorative desire to put his own distinctive stamp on the complex. Kuhgada’i states that the first work the amir undertook was to embellish the tomb of Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan with ceramic tile

144 Ibid., pp. 48–49 and Ansari 2012 pp. [iii–iv]. It should be noted that Ansari, writing in the post-monarchical period, omits ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan’s ornate signature.

145 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 47, photograph.

146 Ansari 2012, p. 15 and reconfirmed by Reza Husaini in a personal communication (email) of July 19, 2019.



FIGURE 3.10 “This is the resting place of Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan, 1316 A.H.” Inscription on tomb inside the amir’s small mausoleum (on the west side of Gunbad-i Khanqah)
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

(Fig. 3.10).¹⁴⁷ However, Kuhgada’i did not apparently see or read at least some of the inscriptions that were there, in particular those on two of the three mausolea (nos. 9 and 10 on Plan 4).¹⁴⁸

Evidence points to ‘Abd al-Rahman’s initiating the construction of both the mausoleum for Shayr ‘Ali and the one for Wazir Muhammad Akbar. According to Yates, who visited Mazar before Muhammad Ishaq’s rebellion and the work undertaken by ‘Abd al-Rahman, Shayr ‘Ali and Wazir Akbar were initially buried on the other side of the shrine, that is assuming Yates remembered his directions correctly:

147 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 102. Kuhgada’i does not seem to have been aware of Yates’s description of the grave as being east of the shrine.

148 For example, *ibid.*, p. 98. The inset cartouche with inscription on the southern façade of the Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan mausoleum (no. 9) is clearly visible but not mentioned by Kuhgada’i. It is possible, but only speculative at this point, that the reason Kuhgada’i did not mention some of these inscriptions was because they were not accessible and in place at the time he was there (1943 or 1944). Given the frequent known renovations and reconfigurings of the shrine’s architecture, it is quite possible that the inscriptions missing from Kuhgada’i were only installed or re-installed after he was there.



FIGURE 3.11 Mausolea of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan and Sardar Muhammad Sarwar Khan built on a plinth or *ṣuffah*
W. VON HENTIG, 1916

A small *musjid* [mosque] has lately been built to the east of the shrine by Sirdar Ishak [*sic*—Sardar Muhammad Ishaq] Khan, and immediately behind it lie the graves of Sirdars Muhammad Akram Khan, Muhammad Akhbar [*sic*—Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan], and Amir Sher [Shayr] Ali Khan.¹⁴⁹

If indeed these two men, along with Sardar Muhammad Akram, the first Muhammadza'i governor of Afghan Turkistan (d. ca 1851), were buried to the east of the shrine, then that meant they were disinterred and moved to their new resting places on the west side of the shrine. However, there is evidence of a *ṣuffah* having been on the site of at least two of the three present mausolea (nos. 10, 11 on the plan). Von Hentig's 1916 and Stuckert's 1945 photographs of the southwestern side of the Noble Rawzah (Figs. 3.11 & 3.12) both show a masonry plinth some sixteen to eighteen inches high and extending at least three feet outside the walls of the mausoleum of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan and the one to its north.

¹⁴⁹ Yate 1888, p. 214.



FIGURE 3.12 Mausoleum of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan
R. STUCKERT, 1945

This *şuffah* disappears in later photographs, apparently cut back flush with the face of the walls and the tile then brought down to the plaza level. If so, and if Yates had misremembered his directions, those two *şuffah* might be explained by the presence of graves and those graves might logically have been those of the men named by Yates. Thus it would not have been necessary to disinter and then reinter their bodies on the other side of the shrine. Yates is the sole source for the location of their initial burial and no source that I have discovered speaks of their being moved.¹⁵⁰

Today, the three somewhat similar mausolea—the smallest one of them unfinished—stand along the west side of the Gunbad-i Khanqah (Fig. 3.13 and Plan 4, nos. 9, 10, 11). Inscriptions show that the two that were finished were commissioned by ‘Abd al-Rahman but finished under his son, Habib Allah. The southernmost of them (no. 9 on Plan 4) is generally called the tomb (*maqbarah*) or *gunbad* of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan (d. 1847) despite the

¹⁵⁰ Kuhgada’i 1946 says nothing about the disinterment and reburial of bodies. On p. 101 he writes, “The tombs of the sardars are fully connected to the building of the Noble Rawzah and are built *over* (emphasis added) their graves as *gunbads*.” A more modern source, Ansari 2012, p. 16 who likewise does not mention disinterment adds, “When he was in Mazar-i Sharif, Amir ‘Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan also built beautiful domed mausolea *over* (emphasis added) the graves of Wazir Akbar Khan and Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan and covered them in elegant *kāshī*.” There is thus some evidence that Yates placement of the burials of the three men he names on the east side of the shrine is simply wrong.



FIGURE 3.13 Mausolea (*gunbads*) of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan (far right), Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan (center), and Sardar Muhammad Sarwar Khan (left) constructed in the 1890s
R. HUSAINI, 2018

fact that it contains the graves of four elite figures besides its eponym: Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan, the first Muhammadza’i governor of Balkh; Sardar Shayrdil Khan, who succeeded Na’ib Muhammad ‘Alam Khan as governor of Afghan Turkistan in 1875 and died about two years later being initially buried somewhere in the plaza, possibly on the *şuffah* mentioned above. The bodies of Mirza ‘Aziz Khan, the Ansari *mutawallī* (fl. late eighteenth century), who enjoyed a strong relationship with the Saduza’i Durrani Zaman Shah (1793–1801) and his son and successor, Mirza Shuja’ al-Din Khan, who flourished in the 1830s as political leader of Mazar may have been moved from other sites since the small mausoleum in which they are now found did not exist at the times of their deaths. But it is also possible that they were buried initially on the *şuffah* visible in the photographs of 1916 and 1945.

The second mausoleum (no. 10 on the plan), separated from the first by some 10 or 12 feet, houses the grave of Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan. It is possible that the plan anticipated others being interred here for the amir’s grave is set off-center and close to the wall of the Gunbad-i Khanqah or simply reflects the position of the grave before the gunbad was built. Although Plan 4 does not indicate it, this mausoleum is perhaps three-quarters the size of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan’s.

The third mausoleum (no. 11 on Plan 4) contains the graves of Sardar Muhammad Sarwar Khan (d. 1879), a son of Amir Muhammad A’zam Khan, ‘Abd al-Rahman’s uncle, and Sardar Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan, who was



FIGURE 3.14 Mausoleum of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

appointed governor in 1892 and died eleven years later. Muhammad Sarwar Khan had been a loyal supporter of 'Abd al-Rahman and was in exile with him. He was killed in 1879 while trying to rally support for 'Abd al-Rahman in Afghan Turkistan.¹⁵¹ This is by far the smallest of the mausolea, was probably built during Amir Habib Allah Khan's reign (1901–19) and, as noted above, has undergone many changes and is still unfinished (Figs. 3.14 & 3.15).

The two mausolea commissioned by Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan were to be fully sheathed in elaborate and colorful ceramic tile designs while the interiors, though plain white-washed stucco, had niches with fine stalactite carvings (*muqarnas*).

Just outside the entrance to the third *gunbad* is a white marble *şuffah* with a headstone on the north end (see figure 3.13). It contains the body of the field marshal (*sipahsālār*) Ghulam Haydar Khan Urakza'i (d. 1897), one of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's three field marshals and in command of the troops

¹⁵¹ His death is described by his cousin, Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, in *Pandnāmah-i dunyā wa dīn*, p. 126. Also Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, p. 365 under the events of 1297/1879–80.



FIGURE 3.15 Shayr 'Ali Khan's grave
P. BUCHERER-DIETSCHI, 2008

of Afghan Turkistan. He was instrumental in crushing the rebellion of Sardar Muhammad Ishaq Khan.

Building and elaborately decorating the tomb of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan, a man whom 'Abd al-Rahman had devoted much of his life to fighting, seems anomalous. What prompted this apparently deeply respectful gesture to the late amir whose family and followers Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan had earlier persecuted is not at all clear. As already mentioned, when 'Abd al-Rahman Khan came to the throne in the summer of 1880 he was forced to fight one of his own first cousins for the throne, a son of Shayr 'Ali Khan, Muhammad Ayyub, and when he had defeated him, he was relentless in expelling from the country every member of Shayr 'Ali Khan's family and every known supporter of the deceased amir. But the 1888 rebellion of Muhammad Ishaq Khan, to whom the amir had given control of the north at the outset of his reign, perhaps altered his feelings about the political threat from Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's family and supporters, the prominent survivors now mostly living in India as British pensioners. Around the time of completion of the work in 1898, he was beginning to permit the return to Afghanistan of those whom he had exiled eighteen years before. Thus, 'Abd al-Rahman may have authorized work to create distinctive tombs for Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan, Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan, and others as a gesture of reconciliation. On the other hand, if we take a slightly less generous view of his motivations, building these mausolea was simply a way to put his own stamp on their graves and assert his power over



FIGURE 3.16
(Detail) Inscription on mausoleum of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

them. One such mark is very visible today. He is the one remembered, almost to the exclusion of Amir Habib Allah Khan, his son, whose name appears on more epigraphs, as the one responsible for building the mausolea.¹⁵²

The actual construction that the amir had ordered on the mausolea probably did not begin until after he left Mazar-i Sharif in the summer of 1890. Besides the projects at the shrine, he had also commissioned a large government house (*dawlat sarāy*) for the city and ordered other public works as well, including a hospital. The earliest dates on the graves and the mausolea are 1316/1898–99 showing completion almost a decade after the amir returned to Kabul. The task of constructing the new mausolea and the other public works was assigned to two Indian Muslims who successively held the position of Superintendent of Public Works for Turkistan (*sar parast-i ta'mūrāt-i Turkistān*), 'Abd al-Rahman Khan "Overseer" (*ūwarsīr*) and Dr. 'Abd al-Qadir Khan Hindī.¹⁵³ The former began the work, probably shortly after 'Abd al-Rahman left Mazar-i Sharif in 1890, but died before finishing it and the latter then finished it.¹⁵⁴

The epigraphic evidence credits 'Abd al-Rahman only with Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's *gunbad*. in an inscription on its south façade (Fig. 3.16):

In 1316 (1898–99) during the justice-marked era of the ḥaẓrat Light of the Nation and the Religion, Amīr 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khan, [this building] was completed.

¹⁵² See, for example, Ansari 2012, p. 16, who ascribes all three gunbads to 'Abd al-Rahman alone.

¹⁵³ On these two men, see Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, index ('Abd al-Raḥmān "Overseer" and 'Abd al-Qādir Hindī, Doctor) and vol. 4, index ('Abd al-Qādir K. Hindī, Dr.). As an inscription on the upper south façade of the Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan mausoleum records, Dr. 'Abd al-Qadir was the son of Ilāhī Bakhsh Qurayshī Hindūstānī (see below).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 17.

As will be seen below, the inscription on Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan's *gunbad* (no. 9) makes no mention of 'Abd al-Rahman, although he most likely first ordered its construction.

There is another inscription, this one on the west façade of the Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan mausoleum but for which no legible photograph was available to me. In shape and color of stone however it bears a remarkable resemblance to the inscription on the south façade of Wazir Akbar's *gunbad* and so might well record Amir Habib Allah's work on Shayr 'Ali's *gunbad* begun by his father, despite the fact that his father's inscription on that mausoleum signals the work was completed (*itmām [yā]ft*). The addition of the inscription on the western façade of the *gunbad* must have taken place after 1916 when the building was photographed by Werner Otto von Hentig, a member of the joint Ottoman-German mission to Afghanistan in 1915 to try and persuade (unsuccessfully) Amir Habib Allah Khan to attack India. His photograph (see figure 3.11) shows a very different inscription on the upper west façade, three lines of poetry in a square frame, in contrast with the single paragraph in an oblong cartouche with pointed ends that replaced it by the time of Stuckert's photograph twenty-nine years later (figure 3.12). If Habib Allah, 'Abd al-Rahman's son, were responsible for the replacement of the inscription it had to have occurred between 1916 and February 1919 when he was assassinated.¹⁵⁵

This is more evidence that the architecture underwent continual change sometimes because of maintenance requirements, sometimes due to complete renovation, often to allow another member of the elite to inscribe his name on the shrine. For all we know much of the work we ascribe to those who left inscriptions may actually have been and even redone later, re-installing the old inscriptions. The effect of work on the exteriors of the small *gunbads* may be seen in a comparison of images taken more than ninety years apart (cf figures 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13). Among the most visible changes besides the replacement of the inscription on Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's *gunbad*: the cupolas on the domes of Wazir Muhammad Akbar's tomb and the smallest mausoleum, Sardar Muhammad 'Aziz Khan's, disappeared after 1945 and the domes of all three mausolea appear flatter and probably had been rebuilt although the flatter appearance may simply be due to the addition of coamings around the tops of each *gunbad's* walls and downspouts incorporated as weatherproofing, work done after 1945 which hides from view the base of each dome (see figure 3.14). The major earthquakes of 1949 and 9 June 1956 may also have had profound effects (see below).

155 According to Reza Husaini (personal communication), it is impossible now to know exactly when the inscriptions were installed and by whom.

27 The Qasim Khani Gate Area

Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman also commissioned the largest of all his projects, a rebuilding of all four sides of the Noble Rawzah. He left a detailed inscription of his plan on the Qasim Khani Gate (figure 3.5) That text reads:

One hundred and seven *riwāqs* and a *langar-khānah* made of baked brick and plaster [were constructed] at the Qāsīm Khānī Gate, also the noble Naẓargāh Gate [was constructed] of baked brick and plaster with *kāshī-kārī* tilework, and a plaza of bricks of worked [artificial] stone (*khisht-i sang-i maṣnū‘ī*) [was laid] all around the Murtaẓawī tomb of the Ḥaẓrat King of Saints, the Victorious Lion of God, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—may God honor him—during the reign and days of the amīr, son of the amīr, the pious Amir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān—may his reign endure forever. 1315 (1897–98).¹⁵⁶

‘Abd al-Rahman thus may have had the Qasim Khani Gate rebuilt, although that is not specified in the inscription, and the area around it largely reconfigured; the Nazargah Gate was either totally reconstructed or was built for the first time, “107 *riwāqs* and a *langar-khānah*” were also added, and the plaza was repaved. Only the Qasim Khani Gate and the Nazargah Gate remain today. Since the former gate continued to commemorate the Tuqay-Timurid, Qasim Muhammad Khan, and predated the amir’s intervention, it would appear that any work done was only intended to add the amir’s self-commemoration to it.

28 The 107 *riwāqs*

The most extensive (and perhaps the most expensive) project was building the *riwāqs*. A *riwāq* is an arched opening, sometimes used synonymously with iwan. Several small ones together create an arcade or cloister (Fig. 3.17). In 1945, Stuckert photographed a section of seven of the 107 *riwāqs*. These seven were situated just west of the the Dar-i Ihram, the south gate. On his plan of the Noble Rawzah, from which we have drawn up our plan, Stuckert also included the location of these seven *riwāqs*. Each *riwāq* in the photograph appears to be about eight to ten feet wide and was the outside wall of a small room or cell fronting

¹⁵⁶ Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 97. In the early 2000s Reza Huseini also recorded the still-intact inscription. (personal communication May 8, 2020.)



FIGURE 3.17 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's *riwāq* project to provide accommodations and food service to staff and visitors (seven *riwaqs* along south wall of Noble Rawzah)
R. STUCKERT, 1945

on the shrine plaza. Our plan assumes all 107 were built, lining a large part of the outer wall of the shrine precincts, if not nearly the entire wall. This wall no longer exists nor do the *riwāqs* attached to it. In the lower left of Stuckert's photograph, beyond the tree, arches of the *riwāqs* of the east wall are plainly visible. On his plan of the shrine, however, Stuckert only indicated the seven *riwaqs* that he photographed along the south wall.



FIGURE 3.18 Overall view of the Noble Rawzah from the east seen from outside the Qasim Khani Gate (upper right, double arched gate) with the Shibanid gunbads to the south (upper center). Published in *Sirāj al-Akhhār*, vol. 3, no. 22, p. 5 the original, shown here, was given to Emil Rybitschka by Mahmud Tarzi, editor of *Sirāj al-Akhhār*

PHOTOTHECA AFGHANICA ER 268-2

In 1913 the newspaper *Sirāj al-Akhhār* published a panoramic view of the shrine mislabeled “Ruins of Balkh” (Fig. 3.18). The photograph provides evidence of the existence of these *riwāqs* along the east, south, and west walls of the shrine. It faintly shows the back of the east wall extending south from the Qasim Khani Gate and the eastern half of the southern wall up to the south gate, the Dar-i Ihram. On the east and south walls, and the visible section of the west wall there is a series of identical shallow domes, or arched openings in the case of the west wall, each representing a single cell behind a *riwāq* arch. There are some sixty visible in the photograph (Fig. 3.19). A view of the north-west quadrant of the shrine grounds, the *Souvenir d’Afghanistan* photograph of 1925 mislabeled “Kandahar”, shows some of the *riwāqs* along the north wall. From these three images, from 1913, 1925, and 1945, it is not difficult to imagine the full 107 cells lining all four of the walls defining the precincts of the shrine. Moreover, as is visible in the 1925 and 1945 images, the cells were separated from the plaza by a low wall shown in the 1925 photo as an elegant arched wall. That same picture also shows *riwāqs* on the north wall to the west of the Chaharbagh Gate where they appear to be in much more pristine condition than in Stuckert’s 1945 photo with porticos that have since disappeared.



FIGURE 3.19
Riwāqs along north wall and *langar-khānah*
SOUVENIRS D'AFGHANISTAN, 1925

29 The *langar-khanah*

In the 1925 image of the northwest quadrant of the shrine area, the elegant domed building with cupola shown center left may well have been the *langar-khānah* that was also ordered built by ‘Abd al-Rahman. The *langar-khānah* would probably have included a kitchen like the one at the Gur-i Mir that existed to serve students, staff, and guests of the Muhammad Sultan Madrasah and perhaps provide temporary lodging for visitors as well. If the 107 *riwāqs* at the Noble Rawzah were used as cells for *mujāwirs* or other permanent personnel, a place for food preparation and service would have been an obvious need. Rudolf Stuckert’s 1945 plan suggests the existence of the building (see Plan 4, no. 13) so something must have still remained twenty years later. A photograph taken from behind the *langar-khānah* in 1936 shows the structures still intact (Fig. 3.28).

30 The *Darwazah* (or *Darb*)-*i Nazargāh*, the West Gate

‘Abd al-Rahman’s Qasim Khani Gate inscription also mentions construction of the west gate, the Nazargah Gate. The finished gate was visible from 1904 when it was completed until 1956 when it was swallowed up in another structure, the Paramach Congregational Mosque, and came to serve as the mihrab of that huge mosque (see below). In 2017, when that building was demolished by the Balkh governor, Atta Muhammad Noor, to make way for his own large mosque, the new mosque was pivoted slightly west to more precisely locate the mihrab in the qibla direction and the Nazargah Gate re-emerged, in its former, somewhat tattered, glory (Fig. 3.20).



FIGURE 3.20

Darwazah-i Nazargah attributed to Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan and his son Amir Habib Allah Khan after its emergence in 2018 from being enclosed within the Paramach Mosque, built in 1956

R. HUSAINI, 2018

According to Kuhgada’i, there are two inscriptions on the Nazargah Gate. Both refer to “completion” (*itmām*) of work on the gate. One describes work completed during the reign of “Light of the Nation and the Religion” Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan and is dated 1315/1898–99 and the second, dated 1322/1904, announcing completion of work during the reign of “Lamp of the Nation and the Religion” Habib Allah Khan.¹⁵⁷

31 The Plaza (*ṣaḥn*)

The inscription on the Qasim Khani Gate also speaks of “a plaza of bricks of worked [or artificial] stone [laid] all around the Murtaẓawī tomb of the Ḥaẓrat King of Saints, the Victorious Lion of God, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.” Was the entire plaza between the gatehouses and the main shrine building now paved with cobblestones? The wording of the inscription would logically indicate the whole plaza and “bricks of worked or artificial stone” (*khisht-i sang-i maṣnū’ī*) would suggest either cobblestones or slates. Photographs taken in 1945 by Stuckert show a courtyard paved with cobblestones. Later photographs from 2007 (Figs. 3.21 & 3.22), show carefully shaped and interlocking reddish slates with banded areas before the entryways to the Noble Rawzah as well as white square marble tiles. ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan’s work was clearly replaced more than once, at least in those areas of the plaza or courtyard that are visible in photographs. A GoogleEarth image before 2015 (see figure 3.1) shows contrasting areas of pavement indicating different types of stone. The lighter stone is

157 Ibid., p. 42, note 1.



FIGURE 3.21 Plaza paving at entrance to the sacred precincts from Darwazah-i Chaharbagh (North Gate)

B. WOODBURN, 1972



FIGURE 3.22 Plaza paving at outside entrance to Darwazah-i Chaharbagh (North gate) also showing Sardar Muhammad Ya‘qub’ Khan’s inscription
B. WOODBURN, 2007

actually the marble now while the darker along the east side might still represent ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan’s paving project. (We know that the surface was again replaced in the 1990s (see below) and that may be what is visible in figures 3.21, and 3.22).

As seems most likely, the east and west gate projects including the *riwāqs*, the *langar-khānah*, and the pavement of the courtyard were a single project carried out under the supervision of the high governor of Afghan Turkistan at the time, Sardar Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan, son of Sardar Shams al-Din Khan, who served from 1892–1903, bridging the reigns of the two amirs, ‘Abd al-Rahman and Habib Allah. The actual work was in the hands of ‘Abd al-Rahman Overseer and “Doctor Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, the son of Doctor Ilahi Bakhsh Qurayshi Hindustani,” the two having served as successive directors of public works in Afghan Turkistan. These men must have been trained architects although there is no available information about their training or professional credentials. The only information about them that exists, as far as I know, is the inscription on Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan’s *gunbad* and what little Fayz Muhammad provides in *Sirāj al-tawārikh*.

32 The Political Message

By the time Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan and his retinue left Mazar-i Sharif for Kabul in the summer of 1890 he had begun a major makeover of the shrine, not just of its architecture but of its administration, its finances, and not least, of the message it was meant to convey. He left behind symbolic reminders of his all-encompassing power: to provide shelter (the 107 *riwāq*-cells), to nourish (the *langar-khānah*), to intercede with the eternal (the *salāmnāmah*), and to safeguard select souls through eternity (the *gunbads* for certain elite figures). His works were intensely self-commemorating and some, if not all, of that self-commemoration still survives such as in the prominent epigraph (figure 3.16) on the south façade of Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan’s mausoleum and on the *salāmnāmah* inside the Gunbad-i Khanqah.

33 The Early Twentieth Century

With the amir’s death in 1901, his son and successor, Amir Habib Allah Khan (r. 1901–1919), adopted the projects begun by his father (it appears the repaving of the courtyard and the construction of the *riwāq*-cells and *langar-khānah* all had been finished by the time of the amir’s death) even some that would seem to have been completed (the two mausolea and the Nazargah Gate). He it was who ordered the construction from the ground up of the third small *gunbad* just north of the Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan mausoleum, this one to house the graves of two more Muhammadza’i sardars, Muhammad Sarwar Khan (d. 1879) and Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan (d. 1903). Begun in 1322/1904 this smallest of the *gunbads* was never finished. It may have been intended to cover an existing *suffah* with the graves of the two sardars. There are two surviving inscriptions, one broken and incomplete and a complete one that was probably on the *gunbad* itself and identified the place as the cemetery of the two sardars.¹⁵⁸ The incomplete inscription is on the tombstone of Sardar Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan and reads:

“Everything perishes except His face” (Qur’an 28:88)

This is the resting place (*sang* possibly *marqad*—) of Sardār Muḥammad ‘Azīz Khān, high governor (*nā’ib al-ḥukūmah*) of the “Mother of

¹⁵⁸ I am grateful to Reza Husaini who read and recorded both of the following inscriptions. The translation is mine.

Cities” Balkh, the son of Sardār Shams al-Dīn Khān *Ghāzī*, the son of Amīr Muḥammad Khān, the brother of the Amīr-i Kabīr Dūst Muḥammad Khān—may God make eternal his resting place. In Tawishqān Yil (1321/1903–4) he had gone to the capital (*dār al-mulk*) but en route, at Nahr-i Chahār Būlak, the drum of death sounded, he went to the Everlasting Abode and was buried next to the pleasant paradisial *rawzah* of the Ḥāzrat Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī—May God Most High be pleased with him. During the era cradled in nobility of the Amīr of Muslims, the sovereign in whom the world takes refuge, the cream of kings, the pillar of khans, His Majesty Lamp of the Nation and the Religion, Amīr Ḥabīb Allāh Khān—May God make eternal his kingdom and his sultanate—the *pādshāh* of the lands of Afghanistan, in accordance with the noble sovereign decree in 1322/1904–5 (?) a tomb (*maqbarah*) was built. A special headstone was engraved at the order of His Majesty and the grave of Sardār Muḥammad ‘Azīz Khān was included in [the tomb]. Therefore in 1324/1906–7 (?) through the efforts and patronage of the pilgrim to the Blessed Ḥaramayn Ḥājji Sardār ‘Abd Allāh Khān (Tūkhī), deputy field marshal (*nā’ib sālār*) and high governor of Balkh and the supervision (*sar parastī*) of Doctor Shaykh Ilāhī ... [inscription incomplete]

The epigraph commemorating both Muhammad ‘Aziz and Muhammad Sarwar is on the *gunbad* itself, the inscription that shows on the west façade in von Hentig’s photograph (figure 3.11):

This (is the resting place) of the late Sardār Muḥammad Sarwar Khān, son of the late Amīr Muḥammad A’zam Khān, son of the late Amīr-i Kabīr Dūst Muḥammad Khān and [the resting place] of Sardār Muḥammad ‘Azīz Khān, high governor of “the Mother of Cities” Balkh, son of Sardār Shams al-Dīn Khān *Ghāzī* whose *maqbarah* (i.e. *gunbad*) was built in Lūy Yil, the year 1322/1904–5, during the reign of the cradle of tranquility, the merciful caliph, sultan of the time, imam of the Muslims, His Majesty Lamp of the Nation and the Religion Amīr Ḥabīb Allāh Khān—May God make eternal his kingdom and his sultanate—*pādshāh* of the lands of Afghānistān in accordance with the most holy decree of the noble majestic sovereign. It was brought to completion through the efforts and patronage of the pilgrim to the Blessed Ḥaramayn, Ḥājji Sardār ‘Abd Allāh Khān [Tukhi Miranza’i], deputy field marshal and high governor of Balkh, and under the supervision of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir the son of Doctor Ilāhī Bakhsh Qurayshī in Yūnt Yil 1324/1906–7. Muhammad ‘Umar [calligrapher].



FIGURE 3.23 The inscription on Wazir Muhammad Akbar's mausoleum
P. BUCHERER-DIETSCHI, 2008

Thus, the third mausoleum was constructed under Amir Habib Allah Khan and some reconstruction work undertaken on at least the *gunbad* of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan and on the Nazargah Gate. A commemorative inscription was added to Wazir Akbar's *gunbad* and perhaps to the west façade of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's mausoleum as well. The former, a five-line epigraph near the top of the south façade lists the people buried in the *gunbad*, the amir in whose reign work was completed, the years during which work was carried out, the governor in charge at the time, the actual architect-engineers responsible for construction, and the artisan who crafted the inscription:

- (1) This tomb of the ones enjoying God's mercy, Wazir Muḥammad Akbar Khān *Ghāzī* and Sardār Muḥammad Akram Khān *Ghāzī*, two sons of the late Amīr-i Kabīr Dūst Muḥammad Khān *Ghāzī* abiding in eternity;
- (2) Shāghāsī Lūynāb Shayr Dil Khān, high governor (*nā'ib al-ḥukūmah*) of Balkh; the "refuge of sayyids" Mīrzā 'Azīz Khān *mutawallī* and Mīrzā Shujā' al-Dīn *mutawallī*, son of the aforementioned *mutawallī* of the Holy Rawḥah of the Ḥaẓrat Shāh-i Mardān of Paradise, the Commander of the Faithful (3) Ḥaẓrat 'Alī—may God ennoble his face—[was built] during the caliphate of the Shadow of God, the Caliph of the Merciful One, the Commander of the Faithful, the Ḥaẓrat, Lamp of the Nation and the Religion, Amīr Ḥabīb Allāh Khān, Pādshāh of the lands of Afghānistān,

in Lūy Yil (Year of the Dragon) One Thousand (4) Three Hundred Twenty-Two (1904–5) Hijrī Nabawī—prayers and peace of God be upon him—and was carried out and completed in accordance with his *farmān* by the pilgrim to the Two Holy Places Ḥājji Sardār ‘Abd Allāh Khan, high governor of Balkh, in (5) Yūnt Yil (Year of the Horse) 1324 (1906–7) under the supervision of Doctor Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir, the son of Doctor Ilāhī Bakhsh Qurayshī Hindūstānī. Muḥammad ‘Umar calligraphed [the inscription] (*ḥarrara-hu*) in 1324.¹⁵⁹

The name of Muhammad ‘Umar, architectural calligrapher, responsible for calligraphing the inscriptions of two of the three gunbads and perhaps the third as well, may now be added to a list of craftsmen involved with the four shrines whose names have come down to us.¹⁶⁰ Was Muhammad ‘Umar’s calligraphy used by the stone engraver to carve the stones or should we credit Muhammad ‘Umar with the carving as well? And was this the same person who produced the spectacularly intricate floriated epigraphs on the Herati marble tombstones inside?

34 The New Tombstones

In 1904, Habib Allah Khan sent a *farmān* to the governor of Herat commanding him to fashion new marble tombstones for Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan, Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan, and Sardar Muhammad Akram Khan. These

159 I have no text for the very similar looking inscription on the upper west façade of Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan’s gunbad. According to Reza Huseini (personal communication, July 17, 2019) the inscription indicates that Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman ordered the building of the *gunbad* (Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan’s) and he is memorialized in the inscription on the south façade dated 1306/1898–99. Amir Habib Allah then did some unspecified work dated 1324/1906. It is worth noting again that ‘Abd al-Rahman’s name is not mentioned in the inscription on Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan’s *gunbad*. From figures 69a and 69b one can see that a southern extension has been added to the *gunbad* that is not covered by the dome and it is perhaps only for this structure on which the inscription is mounted that Amir Habib Allah is taking sole credit.

160 Other artisans named so far are Muhammad the son of Mahmud al-Isfahani, builder-architect at Gur-i Mir; Mawlana Sabz Banna’, architect of the first structure of the Noble Rawzah erected under the patronage of Sultan-Husayn Bayqara in the fifteenth century; Mir Qasim, Ustad Hajji, and Ustad Nur Muhammad, architects and builders of Nazr Muhammad Khan’s madrasah in Balkh; Khwājah Faqir diwānbeḡi, who repaired the earthquake-collapsed dome of the Gunbad-i Khanqah; Ustad Sami’ Samarqandi, the ceramicist; and his student-apprentice, Ustad Artuq.



FIGURE 3.24 Wazir Muhammad Akbar's tombstone
(obverse)
P. BUCHERER-DIETSCHI

tombstones were then shipped from Herat to Mazar-i Sharif and installed on the tombs of the three men (Figs. 3.24 & 3.25).¹⁶¹ Photographs from 2007 and 2008 of the tombstone of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan show the highly elaborate carving that was done on those stones, the extraordinary level of artistry current in Herat at the time, and the state of preservation they have enjoyed since. The stones may have been carved in Herat and then shipped to Mazar-i Sharif or the artisan or artisans, perhaps the same Muhammad 'Umar, came to Mazar and performed the work on site (Figs. 3.26 & 3.27). Sometime between 2008 and 2015, a portrait framed with plastic flowers of Wazir Muhammad Akbar,

161 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 4, pp. 1235–36. He writes that the date the stones were ordered was 1324 (1906) but today those tombstones are found in the two mausolea with inscriptions on their exteriors dated 1322 (1904) commemorating Habib Allah Khan's order. (Personal communication [email] from Reza Husaini with the inscription, July 19, 2019.)



FIGURE 3.25 Reverse of Wazir Muhammad Akbar's tombstone
R. HUSAINI

an artistic rendering that has become a standard way of representing him, was added to his grave and rests against his headstone.¹⁶²

Even though the inscription on the south façade of Wazir Muhammad Akbar's tomb makes it appear that some conclusive end to the project was

¹⁶² The origin of the image is not entirely certain but bears a striking resemblance to an equestrian portrait of the *wazir* published in Atkinson 1842. Atkinson was sketching during the First Afghan War (1838–42). In its detailed form (head and shoulders only) it again appears in print in 1846 in Mohan Lal's biography of Dust Muhammad Khan and becomes a standard way of representing him. (Lal 1846/1978, vol. 1, facing p. 153.)



FIGURE 3.26
Portrait of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015



SARDAR MAHOMED AKBER KHAN

FIGURE 3.27
Mohan Lal portrait of Wazir Muhammad
Akbar Khan from 1846

reached by 1304/1906, in late September 1907, Amir Habib Allah Khan himself arrived in Mazar-i Sharif on a circular tour of the country that had begun in Kabul in May. He was not pleased by the state of all of his and his father's architectural commissions for on his return to Kabul he sent a *farmān* to Sardar 'Abd Allah Khan Tukhi, his high governor of Afghan Turkistan (1903–1911) in March 1908 that read:

[The governor] should focus on the buildings that were built in Turkistan by His Late Majesty, Light of the Nation and the Religion, such as the army base at Dihdādī, the Bāgh-i Sipahsālār (Field Marshal's Park), the Salāmkhānah-i 'Āmm (Public Audience Hall), and *other buildings of Mazar-i Sharif, including the langar-khānah, the Nazargāh Gate, the Qāsim*

Khānī Gate, the hospital, and the buildings at the holy and blessed shrine [emphasis added] as well as the Jahān-numā Palace in Tāshqurghān. [The governor] should repair them and keep them from deteriorating to make sure that the efforts and orders of that Paradise-dwelling ḥazrat do not go for naught but remain fixed in history as a memorial to him.¹⁶³

It is somewhat ironic that two years earlier that same governor had his name commemorated for work “completed” in the inscription on Wazir Muhammad Khan’s mausoleum. Whether the work was ever carried out to the amir’s satisfaction is not recorded. The high governor, Sardar ‘Abd Allah Khan Tukhi (1903–1911), meantime, had already taken upon himself the retiling of the Nazargah iwan, that is, the west iwan of the Gunbad-i Haram which faced the Nazargah Gate and he placed there a plaque of self-commemoration. It reads:

The renovation of this *riwāq* (i.e. iwan) was completed during the reign of the Caliph of the Muslims, Amir Ḥabīb Allāh Khān in 1322/1904–05 and was carried out on behalf of the pilgrim to the two sacred places (Mecca and Medina), the one with the title ‘Civil and Military Deputy Field Marshal (*nā’ib sālār-i mulkī wa niẓāmī*)’ the high governor of Balkh and Turkistān [Sardar ‘Abd Allah Khan Tukhi] whose grave will be beneath this *riwāq*—God willing.

Apparently God (and perhaps the amir) was amenable and the Tukhi sardar would enjoy the extraordinary honor of burial within that iwan, a place as close as possible to the *panjarah*, the screen around the tomb of ‘Ali, without actually being within the walls of the Gunbad-i Haram.¹⁶⁴ Kuhgada’i notes that after the sardar no one was ever permitted to be buried so close to the saintly remains. In more recent times Sardar ‘Abd Allah Tukhi’s grave has reportedly been moved elsewhere.

Except for his visit in 1907 and subsequent admonitory *farmān*, there is nothing recorded to indicate that Amir Habib Allah Khan had any further interest in the shrine. However, one might expect that someday archival materials will show that he did maintain an interest in the progress of his father’s various projects.

During Habib Allah’s reign, another Muhammadza’i high governor of Afghan Turkistan, Sardar Muhammad ‘Usman Khan, son of Sardar Muhammad ‘Umar Khan, made a contribution still visible today. The amir appointed him

163 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 4, p. 1172.

164 For the inscription and the place of burial see Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 100.

high governor in 1916 and he is remembered for having constructed the balustrades (*katārah-hā*) that line the tops of the walls of the Gunbad-i Haram and Gunbad-i Khanqah.¹⁶⁵ A comparison of Werner Otto von Hentig's 1916 photograph and Rudolf Stuckert's 1945 image of the small mausolea show Muhammad 'Usman Khan's balustrade (cf. figures 3.11 and 3.12).

Amir Habib Allah's son and successor, Amir Aman Allah Khan, who came to the throne in February 1919, never showed any interest in the shrine prior to his overthrow in 1929, nor is there any record that he ever traveled to Afghan Turkistan during his reign. He may well have been in his father's entourage in 1907 touring the country but there is no evidence yet that he was. Aman Allah concentrated his own self-commemorative efforts on a new city for Kabul which he named Dar al-Aman. There was no relationship to the Dar al-Aman of the Mujaddidi, Khalifah Sahib, mentioned above. This name was inspired by pure self-commemoration.

35 The Noble Rawzah under the Yahya Khayl Muhammadza'i Monarchy: Muhammad Nadir Shah (r. 1929–33) and Muhammad Zahir Shah (r. 1933–73)

The 'revolution' (*inqilāb*) that ousted Aman Allah Khan, engineered by a Tajik warlord from north of Kabul, the famous, or infamous depending on one's point of view, "Bachchah-i Saqqaw" (Bacha Saqao, Watercarrier's Boy) whose actual name was Habib Allah Kalakani, briefly interrupted Muhammadza'i control of government.¹⁶⁶ Kalakani enjoyed broad support in Afghan Turkistan and his loyalists struggled throughout his nine-month tenure in Kabul with supporters of Aman Allah Khan to gain control of the region. Although there is some record of what was taking place in the north, we have no record yet that the shrine was involved.

After the fall of the Tajik amir, Afghan Turkistan was decidedly restive.¹⁶⁷ Once Kalakani was defeated and killed and suitable Afghan vengeance wreaked on his supporters and fellow Tajiks, the next two Muhammadza'i kings, members of the Yahya Khayl Muhammadza'i clan, would devote a great deal of attention to the shrine, or at least their governors would, in efforts to reestablish Kabul's control over Turkistan. To purge the region of the Tajik supporters of Kalakani and other anti-Pashtun forces, Nadir Shah sent "special envoys" (*ra'īs-i iṣlāḥīyah wa tanzīmīyah*) to Afghan Turkistan, one of whom, mentioned in the previous

165 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 35.

166 On the coup see McChesney 1998 and Fayz Muhammad 2019, pp. 47–341.

167 For details of the various forms and sites of resistance to the Yahya Khayl government of Nadir Shah and his son Zahir Shah see Boyko 2010, chapters 3 and 4.



FIGURE 3.28 North Gate (Darwazah-i Chaharbagh) from outside the *haram* area showing the back of the *langar-khānah* to the right, F. Clapp 1936

chapter, was Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand. He was preceded briefly, however, by Muhammad Ya‘qub Khan, the governor of Kabul province (Figs. 3.28 & 3.29).¹⁶⁸ Muhammad Ya‘qub must have been sent north almost immediately after his appointment as governor of Kabul late in 1929 because less than one year later one of the first things he did, recorded by an inscription placed on the Chaharbagh Gate, was to make repairs (*tarmīmāt*) to “the *kāshī-kārī* (tile work) of the triumphal archway (*tāq-i zafar rīvāq*) of the *chahārbāgh* of the splendid *rawzah* of Ḥaẓrat, Shāh of Saints.” Work on the Chaharbagh Gate had earlier been done by Ustad Sami‘ Samarqandi and then by the governor Luynab Shayr Dil Khan in 1294/1877, but only apparently on the interior façade. According to Kuhgada‘i, Muhammad Ya‘qub’s tile project was on the outside (northern) façade of the gate, where the inscription is found. The date on the inscription is 30 Mizan 1309 or 30 Jumadi I 1349 (October 23, 1930).¹⁶⁹ It is possible that on the two earlier occasions when the gate was revetted, the northern side was not touched. In any case the work was deemed substantial enough for Muhammad Ya‘qub to feel justified in inscribing himself into the fabric of the shrine.

Muhammad Ya‘qub Khan was succeeded as special envoy by Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand in 1933, the man remembered in the area as “a second Genghis Khan.” As at Balkh, Muhammad Gul Khan also staked out a design for reconfiguring Mazar-i Sharif to reflect new nationalist or ethno-nationalist ideas. At Mazar-i Sharif, these were articulated as “progress” and “modernization”

168 Although Adamec 1975, p. 327 lists Muhammad Yakub [*sic*] as governor of Kabul Province from 1929–32 in his list of governors, he provides no biography for him. The *Sālnāmahs* for 1311, 1312, and 1313 (1932–33, 1933–34, and 1934–35) list Muhammad ‘Umar Khan as governor of Kabul.

169 Kuhgada‘i 1946, facing p. 41. Both inscriptions, those of Shayr Dil Khan and Muhammad Ya‘qub Khan are given by Kuhgada‘i, the latter one in full.



FIGURE 3.29 Chaharbagh Gate showing Sardar Muhammad Ya'qub's inscription
B. WOODBURN, 2005

attributable to the Yahya Khayl regime while the Aryan element was downplayed, perhaps in light of the multi-ethnic composition of Mazar-i Sharif's population. In practice, foregrounding modern nationalist ideas meant, among other things, demolishing buildings to open up vistas, creating broad avenues leading to a focal point, and highlighting historic architecture. It is not hard to understand why the Noble Rawzah, like the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine at Balkh, should form the centerpiece of this vision. There was nothing to compare with it. The 1913 photograph mislabeled as "the ruins of Balkh" (see figure 3.18) and taken well before the clearances in Mazar-i Sharif gives some idea of how urban structures, commercial and residential, nestled up close to the shrine and what would have to be cleared to create the long views that modernity required. (Cf. figures 3.18 and 3.30.)

After the clearances supervised by Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand, six years would pass before more evidence of Kabul's interest again appears. There is an inscription from 1940 which suggests both the kind of work still being done on the shrine and the continual effort by Pashtun ruling circles to inscribe the authority of Kabul on the shrine. The inscription also underlines the new goal of historic preservation, the first time it is mentioned as government policy.

This time it was the south gatehouse, the Dar-i Ihram, that was rebuilt and the following inscription prominently mounted (Figs. 3.31 and 3.32):

During the glorious reign and in accordance with the will of the religion-advancing one and the one reliant on God, His Majesty [Muḥammad Zāhir Shāh] the progress-desiring *pādshāh* of Afghanistan,



FIGURE 3.30 Aerial photograph of Noble Rawzah
D. DWINELL, 1977

worthy successor of the fortunate holy warrior and martyr, His Majesty Muḥammad Nādir Shāh, may God have mercy on him, whose glittering times have been an era of new revitalization and prosperity for the country, and especially their turning their royal attention to respect for and preservation and construction of the blessed shrines and historical buildings of the homeland, besides the many other important creations of public benefit which they are doing at this time from one end of the country to the other, the construction of this southern heaven-like entry archway to the Pure Rawzah of the Ḥaẓrat Lord of the Saints, the Victorious Lion of God, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—God honor him—the (re)construction of Ḥaẓrat Bahā al-Dīn Market Street—on him [Baha al-Din] be God’s mercy—other streets around the Noble Rawzah, and important improvements to the city were all completed in accordance with what was desired in the solar year 1319 (1940–41) through the magnificent efforts of His Excellency Gul Aḥmad Khān Ghaznawī, the high governor of Mazar-i Sharif.

Gul Ahmad Khan Malikyar of Ghazni was governor of Afghan Turkistan from 1935 to 1949. He was in his late thirties when appointed high governor after serving as chief of intelligence and deputy minister of justice under Amir Aman Allah Khan.¹⁷⁰ We know little about his relatively long tenure as governor but

¹⁷⁰ Adamec 1987, p. 102, says he was “governor of Mazar-i Sharif and Herat” from 1935–45. On the other hand his lists of governors of Herat and Mazar-i Sharif (Adamec 1975, pp. 331,



FIGURE 3.31 Exterior of South Gate (Dar-i Ihram)
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2008



FIGURE 3.32
(Detail) Inscription on Dar-i Ihram
commemorating work sponsored by the
king, Muhammad Zahir Shah in 1940–41
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2008

it was during his regime that Kuhgada'i came to Mazar-i Sharif to carry out his research on the shrine. He tells us that in the interior of the building artisans from Kabul and Ghazni had retiled the mihrabs of both the Gunbad-i Haram and the Gunbad-i Khanqah and then left their names prominently

333) seem to show that he was governor of Mazar-i Sharif from 1935–49 and governor of Herat from 1948–50.

displayed—Aslam Khan Kabuli and ‘Alam Khan Ghaznawi. Anyone who read the plaque might then be reminded of the Pashtun south, and especially the center, represented by Kabul and Ghazni.¹⁷¹

The renovated southern gate, Dar-i Ihram, had another feature that Kuhgada’i mentions. It stood at one end of the Baha al-Din Market, which he credits Gul Ahmad with opening although it may have been more a reopening. The 1913 photograph (see figure 3.18) seems to show already a covered market connecting the south gate, Dar-i Ihram with the remains of the two Jani-Begid mausoleums flanking the *khiyābān*-avenue. Another photograph dated to 1916, this one taken by Oskar von Niedermayer clearly shows the long slightly peaked roof of the market, the roof being used at the time as a thoroughfare for pedestrians. Niedermayer’s vantage point was at the southern end of the bazaar roof facing the other end of the market and the abutting southern façade of the Dar-i Ihram, the southern gate to the Noble Rawzah.¹⁷²

The name of the Baha al-Din Market commemorates the legend of Baha al-Din Naqshband’s pilgrimage to the area and the three forty-day retreats (*chillahs*) he completed at the very site of what would be the southern gate. Although there is no evidence for it, it is also possible that the market was on the same site as the one Sultan-Husayn Bayqara is said to have ordered built as part of the shrine’s endowment in the 1480s.

36 The Earthquake of 9 June 1956

For the 1950s, it is more than likely that the most important event affecting the ‘Alid shrine, as it did the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine, was the 7.6 magnitude earthquake of 9 June 1956, the epicenter of which was the Sayqan-Kahmard area, 100 miles south-southeast of Mazar-i Sharif.¹⁷³ Despite the apparently catastrophic effects to the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine and the buildings around the Noble Rawzah in Mazar-i Sharif neither the Afghan press nor foreign observers mention the earthquake’s effect on either Balkh or Mazar-i Sharif.

171 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 42; also Dupree 1977, p. 393.

172 von Niedermayer and Diez 1924, plate no. 189.

173 Balland 1996, p. 627 and Heuckroth and Karim 1970. It is worth noting that in Mazar-i Sharif people refer to the enormously destructive 1956 earthquake as the “Tashqurghan earthquake” (*zilzilah-i Tāshqurghān*). (Reza Huseini, personal communication July 18, 2019.) I could find no record of another earthquake in 1956 with the kind of destructive power for which the “Tashqurghan” earthquake is locally remembered and assume it was the same as the Sayqan quake.

A search of the *Sālnāmah* (*Almanach de Kaboul*) for 1335/1956–57 mentions only the arrival of aid workers from the Turkish Red Crescent to assist the survivors in the Sayqan area. Perhaps a Mazar-i Sharif newspaper such as *Bidār* or *Ittihād-i Islām* might have had reports but if so these are unavailable to me. Unfortunately, Kabul observers like L.E. Heuckroth and R.A. Karim, who combed newspaper accounts, only speak of damage in the immediate Sayqan-Kahmard area and where tremors were felt elsewhere and have not a word to say about Afghan Turkistan. Seismologists have indicated that the epicentral area did not extend as far north as Mazar-i Sharif, although it and Balkh both sit on one of the multitude of transform faults that run through the area and have been the epicenters of earthquakes in the past.¹⁷⁴

Between the 1920s and the 1960s the photographic record shows the loss of a substantial number of buildings at the shrine, or adjacent to it. Byron's photos of 1934 show, for example, the two ruined but still standing Jani-Begid mausolea on the south side of the sacred grounds (figure 3.4).¹⁷⁵ After 1956, we have no photographic or textual evidence yet of these buildings still standing in any form.¹⁷⁶ The *langar-khānah* and *riwāq*-cells ordered built by Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan and shown in the 1913 panoramic view of the Noble Rawzah (figure 3.19), the 1925 photograph in *Souvenirs d'Afghanistan* (figure 3.20), and Stuckert's 1945 picture (figure 3.17), have completely vanished. This may have been the time as well when the large cupola atop the dome of the Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan mausoleum disappeared.

Much more recently, 'Abd al-Qayyum Ansari has dated the destruction of what he calls the "outbuildings (*ilhāqīyah-hā*)" of the shrine to 1956 but does not say what the cause of the destruction was:

In 1335 A.H.S. (1956) when Ghulām Rasūl Paramāch¹⁷⁷ was high governor (*wālī*) of Balkh during the reign of Muḥammad Zāhir Shāh, changes and much destruction took place around the Noble Rawzah. All the historical buildings like the drumhouse (*naqqārah-khānah*) or the tomb of Sanjar [*sic*] (*dakhmah-i Sanjar*), which were on the south side of the Noble Rawzah and were more than 800 [*sic*] years old, were destroyed.

174 See Carbonel and Denizot 1977, p. 122.

175 See O'Kane 2000, pp. 122, 128–29, 131.

176 Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 94 has an image of the Gunbad-i Kabud (Kistan Qara's mausoleum) but there is no indication of the date of the photograph. Obviously, it is not later than 1946.

177 According to Adamec 1975, p. 331, Ghulam Rasul Paramach was high governor of Balkh just for the year 1956.

[Also] the cells (*hujrah-hā*) around the Noble Rawzah as well as the Baha al-Dīn Madrasah, the Diwanbegi Madrasah, and the Khwajah Khayran Madrasah, which were several hundred years old, were all destroyed.¹⁷⁸

And later he adds an apparent clarification about the cells (*hujrah-hā*) around the Noble Rawzah that were destroyed:

Before 1335 A.H.S. [1956–57], when the destruction of the area around the Noble Rawzah and within the perimeter wall took place, there were some 50–60 residential rooms to house devotees and employees (*nawkarīwāl*).¹⁷⁹

Ansari was clearly referring to some of the 107 *riwāqs* that Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan had commissioned and that are depicted in the photographs mentioned above. Despite Ansari’s failure to note it, the earthquake most likely was the cause of the destruction. No other known event—natural, economic, or political—would account for the degree of buildings’ absence in photographs of the shrine taken after 1956. Since at least half of the *riwāq*-cells (or *hujrahs* as he calls them) existed, in his view before 1956, and some of these were documented by Stuckert in 1945, then their disappearance cannot be blamed on the reported clearances of Muhammad Gul Khan Mohmand. In addition, Ansari’s account is the first known reference to a “Diwanbegi Madrasah” in Mazar-i Sharif but perhaps he was referring to the Allah Yar Qataghan Diwanbegi Madrasah in Balkh City (see above, p. 174).

Ansari and a recent photograph help us account for what happened to the Nazargah Gate, the west gate. Concurrent with or right after the 1956 earthquake, the then high governor, Ghulam Rasul Paramach constructed a large congregational mosque that swallowed up but did not destroy the west gate. According to Ansari, due to the increasing inadequacy of the Gunbad-i Khanqah section of the main structure of the Noble Rawzah to accommodate worshippers at the Friday congregational service and for holiday prayers, Paramach built a new mosque which could hold some 3,000 worshippers. Its footprint so far extended into the grounds of the Noble Rawzah that the Nazargah Gate was enclosed and wound up at the back center of the mosque, serving as the mihrab (and see figure 3.1 where the smaller dome on the Paramach Mosque is the dome of the Nazargah Gate).¹⁸⁰ It is odd, however,

178 Ansari 2012, p. 16.

179 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

180 Ansari 2012, p. 16.



FIGURE 3.33 Paramach Mosque (east façade (back side) as seen from the northeast) enclosing Nazargah Gate (center portion under smaller dome)
B. WOODBURN, 2007



FIGURE 3.34 West façade from south showing mihrab and dome (lower of the two) of Nazargah Gate
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2007



FIGURE 3.35

Satellite image of Noble Rawzah showing footprint of demolished Paramach Mosque, the Nazargah Gate, and the new Atta Muhammad Noor Mosque
CAMEL, 23 APRIL 2020

that Ansari says nothing about the relationship between the construction of the new mosque and the destruction caused by the earthquake.

The Paramach Mosque was probably renovated more than once and then completely demolished by New Year's Day 2017 to make way for a much larger mosque (in self- commemoration of a new ruler of Balkh). Figure 3.34 (from 2007) shows how the Paramach mosque of 1956 encroached on the precincts of the Noble Rawzah and figure 3.20, taken from almost the same perspective, shows how the Nazargah Gate emerged from the rubble of the Paramach Mosque with the new mosque nearly finished in the background. Even more dramatic are satellite images (figure 3.1, taken before 2015 and figure 3.35 taken in 2020) that show how in 1956 the Paramach mosque had incorporated the Nazargah Gate (the smaller of the two domes). The comparison of these two satellite images also show how the new mosque was designed to respect the older boundary and is apparently oriented to better conform to the qibla direction. Its position leaves the Nazargah Gate standing as a lone reminder of the historic limits of the *ḥaram* area on the west side and how much the Paramach Mosque had intruded.

Ansari's description of the destroyed buildings also shows how shrine legends take on material form, the "tomb of Sanjar" for example. The twelfth-century al-Gharnati's account of the discovery of the 'Alid grave at Khwajah Khayran names the political figure involved with the discovery of 'Ali's tomb as Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj, governor of Balkh for the Saljuqid, Sultan Sanjar (r. 1118–57 AD). This story centering on Amir Qumaj or Amir Ahmad b. Qumaj as the main figure in the episode and the sponsor of whatever development took place then continues through the fifteenth-century rediscovery when it again appears. Later, however, Sultan Sanjar himself, an iconic historical figure in local lore like Chinggis Khan, Baha al-Din Naqshband, and 'Abd Allah Khan becomes the protagonist. Not only was it Sultan Sanjar, in modern lore, who came to verify the discovery but, even more, he died and was buried

at the shrine. This, despite the presumably well-known grand mausoleum of his at Marw (Merv or Mary), now in Turkmenistan. By the time Kuhgada'i did his work at the shrine in the 1940s, one of the remains of the grand Jani-Begid mausolea located south of the Dar-i Ihram (the south gate) was by the 1940s believed to be the tomb of Sanjar. Kuhgada'i himself seems to have believed it and he labels a photograph of one of the remaining remnants of the Jani-Begid mausolea as "the ruins of the tomb of Sanjar which some call 'the tomb of the sultans' and some call 'the blue mausoleum' (*gunbad-i kabūd*)."¹⁸¹ The fact that Ansari, writing in the early twenty-first century, attributed the destruction of "the tomb of Sanjar" to the earthquake is some evidence that one of the Jani-Begid mausolea survived until the mid-1950s.

37 After the Monarchy

The Yahya Khayl monarchy ended in 1973. We all have a general idea of the unhappy history of Afghanistan between then and now. Five years of a nominally Islamic republic (1973–78) was followed by fourteen years of the Democratic Republic during which the Soviet Union invaded the country, the jihad began which continues to this day, and the Soviet Union withdrew after more than nine futile years of fighting the mujahideen. Mazar-i Sharif was generally well-protected during the Soviet occupation. Close to the Soviet-Afghan border and on the main highway between the two countries, it was well-defended by Soviet troops. The end of the occupation in February 1989 and the fall of the last head of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1992 brought into prominence a former general of Afghan government forces, Abdur Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek, who had fought alongside Soviet and Afghan forces but switched sides when the jihadists began to get the upper hand. We know of his work in Balkh on the Abu Nasr Parsa shrine where he added two one-storey cement wings to the building, to serve as a mosque.

38 The Dostum Era

From 1992 until 1997, Dostum attempted to turn Mazar-i Sharif and its surrounding area into an independent mini-state. He created his own flag and airline, tried to attract tourism, and forged close ties with the government of newly-independent Uzbekistan, which bordered Balkh Province to the north.

¹⁸¹ Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 94, figure.

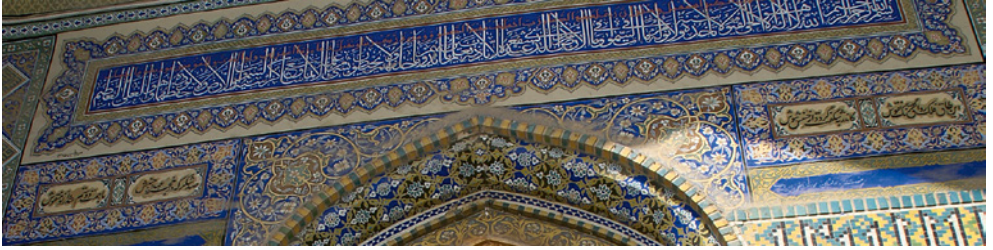


FIGURE 3.36 Abdur Rashid Dostum's Poem, interior Gunbad-i Khanqah (S. Mahendrarajah) (detail)

He also began a program of commemorative architectural projects. Over the course of the five years, before he was driven out by Taliban forces, he also put his stamp on the shrine by redecorating and rebranding it, as many had done before him. According to one source, he “lavished huge sums” on it after he declared himself independent of Kabul in 1992.¹⁸²

One self-commemorative example is located high up on the interior north wall of the entry to the Gunbad-i Khanqah (Fig. 3.36). There, four horizontal cartouches are easily read, each filled with one half-line of poetry celebrating Dostum and his redecoration of the interiors of the Gunbad-i Haram and the Gunbad-i Khanqah (Fig. 3.37):

This rose painted arch of celestial camber / Inside, wonder is excited and
 beauty comprehended /
 A hundred thanks that in the auspicious time of Junbish¹⁸³ / This was
 painted under the patronage of Dustum. 1375/1996

Besides having the interiors of the Gunbad-i Haram and Gunbad-i Khanqah lavishly repainted, Dostum also weather-proofed the roofs of the two domes in some fashion. It is unclear exactly what that work entailed (Fig. 3.38).¹⁸⁴ Moreover, he also purchased from “the Arab world” a solid gold plaque that measures approximately two-feet wide by twelve feet long, weighing over fifteen pounds, and embossed with the “Good Words” or profession of faith (*shahādah*,

182 Lee 1998, pp. 136, 263.

183 *Junbish-i Milli-yi Islāmi-yi Afghānistān* (Islamic National Front [Movement] of Afghanistan) the official name of Dostum's political faction.

184 Ansari 2012, p. 17. Ansari seems to be saying that Dostum rebuilt the domes but uses the word roof (*bām*) instead of dome (*qubbah*) and may only have been referring to interior work.



FIGURE 3.37 Abdur Rashid Dostum's Painted Interior
S. MAHENDRARAJAH 2015

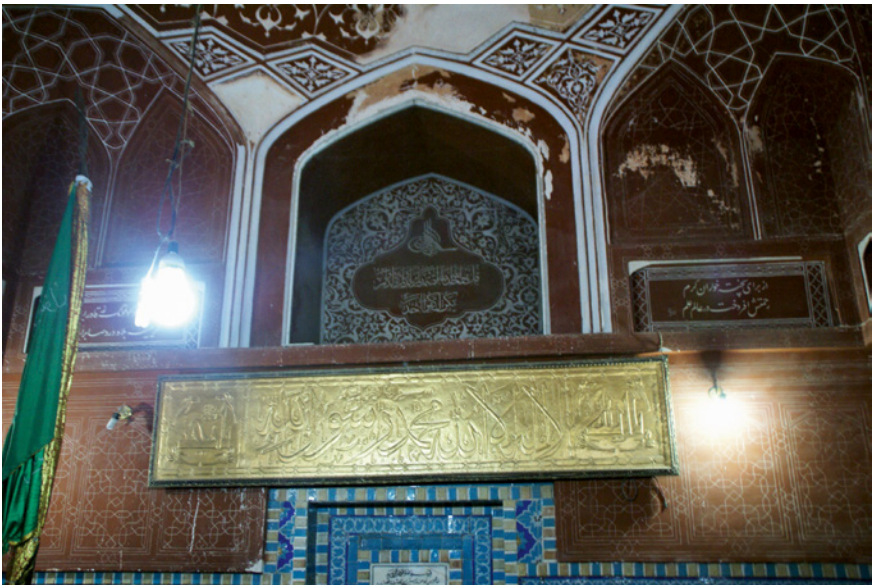


FIGURE 3.38 Abdur Rashid Dostum's Gold plaque of the profession of faith (*shahādah*)
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

“There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God”). It is suspended over one of the inside iwans of the Gunbad-i Khanqah.¹⁸⁵

Outside, Dostum repaved the surface of the plaza replacing the “cementitious stones” (*sang-hā-yi samantī*) with marble. Were these “cementitious stones” perhaps the cobblestones that Kuhgada’i attributes to ‘Abd al-Rahman? Reza Huseini noted a marble inscription of Dostum’s affixed to the Qasim Khani Gate dated 1375 Shamsi/1996 and commemorating his renovation work on the shrine.¹⁸⁶

39 The Taliban and the Monuments Men, Dostum and Noor

In August 1998 the Taliban took control of Mazar-i Sharif and at first indulged in an orgy of retaliatory mayhem. The shrine, however, seems to have been largely spared. Or if not spared, the damage was minor enough to be easily repaired. For example, the inscription General Dostum mounted on the Qasim Khani Gate commemorating the work he had done was smashed and wherever they noticed his name, they either smashed the tile it was on or covered it with black paint.¹⁸⁷ However, they overlooked the verses written in the entrance to the Gunbad-i Khanqah. We have no other record of attempts by Taliban to put their mark on the shrine and depending on how Wahhabi-oriented, iconoclastic, and hagiophobic the Taliban commanders were, they would have been more likely to destroy the shrine as a site of inappropriate saint-worship than to patronize it. On the other hand rank-and-file Talibs might have found it a reassuring presence, a place to approach as worshippers and supplicants. It also would have been a likely venue for Taliban leaders to deliver their Friday sermons. As sacred space it transcended in many ways the parochialism of sectarian identities. In 1888, for instance, Yate noted the eagerness with which his Muslim and Hindu staff members looked forward to visiting the shrine. He too, though he does not admit it, seems to have been similarly attracted by it.

The retaking of Afghanistan by American-led forces in 2002 and the expulsion of its Taliban government as retaliation for destruction of the World Trade Center and attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, restored General Dostum to Mazar-i Sharif. Back in control, if briefly, of the Balkh region, Dostum began another more grandiose commemorative project. Although

185 Ibid., p. 17.

186 Huseini 2020. The last line is *bā-himmat-i Dūstum shud naw manqūsh*. (Due to the altruistic concern of Dostum [the shrine] was painted anew.)

187 Ibid.

slightly outside the limits of the precincts of the shrine, it had a strong symbolic connection and suggests how the shrine focuses social and political life in Mazar-i Sharif.

Dostum's project consisted of five monuments, four of them set in the middle of the main streets radiating from the shrine in the four cardinal directions.¹⁸⁸ It is unclear whether all the monuments were built in the post-2001 era (although two of them must have been) or whether they had been begun before Dostum's regime was interrupted by the Taliban.

Three of the monuments are in honor of iconic figures of Balkh and Mazar-i Sharif's literary and cultural heritage: Rabi'ah Balkhi, the tenth-century poetess believed to be buried at Balkh and whose tomb was reconstructed as part of the rebuilding of the Mir Mazid Arghun (Abu Nasr Parsa) mausoleum in Balkh City; Nasir-i Khusraw, poet, traveler, and introducer of Isma'ili Shi'ism to Central Asia (a part of his story that is not foregrounded in Mazar-i Sharif),¹⁸⁹ and Jalal al-Din Balkhi (Rumi), the thirteenth-century mystic poet. A fourth monument although it has no particular tie to Balkh, sanctifies the sacrifices of the recent past as represented by a now-transcendent martyr, Ahmad Shah Mas'ud (Massoud), whose resonant nickname "Lion of the Panjshayr (Five Lions) Valley" connects his legacy to 'Ali, the "Victorious Lion of God." On September 9, 2001 Mas'ud was assassinated, as 'Ali had been 1,340 years earlier, and so became an instant symbol of resistance and sacrifice. After his death this was one of many monuments to Massoud that sprang up around the country and in this case was perhaps also to remind observers of the one-time alliance between Dostum and Massoud, when they formed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.

In 2001, after returning from exile in Turkey, Dostum completed the various projects at the Noble Rawzah that he had first commissioned in 1992–96. One of these, and the fifth of the major monuments attributable to him, recalls Soviet efforts of the 1930s and 1940s to emphasize the historic importance of Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i (d. 1501). But the head of a Tajik faction and an erstwhile ally of Dostum's, Atta Muhammad Noor, challenged him for control of Mazar in 2001 and finally ousted him in 2004.¹⁹⁰ Nonetheless, on Nawruz

188 On these monuments see Kazemi 2014.

189 This omission of the Isma'ili connection is reflected in Kazemi's characterization of Nasir-i Khusraw as "another famous poet, traveller, and philosopher who lived in the eleventh century and is known for his *Safarnama* (travelogue) ...," [p. 2].

190 Mukhopadhyay 2014, chapter 2 on Atta Muhammad Noor's career.



FIGURE 3.39 Mir 'Ali Shayr monument erected by Abdur Rashid Dostum
R. KAZEMI, 2014

(March 20) 2010 another large monument originally commissioned by Dostum was unveiled (Fig. 3.39).¹⁹¹ This was a grandiose lapidary commemoration of the late fifteenth-century literary figure, the man named by Central Asian Uzbeks as the “father of Uzbek literature,” the ever-popular Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i. Over the years, Mir 'Ali Shayr entered the story of the Noble Rawzah first as someone who built a caravanserai there and endowed it to the shrine and then as someone sent by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara to verify the story of the discovery and even later—and now the widely-believed story—as the person actually in charge of building the Gunbad-i Haram and supervising the organization of its administration.¹⁹² This, despite the fact that there is no mention in any late Timurid or early Abu'l-Khayrid source of Mir 'Ali Shayr Nawa'i's having had anything to do with the shrine rediscovery. The earliest reference to Mir 'Ali Shayr's involvement with the

191 Kazemi 2014, p. 3. By 2010, Dostum had been relegated to Shibarghan, his home town, by his former ally now political enemy Atta Muhammad Noor, but there is no question that the Nawa'i monument represents Dostum's vision because his name is inscribed on it.

192 Kazemi 2014.



FIGURE 3.40 (Detail) Mir 'Ali Shayr monument with an image of the Noble Rawzah floating over Mir 'Ali Shayr's head
R. KAZEMI, 2014

shrine comes in the late sixteenth-century work by Warsaji.¹⁹³ Much later, in the course of the twentieth century, as nationalist aspirations in Central Asia, particularly those connected to language development, singled out Mir 'Ali Shayr as an historical personage of special importance, his cause was also taken up by ethno-nationalists in Afghanistan and in Uzbekistan, who competed for the exclusive right to claim him. It is not surprising that despite the lack of historical evidence for any role in the rediscovery and early development of the shrine, by 2010, when 'Abd al-Qayyum Ansari writes about those earlier events, Mir 'Ali Shayr had assumed a central role and in many respects appears as a more prominent figure than Sultan-Husayn Bayqara himself (Fig. 3.40). In any event, the monument places him and the shrine in iconic juxtaposition, the image of the shrine floating above Mir 'Ali Shayr's head like an architectural halo or crown.

Atta Muhammad Noor, Dostum's chief rival at Balkh, is known to his followers as *ustād* (master, teacher) and displayed a strong sense of the pedagogue's obligation to convey Afghanistan's historic past to the public. In 2006, he unveiled in black and white marble his own contribution to the shrine, a wall of monuments, installed along the south side of the perimeter wall of the shrine, commemorating twenty-seven individuals of historic

193 E.g., the late sixteenth-century Warsaji 2010, p. 17 and more recently Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 31.

importance to Balkh (including himself), and one iconic book, the *Fazā'il-i Balkh*, the model for Warsaji's "seventy shaykhs" volume (Figs. 3.41 & 3.42).¹⁹⁴ The wall has images of the personalities, each with a tablet containing a lengthy description in Dari Persian. Noor has placed his own portrait and tablet in the middle of the commemorative wall and an explanation of his intentions rendered in both Dari and English. The somewhat idiosyncratic English reads:

Our ancient homeland which was called Ariana (land of spirituals) some 5000 years ago. and was named Khorasan (Sunrise) 1500 years ago however is called Afghanistan today. The land is cradle of ancient culture and human civilization. Bakhdi Bakhtar or Balkh wich [*sic*] was founded by the Arians some 3700 years ago was the capital of Ariana for along time and is one of the most important provinces of our country. From this land wich [*sic*] is the mother of cities. and Islam Tradition and modern civilization is glittering here a number of intellectuals, leaders cultural men belonging to peshdadi, Kayani, Greek or Bactrerien, Ashkjani, Koshani, Yaftali, Khorasani, Barmeki, Samani, tribes have grown up here. They have left unforgettable memories in the culture and history of this province.

I, on behalf of a son [*sic*—as a son?] of Balkh province and Afghanistan who loves the history and culture of his land wanted to fulfill my responsibility by inaugurating [a wall of Balkh intellectuals] in order to introduce the biographises [*sic*] of some of them. I hope this project is put into practice in order to do more for the national, cultural, and ancient national identity, national solidarity and development of our beloved Afghanistan under the shadow of our Islam and our constitutional law. Because the future palace [*sic*—place] of a national [*sic*—nation] will rely on its past achievements. Regards, Full General Atta Mohammad Noor, Governor of Balkh Province and founder of Balkh intellectuals association. (Dated April 25, 2006)

This expansive view of Afghanistan's past is very much in accord with Balkh's acquired role as "cradle of the Aryans," claiming for Balkh a central importance in the development of world civilization, the Noble Rawzah being one preeminent symbol of that importance.

194 Kazemi 2014.



FIGURE 3.41 Atta Muhammad Noor's Commemorative Wall
A. AZAD, 2013



FIGURE 3.42
(Detail) Atta Muhammad Noor's Wall
R. KAZEMI, 2014

Noor also wanted to put a much grander imprint on the shrine. In 1956 Ghulam Rasul Paramach had sponsored the construction of a congregational mosque capable of holding 3,000 worshippers. But, as was noted above, in doing so he had substantially impinged on the western side of the shrine *ḥaram* area. Either to rectify this intrusion on the sacred space, to correct the qibla orientation of the mihrab, or simply out of a desire for self-commemoration and to show his power, Noor ordered the Paramach Mosque razed and another enormous mosque built. Relative to the Paramach Mosque, the longitudinal axis of the Noor mosque was shifted some fifteen to twenty degrees to the south of the Paramach axis and its footprint is now entirely outside the *ḥaram* area of the shrine, bringing back into view the Nazargah Gate.

These attempts to exert some control over the past and provide commemoration, retelling history and updating its meaning, are never-ending and central to the legitimacy of those claiming political power as well as a society's sense of identity. Moreover, it is of some interest that, as in the past, Balkh's leaders would surround themselves with coteries of dependent intellectuals as a perceived instrument for solidifying power.¹⁹⁵ Noor founded a Balkh association of intellectuals called the "Circle of Intellectuals" (*ḥalqah-i rawshan-fikrān*), or as it appears in his text, the "Balkh intellectual association" formed exclusively of Tajiks. Similarly, Dostum is reported to have surrounded himself with a circle of Uzbek intellectuals connected with the Uzbek commanders who are the mainstay of his National Front party. The intellectuals, Tajik and Uzbek, are supported with government appointments by their commanders and respective amirs (Dostum and Noor) and in turn write at their patrons' behest. This recalls the political culture of Chinggisid Balkh (thirteenth to the mid-eighteenth century) in which Uzbek and other amirs formed the military support of the Chinggisid sultans and khans and the ulema served to connect political and military circles with the general populace. It is as if this culture of interdependency has remained deeply embedded in the collective memories of the people of northern Afghanistan and reemerges to public view in those times when a strong center (in latter days, Kabul) is unable to assert itself. In all this, the Noble Rawzah serves as a durable palimpsest of philosophical and political intentions and the tangible and symbolic manifestations that those intentions produce.

195 Kazemi 2014, p. 4.

40 Popular Use of the Shrine: Elite Burials

Up to this point the narrative has been almost exclusively focused on architecture and political power to the neglect of the social impact and meanings of the shrine for the general populace. Pilgrimage to it, of course, is undoubtedly the most important social activity in which populations both near and far engage. The term “pilgrimage” (*ziyārat*) embraces an act with myriad and disparate motives that encourage people to seek out the blessings of the shrine. It is also a surrogate for the pilgrimage required of all Muslims, the haj to Mecca.

Besides being a pilgrimage destination, a fundamental role of all of the shrines considered here, with the possible exception of Gur-i Mir, was to provide consecrated space for burials. The demand must have always exceeded the available space so burial close to the saint or sacred artifact could only have been the privilege of a select few. We have no evidence of how space was allocated and controlled but there should be little doubt that some system must have been in place to regulate access. There is some indirect evidence that the administration of the shrine had a large role to play. We know that two of the known *mutawallis* of the shrine, a father and his son, were buried next to the Gunbad-i Khanqah in the *gunbad* of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan (see above, p. 288).

In the post-Timurid period, if there is a general rule about the choice of burial site for the deceased, it is that whatever sacred ground is nearest to where death occurs is most likely to be the place selected for interment. The example of Gur-i Mir with bodies disinterred from elsewhere (Muhammad Sultan, Miranshah, Mir Sayyid Barakah) and reinterred in Samarqand or being brought soon after death from afar to be buried in the mausoleum (Timur himself and Shah Rukh) was uncommon, and therefore not seen as having particular enduring significance at Balkh or Mazar-i Sharif. We have seen that Parsa'i relatives and others from away testified that the Balkh shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa be their place of burial. The bulk of burials, for which we have records, however, follow the general rule of being buried where the deceased resides when the time comes. The Jani-Begid necropolis that stood just outside the south gate is a good example with the known burials there including only those for whom the evidence is that they were at Balkh City when they died. After the Jani-Begids, the Tuqay-Timurids interred there, including the women mentioned earlier, Tursun Begi Sultanum, 'Ajab Nigar Khanum, Ayum Bibi, as well as Jahan Sultan, the latter a daughter of Kistan Qara Sultan, were all seemingly residing in Balkh at the time of their deaths, as far as we know.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Kuhgada'i 1946, p. 94.

Of the Tuqay-Timurids who had ruled Balkh, only Qasim Muhammad (d. 1659) and Muhammad Muqim Sultan (d. 16 February 1707) were buried at the shrine.¹⁹⁷ The others (Wali Muhammad, Nazr Muhammad, and Subhan Quli) probably would have been buried there had they not been elsewhere when they died and thus far from the sacred sites they had helped develop—Wali Muhammad in battle at Samarqand, Nazr Muhammad at Simnan en route to Mecca, and Subhan Quli at Bukhara. The only other known Tuqay-Timurid buried at the shrine was a son of the second Tuqay-Timurid khan, Baqi Muhammad. Of this son, whose name was ‘Ibad Allah Sultan, other than his burial at the ‘Alid shrine, “on the east side of the pure *rawzah*” virtually nothing is known.¹⁹⁸

What was true for the Jani-Begid Shibanids and the Tuqay-Timurids was also true for the Muhammadza’i Afghans. With the extraordinary exception of Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan who died in Jalalabad, most elite Durrani burials at Mazar-i Sharif were for those who were at or near Balkh at the time of their demise. Nor is there evidence of the transportation of bodies from the Balkh area to other favored Durrani burial places—Hazrat Ji in Qandahar or ‘Ashiqan wa ‘Arifan in Kabul, two of the more popular for the Afghan elite.¹⁹⁹

Already mentioned are other major Muhammadza’i figures or close supporters of the Muhammadza’i ruling clan who were in the Balkh region when they died: Sardar Muhammad Sarwar Khan (d. 1879), Sardar Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan (d. 1903), Field Marshal (*sipāhsālār*) Ghulam Haydar Khan Urakza’i (d. 1897), and Sardar ‘Abd Allah Khan Tukhi (d. 1911).

There is some slight evidence—probably a thorough study of all surviving tombstones would provide more—that Shi‘is too prized the Noble Rawzah for burial. Fayz Muhammad Katib, who is sympathetic to the fates of Shi‘i figures, writes that Aqa Sayyid Ahmad, a Qizilbash sayyid who had been dismissed as chief financial officer (*sar daftar*) of Qataghan, set off for the ‘Alid shrine to perform *ziyārat* at the “King of the Saints,” was accosted and robbed at Qunduz while en route, and, perhaps as a result, died in late December 1897 and was buried at Mazar-i Sharif.²⁰⁰ Another Shi‘i buried there was Nazir Qurban ‘Ali Khan (also probably a Qizilbash). He was in Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan’s party

197 For death of Qasim Muhammad see Maliha, ms., fol. 179a–b; for the burial Kuhgada’i 1946, pp. 96–97; and for the death and burial of Muhammad Muqim see Salim, ms. fol. 330b.

198 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms 575, fol. 319a; Welsford 2013, pp. 277–78; Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 94.

199 For a full list of the burial places of all the Muhammadza’i sardars who were the male offspring of Sardar Muhammad Payandah Khan and the offspring of one of his sons, Dust Muhammad Khan, whose descendants claimed the amirate until 1973, see Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, pp. 197, 251. Three were buried at the ‘Alid shrine: Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan, Sardār Muḥammad Akram Khān, and Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan.

200 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 4, pp. 117–18.

when it went to Mazar-i Sharif in late 1888 and earlier had been with the amir during the latter's exile in Samarqand. After 'Abd al-Rahman's accession to the throne, Qurban 'Ali was named treasurer for taxes paid in kind and was serving in that office when he died. At the amir's order he was buried "in the forecourt of the shrine," a prized position.²⁰¹

The area outside the perimeter wall is now where burials take place. Earlier, as the cases of Sardar 'Abd Allah Khan Tukhi, high governor of Afghan Turkistan 1903–1911; Bibi Sahibah or Bibi Ma'sumah, the Mujaddidi sage; and Sayyid Taj al-Din Abu'l-Hasan Ansari, the founder of the Ansari line of *mutawallis* show, it was possible to be buried in one of the actual iwans or *riwāqs* of the Noble Rawzah or, as was the case with Nazir Qurban 'Ali Khan, in the forecourt of the shrine. The plaza area too was a place where the privileged could hope to be interred. Again from 1897, we have a record of an officer, probably the commanding officer, of the regular army's Alkuza'i Infantry Regiment, Colonel Shayr Muhammad Khan, who died while stationed in Mazar-i Sharif and was buried, we are told, within the sacred precincts, on the fenced-in plaza of the shrine.²⁰²

There is at least one example of the ritual interment of something other than a human corpse at the shrine. In 1898, when a son of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, Sardar Muhammad 'Umar Khan, who was conceived during the amir's stay at Mazar-i Sharif, reached the full legal age (*sinn al-rushd*) of twelve Hijri years,²⁰³ his mother, who had grand but ultimately unfulfilled aspirations for her son to succeed her husband as amir, paid 1,200 rupees to the Kabul treasury, snipped off a lock of her son's hair and sent it from Kabul to the governor of Mazar-i Sharif. She asked that he see that it was buried in the plaza of the shrine and that he withdraw 1,200 rupees from the Turkistan treasury and distribute it among the *mutawallis* and *mujāwirs* of the shrine.²⁰⁴

201 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 657. The Persian is *dar pīshgāh-i* which can also mean simply "in front of" but the context suggests something close to the shrine. Exactly where is uncertain. Fayz Muhammad himself was probably uncertain about the precise location.

202 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, *tatimmat* to vol. 3, pp. 117–18.

203 See Kamali 1985, p. 102.

204 Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, vol. 4, p. 609. Fayz Muhammad also records a celebration held on the occasion of the first haircut of another son of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan taking place at the shrine in 1892 (*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 846).

41 Popular Use of the Shrine: Miraculous Cures

Over the centuries the shrine became famous for its perceived ability to effect cures for otherwise untreatable diseases and conditions—blindness, deafness, and infertility being some of the more well-documented problems that the shrine is said to have cured. Right from its very earliest days, the shrine was seen as a site of miraculous cures. Khwandamir in the 1520s wrote (perhaps with some skepticism):

When news [of the ‘Alid tomb] spread, the chronically ill turned the face of hope toward that Paradise-marked threshold. According to the stories told by the *mujāwirs* [of the shrine] these people were cured and returned home having obtained what they desired.²⁰⁵

Later in the century, Warsaji repeats the story of the miraculous power of the shrine to cure illness and in the mid-seventeenth century, Muhammad Tahir Balkhi wrote much the same thing. At that threshold, he wrote, “the blind regain their sight and those suffering disease are cured.”²⁰⁶ Little has changed in more recent times. Healing continues to be seen by the general populace of Afghanistan as a principal benefaction that the shrine can bestow. ‘Abd al-Qayyum Ansari has detailed the miraculous cures effected at the shrine during the years 2008–10.²⁰⁷

42 Popular Use: Festivals and Celebrations

The Mazar-i Sharif shrine is somewhat unusual in the number of festivals and celebrations that take place in or around it. Each festival generally increases pilgrimage to the shrine and income from votive offerings and is therefore a boost to the local economy. Writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, Muhammad Tahir Balkhi, as noted earlier, named three holiday periods celebrated at the shrine: 1) ‘Ashura, the first ten days of Muharram; because the shrine is nominally Sunni and is administered by a Sunni staff, it did not

²⁰⁵ Khwandamir 1954, vol. 4, p. 172.

²⁰⁶ Warsaji 2010, p. 15 and Muhammad Tahir Balkhi ms., fol. 17b.

²⁰⁷ Ansari 2012, pp. 25–26 describes five cases of miracle cures 1387–88/2008–11. Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 93, note, says that in 1323/1944, the year he was there, “a few afflicted people experienced a cure.”

witness the passionate enactments of the events associated with ‘Ashura elsewhere. 2) The month of Rajab, the seventh month on the Muslim calendar, and a particularly holy month because during it the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelations. 3) Gul-i Surkh (Red Rose or Red Poppy), a forty-day celebration associated with New Year’s (Nawruz).²⁰⁸

When Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada’i visited the shrine in 1944 he cites Muhammad Tahir Balkhi’s description of the three festival times but notes that the Muharram and Rajab festivals had fallen by the wayside in his own day.²⁰⁹ In 2010, ‘Abd al-Qayyum Ansari, curator of the museum at the ‘Alid shrine, when discussing the shrine as a venue for celebrations, omits any discussion of ‘Ashura or Rajab, finding only Gul-i Surkh worth mentioning. Nor does Jonathan Lee, in his thorough study of festivals at the Noble Rawzah mention any ‘Ashura or Rajab celebrations.²¹⁰

Today, the forty days of Gul-i Surkh is the time with which miraculous healing is most closely associated. Gul-i Surkh is a spring festival of ancient origins but it is unclear when celebration of it at the shrine actually began. It is more than likely, as Lee shows, that Gul-i Surkh, or some form of spring festival signifying rebirth and associated with flowers blossoming, had long existed even before the discovery of the grave of ‘Ali in the twelfth century. Perhaps it should be assumed that as soon as the shrine became a focus of popular interest and pilgrimage the celebrations of Gul-i Surkh and other festivals gravitated to it.

Gul-i Surkh and Nawruz are now inextricably linked, the vernal equinox (Nawruz or New Year’s Day) being the start of the forty-day Gul-i Surkh festival. The beginning is marked by the raising of a 40-foot finial-topped flagpole (*jandah*) wrapped in specially-woven cloth with a banner at the top (Fig. 3.43). The ceremony, called *jandah bālā*, can be traced back at least to as early as the late nineteenth century.²¹¹ Today, the shrine custodians say that the word *jandah* refers to the finial and the banner but not the pole.²¹² The banner, finial, and pole are all considered sacred and when the pole is lowered forty days after Nawruz,

208 Muhammad Tahir Balkhi ms, fol. 17b.

209 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 93, note.

210 Lee 1998.

211 On Nawruz 1896, Sardar Muhammad ‘Aziz Khan, governor of Mazar-i Sharif “as was the tradition on every Nawruz” raised the *jandah* at the shrine. (Fayz Muhammad 2013–14, vol. 3, p. 191). Clearly the ceremony had been going on for some time but this is the earliest reference to the *jandah* that I have found. Lee 1998, p. 227 speculates that the practice was introduced by Sultan-Husayn Bayqara in the late fifteenth century but he provides no evidence other than popular belief nor has any evidence of it yet appeared in later sources relating to the shrine before the nineteenth century.

212 Lee 1998, p. 222.



FIGURE 3.43 Wazir Muhammad Akbar Khan's mausoleum to the right, Paramach Mosque to the left and *jandah bālā* between them
P. BUCHERER-DIETSCHI 2008

people, especially those seeking cures, do their best to have some piece of their own clothing come in contact with the material wrapping the pole.²¹³

As elsewhere, cloth is important for its latent sacrality and thus to the displays of devotion and homage to 'Ali. Besides the ceremony surrounding *jandah bālā*, the covering of the actual tomb of 'Ali with an elaborate piece of embroidered cloth has been a way to show reverence and also to remind the viewer of the covering (*kiswah*) of the Kaaba in Mecca, a ceremonial drape woven new every year. A similar practice of sending a coverlet to the 'Alid shrine involved Halimah, popularly known as "Bobo Jan" the mother of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's youngest son, Muhammad 'Umar, and the most powerful member of the amir's harem.²¹⁴ She is the same woman who arranged for the burial of a lock of her son's hair at the shrine on his twelfth birthday.

213 Lee 1998 is a major study of these festivals, their possible antecedents, their history, and present practices. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to try and summarize his extensive findings here. The interested reader is encouraged to consult his work.

214 See Hamilton, L. 1897, part 3, p. 648.



FIGURE 3.44 *Panjarah* Screen, Gunbad-i Haram Interior
S. MAHENDRARAJAH, 2015

Impregnated during ‘Abd al-Rahman’s stay in Mazar-i Sharif (1888–1890), she apparently made a vow to reward the shrine richly if her child was a boy. When Muhammad ‘Umar was born, she began the practice of sending an annual gift to the shrine, which she timed to coincide with Gul-i Surkh. The first year she sent a one-time gift of a silver finial or cupola weighing fourteen seers, (about 218 pounds) for the dome of the Gunbad-i Haram. She also sent the embroidered covering (*rū-pūsh*) for ‘Ali’s tomb.²¹⁵ From then until the amir’s death in 1901 she would annually send a new covering at Gul-i Surkh (Fig. 3.44).²¹⁶ Today, the tomb is completely enclosed by a gilt and silver screen (*panjarah*) and any covering of the sarcophagus is invisible unless one is able to stand next to the screen (Fig. 3.45). But a photograph taken in 1944 by Kuhgada’i is probably indicative of the appearance of the tomb in Bobo Jan’s day and of the type of ornate embroidered coverlet she would have commissioned for it.²¹⁷

215 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, p. 990. Today, both domes are surmounted by large silver finials. Smaller identical finials are used as well to top the smaller domes of the mausolea and other structures surrounding the Gunbad-i Haram and Gunbad-i Khanqah.

216 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 609 where the coverlet is described as *māhūt* (wool broadcloth or worsted wool).

217 Kuhgada’i 1946, p. 87. The coverlet in the 1940s photograph is decorated with embroidered images of cypress trees, an image that appears painted on the exterior walls of the Shrine



FIGURE 3.45 *Rū-pūsh* (tomb coverlet) (The text reads: The pure resting place of our lord, the ḥazrat ‘Alī–May God ennoble him—which is located in the Gunbad-i Ḥaram, N. Kuhgada’i, 1946)

New Year’s Day itself is celebrated with traditional dishes such as a fruit pudding called *haft maywah* (“seven fruits” also known as *maywah-i Nawrūzī*) and during the forty days of Gul-i Surkh residents of Mazar-i Sharif open their homes to pilgrims to the shrine. Ansari relates that many houses in Mazar-i Sharif are specially designed for this purpose with two courtyards, the outer one with public guest rooms to accommodate pilgrims and the inner court the private rooms of the family.²¹⁸

All three celebrations—Nawruz, Gul-i Surkh, and Jandah Bala—are generally believed to be Islamic only by association. There is tension in Mazar-i Sharif today between the “circle of intellectuals” and some ulema who support the celebrations at the shrine and more conservative clerics, especially those influenced by Salafi and Wahhabi teachings, who see these festivals as pagan and anti-Islamic. Lee covers most aspects of these holidays and I would just add here one other phenomenon that he did not touch on in his study.

of Prophet’s Cloak in Qandahar before those walls were covered with blue ceramic tile (*kāshī-kārī*). (See figure 4.6). According to Reza Huseini, one of the *rū pūsh* that Halimah sent to the shrine was made in Bukhara and has been preserved as part of the museum collection of the Treasury. (Personal communication 19 July 2019.)

218 Ansari 2012, p. 33.

43 Modern Sufis at the Noble Rawzah

It seems generally taken for granted, and is signaled by the name eventually given to ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s late sixteenth-century addition to the shrine (Gunbad-i Khanqah), that the shrine has long been a place for Sufi gatherings. The forty nights of Gul-i Surkh are particularly active times for the forming of Sufi circles at the shrine and the performance of *zikr*, the repeated utterance of God’s name, either silently or aloud.

As already mentioned, it is popularly believed that the founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Baha al-Din Naqshband (1318–89 AD), came to Balkh and performed three forty-day retreats there. He did so when the shrine had been supposedly destroyed by Chinggis Khan and had not yet been rediscovered under Sultan-Husayn Bayqara. The spot he is said to have chosen for his spiritual retreats turned out to be on the south side of the very spot where the shrine would be rediscovered and, as a result, the site has ever since been a sacred one for Naqshbandi Sufis. Thus the legend.²¹⁹

It is quite possible that Baha al-Din Naqshband, whose home was Bukhara and who is known to have visited Herat, might well have stopped in Balkh but Ansari, for example, provides no source for the information nor does an encyclopedic account of the founder of the Naqshbandi order offer any hints that he ever visited Balkh.²²⁰ According to Ansari, the place where Baha al-Din Naqshband carried out his *chillahs* “about 150 meters south of the resting place that is at the feet of the Hazrat-i Shah [‘Ali]” was also destroyed in 1335/1956 along with many other buildings.

What is relevant here is that the story of his retreat at the site is a lead-in to the information that:

over the last 100 years such Naqshbandi luminaries as Hazrat Khalifah Sahib Dar al-Aman; Janab Shaykh Marghinani, the “Mir of Butchers’ Street (Qaşşāb Kūchah)” [in Kabul]; and disciples and followers of the (Naqshbandi) path from here and abroad at various seasons, particularly in the days of Nawruz and Gul-i Surkh return here to worship and seek blessing. On the forty nights of Gul-i Surkh, the *rawzah* is a place where circles form for the vocal *zikr* which leaders of the paths of mystical knowledge (*‘irfān*) conduct until midnight.²²¹

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 28–29.

²²⁰ Algar 1989.

²²¹ Ansari 2012, p. 29. Some of his information is from Kuhgada’i 1946 but not the part about Baha al-Din Naqshband.



FIGURE 3.46 The Library (*kitābhānah*) on the north side of Gunbad-i Haram, Noble Rawzah
B. WOODBURN, 2007

Besides the *zīkr* performances, there are ceremonial perorations called “*na’t khwānī*” that are delivered by the person leading the *zīkr* circles. *Na’t* means “praise” or “eulogy” and *na’t khwānī* is an artistic performance usually given in honor of the Prophet Muhammad and at Mazar-i Sharif in homage to ‘Ali. For thirty years the eulogist (*na’t-khwān*) was a baker named Sufi Sharif but from 2006 the *zīkr* circles were led by a man named Muhammad “Zakir” (literally, the one performing or leading *zīkr*) who also was then responsible for and had the honor of delivering the eulogy.²²² In more recent times, the best *na’t* reciter in Mazar-i Sharif was Mir Fakhr al-Din, whose eulogies can be heard on YouTube. According to Reza Husaini, Mir Fakhr al-Din performed in the Library wing of the Noble Rawzah where Sufis and others would gather to listen to him. (The Library is the area covered by the three domes on the north side of the Gunbad-i Haram, [no. 8 on Plan 4 and Fig. 3.46]) Other “old men used to stand in the Charbagh of the rauza and recite *na’ts* ... specifically in praise of ‘Ali. After Mir’s death I did not see anyone continue reciting *na’t* in his place.”²²³

222 Ibid. pp. 29–30.

223 Husaini 2019.

44 Conclusion

The way the shrine appears today, with its sparkling blue ceramic exterior, and the massive Chaharbagh Gate to its north, the visible domes, and the paved courtyard, is mostly the product of a fairly short period of time (1875–1906) that bridged the reigns of three Afghan amirs—Shayr ‘Ali Khan, ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, and Habib Allah Khan. Much cosmetic work has also been done in the interim by Muhammad Zahir Shah, Abdur Rashid Dostum, and Atta Muhammad Noor along with the new congregational mosque of Noor replacing the Paramach Mosque (1956–2018). The main building itself, comprising the Gunbad-i Haram and Gunbad-i Khanqah, should remind the observer of the vision of two much earlier figures, the Jani-Begid Abu’l-Khayrid ‘Abd al-Mu’min Khan who added the original Gunbad-i Khanqah, called in his time *jāmi’-i āstānah* (Threshold Congregational Mosque) and a successor of his at Balkh, the Tuqay-Timurid Wali Muhammad Khan, who expanded the footprint of both buildings and so placed his indelible if unacknowledged stamp on them. Both these latter men are now largely forgotten as are many of those whose inscriptions are scattered around the ensemble.

Architecture is expensive and it is only when the means are available that patrons are able to realize their dreams of immortality through building construction. The most prominent moments after the sixteenth century when a vision was joined with adequate resources to produce durable commemorative architecture at Mazar-i Sharif were the 1582–98 regime at Balkh of ‘Abd al-Mu’min Sultan, son of ‘Abd Allah Khan; the five-year reign at Balkh of Wali Muhammad Khan the Tuqay-Timuri, 1601–6; the reign at Balkh of the Tuqay-Timurid Subhan Quli Khan, 1651–81; then, after a long interval, the governorship of the Barakza’i Afghan Na’ib Muhammad ‘Alam Khan in the 1870s; and finally major projects initiated by Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, and his son Amir Habib Allah Khan from the 1890s and early 1900s. In the intervals, repair was often required and on rare occasion recorded for posterity, such as when an earthquake brought down the Gunbad-i Khanqah in 1704 and the Balkh ruler, Muhammad Muqim Khan, then rebuilt it. Otherwise, except for those moments, the history of the shrine and its architecture remains mostly hidden.

Afghanistan has lost much of its historical memory, in part through violent and deliberate destruction and in part through the indirect loss caused by the injury done to its tradition of historical scholarship represented by someone like Hafiz Nur Muhammad Kuhgada’i.²²⁴ Nevertheless, with a little research

224 It is to be hoped that a new generation of scholars of Afghanistan whether Afghan or non-Afghan will emerge to restore and enrich the legacy of Afghanistan’s deep past.

the Noble Rawzah of Mazar-i Sharif has revealed bits of its past. Of the four shrines being considered here, this one in many ways presents the most complete picture of the socio-political functions of a major shrine. The degree to which local authorities from the fifteenth century onwards expended their resources to show a commitment to the shrine, the obvious importance of the shrine to those figures as a venue for self-commemoration, the capacity of the shrine to drive the local economy, the extent to which its architecture was continually subject to alteration, the perceived power of the shrine to cure disease, its use as a site for celebrating holidays and festivals—all these aspects, common to some degree to each of the shrines, seem most pronounced in the case of the Noble Rawzah and are more thoroughly documented for it than for the other shrines. It would be the most recent of these four shrines, the shrine of the Prophet's Cloak in Qandahar, that would show the power of a shrine to confront the coercive power of the state in a way none of the records for the other shrines reveal.

The Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak, the *Khirqat al-Nabī* of Qandahar

Qandahar (Kandahar in the modern Pashto-based English spelling) is today a dusty provincial capital in southern Afghanistan, the country's second largest city, and perhaps best known to the world as the birthplace of the Taliban movement.¹ Historically, however, Qandahar has long functioned as a major commercial center on the overland route between South Asia and Iran. As long as overland routes in Asia maintained their transportation efficiencies, Qandahar enjoyed great prosperity from its strategic position on the east-west trade route linking South Asia with Iran and the Mediterranean world. Besides its important commercial role, it was a thriving agricultural center, particularly famous for its grapes and fruit orchards thanks to a relatively steady supply of water from a series of rivers—the Tarnak and Kadanay flowing into the Duri (Dori) to the east and south of Qandahar and the Duri into the Arghandab just west of the city. Not surprisingly, the city also has been a shrine center and pilgrimage destination since early Muslim times.

There are many shrines in and around Qandahar that attract pilgrims. In Qandahar City, Sardar Kuhandil Khan, the eldest of the “Dil” brothers, a powerful nineteenth-century Muhammadza’i Durrani clan, built a mosque in the first half of that century to house a strand of the Prophet’s hair. He and his brothers, who controlled Qandahar for some forty-seven years, also performed *ziyārat* at the tomb of Hazrat Ji Sahib, or Hazrat Ji Baba, in the northeast corner of the city and chose it as their place of burial.² Hazrat Ji Sahib was the title of a famous Mujaddidi Naqshbandi shaykh, Shah Ghulam Husayn.

Just west of Qandahar is the shrine of Baba Wali, one particularly sacred to Sikhs, and to the northwest some thirty-five miles by road from Qandahar City is Shah Maqsud in Khakriz, a shrine for a man said to have been a companion of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the saint buried at Mazar-i Sharif. The Shah Maqsud shrine was deemed important enough by the NATO forces that occupied Afghanistan after

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- 1 This chapter draws some of its material from work published recently (see McChesney 2018). There, however, the emphasis was on the *khirqah* shrine during the half century from 1880 to 1930. Here the focus will be on the founding and financing of the shrine, especially the process by which the personal interests of its administrators came to dominate its history as well as on the role the shrine played in its socio-economic environment.
 - 2 For a photograph of the *mazār*, see Fufalza’i 1967, vol. 2, facing p. 649.



FIGURE 4.1 Shah Maqsud shrine, Khakriz, after renovation with help from ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) both mainly United States Military forces.

the events of 9/11 (2001) to be completely renovated in 2002–03 with the help of the US military (Fig. 4.1).³ Its origin story echoes one of the origin stories of the tomb of ‘Ali at Balkh. Nancy Dupree recorded the following version of the story:

Shah Maqsud was a companion of the Hazrat Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad and fourth orthodox Caliph of Islam. Numbers of battles were fought in the dispute which arose over the legitimacy of Ali’s succession to the Caliphate, however, and Ali had arranged with his followers that in the event of his death his body was to be placed in an unmarked coffin so that his enemies might not desecrate it. Furthermore, according to the story told at Shah Maqsud, three identical coffins were to be allotted to any three of his companions who might fall with him. No one was to know who lay in which coffin and all four were to be placed on camels which were to be allowed to wander at will. The coffins were then

3 Wikipedia refers to the shrine as the “Shah Agha” shrine.

to be buried where the camels came to rest, their occupants still unidentified. Hazrat Ali's final battle took place in 661 AD and the four coffins were duly dispatched. Long afterwards miraculous visions revealed that Hazrat Ali lay in Mazar-i-Sharif and his companion, Shah Maqsud, rested on this hillside. Some pilgrims, however, wonder if perhaps it is not the Hazrat Ali himself who is actually buried there.⁴

Thus the origin story of the Shah Maqsud tomb at Khakriz. Another shrine, this one in Qandahar City that was of special importance to the Muhammadza'i Durrani Afghans who ruled the Qandahar region for much of the first half of the nineteenth century was that of Hazratji Baba (Fig. 4.2).⁵

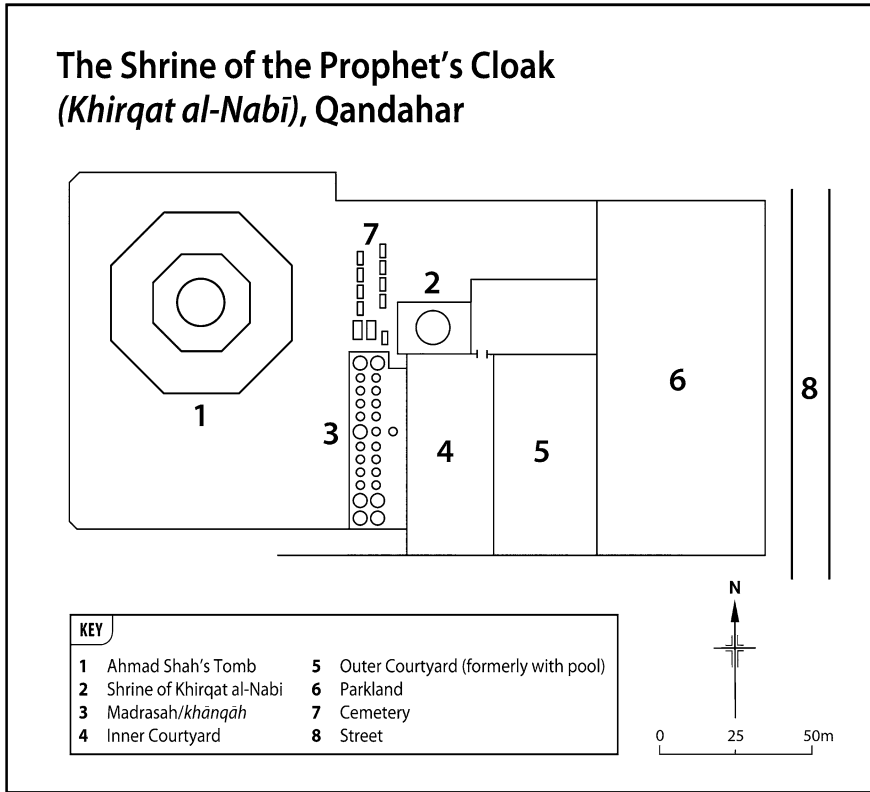
In Qandahar City, the most important shrine complex now includes the tomb of Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1772) and the adjacent shrine of the Prophet's Cloak (*Khirqat al-Nabi*). The site, including the royal tomb and the shrine that houses the cloak, has been a pilgrimage destination since its founding by Ahmad Shah in 1769. The two shrines today honor the Prophet Muhammad and pay homage to Ahmad Shah, the man deemed the "father of modern Afghanistan." Like the shrine complexes discussed in previous chapters, from the very outset the ensemble also included a mosque and madrasah. The function of *khānqāh* or



FIGURE 4.2 Satellite view of the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak (*Khirqat al-Nabi*)
GOOGLE EARTH

4 Dupree 1977, pp. 306–7.

5 Ibid., pp. 286–87.



PLAN 5 The Shrine Complex of the Prophet's Cloak (*Khirqat al-Nabi*), Qandahar

Sufi lodge would develop later and the part of the building used as a madrasah would also serve as the *khānqāh*. My focus here is not on the tomb of Ahmad Shah per se but on the adjacent shrine that contains the relic said to be a cloak or mantle, or a piece of one, that once belonged to the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 AD).

‘Aziz al-Din Wakili Fufalza’i is the only modern-day scholar, as far as I know, to do extensive research at the shrine, work he carried out in 1962. He has recorded a description of the actual garment held at the shrine although he himself was not allowed to see it but “someone who had put it on” (probably its caretaker) described it to him as:

a bulky garment (*jāmah-i zakhīm*) made of fine wool, technically camel's hair (*qāqumah*), its blessed sleeves shorter than the body (or

skirt—*dāman*). It's of a particularly shiny bluish tint and was made for a short man. It lacks a lining, is somewhat moth-eaten (*zhūlīdah*), and is stitched together with wool thread.⁶

One recent appearance of the remnant occurred in 1996 when Mulla Muhammad Omar, then the head of the Taliban movement, forced the caretakers to bring it out and to allow him to drape it on his shoulders and thereby assert the legitimacy of his emirate as prophetically-anointed. A few seconds of the display of the cloak was caught on video giving millions of people a glimpse of it as well as a sense of the fervor of the moment. Garments go flying as people in the crowd toss their clothing in hopes of contact with the cloak. Like the *jandah* at Mazar-i Sharif, the *khirqah* is a piece of fabric believed to have curative powers that can be transmitted to ordinary cloth.

1 The History of the Prophet's Cloak in Afghanistan

The earliest written source discovered so far for the presence of the Cloak or of a cloak belonging to the Prophet Muhammad in what is now the country of Afghanistan is a work by the seventeenth-century court historian of Balkh, Mahmud ibn Amir Wali. The relevant part of his great chronicle, *Baḥr al-asrār fī manāqib al-akhyār* (The Sea of Secrets on the Virtues of the Elite) written in the 1630s, covers events in Greater Balkh (northern Afghanistan) and to a lesser extent Transoxiana (the khanate, later emirate, of Bukhara, now Uzbekistan) in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first four decades of the seventeenth.⁷

Mahmud's account of the Cloak is set in the context of relations between Balkh and Mughal India. It is prompted by the report of the arrival of the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–57), in Kabul, a province of the Mughal Empire, in late May 1639. The Mughal emperor was apparently responding then to rumors that the Safavid ruler of Iran, Shah Safi (r. 1629–42), was planning a campaign to take the strategic city of Qandahar.⁸ However, the neo-Chinggisid Tuqay-Timurid ruler at Balkh, Nazr Muhammad Khan, Mahmud's patron, interpreted Shah Jahan's expedition to Kabul as a hostile move to seize Balkh as part of the irredentist goal of the Mughals to retake the ancestral homelands

6 Fufalza'i 1988, p. 12. See also Grigoryev 2002, p. 5.

7 For a description of Mahmud b. Amir Wali's work see Akhmedov 1991.

8 Inayat Khan 1990, pp. 254–58.

of Central Asia lost to the neo-Chinggisid Abu'l-Khayrid Shibanids at the beginning of the sixteenth century. So Nazr Muhammad sent his son with an army to block the route through the Hindu Kush that any Mughal force might be expected to take if Balkh were their objective.

It was at this point that the Cloak of the Prophet makes its appearance on the scene. According to Mahmud, it was brought to bless the Tuqay-Timurid army "from the *langar* [here another name for *khānqāh* or Sufi lodge] of Muḥammad Ṣādiq Shaykh." Mahmud's account seems to take it for granted that his audience would know how the cloak came from Arabia to Central Asia in the first place. He goes on to say that the Tuqay-Timurid army then performed the ritual of *ziyārat*-homage to the cloak but Nazr Muhammad decided not to permit its return to Muhammad Sadiq Shaykh's lodge, the location of which Mahmud never mentions. Instead, those who had brought it from the *langar* were ordered to proceed to Balkh from the point where they had met the army. The khan then ordered the cloak held at a village a few miles outside Balkh and, to honor the sacred relic, he led a procession of city notables out to the village on foot. He ordered that a wooden box measuring about fifteen inches (one-half *gaz*) high by some 120 inches (four *gaz*) in circumference be built to hold the precious relic. The box had gold hooks (*qulāb*—hinges?) and nails and was wrapped in three square coverlets (*ghilāf*), one of gold-brocade (*zarbāft*), one of velvet (*makhmal*), and one of wool (*ṣūf*). After the party had performed *ziyārat* to the cloak, the khan placed it in the box, hoisted the box onto his shoulder, and carried it back to the city at the head of the procession. Probably to mollify the former keepers of the Cloak, Mahmud tells us that Nazr Muhammad named "the *khwājah* who had inherited the *khirqah*" as "mantle-keeper (*khirqah-dār*)" of Balkh.⁹ This is not the last time that we hear of the Cloak being in Balkh. However, no writer after Mahmud cites his version of the Cloak's peregrinations and as far as Mahmud was concerned, since the last event he mentions in his book is dated March 1641, the Cloak now had a permanent home in Balkh.

All our other sources on the relic are much later and follow a narrative arc that runs in at least more or less parallel courses, all but one of which end up with the cloak reaching Juzun (or Juzgun) in Badakhshan. All agree that the Cloak had come from the Arab world (Syria or Iraq), to Transoxiana but here the stories go in different directions. One version has the Cloak going to Bukhara, brought by sons of a shaykh who had appropriated it from Mecca by way of Baghdad. Another has Amir Timur as the vector, bringing it from

9 Mahmud b. Amir Wali ms. no. 575, fols. 263b–264b.

some unspecified place in the Arab world (perhaps Baghdad or Damascus) to Samarqand during one of his campaigns. Both versions agree that it eventually wound up in Juzun, Badakhshan, later to be known as Fayzabad (Abode of Grace) because of the Cloak's presence, while another variant has the Cloak being given directly to Ahmad Shah from Bukhara by Shah Murad Beg.¹⁰

Perhaps the best way to understand the lingering uncertainty about the career of the Cloak is to cite the long passage in *Sirāj al-tawārīkh* (written in the first decade of the twentieth century) that grapples with the question. First, the author, Fayz Muhammad Hazarah, gives one version of the story. Since he places it first, it is apparently the one he felt most credible but he then had to defer to his patron, Amir Habib Allah Khan, for his version. First, Fayz Muhammad's unmediated version:

In 1182/1768–69, His Highness Aḥmad Shāh dispatched Wazīr Shāh Walī Khān and a force of 6,000 horsemen to suppress the activities of troublemakers in Balkh and Badakhshān. The ruler of Bukhārā, Shāh Murād Bī,¹¹ found out about the expedition and prepared to assist the Balkhīs and Badakhshānīs. By letter, Shāh Walī Khān informed His Highness Aḥmad Shāh, who then set out from Qandahār for Bukhārā by way of Harāt. He crossed the Marw River and marched through Maymanah, Balkh, Andkhūd, and Shibarghān. He ordered Shāh Walī Khān to go to Badakhshān while he headed towards Bukhārā. Murād Bī readied an army, sallied forth to defend Bukhārā, and made camp at Qarshī. Aḥmad Shāh was willing to negotiate rather than fight because of his zeal for Islam. Negotiations were successfully concluded, the outcome being that the Oxus River was established as the border separating the two countries. According to what the author of *Tārīkh-i Sulṭānī* has noted, it was also decided that the Bukhāran ruler, as a show of esteem for His Highness Aḥmad Shāh, would give him the Holy Cloak of the Prophet, then kept in Bukhārā, so that he might enjoy the felicity of performing *ziyārat* to it. This Cloak had first passed (from the Prophet) to Uways-i Qaranī and then over the centuries had somehow found its way to Bukhārā. Now Murād Bī, with all due reverence, sent it to His Highness Aḥmad Shāh. The latter viewed the Cloak as the producer of future victories and certain blessing. He distributed alms and votive gifts, and performed a *ziyārat* to the Cloak, and obtained, through its *barakah*-grace, a fulfilling inner joy. He then took the cloak back to Qandahar.

10 For more detail on the various story lines see McChesney 2018.

11 In 1768–69 the nominal ruler of Bukhara was Amir Danyal Bi. His son, Shah Murad Bi, only succeeded to the throne in 1785. See Bregel 2003, p. 60 and Bosworth 1996, p. 292.

At this point Fayz Muhammad turns to the view of His Majesty Amir Habib Allah Khan:

But the most reliable and correct tradition concerning the Prophet's Cloak is this: One day, in the presence of His Highness, the Lamp of the Nation and the Religion (Amir Habib Allah Khan), the one who laid the foundations of this book and the source of this accurate narrative, some mention or other was made (of the Cloak). His Highness opened his pearl-scattering mouth and said, "Of all the stories I have heard about the beautiful Cloak and the one I believe to be true is that Amīr Tīmūr brought the sacred Cloak of the Prophet and those who were the guardians of this precious treasure from 'Arab 'Iraq to Transoxiana, built a structure to house it in Samarqand, and appointed some sayyids whose genealogies were impeccable to administer the shrine. He also made a *waqf* endowment of the village of Dabhid so that its income would provide the stipend of those charged with responsibility for the sacred garment. That domed building (in Samarqand) is now called Khwājah Khiḏr and is in a thriving and sound state. In 1297 [1879] I saw with my own eyes what a fine condition it was in.¹² It is possible that after Amīr Tīmūr's death, because of the intervention of the rulers of that land and the descendants of Amīr Tīmūr, the Cloak was moved to Bukhārā along with its caretakers. It was then later moved to Jūzūn by one of that amir's descendants. Shāh Beg Khān Walī was the chief trustee (*mutawallī-bāshī*) at the time and at the order of the Timurid who had brought it there, a domed building was erected for it outside the city walls. By virtue of the abundant grace (*fayḏ*) which that Cloak brought the city, it came to be known as Fayḏābād (Abode of Grace). Until Aḥmad Shāh brought it to Qandahār, it had remained in Fayḏābād. He conveyed it with such reverence and esteem that at every stage where they stopped with the Cloak, His Highness Aḥmad Shāh would have an 'alms-deed' written out. He would then hang that deed around the neck of the camel which had carried the Cloak that stage of the journey and set it free. The camel would then belong to the person who caught it. When the procession reached the mountains north of Kābul, it had to stop two or three days at every stage along the route because of the throngs of people coming to perform *ziyārat* to the Cloak. When the party reached Kābul, they set the Cloak down at a place two *kurūhs* northwest of the city and east of 'Alīābād at the foot of the mountains. There it stayed for seven to nine months during

¹² Habib Allah Khan was born in Samarqand on 2 July 1872 and spent his first eight years there. (Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, p. 334 for the date of his birth.)

which time, due to the great crush of pilgrims, the custodian would occasionally remove the Cloak from its box and spread it out on a black rock on the northern edge of that stopping place. The pilgrims would then perform the ritual of *ziyarat* around the rock. That spot, along with all the other places where the Cloak stopped, is now known as 'the alighting place of the Lord of Men (*qadamgāh-i shāh-i mardān*).'¹³ While the Cloak stayed in Kabul, a temporary building to house it was constructed in Qandahār by order of the shah. The Cloak was then transported from Kabul and safely deposited there. State officials were assigned (to build) a great domed edifice in Qandahār specifically for the Cloak and as a mausoleum for Ahmad Shah. They erected a high domed building two stories tall, the lower story of which was in the form of a covered cistern and was to be the shah's burial place. The upper floor was a place to walk around the beloved Cloak. After Aḥmad Shāh's death, he was buried, according to his instructions, in a corner of the lower story. But the Cloak was never brought to its designated spot. It is conjectured that the Cloak was not removed from its temporary quarters because of a fatwa from the ulema that (the Cloak) should not be a plaything of sultans and moved from place to place. Otherwise that is what would happen.

In 1325/1907, His Highness, Lamp of the Nation and the Religion (Habib Allah Khan), left Kābul on a tour of the country. When he got to Qandahar he saw with his own eyes that Aḥmad Shāh's tomb was on one side of the lower floor of the domed building. He then knew for certain that the domed building had been erected as described above to house both the Cloak and the sepulcher of the shah. Had that not been the case, then the shah's tomb would have been centered under the dome. (Also the fact that on each floor, the upper and the lower, the grave (*qabr*) and the cenotaph (*ṣūrat-i qabr*) (of the shah) are located off-center is a clear indication that the domed building was intended for the Cloak. The end [of Amir Habib Allah Khan's version].

After the above story was related, this humble servant, the author of this memoir [Fayz Muhammad], was ordered to ascertain the facts of the matter and obtained and includes here in this book, the seventy-fourth of the epistles (*Maktūbāt*) written by Miyān Faqīr Allāh Shikārpūrī Naqshbandī¹³ [d. 1195/1781], God rest his soul, corroborating the explanation given by His Highness (Amir Habib Allah Khan) and even more

13 Also known as Shah Faqīr 'Alwi (see Khan 1997), Mian Faqīr Allah Jalalabadi Nangarhari Shikarpuri (Farhadi 1985, p. 565) and Miya[sic] Faqīr Allah Shikarpuri Naqshbandi (Fufalza'i 1988, p. 12).

firmly verifying that the Cloak is indeed that of the Prophet. It came about this way. Some questioners¹⁴ wrote Miyyān Faqīr Allāh a question (about the Cloak) and he wrote a reply. First the question:

Regarding the Cloak which the Prophet and also the 'People of the House' (the Prophet's family) had sewed with their own hands and which 'Alī had given to Uways-i Qaranī after the death of the Prophet at the latter's behest and it was worn by Uways and then, after his death, was brought to Mecca and placed in the Ghār-i Hīrah where it remained for many years. Then Shaykh Dūst Muḥammad, announcing the glad tidings that this was the Prophet's Cloak, brought it with him to Baghdād from where his sons brought it to Bukhārā. There it stayed for eighty years after which Shaykh Āghā Muḥammad and Naẓar Muḥammad brought it from Bukhārā to Balkh where it stayed thirty-five years. Then Shaykh Muḥammad Ziyā and Shaykh Niyāz carried it on Sunday, the twenty-fourth of Muharram 1109/12 August 1697 to the *khānqāh* of Jūzgūn:

The pure Cloak of the 'Arab Lord / Given as a token of the Garden of Paradise

In 1109 after the Hijrah / Was carried to Jūzgūn.

Jūzgūn, as the recipient of this grace, / Was called the Abode of Grace (Fayzābād).

On the ninth of Rabī' al-Awwal 1182/24 July 1768, the wazīr, Shāh Walī Khān Bāmizā'ī, brought it to Qandahār. What do you say to this?

The Reply in Brief

Several students of hadith from among Qur'an memorizers and Ṣūfī shaykhs believe in its concrete existence. The late Qur'an memorizer, al-Suyūṭī,¹⁵ in his book *Ithāf al-firqah bi-raf' al-khirqah* says that a number of Qur'an memorizers favor affirming its existence. Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammadan [*sic*] al-Khāṭib al-Qastallānī¹⁶ in his book, *al-Mawāhib al-Ladunīyah*, after relating the views of those who scoff at the tradition by connecting the wearing of the Cloak to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣṭī says, in fact, that the Prophet's wearing it comes from information provided by one of the Companions of the Prophet, Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakha'ī. He was (also) a companion of 'Alī, son of Abū Ṭālib,

14 According to Fufalza'ī, this was Sufi Mawla Dad Qandahari, the brother of the first *mutawalli* of the Cloak at Qandahar, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq (Fufalza'ī 1988, p. 12).

15 The Egyptian scholar, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Suyuti, d. 1505 AD.

16 Al-Qastallani (d. 1517 AD) was a lifelong Cairo resident and hadith specialist. See Brockelmann 1978, p. 736b.

and amongst hadith scholars his information is incontrovertible. In some traditions about the Cloak, it is linked to Uways b. ‘Āmir al-Qaranī, the best of the second generation (after the Prophet). He was an associate of ‘Umar son of al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Alī and there is no dispute about (the reliability of) his information.¹⁷

[The end of Fayz Muhammad’s account.]

Faqir Allah Shikarpuri’s response was cagey. Citing as his authorities the fifteenth-century Egyptian scholars al-Suyuti and al-Qastallani, the shaykh only concluded that there was no question that there was such a Cloak but he made no unambiguous endorsement of the Qandahar piece of fabric being that Cloak.

Thus we have three versions of the story provided here with the author, Fayz Muhammad, leading his account with the one that seems to have enjoyed the most popularity, the story that said that the amir of Bukhara gave the cloak directly to Ahmad Shah Durrani as a peace offering. This is the version that Fayz Muhammad himself preferred and the one that is most widely believed in Afghanistan today. The story first appears in the mid-nineteenth-century *Tārīkh-i Sulṭānī*, as Fayz Muhammad notes, and has the amir of Bukhara in a confrontation with Ahmad Shah (although there is no early record that Ahmad Shah ever personally campaigned in the Turkistan region) agreeing with the Afghan ruler to make the Oxus River the boundary and giving him the cloak either to show his sincerity or as a quid pro quo transaction. Another version, which has developed since Fayz Muhammad wrote, has Ahmad Shah asking the Bukharan amir for permission to pay homage and perform *ziyārat* to the cloak. The amir agrees and tells Ahmad Shah that the cloak is not to pass a certain boundary stone. Thereupon, the cunning Ahmad Shah carries away both the cloak and the stone. Today, lending apparent credence to this story is a typical plinth stone for a wooden column common to Central Asian architecture which is prominently displayed at the shrine and might have come from anywhere. However, none of these stories are confirmed by narrative accounts more contemporary with the episode itself.

The story which seems the most credible from an historian’s perspective is the one written by Ahmad Shah Durrani’s own court chronicler Mahmud Husayni Jami. In late spring 1768, Ahmad Shah, preparing for another plunder campaign to India, sent his top general, Shah Wali Khan Bamiza’i, to Badakhshan to punish a man called “Sultan Shah, high governor of Badakhshan” and “to remove with the greatest respect the Blessed Cloak of the One Seated on the

17 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, pp. 27–29.

Dais of Purity, Commander of the Pious and Chief of the Prophets ... and bring it to the House of Sovereignty, Kābul.”¹⁸

Shah Wali Khan then took possession of the Cloak and brought it to Kabul. After a stay in Kabul, it slowly made its way to Qandahar with ceremonial stops all along the way, at each stop creating a new sacred site, a *qadamgāh* (literally, footstep or alighting place, a sanctified place created by the visit of a saintly person or sacred artifact). The Cloak arrived in Qandahar, Ahmad Shah's capital, probably in the spring of 1769. It was first housed either in a temporary building that Ahmad Shah ordered built for it¹⁹ or in a ten-year-old mosque later known as “Old Mosque” (Zarah Masjid).²⁰

There is some circumstantial evidence that the shah was eager to get his hands on the Cloak for its perceived curative powers. By 1768, he was suffering either from some form of cancer or leprosy, and had lost part, if not most, of his nose to the disease. Ahmad Shah must have hoped the Cloak would ameliorate, if not cure, his affliction, ensure future victories, and keep him within the sacral aura and the blessings it was understood to provide. But unlike the use of the Prophet's Cloak that the Ottoman court claimed to have, Ahmad Shah did not try to keep it in close proximity to his person wherever he went as did the Ottoman Sultan Ahmad I (r. 1603–1617).²¹ Given the fact that illness caused the Afghan shah increasingly severe pain during the last decade of his life, it seems somewhat surprising that once he gained possession of the Cloak in 1768, he did not keep it with him for the last four years of his life. However, there was already in his time a great deal of feeling about the way in which the Cloak was handled and this sentiment may have played a part in the formulation of a *farmān* he issued in 1769, three years before his death. In his son Timur Shah's time (r. 1773–93) Ahmad Shah's *farmān* would lead to a reported fatwa from the ulema of Qandahar against any movement of the Cloak. Later still Amir Habib Allah Khan would give as a rationale for the fatwa the desire of the ulema that the cloak not become a “plaything in the hands of sultans.”²²

2 The Administration of the Cloak in Qandahar

In late spring of 1769, Ahmad Shah issued the *farmān* concerning the Cloak. In the decree, dated 26 Muharram 1183/1 June 1769 he named a trustee (*mutawallī*)

18 Mahmud Husayni 2005, p. 646.

19 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, p. 28.

20 Fufalza'i 1967, vol. 1, p. 296.

21 Atasoy 1986.

22 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, p. 28.

and established certain conditions for the proper handling of the sacred relic.²³ These conditions would be reiterated in later decrees and remain the principal rules for handling the Cloak. First, only the designated trustee would have a key to the locked box in which the cloak was kept and the box was never to be opened without a direct order from the sovereign. Later these conditions would be amplified by the further clarification that anyone, regardless of rank or position, who wished to perform *ziyārat* to the cloak would have to perform it to the closed box.

In the *farmān*, Ahmad Shah also named a trustee to be responsible for the cloak and to manage its finances. The man he chose was Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq of the Ya‘qubza’i clan of the Alkuza’i (or Alikuza’i) Durrani tribe. He was called “Akhundzadah” (descendant of an *ākhūnd*, a religious scholar and teacher). Akhundzadah soon became the family name and from this point on would identify it with the shrine, as Ansari identified the family managing the Noble Rawzah and Parsa’i, those responsible for the *mazār* of Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa.

And just as in the case of Mazar-i Sharif, a major irrigation canal was assigned to be the financial backbone of the shrine. The canal is known in our sources by at least four names: Nahr-i Ahmad Shahi, Nahr-i Rawzah Bagh, Nahr-i Shahi, and Ashraf al-Nahr. In imitation of his former Iranian liege-lord, Nadir Shah Afshar, who had built a garrison city at Qandahar called Nadirabad, Ahmad Shah planned a new capital city in Qandahar sited to the east of Old Qandahar and directly north of Nadirabad. He gave it the grandiose name “Ashraf al-Bilad-i Ahmad Shahi” (Noblest Ahmad Shah City) and had a major canal excavated to supply water and especially to irrigate the garden estate called Manzil Bagh that he constructed for himself to the northeast of his new city. The canal would terminate at his estate and predated the arrival of the Cloak. Its source was the nearby Arghandab, a river that flowed from northeast to southwest just to the northwest of the city. Soldiers who were stationed in Sind were summoned to dig the waterway which ran for some fifteen miles and still exists today. The project bears obvious comparison to the Nahr-i Shahi at Mazar-i Sharif although we have no information that Ahmad Shah was aware of the similarity. All indications are that he was mainly concerned about bringing water to his Manzil Bagh.

23 Fufalza’i 1967, p. 297. A photograph of a part of the *farmān* faces p. 297. Fufalza’i conducted research at the shrine in Qandahar in 1962 and was given access to many if not most of the documents held there. He published his research in two editions, Fufalza’i 1965–66 and Fufalza’i 1988 and in a slightly different form in Fufalza’i 1967.

3 The First Architectural Ensemble

It would be Ahmad Shah's son and successor Timur Shah who would develop the site for housing both his father's body and the sacred relic. He apparently envisioned a sizeable necropolis along the lines of the Gur-i Mir with a single mausoleum to house both his father's remains and the holy relic and an assemblage of the usual religious institutions nearby—congregational mosque, *khānqāh*, and a madrasah. He had plenty of local architectural expertise to call upon for design and construction. The names of the architects and builders are unknown but one well-known family of architects had already designed a number of buildings in Qandahar and when Timur soon moved his administrative seat to Kabul he would recruit Qandaharis to design his city there.²⁴ But there was resistance to the idea of housing the Cloak with the remains of Ahmad Shah and objections must have reached a critical point just after his tomb was completed and his body placed off-center in it to accommodate the Cloak. As Fayz Muhammad's quoting of Amir Habib Allah Khan shows, the Cloak was intended to occupy the epicenter of the space beneath the mausoleum's dome. However, Timur Shah's initial plan was reportedly resisted by religious scholars who disliked the idea of the Cloak becoming "a plaything (*bāzīchah*) in the hands of kings and be moved about from place to place."²⁵ So the Cloak was never installed there and instead a separate building for the Cloak was constructed and completed, according to Fufalza'i's dating, on the first of Ramazan 1190/October 14, 1776, Pichi Yil on the Turki duodecimal calendar, some four years after Ahmad Shah's death.²⁶ Moreover, Timur Shah then received the fatwa from the religious scholars of Qandahar which banned any further movement of the Cloak; this again according to Fufalza'i.²⁷

Therefore, sometime after the interment of his father, a separate but adjacent building was erected to house the Cloak with an attached wing to serve as a combination mosque-*khānqāh*-madrasah. It had a pool (*hawẓ*) and an enclosing wall (a *muḥawwatah*, comparable to the *iḥāṭah* at Mazar-i Sharif and the *muḥāwatah* at Gur-i Mir) defining the sanctified space. The best photographs we have of the complex, but showing only the building housing the Cloak, a section of the mosque/madrasah attached to the shrine building, and the tomb of Ahmad Shah in the background, date only to 1908 (Figs. 4.3, 4.4, & 4.5).

24 On Qandahari architects and their work see Fufalza'i 1967, vol. 2, p. 497 and Schinasi 2016, p. 29.

25 Fayz Muhammad 1913–15, p. 28.

26 Fufalza'i 1967, vol. 1, p. 297.

27 Ibid.



FIGURE 4.3 The shrine complex under renovation 1908
 ‘ABD AL-SAMAD—PHOTOTHECA AFGHANICA



FIGURE 4.4 Shrine complex under renovation
 ‘ABD AL-SAMAD—PHOTOTHECA AFGHANICA



FIGURE 4.5 Shrine 1908 with Ahmad Shah's tomb behind
 ‘ABD AL-SAMAD—PHOTOTHECA AFGHANICA



FIGURE 4.6 East entryway showing exterior fresco decoration
B. SIMPSON, 1879

It is impossible to say with any certainty therefore that these images approximate the appearance of the buildings in the 1770s. The paintings of Qandahar made by English officers in the occupying army of 1839–42 only touch on the shrine building in the most impressionistic and unfocused way (Fig. 4.6). An image from 1879 of a detail of the building while the British were occupying Qandahar, shows the extraordinary decorative program of the stuccoed exterior on the east side. It does not however provide any sense of the complex as a whole at that time.

4 The Personnel

Concurrent with the completion of the buildings at the site towards the beginning of Ramazan 1190/mid October 1776, Timur Shah issued a *farmān* ordering the transfer of the Cloak from its temporary housing in the Zarah Masjid to the separate building constructed for it and making provisions for compensating the officials who would be affiliated with the guardianship of the Cloak.

Fufalza'i describes the decree but does not transcribe it.²⁸ He says the *farmān* identified "five ulema and five *mutawallis*" each of whom was to receive a daily food allotment of "one *man*, ten seer by Tabrīzī weight" of baked bread.²⁹ The use of the term "*mutawallis*" is difficult to explain. There can be no question that there was only one chief trustee or *mutawallī* or at least only one who is repeatedly named as head administrator for the shrine. Perhaps, as Fufalza'i suggests, the plural form referred to Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq's staff, which was responsible for the five individual buildings and their functions: the madrasah, *khānqāh*, mosque, the building housing the Cloak, and the tomb of Ahmad Shah. We assume that Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq was one of the five. The *farmān* was addressed to the finance officials of Qandahar meaning that at first compensation was to come from the general revenues not from any dedicated source such as a *waqf* endowment.

The duties of the "five ulema" included in the grant are not explained. Perhaps it was simply a sinecure connected with the establishment of a religious institution or perhaps these were the positions that would later come under the rubric of *mujāwir* equivalent to "scholars-in-residence." A later decree would identify them by name and admonish them against interfering with the work of Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq.

5 The Endowment

As far as is known, Ahmad Shah did not establish an endowment for the Cloak and made no recorded provisions for its financial support, although he probably told those close to him his wishes. It would be his son and successor, Timur Shah, who would undertake to carry out what his father wanted, both for the latter's place of burial and for the architectural and financial provisions for the Cloak. In 1962, when Fufalza'i did his research at the shrine, the endowment charter or deed issued by Timur Shah still existed and was privately held by Akhundzadah Hajji 'Abd al-Razzaq, a direct descendant of the first chief trustee, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq. Fufalza'i copied out the entire document and reproduced it in one of his three major publications on the shrine.³⁰ He also copied

28 Ibid.

29 *Hobson Jobson*, s.v. "maund." The Tabrizi maund (*man*), in nineteenth-century India at least, was "a little less than 7 lbs" with 40 seers to a maund. Thus the daily ration, if the Tabrizi *man* in Qandahar in the eighteenth century was equivalent to the Indian in the nineteenth century, would have been a little less than nine pounds of bread.

30 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 45–51.

out numerous *farmāns* that were also held at the shrine, or were in the hands of the *mutawallī* at the time he did his research.

During the five years between completion of the buildings and the establishment of the endowment, there was already a commitment of resources to the complex to maintain it and its staff and the way the administration took early form would have affected the nature of the endowment. The cost of building the complex, like the provisions for the five *mutawallīs* and five ulema, must have come from current government revenues but the shrine's long-term health required a more secure form of funding. Therefore, to insure that the complex survived, Timur Shah and his six brothers established an endowment for the Shrine of the Cloak in a *waqf* deed dated "the beginning of Bars Yil (the Year of the Tiger) Rajab 1196"³¹/12 June–11 July 1782, almost six years after the completion of both the Shrine of the Cloak and Ahmad Shah's mausoleum. The *waqf* deed mentions only the "Blessed Cloak" but there is some reason to believe that the tomb and the shrine were treated as one entity for the purpose of financial administration. There is no clear evidence of any permanent administrative structure connected with the tomb at first but like all buildings it would have required maintenance and daily custodial care. Later there is reference to a separate *mutawallī* for the tomb (see below) but his relationship to the shrine's chief administrator is unclear.

6 The Nahr-i (Ahmad) Shahi

The initial capital asset of the endowment was the trunk canal, the Nahr-i Shahi, built by Ahmad Shah mainly to provide water to his new city and his Manzil Bagh estate. The endowment deed asserts that Ahmad Shah had paid for the canal with his own legitimate (*ḥalāl*) money and that it was the patrimony of his children. It may have required the years between completion of the ensemble's construction and promulgation of the endowment in order to probate Ahmad Shah's estate and secure agreement for the endowment by Timur Shah's six brothers,³² Sulayman, Iskandar, Parwiz, Darab, Shihab, and Sanjar, who along with Timur Shah had succeeded to joint ownership of it. The endowment deed contained the seals of all seven men. Considering the fact

³¹ Ibid., p. 48.

³² According to Fuzalza'i 1967, p. 29, the only reliable source for a full list of Ahmad Shah's sons is the endowment deed of 1196/1782, although he himself misstates the number of Timur's brothers as five rather than the six listed in the deed and, indeed, by him on the same page.

that they were scattered about Afghanistan and Sind, it no doubt took some time to obtain first their agreement to the endowment and then their signatures and seals.

As mentioned above, the donation of the canal recalls the late fifteenth-century donation of the namesake trunk canal in Balkh as the principal initial endowment for Noble Rawzah. However, the Nahr-i Shahi of Balkh was specifically endowed to support the Noble Rawzah while the water of the Nahr-i Shahi from the Arghandab had many preexisting demands on it. In the twenty-three years between the canal's completion in 1759 and its endowment in 1782, the canal had acquired a number of ownership claims. One was for a mill near its head built by a certain Mulla Fayz Allah Khan with his own money and operated by his own men. His water rights are reaffirmed in Timur Shah's endowment deed. Ahmad Shah had also granted lands along the canal to family members, officials, and close confidants and there were at least four garden estates along the canal at the time the endowment was made. The *waqf* deed refers to the newly-established endowment as consisting of "the entirety of the new canal known as Nahr-i Ahmad Shahi in Ashraf al-Bilad-i Ahmad Shahi [New Qandahar] and all the water and lands dependent upon it" while excluding "Bagh-i Diwankhanah wa Haramsara (Garden of the Chancellery and the Harem), Anar Bagh (Pomegranate Garden), Majlis Bagh (Council Garden), and [Ahmad Shah's] Manzil Bagh (Home Garden) which all have rights to the water and are irrigated by this canal. [Also excluded are] the endowments (*awqāf*) of those places [with their water rights]."³³ It also named certain properties belonging to "proprietors (*mallāk*) dependent on that canal, whose properties are worked by *arbābs* (factors, agents) and are in someone's [legal] possession." These exceptions were all documented, according to the deed, by *farmāns* issued by the padishah to the people involved. The deed makes it quite clear that the canal had already attracted improvements in the twenty-three years of its existence and that any revenue produced by these preexisting improvements was explicitly excluded from the endowment. This would later lead to major problems. Finally, the deed required that all the income from this endowment was to be spent on cracked wheat (*bulghur*) to be served daily to the poor. The routine expenses of the shrine were still, apparently, to be covered by government outlays.

33 For the full text of the *waqf* deed see Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 45–51.

7 The Shrine Administration (*tawliyat*)

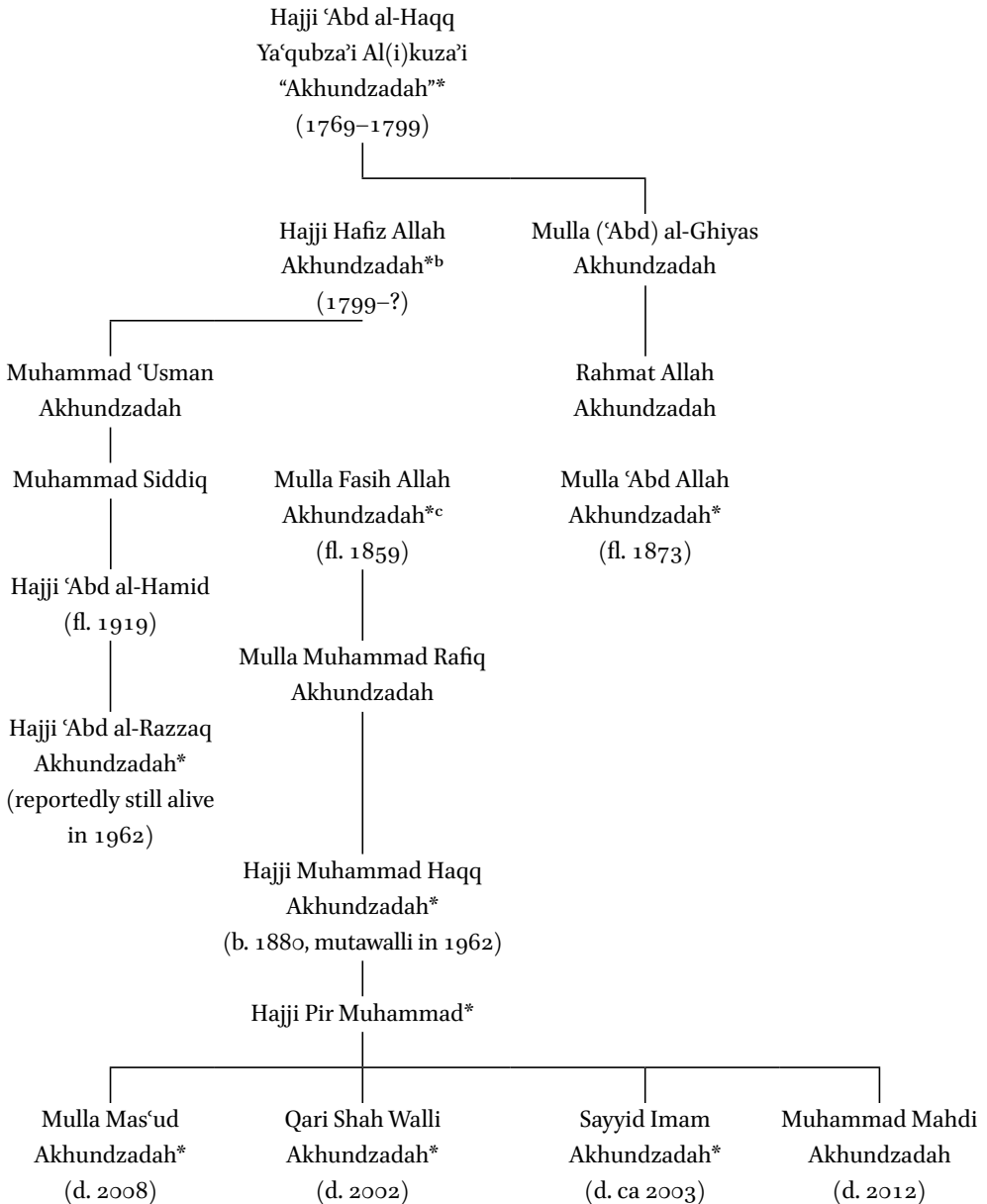
The trusteeship for administering the endowment was conferred on the same man who held the trusteeship of the Cloak itself, Akhundzadah Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq Alkuza'i. Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq's home was Takhtah Pul, a village in Qandahar Province, about twenty-seven miles southeast of Qandahar City. All chief administrators after Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq would be his descendants and would come to be known right up to the present as the Akhundzadah family.

There were several unstated assumptions about the context, socio-economic and legal, into which the terms of this endowment deed would fit. First, the labor to maintain the canal in good working order was critical. Canals would silt up and have to be cleaned regularly, at least once every decade if the documents can be trusted, in order to keep water flowing through them. In the years before the *waqf* was made, clearly some procedure was in place to maintain the flow, especially since the most important recipient of water was the king's garden, Manzil Bagh, at the canal's terminus. Manzil Bagh would have been the first place to experience the effects of silting or any lessening of the flow. As we will see, there was an expectation by the endowers and the trustee that the necessary labor would be available when it was time to clean the canal. But against this need was the reality of strong community resistance to providing the needed labor, and that turned out to be no simple matter to overcome.

A second assumption of the endowment deed was that water regulation was fully institutionalized. Water shares were a form of private property (*milk*) and therefore protected by law and usually enshrined in a paper record. Since each of the bagh-estates and the other properties mentioned as being separate from the endowment revenues depended on the canal, that meant there was a water regulator (*mīrāb*) or chief water regulator (*mīrāb-bāshī*) in place to control the distribution of water even though none is mentioned by the documents that have survived.

A third assumption of the endowment deed is that the limits of the land represented by the names of the various bagh-estates must have been well-known and did not require further definition and in fact were probably each marked by perimeter walls, a usual way of delimiting and displaying ownership rights. Either that or the water rights of each were so well-known and documented that they did not have to be specified in the *waqf* deed.

A fourth assumption is that the jurisdiction of the trustee or trustees did not need to be further defined. Yet there is some uncertainty here. In those cases with which this writer is familiar the *mutawallī* is identified in the deed of endowment or at least how that official should be chosen. Multiple *mutawallīs*

TABLE 3 Akhundzadah *Mutawallis*^a

* known to have served as *mutawalli*

a This table should only be considered exploratory. There is little on which to base it. I have tried to reconcile available texts with Fufalza'i's table of Akhundzadah mutawallis facing p. 301 (Fufalza'i 1967).

b In his table, Fufalza'i inserts a Hajji Mawla Dad, the brother of 'Abd al-Haqq, as the second mutawalli although the documents have Hafiz Allah, the son, petitioning for and receiving the tawliyat on his father's death. Fufalza'i too notes the discrepancy between the documents and his interlocutor's memory.

c Does not appear in Fufalza'i's table.

generally mean multiple *waqf* foundations which is not the case here. The documentary evidence provides only a second name of a *mutawallī* concurrent with the *tawliyah* (office of the *mutawallī*) of the son of Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq and that a lone instance—Mulla Yasin Barakza’i Gurjiza’i, *mutawallī* for the tomb of Ahmad Shah mentioned in 1806³⁴—as if for a time there may have been two coequal *mutawallīs*. The problem arises because the earliest surviving document of Timur Shah, the October 14, 1776 *farmān* mentions “five *mutawallīs*” associated with the Shrine of the Cloak to receive food allotments when only one, Hajji ‘Abd al-Khaliq, is ever identified by name as the *mutawallī*.

Lastly, the 1782 *waqf*-deed mentions a related document, a set of instructions (*dastūr al-‘amal*) that provided details and clarifications for the endowment’s provisions, which has not survived. Some of the assumptions might well have been clarified in the set of instructions. However, some of the specifics of the instructions do appear in later confirmations of the deed itself.

By the end of 1782, the complex—including the domed tomb of Ahmad Shah, the shrine building for the Cloak, the mosque, a pool or reservoir, an enclosing wall with entryways, a staff of at least ten people, and a capital asset in the form of the Nahr-i (Ahmad) Shahi, were all incorporated as a single social and economic entity in the city of Ashraf al-Bilad-i Ahmad Shahi, otherwise known as Qandahar. Perhaps of greatest importance is the fact that this ensemble was endorsed and sustained by the political authorities.

8 The Administrative Challenges

Such resources inevitably bring challenges. In this case, they appeared almost immediately. Within a year, Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq was complaining to the shah about encroachments on the canal and on his fiscal jurisdiction. We know of his complaint through a summary of it contained in a *farmān* issued in response from Kabul by Timur Shah and dated 4 Jumadi al-Saniyah 1197/April 7, 1783. It was addressed to the eldest of the shah’s twenty-four sons, Prince Humayun, whom he had appointed governor of Qandahar after he moved the capital to Kabul. The *farmān* not only deals with the *mutawallī*’s complaints but it also reveals some change in the stipulations of the endowment. As far as we know from the original endowment deed, the trustee was to distribute bulgur (parched cracked wheat) to the poor, the only cereal grain mentioned. But in Timur Shah’s *farmān* to his son he does not mention bulgur at all, but “fifty Tabrīzī *mans* of baked bread” [approximately 350 pounds] that was supposed

34 Ibid., p. 89.

to be distributed every day to the poor and purchased with revenue from the canal. (It is important to note, however, that a year later another *farmān* refers to the bulgur but not the baked bread, see below.) However, as the *farmān* makes clear, for five months there had been drought and the daily distribution had to be reduced to thirty *mans* of bread a day. Moreover, because there had been so much water the previous year, half of the Manzil Bagh, the private garden-estate of the royal family, had been turned into a vineyard. The implication here is that now [in 1783] with drought, the vines of Manzil Bagh demanded even more water to survive and were adding to the pressure on grain production. As Manzil Bagh was the terminus of the canal it would be the first to run dry if there were any reduction of water. Since it was royal property it might not be unreasonable to assume that the chief water regulator would have felt obliged to deprive other holders of water rights closer to the canal diversion at the Arghandab River in order to ensure Manzil Bagh received what it needed. Thus the consequences of the vagaries of the weather as well as unforeseen inroads on his rights must have preyed on the mind of the chief administrator of the shrine.

An additional concern, and undoubtedly the one most threatening to Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq, was the fact that one of Prince Humayun’s most trusted confidants and his chief equerry (*mīrākhūr-bāshī*), Mihr ‘Ali Khan of the Ishaqza’i Durrani tribe, was pasturing his flocks on the grain-producing lands of the Nahr-i Shahi.³⁵ At first, the trustee had sent his four sons to drive the animals off the fields but then, according to Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq’s petition repeated back to him in the *farmān*, the following day Mihr ‘Ali Khan told a lieutenant, “Take twenty or thirty men. Put the animals out to graze again and conceal yourselves. Then when Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq sends his men out, attack them, and beat them up.” They did as the chief equerry commanded and caused such severe injuries that a month and a half later the trustee’s men were still suffering abdominal bleeding. Thus Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq’s complaint. Timur Shah responded by ordering Prince Humayun to prevent his chief equerry from intruding on the endowment lands and to punish him if he disobeyed.³⁶ However the case was

35 Mihr ‘Ali Khan was both ruthless, as the incident over his flocks shows, and an opportunist. When Prince Humayun challenged his younger brother Zaman’s claim to the throne on the death of their father, Mihr ‘Ali Khan led the advance force of Prince Humayun’s army against Zaman’s forces. But in the following negotiations, seeing the way the political winds were blowing, he offered his allegiance to Zaman without a fight. See Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, p. 46. Fufalza’i 1988, p. 53 calls him Mīr ‘Ali Khan but both he and Fayz Muhammad identify him as Ishaqza’i (Durrani) and as chief equerry of Prince Humayun. Clearly Fufalza’i meant Mihr ‘Ali.

36 Fufalza’i 1988, pp. 53–54.

finally resolved, it showed the vulnerable position of the chief trustee when it came to conflicts with persons well-connected to the ruling clan.

As noted, the endowment revenues at first were entirely allocated, as far as we can tell, to feeding the poor. The original grant of stipends, issued before the endowment was made, supported ten staff members at the shrine complex. These salaries must have come from the government treasury and were therefore dependent on provincial fiscal officials to see that they were paid. It was the government treasury that received the revenues from the Shahi Canal, which were then debited to government registers and transferred to the *mutawallī* or one of his agents. Chancellery officials might well have pressured the stipend recipients to get their food allocation from the endowment rather than issue them vouchers (*barāts*) on government stores.

This ambiguous situation led to the next challenge to Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq's authority. Less than a year after his petition to the shah in Kabul, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq sent a letter seeking relief from people interfering in the distribution of food to the poor. The shah responded on 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1198/4 February 1784 with the following *farmān*:

The chief mullah (*mullā-bāshī*) [a man named Mullā Khudā Bakhsh]; Mullā Maddāḥ, supervisor of the Sharī'ah Court (*amīn al-maḥkamah*); Mullā Ilyās; Mullā Pīr Muḥammad Kākārī; Mullā Dūst Muḥammad 'Azīz Tabrīzī; as well as other mullahs of Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī, having been favored by the day-enhancing shah, should know that at this time the refuge of virtue and perfection, the pilgrim to the two Holy Cities, Ḥājji 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Durrānī Alkūzā'ī, trustee of the Blessed Cloak and the Nahr-i Shāhī Canal [endowment] of the Ashraf al-Bilād has petitioned the court saying that they collectively have filed suit against him saying that he should give them a food ration from the benefactions of the Shāhī Canal and every day they fight with him over this. Therefore, we decree that each one of them already receives a permanent fixed food ration. The bulgur and other things that are prepared from the yield of the Shāhī Canal are the customary benefactions which are bestowed on people there and on the poor, the deserving, indigents, and others. They must not share in any way in those benefactions and must not interfere with Ḥājji 'Abd al-Ḥaqq nor take him to court over this. They must consider this a final binding decision. (Written 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1198/4 February 1784.)³⁷

37 Ibid., pp. 57–58.

Not only did Timur Shah chastise the five religious scholars for suing the *mutawallī* for their food rations, he also sent a *farmān* with the same contents to the relevant fiscal officials and tax farmers, the concessionaires who had purchased the right to collect the taxes for an agreed-upon price, and reemphasized that they were obliged to pay the stipends. The stipendiaries were squeezed; the provincial finance officials and the tax farmers telling them to get their money from the endowment but the chief trustee, backed by Timur Shah, refusing to pay them from endowment revenues.

The chief trustee would need to return repeatedly to Kabul to have this issue of the source of the food ration for these men reaffirmed. There may have been some initial compliance with the *farmān* of 4 February 1784 but by spring 1791 problems had again become acute and Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq had to petition Timur Shah again over the same issue. Another *farmān*, dated March 1791 but referring back to the decree of October 14, 1776 was sent to the “present and future fiscal officials (*ummāl*) and concessionaires (*musta’jirān*)” and reaffirming that “five mullahs” and the five individuals mentioned in the set of instructions (no-longer extant), as set forth there, were to each receive five seers of bread for a total of “one *man* (i.e. forty seers), ten seers by Tabrīzī weight of bread.” This 1791 *farmān* was to replace the original 1784 *farmān* which was now said to be lost.³⁸

It was not as if the shah in Kabul had nothing to do but watch over the shrine and make sure the endowment deed and any other set of regulations were adhered to. Timur Shah was kept busy throughout the twenty years of his reign dealing with assaults on every edge of the empire that his father had assembled as well as dealing with internal challenges. In the east, campaigns had to be conducted from Peshawar against Sikh incursions on Afghan territory beyond the Indus, including the city of Lahore and its region and further south against Multan and Bahawalpur. To the north, Shah Murad Bi, fighting on behalf of his father, the Manghit ruler of Bukhara, Daniyal Bi (d. 1785) and then as ruler of Bukhara himself (r. 1785–99), was tempted to move against Afghan Turkistan whenever the shah’s attention was turned towards the Indus. Only to the west was the domestic situation in Iran sufficiently unsettled on the eve of the rise of the Qajars that Herat was not threatened during Timur Shah’s reign. This would change dramatically under his successor and Iranian claims to Herat would become a recurring threat to the Afghan government’s hold on the city over the course of the nineteenth century.³⁹

38 Ibid., p. 59.

39 For a comprehensive account of Herat’s position at the end of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth, see Noelle-Karimi 2014, especially pp. 121–59.

9 The Endowment under Timur Shah's Saduza'i Successors

Prince Humayun, the eldest son of Timur Shah and probably in his late twenties in 1783, fully expected to succeed his father. He governed Qandahar, which then included Baluchistan and much of Sind, with full discretion. When Timur Shah died on 18 May 1793, Prince Humayun was quick to claim the throne but was in a strategically disadvantageous position. He was in Qandahar but the bulk of the army was in Kabul and threw its support behind the seventh son, Zaman. Zaman was then forced to campaign against Qandahar to eliminate the challenge of Humayun and against Herat to try and eliminate another brother, Mahmud. Both Humayun and Mahmud would rise again, Humayun only briefly, while Mahmud would actually claim the Kabul throne. (This pattern of Kabul having to conquer Qandahar and Herat would be repeated at least twice in the next century). In Qandahar, Zaman succeeded in ousting Humayun in large part because of the defection of Mihr 'Ali Khan Ishaqza'i, Prince Humayun's chief equerry and the *mutawalli* 'Abd al-Haqq's bête noire.

On his arrival in Qandahar and his expulsion of Humayun, Zaman was approached by Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq for a confirmation of his rights. Such a petition was a statement of allegiance as well as dependence. In the context of this fraternal struggle, the *mutawalli* no doubt had to wait for just the right moment before presenting his petition but once the winning side was clear to him he would have sought an audience and petitioned for reconfirmation.

After Mihr 'Ali Khan's betrayal of Prince Humayun and his alliance with Zaman, the latter quickly took control of Qandahar in late summer 1793. The reconfirmation decree now provides new details of the endowment, which may originally have been part of the manual of instructions that are referred to in the 1782 endowment deed but have not survived. The 1793 *farmān* reads:

Since a prior decree of the Paradise-dwelling sultan (Timur Shah) conferred the *tawliyat* of the Shāhī Canal in Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī on the Refuge of Perfection and Virtue, the pilgrim to the two holy cities, Ḥājji 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Durrānī Alkūzā'i, *mutawalli* of the Blessed Cloak, and made an endowment of the canal on behalf of the Cloak, it is affirmed that the improvements of the aforementioned canal, the produce and agricultural yield, the collection of cash and kind from the lands of the Shāhī Canal with the exceptions of Manzil Bāgh, Majlis Bāgh, Anār Bāgh, the Bāghchah-i Dawlat Sarā, and Dīwān Khānah-i Mubārakah, the mill [built by Mullā Fayz Allāh], and the excluded *arbabī* lands and gardens of the Shahi Canal, everything else, as far as the canal reaches, are under his (the *mutawalli*'s) jurisdiction. Every day he should bake bread from

all the grain produced and should distribute as alms the cash and [the rest of the income] in the following way: twenty-two *tūmāns* cash should be divided into twelve *tūmāns* by invoice (*barāt*) and ... [text missing⁴⁰] thirteen *tūmāns*; 250 *kharwārs* of grain, 250 *kharwārs* of straw, and four *tūmāns* [of cash] for the two servants (*nawkars*) who prepare and serve the bread and the lamb; [from] the entire quantity of straw, [it should be used] every Friday to purchase, slaughter, and roast lamb and distribute it as a benefaction. The first chapter of the Qur'an (the *Fātiḥah*) should also be recited for the victorious soul of the departed Paradise-dwelling shah (Timur Shah). This is now approved by decree. Therefore from the first six months of this year [i.e., March–September 1793] Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq is reconfirmed as both *mutawallī* of the Blessed Cloak and as *mutawallī* of the Shahi Canal and is instructed to continue to act in accordance with previous procedures as set down by the Paradise-dwelling one, to collect annually the revenues of the endowment of the Shāhī Canal, and to distribute them as benefactions. Current and future governors and fiscal officials of Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī (Qandahar) should be aware they are not to interfere in the endowment, the administrative rights (*tawliyat*) of which are confirmed as the covenant of Ḥājji 'Abd al-Ḥaqq. They should 'curtail their pens and withdraw their feet,' issue no invoices on that canal, and make no demands of it. Clerks (*mustawfiyān*) of the chancellery should record copies of this in the relevant registers and consider it binding. Written in Ṣafar 1208/September 1793.⁴¹

In responding to 'Abd al-Haqq's petition, the *farmān* sheds more light on the process and procedures by which the yield of the endowment capital was realized by Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq and his successors. The income of the endowment at this point was still principally allocated to the poor. The *mutawallī* did not yet have an acknowledged administrative budget that would have allowed him to hire the personnel needed to collect the grain at harvest time and the cash derived from leases under the control of tax concessionaires. Instead, it seems clear, especially from the phrase "to collect annually the revenues of the endowment" that he would go to the chancellery officials, probably with this *farmān* and earlier ones in hand, and get vouchers for disbursement of grain from government stores and money from the treasury based on what the Shahi Canal produced, minus what belonged to the *bāgh*-estates and other properties specifically exempted.

40 Fufalza'i 1988, p. 62 leaves spaces for the portion of text that was illegible. There is no indication given as to how much text was involved.

41 Ibid., pp. 62–64.

If he were to distribute bread every day then he had to rely on mills to grind it into flour as needed and bakeries to produce the bread, all of which suggests the delegation or subcontracting of responsibility to agents, whether the millers or the bakers themselves, to handle the process from collecting the harvested and threshed grain to distributing the baked bread, not to mention the need for an accountant to audit the process. Two hundred and fifty *kharwārs* of grain, harvested twice a year in Qandahar, was an enormous amount. The Kabul *kharwār* was about 1,200 pounds avoirdupois. It is uncertain whether the Qandahar *kharwār* was a comparable weight. Weight standardization in Afghanistan would not come for another century.

Thus, at least by the beginning of Zaman Shah's reign in 1793, the *mutawallī* had no administrative budget as far as we can tell and had to rely on the provincial administration or on subcontractors working on commission for the collection and processing of the grain.

After Zaman Shah had taken Qandahar and confirmed the rights of the shrine administration, the city was then put under the nominal control of the shah's seven-year old son, Prince Qaysar. Very briefly, Prince Humayun retook the city, a reconquest that could not have lasted more than a year when it again fell to a force sent by Zaman Shah under Sardar Payandah Khan, leader of the Muhammadza'i Durrani clan. Zaman Shah then named his second son, Prince Sultan Haydar, to replace the slightly older Qaysar who had been wounded when Prince Humayun briefly regained the city. This all happened in the period 1793–94.

Sometime before the autumn of 1794, less than a year after Zaman had first reconfirmed the rights of the *mutawallī* and the terms of the endowment, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq again appealed to him. This time the issue was the silting up of the canal and who was responsible for keeping it dredged. In September 1794, in response to his petition, Zaman Shah addressed a *farmān* to his son, Prince Sultan-Haydar that said:

Prince Sultan-Ḥaydar should know that at this time, the Refuge of Virtue and Perfection, Ḥājji 'Abd al-Ḥaqq, *mutawallī* of the Blessed Cloak and of the Shāhī Canal endowment of Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī, has petitioned the Court saying that in accordance with the decree of the Paradise-dwelling sultan (Timur Shah) regarding the excavation and dredging of the Shāhī Canal, the Durrānī community residing in the four blocks⁴² of Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī should annually provide the

42 Fufalza'i alternates between "Chahār Bulūk" and "Chahār Būlak" (four blocks) and is referring in all likelihood to the four major blocks into which Ashraf al-Bilād-i Ahmad Shahi, was divided. The city was built as a residence for the Durrani tribes. Fufalza'i provides a

necessary (compulsory) labor (*mard-i yāwar*⁴³) to dredge and clean out the aforementioned canal and he has requested that now, in accordance with past practice, a decree be issued that that community in accordance with past practice should annually provide the compulsory labor to dredge the canal. Therefore it is absolutely incumbent upon my son that, in accordance with the command of the Paradise-dwelling sultan and as was done in the past, he provide [the *mutawallī*] with the labor from the Durrani community so that, year after year, they dredge the aforementioned canal and act as they are required to, recognizing this as a binding covenant. Written Safar 1209/September 1794.⁴⁴

It is more than likely that in return for the benefit provided by the canal, Ahmad Shah had elicited a vow from his Durrani allies that they would maintain the waterway. Perhaps when it was turned into an endowment by his sons, the Durrani leaders who had to marshal the manpower for the annual dredging felt that their obligation ceased. Zaman Shah wanted to ensure them that it had not. Eventually, according to Henry Rawlinson, who wrote a long and detailed report in 1841 on the Durrani tribes, the forced labor requirement was converted into a tax in lieu of the “liability which had formerly existed for the tribes to furnish *buzgars* [*sic*] or labourers during five days in the year to keep in order a canal named the Jui Shah that served to irrigate certain lands devoted to the support of the shrine of the ‘holy mantle ...’⁴⁵ No doubt this was due to the unremitting resistance or even refusal of the Durrani tribes to perform the work.

hand-drawn reproduction of an old schematic plan or map (*naqshah*) of the city which he says Ahmad Shah drew up and presented to Sardar Murad Khan [coincidentally the builder of the old quarter in Kabul called “Murad Khani”] with the intention of getting the city completed and showing where accommodations for Durrani tribes and other military forces should be placed (see Fufalza’i 1967, fold-out facing p. 199).

43 *Mard-i yāwar* basically means “helper, assistant” (See Dihkhuda, s.v.) Later on the term evolved to mean “aide-de-camp” in a military context and in the twentieth century under Amir Aman Allah Khan the office of *yāwar-i huẓūr* was comparable to minister of court. However, the subsequent use in the *farmān* of the phrase *bigār wa sigār* as a synonym leaves no doubt that at the end of the eighteenth century the term was used for compulsory unpaid labor, *corvée*.

44 Fufalza’i 1988, pp. 65–66.

45 Rawlinson 1841, p. 523.

10 Succession to the Chief Trusteeship

Sometime late in 1799, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq Akhundzadah, having served for more than thirty-one years as chief trustee of the Cloak and having weathered several challenges to his authority, died and his eldest son, Hajji Hafiz Allah Akhundzadah, petitioned Zaman Shah for appointment to the position. When 'Aziz al-Din Fufalza'i did his research at the shrine more than fifty years ago, he was shown two decrees (*hukms*) from Zaman Shah, one dated only by the year 1214/1799–1800 and the other dated Jumadi al-Sani 1214/November 1799. Together they confirm Hajji Hafiz Allah as rightful successor to his father as trustee of the Cloak and reconfirm the terms of Timur Shah's endowment deed relating to the handling of the Cloak. The first specified that Hajji Hafiz Allah was to keep the Cloak in the padlocked box and only open it on direct orders from the sovereign. People who came to perform *ziyarat* to the Cloak were to do it to the box. Zaman Shah particularly singled out "governors and fiscal officials" and warned them to perform *ziyarat* in the manner prescribed and not otherwise. This *farmān* may in fact have been in response to Hajji Hafiz Allah's complaints about pressure on him to open the box and display the Cloak before high officials or may have been simply a pro forma repetition of Timur Shah's original conditions.

The second decree, dated November 1799, is a full restatement of the terms of the endowment: the gift of the Shahi Canal less the exempted properties; the twenty-two *tūmāns* of cash, the 250 *kharwārs* of grain and 250 *kharwārs* of straw produced by the lands dependent on the canal; baking and distributing bread from the grain; the sale of the straw in order to purchase lamb for roasting and distributing as alms on Fridays; four *tūmāns* (cash) for hiring servants to distribute the bread and the lamb; and, not least, the recitation of the Fatihah and performance of prayers on behalf of the soul of the departed Timur Shah.⁴⁶

To this restatement however, Zaman Shah now introduces both a significant change to the endowment terms and a refinement to one of the earlier stipulations. The significant change came in relation to the chief trustee's remuneration. Up until this point the only recorded stipend for the *mutawallī* is the ten seers of bread allotted as his food ration as one of the original five *mutawallīs* mentioned in Timur Shah's *farmān* of 14 October 1776, which predated the endowment deed by six years. Now, echoing a more or less standard stipulation for the management fee of any charitable foundation, Zaman Shah specifies that Hajji Hafiz Allah should receive ten percent of the annual revenues,

46 Ibid., pp. 70–72.

whether cash or kind, from the Shahi Canal lands (exclusive of those exempted from his control) as his compensation. There is no evidence that the *mutawallī* specifically requested this stipulation but ten percent was a known and widely accepted standard for the management fee of a *waqf* endowment.

He then goes on to refine the issue of food for the poor, saying the “rest of the grain” presumably after baking the fifty *tūmāns* of bread, was to be used to make bulgur (cracked wheat) for distribution to the poor. A certain amount of grain would be sold to buy oil, salt, and any other ingredients needed for making the bulgur and preparing the lamb. So clearly the provision of parched cracked wheat, which had not been mentioned for some time, remained a central responsibility of the shrine administration. In the original endowment deed, the distribution to the poor of bread and lamb was not specified, only bulgur cooked with oil and salt, although the bread and lamb may have been included in the missing “manual of instructions” that was supposed to accompany either the 1776 decree or the *waqf* endowment deed of 1782. For a time only bread is mentioned and now all three: bread, lamb, and bulgur reappear in the record.

But within less than a year more complaints from the new *mutawallī* led Zaman Shah to a full overhaul of the chief trustee’s compensation. While the management fee of ten percent of all revenues may have seemed both customary and proper, it apparently was difficult to enact. To know what ten percent of the total revenues was would require the *mutawallī* to closely monitor revenue collections and chancellery record-keeping and there were already signs of tension, distrust, and lack of cooperation between fiscal officials in Qandahar and the chief trustee. The clash between Hajji ‘Abd al-Haqq’s people and Prince Humayun’s chief equerry, Mihr ‘Ali Khan, over pasturing the latter’s herds on endowment land, the unambiguous warnings to governors and other officials not to try and usurp the *mutawallī*’s authority over the Cloak, and the repeated admonitions, perhaps formulaic but nonetheless pointed, to record the terms of the current *farmān* in all relevant registers do not, taken together, paint a picture of harmony and mutual respect between the shrine and Qandahar fiscal officials. It would have been normal then, as it is at any time, to find bureaucratic tension and conflict over the control of, in this case, specific aspects of the local economy.

In an order dated Rabi‘ al-Sani 1215/August 1800, a year before he was deposed and blinded,⁴⁷ Zaman Shah decreed that starting at the beginning of

47 The years 1800–3 are particularly tumultuous times politically with Zaman Shah, Prince Mahmud, and Prince Shuja‘ al-Mulk all contesting the throne. The most contemporary non-Persian source, Elphinstone 1815, pp. 578–79, places the deposal of Zaman Shah

the Turki solar year, i.e March 20, the *mutawallī*, Hajji Hafiz Allah Khan, was entitled to an annual salary of “twenty *tūmāns* of rupees” (400 rupees) which he was to collect by invoice (*barāt*) from the Qandahar treasury from the *chihilyakah* (one-fortieth) taxes taken from the property taxes (*māliyāt*). The Afghan state used the term *māliyāt* generally for real estate taxes, that is, taxes on land and improvements. Poll taxes, sales taxes, customs duties, and other taxes and fees on transactions were generally not included as *māliyāt*. Little to no work has been done on the fiscal policies of the various Saduza’i regimes and most of what is known has been derived from non-indigenous sources, mainly the reports of informants for the East India Company. The term *chihilyakah* (one-fortieth), the Muslim alms-tax rate on wealth (*zakāt*), was used apparently at this time in place of the more Islamic term. The collector, who later in the century would be called *zakātbegī*, is known in these documents as the *chihilyakchī*.⁴⁸ The fact that Zaman Shah specifies the one-fortieth as the source of the funds for the *mutawallī* and not the *māliyāt* more generally suggests he might have thought that Hajji Hafiz Allah fit one of the eight categories of legal recipients of *zakāt* and therefore had some entitlement.⁴⁹ From what we know of the *mutawallī*, there is no category into which he obviously fits unless “those whose hearts are reconciled” was being used outside its historical context. Perhaps it would be better to assume that this would be the most convenient fund from which to pay him his annual salary.

within the events of 1800. Bosworth 1996, p. 371 also settles on the year 1800 as the end of Zaman Shah’s reign. It is a little difficult to know what to do with a work like Tate 1911 which is quite precise with dating for this period and dates the deposal to the “summer of 1801” (p. 115). As the author admits (pp. iii, 215), however, Persian sources were available to him only through the assistance of the Persianist W. Irvine and in his notes the only Persian source he cites (‘Abd al-Rahman’s “autobiography” should not be considered a Persian source) is the *Tārīkh-i Sultānī* presumably through Irvine for he gives no page references (see Tate 1911, pp. 104, 108, 113). Otherwise his notes cite only English sources. He does list twenty-nine Persian sources amongst his “principal authorities” a few of which, all originating in India, would have been available in English translation. To Fayz Muhammad, the date of Zaman Shah’s deposal and blinding was either 1216/1801–02 or 1217/1802–03, giving the alternate versions from his sources, *Tārīkh-i Sultānī* and *Nāsikh al-tawārīkh*. Following the former, he says, “Prince Mahmud ascended the throne on Thursday, 13 Rabi’ al-Awwal 1216/24 July 1801” (Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, p. 62). For lack of a clear authority on the chronology of this period, I follow Fayz Muhammad.

48 Noelle 1997, p. 271.

49 The eight categories are set forth in the Qur’an, sura 9 (*al-Tawbah*), verse 60: (1) for the destitute [*fuqarā*], (2) for the needy, the working poor [*masākīn*], (3) for those employed to collect *zakāt*, (4) for “those whose hearts are reconciled,” (specifically the pagan Meccans who had opposed the teachings of Muhammad and then eventually were reconciled to him) (5) for the manumission of slaves or captives; (6) to help those in debt, (7) to support those “in God’s way” (i.e. those fighting jihad), and (8) for wayfarers.

What is significant is that there is no mention of the ten percent of revenues as the *mutawallī*'s right and it may well have been that he quickly found that he lacked the means to monitor the revenue collection process in the Shahi Canal district and so attempting to pin down fiscal officials as to what constituted ten percent of the revenue was impossible. All the other revenues were specified in exact terms—twenty-two *tūmāns* cash, 250 *kharwārs* of grain, and 250 *kharwārs* of straw—and thus were far easier to audit.

11 Under the Muhammadza'i Regimes

Meanwhile, the blinding of Humayun in 1795 at the order of Zaman Shah was said to have outraged Prince Mahmud who left Herat bent on taking Qandahar while his older brother was tied up in the Punjab fighting Sikhs. But Zaman Shah had a knack for quickly reversing course. En route to help an ally regain control of Rampur, some 900 miles east of Peshawar, in the face of Mahmud's threat, Zaman Shah abandoned his Indian campaign and once again hurried to Qandahar meeting his brother Mahmud west of the city at Maywand, a spot that would become famous in 1880 as the site of a signal defeat of the British army at the hands of an Afghan force. Once again Prince Mahmud's troops were routed and he sent his mother to the shah a second time with expressions of contrition and regret for his enmity, begging again for a pardon. He received it and was again confirmed as governor of Herat. The following winter when Zaman Shah embarked on another Indian campaign, Mahmud once again marched on Qandahar. This time he sent the shah a promise that if the stipend of 200,000 rupees which Timur Shah had granted him were restored he would give undying allegiance. The shah refused the offer, returned from India, and led an army all the way to Herat, forcing Mahmud to take refuge in Iran where he sought the support of the new Qajar shah, Fath 'Ali Khan (r. 1797–1834) and then soon returned to Herat.

During this internecine fighting of the Saduza'i clan, the Muhammadza'i branch of the Barakza'i Durrani led by Sardar Payandah Khan, who was also known as Sar Faraz Khan, had lost Zaman's trust. In classic fashion, Zaman Shah invited Sardar Payandah Khan and many of his fellow clan members to a banquet in the citadel of Qandahar in 1214/1799–1800 and slaughtered them there.⁵⁰ This gave the sons of Sardar Payandah Khan the motive for a blood feud with the already fractious Saduza'i clan that would lead to its displacement as the ruling clan of Afghanistan.

⁵⁰ Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 1, pp. 59–60.

In the meantime, the *mutawallī* of the Shrine of the Blessed Cloak had to have kept close track of events and identify who at any given moment was in a position to reaffirm and support his rights. The last decree sent to the shrine by Zaman Shah, prior to his departure on his last campaign against the Sikhs, was dated August 1800.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Prince Mahmud managed to gain control of Kabul in alliance with Fath Khan, son of the martyred Muhammadza'i head Sardar Payandah Khan and now himself chief of the Muhammadza'i clan. The *mutawallī* sent Shah Mahmud a petition requesting his intervention in his longstanding struggle to keep others from interfering with the grain used to provide food for the poor. Again, it was the five named scholars who had first brought suit back in 1784 to obtain their own awarded food rations from the endowment grain rather than from government stores. Mahmud repeated the decision of his father, Timur Shah, and admonished the five against interfering with the *mutawallī*, Hajji Hafiz Allah.⁵²

In the meantime, the defeat and blinding of Shah Zaman at Mahmud's order (in retaliation for the blinding of Prince Humayun) had, we are told, deeply offended another brother, Shuja' al-Mulk, who had been in Peshawar with Zaman when the latter was detained by a Shinwari chieftain, whom he thought was an ally, and his eyes put out. As reported by Fayz Muhammad, relying on the account in *Tārīkh-i Sultānī*, Shuja' al-Mulk marched towards Kabul but was defeated by Shah Mahmud's troops at Jalalabad and fled back to the Khyber Valley.

It is difficult to be precise about the chronology of the blinding of Shah Zaman, Shuja' al-Mulk's taking Kabul for the first time in 1801 or 1803, being acknowledged as shah, and then, as shah, reconfirming the rights of Hajji Hafiz Allah Khan as *mutawallī* of the shrine in 1804. Fayz Muhammad's chronology, relies on both the *Tārīkh-i Sultānī* and Shah Shuja's autobiography, neither of which can be called profligate with dates.⁵³ The sequence of most events can be determined but assigning them even to specific years is often uncertain.⁵⁴

51 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 74–75.

52 Ibid., pp. 76–77.

53 The autobiography is Shah Shuja' *Wāqī'āt*.

54 Bosworth 1996, p. 341 dates the beginning of the first reign of Shah Shuja' to 1803 which would accord with Fayz Muhammad's somewhat uncertain dating of the blinding and death of Shah Zaman. (Shah Shuja', in his own memoirs, not cited by Bosworth as a source, says that he ascended the throne at the age of seventeen in 1216 (Shah Shuja' *Wāqī'āt-i*, p. 1) i.e., sometime between 14 May 1801 and 3 May 1802).

12 Shah Shuja's Endowments

It is clear that Shuja' al-Mulk, later to be Shah Shuja' al-Mulk or more simply Shah Shuja', had the full endowment deed for the Shrine of the Cloak copied out on 1 Jumadi al-Sani 1219/7 September 1804, both as a pious act and to ensure that the terms of his father's endowment remained in effect.⁵⁵ He himself then made an endowment of his own, the income from which was dedicated to the *mutawallī*, Hajji Hafiz Allah Akhundzadah, as sole beneficiary.⁵⁶ The endowment consisted of one *zawj*⁵⁷ of land irrigated by the "Shrine Garden Canal" (Nahr-i Rawzah Bagh) another name for the Shahi, Ahmad Shahi, or Ashraf Canal. The income was a life grant and the endowment deed specified that after the death of the *mutawallī* the qadi of Kabul would name the subsequent recipient of the income from this parcel of land.

Although earlier I referred to the shrine and the tomb as being under one administration, for the first time we learn that the tomb had its own *mutawallī*, Mulla Yasin Barakza'i Gurjiza'i, perhaps one of the "five *mutawallīs*" mentioned in the earliest documentation of the shrine endowment but obviously not a member of the Akhundzadah family, members of the Ya'qubza'i Al(i)kuza'i Durrani tribe. Another endowment deed, dated the twenty-second of Rabi' al-Awwal 1221/9 June 1806, specified that the rents from "all the shops of the Idrāk Khwājah Sarāy [in Ashraf al-Bilad-i Ahmad Shahi] standing facing that *sarāy*" as well as what would be paid in property taxes (on the saray?) was to be spent on lamp oil for illuminating the interior of the tomb.⁵⁸

55 Sometimes an endowment deed itself might call for periodic reproduction, see McChesney 2001, pp. 191–92, 221. It is of interest that at about the same time, in Bukhara, Shah Murad Bi (r. 1785–1799) was undertaking a major project of having endowment deeds copied out as a pious act. This can be seen in the large number of copies of *waqf* documents made in Bukhara during his reign as catalogued in Miradylov 1983.

56 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 83–84.

57 The "*zawj*" ("pair") or "*juft-i gāw*" ("pair of oxen") refers to the amount of land a pair of oxen could plow (before planting). Davidovich, pp. 122–23 provides the best information for the use of the term in Central Asia at the time and its extent. Adamec 1972–1985 vol. 5 "Kandahar," compiled from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British sources does not seem aware of the term. Davidovich finds an amount equated to the *juft-i gāw* in a late seventeenth-century source, namely some 50 *tanābs*, or 25 acres although the *tanāb* varied widely from place to place in Central Asia. Later sources put the *juft* (or *zawj*) at 6–7 hectares or about 15–19 acres. In nineteenth-century Afghanistan the *tanāb* (or *tanāb*), literally "rope" or "cord" after the device used to measure land, was synonymous with the more commonly found term, *jarīb*, each one being about a half-acre.

58 Fufalza'i 1988, p. 89.

13 Prince Sulayman's Endowment

On Shah Mahmud's recovery of Kabul in 1809, driving Shah Shuja' into exile, the shrine trustee Hajji Hafiz Allah petitioned him over a problem he was having with control of another sizeable endowment that had been made on behalf of the shrine complex. The donor of that endowment was Prince Sulayman, the fifth son of Zaman Shah. The deed for his endowment does not seem to have survived and the first we hear of the endowment is in this response to the *mutawallī's* complaint. The problem for the *mutawallī* was the wrongful assignment of the income from these commercial properties to other people based on forged documents. The *farmān* was addressed not to the *mutawallī* but to the governor, Prince Qaysar, and confirmed that two caravansaries and a twelve-shop small market (*bāzārchah*) in Qandahar that Prince Sulayman had endowed on behalf of the shrine were properly subject to the administration of Hajji Hafiz Allah Akhundzadah. The decree reads:

The governors and fiscal officials of the city of Ashraf al-Bilād-i Aḥmad Shāhī who have been honored by the posts granted by the shah should know that in accordance with decrees on record two caravanserais that belonged to Prince Sulaymān and a small market have been conferred on the *mutawallī* of the *khirqah*-Cloak, Ḥājji Mullā Ḥafiz Allāh Khān, so that the net yield from them may be applied to the food rations of the staff of the *khirqah* shrine and for lamp oil, repairs, etc. These documents have come from high officials of the Court and therefore we decree that, as in the past, from the beginning of this year, Luy Yil, these things belong to the purview of that *mutawallī* so that he may expend them as he's accustomed to and make necessary repairs. From now on, year by year, the net yield of those properties will be expended on the *khirqah* [shrine]. Similarly, it should be known that the revenue of the twelve shops and the small market which mistakenly was paid to (*dar wajah-i*) Mullā Nāṣir, Mullā Jum'ah, the *mullā-bāshī* (Mullā Khudā Bakhsh?), Mullā Ṣuḥbat, Mullā 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and others is part of the *waqf* endowment and, as in earlier times, under [the control of] Ḥājji Ḥafiz Allāh Khān. Mīrū Khān Durrānī Fūfalzā'ī and others who have forged (*raqam wa dast-khatṭī labāsī*) documents should know that those properties are *waqf*. Henceforth, if anyone else comes up with (forged) documents they must not be approved. Concerning the property (*māliyah*) taxes, the fees (*marsūmāt*), the market police tax (*darūghah-i bāzārī*), the *kutwālī* police tax, compulsory labor obligations (*bigār wa sīgār*), import fees, or any other impost by whatever name invoices might be issued under,

everyone should know that these properties are completely exempt and in no way are they to be interfered with. Clerks of the chancellery are to copy out this decree and record it in the appropriate registers. Written Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1223/June 1808.⁵⁹

The *mutawallī* must have lodged a strong complaint, accusing “Mīrū Khān and others” of fraud and the five mullahs of wrongly being recipients of endowment money. We will probably never know the outcome nor whether the charge of forged documents had any merit. One would assume, however, that before Mahmud Shah accepted the accusation at face value he would have sought corroboration from others in Qandahar.

After this last Saduza‘i document, there is a striking dearth of evidence about the shrine administration and its relations with the royal court. In his research, Fufalza‘i was able to find only one more document from the court in Kabul concerning a petition from the *mutawallī* of the shrine. It is difficult to imagine that the kinds of problems the trustees of the shrine had repeatedly faced—encroachments on their revenue-producing lands, Durrani refusal to provide canal-dredging services, the unjustified appropriation of alms by stipend-receiving ulema, and the need for reaffirmation of the terms of the endowment deed with changes in both shrine and political administrations—did not lead to repeated appeals to whoever held ultimate authority and thus to decrees either siding with the administrators or not. Qandahar itself continued to be somewhat buffered by distance and by its own resources from the dictates of Kabul. There is simply no evidence now available for what was taking place there.

In 1818, sons of the Muhammadza‘i Durrani, Sardar Payandah Khan by his fifth wife—Shayrdil Khan, Kuhandil Khan, and Purdil Khan—seized Qandahar from the governor appointed by Shah Mahmud and along with two other brothers, Rahmdil Khan and Mihrdil Khan, would hold it as their appanage or fief for the next twenty-one years.⁶⁰ But the Saduza‘i Durranis were not quite finished. In 1834, thirty-two years after Shah Mahmud ousted him, Shah Shuja‘ gathered enough support to make an attempt to regain his throne and marched once more on Qandahar.

In the meantime, except in Herat, all Saduza‘i authority had been displaced by the Muhammadza‘i clan of the Barakza‘i Durranis. Sardar Payandah Khan, murdered in Qandahar in 1799 at the behest of Zaman Shah had twenty-one

59 Ibid., pp. 86–87.

60 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol 1, p. 102.

sons, all but one of whom grew to adulthood.⁶¹ Each of them in turn had numerous offspring (one of them, Dust Muhammad, alone had twenty-six sons⁶²) and they struggled mightily first with the Saduza'i and then amongst themselves over control of the country's limited resources. Kuhandil Khan and his brothers in Qandahar nearly lost the region in 1834 to the reemergent Saduza'i, Shah Shuja', who besieged the city for more than fifty days before he was forced to withdraw by the Qandaharis with help from Amir Dust Muhammad Khan, who marched down from Kabul. The "Dil" brothers then held the city and province until 1839, when, backed this time by a British army, Shah Shuja' regained Qandahar for the second time and for the second time declared his rule over Afghanistan. His regime would last only another three years until the British were forced out of the country and left him to his fate. The Dil brothers returned to Qandahar in 1842 and held it for a further seventeen years until ousted by Amir Dust Muhammad Khan during his second reign (1843–63). During the long era of the "Qandahari sardars," Sardar Kuhandil Khan built a Friday mosque which, as mentioned above, was associated with another relic of the Prophet Muhammad, a strand of hair from his beard, the "Blessed Hair" (*mū-yi mubārak*).

Despite all the political change experienced by Qandahar during this time, as far as I have been able to tell no writer found the activities around the shrine worth recording. Sardar Kuhandil Khan and his brothers ruled Qandahar as an independent statelet and so any decisions about the shrine rendered by these Muhammadza'is would not have been appealed to Kabul until Amir Dust Muhammad Khan seized the region in 1859.

From 1859–62, there is a cluster of surviving documents involving the governor of Qandahar, Sardar Muhammad Amin Khan,⁶³ and one of his sons. Two of the documents are decrees (*ḥukm-nāmahs*) and address the question of the stipend of the *mutawallī*. One is dated Ziqā'dah 1275/June 1859 and was issued by Sardar Muhammad Amin Khan to "governors and finance officials" and affirmed that "[the income of] one parcel (*tikah*) of land on the Jū-yi Shāhī (i.e., the Shahi Canal) located in Mazra'ah⁶⁴ which is in the possession of the *mutawallis* [*sic*] of the Noble Cloak, besides the principal compensation (*wazīfah*)

61 For a list of Sardar Payandah Khan's sons *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 197.

62 For a listing of Dust Muhammad's sons see *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 251.

63 See Noelle 1997, pp. 257 and 433 where the dates of Sardar Muhammad Amin Khan's governorship differ slightly from the documents reproduced by Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 141–42.

64 Hensman, p. 500 ff. names the village of "Mazra" as the main camp of Sardar Muhammad Ayyub Khan's army in 1880 and gives its location some four miles northwest of Qandahar on the west side of the Baba Wali Pass (Baba Wali Kotal), a gap in the 1,000–1,200-foot high hills that rise from the plain to the northwest of Qandahar.

of the *mutawallis*' estate (*sarkār*) to which the property tax (*mālīyah*) [of the shops] is connected" was to be divided into three parts, two of which were to belong to "the Refuge of Virtue, Mullā Faṣīḥ Allāh Ākhūndzādah" and the other third of which was to be for the [other] *mutawallis*.⁶⁵ Officials were admonished not to interfere. In other words, this piece of land was exempt from taxation. Perhaps it was the same piece of land that Shah Shuja' in June 1806 had endowed for the benefit of the then chief *mutawallī*, Hajji Hafiz Allah. If so, despite the terms of the endowment deed, it had come to be treated as the patrimony of the family.

In Rabi' al-Sani 1277/October–November 1860, Sardar Muhammad Amin sent another *ḥukm-nāmah* to Nazir Amir Muhammad Khan,⁶⁶ apparently the chief fiscal officer of Qandahar, in which the subject of the *mutawallī*'s stipend is again addressed:

Excellency Nāzīr Amīr Muḥammad Khān, may you be well! The sum of one *tūmān* and 800 dinars cash by voucher or invoice (*barāt*) of the property taxes (*mālīyāt*) of this year Pichi Yil (1860–61), [which is] revenue from the shops, should be delivered as the stipend of the *mutawallis* of the *khirqah*-cloak and [this stipend] be considered permanent and accounted for. Written Rabi' al-Sani 1277/October–November 1860.⁶⁷

The earlier of the two documents actually references the *mālīyah* from the shops which suggests that there was another even earlier though no longer extant document, if we assume Fufalza'i copied the dates correctly. In his book he actually places the 1860 decree before the 1859 one because of the reference to the income of the shops in it, although his methodology up to this point has been to follow the chronological order of the documents.

Here we begin to get a clearer idea of the evolution of the shrine's economy. As far as the existing records show, the only source of revenue for the shrine until August 1800 is what came in from the lands watered by the Shahi Canal. The main problems for the shrine administration were efforts to seize control of those lands for pasturage and attempts by certain Qandahari scholars to claim some of that revenue. In November 1799, for the first time, Shah

65 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 141–42.

66 This is probably Amir Muhammad Khan, son of Khan Shirin Khan Jawanshayr, a member of an important Qizilbash family in Kabul (see Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, pp. 242 and 244 where he is described accompanying Amir Dust Muhammad on his campaign against Herat in 1862–63). For the father's importance, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, index under Khān Shīrīn Khān Jawānshayr and Noelle 1997, index under "Khan Shirin Khan Jawansher".

67 Fufalza'i 1988, p. 141.

Zaman had specified the stipend of the chief trustee and recorded it as ten percent of the revenues from the lands watered by the Shahi Canal, whether in cash or kind. Shortly thereafter, within a few months, the form of the stipend (or a supplement to that ten per cent, it is not entirely clear which) changes. At that point the *mutawallī* is guaranteed an annual sum of twenty *tūmāns* of rupees cash to be collected from the Qandahar treasury. Presumably the income from the endowment capital, the Shahi Canal, as stipulated in the original endowment deed, was still only being spent on bulgur, roast lamb, and bread allotments.

Then in 1806, we have the first endowment specifically to subsidize (in part) the stipend of the chief *mutawallī* of the shrine, that is the one *zawj* of land donated by Shah Shuja'. Two years later, Shah Mahmud confirms an endowment clearly made sometime before, of the two caravanserais and the street of shops formerly belonging to Prince Sulayman and endowed by him. The stipulations on the income from these commercial properties is that they go to pay for food for the staff of the shrine, for lamp oil, and for routine maintenance of the complex. What is important to note is that by 1859 the income from the shops is now treated as part of the permanent stipend of the chief *mutawallī*. (The plural form *mutawalliyān* is used which may have been intended to refer in a generic sense to the chief trustee's staff or, more specifically, to the *mutawallī* for the cloak itself and the *mutawallī* for the tomb of Ahmad Shah.)

Fufalza'i also transcribed a document of Safar 1278/August 1861.⁶⁸ It was from the newly-appointed qadi of Qandahar, Mulla 'Abd al-Salam Khan, the son of Mulla Muhammad Sa'id Khan. The family lived in Kabul and the father, who was appointed by Amir Dust Muhammad, bore the title *khān 'ulūm*, the supreme judicial figure of the country. A year later, in May 1862 when Amir Dust Muhammad Khan was en route to Herat to suppress opposition there, he dismissed 'Abd al-Salam Khan and replaced him with Qazi Sa'd al-Din Khan, a Barakza'i.⁶⁹ In the year before he was dismissed Mulla 'Abd al-Salam issued a judicial finding intended for officials of the chancellery dated Safar 1278/July 1861. It set the annual stipend for the *mutawallis* of the shrine for the year

68 Ibid., p. 142.

69 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, p. 242. Fufalza'i 1988, p. 142 gives the date of the qadi's memorandum as August 1861 but just before that gives the date of his appointment as Ziqā'dah 1278/May 1862. Fayz Muhammad's chronology seems more plausible. Qazi Sa'd al-Din Khan (1848–post 1919) would be a stalwart of the administrations of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan (r. 1863–1879), Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901), and Amir Habib Allah Khan (r. 1901–1919), serving in a variety of roles including eighteen years (1886–1904) as high governor of Herat.

Takhaquy (March 20, 1861–March 19, 1862) as “13 *tūmāns*, 8,970 dinars [cash] and 95 *tūmāns*, 9,101 dinars worth of grain by voucher (*ghallah-i barāt*).”⁷⁰

If the qazi’s decree can be taken as a reliable indicator of the state of the shrine’s finances in 1861, it shows a significant decline in income, at least on the cash side of the ledger. In 1800, the *mutawallī* had been entitled to collect from the Qandahar treasury twenty *tūmāns* in cash. The 1861 figure shows a reduction of some thirty per cent. However, to analyze this adequately one needs far more information. *Tūmān* and *dinar* are accounting terms for keeping track of rupees and parts of rupees. (We have very little information about the value of the Qandahari rupee at this time; later it would be about half the value of the Kabuli rupee). Since the cash stipend had been tied to the collection of the one-fortieth tax, did the lesser amount reflect a decline in these collections and the refusal of finance officials to make up the difference out of other revenue sources?

Then there is the question of what happened to the “250 *kharwārs* of grain and the 250 *kharwārs* of straw” mentioned in the early deeds and decrees. The amount specified as *ghallah-i barāt* (grain by voucher) perhaps represented the value in 1861 of the 250 *kharwārs* of grain and 250 *kharwārs* of straw called for in Zaman Shah’s decree of 1793. Does the sum of 95 *tūmāns* 9,101 dinars represent the market value on that date of the 500 total *kharwārs* or just the 250 *kharwārs* of grain or something else entirely? There is so little price information for grain available at this point⁷¹ that saying anything about this data risks complete misinterpretation. If anything can be concluded, it is that the endowment income of the shrine by mid-century was probably less, maybe even considerably less, than the various numbers from the late eighteenth century suggest.

What seems fairly clear is that the *mutawallī* was not collecting the grain or straw himself from the farmers but would obtain a voucher from the chancellery and then present it at a grain warehouse where he would draw the grain as needed or perhaps would sell the voucher to a broker (*dallāl*), using the cash to fulfill the stipulations of the endowment deed. We have only the earlier documents to suggest that the grain might have been used to make the bulgur and

70 Fufalza’i 1988, p. 142.

71 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, p. 711, says that in 1890 a seer (15.5 lbs approximately) of wheat was worth one-fifth of a (Kabuli) rupee. This would have made the price of a *kharwār* of wheat sixteen rupees. The sum mentioned as the *mutawallī*’s annual right would then have been roughly equivalent to 1,920 (Qandahari) rupees or about 960 Kabul rupees. Fayz Muhammad mentions on the same page the great inflation of prices after 1890. The cash sum would have been equivalent to some sixty-one *kharwārs*, far short of the number specified in the time of Zaman Shah.

the bread but no corroboration that this was done over the long term. The fact that the *mutawallī* thought he needed the qazi's decree to back up whatever other documents he had again underscores the kind of bureaucratic resistance that the trustee regularly had to contend with.

The next document that Fufalza'i includes, providing a full-page photograph of it, is a *farmān* from Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan dated 7 Shawwal 1290/28 November 1873 and addressed to Mir Afzal Khan, governor of Qandahar and the amir's father-in-law as it happened.⁷² The document is in response to a petition made in person by the *mutawallī* of the shrine of the cloak, Mulla 'Abd Allah Akhundzadah, the son of Rahmat Allah Akhundzadah, grandson of Ghiyas Akhundzadah. Neither the father nor his grandfather are identified as former *mutawallis* of the shrine and the endowment and it therefore seems possible that Mulla 'Abd Allah Akhundzadah had come to the position as a result of his predecessor falling out of favor or dying without a direct heir competent to take over the position:⁷³

At this time, the virtuous Mullā 'Abd Allāh Ākhūndzādah, son of Raḥmat Allāh Ākhūndzādah and grandson of the late Ghiyās Ākhūndzādah, being honored by (a visit to) the court, stated concerning officials and stipend recipients connected with the shrine, 'From the time of my forebears, the *tawliyat* and the *mujāwarat* of the *khirqah* shrine have belonged to our family and no one has interfered. Recently some foreigner (*mardum-i ajnabī*) has shown a desire to have the *mujāwarat* and the *tawliyat* of

72 For a photograph of the document see Fufalza'i 1967, facing p. 301. A portion of the photograph appears in Fufalza'i 1988 facing p. 104. Mir Afzal Khan was the son of Sardar Purdil Khan, one of the Dil brothers. He had a lifelong association with Qandahar. On his career see Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 2, index, p. 359.

73 Fufalza'i 1967, foldout, also facing p. 301 gives a table of the Akhundzadah family and the *mutawallis* from it. According to this table, which omits 'Abd Allah Akhundzadah, Hajji Hafiz Allah Khan was succeeded by his great-great grandson Hajji 'Abd al-Razzaq Akhundzadah who in turn was succeeded by a third cousin, once removed, Hajji Muhammad Haqq. 'Abd al-Razzaq and Muhammad Haqq were both alive in 1962 which would mean Hafiz Allah had an extraordinarily long tenure and that his great-great grandson, in turn, was also exceedingly long-lived. Fufalza'i notes on the table that he compiled it at the shrine itself with the intention of publishing it in his book on the Cloak. Since his informant, Muhammad Haqq, was already 82 years old, and his predecessor, Hajji 'Abd al-Razzaq, was a generation younger, though perhaps not in years, it would seem that his informant's memory failed to register at least one and perhaps two generations of *mutawallis*. Fufalza'i says he also had access to notes left by the first *mutawallī*, Hajji 'Abd al-Haqq.

the aforementioned shrine and won't leave me alone.'⁷⁴ He (Mullā 'Abd Allāh) came with certain documents to prove his rights, showed them to the sovereign, and asked for a new charter (*dast-āwīz*) with the royal seal. Since the *sarkār* [the government of Amir Shayr 'Al Khan] has no information about the situation of the *mujāwarat* and the *tawliyat* of that shrine, therefore, to verify this claim of 'Abd Allāh Ākhūndzādah, (the *sarkār*) is sending a bill of particulars (*hawālah*) to my friend [Mir Afzal Khan, the governor] asking him to review the documents and then write and inform (us) so that if 'Abd Allāh Ākhūndzādah truly has the right to it then (we) will order it entrusted to him so that he undertake the duties there and collect, account for, and expend the revenues of that endowment as formerly. If another member of his family in the past had a right to a share in the *tawliyat* and what the endowment produced that same division that was operative between them in the past should be considered restored and made effective. Neither party has the right to oppress the other. If consequently, from the foreign party some individual should press a claim and dispute with Mullā 'Abd Allāh Ākhūndzādah in the above matter, that *ṣāhib* (the governor) will of course put a stop to it so that (Mullā 'Abd Allāh Ākhūndzādah) is not harassed. The end. Written Saturday the seventh of Shawwal 1295/4 October 1878.

Thus, the seemingly inevitable problem of rival claims to administer the revenues of the endowment and to a share in the stipend crops up here as it did in Mazar-i Sharif. Every change of shrine administration had the potential to bring a challenge to the successor to the *tawliyat*. To resolve such disputes certain compromises had to be made that may well have increased the number of those benefiting from the revenues of the endowment. As noted more than once, the original endowment deed made no provision for compensation for the chief *mutawallī*. Then we see various efforts to establish the trustee's right to a percentage of the income and then to a government-paid salary drawn on the *zakāt* revenues. As time passed the salaries of the *mutawallī* and the *mujāwirs*, rather than being paid wholly by the Qandahar treasury, seem to have been converted, in part at least, to tax exemptions on private lands belonging to those individuals and then through inheritance those exemptions were passed

74 The *mujāwarat* was quite obviously a remunerated position. The *mujāwir* or *mujāwirs* who held it were staff members with no specific function that might be revealed by the title except to be present at the shrine and as I've noted earlier, perhaps recite Qur'an, offer up prayers on others behalf, or simply be there as docents for visitors.

on to their heirs and descendants as their due. This begins to become apparent in the time of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901).

14 Privatizing Charitable Capital

Capital in land or improvements is always subject to the effects of entropy, in the case of a *waqf* endowment, the inevitable path of deterioration and depreciation from the moment of its creation. An endowment is expected to produce a certain output or yield with no further inputs of capital. But from the moment of its creation, maintaining the expected output requires more input—either more labor or new capital or both. It is obviously necessary to continually spend some of the yield of the capital on its own maintenance, and this affects the anticipated revenue for the beneficiaries. As time passes greater amounts are required to maintain a deteriorating asset. In the case of the endowment of the Shrine of the Cloak, continual inputs of uncompensated labor were necessary for the maintenance of the irrigation system which formed the principal endowment capital of the shrine complex [including the tomb of Ahmad Shah] yet the calls for that labor clearly generated strong resistance from those expected to provide it. The ability to overcome that resistance, whether in compelling the Durrani tribes living in Ahmad Shah's new city to provide free labor on the irrigation system, or to prevent unwarranted claims on the yield of the endowment, meant a continual interaction with those who commanded the forces of coercion, i.e., the provincial governor and the commanders of regular and militia forces. However, those who could deploy force by no means possessed full discretionary power to do so. They also had superiors as well as dependents to whom they had to answer and so, despite an assumed desire to maintain the integrity of the shrine and the sacred purpose supported by the endowment, they may not always have been able to give the shrine administrators their wholehearted backing. Eventually, as noted earlier, the labor requirement was converted into a tax, presumably to make it easier to insure compliance.

As time passed, the available records show how the personal interests of the Akhundzadah family came to shape its relations with the state. From a concern for the intended beneficiaries of the endowment income, especially the poor and indigent, the central concern becomes the stipend received by the *mutawalli*. Once the Akhundzadah family, members of the Durrani clan of the Ya'qubza'i Ishaqza'i, is recognized as having the sole claim to the office of administrator of the shrine, their personal interests rise to the fore, probably at the expense of the class of named beneficiaries. We have no way of

knowing at this point, for example, how long the practice of providing meals of bulgur and lamb on Fridays and the daily distribution of fifty *mans* of bread lasted. The tenor of the various *farmāns* reconfirming rights and the terms of the endowment emphasize the rights of the administrators to be paid rather than the rights of the beneficiaries, the poor and indigent, to be fed. We have seen how factors beyond the control of the administrators, notably drought, affected their ability to meet the requirements of the endowment deed and as the lands on which the endowment depended became less productive, as would inevitably have been the case, the *mutawallī*, without new sources of income, would have been forced to make changes in the distributions.

The evidence indicates that the well-being of the shrine went hand-in-hand with the welfare of the family, especially its ability to maintain control of the administration over generations. The perception of what constituted the well-being of the family seems to have evolved from enjoying high regard in the intellectual community to preserving the wealth gained through serving as superintendents of the shrine. We know little about how the *mutawallī* and thus his family and wider circle of relatives were compensated after the available documentation for the shrine peters out in the 1870s. We are left to draw inferences from what evidence remains of the Akhundzadah family in the Qandahar region.

Fufalza'i includes the texts of three documents from Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901) that relate to the Akhundzadah family and suggest the way in which wealth was shifting into their hands. All three documents are responses to petitions made by family members for fiscal relief in one form or another. The first royal *farmān* is dated Sha'ban 1302/May–June 1885 and was sent to the police and postal (*dāk*) station at Dih Hajji, a village seventeen miles southeast of Qandahar.⁷⁵ It was addressed to officials at the station and ordered them to stop requisitioning foodstuffs from a certain 'Abd Allah Jan Akhundzadah of Maliki Sukhtah, a village near the post, on the grounds that he was already exempt from all such imposts.

The small fort (*tahānah*) serving as the police post and post house was a rest stop for postal runners about a day's journey out of Qandahar. Such *dāk*-posts, like customs posts (*bandars*) with their garrisons of irregular soldiers (*Sākhlū* or *khāṣṣahdārs*), were scattered around the country and most were required to get their food supplies from the local populace, although a few did try and raise food in gardens around their posts. The officers in charge of the posts were supposed to pay for what they requisitioned but since the men had to

75 Nahiz, vol. 2, p. 286 for the location of the village; Fufalza'i 1988, p. 143 for the text of the *farmān* and McChesney 2018, pp. 205–06 for a translation of the text.

eat and pay was sometimes slow in coming the requisitions may have often been made with promissory notes. Even if they were paid, the farmers were not always happy to have to sell to the government, particularly if payment was not immediately made.

The fact that Fufalza'i found this document from Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan at the shrine strongly suggests that 'Abd Allah Jan Akhundzadah, although nothing is said to otherwise identify him with the family of *mutawallīs*, may well have been the very same 'Abd Allah Akhundzadah who is named as *mutawallī* in the December 1873 *farmān* of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan.

The next royal pronouncement comes in August of 1894 and is addressed to officials at the customs post of Takhtah Pul, which also stood on the Qandahar-Chaman-Quetta road about sixteen miles beyond the police post of Dih Hajji and to its southeast.⁷⁶ Again, the issue is the supplies requisitioned by the garrison of irregular soldiers (*khāṣṣahdārs*) guarding the customs post at Takhtah Pul. Two Akhundzadah family members, Muhammad Aslam Akhundzadah and 'Ata Muhammad Akhundzadah were both claiming long-standing exemptions from such occasional requisitions (called here *sūrsāt* [or *siyūrsāt*] and *chīghāt*) by customs post officers. In their petition they do concede that they are paid a fair price for what they provide but nonetheless it was a hardship for them and so they asked for relief. The amir orders the officials to cease requisitioning from them and to identify other people not enjoying exemptions from whom to obtain what they need.⁷⁷ Again the fact that the document was found at the shrine is a sign that these men were kin of the *mutawallī* or members of the *mutawallī*'s staff.

A year later, in Safar 1313/August 1895, in a third document found at the shrine, the amir warned off other officials attempting to collect taxes and fees from which the Akhundzadahs were exempt. Again, the burden from which they were seeking relief was the occasional requisition. The order, sent this time to local leaders (*maliks*) of Paymal, called on them to respect the exemptions granted by an unnamed "previous government," probably that of Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan. Here, the amir reaffirms that "*mutawallīs* of the Blessed Shrine of the Cloak, namely Ahmad Jan Akhundzadah and Ghulam Qadir Akhundzadah" were exempt from all taxes except property taxes (*māliyyāt*) and including such things as the occasional requisition and the fine levied on people resident in

76 This is the location of Takhtah Pul on the Ayazi 1:1,500,000 map of Afghanistan and on the USSR General Staff Map "Takhtapul" (H-41-X11). Nahiz 1957, vol. 1, p. 388 does not identify this Takhtah Pul but has one in the district of Arghastan east of Qandahar but far north of the location given in the maps.

77 Fufalza'i 1988, p. 144. For a translation of the order see McChesney 2018, p. 207.

a village where a murder has occurred. This exemption involved the village of Paymal, located just to the west-south-west of Qandahar City.⁷⁸ It was the last substantive document to which Fufalza'i was given access during his research at the shrine.⁷⁹ These documents either represented everything the Akhundzadah family had managed to preserve over the years or what they were willing to show Fufalza'i.

While these documents suggest that the amir was concerned with protecting rights acquired by the Akhundzadah family over the years, 'Abd al-Rahman was less accommodating when it came to property rights that had been gradually acquired along the Nahr-i Ahmad Shahi. We know that some of the lands watered by the canal were private, or considered private, for they were bought and sold often enough over the years that their status as private lands was assumed. The source here is secondhand but underscores the problem of the irregular if not illegal usurpation of property rights. Under the terms of the 1885 agreement reached at Rawalpindi between the amir and the British Government of India, the British were allowed to maintain Indian Muslim representatives at Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat. These representatives, or "news writers" as they were called (*wāqī'ah-nawīsān*), were supposed to file weekly reports that were then translated into English and delivered, in the case of the Qandahar news writer, to the English commissioner or resident of Baluchistan. A newsletter dated 31 August 1885 from Sayyid Mir Hashim, the British representative in Qandahar at the time, reported an order from the amir for the confiscation of the lands and gardens watered by the "Shahi Nahr" claiming that the canal was crown property and people had no right to its water. The news writer also noted that among those affected were "lands in the possession of the priests of the Khirka Sharif."⁸⁰ No further information is given as to how, or even whether, those lands were reclaimed for the crown but the decree, if accurately reported, would seem to be clear evidence of the continuing interest and involvement of the *mutawallīs* of the shrine in the canal and how private property interests in the water shares and lands dependent on those shares had survived for a century and more.

78 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 143–44. For a translation of the text of the *farmān* see McChesney 2018, p. 208.

79 There is one other document, somewhat irrelevant to the shrine, which Fufalza'i includes, a letter written by the then prime minister Shah Mahmud Khan in response to one from the *mutawallī*, Muhammad Haqq Khan, dated 27 Hut 1331/17 March 1953 thanking the *mutawallī* for his letter and assuring him that he and his brother (the king) are both in good health. See Fufalza'i 1964, p. 542. Shah Mahmud was forced to resign that same year.

80 *Kandahar Newsletters*, volume 2, newsletter no. 30, p. 215.

The impression one receives from these few pieces of evidence is first that the Akhundzadah family repeatedly had to appeal to the amir in Kabul for the protection, sometimes restoration, of what they considered their rights, rights which they acquired through their control of the administration of the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak. Second, it appears that they could count on amirid support but it should be kept in mind that if their hopes were disappointed, and there were documents concerning such disappointment, there would have been little reason to preserve them. It would be those documents which confirmed their rights that would have been important to keep safe.

15 The Architecture of the Shrine of the Cloak

For more than a century, the available information for the shrine, except for that relating to Timur Shah's initial orders to construct the complex, conveys nothing about the shrine's architectural development. Its socio-political history is entirely consumed by the problem of finances. Distant details of the shrine and fully-rendered portraits of the tomb of Ahmad Shah from the paintings of James Atkinson and James Rattray executed in connection with the British invasion and occupation of the eastern part of the country in 1839–42 reveal nothing of any architectural changes nor establish an overall view of the shrine against which to compare photographic images when they first appear.⁸¹ In the left center of Rattray's painting "City of Candahar. Its Principal Bazaar and Citadel" is a rendering of the tomb of Ahmad Shah and a low white square structure to its right that must be the *khirqah*-shrine. But his "Temple of Ahmad Shauh, King of Afghaunistan, Candahar" portrays the tomb as standing utterly alone in an open space with nothing nearby except bazaar awnings in the foreground. Atkinson's "Interior of the City of Kandahar from the House of Sirdar Meer Dil [Mihrdil] Khaun Brother of the King of Kabul" provides a good view of the tomb of Ahmad Shah but no sign of the low square building Rattray had included. He has painted trees which might be hiding the building and the citadel to its right.

It is not until there is another English invasion and occupation of Afghanistan that we find the first known photographic image of the *khirqah*-shrine, Benjamin Simpson's 1879 photograph "Khirka Sherif—The Shrine Where the Mantle of the Prophet is preserved" (Fig. 4.6) showing a stuccoed wall with part at least covered with frescos of different trees painted within panels of equal size. A low wall in the foreground is similarly covered with panels of

81 Rattray 1848 and Wilkinson 1842.

frescos each of which contains what appear to be representations of peacocks. This photograph is evidence that the shrine was not covered with ceramic tile. Nor would this frescoed exterior last for very long.

16 The Patronage of (Prince) Sardar Nasr Allah Khan in 1895

There is no record, aside from the decrees issued concerning the rights of the Akhundzadah family, that Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan himself made any investments in the Shrine of the Cloak or involved himself with its administration, other than what has already been mentioned as well as his attempt to regulate the use of the shrine as a place of sanctuary (see below).

The next royal to be involved with the shrine was the amir’s second son, Prince Nasr Allah Khan. Unlike his father for whom Islam was primarily a political tool to be wielded to keep a fractious populace in line, or his brother, Habib Allah Khan, who would succeed to the emirate but was cavalier about Islamic law and personal devotion, Nasr Allah was by all accounts a fervent believer and a favorite of the ulema.

In the late autumn of 1895, Nasr Allah spent a month in Qandahar. He was returning from a six-month sojourn in Britain and Europe. Queen Victoria had deigned to meet him three times, one of them an official audience. The British Foreign Office had laid out an extensive tour for the prince around England and southern Scotland, escorted him everywhere with an interpreter and a tour coordinator, and people turned out to greet him as if he were a reigning monarch, not the second son of an autocrat of a small but strategically important country. Later, as his stay was prolonged, those cheers turned into parliamentary questions about the length of his stay and the cost to the taxpayer, mainly taxpayers in India.

After England, he visited France and Italy, again at British expense, with stops in Paris, Marseilles, Naples, and Rome before departing for Karachi on a British vessel.⁸² His return route to Kabul from Karachi was via Shalkut (Quetta), Qandahar, and Ghazni. In Qandahar he took particular interest

82 Prince Nasr Allah Khan’s trip, the first official trip by an Afghan to Europe, was at the invitation of the English government. Originally, the British hoped to convince the amir himself to make the trip but after much vacillating, he refused, citing health reasons and being too busy with affairs of state. Nor would he send his eldest son and likely successor, Sardar Habib Allah Khan, to make the trip. In the end, the English had to settle for Sardar Nasr Allah Khan. The trip is covered in detail in Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3 (see index under “Naṣr Allāh Khān, Sardār and Prince, son of His Majesty, Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān”). Another account, based on British newspaper reports, is Adamec 1994.

in the shrine's welfare. In the short time he was there, he developed a plan for expanding the western courtyard of the shrine and ordered an official to negotiate with the owners of houses and serais that abutted the shrine for the sale of their properties. He also ordered some enhancements to the interior decoration—a silver screen (*panjarah*) to surround the box in which the Cloak was kept, new carpets, and five crystal chandeliers. He also took an interest in the condition of the shrine's hostel or kitchen, the *langar-khānah*, and ordered unspecified work done on it. He apparently had permission from the amir to draw on the government treasury for these expenses with some addition (unspecified) of his own money.⁸³ To this information about Prince Nasr Allah Khan's contributions to the shrine, the British news writer in Qandahar at the time, Dilawar 'Ali Shah, added:

At the prince's command a metalled road has been made from the Darbar to the Khirka-i-Mubarak. The Shahzada has further ordered silver leaf to the value of thousand of rupees to be placed on the shrine.⁸⁴

Metaling the road meant surfacing it with crushed stone, cinders, or coarse gravel. The "Darbar" was held in the citadel, just across the road and to the east of the shrine. This road construction would have been for the convenience of any royal visitors and their associates. It would have been a very short road. It is not clear that the silver leaf was ever applied, or to what it was to be applied, despite being ordered. There is no corroboration of Dilawar 'Ali Shah's report in Afghan sources.

Prince Nasr Allah Khan's grand gestures were undoubtedly meant to enhance his public image as a notably devout, even zealous, adherent of the faith, in contrast to his older brother, Habib Allah, whose pleasure-loving ways were common knowledge. Whether his wishes were actually fulfilled cannot be said except that the chandeliers he purchased were hung in the shrine. Nasr Allah's very public activities at the shrine certainly did not go unnoticed by his brother who would put his own mark on the shrine within a few years.

17 Amir Habib Allah Khan's Projects

In one of the few examples in Afghanistan's turbulent history of a peaceful transition of authority, on 3 October 1901 Amir 'Abd al-Rahman died quietly in

83 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, pp. 1160, 1185.

84 *Kandahar Newsletter*, no. 41, 8 November 1895.

bed in one of his palaces, Bagh-i Bala (or Bagh-i Buland), at the age of fifty-seven and his eldest son, Sardar Habib Allah Khan, ascended to the throne with his younger brother Nasr Allah being the first to swear fealty. Six years later, as noted above the new amir undertook a tour of the country, leaving Kabul on 7 May 1907 for Ghazni, Qandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i Sharif, eventually arriving back in Kabul on 23 November.⁸⁵ It would be his only visit to all those cities with the exception of Ghazni which he visited at least twice in the course of his seventeen years and four months on the throne. He reached Qandahar on 21 May and settled in at Manzil Bagh,⁸⁶ the estate originally constructed by Ahmad Shah a century and a half earlier and several times renovated for royal use and for housing distinguished guests.⁸⁷ The amir stayed twenty-seven days in Qandahar during which he initiated major construction projects all over the city, including at the shrine and so gave it the appearance it would have when later photographed.⁸⁸ According to an eyewitness, the amir

expanded the courtyard of the Shrine of the Cloak, buying serais to the east and bringing them within its perimeter. He built vestibules (*dālān-hā*) on its south side and appointed an imam, a muezzin, custodial staff, and students [for the madrasah].⁸⁹

The amir was also a devoted student of photography and in the following year he sent ‘Abd al-Samad, one of his court photographers, to Qandahar to document progress on all the projects he had ordered.⁹⁰ The Phototheca Afghanica in Bubendorf, Switzerland, has now in its care an album of forty-two photographs taken by ‘Abd al-Samad of the projects ordered by the amir the previous year. Three of the images are of the Shrine of the Cloak (figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5) and two (figures 4.3 and 4.4) were published in the journal *Sirāj al-akhbār*

85 Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, vol. 4, pp. 1146 and 1163.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 1150.

87 See for example, C.E. Yate’s account of his stay at Manzil Bagh in April 1893. (Yate 1900, p. 3).

88 ‘Aziz al-Din Wakili Fufalza’i found a detailed account of Habib Allah’s work written by a certain Mir Muhsin Aqa-yi Pishini. He provides no more information than the author’s name and his obituary (17 Shawwal 1341/2 June 1923) which does provide a terminus ad quem for the projects he mentions. See McChesney 2018, p. 223 for a translation of the full account of Pishini as recorded by Fufalza’i 1988, pp. 104–106.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

90 In McChesney 2018, p. 224 I stated that ‘Abd al-Samad accompanied the amir on his tour in 1907 but the photographs clearly show work completed or well underway which supports the later date. According to Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, personal communication of 15 May 2019, ‘Abd al-Samad was sent to Qandahar in 1908 to document progress.

five years after ‘Abd al-Samad’s visit.⁹¹ These photographs show the shrine and its related buildings undergoing renovation with construction material scattered about. Behind the cloister in the foreground of figure 4.3 is the dome and cupola of a no-longer extant structure and to its right a lower cupola. The first is modeled on the upper structure of Ahmad Shah’s tomb (visible in figure 4.5). These two cupola structures may be what are referred to as the “vestibules (*dālāns*)” of the quotation from Mir Muhsin Aqa-yi Pishini. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the shrine building (in the right hand part of the photograph) with no evidence of the frescos visible in Simpson’s 1879 photograph. Figure 4.4 shows part of the same (east) façade photographed by Simpson. Evidently, the stucco surface had been renewed either before Amir Habib Allah’s renovations or as part of them and the images of trees and peacocks had vanished. Figure 4.4 seems to indicate as well that the low wall seen in Simpson’s photograph had also disappeared, although it may simply have been screened by the high exterior wall between the photographer and the buildings. Only the trees and the tall standing tombstone of the 1879 photograph are still visible twenty-nine years later in figure 4.4.

18 The Work of Sufi ‘Abd al-Hamid

Amir Habib Allah Khan drew on at least two known sources of expertise for the work on the shrine, Qandahari architects and a group of Herati artisans. We are uncertain of the exact role played by the Qandaharis but we are told that work of the Herati contingent focused on interior decoration, perhaps indicating that building construction and exterior work was handled by the Qandaharis.

The name of only one Herati artisan has come down to us for work on the *khirqah*-shrine. This was Sufi ‘Abd al-Hamid, a Barakza’i of the Khwanchiza’i clan and a native of Qandahar. At the age of nine his family moved to Herat and it was there that he was educated and received his artisanal training. Herat, it should be recalled, was also the place to which Habib Allah turned for expertise in stone carving for the tomb stones of Muhammadza’i notables buried at the Noble Rawzah in Mazar-i Sharif.

Fufalza’i provides a biography of Sufi ‘Abd al-Hamid that states that when Amir Habib Allah Khan visited Herat in 1907, Sufi ‘Abd al-Hamid was just sixteen years old and perhaps the amir then was introduced to him or learned of his skills.⁹² In 1909, Sufi ‘Abd al-Hamid was sent to Qandahar from Herat,

91 *Sirāj al-akhbār* 1911–1918, vol. 3, no. 18, p. 5, and vol. 3 no. 20, p. 6.

92 Fufalza’i 1963, pp. 46–47.

presumably at the amir's orders, to renovate Manzil Bagh and while there he repainted the interior of the dome of the *khirqah* building and added new inscriptions.⁹³

Another element of the refurbishing of the Shrine of the Cloak as a result of Amir Habib Allah Khan's visit though not specifically linked to Sufi 'Abd al-Hamid was a new perimeter fence. Part of it may be what is visible in figure 4.4. How long this particular fence lasted is impossible to say. In any event, whatever existed in 2002 would be replaced by a new fence and the replacement would spark some sectarian outrage (see below).

Long after the work carried out by Sufi 'Abd al-Hamid, Khushdil Khan Luynab, high governor of Qandahar under both Habib Allah and Amir Aman Allah Khan (r. 1919–1929), added silver sheathing to the panels of the door leading to the innermost sanctum where the cloak was kept. An inscription on the door dated the gift to 1336/1917–18.⁹⁴ Khushdil Khan was appointed governor in July 1916 and this may have been a token of his appreciation for the appointment or simply the expected kind of tribute to a project known to be favored by the amir.

19 Under Amir Aman Allah Khan, 1919–29

There is no evidence that Habib Allah Khan's third son and his successor, Aman Allah Khan, made any comparable investments in the shrine but he made several efforts to exploit its symbolism in the hope of advancing his agenda of social and political reform.⁹⁵ In contrast to his apparent indifference to the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif, Aman Allah used the shrine, situated as it was in the heart of Afghandom, as a public platform for affirming his commitment to Islam and Islamic ways while at the same time, as most understood him, seeking to overturn some of the most cherished institutions of Afghanistan's society. Qandahar was and still is a center of conservative Muslim sentiment and in the 1920s was home to some of the country's most eminent Islamic scholars. In 1923, the Shrine of the Cloak became the site of a protest against Amir Aman Allah Khan's attempt to reintroduce the very unpopular military conscription that had been introduced but never successfully imposed by 'Abd

93 For other work performed by Sufi 'Abd al-Hamid in Qandahar, see McChesney 2018, pp. 224–25.

94 Fufalza'i 1964, p. 541. Khushdil Khan was the son of Shayr Dil Khan Luynab who had been governor of Afghan Turkistan and was credited with work at the Noble Rawzah.

95 See Nawid 1999 and Poullada 1973 for good overviews of Aman Allah Khan's efforts at reform and the reactions they provoked.

al-Rahman Khan, a much more politically savvy and forceful amir than his grandson. In Qandahar, shopkeepers shuttered their shops in protest of conscription and then took refuge in the shrine, part of the country-wide rebellion against Aman Allah's ill-considered reforms.⁹⁶

The amir visited the shrine on several occasions and always took the opportunity to call for reforming Islam in order to strengthen it. Long before any of his visits, the ulema of Qandahar had already expressed their opposition to his introduction of a constitutional monarchy as early as 1920.⁹⁷ In 1925, in the wake of the Mangal rebellion in Khust of the previous year, Aman Allah came to Qandahar and delivered a speech "on the plaza of the congregational mosque of the Shrine of the Cloak" as well as three homilies (*khutbahs*) from the pulpit of its mosque on successive Fridays (30 Mizan, 7 'Aqrab, and 14 'Aqrab 1304/October 23, 30, and November 6, 1925) in which he attempted to cloak his various reform proclamations (*nizāmnāmahs*) in Islamic garb.⁹⁸

In late November 1927, he arrived in Qandahar en route to Europe on a junket that would prove fatal to his emirate. During the eight days he spent there he performed *ziyārat* to the Cloak on two successive Fridays (2 and 8 December) and offered up special prayers invoking not just the rights of Afghanistan but the whole of the Muslim world. Then, after receiving the prayers of the *mutawallī* and staff of the shrine for a safe journey, he departed.⁹⁹ On returning from his trip to Europe, Russia, and Iran, he arrived back in Qandahar on 24 June 1928, driving a new yellow Rolls-Royce boat-tail roadster presented to him by the British government, not an image likely to have won him many friends in Afghanistan. He stopped at the shrine and again performed *ziyārat*, his yellow Rolls parked outside.

Aman Allah would return to Qandahar seven months later, but now with his government in complete disarray. In January 1929, the Tajik warlord, Habib Allah Khan Kalakani, took Kabul and drove Aman Allah and his coterie south to Qandahar where the ousted amir tried without success to rally support. By late March, realizing his position was hopeless, he performed a final *ziyārat* at the shrine and then left for India never to return to his native land.¹⁰⁰

96 Nawid 1999, pp. 99–100.

97 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

98 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 114–117 gives the gist of the speech and transcripts of the Friday homilies. See also Nawid 1999, p. 126 who dates one speech in Qandahar to November 9, 1925.

99 Ibid., pp. 128–29.

100 Ibid., pp. 131–33.

20 The Last Hurrah of the Muhammadza'i Monarchy (1929–73)

Between the reign of Amir Aman Allah Khan and the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11) I have found very little information about the shrine and what there is is mostly photographic. In 1934 images of the shrine were published in *Salnāmah-i Kābul* showing again the results of Amir Habib Allah Khan's project, the shrine building covered with white-washed stucco. The attached structures to the south with small dome, and flanking minarets are still visible (Figs. 4.7 & 4.8). When these latter disappeared is unknown, but figure 4.2 taken late in this century shows no evidence of them.

We come now to the most recent iteration. In the 1960s, the last Muhammadza'i monarch, Muhammad Zahir Shah (r. 1933–73) sponsored a major facelift of the shrine. The renovations involved sheathing the formerly stuccoed exterior in ceramic tile (*kāshī-kārī*), adding inscriptions of Pashto poetry and Qur'anic verses on all its facades, filling in the pool, razing at least one small mausoleum on the grounds of the shrine, and interring several privileged people on the grounds in close proximity to the shrine (Fig. 4.9).

The work was done in the years 1967–68. Our main authority on the shrine, 'Aziz al-Din Fufalza'i, did his research there in 1962 and first published it in 1967. He mentions that the king, to show his high regard for the shrine, planned to sheath the casket that held the Cloak with alabaster and "to expand and modernize its historic building"¹⁰¹ without saying what that "modern form" (*shakl-i 'aṣrī*) would be. It apparently included the tile work and the new inscriptions. There is no indication that the footprint or the structure of the building was altered.

In the Kabul Yearbook (*Afghanistan Kalanay/Sāl-nāmah-i Kābul*) for 1346–47/1967–69, we learn that the king made a brief inspection tour of Qandahar on 12 January 1968.¹⁰² He performed *ziyārat* at the shrine and inspected progress on the task of transforming its exterior with ceramic tile and enamel work (*mīnātūr-kārī* [*sic-mīnā-kārī*]), according to the account. Of the responsible officials he met with, only two are named: the director of the Poor House (*ra'īs-i marastūn*) and the technical director (*mudīr-i fannī*) of the regional Public Works Administration. While Public Works would seem to be a logical choice for building renovations, the involvement of the Poor House (*marastūn*) seems odd. The Poor House was in fact an orphanage, since adults, however

101 Fufalza'i 1965–66, vol. 24, p. 542.

102 Afghan Digital library, University of Arizona, unpaginated. In Adobe Reader it appears as p. 26.



FIGURE 4.7 *Sālnāmah* overview of shrine from the west (1932)



FIGURE 4.8 *Sālnāmah* view of shrine from Ahmad Shah's tomb (1932)



FIGURE 4.9 1967 renovated exterior (Reza Kateb, n.d.)

poor, were expected to support themselves.¹⁰³ In the absence of other information might we speculate that the *marastūn* supplied the workers, presumably older boys who would have been recruited for unskilled labor but actually might have been trained in ceramic production as well?

We can therefore date the exterior decorative program, sheathing the whole building in ceramic tile with its many Arabic and Pashto inscriptions, to 1967–68.¹⁰⁴ The inscription around the cornice of the building, shown in the photograph of the east facade, is the 48th sura of the Qur’an, “al-Fath,” the Victory (figure 4.9). The rest of the verse is no doubt inscribed on the other sides of the building, for which no photographs were available. That text corresponds closely to what Ahmad Shah Durrani’s chronicler, Mahmud al-Husayni, asserts was one of the shah’s expectations of the Cloak that, after helping him deal with his disease, it would bring him victories. The latter-day architect or architects may have selected that particular text because they were familiar with the *Tārīkh-i Aḥmad Shāhī* or at least knew the story of Ahmad Shah’s

103 I am grateful to Dr. Amin Tarzi for the information about the Poor House being an orphanage and for assistance with the Pashto.

104 The inaugural issue of *The Afghanistan Studies Journal*, Spring 1988, from the Center for Afghanistan Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha, published an undated picture of the shrine in its pre-1967 state (insert, following p. 28). It is also worth noting that a native Qandahari, Mir Hussain Shah, who was educated and spent his entire career in Kabul as an academic, in 2016 remembered the shrine as having *kāshi-kārī* tile only on the interior. (Personal communication of September 11, 2016 conveyed by a friend of Mir Hussein Shah’s, Dr. Rawan Farhadi.) A short biography of “Mir Husain Shah, Prof.” is found in Adamec 1987, p. 108.

acquisition of the Cloak and one of his hopes for it, that it would produce constant success on the battlefield.

At least three other Qur'anic verses appear as well, all very appropriate to the shrine: the complete Sura 108 "al-Kawthar" (a river of Paradise); verses 40–41 of Sura 79 "al-Nāzi'āt" (Those Who Withdraw), which emphasize Paradise as the abode of the one who fears God and "restrains himself from impure desires and evil lusts;" and verse 56 of Sura 33 "al-Aḥzāb" (The Confederates), a blessing for the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, one elaborate undated plaque, its doubled-text inverted and interlaced, celebrates the patronage of the king, Muhammad Zahir Shah (Fig. 4.10). The plaque occupies a very prominent place on the east side of the building, over the main entryway. It appears that the royal project to cover the shrine with tile and add the Qur'anic and Pashto inscriptions has been the most recent major architectural initiative at the shrine with the exception of the perimeter fence donated by the Iranians (see below) (Fig. 4.11). The Pashto inscription is a verse taken from the controversial anthology of Pashto poets called *Putā Khazana* which some believe was invented by scholar and Pashto nationalist, 'Abd al-Hayy Habibi, to show that Pashto had as long a literary tradition as Persian.¹⁰⁵ The verse shown may be translated as:

Those who seek piety and devotion without You /
Their efforts are as futile as making ropes from sand.

21 Post-Muhammadza'i Qandahar

This is the last we really know of the shrine and any major work done on its architecture until the aftermath of 9/11 when it reemerges briefly and mostly in the works of Western journalists, who were concerned first with the occupation and rebuilding of Afghanistan and then later with the reemergence and restrengthening of the Taliban movement.

In 2002, a journalist was told that the last restoration work before the Sawr Revolution of April 1978, which brought a nominally Communist regime to power, was done in 1974.¹⁰⁶ But there is no information on what exactly was done. Otherwise, the endless jihad has made finding information on the shrine

¹⁰⁵ Adamec 1987, p. 65; idem 2006, p. 146; and Wikipedia, "Abdul Hai Habibi."

¹⁰⁶ Atayee 2002.

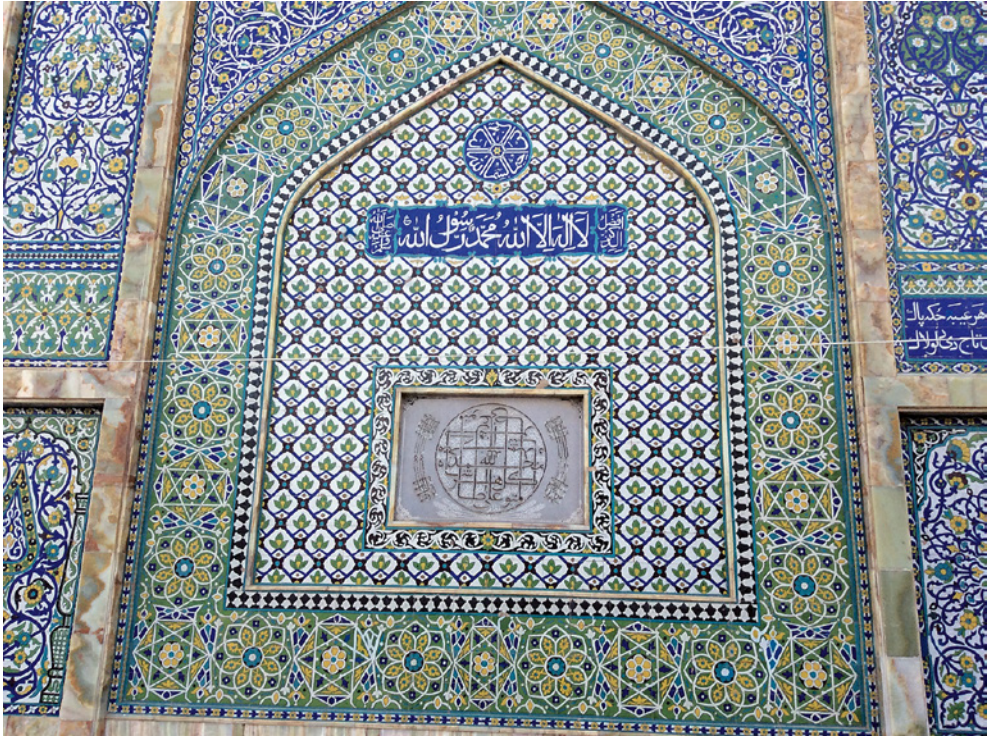


FIGURE 4.10 Muhammad Zahir Khan plaque (Open Jirghay)

and its architecture virtually impossible. We know political events caught up with the shrine in 1987 when its *mutawallī* was assassinated, perhaps because he was doing what all *mutawallīs* had to do, which was ensure the shrine's stability through good relations with the group in power. But in the Qandahar of 1987, the people nominally in power were already reading the handwriting on the wall with the resistance in full flower and the Soviets planning within about a year to withdraw all their forces. Perhaps the *mutawallī* failed to make sufficient overtures or show adequate regard for the leaders of the resistance in the Qandahar region or was simply a victim of the violence that engulfed the city.¹⁰⁷

For three years 1989–92, the national Communist regime survived the Soviet withdrawal, but then fell when the Soviet Union itself broke up and ceased its material support. For four years there was civil war as the various factions that had led the resistance to the Communist regime struggled for dominance until

107 Sieff 2012.



FIGURE 4.11 Pashto poetry from the controversial *Putā Khazana* (Open Jirghay)

the rise of the Taliban in 1996 and their conquest of all but the very northeastern part of the country. In April that year the Cloak was again extracted from its triply-locked nested chests, displayed on the roof of the shrine building, and then donned by Mullah Muhammad Umar, a native of Sang Hisar, a town a few miles west of Qandahar, who then claimed the caliphal title “Commander of the Faithful” (*amīr al-Muʿminīn*) as head of the Taliban. The display of the Cloak was captured in a few seconds of video and soon shown worldwide on BBC.

For the next five years we have no information about the shrine. But then with the American attack on the Taliban following al-Qaʿidah’s bringing down the World Trade Centers in New York City on 11 September 2001, suddenly the shrine reemerges and is revealed to a wider world. With Qandahar under American control, journalists flocked to the city, looked for a story, and found the shrine in its blue tiled glory the most noteworthy landmark in dusty brown Qandahar. We can only sketch here the numerous stories that then emerge about the Cloak and about the people charged with administering the shrine.

22 Post 9/11 Interpretations

As early as 19 December 2001 a story was published in the *New York Times*—“A Tale of the Mullah and Muhammad’s Amazing Cloak”—in which the then *mutawallī* of the shrine, Qari Shah Wali Akhundzadah, told the reporter of the Cloak’s magical properties.¹⁰⁸ Other stories that appeared in 2002, 2008, 2012, and 2014 attempted in varying degrees to get at the “truth” of the story of the Cloak, each riding a bit on the coattails of the preceding accounts. It was also true that the *mutawallī*, as chief spokesman for the shrine, liked to tell different stories to different journalists. Most of the journalists had the added difficulty of communicating with the *mutawallī* of the shrine through interpreters who, depending on their fund of knowledge, may, in turn, have added their own gloss to the stories they were hearing.

An Associated Press (AP) reporter caught the *mutawallī* “his fingers caked in plaster and his white beard flecked with paint” at a moment in November 2002 when the shrine was again undergoing restoration, thanks to the reconstruction policy of the Western occupying forces. One million dollars was said to have been spent all told refurbishing the Shrine of the Cloak, Ahmad Shah’s tomb, and the Shah Maqsud shrine at Khakriz (figure 4.1). Although the AP reporter was told that the money for the renovations came from customs duties and local taxes, the fact that a US Military website shows the retiling of the Shah Maqsud shrine with “help from US Special Forces” and that the governor of Qandahar was quoted as saying that the work was “to show the UN and international donors that we are not (just) sitting and watching” suggests that some of the money making its way to these shrines was from the billions that were pumped into Afghan projects after 9/11.¹⁰⁹

By 2008, the optimistic stories in Western media about “reconstruction” became much less so. The Taliban had by then begun a concerted effort in Qandahar to kill those leaders who had cooperated with the Americans and the Akhundzadah family was one such target. Qari “Shawali” (Shah Wali) Akhundzadah, who is described in newspaper accounts of 2002 as “Keeper of the Cloak” was succeeded by his brother, Sayyid Imam Akhundzadah, who was assassinated not long after. Another of the brothers, Mullah Mas‘ud Akhundzadah, succeeded Sayyid Imam and in a 2008 news account, was reported killed by a suicide bomber.¹¹⁰ By 2012, it was said that five or more previous *mutawallis*—Mullah Mas‘ud’s brothers—Muhammad Mahdi, Qari

108 Onishi 2001.

109 Atayee 2002.

110 Smith 2008.

Shah Wali, and Sayyid Imam—his father, Hajji Pir Muhammad Nabi; and two cousins, or a cousin and a nephew, had all been assassinated and the Taliban blamed for the killings.¹¹¹

Sectarianism, for which the shrine had been used in the past to inflame inter-group hatreds, again came to the fore in 2010 with a rumor that Iran had stolen the old perimeter fence. The Iranian government, as part of its contribution to Afghanistan's "reconstruction," had indeed given the shrine a new railing for the *muḥawwatah* defining the sacred space around the repository of the Cloak. With the permission of someone in the Qandahar governor's office but without notifying the local official of the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Iranians had removed the old fence and installed the new one. The ministry official thereupon raised an alarm, accusing the Iranians of having "stolen" the old fence.¹¹² If the old fence was what is seen as the wall in 1908 it is hard to imagine how the Iranians could have "stolen" it. Destroyed it, yes but not stolen it. Obviously, the ministry must have had something else in mind. How, or even if, the matter was resolved remains unknown, at least to this writer.

23 The Shrine as Sacred Space: Providing Food and Sanctuary (*Bast*)

As has been shown, shrines were used by political figures to assert and perhaps strengthen their ties to their subjects, or so they hoped. Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan made the logo of his regime an image of the south iwan of the Noble Rawzah's Gunbad-i Khanqah to show his allegiance to a powerful Islamic tradition. Sardar Nasr Allah Khan and the amirs Habib Allah Khan and Aman Allah Khan all made very public gestures either on behalf of the shrine in the first two cases or, in the case of the last, at the shrine, using it as a setting to appeal to its devotees. However, up to this point I have neglected what may have seemed to people living with the shrine in Qandahar to be the most important functions it served. One was that of commemoration, remembering an historical personage or the artifact of some personage whose life gave their own lives meaning and made them feel part of a wider community. For the generation of Afghan Durrani of Ahmad Shah's time (mid eighteenth century) his tomb may have served to remind them of the glory days of the repeated looting and conquest campaigns to India. For later generations it was commemoration of Prophet Muhammad by honoring his cloak through performing *ziyarat* that seemed to offer the promise of some stability in an uncertain world where politics were

¹¹¹ Sieff 2012.

¹¹² Foschini and Dam 2014.

in flux, economic life was always subject to forces beyond human control, and the ouster of the Saduza'i royal clan in the 1820s altered the symbolic value of the figure of Ahmad Shah.

There were times, as noted previously, that the Shrine of the Prophet's Cloak provided some very practical solutions to everyday problems, one being physical sustenance. Timur Shah's endowment of the Shahi Canal and the agriculture it supported appears to have been deliberately made to address the serious problem of endemic hunger. There were many other choices he could have made for distributing the proceeds from his endowment—stipends for professors at the madrasah, scholarships for students, and building maintenance. Instead he (and his six brothers) chose to subsidize food, unspecified amounts of cracked wheat, the equivalent of 350 pounds per day of baked bread, and roast lamb on Fridays. It is difficult to imagine this was a purely whimsical decision but must have been inspired by the real plight of the poor of the city. Feeding the poor continued to be seen as the main object of the endowment for at least the next forty years.

Another very practical need that the shrine answered was the ultimate in protection, a kind of insurance against oppressive behavior by forces beyond an individual's control. One of the most often-recorded features of the *khirqah*-shrine was its acknowledged power to provide sanctuary, or at least the promise of sanctuary. The term for sanctuary in Afghanistan is *bast* and one would “sit *bast*” (*bast nishīn gashtan*) or “choose to be in *bast*” (*dar bast guzīdan*) on the grounds of the shrine delineated by the perimeter railing (the *muḥawwatah*). Records of “sitting *bast*” continue from the shrine's founding until very recent times.

At what point it was understood by all concerned that the cloak had the power to extend protection to those who sought sanctuary within the radius of its sanctity is by no means certain. The reported reverence with which the cloak was greeted as it made its way from Badakhshan to Qandahar leaving sacred sites (*qadamgāhs*) in its wake would suggest that the cloak could offer sanctuary by its very presence, however transitory. For Timur Shah, who did the most to give lasting form to the shrine complex in Qandahar, the shrine was first and foremost a site of commemoration to honor his father, Ahmad Shah, whose tomb is an integral part of the complex. In its earliest days there is evidence that commemoration of the life of Ahmad Shah was the primary meaning of the *khirqah*-Cloak site and that that commemoration gave the site sanctity. The author of *Tārīkh-i Husaynī*, writing during the reign of Shah Zaman (1793–1801), in a digression from the story he was telling about the immediate aftermath of the death of Ahmad Shah (1772), described a tradition (probably not more than a decade or so old) that anyone who sought sanctuary at the tomb of Ahmad Shah after committing a “grave sin” other than murder would enjoy “security from being killed or punished.”

Thus, he claimed that many people of all social conditions (“high-born or low”) had taken refuge at Ahmad Shah’s tomb right up to the time he was writing and managed to save their own lives by doing so.¹¹³ His account fails to say what happened when they had to leave the tomb site. The author himself never set foot in Afghanistan and from what he heard may have been using “the tomb of Ahmad Shah” as a reference to the entire site. It is not however until the reign of Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, if we exclude the one reference in *Tārīkh-i Husaynī*, that we find multiple instances of sanctuary-taking reported. The fact that there are so many instances of it under his regime may be interpreted as a sign both of the effective extension of central state control to Qandahar under his harsh regime and also of a well-established tradition of such *bast*-protection. The problem for the historian is that the evidence of sanctuary-seeking arises almost exclusively when the state becomes involved and creates a record of it. Everyday disputes in which sanctuary might have been sought—a wife from an abusive spouse, a debtor from a creditor, two lovers from an outraged spouse or an offended family or clan, or an army deserter in protest of an officer’s heavy-handedness—might well have been resolved without state involvement or, more importantly, since almost all the records we do have involved the government in Kabul, that is, the amir, problems resolved locally have left almost no surviving record. The one exception is the weekly reporting of the British representative in Qandahar. His reports, no doubt largely based on hearsay, provide perhaps a more populist view not only of the use of the shrine as sanctuary but also its use in stirring sectarian sentiments. The records that do survive suggest beyond what is recorded that there was a hidden world of sanctuary-takers many of whom achieved their ends without leaving a documentary trail.

As reported, people seeking protection there took it for many different reasons. In some cases it was to protest what they felt was extortion on the part of tax officials. In a complicated case, dating to the spring of 1897, the chief finance officer (*sar daftar*) of Qandahar wrote to the amir complaining about the poor performance of two men who held the tax concession for Qandahar’s revenues. One of the illegal things they had done, he explains, was to charge the Hindus of Qandahar an excessive rate of taxation for the *jizyah* (head tax on non-Muslims), demanding from them sixteen rupees per head which was much higher than what had been agreed upon. As a consequence he notes, the

113 Imam al-Din Husayn ms, pp. 142–43. Forty years later when the British occupied Qandahar, the legend of the power of Ahmad Shah’s tomb to provide sanctuary was still very much alive as James Rattray recorded in the commentary on his painting “Temple of Ahmed Shauh, At Candahar” (Rattray 1848, p. 27): “It [the tomb complex] is also frequented as an asylum by murderers and malefactors of every degree, and neither justice, nor power, nor rank, nor even the hand of royalty itself, dares to molest or touch them there.”

Hindu merchants had taken *bast* at the Shrine of the Cloak.¹¹⁴ How this was settled is hinted at in the explanation given by the concession-holders that commerce had increased considerably and the Hindus could well afford to pay the higher *jizyah*. This may have been the same case reported by the British representative, Dilawar ‘Ali Shah, whose informants gave him a different story. They reported to him and he passed it on in one of his newsletters that the reason “fifty Hindu merchants” took sanctuary at the shrine was because they “were ordered to pay taxes in ‘the coin of the realm’ instead of in Kabuli [money].”¹¹⁵ What is meant by “coin of the realm” is unclear. One must keep in mind that the phrase “coin of the realm” was not Dilawar ‘Ali Shah’s but that of his translator in Baluchistan. Since the Kabuli rupee was the coin of the Afghan realm perhaps what Dilawar ‘Ali Shah was referring to was English coinage, i.e. the Indian rupee known in Afghanistan as the *kallahdār*, *kāldār*, or *chihrah-shāhī* (the rupee with the “head” or “face” of the English sovereign). The translator, knowing his audience, might then refer to it as “coin of the realm” and not risk any misunderstanding.

There are at least three other recorded cases of Hindus taking sanctuary at the shrine. The late Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah Khan, prime minister (*ṣadr-i a‘zam*) under Amir Shayr ‘Ali Khan had reportedly deposited 64,590 rupees with a Hindu moneychanger in Qandahar, Diwan Shanku. In 1894, Sayyid Nur Muhammad’s son sent the government documentation showing that this was money that belonged to the government and so a bill was issued to Diwan Shanku. In July 1894, unwilling and probably unable to pay the sum, Diwan Shanku took sanctuary at the shrine with his family. According to Fayz Muhammad, he was tricked into leaving the shrine at which point pressure was brought to bear and the money was collected from him and from his relatives.¹¹⁶ There is an oddly similar case found in the *Kandahar Newsletters* apparently involving the same Sayyid Nur Muhammad’s estate but dating to 1885. The British representative then, Mir Hashim, reported that the governor [in 1885 the governor was Sardar Nur Muhammad Khan, a son of Sultan Muhammad Khan, brother of Amir Dust Muhammad Khan] had accused a “Sahibzadah” of holding property belonging to “Syed Nur Muhammad Khan’s son.” The Sahibzadah had taken refuge in the shrine but was forcibly removed by members of the regular Ardali regiment and beaten. This violation of the sanctity of *bast* had caused considerable grumbling amongst the populace

114 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, *tatimmat* to volume 3, p. 78.

115 *Kandahar Newsletters*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 6.

116 Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 3, p. 1016.

and its leaders were complaining that “they had suffered enough from worldly troubles but now their religion was also being interfered with.”¹¹⁷

In the second case involving a Hindu and dating to February 1895, a banker sat *bast*. Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan had been told that he was in possession of one lakh of rupees which had been deposited with him by a now deceased sayyid (still the same Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah?). The banker’s relatives were arrested in response to his taking sanctuary. The British news writer, Dilawar ‘Ali Shah, who was then new to the job, was clearly intrigued by the power of the shrine to provide sanctuary and added a note to his report describing the shrine of whose function at this point he had little understanding. It is, he says (or as he is translated), “a Muhammadan sanctuary in Kandahar and one who is involved (in financial transactions) and is unable to pay the debt takes refuge in the shrine and is thus considered free from liability.”¹¹⁸ Hardly the case, as the reported arrest of the banker’s relatives indicates.

The issue of Muslim communal loyalties also arises in the third case of a Hindu *bast*-taker in the spring of 1903. Accused of theft, the man took sanctuary at the shrine. The news of this first reached the chief secretary of the governor, Mirza Fayz Muhammad, a man who, in light of his position and the reaction of Sunnis, was most probably a Qizilbash, an Imami Shi‘i. When the mirza heard of the Hindu thief’s taking refuge, he reportedly said, “This *dharamsāl* [i.e. dharamshala, a Hindu sanctuary] doesn’t do the government any good.” Some Afghans and Muhammadza’is who overheard him were incensed by his words and drew their swords to punish this insult of calling the Shrine of the Cloak a *dharamsāl*. With considerable difficulty, the mirza escaped and hid himself in the citadel whereupon the governor suspended him from his duties and awaited orders from the amir as to what to do with him. The qadi of Qandahar also issued a fatwa pronouncing him a kafir and subject to execution. Sayyid ‘Abid Husayn, the British Indian news writer at the time who reported the incident, was himself Shi‘i as were all the British news writers in Qandahar and so was sympathetic to him. There is no report of the outcome.

Despite the apparent ecumenism of the shrine when it came to offering protection, it was also a flashpoint for sectarian hatreds as the above incident suggests. Anti-Shi‘ism in the cities of Afghanistan, most notably in Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat was a fact of life from 1737 onwards after Nadir Shah Afshar planted communities of Iranian soldiers and bureaucrats in those cities, groups that came to be known generically as “Qizilbash” (“redheads” a term dating back to the rise of the Safavid dynasty in Iran at the beginning of the sixteenth

117 *Kandahar Newsletters*, vol. 2, no. 36, 9 November 1885.

118 *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 6, no. 3.

century) and “Farsiwan” (Persian speakers). The situation was probably exacerbated by the fact that members of the Qizilbash community often held high positions in the central and provincial chancelleries. On occasion, sparked by a quickly-spreading rumor of some Shi‘i outrage (usually unfounded) there would be a spasm of violence against the Qizilbash community which would wrack the city for a short period and then die down. But the embers of hatred were never completely extinguished. The kinds of rumors that would light the fire were those things that involved violations of honor (notably sexual offenses) or less commonly some supernatural privilege enjoyed by Shi‘is such as their widely-rumored immunity from epidemics. It appears that the shrine itself had little appeal for the Qizilbash, perhaps because the Sunnis used it to launch sectarian riots, often implicitly supported by the government. Or perhaps because Shi‘is of Afghanistan had their own shrines in which the figure of their first imam, ‘Ali son of Abu Talib, was preeminent such as the ‘Alid shrine at Mazar-i Sharif, Sakhi in Kabul, or the Shah Maqsud shrine in Khakriz.

According to the British news writer, Mir Hashim, in his report of 1881 or 1883¹¹⁹ [this story does not appear in Afghan sources] it was the custom at the time to remove the Cloak from the shrine and parade it to the holiday mosque grounds (the ‘Idgah) outside the city walls during festivals. On the occasion reported by Mir Hashim, the Cloak was apparently taken out in celebration of the hajj-pilgrimage, although exactly why it was taken out is not explained. The report reads:

The day that the Holy Cloak was taken to the Idgah, Mulla Takhmir stood on the roof of the mausoleum and, in the presence of the Governor and the Sepah Salar (field marshal) and the whole population called out in a loud voice that Farsiwans [Qizilbash] are the same as Faringhies and Hindus and are Kafirs. This sort of speech is likely to provoke disturbances in the country.

In the following week’s newsletter, the representative reported on the latest cholera epidemic that was afflicting Qandahar and reveals how such moments released sectarian hatreds:

119 There is a small dating problem here since the *Kandahar Newsletters*, volume 1, pp. 109 and 112 give the impossible correspondence of 3 Zihijjah to 26 October 1883. But if it had been 3 Zihijjah then that would have only corresponded to the year 1881 (3 Zihijjah = 27 October 1881). Probably the Zihijjah date corresponding to 1883 should be treated as the correct one and 5 or 6 October 1883 as the correct correspondence, not 26 October.

Not a single Farsiwan was attacked (by the cholera epidemic) and the Afghans prepare to make this a pretext for fighting the Farsiwans. This is the result of the Governor's want of resolution in not having Mulla Takhmir punished for denouncing the Farsiwans as Kafirs on the day the Holy Cloak was taken out.¹²⁰

It should be noted that the administrators of the shrine, on at least one occasion, were singled out for having helped defuse a sectarian outburst. The episode occurred in 1919 when Sunni tribesmen had left the area to wage jihad against the English in the brief War of Independence. Fufalza'i tells a story of the murder of a prominent Sunni sayyid left partially buried "outside the door of the chief water supervisor (*mīrāb-bāshī*) of the city."¹²¹ The implication here is that the *mīrāb-bāshī* was Shi'ite for when the news reached Afghan *ghāzīs* at Spin Boldak, the border with British India, they quickly returned to Qandahar and began a violent pogrom. Fufalza'i does not mention that the victims were Qizilbash Shi'is but they were the obvious targets. Nothing else would make sense. Fufalza'i then tells us that Hajji 'Abd al-Hamid Akhundzadah, *mutawallī* of the shrine, intervened to make peace between the two sides. He concludes, "when it ended it was clear that the incident had been at the hand of outsiders [i.e. the English] who hoped it would derail the fight for independence."¹²²

The vast majority of sanctuary-seekers were, of course, Sunni Muslims, and sometimes they crowded the place. The sanctuary or *ḥaram* area defined by the perimeter wall was fairly large and could absorb a sizeable crowd of asylum seekers if necessary. Possibly with some exaggeration, the British news writer, Dilawar 'Ali Shah, wrote in his twenty-fifth newsletter of 1895 dated 18 July:

Were it not for the shrine of Khirka-i-Sharif, the local jails would have been full. Some 800–1,000 men are at present sheltering in the shrine pending the arrival of Sardar Nasralla Khan, whom they contemplate petitioning on his arrival at Kandahar. Hindus and Musalmans take shelter in the shrine and, as already noted, the law cannot touch them so long as they remain there. A few days ago the Governor posted orderlies on the gates of the shrine with orders to arrest anyone entering or issuing from

120 *Kandahar Newsletters*, vol. 1, pp. 111–12.

121 Fufalza'i 1988, pp. 112–13.

122 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

the gates. As the general opinion was that the Governor's illness (a stroke) was due to this action, the orderlies were withdrawn.¹²³

There is no information as to what, if anything, Prince Nasr Allah did regarding the refuge-takers on his arrival in Qandahar. He performed *ziyarat* at the shrine and would no doubt have noticed "800–1,000" refugees clamoring for his attention but no record exists of any action taken if the situation were indeed as reported by the British agent.

But the power of sanctuary at the shrine was not absolute. Amir 'Abd al-Rahman had already established his willingness to ignore the inviolability of *bast* at the Shrine of the Cloak. Having defeated his first rival for the throne, Sardar Muhammad Ayyub Khan, a son of the former amir Shayr 'Ali Khan, at Qandahar in September 1881, he expelled one of the *sardār's* supporters from the shrine and claimed to have personally executed him.¹²⁴ However, it was not until 1895 that the amir decided to set official limits on *bast*-sitting. In that year, the amir was confronted with a group of sanctuary-taking Qandahar officials who had reportedly swindled the government out of hundreds of thousands of rupees, or so it was claimed by someone sent from Kabul to investigate corruption. So by decree the amir established a new policy on *bast*. Asserting that those corrupt officials were polluting the shrine by seeking sanctuary there, he ordered them removed by force and then issued the following order:

I inform the people of Qandahar that if there is a problem among them, other than a governmental issue, and they should take refuge at the Holy Cloak so that perhaps their adversary, out of regard for the Cloak's sanctity, will forgive them, that is perfectly fine and there is no obstacle to entering within the walls of the Cloak. But if tax assessors or collectors, murderers, fornicators, traitors, or violators of the Shari'ah or governmental regulations should enter and take sanctuary with the cloak, they should be expelled forthwith and held to account in accordance with the Holy Law, and whatever is required after a review of their account books.¹²⁵

From that point on, at least as long as he lived (until October 1901), those who were excluded from the protection of sanctuary by his decree were forcibly removed or in some cases starved out.

123 *Kandahar Newsletters*, volume 7, pp. 46–47.

124 Sultan Mahomed Khan 1900, vol. 1, p. 216. It should be noted, however, that this is a controversial part of the so-called "autobiography" of the amir.

125 Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, volume 3, pp. 1088–89.

The amir himself had a personal tie to a sanctuary-seeker whose case was not covered by either of the two situations his proclamation foresaw and in fact was the kind of situation not likely to have been memorialized. It concerned his brother-in-law, Shahzadah Jahangir Khan, the son of Mir Jahandar Shah, father of the amir's first wife, Bibi Jan. Shahzadah Jahangir Khan had been forced into internal exile in Qandahar from his homeland of Badakhshan because of an uprising there against the amir. He came to suffer from mental illness and in May of 1899 became so deranged that his wife and children, feeling threatened by his behavior, took refuge at the shrine. The amir's response was surprisingly compassionate. He instructed the governor of Qandahar not to treat his brother-in-law as a madman, which probably would have meant incarceration, but to try and find some effective treatment. He was also ordered not to suspend his brother-in-law's stipend nor that of his brothers, who also had been forced to move from Badakhshan, "lest they be demeaned and embarrassed."¹²⁶ How his wife and children were to be protected is not reported.

There are many more examples of sanctuary-taking during the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman and later.¹²⁷ What is important to note is that despite these apparent arbitrary violations of the sanctity of *bast* at the shrine, people were not discouraged from resorting to it and it continued to be a recourse for those with a grievance, especially a financial one. Writing about the situation in the late 1950s, the American anthropologist Louis Dupree sardonically noted a kind of ritual performance, as he tells it, involving *bast*-sitting at the Shrine of the Cloak:

Each year, about December, the governor of Qandahar notified the landowners of their delinquent taxes. Each year the landowners (or their *arbab* [stewards, foremen]) gathered in and about the governor's compound, listened to the governor's complaints, and then marched en masse to the nearby mosque compound, Masjid-i-Jami-Kherka-Mobarak [*sic*], which traditionally contains a fragment of the cloak of the Prophet Mohammad ... [T]he landowners and *arbab* settled down for a few hours (or a few days at the most) until the exasperated governor gave in. These annual tableaux offered a welcome break in the beginning of winter ... All—except the governor—seemed to enjoy these exercises of will and tradition.¹²⁸

126 Fayz Muhammad 2013–2016, vol. 4, p. 295.

127 McChesney 2018, pp. 217–19. Another incident was the revolt of a Nurza'i battalion in Qandahar over delinquent pay and their sitting *bast* at the shrine on two occasions in late 1923. (See Nawid 1999, p. 99.)

128 Dupree, L. 1980, p. 536.

24 The Shrine's Power to Bless

Besides offering sanctuary and serving to focus sectarian animus, the Shrine of the Cloak was also seen as a source of blessings (*fayẓ* or *barakah*). One such blessing which would last through eternity was obtained by burial within the perimeter of the shrine. There is a poignant story about Sardar Muhammad Amin Khan, Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan's brother and governor of Qandahar for a time. He was a devoted servant of the *mutawallī* and staff of the shrine and in his last will and testament he asked to be buried beneath a downspout from the roof of the shrine so that rain water running off the roof would continually freshen his grave with the shrine's blessings. Unfortunately for him, when he was killed on 6 June 1865 in Kalat to the northeast of Qandahar and his body was brought back to the city, because no one was there at the time who knew his testament, he was buried within the precincts but in the eastern part of the grounds near the entry vestibule (*dālān*) well away from the shrine building's downspouts. His tomb was still visible there in 1962 when Fufalza'i did his research.¹²⁹

There can be little doubt, even though records are nonexistent, that the shrine was frequented by people seeking blessings for all the reasons that shrines are revered—to cure infertility and illness, to alleviate poverty, or to grant some other wish. In addition, having a child blessed at the shrine for protection against the evil eye, to purchase one's prayer beads or have them blessed there, to have a gift blessed before giving it, all these things made the shrine invaluable to Qandahar society. We have only one example of a version of this "blessing" recorded because it involved a justified fear of governmental punishment.

Sometime in 1899, the chief fiscal officer of Qandahar, Ghulam Muhammad Khan Wardak, became apprehensive because he was extorting money and goods from people who had been newly appointed as revenue agents before allowing them to take up their duties. Afraid of being found out, he wrote the amir an exculpatory note in which he explained about some 6,000 rupees he could not otherwise account for saying they had been given him as a gift. He asked if he could use the money to buy some farmland to provide food for himself and his family or whether he should deposit it in the treasury. The amir had long since established a strict policy about his officials taking gifts and not notifying him, but was apparently persuaded by the official's representations and, in an unusual for him display of forbearance, granted Ghulam

¹²⁹ Fufalza'i 1988, p. 140.

Muhammad's request to buy some land with the 6,000 rupees. Thereupon, says Fayz Muhammad:

Thankful for this favor, he went to the precincts of the Holy Cloak with his wife and son and there offered up prayers for the perpetuity of the government and its authority and for the long life of His Majesty. He had the following items blessed at the shrine: a piece of finely embroidered silk turban cloth, two [women's] gold-thread skull caps, one set of prayer beads made of Shah Maqsud stone [a type of serpentine], and one finely embroidered silk handkerchief and sent them to His Majesty.¹³⁰

He also reported to the amir the prayers that he had offered on his behalf.

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Like the other shrines that have been discussed, the Shrine of the Cloak served multiple functions for the people of Qandahar. For its administrators it became a source of family wealth and power; for politicians it was an instrument for asserting their role in society to promote Islam and the way it was practiced locally; for Qandahar society as a whole it was an object of pride and something that distinguished the city and made it a destination for outsiders; and for the ordinary Qandahari it was a beacon of stability and hope in a world in a constant state of political and economic uncertainty. The believer understood the agency it could bring to their lives through its role, at least at one time, to be a source of food in times of hunger, to provide the intangible but real benefit of blessings, and in extreme situations to provide asylum from physical violence.

¹³⁰ Fayz Muhammad 2013–16, vol. 4, p. 262.

Conclusion

Buildings enjoy long life because they inspire meaning in the communities responsible for their maintenance and preservation. The historian of architecture must rely on communal memory as preserved in texts or inferred from artifacts to have any sense of what those meanings, whether practical or symbolic, might have been.

The survival over centuries of a monumental piece of architecture should raise a number of questions. What does it represent in terms of practical use and in terms of commemorative value? What makes it worth the sacrifice that the investment of critical resources necessarily entails for its creation and preservation, such as the required infusions of labor and capital? Does it provide a meaningful function or stand as a significant symbol that its community, no matter how far-flung, does not want to live without? Such questions engage any student of architecture no matter the cultural setting in which the monument is found.

Biology dictates that communities continually change as generations succeed one another. The survival of architecture requires that successive communities find some commemorative or practical value in the structures they inherit. What buildings stand for is therefore likely to change with the passage of time as each generation addresses the meaning of existence in its own fashion. The answers arrived at will influence the way the architecture evolves, sometimes dramatically, sometimes gradually. Then there are changes which occur because of natural events. These require a community to accept those changes as irremedial or attempt to rectify them.

The four monumental commemorative shrines that form the subject of this book all changed in significant ways through the course of their separate existences. The Gur-i Mir in Samarqand begins as a modest, then a magnificent, addition to the madrasah of a grandson of Amir Timur, Muhammad Sultan the son of Jahangir Sultan, a place for the burial of Muhammad Sultan and shortly thereafter his grandfather. From secular mausoleum, its meaning is quickly recast with the burial of a holy man, Mir Sayyid Barakah. From that point on, the mausoleum challenges the primacy of the madrasah for the meaning of the site and, for a time, its place as a dynastic necropolis gives it a meaning equivalent to, if not greater than, that of a sacred site blessed by the presence of a saint. With the passing of the Timurids from Central Asia, their memory remains important mainly to their direct descendants, the Mughals, who forge a new empire in India. Locally, the site's importance is remembered for the presence of the holy man and not less for the madrasah's function as

employer and contributor to Samarqand's economy. The site, through the madrasah, is kept afloat by a steadily shrinking endowment as well as by regular remittances from successive Mughal rulers seeking to maintain the dignity of their forebears' burial place. By the mid-nineteenth century the endowment appears a shadow of its former self while the decline and eventual disappearance of Mughal power from the early eighteenth century on ends the remittances. But then the forced imposition of an entirely foreign culture, that of Christian Europe in the form of Tsarist Russia radically changes the meaning of the site as far as those with the means to maintain it are concerned and thus alters whatever importance the madrasah still retains. The significance of the site becomes derived from the Gur-i Mir, the Timurid legacy is revived and whatever is left of the madrasah's architecture disappears. Soon, the cultural revolution that overtook Christian Russia in October 1917 finds new meaning in the Gur-i Mir. While further invigorating its Timurid identity, new ideas of "people's art" and historic preservation produced new meaning and mustered new resources to alter the fabric of its architecture. Efforts were made to create physical links between some of those buried in the mausoleum and the living community that inherited it. In its most recent iteration, the Gur-i Mir has been transformed into the centerpiece of a nationalist project, the site's official interpretation eliding the sacredness of a saint's presence in favor of promoting it as a symbol of the nation's historical greatness. The sacrality of the shrine persists, however with a popular transference of the saintliness of the holy man, Mir Sayyid Barakah, to the foundational figure of Amir Timur, now the producer of miracles.

The Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa shrine in Balkh City shows some similar symptoms of transference and altered meaning but was not subjected to the radical social changes taking place a few hundred miles north of it in the twentieth century and therefore to major changes in the interpretation of the site. The monumental piece of architecture affiliated with the shrine did see its meaning soon transferred from the Timurid-era family for whom it was built to the saint whose grave lies adjacent to it. Its architecture underwent two major transformations related to new interpretations and several minor transformations. The minor ones came when its role as a learning center was in the ascendant and madrasahs were added to its architectural ensemble. Later when the madrasah function ceased, for whatever reasons, to attract adequate financing, the mausoleum with its "encircling madrasah" reverted wholly to the function of congregational or Friday mosque signified by an accompanying name change. Two major transformations of the architecture occurred, the first in the 1590s when the *gunbad*-mausoleum built by the Timurid general Mir Mazid Arghun was reinterpreted by the Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrid ruler at Balkh, 'Abd

al-Mu'min Sultan, as a four-iwan mosque with a monumental entry iwan or *pīshṭāq* covered in ceramic tile and with inscriptions expressing latent political grievances. The second major transformation came in the twenty-first century with a rebuilding of the “encircling madrasah” portion, though still deemed unquestionably to be a mosque and a congregational one at that. Motivated by notions of the “reconstruction” and “rebuilding” of Afghanistan during a lull in the generations-long civil war and the attendant destruction of infrastructure, the work was financed by a non-Muslim secular government as a symbol of international cooperation. It had little to do with the saintly legacy of the site. For the local population, the motives behind the reconstruction probably made little impression. The community received a new mosque, a rehabilitated *ṣuffah*-sepulcher for the eponymous saint, and a park with rejuvenated shrine for another iconic figure, the poetess Rabi'ah Balkhi.

The Noble Rawzah, the shrine to 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661 AD), the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, at Mazar-i Sharif, is also a telling example of how changed interpretations and the derivation of new meanings affected architecture. In the late 1400s, Sultan-Husayn Bayqara, the ruler of Khurasan (western and eastern Iran today) saw in the claimed rediscovery of the final resting place of the fourth Sunni caliph and first Shi'i imam an opportunity both to assert his credentials as an Islamizer and to translate the event into an economic development project. Over the course of a decade or more, he had a mausoleum at the rediscovered tomb site constructed, endowed it with commercial facilities (a market and a bath) and an expanded irrigation system, and then organized the management of the new shrine and its economy under his direct supervision and with his own personnel. If there had been a preexisting shrine, which seems possible, Sultan-Husayn reinvigorated the meaning of the site and set a pattern of political patronage of the Noble Rawzah (noble garden) as it was soon to be called that would remain a way in which the site was interpreted for centuries to come. Major changes to the architecture in the form of horizontal and vertical expansion by the Jani-Begid Abu'l-Khayrid 'Abd al-Mu'min between 1582 and 1598 and by the Tuqay-Timurid Wali Muhammad Khan in the first decade of the seventeenth century continued to express this devotional interpretation.

Afghan rule after 1849 did little to alter the deferential behavior towards the shrine of those who held sway over the Balkh region. Once the administrative center was moved finally from Balkh to the shrine center, Mazar-i Sharif, in the 1870s every governor and several of the amirs did their best to put their mark, sometimes substantial, on the architecture according to the resources available to them. One governor expanded the domes of the Noble Rawzah

and faced the exterior with ceramic tile. Others remodeled the gates leading into the *ḥaram* area, the sacred inner precincts surrounding the double-halled Noble Rawzah. Through renovations and inscriptions, all these figures sought to identify themselves very publicly with what the shrine commemorated.

At the end of the 1880s, after his army had suppressed a major challenge to his rule, the Afghan amir, ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, spent a year and a half in Mazar-i Sharif brutally purging those he thought had supported the insurrection. At the same time, he made use of the shrine seemingly to expiate any sense of guilt for the blood he had shed or perhaps simply to impose his will on it through architecture. Late twentieth-century rulers of the Balkh region, the Uzbek Abdur Rashid Dostum and the Tajik Atta Muhammad Noor, approached the Noble Rawzah in much the same frame of mind imposing their own architectural visions. Dostum sponsored a major renovation of the interior decoration as well as a series of large monuments outside the shrine precincts but connected to it by position and theme, while Atta Muhammad Noor added a large new congregational mosque in 2018–19 and a distinctive row of commemorative tablets celebrating himself as well as the intellectual heritage of the shrine and the region to which it gave a reinforcing center of sacredness.

Of all four sites, the shrine in Qandahar, believed to hold a fragment of the Cloak of the Prophet Muhammad, has left the least information about its architectural development yet a comparably rich trove of records documenting its social and political history. From the outset the ensemble included the *gunbad*-tomb of Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1772) and a separate complex of shrine (*mazār*), madrasah, and mosque, as they would appear later on, forming a connected structure around a courtyard with, at some point, a pool. Much of our information about the Qandahar shrine relates to its administration's contentious relations with provincial government officials and with the central government, when one existed. The Shrine of the Cloak also focuses attention on one of the most important features of all the shrines, their perceived ability to provide two forms of relief—relief from political, fiscal, and individual oppression through the granting of sanctuary (*bast*) and relief from disease and other ailments through the granting of cures. The records for the Qandahar shrine also underscore its power to bless—objects and people alike. The universal belief in the shrine's spiritual power meant that individuals attempting themselves to assert and project power sought at times to identify their goals with those of the shrine, as Amir Aman Allah Khan did on several occasions in order to advance an ultimately doomed project of social reform. More recently the last king of Afghanistan made a great show of renovating the shrine and like his cousin, Aman Allah before him, even performed *ziyārat* in

person. Other members of the ruling elite made efforts to identify themselves with the shrine through spectacular and well publicized gifts recorded for posterity in an inscription or in the pages of a book.

All the shrines reveal themselves through the written and photographic record as serving similar instrumental ends. The study of the architectural evolution of the shrines was obviously much enhanced, by the invention and use of photography. Indeed it is hard to imagine how such a study could be carried out without recourse to the evidence provided by images. When photographs can be dated, they are obviously even more valuable for understanding the evolution of the architecture they depict. Without the dated photographic evidence, for example, it would have been impossible to attribute the June 1956 earthquake in the mountains of central Afghanistan to the massive destruction caused at both the Khwajah Abu Nasr Parsa mausoleum in Balkh and the Noble Rawzah at Mazar-i Sharif. The rich photographic record of the Gur-i Mir in Samarqand provides a nearly year by year record of architectural change, especially during the tourist years of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

There is always an impulse for historians of architecture to seek out the original and authentic building. But as we have seen it is virtually impossible to find buildings unchanged over centuries just as it is impossible to find unchanged societies. The architecture that remains today as well as what has vanished represents the ideas of successive communities that sought to commemorate the meaning they found in their shrines through architectural modifications. Had it not been so, had the buildings not elicited meaning for every generation, they would not have survived at all, as was the case for many of the buildings affiliated with the mausolea of the shrines.

A shrine's capacity to encourage and nourish a sense of its importance in the minds of both local and distant peoples, those who valued one or more of the building's meanings—as a link to the divine through burial and pilgrimage, as a focus for the transmission of social values, as a cultic venue, as assembly hall, local employer, linchpin of urban renewal, nationalist monument, cultural icon, object of scholarly study, or touristic curiosity—contributes to its continued existence. The long-term survival of any of the shrines discussed here is by no means assured, of course, but their histories tell us that they have survived because of their malleable nature, their capacity for renewal, and their ability to symbolize different things to different generations.

Glossary

For architectural terms it is also useful to consult Golombek and Wilber 1988, vol. 1, pp. 469–71; O’Kane 1987, pp. 385–88; Koch 1991, pp. 137–42; and idem 2006, pp. 260–62.

ajzā (see *juz*)

aywān, aivān see *īwān*

‘āmil (pl. *‘ummāl, ‘amalah*) agent, factor, functionary

amīn trustee, cf. *mutawallī*

arg citadel, fortress, cf. *bālā ḥiṣār*

atālīq Turkic title usually given to a high advisor, someone assigned to a prince by the khan as counsellor

bāgh garden, park, cf. *chahār bāgh*

bālā ḥiṣār citadel, cf. *arg*

bandar customs post

bannā builder, contractor, cf. *mi‘mār, muhandis*

barakah blessing, divine favor, cf. *fayz*

bast sanctuary, refuge

buyūtāt workshops, outbuildings

chahār bāgh formal garden, park

chahār ṣuffah and *chahār ṭāq* design form of vaulted spaces around an open square

chaman terrace, lawn, field

chīghāt requisitions, cf. *ṣūyūrsāt/sūrsāt*

chihilyakah “one-fortieth,” a tax of 2.5%, cf. *zakāt*

chihrah-shāhī “king’s face” a name for the English rupee, cf. *kāldār, kallah-dār*

dāk the Afghan Post, carried by runners

dāk-khānah postal station

dakhmah grave, tomb

dālān vestibule, anteroom, cf. *dihlīz*

dar-i iḥrām “door of sanctity,” the name of the south gate of the Noble Rawzāh

dār al-‘ilm “house of knowledge,” cf. *madrasah*

dastūr al-‘amal manual, set of instructions

dīg cauldron, kettle, sometime used for a kettledrum

dihlīz vestibule, anteroom, cf. *dālān*

dīwān chancellery

dīwānbeḡī minister, chief minister, cf. *wazīr*

du‘ā-gū professional prayer

- dū āshyānah* “double-roofed” or “double-domed;” architectural feature in which one dome encloses another
- farmān* royal edict
- farrāsh* custodian
- farrāsh-bāshī* chief custodian
- farsakh, farsang* a unit of length approximately equal to six miles
- fayz* grace, divine favor, cf. *barakah*
- gaz* unit of linear measurement, approximately thirty inches, cf. *zarʿ*
- ghāzī* holy warrior
- guldastah* balcony for the muezzin on a minaret
- gulū* throat, main part of a minaret
- gunbad/gunbaḡ* domed building; often a mausoleum
- gūr* grave, tomb
- gūristān* cemetery
- gūrkhānah* mausoleum
- ḥāfiẓ* (pl. *ḥuffāẓ*) one who has memorized the entire Qurʾan; a person employed for public recitations at ceremonial occasions and for religious services
- ḥākīm* governor, cf. *nāʾib al-ḥukūmah*
- ḥakīm* practitioner of Galenic (Yunānī) medicine
- ḥaram* sacrosanct area (hence the women in the family, the harem)
- ḥaramsarāy* women’s quarters
- ḥarām* forbidden, prohibited by law
- ḥarīm* areas around waterways and wells that could not be privately owned
- harīсах* a kind of stew
- ḥawālah* bill of exchange, invoice
- ḥawīlah* compound house, mansion
- ḥawz* pool, cistern
- ḥaẓīrah* walled or fenced funerary enclosure
- ḥaẓrat* his excellency, the honorable (a title of high distinction)
- iḥāṭah* enclosure, especially a sacred enclosure, (cf. *muḥawwaṭah, muḥāwaṭah*)
- ʾidgāh* holiday prayer area, usually an open space with permanent mihrab.
- ʾimārat* building, palace
- iwān* or *aywān* vaulted space, cf. *ṭāq, pīshṭāq, ṣuffah*
- jalsah* kneeling position in the *rakʿah*
- jarīb* areal and linear measurement, approximately .5 acres (areal) and sixty *gaz* (linear)
- jīzyah* tax on non-Muslims living in a Muslim area
- jūy* water channel, canal, cf. *nahr*
- juz* (pl. *ajzā*) part, section; as a technical term, one of the thirty parts into which the Qurʾan is divided, cf. *sipārah*

- kāldār* (var. *kallah-dār*) “face-showing”, another name for the English rupee with the sovereign’s head, cf. *chihrah-shāhī*
- karāmah* (pl. *karāmāt*) lesser miracle, marvel, wonder
- kāshī-kārī* glazed ceramic tile
- katārah* balustrade
- khalīfah* deputy or successor (to the head of a Sufi confraternity), caliph
- khānqāh* (or *khānaqāh*) hospice, lodge, especially a Sufi lodge
- kharwār* unit of weight equal to approximately 1,200 lbs.
- khātimah* conclusion, appendix
- khiyābān* avenue, a street design with a water channel and landscaping
- khizānah* treasury
- khuṭbah* the homily delivered at the Friday noon service during which the sovereign’s name is invoked
- kitābdār* librarian, manager of a scriptorium
- kitābkhānah* library, scriptorium
- kurūh* measure of distance, about two miles
- langarkhānah* kitchen, lodge, cf. *maṭbakh*
- laylat al-qadr* “Night of Power”—the night in Ramazan (the 27th) when the Qur’an was first sent down
- maḥkamah* Muslim law court
- maktab* school, usually elementary level
- mamālik-i mawrūsī* (*yah*) the “patrimonial lands,” especially in the Mughals view of Central Asia
- manzil* residence; also halting place or rest area
- marqad* resting place, tomb, grave, cf. *maẓjaʿ*, *qabr*, *gūr*, *dakhmah*
- marṣiyah* elegy
- maṣḥaf* copy of the Qur’an
- maṣjid* mosque
- maṣjid-i-jāmiʿ* congregational or Friday mosque
- maṭbakh* kitchen, cf. *langarkhānah*
- mazār* (pl. *mazārāt*) shrine
- maẓjaʿ* resting place, cf. *marqad*
- miʿmār* architect, builder, cf. *bannāʿ*, *muhandis*
- mīnā-kārī* enamel work
- mīrāb* irrigation control officer
- mīrāb-bāshī* chief irrigation control officer
- muʿāf* sustenance, stipend
- mudarris* professor in a madrasah
- muhandis* engineer, builder, cf. *miʿmār*, *bannāʿ*
- muḥawwaṭah* (or *muḥāwaṭah*) enclosure, especially of sacred space, cf. *iḥāṭah*
- muhtasib* market inspector, policeman of public morals

- mujāwir* shrine denizen, casual employee, often earning a living through services provided to pilgrims
- mullā* mullah, a figure with a knowledge of Muslim law and theology
- mullā-bāshī* chief mullah
- muqarnas* stalactite design of a squinch often marking the transition boundary of a rectangular structure to a dome
- muṣallā* mosque, prayer space with a mihrab, sometimes used for holiday prayer ground, cf. *īdgāh*
- mutawallī* trustee, especially of an endowment, cf. *amīn*
- mutawallī-bāshī* chief trustee
- mū-yi mubārak* “Blessed Hair,” hair of the Prophet Muhammad
- nahr* (pl. *anhār*) large canal, river, cf. *jūy*
- nā’ib al-ḥukūmah* high governor, a title favored by Afghan governments for the heads of major provinces (Afghan Turkistan, Ghazni, Qandahar, Herat)
- namāz* the Persian term for *ṣalāt*, the five daily moments of worship, or prayer, required of every Muslim
- naqīb* a usually civilian title of distinction covering a variety of duties and responsibilities
- naqqārah-khānah* literally “drum house” a music room often set over a gateway where drums were beaten or music played to signal the arrival or departure of the sovereign
- nazr* (pl. *nuzūr*, *nuzūrāt*) votive offering
- pādshāh* sovereign, king
- panjarah* screen, grating, (grille) window
- qabr* grave, cf. *gūr*, *dakhmah*, *saghānah*
- qabristān* cemetery, cf. *gūristān*
- qadamgāh* “footstep site,” a shrine created where a saint has visited, cf. *mazār*, *ziyāratgāh*
- qa’l-khān* prince-regent, heir-apparent, cf. *tūrah*
- qandīl* or *qindīl* architectural lantern, finial, chandelier
- qishlāq* village, winter quarters
- qiyām* the standing position in the course of the *raḳ’ah*
- qubbah* dome, by extension, a mausoleum
- qubbah-i rukhdār* ribbed dome
- quṭb* pole, axis, a title used for particularly significant Sufi figures
- raḳ’ah* the series of physical positions (standing, kneeling, prostrating) and the accompanying recitations that form the prayer *namāz/ṣalāt*
- rawzah* garden, Paradise
- riwāq* arched opening, portico or porch

- riwāqāt* cloister
- rūḥānīyat* spirituality
- safīnah* a manuscript volume containing several works, usually poetry
- ṣāḥib-i qirān* “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction,” the title given Amir Timur and adopted by later sovereigns (e.g. the Mughal, Shah Jahan, and the Iranian, Nadir Shah Afshar)
- sajdah* prostration position assumed during the course of the *rak‘ah*
- salām ‘alaykum* Persian form of the Arabic greeting “*as-salāmu ‘alaykum*” (peace be upon you)
- sanbūсах* fried stuffed pastry
- sarāy/serai* large house, mansion, warehouse (cf. *tīm*)
- sar daftar* bureau chief
- sardār* A prefixed title of honor, generally, but not exclusively, limited to male members of a Durrānī Afghān clan
- ṣawmī‘ah* cloister, abbey, cf., *khānqāh*
- shahādah* profession of faith, (“there is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God”)
- shamshād* boxwood
- silsilah* genealogy, either spiritual or biological
- siṭārah* one of the thirty parts of the Qur’an cf. *juz*
- ṣuffah* raised platform, dais, bulwark, vault, cf. *iwan*, *ṭāq*
- sūrsāt* (var. *siyūrsāt*) requisition, cf. *chīghāt*
- takyah* bolster, cushion; metaphorically, a sacred site
- takyah-khānah* rest house
- ṭanāb* (or *tanāb*) linear and areal measurement, a measuring cord, cf. *jarīb*
- ṭāq* arch, vault, cf. *iwan*, *ṣuffah*
- ṭarḥ* design, drawing
- ṭarrāh* draftsman, cf. *mi‘mār*, *muhandis*
- tashahhud* the act of uttering the profession of faith (*shahādah*)
- tawliyat* office of the *mutawallī*
- tīm, tīmchah* warehouse, small warehouse, cf. *sarāy/serai*
- tūmān* a counting unit signifying twenty used exclusively with money; an obsolete Mongol military term for a division of 10,000 men
- tūrah* Turko-Mongol term for prince-regent or heir apparent, later an honorary title, cf. *qa‘l-khān*
- waqf* charitable endowment
- wāqī‘ah-nawīs* (var. *waqā‘ī‘-nawīs*) news writer, reporter, informant
- waṭan-i ma‘lūf* homeland
- wazīfah* stipend, salary, pension

zakāt obligatory wealth tax on Muslims for defined charitable purposes, generally 2.5%

zakātbegī collector of the *zakāt*

zarʿ measurement of length, about thirty inches, cf. *gaz*

zawj pair (of oxen), unit of areal measurement, cf. *jarīb*, *ṭanāb*

zīkr mentioning the name of God repeatedly as ritual practice

ziyārat pilgrimage, ritual at a shrine

ziyāratgāh shrine, cf. *mazār*, *takyah*, *qadamgāh*

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