

Tadhkira-yi Tāhir Īshān: A Neglected Source on the History of the Naqshbandī Sufi Tradition in Central Asia

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Abstract

The present study is intended to introduce and explore a hagiographical compendium known as the *Tadhkira-yi Tāhir Īshān* which was compiled in the middle of the eighteenth century in Khwarazm and Bukhara. Although this work has drawn minimal scholarly attention, it is a critical text for understanding the Naqshbandī history in Central Asia prior to the transformation of the local Sufi communities in the wake of the arrival of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī groups in the region.

Keywords

Central Asia – Khwarazm – Bukhara – Tāhir Īshān – 18th century – Naqshbandiyya

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the study of Sufism in Central Asia. Despite this, a great many hagiographical works, which are key sources for Sufi history, remain poorly studied and barely known. This applies both to works focused on individual saints and to large collective hagiographies that compile material on multiple saints grouped according to various principles. The present study is intended to introduce and explore a work of the latter type, compiled in the middle of the eighteenth century in Khwarazm and Bukhara. Known as the *Tadhkira-yi Tāhir Īshān*, this work has drawn minimal scholarly attention,¹ but is a critical text for understanding the

¹ The *Tadhkira-yi Tāhir Īshān* (hereafter *TTI*) was recently discussed in Aziza Shanazarova, "A Female Saint in Muslim Polemics: Aghā-yi Buzurg and Her Legacy in Early Modern

Naqshbandī history in Central Asia prior to the transformation of the local Sufi communities in the wake of the arrival of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī groups in the region.

This eighteenth-century Naqshbandī hagiographical compendium was compiled by Muḥammad Tāhir b. Muḥammad Ṭayyib Khwārazmī, better known simply as Tāhir Īshān. It is a key source for the study of the two important lineages – Makhdūm-i Aẓamī and the non-Ahrārī lines – of the Naqshbandī tradition in Central Asia up until the second half of the eighteenth century. Tāhir Īshān's personal affiliation with both of these lineages makes his *Tadhkira* even more significant, as it opens a window into the inner world of the eighteenth-century Sufi author and his immediate circle. Therefore, the aim of the present article is to explore the *TTI* through the eyes and experiences of its author, while reading the text as an expression of the historical person and keeping in mind his intentions, choices and decisions in shaping his text as a way of reconstructing his own spiritual lineages within the Naqshbandī tradition.

In addition to the *TTI*, which is a generic shorthand way to refer to the work, this hagiographical compilation is assigned other titles in some manuscript copies including the *Tadhkirat al-avṭiyā'*, the *Silsila-yi Khwājagār-i Naqshbandiyya* or just the *Tadhkirat-i Naqshbandiyya*.² The work was originally

Central Asia," PhD Dissertation (Indiana University Bloomington, 2019), 104–36, 211–26; and her "Locating the Non-Ahrārī Silsila of the Naqshbandiyya in Central Asia: A Historical Contextualization of Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr within the Central Asian Sufi Tradition," *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 1 (2021): 24–47. See also Devin DeWeese, "Mapping Khwārazmian Connections in the History of Sufi Traditions: Local Embeddedness, Regional Networks, and Global Ties of the Sufi Communities of Khwārazm," *Eurasian Studies* 14 (2016), 81–83; his "The Mashā'ikh-i Turk and the Khojagān: Rethinking the Links between the Yasavī and Naqshbandī Sufi Traditions," in *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia*, no. vi, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 202–3; and his "The Sayyid Atā'ī Presence in Khwārazm during the 16th and Early 17th Centuries," in *Studies on Central Asian History in Honor of Yuri Bregel*, ed. Devin DeWeese (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2001), 260, footnote 26. James Pickett, "Enemies beyond the Red Sands: The Bukhara-Khiva Dynamic as Mediated by Textual Genre," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 9 (2016), 161–64. M. Razzoqova, "Tadhkirat Naqshbandiia' – tasavvuf tarikhiga oid muhim asar," *Sharqshunoslik* II (2002), 45–50 and her "Tadhkirat Naqshbandiia' asarida Ghijduvoni zikri" in *Naqshbandiia' tariqatiga oid qulāzmalar fihristi* (Toshkent: Movarounnahr, 1993), 82–88.

² All known manuscript copies of the *TTI* are housed at the Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies (hereafter *IVRUz*) in Tashkent under the inventory numbers of MS 69, MS 75, MS 855/1, MS 856/1, MS 8791/1, MS 6832 and MS 7017/1. The catalog descriptions of MS 69 (ff. 1b–262a), MS 75 (ff. 1b–407b), MS 855/1 (ff. 8b–358b; cop. 1311/1893), and MS 856/1 (ff. 1b–396a; cop. 1335/1917) can be found in *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR* (hereafter *SVR*), ed. A.A. Semenov, vol. 3 (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk UzSSR, 1955), 364–66, nos. 2692–95. For the catalogue description of MS 7017/1 (ff. 1b–376a; cop. 1329/1911) see *SVR*, eds. A. Urunbaev and L.M. Epifanov, vol. 7 (Tashkent: Nauka, 1964), 390–1, no. 5575.