Afghanistan's Islam

Nile Green

Published by University of California Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/63381

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2260125
The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like other periods in Islamic history, were critical to the promotion, preservation, and advancement of Islamic culture in Central Asia. This chapter provides an overview of the process of transmitting and transforming religious culture during this period, with emphasis on how the material aspects were organized and exploited. The chapter draws on a sample of contemporary works that focus on the lives of notable individuals who contributed to the process of advancing the Islamic tradition—absorbing it, studying it, teaching it, and trying to earn a living from it. These works are more or less evenly distributed over the period: *Muzakkir-i Ahbab*, written in 1566 by Baha al-Din Hasan “Nisari”; *Nuskhah-i Ziba-yi Jahangiri*, written about 1625/6 by Sultan Muhammad Bi “Mutribi” Samarqandi; part 4 of volume six of *Bahr al-Asrar*, by Mahmud ibn Amir Wali (the biographies in it written by 1640); *Matlab al-Talibin*, which Muhammad Talib Juybari completed in 1663/4; and *Muzakkir al-Ashab*, which Muhammad Badi’ Samarqandi completed sometime around 1692. These works cover some five or six generations and represent different urban milieus and different regional attachments (Samarqand, Balkh, and Bukhara) in the Persianate Central Asian domain.

*Muzakkir-i Ahbab* focuses on Bukhara and foregrounds royals and their poetry in the first half of the sixteenth century, whereas *Nuskhah*, filled with anecdotes from the lives of some 292 poets of all backgrounds with excerpts from their compositions, focuses on both Samarqand and Bukhara and the life and the students of the author’s own principal mentor, Nisari Bukhari, the author of the *Muzakkir-i Ahbab*. The sections of part four of volume six of *Bahr al-Asrar* containing biographies foregrounds Balkh, its royal family, and notable individuals connected...
in some way to the city, whether living or recently dead, and also provides some biographies of Bukharan notables both living and recently deceased. The *Matlab al-Talibin* has a very narrow focus, Bukhara and the Juybari family of Naqshbandi shaykhs, their wealth, those who were either employed by or in some way dependent on the family, and those VIPs who corresponded with or were in some way influenced by members of the family. The *Muzakkir al-Ashab* is almost all biographies of contemporaries whose poetic compositions appealed to the author, and it reflects the author’s strong patriotic feelings for Samarqand.

Explicitly or otherwise, all five works exhibit symptoms of patriotism. This was deemed a virtue, expressed aphoristically as “Love of homeland is a part [or half] of faith” (*hubb al-watan min [or nisf] al-iman*). Those who cited this phrase, like the author of *Muzakkir al-Ashab*, to rationalize, perhaps, their return home or their never leaving home also understood the force of maxims that recommended going abroad: “Knowledge can be acquired only by leaving home behind and parting from your brethren” (*la ‘ilma illa bi-muhajarah min al-awtan wa mufaraqat min al-ikhwan*) and “Seek knowledge even unto China” (*utlub al-‘ilm hatta al-Sin*). But seeking knowledge was not all that prompted leaving home. The biographical material shows that seeking work was also a great motivation to travel.

**THE REGION AND ITS POLITICAL FORMATIONS**

The territory of present-day Afghanistan was part of a large eastern Persianate region divided among three distinct and sometimes actively contending but for most of our period amiably coexisting states: the Baburid-Timurid (i.e., Mughal) state, centered in Agra and Delhi and controlling the region north and west up to the Hindu Kush, including the town of Kabul; the neo-Chinggisid state, centered in Bukhara, controlling the routes west to the Murghab River and south to the Hindu Kush, including Balkh; and the Safavid state, centered in Isfahan, controlling up to the Murghab and the western end of the Herat-Qandahar route, including the Herat oasis. The part of the region corresponding to the modern state of Afghanistan thus formed a marchland, *grosso modo*, between those three political entities. This configuration was remarkably stable through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the exceptions of Qandahar changing hands a number of times between Mughals and Safavids, Herat taken for a decade (1587–98) from the Safavids by the neo-Chinggisid Shibanids, and Balkh occupied for one year (1646–47) by Mughal forces at the expense of the neo-Chinggisid Tuqay-Timurids. When there was no active military campaigning taking place, which was the case for most of the period, the frontiers between these three polities were open. Even when there was skirmishing, travelers could find their way around the trouble spots. Security from banditry was probably more of a perennial problem than any campaigning conducted by any of the political entities against another. Binding the region into
a whole were venerable trade and pilgrimage routes and, most important, a shared literary culture and a common religious and linguistic tradition with Persian and Turkic as lingua francas and Arabic as the language of religion and prestige.

RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN THE REGION

Two of the region’s powers, the Mughals and the neo-Chinggisids, espoused sunna-jama‘i (i.e., Sunni) Islam. The third major power, the Safavids, promoted ithna‘ashari (i.e., “Twelver” Shi‘i) Islam. The apparent Sunni-Shi‘i religious divide thus created had to be continually reproduced in the real world through public discourse, which, at times of political contention, was used to rouse and focus public sentiment into action. As a form of human behavior, this was not unlike the long-standing Ni‘mati-Haydari factionalism and ritual fighting in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the commemoration of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne by Orangemen in Northern Ireland, or even football hooliganism in modern Europe. All these phenomena arise from a primordial human impulse toward what has been called “bilateral factionalism.”

But the factionalism was balanced by popular religious practice with its shared communal values. There is a constant conversation between adherents of Twelver Shi‘ism and Sunnism reflected in our sources, and much sharing of devotional practices but little evidence of sectarian fighting. A shared landscape probably encouraged sympathy, disillusion, and factionalism in equal measures, but our sources downplay the latter. This was expressed through reverence for the Prophet’s Family (ahl-i bayt); shrine visitation (ziyarat) to the shrines of Imam ‘Ali at Balkh and Imam Riza at Mashhad, which attracted both Sunni and Shi‘i devotees; commemoration of the passion of Husayn on the day of Ḩan‘el; and other shared holidays, whether the universal ones (such as ‘Id-i Fitr, ‘Id-i Azha, and Nawruz) or the local ones (such as Gul-i Surkh in Balkh), which all seem to have produced some level of harmony or at least tolerance of others’ beliefs. Sometimes this shared landscape produced unusual manifestations, such as a mode of belief that, we are told, the Shi‘is called Sunnism and the Sunnis called Shi‘ism.

Certainly there was no geographic separation of Sunnis and Shi‘is and no noteworthy episodes of ethnic cleansing such as the modern world has become accustomed to. Shi‘is lived in large numbers in what is now central and northeastern Afghanistan (in the former region mostly “Sevener” or Isma‘ili Shi‘is) and throughout India (notably in Awadh and the Deccan) and among the Pashtuns (particularly the Turis) of the northwest frontier of India. The Shi‘is of Afghanistan and India continued to travel the pilgrimage routes to their holy sites in the west and transited what is now Afghanistan and Iran to make pilgrimage to Mashhad in northeastern Iran and to the ‘atabat cities (i.e., Najaf, Karbala, and Kazimayn) in Iraq. Sunnism, on the other hand, remained strong in eastern Iran at least until well
into the twentieth century, when the Qajar shahs were still appointing Sunni qazis for the Sunnis of Khurasan. In short, the complex reality on the ground belies any easy assertion of separation, isolation, or, as the great Persianist E.G. Browne called the effect of the conversion of Iran to Twelver Shi’ism in the early 1500s, the erection of a “barrier of heterodoxy.”

Woven through both Sunnism and Shi’ism and, in effect, defining the popular practices of both sects was the phenomenon of what we call “Sufism” today. People whom we may think of as Sufis are rarely referred to that way in the sources that we have. Common literary appellations for such a person would be darwish (mendicant), zahid (ascetic), mujarrad (celibate), faqir (mendicant), or someone of faqr wa fana wa sidq wa safa. Alternatively, an individual might be labeled makhduum (master) or khwaja (lord), the latter often a sign of affiliation to the Naqshbandi way. Instead of “Sufism,” this chapter uses the more cumbersome term “pir-muridism” (that is, the tie between pir [teacher] and murid [student], mentor and disciple, that entailed loyalty and duty on both parts) because it signifies better what was happening in daily life. Pir-muridism often contained a distinct economic component and expectation, that the master or mentor could provide access to a living either directly from his own resources or indirectly through the influence that he had over other disciples of his who did have the resources. Pir-muridism often was associated with a shrine, the geographic and cosmic focal point of the relationship, which gave it an institutional basis.

Pir-muridism had many franchises (so-called Sufi brotherhoods) in the sixteenth century, with names such as Yasawi, Kubrawi, ʻIshqi, Naqshbandi, Khalwati, Qadiri, and Ata’i. In the eighteenth century pir-muridism seems to have been going through a slow, perhaps multigenerational, process of what Devin DeWeese refers to as “dis-ordering” and reformation of pir-murid affiliations. But through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sufi shrine centers and the families who controlled them (the Juybaris in Bukhara, Ahraris in Samarqand, Ansaris in Balkh and Herat, Dahbidis outside Samarqand, and the ʻAzizans of Karmina) were shaping the dominant elements of pir-muridism thanks to their considerable resources.

Historians of Islam in this period tend to focus on social connections and social action arising from shared interests and loyalties, and on the relations between those seen as predominantly religious and those seen as predominantly political. What gives rise to religious loyalties beyond intellectual appeal, what inspires individuals to make life-altering decisions and commitments expressed within a discourse about belief, is more difficult to ascertain. In this volume Jürgen Paul’s concise survey of the Naqshbandi Sufi affiliation in fifteenth-century Herat sees loyalty between master and disciple as a performance art embracing the vocal zikr chant, the wilderness retreat, and an opportunity to hobnob with and perhaps influence people of power, or so their own admiring memorialists want posterity
to believe. For the Naqshbandis in a much later guise, that of the Mujaddidi affiliation, Waleed Ziad’s chapter provides a detailed and subtle analysis of the intellectual foundations of belief and practice centered more or less in what are now the modern countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He offers an engaging approach in which the reproduction of a manual of practice is used to limn both the geographical extent of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi ideology down through time and its power to remain vital and compelling even in the modern world. The strength of both studies is to bring out the intellectual appeal of their sources through their portrayals of model individuals and their clearly outlined steps to self-awareness, right belief, and personal salvation.

But these beg the question: How did people put food on the table? How did they support themselves in the process of (we assume) actually fulfilling the goals implicit in the texts that have come down to us? How did those recipients of the
tradition find time to reproduce it for posterity? In other words, how did those who transmitted the intellectual corpus of Islam either orally or through written texts find and exploit opportunities that would give them the time and the means to add to, enhance, and reproduce what they understood as the culture of Islam?

Some of the mundane aspects of life may be found in these same sources. The texts associated with, for instance, a Naqshbandi tradition, will sometimes reveal how life is lived, how money is obtained, how property is accumulated, if some larger moral or philosophical lesson can be drawn from that information. A good example would be the late-sixteenth-century biography of the first Bukharan Juybari shaykhs, Rawzat al-Rizwan. In its more than eleven hundred pages, story after story of the mundane aspects of the lives of Khwaja Muhammad Islam, known as “Khwaja Islami” (1482–1563), and his son Khwaja Sa’d al-Din, known as “Khwaja Kalan Khwaja” (1531–1589), are revealed, the stories meant to serve a moral purpose, to show these individuals both as human beings and as exemplary figures. Unsurprisingly, the Juybaris were Naqshbandis living at ground zero of Naqshbandism, and, characteristic of some of the often most prominent community leaders, they were tenders of the shrine at Char Bakr, the shrine proving a useful vehicle for the circulation and redistribution of wealth.

Instead of foregrounding these idealized figures as powerful molders of public opinion and magnets for loyalty by virtue of their exemplary characters in society, this chapter takes a somewhat different approach, thinking of loyalties and social connections as arising from individual self-interest and need, and proposing that this can be captured to some degree anecdotally and aphoristically. If we take the stories and the often-cited Arabic maxims as the textual tip of a cultural iceberg representing the accumulation of what people generally believe to be true about aspects of life, then it is possible to begin to reconstruct the diversity of possible experience and how religion was incorporated in the individual’s daily life and work.

To personify the commingling of formal scholarly education and pir-murid practice as well as to introduce into the equation the human capacity for reinventing the self, two examples are offered here, namely Shaykh Baha al-Din ‘Amili of Isfahan (d. 1622) and his contemporary Mawlana Yusuf Qarabaghi (or Bukhari, d. 1621), as embodiments of the spirit of the age. Aspects of ‘Amili’s life and his writings, first as a Shafi‘i Sunni then as an Twelver Shi‘i (Shah ‘Abbas named him shaykh al-Islam of Isfahan, as the leading Shi‘i theologian of the time), and his affinity for Sufism, not to mention all his writing in other areas—the natural sciences (his book on arithmetic remained a standard prerequisite for someone hoping for career in the Afghan administration as late as the end of the nineteenth century) and his work on the occult sciences—all stand as somehow emblematic of intellectual currents flowing in the region. Though less wide-ranging and less prolific than ‘Amili, Qarabaghi represents the same kind of catholicity of interest, whether it was in the transmitted religious and legal sciences, the natural sciences, or the
occult. Qarabaghi was perhaps the most widely recognized theologian of the first half of the seventeenth century in Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) and Balkh. Mutribi, one of our richest sources for the social history of Central Asia in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, knew Qarabaghi personally and calls him "one of the greatest of 'ulama.” Mutribi wrote that:

[Mawlana Yusuf] wrote a gloss on Dawwani’s commentary on the fourteenth-century al-Iji’s al-‘Aqa’id al-‘Adudiyyah [a work of Hanafi dogma] which is universally acclaimed. Despite his rank as a scholar (mawlawiyat) he also composes poetry [which is why Mutribi included him in the Nuskha]. Imam Quli Khan (the ruler of Bukhara from 1611 to 1641) has utter faith in his advice. At this time, which is 1034 Hijri (1625–26) he has built a khanaqah in the quarter of Safidmun (a village in the tuman of Rud-i Shahr, Bukhara) and there he spends his summers in spiritual exercises (riyazat) and teaching. He follows the Kubrawi path and has chosen the path of dervishism and he is a disciple (murid) of the followers of Shaykh Husayn Khwarazmi. At the time that I went to Hindustan (in 1622) due to our earlier sharing together the study of the Talwih, I went to see him.

The Talwih was a late-fourteenth-century commentary by Mas’ud ibn ‘Umar al-Taftazani on an early-fourteenth-century work of jurisprudence (fiqh) entitled Tanqih al-Usul, by the Bukharan Hanafi legal scholar Taj al-Shari’a al-Mahbubi (d. 1281). Although Mutribi accords Yusuf Qarabaghi an entry for his poetry, in the discussion that he had with him Qarabaghi admitted he wasn’t composing any more, citing his age. (He was seventy-six.) Among his many students, some had noteworthy careers of their own. One of them, Sayyid Mir ‘Iwaz, studied with Qarabaghi in Bukhara, was credentialed in Arabic grammar and syntax, theology, philosophy, logic, mathematics, astrology, and poetics, and then moved on to law, Hadith, and Quranic commentary. He came to Balkh, was “treated favorably” by the ruler, Nazr Muhammad Khan, and then had a midlife crisis, “withdrew into seclusion,” and went off on the hajj pilgrimage, spending several years in the Hijaz. In 1634 he returned to Balkh, where the khan appointed him to a professorship in the khan’s own madrasa and made him head of the ‘ulama.20

What the cases of Shaykh Baha’i and Qarabaghi highlight is the importance of distinguishing “religion as an aspect of state policy in which adherence to a specific doctrine is a test of political loyalty, from religion as a set of personal belief and practices within a family or community context.”21 But in reality these are not discrete, separable categories. As major providers of the livings that people seek, states or at least political figures, people with power, inevitably influence the nature of personal belief and practice—not that there is a uniform set of practices or codes to which patronized individuals adhered beyond the universally prescribed five Quranic duties of all believers. To imagine an opposition, or an intellectual gulf between a scholar, say, and an itinerant dervish qalandar, may miss the variety and complexity of the experience of any one individual. And to apply, without
qualification, any labels to a person, as if they represent that person’s essence, will
certainly miss the effect of the passage of time on an individual’s outlook. Qa-
rabaghi is a good example of the effect of aging on changing priorities, whereas
al-‘Amili, the polymath, exemplifies the vast intellectual landscape that any gifted
individual might explore.

MADRASA AND KHANAQAH: ‘ILM AND MA’RIFAT

The intellectual development of Central Asians like Qarabaghi was shaped by two
legacies driving the reproduction of Islamic knowledge, whether it was of the ‘ilm
type (i.e., formal knowledge transmitted through the mudarris-talib relationship)
or the ma’rifat type (i.e., experiential learning through the pir-murid connection).
One legacy was the tremendous corpus of scholarly literature produced in the re-
gion in the fifteenth century that showed up in the collections of Central Asian
libraries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was then reinforced by
a madrasa-building boom in Bukhara, Samarqand, and Balkh that created brick-
and-mortar institutions complete with waqf endowments that could support stu-
dents, faculty, and maintenance over the long term, not to mention the libraries
that helped ensure continuity and reconsideration of ‘ilm-type knowledge over the
generations. The second legacy was shaped by the various pir-murid “Sufi paths”
(tariqas). In a somewhat complementary fashion, this legacy was reinforced and
institutionalized by the building of khanaqahs, a sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-
century phenomenon in many ways comparable to the boom in the building
of madrasas.

But this is somewhat peripheral to our subject, which is how such individu-
als made a living. (On the other hand, a skeptic may connect the changing interests of
al-‘Amili and Qarabaghi to opportunity, if not opportunism.) Perhaps it isn’t really
possible to trace the development of religious expression and practice, what people
say and do, without following the money. At the very basic level a certain amount
of money or wealth is obviously necessary to live. Then beyond that, to qualify as
a believer (mu’min) there are the basic obligations of every Muslim, fulfillment of
which requires some surplus wealth. Specifically, these duties are the payment of
the prescribed alms (zakat) and the one-time pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). Because
of the region’s distance, both physical and psychological, fulfilling the hajj obli-
gation tended to be something that people strive for yet rarely attained. In the late-
seventeenth-century Muzakkir al-Ashab, only fifteen of 206 (or some 7 percent) of
the poets profiled are identified as having fulfilled the hajj obligation. And these
were all people of intellectual achievement, some just in the field of poetics but
most with other scholarly credentials as well. Even among the ruling class, fulfill-
ment of the hajj obligation was rare, although finances were not necessarily the
determining factor. Of the eleven sixteenth-century rulers of Bukhara, none so far
as we know even attempted the hajj. Of the seven from the seventeenth century, four planned it, but only two actually succeeded in reaching Mecca: thus, for the two centuries a percentage (7.6%) very similar to the poets’ of notable individuals who actually made the hajj. Many must have set out with the object in mind and then failed to reach their destination because of financial or other obstacles along the way. Thus both the hajj and the payment of alms (zakat) make earning a living a prerequisite for fulfilling all of one’s religious obligations.

WAYS OF EARNING A LIVING

The ways these sources reveal how livings were acquired are not particularly unusual, and many of them would be familiar in our own lives. Perhaps the most obvious one was the conveyance of property between generations through inheritance or gift. There was a popular Arabic saying (at least amongst the literati) WEALTH AND STATUS ARE BOTH HERITABLE (al-mal wa’l-hal tawaruthani). Although Islamic legal norms on inheritance are unambiguous and prescribe the division of an estate among two classes of heirs, seemingly leading to the dissolution of accumulated wealth, there were any number of ways to evade the prescribed fissiparous effects of estate division. Wealth could be transferred during the owner’s lifetime through a deed of conveyance (tamlik-nama); private trusts could be set up by someone of wealth naming the beneficiaries he or she preferred; and purely charitable trusts could be established, their administrations appointed, and a portion of the income from the trusts assigned to the administrators, often individuals who would also have been heirs to the estate.

The lives of the authors of our sources are good examples of the aphorism on wealth and status. The author of Matlab al-Talibin, Muhammad Talib Juybari, was the great-grandson of Muhammad Islam, the founder (in terms of property amassment) of the Juybari family of shrine keepers in Bukhara. Muhammad Talib’s grandfather, Khwaja Sa’d Juybari, had inherited the bulk of the Juybari fortune and immensely increased it in his position as confidant of the powerful Shibanid ruler ‘Abdullah Khan, the son of Iskandar Khan. He passed control of it on to his eldest son, Taj al-Din Hasan, from whom the latter’s eldest son, Muhammad Talib, inherited.26 The author of the Bahr al-Asrar, Mahmud-i Amir Wali, inherited his father’s status as a member of the Balkh court of the late-sixteenth-century Shibanids and earned his later position as royal librarian to the Tuqay-Timurid ruler of Balkh, Nazr Muhammad Khan, through his own merit but no doubt was helped by the fact that he came from a familiar family and had been admitted to study under the leading Hadith specialist of the day. The author of Muzakkir al-Ashab, Muhammad Badi’ Samarqandi, was the son of a mufti in Samarqand, and when his father died, he successfully petitioned the ruler of Bukhara for his father’s living.
THE PATRONS

But if inheritance and a good family background were not available, what were the options? First, one had to know who the people were who disbursed wealth and how to approach them. For simplicity’s sake we may divide the patrons into three classes: the royals, the members of the khanly families; the amirs, those mainly military figures who sustained the Chinggisid mandate in Central Asia and served the khans as local governors or local garrison commanders; and the handful of wealthy shrine-keeping families, the Juybaris in Bukhara, the Ahraris in Samarkand and Tashkent, and the Parsa’is in Balkh. Merchants do not figure prominently as patrons, though members of the Juybari family, primarily characterized in our sources as sacralized by virtue of their identity as shrine keepers and workers of miracles (karamat), were also heavily invested in commerce and could thus be considered merchants as well. That shrine keepers should have considerable means at their disposal should not be surprising, given the importance of local and regional shrines in Central Asia and the wealth gravitating to them in the forms of votive offerings or endowments.

The surplus resources at the disposal of the royal or khanly families and their military supporters ran the gamut of revenues collected from property taxes, customs duties, a range of miscellaneous fees, and rents from state lands. Unless he delegated the function, the khan reserved to himself appointments to a variety of positions that required religious learning—judges, muftis (legal advisors), imams (prayer leaders), khatibs (preachers, sermonizers), muhtasibs (market and morals enforcers, also sometimes known as ra’ises). There were also secretarial and ministerial positions in the chancellery (diwan-i a’la) and the secretariat (dar al-insha), requiring skills in accounting, bureaucratic administration, and the scribal arts. The Matlab al-Talibin has a chapter on the “tribe of attendants” serving Khwaja Sa’d al-Din Juybari, the men managing his far-flung property holdings. The work names forty-one employees of the Naqshbandi shaykh, six of whom formed a private chancellery for him, each manager with his own personal secretary and with some forty clerks at his disposal.27

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the royals were the neo-Chinggisid Shibanids and Tuqay-Timurids, respectively, and their military supporters were the leaders of “Uzbek” groups (i.e., the Durman, Nayman, Qushji, Barlas, Arlat, Qunghrat, Mangghit, Kanikas, Qataghan, Ming, Alchin, Ushun, etc.).28 These royal and military-elite (amiri) groups governed the principal metropolitan regions of Central Asia (i.e., Balkh, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent). As seen in Nushin Arbazadah’s chapter in this volume, many of their individual members (and their womenfolk) liberally supported Islamic learning with money to build madrasas and khanaqahs. They also appointed the learned to positions in fiscal, judicial, and religious administration.
A principal duty of any ruler, besides providing justice, is contained in the maxim *Build Up the Country, and Improve the Lot of the Subjects* (*ta’mir al-bilad wa tarfih al-‘ibad*), and erecting public buildings that advanced the cult were particularly esteemed as another maxim makes clear: *Whoever Builds a Mosque for God, God Will Build for Him Its Like as a Dwelling Place in Paradise* (*man bana masjidan lillah bana lahu Allah bayt al-janna mithlahu*).

Two of the most notable types of public works by which individual politicians as well as others sought to fulfill the charge to build up the country and achieve a promised reward in paradise were the madrasa, the religious academy, and the khanaqah, the Sufi meeting house, often built together at a shrine center along with a mosque. Such buildings were usually accompanied by endowments that provided for permanent administrative and custodial positions as well as student scholarships and, in the case of madrasas, professorships, and food and lodging for visitors in the case of the khanaqahs. Both in a way stood for the two strains of Islamic culture, the formal scholarly and the less formal spiritual tradition represented by pir-muridism.

Several members of the three classes of patrons stand out as builders of madrasas and khanaqahs: among the Shibanids, Muhammad Shibani Khan (r. 1501–10) built a double madrasa in Samarqand, which his daughter-in-law endowed; 29 ’Ubaydullah Khan (r. 1533–40), a nephew of Muhammad Shibani, sponsored a madrasa in Bukhara between 1530 and 1536. 30 ’Ubaydullah’s son, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, built the khanaqah at the shrine (today known simply as Baha al-Din) of Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) in Qasr-i ‘Arifan just outside Bukhara and dated to 1544/5, as well as the Walida-i Khan Mosque, on the Khiyaban in Bukhara. 31 Both buildings still stand today. Later in the century, ‘Abdullah Khan, son of Iskandar Khan (r. 1583–98), built madrasas in Bukhara and Balkh, the former of them still standing. Of the seventeenth-century Toqay-Timurids, Nazr Muhammad Khan (who reigned at Balkh from 1612 to 1642 and briefly in Bukhara, from 1642 to 1645) and his son Subhan Quli Khan (who reigned at Balkh from 1642 to 1681 and at Bukhara from 1681 to 1702) both built large madrasas in Balkh, though only the remains of the latter khan’s are still visible. Three of the main military supporters of the Shibanids and the Tuqay-Timurids, Qul Baba Kukaltash, Nadr Diwanbigi Arlat, and Yalangtush Bi Alchin, left extensive records of their philanthropy and are remembered today for six madrasas that still stand in Bukhara, Samarqand, and Tashkent. 32

Royals could also provide livings both directly through control of appointments to such judicial positions as *qazi* (magistrate), *mufti* (legal advisor), and *qazi ‘askar* (military judge, judge advocate); to madrasa-related jobs such as *mudarris* (teacher), *mutawalli* (endowment administrator), *sanduq-dar* (treasurer), and...
farrash-bashi (chief custodian); to mosque positions, especially those that were endowed, such as khatib (preacher, sermonizer), imam (prayer leader), imam-i jum'ah (prayer leader at a congregational mosque), hafiz (Quran memorizer and reciter), and farrash (custodian); and clerical and supervisory posts within the chancellery or the secretariat. Finally, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in other periods, leaving a memorial and a good name exerted strong moral pressure expressed in the oft-cited Arabic saying Our Works Tell Who We Were, So Contemplate Our Works after We Are Gone (atharuna tadullu ilayna fa-unzur ba'dana ila'l-athar).

GAINING ATTENTION

How did a seeker of patronage gain the attention of such men? How did the support seeker make himself known to someone who could recommend him for remuneration of some sort? First, he might establish an affiliation with a pir who had access to a patron. Clearly Mutribi and his contemporaries believed that their pir, Nisari, could provide this access. Then there were literary and scholarly salons and debates. Reputation, scholarly promise, as purveyed by word of mouth, often led to an invitation to a salon, and these salons (known generally as majlis and mahfal) were often a pathway for gaining a salary. At them one demonstrated in a sometimes highly competitive environment one’s academic knowledge, the ability to debate a theological question or, in the case of a poetry salon, one’s extemporaneous ability, inventiveness, and quick-wittedness at poetry. Presided over by a well-to-do or well-known figure and sometimes attended by the khans and governors themselves, the majlis was a gathering where theological and juristic issues were discussed and debated. It served as the equivalent of today’s “job talk” and could lead to appointment to any one of the many positions that these patrons had control over. For a scholar, presiding over a majlis was a sign of prestige, and those hoping to make their own mark frequented these gatherings and might later refer to them as a credential when seeking an appointment.

A majlis was also a chance for a scholar (or poet) whose reputation had reached the ears of, or who was already known to, a local dignitary to exhibit his knowledge of the religious sciences or his literary artistry. The majlis might feature a munazara or scholarly debate on some point of theology or law. One such recorded debate also had an undercurrent of intercity rivalry, which might also have been present in other such debates. This particular munazara, which took place in Balkh under the auspices of the Shibanid ruler of the region, Kistan Qara Sultan (who ruled at Balkh 1526–47 or 1548), was held because the reputation of a young scholar named Amir Qasim “Shubha” (the provenance of the nickname shubha [obscure or arcane issue] probably coming from the munazara itself) in mastering the “speculative and transmitted sciences” (‘ulum-i ma’qul wa manqul) had
reached the ears of “two of the greatest mubahisan (disputationists) of Transoxiana,” Mir Abu’l-Fath and Mir Abu’l-Fayz. They sought and received the permission of Kistan Qara Sultan to debate the young scholar in public. News spread, and scholars from all around flocked to attend, we are told. Amir Qasim, now worried, consulted his mentor, a Sufi named Mawlana Abu’l-Khayr, who rather than encouraging the young man told him that turning back their challenge would be extremely difficult. He then recommended that Amir Qasim solicit a certain judge, Qazi Salih, without whose help, the mawlana warned, victory in the debate would be impossible. Amir Qasim persuaded Qazi Salih to attend, in his corner as it were. The debate began, having a formal structure, a presiding referee, and a specific number of rounds of argument, rebuttal, and counterrebuttal, and Amir Qasim, confronted by a shubha, an arcane problem of law, proposed by Mir Abu’l-Fath, was reduced to citing Quranic verses, which turned out not to be an effective defense. At this point the referee called time-out and summoned another scholar, Mir ‘Abid, who happened to have been a student of the famous Sufi ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492) of Herat, and turned the matter of solving the shubha over to him. When he and the challengers had gone eight rounds of counterrebuttals without a winner he turned finally to Qazi Salih, who, we are told, instantly solved the problem and sent the challengers back to Bukhara in defeat. This so won the admiration of the people of Balkh, we are told, that they all became the qazi’s disciples.33

This particular instance also illustrates the difficulty of separating pir-muridism learning from ‘ilm scholarship. Qazi Salih, a qazi by virtue of his knowledge of the law and therefore his solid grounding in the transmitted and speculative disciplines (manqul wa ma’qul), is also called makhdum (lord, master), one of the ahl-i qulub (people of the heart, people of intuition), and as sahib-i karamat wa khariq al-‘adat (master of miracles and wonders). All these terms are generally reserved for types of individuals who, in English, tend to be grouped together and called Sufis. One could, of course, specialize in the ‘ilm (religious sciences) and become noted mainly as an ‘ilm scholar (i.e., one of the ‘ulama); or, conversely, one could shun formal learning and become known as a dervish, qalandar (antinomian), or malamati (blame seeker). But the figures who appear most virtuous and influential as their stories unfold are those who combine in themselves the qualities of both scholar and mystic.

THE BENEFICIARIES

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the majlis or mahfal was the institution that brought together those seeking credentials, those who could provide them, and those who had it in their power to grant appointments to salaried positions. In late-seventeenth-century Samarqand, for example, the Nayman amir
who governed Samarqand, ‘Abd al-Karim Bi, lauded as a second Hatim-i Tayy (an exemplary pre-Islamic Arab renowned for his extravagant generosity), held a weekly majlis for all the madrasa students of the city. He would bring in an established member of the ‘ulama and through presentations and a question-and-answer period would name one of the students talib of the week.34

One example of the process is found in the person of Mawlana Hasan Qubadyani, who studied in Bukhara and came to Balkh in the 1620s. As the Bahr al-Asrar puts it: “After the breadth and depth of his knowledge became known to all through the majlises in which he participated [emphasis added], he was appointed professor of the ‘Abdullah Khan Madrasa in Balkh.”35 He then had a short but influential career, being appointed to a professorship in two of Balkh’s madrasas and also turning out a substantial number of students who later gained prominence.36 Qubadyani then left Balkh to make the hajj pilgrimage but, according to Mahmud-i Amir Wali was persuaded by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58) to stay in Hindustan, where he died in 1633.37

But then there were those who, following the Arabic aphorism “corrupted is the scholar who consorts with amirs” (sharra al-‘ulama man zar al-umara) refused to have anything to do with politicians, would seek no appointments, and preferred to live however they could, uncontaminated by the corruption that went along with power.38 Others liked to appear as ascetics “in the garb of faqr wa fana [poverty and self-annihilation]” but were great scholars.39 Mahmud-i Amir Wali likes to profile the subjects of his biographies in terms of their learning (or their shunning of formal learning), their spiritual side (if developed), and whether they accepted appointments—and if they did, whether they became known for avoiding contact with political figures, the khans, sultans, and amirs, “plying back and forth between the doors of the nobles.” A sixteenth-century figure, “Mirzada-i Muflis,” who, we are told, shunned the superficialities of scholarship instead concentrated on developing his spiritual side. However, he had no problem consorting with “worldly people” (abna al-zaman) and became a well-known personality “whose advice was sought by sages and kings.”40 Others, like Mawlana Jarullah (d. 1589) and Mawlana ‘Ali Beg (d. 1612), accepted professorships but refused to have anything to do with their patrons.41

Poetry was a common currency connecting people in literary networks, to which I have referred elsewhere as a “poetic economy.”42 The ability to versify and to do it spontaneously and in a group setting was highly valued and rewarded. A standard sort of intellectual competition at a literary salon required participants to complete a ghazal poem after the host provided the matla’, the first verse.43 The best composition then was rewarded. Poetry being a universal calling, it was the rare poet who could make his living simply on poetry. There are, however, a few examples of poetry jobs. The wealthy Naqshbandi shaykh Khwaja Sa’d Juybari had a poet who composed and recited poetry for him when he traveled.44 So poets had
other identities as well—they were ‘ulama, students, artisans, politicians, royalty, laborers, servants, and slaves. What they tended not to be were women, at least those profiled in these sources. Although some 30 percent of the property owners of Bukhara (based on the names mentioned in the documents of the Juybari archive) were women and no doubt many of them composed poetry, none of them appears in our sources.

A speculative approach for the stipend or reward seeker was composing a eulogy (madh) about someone and presenting it to the prospective patron. This sometimes worked, but the sense one gets from the biographies is that it more often failed. In the 1680s the poet Mufid of Balkh, having established a reputation there as a eulogist (maddah), went to Samarqand to sell his services to the Dahpidi family but managed to offend people there with his verse and so returned to Balkh, where he presented a panegyric ode to the ruler, Subhan Quli Khan, in the hope of securing a living. The khan, like the others, was unimpressed, and Mufid, we are told, kept moving, eventually reaching India, where he was given an allowance by the emperor ‘Alamgir (also known as Awrangzeb, r. 1658–1707) and went off to live in Kashmir.

Mufid’s example may stand for the experiences of many seeking to find employment and reward for their learning. There are numerous examples of individuals who journeyed to India, lured by the mistaken belief that coming from Bukhara, Samarqand, or Balkh and possessed of a little learning guaranteed one a high judicial position such as qazi or mufti in the Mughal administration, or at least a professorship in a madrasa.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has been based on several assumptions that have, it is hoped, been borne out. One is that personal cultural and economic factors such as family and peer support on the one hand or resistance on the other are clearly critical to earning a living, as was the concentration or even the availability of communal wealth that could be allocated to an individual. Cities and their immediate hinterlands were obviously the places where surplus resources concentrated, and thus to some degree they predict the location of shrine centers. Another assumption is that our sources represent only a fraction of the people seeking material support through the religion and that beyond what they tell us there was a vast spectrum of intellectual and spiritual attainment, ranging from the possessed (majzub baba) and itinerant (malamati or qalandar) to the greatest theological and legal minds of their time, overlooked by our texts. Obviously hundreds of thousands of people pass beneath the radar—slaves, tenant farmers, day laborers, nomads, soldiers, artisans, and shopkeepers. And those from these groups who do manage to earn a living from their religious credentials are rare.
A third assumption underlying this chapter is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the bulk of discretionary resources was allocated by a ruling class including the neo-Chinggisid khans and their families; their military supporters, the amirs; and wealthy landlords, many of them religious figures. A fourth assumption is that making religion pay was accessible to only a small percentage of the population directly but indirectly was a major economic force affecting all those who depended on the direct recipient. So when an individual is profiled, we should understand that behind that name is an invisible but real community of family, employees, servants, and sometimes slaves. A fifth assumption, much more problematic than the other four, is that the built environment is a reflection and a shaper of the way religion was experienced and how it could be made to pay. The madrasa and the khanaqah, as well as the mosque, were not simply testimonials to the piety of the sponsor but were very visible signifiers of what constituted beliefs that would be rewarded.