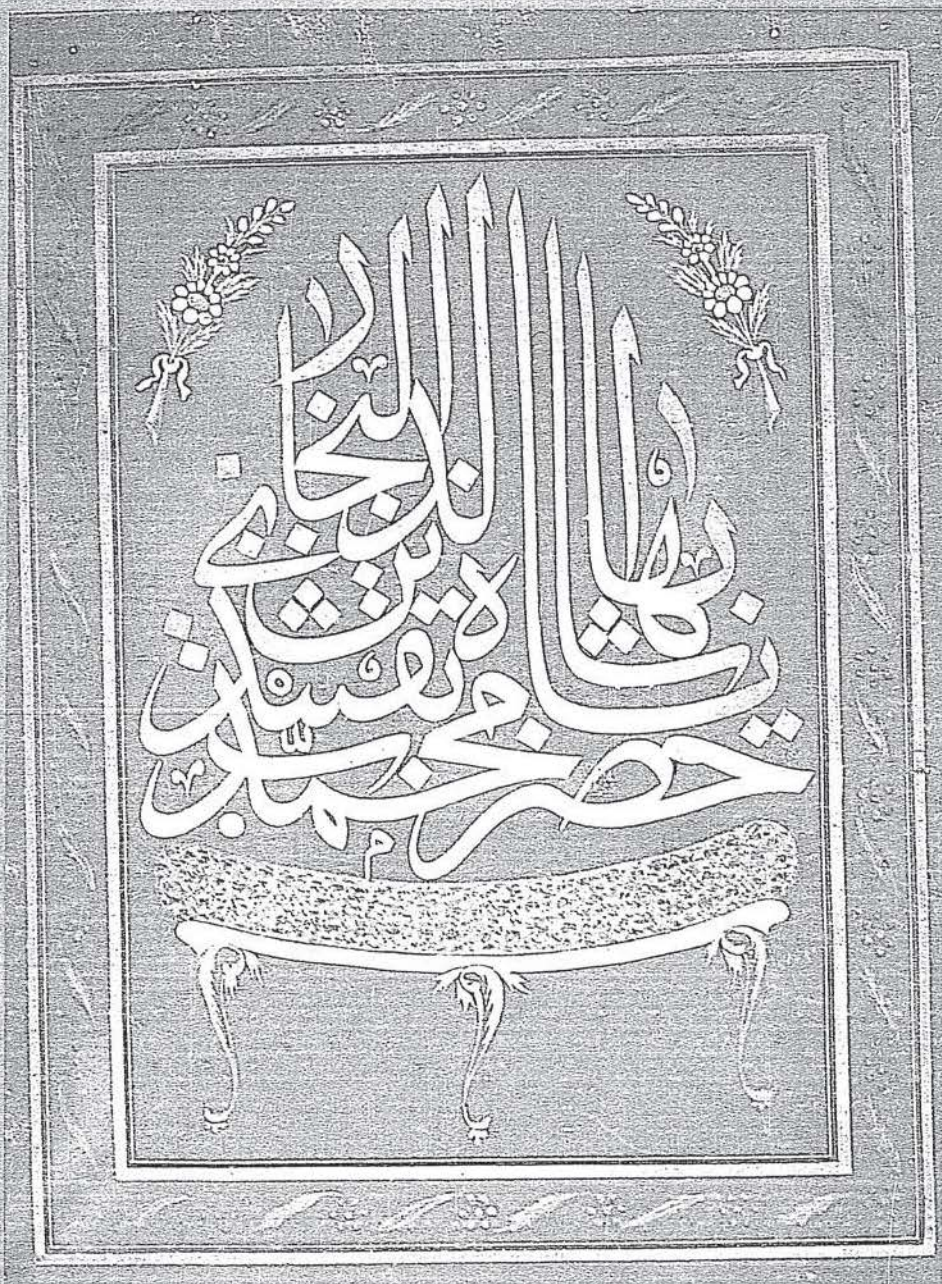


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NAQSHBANDIS

IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL ASIA



Edited by Elisabeth Özdalga

SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL 1999



NAQSHBANDIS IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL ASIA CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

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Post-Soviet Hagiography and the Reconstruction of the Naqshbandī Tradition in Contemporary Uzbekistan¹

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Since its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1992, there has been a tremendous resurgence of interest in Sufism among the people of Uzbekistan. One element of this renewed interest has been the appearance of numerous books, pamphlets, newspaper articles and television and radio broadcasts on the lives and teachings of the great *awliyā* of Central Asia. These “post-Soviet hagiographies,” presented almost entirely in the Uzbek language, rather than in Russian, are playing a crucial role in the process of the reconstruction of the Sufi tradition—especially the Naqshbandiyya—in Uzbekistan.

In pre-Soviet Central Asia, belief in the *awliyā-i Allah* as the spiritual successors to the Prophet was an essential element of Islamic piety. Central Asians, like Muslims elsewhere, believed that the *awliyā* were privy to secret knowledge and possessed miraculous powers. Several of the great transnational *tariqas*, including the Naqshbandiyya, Kubrawiyya and Yasawiyya, originated in the region.

The Naqshbandiyya *tariqa*, in particular, was a crucial religious and cultural institution, and living sheikhs of this tradition played important roles in their society. Tombs of the most famous Naqshbandī *awliyā* were important sites of pilgrimage not only for Central Asians, but for Muslims from throughout the Islamic world; similarly, numerous less well-known local shrines served as regional centers of pilgrimage *ziyarāt*.

Along with *ziyarāt*, oral and written narratives about the lives of the *awliyā* played a crucial role in Central Asian piety. Through stories of the *awliyā*, ordinary Muslims become aware of their moral and spiritual teachings, as well as the general worldview of Sufism. Through these narratives, belief in the *awliyā* became part of the culture at a basic level, providing individuals with what Victor Turner has called the “root paradigms” of Islam, instilling beliefs and attitudes in an existential rather than purely cognitive and didactic manner.² In Central Asia, this was true both at the level of “high culture”—through the Chagatay poetry of Navai’i and Mashrab and the highly sophisticated Persian *tazkirah* (hagiography) tradition—and at the “popular level” through countless oral narratives about the *awliyā*.

During the Soviet period, much of the continuity of Central Asian Islam with its past, including the Sufi tradition, was irreparably disrupted. Under the official state doctrine of “scientific atheism,” Islamic institutions were destroyed or deformed by the Soviet governments. Under Stalin, *‘ulamā* and *pīrs* were killed and *madrasahs*

¹ The research for this paper was conducted in Uzbekistan from September 1995 through April 1996 under the auspices of an IREX Advanced Research Fellowship. I wish to thank IREX for the generous support.

² Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1974, p. 64.

were closed.³ Contrary to the theories of cold war sovietologists like Alexandre Benningsen, it seems that the once thriving Naqshbandiyya tariqa system was nearly completely rooted out. On a recent research sabbatical in Tashkent, I was told on more than one occasion that for all intents and purposes the classical institution of *pir-murid* (the relationship between Sufi master and disciple) has been utterly destroyed. Thus, perhaps the most authentic and significant element of the Sufi tradition, has been eradicated from Central Asia, and in the opinion of many Uzbeks, sympathetic to the Sufi tradition, there is little chance that it can be revived in a meaningful way.

The tradition of hagiography also suffered during the Soviet period. Not only was the Russian language given precedence over Uzbek to the extent that many educated Uzbeks know it better than their mother tongue, but under Stalin the scripts of the Central Asian languages, including Uzbek, were changed to the slavonic Cyrillic, which among other things rendered most Uzbeks illiterate in relation to books written in the Arabic script.⁴ While the works of important medieval writers like Navai'i continued to be published in the new script during the Soviet period, they were greatly censored. Thus, literature which was steeped in the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism had all references to God or the Prophet Muhammad or the four Caliphs expunged. Uzbeks lost touch with their past and, as is the case with colonized peoples everywhere, many people began to accept their colonizers' belief that their indigenous culture was parochial, backwards and inferior.

Even at the oral level there was a disruption in the hagiographical tradition. Many parents purposely avoided teaching their children too much about Islam for fear of the repercussions it would have on their futures, if they were identified as believers.

However, since independence there has been a resurgence of Sufi literature, including hagiographical materials. The period around independence saw the publication for the first time of unexpurgated versions of classical Chagatay literature in Cyrillic script. Similarly, there has been a veritable flood of modern Sufi literature published in Uzbek. Bookstores throughout the country are well-stocked with books on Sufis and Sufism. For a variety of reasons the government has been supportive of the literary reconstruction of the Sufi tradition as a fundamental aspect of the "*altin meros*" or "golden heritage" of the nation, and it has made the celebration of the lives of medieval Sufi *awliya* a centerpiece of its nation-building agenda.⁵

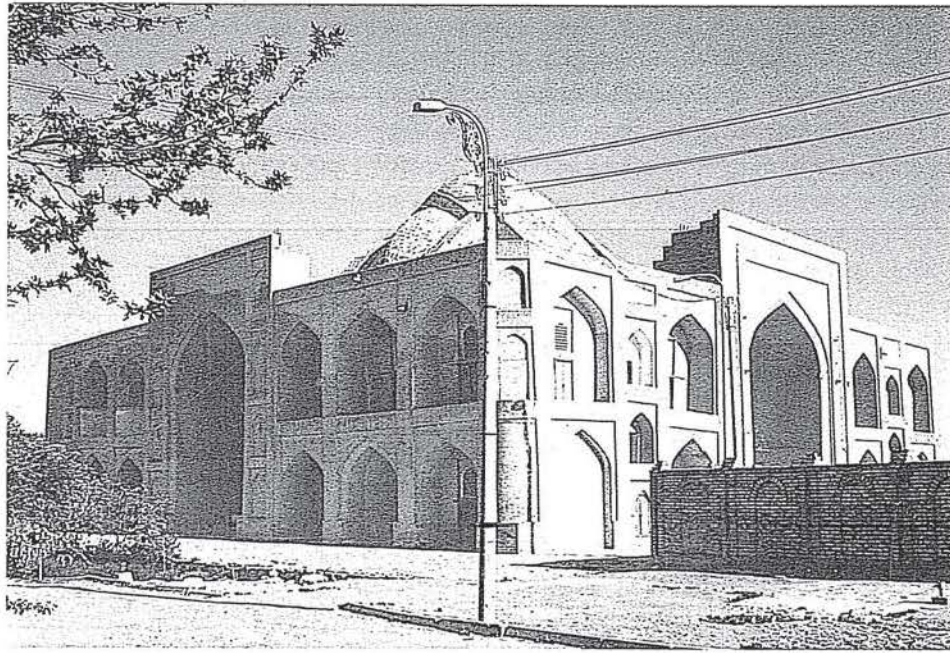
The Re-creation of History in Uzbekistan

The reconstruction of the Sufi tradition is part of a larger reconstruction of medieval history. For a variety of reasons, the Uzbek government has especially encouraged the examination of the "*altin meros*" and the great medieval cultural florescence of Central Asia, while simultaneously discouraging scholarly inquiry into the Soviet period. While the Soviet period is often briefly described in the introduction to books dealing with the "*altin meros*" as a period of oppression in which culture and religion were destroyed, there is little systematic historical study of the Soviet period. Instead, the officially encouraged history focuses on the glories of the

³ Nazif Shahrani, "Central Asia and the Challenge of the Soviet Legacy," *Central Asia Survey*, 12/2 (1993), 123-135.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵ For a general overview of this process, see Thierry Zarcone, "Sufi Movements: Search for Identity and Islamic Resurgence," in K. Warikoo (ed.), *Central Asia: Emerging New Order*, Haranand, 1995, pp. 63-75.



The mosque belonging to the tomb complex of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband in Bukhara (E. Özdalga, 1999).

medieval past, particularly the Timurid period.⁶ This reconstruction of medieval history, of course, involves the reconstruction of the Sufi Islamic tradition and more particularly the Naqshbandiyya.⁷

The Sufi Islamic Past

Perhaps no other aspect of Uzbekistan's past was so maligned under the Soviet system as Islam. Islam and Islamic institutions—including Sufism—were constantly blamed for the “backwardness” of the Uzbeks, which, in turn, justified their colonization by the Russians and Soviets. With independence, Uzbeks were probably more interested in gaining access to information about Islam than any other facet of their past. Despite its apparent support for the return of Islam as a religion, the current regime is in many ways fearful of religious resurgence. Current government officials and academics were themselves schooled in the former system which made antipathy to religion a cornerstone of its policy. Many officials fear the rise of religious political movements—like those in Algeria or Iran—which would challenge their authority. Nonetheless, it seems that the government sees the rehabilitation of Sufism as a way to feed its people's yearning for a connection with Islam in a way that does not threaten the state.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the new emphasis on Amir Timur and the Timurids, see Stephen Hegarty, “The Rehabilitation of Temur: Reconstructing National History in Contemporary Uzbekistan,” *Central Asia Monitor*, 1 (1995), 28-33.

⁷ The Naqshbandiyya is so intimately a part of the “*altin meros*” that it is impossible to present the history of Timurid Turkestan without reference to it. Of course the government also emphasizes the more obviously Turkic tradition of the Yasawiyya *tariqa*. But the Naqshbandi tradition is honored as a truly Turkic *tariqa*, even though Bahauddin wrote in Persian. Many writers, including Arif Usman spend a great deal of time defending the Naqshbandiyya as a Turkic Sufi order—pointing out that Navai'i was a Naqshbandi *murid* and he certainly was a crucial creator of Uzbek Turkic identity. Because the Naqshbandi are an important phenomenon on the world stage there is a great deal of national pride involved in maintaining its legacy. The Yasawi tradition on the other hand largely died out even in Turkestan. It is more localized, politically more relevant to Pan-Turkism than to global Islam.

The absence of actual Sufi orders allows the state to sponsor Sufism as a complex of ideas and practices divorced from institutions that might challenge its authority. Although the Sufi *tarīqas* as institutions were largely destroyed under Stalin, a variety of manifestations of Sufism, including the patronage of mystical healers and pilgrimage to shrines, have become once more popular with the people and form a basis for a kind of Islamic practice which shows a continuity with pre-Communist Islamic piety.

The practice of *ziyarat* (pilgrimage or visit to the tomb of a saint) is a particularly visible continuity with the past. Although *ziyarat* was discouraged in the Soviet period and many tombs fell into disrepair, it never completely ceased. Some of the more important shrines were, in fact, well maintained as museums. Currently, pilgrimage to the tombs of important *awliyā* has re-emerged as a popular manifestation of Islamic piety. The tomb of Bahā'al-Din Naqshband near Bukhara is once more thriving as a place of *ziyarat* not only for Uzbeks and other Central Asians but also for Muslims from around the world. The tombs of other Khojagān *awliyā*, such as Mir Kulāl and Abdulkhalīq Ghijduwanī, have also re-emerged as centers of *ziyarat*. In fact, the tomb of Bahā'al-Din Naqshband's *pir* Mir Kulāl, which had fallen into ruin under the Soviets, has recently been completely rebuilt with the help of Pakistani *murids*.⁸

Similarly, classical Sufi poetry survives in a variety of forms, for example, in the lyrics of popular songs. The republication of the mystical poetry of Mashrab, Navai'i and Yasawī in a complete and uncensored form not only provides new access to the Islamic heritage of the pre-Soviet past but also provides evidence that despite the political continuities with the Soviet past, society has, from the standpoint of religious freedom, indeed transformed for the better since the end of the Soviet Union.

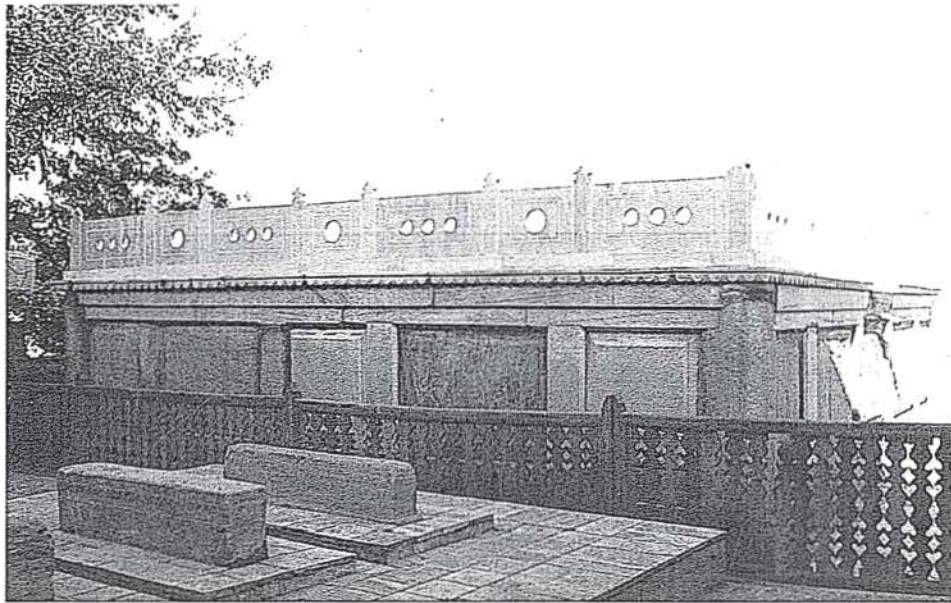
Post-Soviet Hagiography

The post-Independence period has seen the rise of a form of literary and scholarly writing which is sometimes referred to as "post-Soviet hagiography," a kind of writing which now fills the bookstores and scholarly journals.⁹ Not surprisingly much of these materials concerns the Naqshbandī tradition and its role in the history and culture of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. The year 1993 was officially recognized as the 675th birth anniversary of Bahā'al-Din Naqshband (and the 900th anniversary of Ahmad Yasawi); and that year saw a remarkable flurry of writings about Naqshbandī tradition.

There are three major types of Naqshbandī literature being published in contemporary Uzbekistan. The first is the publication of medieval Chagatay literature transliterated into Cyrillic. This category includes the republication of Alisher Navai's poetry, including his clearly mystical Sufi works such as *Lisan at-Tair*, his retelling of Attar's *Mantiq ut-Tair* (The Conference of the Birds) in Chagatay Turki, and a variety of other Chagatay works connected to the Naqshbandī tradition. Often

⁸ This resurgence of *ziyarat* is not limited to Naqshbandī sites. Just across the border from Uzbekistan in the city of Turkestan in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the tomb of Ahmad Yasawi—currently under a major reconstruction effort by the Turkish government—is a center of pilgrimage for the entire region. Even in Tashkent, sometimes referred to as "the capital of atheism," the tomb of the Yasawi saint, Zangi Ota, is under renovation and has become a thriving center of *ziyarat*. Lesser known sites such as the tomb of sheikh Antaur located in downtown Tashkent have also been revived as local centers of *ziyarat*. *Ziyarat* activities, including the ritual slaughter of animals and the communal distribution of food, which had been discouraged during the Soviet period, now have the tacit approval of the government.

⁹ I was first made aware of this term by Iliyar Karimov a scholar at the Oriental Institute, who has also studied at Indiana University.



At the graveyard of Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 1389) in Kasr-i 'Arifan in the vicinity of Bukhara (E. Özdalga, 1999)

these works include introductions which not only describe the circumstances of the author's life but juxtapose the suppression of Islam in the Soviet period, when such works could not be published, with the situation since independence.

A second category includes translations of works from Persian and Arabic. A variety of classical biographies of Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband are available including a translation of Abul Muhsin Muhammad Bakir ibn Muhammad Ali's *Maqamat-i Khoja Bahaiddin Naqshband*¹⁰ as *Bahaiddin Balogardan*. Surprisingly, Ali Safi's *Rashahāt-i 'Ain al-Hayat*—probably the most important and frequently cited hagiographical source for the Naqshbandiyya in Central Asia—has not been republished in a complete translation, although portions of it have appeared in a variety of journals, including *Muloqot*, the official journal of the ruling party.¹¹

Another category of this literature consists of contemporary hagiographies of medieval *awliyā* based on primary sources. These include books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles written both by journalists and academics. One such work is Sadriddin Salim Bukhari's *Dilda Yar*, a popular work on Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband.¹² Professor Bukhari is a professor of literature at the University in Bukhara and was perhaps most famous in the Soviet period for translating Goethe into Uzbek. He has also translated medieval hagiographical literature from Persian into Uzbek.

Dilda Yar is a curious and diverse work. Published in 1993, its contents include: a brief biography of Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband,¹³ a chapter devoted to the nature of *tariqa*,¹⁴ a discussion of Naqshbandi doctrine as presented in the *Rashahāt*,¹⁵ a description of the rules and *adab* of the Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* as presented in a speech by a visiting Khalidi sheikh from Turkey in 1991,¹⁶ and selections of relevant

10 Abu Muhsin Muhammad Bakr b. Muhammad Ali, *Bahaiddin Balogardan*, Muhammadkhan Makhdum Hasankhan Makhdumoghli (trans.), Yazuvchi, Tashkent, 1993.

11 See for example *Muloqot*, 7-8, 1995. pp. 57-61.

12 Sadriddin Salim Bukhari, *Dilda Yar: Hazrat Bahaiddin Naqshband*, Ghafur Ghulam Nomidagi Adabiyat va San'at, Tashkent, 1993.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-20.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 20-33.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-70.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 71-75.

poetry by Mashrab, Alisher Navai'i, Sufi Allahyar, and Babur.¹⁷ This book, which was readily available in bookstores throughout the country, was one of the sources that people would frequently recommend when I told them I was interested in Sufism.

The book is clearly intended as an introduction to the Naqshbandiyya tradition. The author carefully explains concepts such as *ilm la-dunni* (knowledge directly from God) and phenomena like the Uwaysiyyah *tarikāt* to an audience that is largely ignorant of the basic elements of the Sufi worldview.¹⁸ He also presents a variety of sources stressing the importance of the fact that Bahā' al-Din Naqshband received training not only from living sheikhs but also from the *ghayb*—particularly from Abdulkhaliq Ghijduvani. Like most writers on the Naqshbandiyya, he emphasizes Bahā' al-Din Naqshband's teaching of silent *zikr*.¹⁹ A significant element of this book is the way in which it stresses the ancestry of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband on his father's side back from Ja'far As-Sadiq through Husayn b. Ali to Ali b. Abu Talib, drawing on a work entitled *Tuhfatul Ansab*. While he also mentions that Bahā' al-Din is a descendant of Abu Bakr Siddiq on his mother's side, he seems to emphasize the 'Alid *silsila* over the Bakrī one.²⁰

Dilda Yar contains a variety of stories about Bahā' al-Din Naqshband that emphasize his solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden. In one such story he refuses the food of a king explaining that kingship is not legitimate labor and thus the food offered by a king is not *halal*.²¹ This not only emphasizes Bahā' al-Din's preference for ordinary working people over rulers, but also gives evidence of the importance the Naqshbandī sheikhs gave to the necessity of honest labor—an important theme in all of this literature. Another anecdote notes that the saint's hands always smelled of earth because in the dark of night when no one was looking he would crawl along the roads and clear away thorns and stones so that blind or infirm persons would not step on them. He did this at night so that no one would see him performing his good deed.²² Throughout, Bahā' al-Din is presented as a perfect exponent of devotion and humility. In one story he is even shown kissing the footprints of a dog and crying, saying that Sufis should learn purity of love for God from dogs, who are symbols of obedience and humility.²³

In an obvious rejection of "scientific atheism" the author of *Dilda Yar* accepts the authenticity of miracles and presents several examples of them. In one such story Bahā' al-Din, while still under the tutelage of his *pir*, Mir Kulāl, burned his winter cloak by throwing it into the flames of an oven. Upon learning of this his *pir* responded by telling him that he still had need of it and he should retrieve it. Bahā' al-Din noted that this was impossible, as the cloak had surely already burned away. But Mir Kulāl responded that the cloak had been upon his shoulders all these years while he was burning in the fire of love and it had not been harmed. Thus, if it had not been harmed by spiritual fire, how could it be harmed by earthly flames? Bahā' al-Din then miraculously removed the cloak undamaged from the fire.²⁴

This story resonates with a number of stories told in Central Asian hagiographical literature about *awliyā* who are able to enter into fire and not be burned.²⁵ It also

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-64.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-19.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

25 For a fascinating discussion of this metaphor in Yasawiyan hagiography see Devon DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, 1994, pp. 243-289.

provides a striking example of the necessity of obedience in the *pir-murid* relationship and the ability of *pirs* to perform *karāmat* or miracles—all constant themes within the larger Naqshbandī tradition and the Sufi tradition in general.

Like other authors, Sadriddin Salim Bukhari stresses the important role played by Bahā' al-Din Naqshband and the Naqshbandiyya tradition on Uzbek literature and history—in particular his influence on Navai'i.²⁶ To this end he presents examples of poetry by important figures dealing with Bahā' al-Din Naqshband. Thus, *Dilda Yar* not only functions to reconstruct the Sufi tradition, it also helps in the construction of a national Uzbek identity.

Another major writer of Naqshbandī hagiographical literature is Arif Usman, formerly Arif Utmanov, a professor of history at the Al-Biruni Oriental Institute in Tashkent. Among his works is a short booklet on the life and teachings of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband, *Bahauddin Naqshband va Uning Ta'limati Haqida*²⁷ (On Bahā' al-Din Naqshband and his Teaching) and a similar booklet on the Yasawiyyan *pir*, *Zangi Ota*.²⁸ He has also published numerous newspaper and journal articles and appears regularly on television and radio discussing the lives of the *awliyā*. One of the key themes of Arif Usman's works is the reconciliation of the apparent historical contradictions between the various *tariqas* of Central Asia. He stresses the common source of the Naqshbandiyya and Yasawiyya *tariqas* in the person of Yusuf Hamdani, whose tomb lies not far from the Uzbek border near the city of Merv in neighboring Turkmenistan. As he frequently argues, Yusuf Hamdani's *khalifas* included Ahmed Yasawi, the founder of the Yassawiyya *tariqa*—and a spiritual ancestor of the Bektashis—and Khoja Abdulkhaliq Ghijduvani, who is part of the *sil-sila* of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband.²⁹ Not only has he made this argument in print on more than one occasion, but I have seen him on television presenting pictures of his trip to the tomb of Yusuf Hamdani, explaining this connection to the Uzbek-speaking television audience. This argument not only reconciles apparently contradictory elements in Central Asian religious history but also presents to Uzbeks—who have long been taught that their culture was inferior to that of the Russians—a vision of their culture as one that played a central role in Islamic and, thus, world history.

Despite his training in the Soviet academy, Prof. Usman has made a clear break with some of the most important themes of Soviet-era scholarship by thoroughly and explicitly rejecting the doctrine of “scientific atheism.” For example, Prof. Usman's writings like those of Sadriddin Salim Bukhari, accept the authenticity of the miracles of the Central Asian *awliyā*, ignoring the Soviet rejection of miracles as superstition.

Like *Dilda Yar*, Arif Usman's *Bahauddin Naqshband va Uning Ta'limati Haqida* is designed as an introductory text on Sufism for persons with little or no previous knowledge. He presents a brief biography of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband,³⁰ a brief description of the eleven rules of the Naqshbandiyya,³¹ a lengthy discussion of the political and social activism of the Naqshbandīs with a detailed discussion of the slogan *Dil ba Yar, Dast ba Kar*,³² (“the heart with the Friend, the hand at work”) a discussion of the role of Naqshbandī sheikhs in rebellions against the Russians and other colonial powers,³³ and the importance of “humanism” in the thought of Sufis (including a

26 Bukhari, *ibid.*, pp. 53-63.

27 Arif Usman, *Bahauddin Naqshband va Uning Ta'limati Haqida*, Universitet, Tashkent, 1993.

28 Turghun Faiziev and Arif Usmanov, *Zangi Ota*, Uzbekistan Respublikasi Khalq Ta'limi Vazirligi T. H. Qari-Niyazi Uzbekistan Pedagogika Fanlar Ilmi-Tadqiqat Instituti, Tashkent, 1993.

29 Usman, *ibid.*, pp. 9-10, 25-27.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-14.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-21.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

fascinating discussion of *wahdat ul-wujud*).³⁴ He devotes a significant portion of the book to showing the connections between the Yassawiyya and the Naqshbandiyya and the importance of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* as an order that united Turki and Tajik speakers—an significant point to make in a country where ethnic and linguistic conflict is a real possibility.³⁵ Thus, he covers a lot of ground in 32 brief pages. He closes his book with a call to the people to remember in a proper manner the life and works of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband in the upcoming anniversary year of his birth (1993) and with a quotation from President Karimov about the need of the people to honor the great persons of their past including Ahmad Yasawi and Bahā' al-Din Naqshband.³⁶

Other important sources of hagiography are newspaper and journal articles. In 1994, a paperback was published collecting representative newspaper and journal accounts of Sufism which had been published since independence. Entitled *Ghaiblar Khailidan Yangan Chiragh* (The Lamp that Burns from the Hidden Ones), it was readily available in an inexpensive edition throughout the country.³⁷ It collected a wide variety of materials, including scholarly articles and journalistic accounts of the Sufi tradition. Arif Usman provided materials for this work,³⁸ as did Najmuddin Kamilov—a talented scholar who has himself written a remarkable hagiography of Najmuddin Kubra³⁹—who wrote an excellent chapter on the basic ideas of *tasawwuf*, Islamic mysticism, and a historical outline of the Sufi tradition.⁴⁰ An important theme present in many of the articles was the people's tragic lack of knowledge about religion as a result of the Soviet experience and the need to correct the slanders against Islam that were a central part of the previous system.

This is an important objective of post-Soviet writing on Sufism—to counter the ideas about the *awliya* that were taught as part of the Soviet educational system. It should be remembered that there was very little actually taught, even in the Uzbek language-medium schools, about the *awliya*. What was taught was generally negative—although certain aspects of Naqshbandi teaching were seen as superior to other forms of Sufism. The slogan *Dil ba Yar, Dast ba Kar* (see above) was a notion which could be reconciled with a kind of proto-socialism as the Naqshbandis demanded that their *murids* work for a living rather than beg or receive public remuneration for religious practices. This was a Sufism that valued the labor of the working class.⁴¹ Similarly, Arif Usman sees the early Naqshbandis as practicing *hurfiylik* (free thought) and *gumanizm* (humanism).⁴²

Still, in the Soviet period the Naqshbandiyya—and Sufism in general—were presented as tools of the state used to control the lives of working people. For example, the fifteenth-century Naqshbandi saint, Khoja Ahrār, was commonly portrayed as: (1) a large feudal land owner who used his religious status to oppress the peasantry, (2) a rival and enemy of the poet Navai'i, and (3) a signatory to the unjust death warrant against Ulugh Beg.⁴³ Despite his important role in Central Asian history there was little discussion of his life in school beyond this. Thus, one of the first tasks

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁷ Shamuiddin Mansurov (ed.), *Ghaiblar Khailidan Yangan Chiragh*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1994.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-147.

³⁹ Najmiddin Kamilov, *Najmiddin Kubra*, Abdullah Qadiri Nomidagi Khalq Merosi, Tashkent, 1995.

⁴⁰ Mansurov, *ibid.*, pp. 13-58.

⁴¹ M. A. Usmanov (ed.), *Islam: Spravochnik*, Uzbek Sovet Encyclopediasi Bosh Redaksiya, Tashkent, 1989, p. 67.

⁴² Usman, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁴³ Arif Usman, "Hitoyo Hindgacha Mashur Edi," *Tashkent Okshomi*, November 23, 1994, p. 3. See also, Usmanov, *ibid.*, p. 275.

of this new hagiographical tradition is to make available new versions of the history, which tend to reconstruct the lives of the *awliyā* in a more favorable light.

An article written on the life of Khoja Aḥrār by Arif Usman in the journal *Tashkent Okshomi*, published on November 23, 1994 entitled, "Hitoyo Hindgacha Mashhur Edi" (He was Famous as Far Away as China and India) provides a good example of this. In the beginning of his article Professor Usman argues that Sufism is a part of the culture and values of the region which has influenced the whole world—a fact which is affirmed by the number of European and American orientologists interested in the tradition. He quotes the famed academic, Professor Wahid Zahidov, who told him in the 1970s that the people were looking forward to the time when they would have access to the "golden manuscripts" that have been stored in the institutes "as the mother's milk of the culture." Now that "blessed day" has come, he argues, and it is the task of scholars to bring out the true nature of that culture. In the rest of his article Arif Usman takes on the Soviet version of Khoja Aḥrār as a feudal landlord—a charge which he dismisses as slanderous and baseless. Usman stresses several themes. One is Khoja Aḥrār's unbroken *silsila* to the Prophet, which is the source of the saint's authority. He also notes Khoja Aḥrār's familial connections on his mother's and father's sides with great *awliyā*. Professor Uthman also addresses the issue of miracles by narrating how during a childhood illness Khoja Aḥrār slept in the tomb of his ancestor Hazrati Kaffal al-Shashi in Tashkent. That night he was visited both by the aforementioned *wali* and Hazrat Isa in a dream. Not only was he healed of his illness, but Khoja Aḥrār was also given the power to start the "dead hearts of corpses"—interpreted metaphorically by Prof. Usman as the ability to turn worldly selfish people into *murids* merely by casting his glance upon them.⁴⁴ This is a common theme in Central Asian hagiography. Najmuddin Kamilov presents a similar story in his remarkable book on the life of Najmiddin Kubra where a merchant is turned into a *murid* by a mere glance during a *sohbat* (conversation).⁴⁵

Prof. Usman also counters the story of animosity between Khoja Aḥrār and Navai'i by quoting the poet on the greatness of the saint, whose *murids* and *firman*s (edicts) stretched throughout the Muslim world and were famous as faraway as China and India. The article ends with a call to scholars to serve the country by recovering for the youth the real history of the *awliyā*.⁴⁶ This is certainly the case in Uzbekistan. People trained as orientologists in the last regime are now functioning as the cultural transmitters of a forgotten past. To this end, numerous newspaper articles of this kind have been written by scholars from the academic institutes pointing out what they see as the calumny of Soviet writing about the *awliyā* and presenting their own responses to it.

The Reconstruction of the Naqshbandī Tradition in Uzbekistan

There are a variety of writings on the Naqshbandī tradition available in modern Uzbek. Everything from the translation of classical materials to tri-lingual abridgements of the writings of Idries Shah in English, Russian and Uzbek.⁴⁷ Some empha-

44 Usman, "Hitoyo Hindgacha," p. 3.

45 Kamilov, *ibid.*, p. 25.

46 Usman, "Hitoyo Hindgacha," p. 3.

47 Idries Shah, *Order of Nakshbandi*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1993.

size the *sharī'a*-mindedness of the Naqshbandī path and some the *hurfiylik* and humanism of the *awliyā*. Most emphasize the importance of obedience to one's *pir*, the existence of the *ghayb* and the efficacy of belief in the *awliyā* for obtaining spiritual and material ends—all common themes within the Sufi tradition throughout the Islamic world.

At first glance, there is little different in these post-Soviet writings from what one might encounter, for example, in modern South Asian hagiographies. But the intellectual and religious context of post-Soviet Uzbekistan means that readers are using these materials in a very different way from their co-religionists in South Asia. While British colonialism in South Asia attempted to control religion within limits, it never attempted to destroy it at its roots. South Asian hagiographies are written for an audience that has maintained connections with its religious past. It is unlikely that a person reading a spiritual biography in Urdu in Karachi or Delhi would have no familiarity with the basic concepts of the Sufi tradition. On the other hand, the Soviet system attempted to destroy religion as part of its official position of "scientific atheism." In many ways it was extremely successful.⁴⁸ Many people in Uzbekistan have only a cursory idea about the nature of the Sufi tradition. The work of a writer like Arif Usman is based on classical sources. Thus, it emphasizes major themes common throughout the tradition—the authority of the *awliyā*, the necessity of obedience to one's *pir*, the ability of *awliyā* to work miracles, the danger involved in showing disrespect to the *awliyā*, the need to seek humility and not judge people by outward station or state. But Professor Usman is not reminding his audience of something they have known since childhood; he is teaching persons who have been raised with an ignorance of and antipathy to the basic ideas of the Sufi tradition.

The themes in these works have in many ways been forgotten by the current generation, which has been cut off from the Sufi tradition for decades. Clearly Arif Usman is trying to re-educate a new generation. And as the government has no objection to this emerging literary Sufism, he and others like him are more than free to publish such works. There is very little here that challenges the state's nation-building agenda. In fact, these works aid in that agenda.

Despite its resonance with the larger Sufi tradition, the literary reconstruction of the Naqshbandī tradition in Uzbekistan does, however, distinguish itself from Naqshbandī Sufism in other places in several significant ways. The first and most obvious is the lack of a thriving *pir-murid* tradition. Thus, perhaps the most important theme in Sufi hagiography is the one that is hardest to articulate in the current Uzbek environment.

The *awliyā* are both objects of devotion and paradigms of devotional allegiance—achieving *fana fi-sheikh* (spiritual annihilation in one's sheikh) through their devotion to their *pirs*, a devotion which the rest of us should imitate. This is a major theme in the hagiography being published in contemporary Uzbekistan. Devotion to one's *pir* is a major virtue, the highest evidence of one's sainthood. Contemporary hagiographical writings emphasize this virtue, and yet in Uzbekistan, this is in many ways an impossible virtue to articulate, as living *pirs* are few and far between.

One of the most interesting characteristics of writing about the Naqshbandī tradition in Uzbekistan is the lack of attention given to Ahmad Sirhindi and the Mujaddidī tradition and its offshoots. Given the fact that the Mujaddidī tradition has become so dominant within the Naqshbandī *tariqa* that it is treated by some scholars

48 I am grateful to Prof. Nazif Shahrani of Indiana University for his insight into this fundamental difference between Soviet and British colonialism.

as synonymous with the larger Naqshbandī tradition,⁴⁹ it is unusual that among all of the books and pamphlets written in modern Uzbek about the Naqshbandī tradition there is almost nothing written about Ahmad Sirhindi and the Mujaddidīs. The emphasis is clearly on the Khojagān tradition and, to a lesser extent, the later *silsila* running through Khoja Ahrār to Makhdum-i A'zam. Arif Uthman mentions Ahmad Sirhindi briefly in *Bahauddin Naqshband va Uning Ta'limati Haqida*, but gives no details about him except that he played a major role in spreading Naqshbandī teaching in India.⁵⁰ In *Dilqā Yar* Sadridin Salim Bukhari presents the discussion of proper *adab* (rules of good manners) by a Turkish Khalidī *pir*, but does not discuss the specific beliefs or practices of the Khalidīs as a branch of the Mujaddidīs.⁵¹ The discussion of miracle stories in hagiography in general is focused on the Khojagān tradition and draws heavily on the *Rashahāt* for its material. The Mujaddidīs are conspicuous by their absence. When I asked an imam in Bukhara about Ahmad Sirhindi, he responded that the Mujaddidī was not a popular figure in the region and instead argued that people in Bukhara tended to follow the teachings of Makhdum-i A'zām.

There are several possible reasons for the absence of the Mujaddidī in published works about the Naqshbandiyya. One is largely nationalistic. The Khojagān *awliyā* spent most of their lives in Central Asia and their tombs are all located in or near Uzbekistan. As the literary reconstruction of the Naqshbandiyya tradition is linked to an agenda of nation-building, it is not surprising that the hagiographical tradition focuses on those *awliyā* who can be presented as national heroes in ways that the South Asian Ahmad Sirhindi cannot. Secondly, there is the possibility that the government fears the kind of political resurgence sometimes associated with the Mujaddidīs.

A crucial idea associated with Ahmad Sirhindi is the attack on *wahdat ul-wujud* (the unity of being)—a concept dominant in much of Shi'a and Sunni esotericism. *Wahdat ul-wujud* is an important theme in much of the poetry of Mashrab, who saw no contradiction between venerating Bahā' al-Din Naqshband in his poetry and holding to a radical notion of mystical *tawhid* (unity).⁵² I have not found this attack on *wahdat ul-wujud* to be a common feature of contemporary Uzbek writing about the Naqshbandiyya. In fact, Arif Usman presents a remarkable story concerning *wahdat ul-wujud* in *Bahauddin Naqshband va Uning Ta'limati Haqida*.

One day a court official came upon a dervish sitting in the middle of the road. The dervish refused to get up or even acknowledge the presence of the courtier. The courtier asked him, "Who are you and why haven't you stood up upon seeing me?" The dervish asked the courtier who he was and he replied proudly that he was a person of high stature. The dervish asked him if there was anyone higher than he and the courtier replied that certainly the king was higher. The dervish then asked if there was anyone higher than the king and the courtier replied that of course God was higher than the king. The dervish then asked if anyone was higher than God and the courtier replied that no one was higher than God. At this point the dervish replied, "That 'No one' that you say—that's me! Leave and don't remain on this road!" Arif Usman uses this story to demonstrate the meaning of *wahdat ul-wujud*, which he sees as a source of the humanism in the Sufi tradition.⁵³

49 See for example, Hamid Algar, "Naqshbandiyah," *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 3, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 226.

50 Usman, *Bahuddin*, p. 12.

51 Bukhari, *ibid.*, pp. 71-74.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

53 Usman, *Bahuddin*, pp. 23-25.

perspective it is perhaps useful to begin with the opposite question why have the Mujaddidis become so dominant in the larger Sunni world that they have become synonymous with the term “Naqshbandi”? There was a time when Sufism seemed to treat the borders between the *ummah* (community of Muslim believers) and potential converts in the non-Muslim world as fluidly as possible in order to facilitate conversion to Islam. To this end many *tariqas* emphasized vernacular poetry and the Islamization of indigenous practice. The Mujaddidis, born in India where the *ummah* was surrounded by Hindus and where Shi’a minorities were playing a major role within Islamic culture, attempted to draw the boundaries of Sunni Islam more rigidly, treating the border between the *ummah* and the non-Muslim world as a wall to protect the “true Islam” from external and internal pollution. The Mujaddidiyya presented a form of Sufism which can easily exclude Shi’a Muslims by emphasizing Bahā’ al-Din Naqshband’s *silsila* through Abu Bakr, rather than through Ali. Its primary goal was not the spread of Islam to non-Muslims but the protection of Islam from “heretical” influences. Thus it is not surprising that with the rise of the Shi’a Saffawid empire the explicitly pro-Sunni Mujaddidi *tariqa* would grow in popularity, particularly with rulers who sought to prevent Shi’a influences from destabilizing their rule. Similarly in the contemporary world, the Mujaddidis remain popular with those persons interested in protecting Islam from the polluting *bid’a*, innovation, of modernity and westernization. This tendency of the modern Mujaddidi-Naqshbandiyya to divide the world into “Us” and “Them” is likely seen by the government of Uzbekistan as potentially de-stabilizing. Perhaps even more importantly, the fact that the majority position of the Naqshbandi tradition is Mujaddidi raises the possibility that a living Naqshbandi tradition could once again emerge focused around *murids* trained by Pakistani and Turkish sheikhs. As I have already stated the government is supportive of Sufism as a worldview—not as an alternative political institution capable of civil disobedience.

Conclusion

Post-Soviet hagiography is playing an important role in the reconstruction of Islam in Central Asia. There were occasions where I would be sharing food with people at a shrine or in a home and I would ask someone if they knew any *rivayat*, narratives, about the *awliya*, and when they told me one I would ask where they had learned it. I expected to hear that they had learned these things from their parents or grandparents, until they would mention the recent issue of some journal which they had read.

In many other parts of the Muslim world people know their Islamic identity in hundreds of subtle and organic ways. They may see themselves as “secular Muslims,” they may not pray or fast with any regularity. But they know the poetry of Hafiz or Rumi or Yunus Emre or Ghalib or the stories and songs of their grandparents. These living cultural artifacts—steeped in the language and worldview of Islam and *tassawuf*—are the places they look to when their lives are in crisis, their hearts are broken, or the anomie of modern existence stands threatening like a wolf at the door. In Uzbekistan, this organic quality has been largely disrupted. The recreation of Islam is in some ways like the reconstruction of the memory of an amnesiac who has been told he was a Muslim and tries to regain his Islam through reading books about Islam or questioning other Muslims. If this sounds harsh it is not far off from the metaphor of the *mankurt* used in Chingiz Aitmatov’s remarkable novel. *The Day Lasts More Than A Hundred Years*. *Mankurts* were unfortunate souls, kidnapped and tortured by having a leather band placed around their heads until they forgot who

they were and became the willing slaves of their captors.⁵⁴ (One wonders how Aitmatov ever got this metaphor past the Soviet censors.)

The Uzbeks are trying to recreate their religious past out of the murky amnesia of the Soviet period. It floods back in fits and starts from numerous directions producing a weird jumbling effect. Islam is mixed-in with *The Weekly World News*, flying saucers, aliens, ninjas and a variety of supernatural phenomena generally referred to as "extra-sense."⁵⁵ Faith healers who channel Islamic spirits, including famous *awliyā* have become commonplace—in fact they are forced to register with the government. People are in the process of sorting it all out.

Of course the government has its own reason for making sense out of all this jumble. The state is trying to construct a univocal Islam—one voice, one interpretation of history. To my mind there is an insoluble dilemma inherent in the top down version of Sufism being currently constructed by the government. It is akin to creating a religious Esperanto, a Sufi tradition stripped of its organic wholeness, and thus, to my mind, doomed to artificiality. The Sufi tradition as it grew naturally in the region is deeply multivocal. It is both the sober (at least in some accounts) Sufism of Bahā' al-Din Naqshband and his companions and the drunken spiritual madness of the liminal poet saint of the Fargana Valley, Mashrab—the 17th-century advocate of *wahdat ul-wujud* who was executed by the king of Balkh after defecating on his throne, one of history's ultimate anti-authoritarian gestures. The government clearly prefers the former to the latter.

Of course, some people want to avoid the Turko-Iranian past entirely. These are voices that say that we don't need any "little books," only Qur'an and *hadith*; voices like that of the young man in Tashkent who told me that the Naqshbandis are wrong because they are Shi'a and gave as evidence of this assertion that his local imam told him that this was the case and he should know because he knows Arabic. When I asked the young man if Bahā' al-Din Naqshband knew Arabic, he backtracked and said that Bahā' al-Din was still a proper Muslim but the problem emerged later in the tradition. He gave the same answer when I asked about Khoja Aḥrār and Makhdum-i Azam. In any event, for some the solution is to avoid "the poison of Sufism" entirely.

This attitude is certainly not unique to Uzbekistan. It can be argued that criticism of devotional allegiance to holy persons is one of the major characteristics of religion in modernity. The centrality of devotion to living saints—once a crucial feature of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam—has been one of the first targets of modernizing reformers in all of these traditions. Even in traditions where it still thrives, many people educated in the culture of the modern world system view devotion to saints as a relic, a superstitious anachronism. This is especially true of many of the groups that are often labelled as "fundamentalists" or "Islamists."

There is an ironic situation in Uzbekistan. In other parts of Muslim Asia the Sufi tradition is largely oral, relying on the direct transmission of knowledge from master to disciple. On the other hand so-called "fundamentalism" accomplishes much of its *dawa* through pamphlets and books. In Uzbekistan—where Wahabism is illegal (and any Islam the government disagrees with is labeled "Wahabism")—the situation is reversed. "Fundamentalism" has gone underground where it is passed orally from teacher to student, whereas Sufism—divorced from the institution of *pir-murid* has taken on a new life as a largely literary, intellectual tradition. Of course from the

54 Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Thousand Years*, John French (trans.), Indiana University, Bloomington, 1988.

55 One need only look at the range of articles in the journal *Sirli Alam*, which covers a variety of mystical and supernatural themes—including Sufism.

standpoint of the government's security interests a Sufi tradition free of the pesky problem of actual charismatic religious leaders is much preferred to the alternative.

It is against this backdrop that the current phenomenon of "post-Soviet hagiography" should be understood. On the one hand it serves the needs of the state which is reconstructing a particular vision of history and Islam. And yet the people who participate in the production of these hagiographies have their own agendas, which, although they sometimes coincide with the state's agenda, are less cynically attempting to the best of their ability to recreate an authentic Sufi tradition. Intellectuals in the former Soviet Union are quite used to writing within the narrow limits of state sanctioned opinion. From my conversations with some of these authors it is clear to me that they believe in and value the Sufi tradition. While some of their writings may seem at times like cynical attempts to create a new "politically correct" Islam—writers like Kamilov and Usman strike me as people who believe in the Sufi tradition and wish to see it revived. The fact that the state has reasons of its own for reconstructing it is no mere coincidence, but it is co-incidental.

There is a Naqshbandī saying that a live cat is greater than a 1,000 dead lions—meaning one live sheikh is greater than 1000 dead ones.⁵⁶ From the standpoint of the state, however, it is quite clear that they would much prefer a dead lion to a live cat. And in some sense the point is moot. There are few live cats to be found. Prof. Usman told me once that the old *pir-murid* system may no longer be possible anywhere in the modern world, let alone Uzbekistan. Only time will tell if the living tradition will re-emerge in Uzbekistan as Turkish and Pakistani *murids* and *pirs* re-establish connections with the land of their spiritual origins and what remains of the indigenous tradition slowly re-emerges. Perhaps this new hagiographical tradition will pave the way for its rebirth.

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⁵⁶ Harzulla Yoldoshev, "Hazrat Haqida Ibratli Rivoyatlar," *Bukhara Hakikati*, 9 September, 1993, p. 3.

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