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Nûrbakhsh, MuĤammad

Sayyid **MuĤammad** b. MuĤammad b. ‘Abdallāh (795–869/1392–1464), commonly known as **Nûrbakhsh** (giver of light), was a prominent Šūfī of Iran and Central Asia. He is famous for founding the Nûrbakhshiyya, a Šūfī order that branched off from the Kubraviyya (an order whose eponymous founder was Najm al-Dīn Kubrā of Kh‘ārazm, d. 618/1221), for proclaiming himself the *mahdī* (person rightly guided by God, or messiah), and for his attempt to rebel, together with his spiritual master Kh‘āja Ishāq Khuttalānī (d. 827/1424), against the third Tīmūrid ruler, Shāhrukh Mīrzā (r. 811–50/1409–47). Like Faḍlallāh Astarābādī of the Hurūfiyya (d. 796/1394) and Sayyid MuĤammad b. Falāḥ Musha‘sha‘ (d. 870/1465–6), Nûrbakhsh was one of the proclaimers of messianism in the post-Mongol Persianate world before the reign of Shāh Ismā‘īl I (907–30/1501–24), the founder of the Šafavid dynasty.

1. LIFE

MuĤammad was born on 27 MuĤarram 795/13 December 1392 in a small village

near Qā‘in in Qūhistān, Iran. His father, MuĤammad ‘Abdallāh (d. 799/1396–7)—who claimed descent from the seventh Shī‘ī Imām, Mūsā I-Kāzīm (d. 183/799)—migrated from al-Qaḥīf in Bahrain to Khurāsān to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the eighth Imām, al-Riḍā (d. 202/818) in Mashhad and later settled in Qā‘in. His mother was of Turkic origin. Little is known of his youth, apart from the fact that he studied in Herat for some time. In 819/1416, MuĤammad was recruited into a Kubraviyya *khānqāh* (Šūfī lodge) in Khuttalān (the Khatlon region of present-day southwestern Tajikistan), becoming a disciple of Ishāq Khuttalānī (d. 827/1424), a principal successor of the Kubravī Šūfī and prolific author Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385). MuĤammad reports that, early in his discipleship, he already had a firm belief in his spiritual position as the *khātām-i valāyat* (seal of sainthood), especially because that belief was confirmed by a recurrent dream. His trust was reinforced when one of his associates in the *khānqāh* had a similar dream some time before 826/1423. Hearing his disciple’s report, Ishāq Khuttalānī gave MuĤammad the title “Nûrbakhsh.”

Nûrbakhsh proclaimed himself the *mahdī* in 826/1423 and, with Ishāq Khuttalānī, began to agitate for military action against Shāhrukh Mīrzā. Before long, however, the local Tīmūrid governor of Khuttalān, Sulṭān Bāyazīd, quelled the rebellion, and captured the agitators. Nûrbakhsh was sent to Shāhrukh Mīrzā in Herat and imprisoned, and Ishāq Khuttalānī was executed in Balkh, along with his brother.

The two early hagiographical sources referring to Nûrbakhsh’s proclamation and preparation for rebellion, *Rawḍāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān* (“The gardens