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**AHMED YASAWI: LIFE, WORDS
AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE KAZAKH CULTURE**

The article starts analyzing the spiritual aspects of the culture of the Kazakh people, in particular the role played by funerary rituals, pilgrimages, shamanic practices, Islam and Sufism. It proceeds with an introduction to the life, teachings and words of the Sufi master Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (Sayram 1093 AD, Turkestan 1166 AD), underlining the importance, for the Kazakh culture as well as for the entire world, of the Yasawi self-immurement in an underground cell and of the poems (Divan-i Hikmet) transmitted from down there. Finally are analyzed the existing versions of the Divan-i Hikmet, in particular the structure and contents of the 49 hikmet of the Turkestan manuscript of which, as conclusion, is provided a selection of verses translated in English language.

Key words: Ahmed Yasawi, Divan-i Hikmet, Central Asian Sufi orders, Kazakh culture

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Ахмет Ясауи: өмірі, сөздері және оның қазақ мәдениетіндегі маңызы

Мақалада қазақ халқы мәдениетінің рухани аспектілері, соның ішінде жерлеу рәсімі, қажылық, шамандық наным-сенім, ислам мен сопылық істері қарастырылған. Бұл жұмыста қазақ халқының байырғы мәдениетінің тарихында айрықша орны бар ұлы ақын, сопылық поэзияның негізін салушы, ұлы ойшыл, діни қайраткер Қожа Ахмет Яссауидің (1093, Сайрам -1166, Түркістан), соның ішінде қазақ мәдениеті үшін, бүкіл дүние жүзі үшін оның қалдырған еңбектерінің маңыздылығы жазылған. Өзінің жеке қалауымен жерасты өмір сүріп, сол жерде жазған «Диуани хикмет» жинақ өлеңдері бүгінгі күні бізге жеткен. Қорытындылай келе, «Диуани Хикметтің» қолданыстағы нұсқалары, әсіресе Түркістан қолжазбасындағы 49 хикметтің құрылымы мен мазмұны талданып, оның қорытындысы ретінде ағылшын тіліне аударылған өлеңдерінен үзінді келтіріледі.

Түйін сөздер: Ахмет Яссауи, Диуани хикмет, Орта Азиядағы суфизм діндері, қазақ мәдениеті

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Ахмед Ясави: жизнь, слова и значение в казахской культуре

В статье анализируются духовные аспекты культуры казахского народа, в частности роль погребальных ритуалов, паломничества, шаманской практики, ислам и суфизм. Работа включает в себя о жизни, учениях и словах суфийского мастера Ходжа Ахмет Яссауи (Сайрам 1093 г. н.э., Туркестан 1166 г.) подчеркивая важность как для казахской культуры, так и для всего мира. По его собственной воле Яссауи поселился в подземной камере и его стихи (Диван-и Хикмет) были переданы оттуда. В заключение, анализируются существующие версии Диван-и Хикмет, в частности структура и содержание 49 хикмет туркестанской рукописи, из которых, как вывод, предоставляется отрывок из стихов, переведенных на английский язык.

Ключевые слова: Ахмет Яссауи, Диван-и Хикмет, суфийское духовенство в Центральной Азии, казахская культура

1 – Shamanism, religious rituals, believes and spiritual references in the Kazakh culture¹

In Kazakhstan, in the same way the solidarity groups put themselves as the center of the social life and don't renounce easily to the pretension of territorial power at local and national levels, so the patriarchal family and clans always keep under control religious creeds and practices.

Religious performances in Kazakhstan develop in answer to the practical needs and social interactions of the daily life (healing, fertility, greetings, respect, hospitality, thanksgiving, birthdays, marriages, funerals, festivals and calendar events), ending up by promoting tribal and national affiliations more political than religious. This character explains why Kazakhstan never saw during history the rise of an independent code of religious precepts, compulsory religious creeds and independent clergy, in spite of the strong attempts in that direction made during the XVIII-XIX centuries by the Russian colonization.

The few necessary rituals never develop beyond their pragmatic use: this is true for local pre-Islamic shamanic practices as well as for Islamic creeds and rituals.

1.1 – Shamanism

Shamanism is a term referring to a system of practices and techniques of religious ecstasy engendered in the context of small human communities in order to establish harmony and fertility within human, animal, vegetal and cosmic cycles. It consists in investing a most sensitive person, a shaman (*bakshi*), with the task of getting possessed by spirits in order to manage the relation between humans and the invisible world, in particular for physical thaumaturgy, dispelling bad spirits, appealing to ancestors, foreseeing the future, calling for rain (*tasattyk*), favoring communal integration and providing theatrical support in festivals and ceremonies (*toys*). These tasks are pursued in specific spaces and times by the *bakshi* and few helpers through the manipulation of elements and gestures, onomatopoeic sounds, words, songs, music, dances, of which the knowledge is transmitted person to person from an unknown past. Today in most of the world shamanist practices are incorporated in the ritual context of a soteriological religion or in the field of pseudo-medical science; also in modern Kazakhstan they are much reduced but still in vogue and respected and, of course, merged within newly introduced Islamic formulas.

Such practical technique for solving specific problems, made of concrete actions more than of words and conceptualizations, doesn't cover the

whole spiritual needs, so that it operates within wider religious conceptions with which tries to be compatible and by which is even inspired.

Among the Turko-Mongol peoples of Central Asia and Mongolia, starting from 3-4 millennia ago, spirituality manifests in the form of a natural religiosity called *Tengrism*, of which the main symbolic characteristic is the bipolarity Tengri-Umai ('sky-earth') with the two poles connected by the cosmic tree of the organic life (*baiterek*). It finds analogues among all Siberian peoples, in the Korean *Muism*, in the Chinese *Taoism* and in the Japanese *Shinto*.

The main cultic practices are two and deeply related: pilgrimages and funerary rituals. Two are also their objects and rituals: natural entities and ancestors, celebrated by prayers made of simple formulas and by sheep sacrifices with collective banquet.

1.2 – Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages are oriented towards special natural places, mainly springs, hills and mausoleums built on tombs or cenotaphs (empty tombs) of illustrious human personages. Actually the most popular destinations, the ones provided with lodging facilities, are sites hosting both healing springs (or wells) and mausoleums, witnessing the interconnection of natural and funerary cults, the synchronic worship of living and dead elements.

This is the case of several pilgrim sites, like the Kazigurt mountain of South KZ, which represents a microcosm of natural, mythical and historical events that all together became object of worship. The place is inserted in a landscape underpinned by springs and sheep-shaped stones (*koytas*) and 'covered' by a thick layer of legends of different epochs: it is referred as the cradle of Ana and Ata, the forbearers of the human race, or as a kind of mount Ararat, and hosts the mausoleum of Akbura-Ata, a Zoroastrian saint who healed people and taught monotheism.

On pilgrimage sites is ordinarily performed the sacrifice of a sheep or, in important occasions, of a horse, accompanied with prayers and collective banquet. One-day pilgrimages are done to just one place by entire families, occasionally accompanied by a Moslem cleric (*mullah*). Long pilgrimages are done during the summer season by individual itinerant pilgrims (*palomnik*) across several mausoleums mainly of South and West Kazakhstan.

Today enveloped in the Islamic frame, with shamans promoted to *dervishes* (Muslim itinerant mendicants), the pre-Islamic *cults of nature* and *ancestors* are still very alive and interactive,

connecting springs and landforms with mythical and historical beings.

Cults are imbedded in poetic legends and dedicated, in order of importance, to:

- saints associated with the first spread of Islam in Arabia: Mukhammad the prophet, his daughter Fatima;

- Sufi saints protagonists of the spread of Islam in the Central Asian deserts and steppes: Baba-Ata, Arystanbab, Ahmed Yasawi, Ismail-Ata, Sunak-Ata, etc.;

- mythical forefathers of some tribes, like the couple Baidabek-Ata and Domalak-Ana², protectors of the great *juz* against the Jungars;

- mythical ancestral saints patronizing human activities like fertility, works, arts and knowledge: Aiman-Sholpan, a woman ancestor ensuring fertility; Kydyr-Ata (see note 59), a traveling old man with the eyes hidden under long eyebrows, who announces the new year and masters renovation; Shopan-Ata, protector of sheep-breeding; Kambar-Ata, of horse-breeding; Baba Tukty, of warriors and heroes; Korkut-Ata, of shamans and musicians; etc.;

- benign anthropomorphic natural spirits associated with the cult of nature: Aidarly ('dragon'), a kind of natural energy, a mana-force that embodies enlightened personages; Aulie-Bastau ('sacred spring'), associated with the cult of springs and lakes; Zhilagan-Ata ('crying old man'), associated with the cult of mountains; etc..

In all cases the pilgrimage performance and the presence of springs and mausoleums supporting a legendary account are more important than the historicity and individuality of the saint himself, so that just the building of a mausoleum in the right place would promote in few decades the cult of any particular tomb or bone buried under it. This is the case of several modern mausoleums, like the mausoleum built at the periphery of Almaty for the XVIII century warrior Raimbek and for the XIX century poet Suyunbai which out of two popular figures generated two saints and in few decades became a holy destination.

Also purely natural sites with springs or impressive rocks formations or caves or panoramic tops, when provided by a serious dervish with opportune legends, a holy itinerary and simple accommodation facilities, can become in few years a destination for spiritual travels. This is the case of the pilgrimage and therapeutic site recently developed by the woman dervish Bifatima on a hill in the surroundings of the Ungurtas village (80 km west of Almaty), provided of springs, landforms and

legends³ but by now deprived of bones: the bones of Bifatima will be most probably the first.

It is difficult saying when these nature and ancestor cults started developing: most probably they are the last manifestation of an uninterrupted Stone Age tradition that underwent only secondary changes. Certainly the centrality of the sheep in funerary rituals, sacrifices and petroglyph representations characterizes the local cultures all along the last 3000 years, from the Early Iron age to now. Deep historical roots can be suspected in several Kazakh customs, suggesting a consideration of primary importance: the basic spirituality of the modern Kazakh people is surely very simple but in the same time most ancient, deep and determined, keeping almost unchanged for thousands of years.

1.3 – Islam

Islam diffused in Kazakhstan in two waves. The first wave started 1200 years ago in the Syrdarya region, introduced from the south by Sufi sheikhs during the Arab domination of the Central Asian caravan routes; the second happened 250 years ago and concerned all Kazakhstan, this time introduced from the west (Kazan), promoted by Russian imperial needs of territorial control rather than by popular soteriological concern.

In both cases Islam was spread in the steppes by the action of Sufi masters, respecting and adopting previous ancient cults and converting former spiritual wanderers into Moslem dervishes. In Kazakhstan it mainly provided new names and symbols for ancient practices, i.e. for the basic simple rituals of the Kazakh daily life: salutations, endings, wishes, marriages, births, deaths and burials. It arrived to introduce specific Moslem rituals, festivities and clergy men (*mullah*) only among the farming communities of the Syrdarya region, traditionally exposed to strong cultural influences from Transoxiana.

The Moslem ritual calendar had been juxtaposed to former feasts: baptism at birth (*shildekhana*), circumcision of young males (*syndietey*), yearly fasting (*oraza*) with final festival (*oraza ait*), sacrificial feast 40 days after death (*kurban ait*) and then again after 1 year; etc.. The 16 July festival commemorating the Muhammad flight from Mecca (*hijrah*), which signs the start of the first lunar month, of the 12 lunar months' year and of the Muslim era, is considered most important but didn't arrive to impose its own chronology.

The impact of Islam has been higher in funerary rituals. Here it simplified and democratized the previous customs by reducing the burial to a simple pit for a veiled corpse, without ornaments

or accompanying objects and with architectural extravagances absent or limited to a circumscribing construction.

All Kazakhs consider themselves as good Moslem but very few give importance to regular prayers (daily home prayers are practiced by few, and so are Friday prayers at the mosque) or would be able or interested in explaining doctrinal positions or engaging in theological debates ('Does God exist?', 'Does the world have a beginning?'). The friendly tolerance for different religions (or atheistic positions) and the interest for scientific knowledge are considered much healthier and productive than the elaboration of a personal system of creeds or the pretension to impose it to others.

1.4 – Meditation on death

Meditation on death, which in the consumerist societies of our days is rare and discouraged, is central in all religions⁴ and plays a most important role in the Quran, in particular among Sufi communities. It is deeply rooted in the Kazakh culture where it is individually and socially manifested by the importance given to elders, funerary rituals and pilgrimages to mausoleums.

Kazakh elders are charged with the duty of silently guarding the final door of life and, for this reason, are invested with respect and spiritual consideration and their words are highly esteemed, which in exchange allows the younger generations to enjoy the plenitude of life, undisturbed by existential problems until their turn of spiritual responsibility ripens with age. That conscious regard of old age and death characterizes the family life as well the Kazakh society as a whole, and is so well rooted that makes suspecting the persistency of a very ancient tradition.

We know very little about the conception of death among the prehistoric pastoralist groups of the Kazakhstan territory.

Legends (see here below 'Korkut-Ata') speak about the existence of a mythical period when death was faced without fear but with desire and joy: a mental state that paleo-ethnographic investigations cannot detect but that possibly is still held today secretly by enlightened individuals.

Starting from the Bronze Age and increasingly during the Saka period, two archetypical animals play a major role in funerary rituals: the sheep and the horse. This is witnessed by the presence of their remains in burial assemblages and of their figures in shaping funerary objects and constructions and as dominant subjects of petroglyph representations. Both animals present virtues helping the travel across death and making of them privileged

sacrificial animals: the sheep by its submissiveness, the horse by its speed and vibrant pace exploding in different tempos. A third animal gets involved in sacrificial and funerary rituals at the turn of our era together with the blossoming of continental caravan routes: the camel (with one or two humps), i.e. the master of transports in desert environments.

Information about past conceptions of death becomes more abundant in Turkic medieval times. The Turkic world view (*Tengrism*) deeply differs from the view of Near Eastern monotheistic religions by missing the cosmogonic approach, in the sense that among early Turks an origin for the natural world is not even suspected and doesn't need any answer: nature exists by itself, supreme, irreducible; life and death are cycles within inscrutable ever changing natural dynamics. What is questioned is the ancestry of the human race, which is conceived as springing from natural elements, inorganic or organic – the ground, a tree, a she-wolf – and developing through a lineage of mythical personages and heroes (DeWeese 1994). Even the assimilation of the Turks within Islam at the end of I millennium AD didn't arrive to introduce the cosmogonic paradigm, it only introduced a new kind of primeval human ancestor. In times of Turkic alliance or dependence from the Islamic world, such ancestor was Japheth (Yafith), son of Noah and mythical progenitor of all European and Central Asian peoples; in times of conflict and Turkic supremacy, he was a Central Asian personage, Afrasiyab, a pre-Islamic Turanian king spoken in the Avesta and then similarly in Islamic sources as an archenemy of Iran, a demon causing war, draught and desolation⁵.

Several mythical and historical figures rooted in medieval times are embedded in the Kazakh culture through the memorial transmission of legends, biographies and words. Most illustrious are three personages who made of death the core of their message: Korkut-Ata, Ahmed Yasawi and Abai Kunanbaev. They had the strongest impact in shaping the Kazakh culture and still today constitute its main references, representing respectively the mythical, spiritual and moral spheres.

Korkut-Ata ('frightened ancestor') is the legendary musician of the oldest Turkic legends (VI-VII century AD), of whom the tomb is shown on the shores of the lower Syrdarya river. In spite of the fact that he had been said that "*whoever desires death, he will not die*", he got scared of it and spent the entire 295 years of his long life floating, together with his camel, on a carpet carried by the stream of the Syrdarya, uninterruptedly playing a magic violin (*kobyz*) in order to dispel death...his

only listener! In that sense, Korkut represents the existentialist drama of the modern man, conscious of death and determined to resist to it, with fear and determination, in an enchanted state of mind.

Ahmed Yasawi is the Sufi master and main saint of Kazakhstan who solved the unending contraposition between Korkut and death by dissolving one of the 2 poles of the contrast, the individual self. The Yasawi's path of self dissolution is mystical, i.e. based on total detachment, faith, love and joyful annihilation in God. In the year 1166 AD, aged 63 (the age of the prophet's death) he decided it was time to withdraw from the material world: he entered a virtual dying scenario by retiring without return in a 3 m deep underground cell that is still shown today near his mausoleum in Turkestan. It is from down there that, for years, he spoke and transmitted his wisdom (*hikmet*) in poems (*divan-i*).

Abai Kunanbaev (1845-1904 AD) is a kind of existentialist poet, translator and philosopher who opened the Kazakh culture to the external world and became the main reference of the modern Kazakh nation. At the end of his life, when writing the introduction of his pamphlet of moral sayings (*Kara sodzeri*, Words of edification), declares to have grown total disgust for the Russian colonial policies as well as for the behavior of his own people, to be tired of everything and in solitude, to be empty of expectations and hopes, and confesses that he is writing few moral aphorisms and poems just because he doesn't know what else to do. Abai is a sad man and certainly doesn't manifest the Yasawi's joy for dying, but doesn't even show resistance or pretension of immortality: nature, morality and religiosity provide the bridge.

Among these examples, most significant for the past and present Kazakh culture and also the one endowed of highest potential of worldwide resonance are the life, teachings, verses and mausoleum of the Sufi master *Ahmed Yasawi*. This saint arrived to emphasize the aspects of renunciation, compassionate love and divine knowledge deeply rooted in the Moslem tradition, and to develop them with his living example and words at a level far above any particular culture, creed or school. He conveyed a message of universal significance capable of answering the spiritual needs of the modern humans, which make of him a spiritual vanguard not only for the Sufi and Muslim communities but for the entire planet. Groups of followers are still gathering around his mausoleum in Turkestan and even abroad; and, after independence, actions have been taken by local and international institutions in order to restore his tomb and spread his teachings.

How many years must pass before the words and deeds of Ahmed Yasawi would express their full potential and inspire at all levels the culture of modern Kazakhstan? Or before a new generation of saints would recover and teach the forgotten mythical way of joyful death?

2 – The Sufi movement and its spread in Kazakhstan (VIII-XII AD)

2.1 – Sufism

Sufism ('rough garb') is a very peculiar minority movement within Islam that follows a spiritual journey (*tasawwuf*) based on individual moral responsibility and mystical⁶ relation with the divine. The adepts go through a path of renunciation, asceticism, love, knowledge and annihilation of the individual soul in God (Fig. 1).

2.1.1 – Sufi history

Sufis are as old as Islam and co-substantial with it. They are counted among the nearer followers of Muhammad (*sahabah*), the ones who pledge alliance (*bay'ah*) to Muhammad and Allah and claim to be descendants of the prophet through Ali⁷, by which they are called *alawi* (followers of Ali) and deserve the honorific name of *sayyid* ('valiant master').

They have always been a fringe movement who took up the call of spreading Islam in the peripheries and defending Muslim sites from enemies and Crusaders. They appeared in the VI century AD as pious circles of ascetics practicing night prayers and meditations on the doomsday (*ashratu's saah*) passages of the Quran, by which became known as "those who always weep" or "those who consider this world as a hut of sorrows". Then, in few centuries, under the influence of early Christian mystics emphasizing love (*ishq*) and annihilation in God (*fanaa*), their ascetism changed into mysticism and their sects, inspired by Egyptians, Gnostic and Zoroastrians mystery schools, became organized around brotherhoods and holy places, often the tombs of the brotherhood founders. Sufis ended up considering the Quran just their original 'shell', feeling at home in all religions and "disliking being given any inclusive name which might force them into doctrinal conformity" (Shah 1964, introduction by R. Graves).

From the earliest times the succession of Sufi Sheikhs as heads of a lineage (*silsila*) or a lodge (*tekke*) could happen by heredity or by discipleship. The hereditary family succession was the general rule in Sufi orders centralized around a mother lodge and promoted the establishment of longstanding spiritual dynasties. The non-hereditary succession, based

on sainthood, spiritual transmission or economical power, became majoritarian in the XVIII AD among open-minded reformist communities and was more exposed to divisions and mergers (Zarcone 2007).



Figure 1 – Muslim ascetic in Eastern Bengal in the 1860s (Wikipedia, Ascetism)

In the development of the Sufi movement three phases are distinguished. The early phase (VI-VIII century AD) is strictly ascetic [*Hasan of Basra* (VII AD), *Rabi-ah*, *Majnun*, *al-Misri* (VII), *Adham* (VIII)]. The second phase (IX-XII AD) is mystic (devoted to cosmic love) as well as speculative, manifesting the Sufi path of annihilation in God in most brilliant practical and literary ways [*al-Muharisi*, *Dhu-an-Nun al-Misri*, *al-Bistami*, *Junaid Baghdadi* (IX), *Shibli*, *Mansur al-Hallaj* (X), *Ghazali*, *Khayyam*?(XI), *Farid od-Din Attar*, *Ahmed Yasawi* (early XII)]. The third phase (starting at the end of the XII AD) sees the popular spread, multiplication and political involvement of fraternal orders (*uruq*, *tariqah*), the development of epistemological and mystical treatises and literary poetry, but also moralist tendencies and softening of the mystical discipline [*Nizami* (XII), *Najmuddin Kubra*, *Yunus Emre*, *Rumi*, *Moinuddin Chishti* (XIII), *Hajrat Nizamuddin*, *Nasiruddin Chirag-Dehlavi* (XIV), *Jami* (XV)].

In the X AD the Sufis who had strongholds in Khorasan and Margiana spread to Central Asia where gave rise to 3 historically important and still active orders called all together *Khwajagan* (a Persian term meaning ‘masters’), in chronological order: *Yasawiyya*, from Ahmed Yasawi (Turkestan,

XII AD); *Kubrawiyya*, from Najmuddin Kubra (Khorezm, XIII AD); *Naqshbandiyya*, inspired by Yusuf Hamadani and Abdulkhaliq Gujduwani (Baghdad and Bukhara, XII-XIII AD) and founded by Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari (early XIV AD)⁸. Later on, other Sufi orders reached Central Asia from Iran (*Suhrawardiyya*) and India (*Shattariyya*)⁹.

It is during its second phase of historical development that Sufism produced the highest number of saints and martyrs, spiritual masters and enlightened political leaders and, by incorporating shamanistic, Zoroastrian, Manichaeic and Buddhist elements met in the territories of its spread¹⁰, arrived to express a most tolerant path of justice and spirituality that ranges among the highest and most complete spiritual attainments of mankind. The mission of Ahmed Yasawi represents the supreme mystic expression and apotheosis of this second phase of Sufi development.

Today Sufism constitutes a peaceful significant alternative to Islamic extremism and is in rapid expansion. Its orders are counted by hundreds and adherents or sympathizers around one hundred millions. They are most numerous in India and present in every Muslim country, sometimes flourishing in clandestinity because persecuted, like from the 20ies in Turkey and Soviet Union and today openly in Saudi Arabia and secretly in Iran¹¹.

3.1.2 – Sufi spiritual system

In Sufi cosmology, the God’s reason for the creation of cosmos and humankind is the “manifestation” and “recognition” of Himself, and the divine descent happens in six stages, from abstract to concrete (Koslovski 2001, p. 99). In Sufi psychology the human mind is constituted by three levels in dynamic interaction: a lower self called the *nafs* (ego), a faculty of spiritual intuition called the *qalb* (heart), and the *ruh* (spirit) (Schimmel 2013). The Sufi mystical path (*tariqah*¹²) climbs in reverse way the stages of the divine descent: it is entered under the stimuli of fear, is guided by the search of knowledge and love, and develops stabilizing the highest level of the mind (*ruh*).

God’s intimacy increases along a process of purification (*tahara*) made of dispassion for earthly pleasures, growing knowledge and love, dissolution of the ego (*fana*), abiding in God (*baqa*). Accordingly, the Sufi spiritual training proceeds across four main stations (*maqam*, plural *maqamat*) – two exoteric and two esoteric¹³:

- *Shariah* (revealed law, rules): serving God;
- *Tariqah* (path): facing God – accomplishment of the Shariah by entering the Sufi order, following a

spiritual mentor (*murshid*) and traveling the mystical path of love and knowledge;

– *Aqiqah*, (essence, ultimate truth, gnosis): esoteric absorption and dissolution of the self by annihilation in God;

– *Marifah* (divine knowledge, mystical union): achievement of the unseen ecstatic center of the *Aqiqah*, where craving for God will radiate divine love and compassion and feed the universe.

During spiritual retreats (*khalvat*), besides prayers (*wird*), sermons (*sohbah*) and discursive self-examination (*muhasaba*), the deepest and most technical spiritual exercises are *muqaraba* and *dhikr*.

Muqaraba ('watch over') consists of meditating – in sitting or walking pose and with mindfulness on breathing – on different objects, mainly mental objects inside your heart, for accessing the deepest layers of the mind. It promotes a process of abstraction from initial distraction to stable concentration, followed by ascension to direct vision until 3 final stages of enlightening annihilation (*fanaa*): in the Master, in Muhammad (s.a.w.), in Allah (a.s.)¹⁴.

Dhikr (or *zkr*, 'remembrance') consists in direct concentration on the Divine by intimations of holy names or formulas (*wazaiif*). It is generally supported by rhythmic breath-work (*fikr*) and accompanying movements¹⁵ designed to create a 'fly-wheel' in the consciousness and disrupt its normal state. It involves the physical, emotional and mental spheres; can be individual or collective; can be practical (performed together with obedient actions), loud (*jahri*)¹⁶ or silent (*khafi*)¹⁷. The silent *dhikr* is also called *dhikr al-qalbi* ('remembrance of the heart') because obtained by progressing from the vocal *dhikr* in the mouth to the silent *dhikr* in the roots of the mind, the heart.

Dhikr is a central element of the practice of every Sufi school and has several variants: Sufi orders are most often distinguished by their specific style of *dhikr*, which is kept secret.

The doctrinal positions and spiritual practices of Sufism share strict analogies with the teachings of other religions, in particular with Middle East and Indian mystic expressions like: the 8 yoga stages of the Patanjali sutras and the emotional devotionism of the bhakti Hinduist movement; the 8 stages of extinction of the self by breathing (*anapanasati*) and insight (*vipassana*) meditation of the Early Buddhist schools, the 8 stages of the bodhisattva path in Mahayana Buddhism, and the focusing on visionary states of Tibetan yoga. Resemblances are also shared with the 4 stages of 'Lectio divina' of the earliest Christian monks, the breathing techniques and

cathartic practices of medieval kabalistic mystics (Abulafia, Askenazi Hasidim), and the unending repetitions of God's name of the Orthodox monks.

These wide similarities are witnessing the existence in all religions of a common mystic core and proof the universal significance of the Sufi teachings and of the Ahmed Yasawi life and message. Evidently the same mystic search was and is going on under different spiritual flags.

Influences on Sufism from the Persian culture are obvious, influences from the Indian culture cannot be underestimated¹⁸. The life of Ahmed Yasawi and the rise of the Central Asian Sufi schools fall within the time of the Kharakanid Khanate (999-1211) at the north of the Amudarya and, south of it, of the Ghaznavid Empire (977-1163). The Ghaznavid dynasty emerged from the Turkic slave guards of the Samanid Empire and, centered in NE Afghanistan, dominated a huge territory from the Caspian to the Yamuna river, establishing a bridge between the Persian, N-Indian and Central Asian worlds. Under their rule the Khorasmian scholar *Ahmad Al-Biruni* (973-1048) authored important studies of the Indian cultures ('*Indica*') and even provided an Arabic translation of the '*Yoga Sutra*' of Patanjali¹⁹. His works had a big impact on Sufism, being that "in his *Indica* analyses explicitly the parallels between Yoga and Sufism and finds them to have a good number of common motives" (Safronov 2014) and in his translation of the Patanjali's Yoga Sutras he describes in details the relation between breathing exercises and states of mind, which constitutes the basis of the Sufi training.

On another side the Sufi doctrines present points of contrast with mainstream Islam: metaphoric reading (*ta'well*) of passages of the Quran and the Hadith literature²⁰; devotion to living *sheikhs* (moral and spiritual authorities), dead saints and mythical masters; incorporation of rituals and music in spiritual practices; possibility of union with the creator; significance of all religions; refusal of politics and violence; open mindedness towards innovations. These points, which surely characterized the doctrine of Yasawi, constituted in the past as today matters of debate and controversy between Sufis and orthodox Muslims and even between Sufi orders of Sunni or Shia orientation²¹. Sufi sects were also vulnerable within themselves to succession disputes and internal divisions, which favored the formation of offsprings.

2.2 – *The Khoja*

West Central Asia and the Syrdarya region in particular, due to their location at the northern borders of the Islamic world, during the VIII-IX

AD constituted a refuge for political and religious dissidents of the Caliphate, so that the penetration of Islam in the Central Asian territory is strictly connected with the multiplication and spread of heterodox religious groups²².

The first wave consisted in the immigration in West Central Asia of anti-caliphate movements like the Khurramiya and Mubayyidite mixing Iranian religions with Islamic teachings, which conferred to the Islam of Central Asia a multiform aspect and a deeply rooted tolerant character and political orientation²³.

In South Kazakhstan the process of Islamization was accomplished under the action of the *Khoja* (*Hoja, Hodja, Kozha*) tribe²⁴, a strong ethnic group diffused everywhere within the Muslim world and considering itself a religious order within the Ismaili Shia Islam. Its members, who enter the clan only by birth and are basically endogamic, pretend to be descendant from the same Quraysh tribe of the prophet's clan and trace their lineage at least from Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah (or Abi Talib or Mahdi, 633-700 AD), the third son of Ali (prophet's cousin and fourth caliph) counted among the early dissidents of the Caliphate and the founders of the Shiite politico-religious faction. The pretension of spiritual leadership and the dissident political military character have been from the very beginning typical traits of the Khoja tribe²⁵.

The Khoja reached Western Central Asia around 735, few years after the Arab invasion of 706-715, and during the weakening of state power used to put their members as leaders of self-government bodies of central cities. They had a stronghold in Tashkent and from there diffused to the north, east and west. The main protagonist has been *Khoja Ishaq Bab*²⁶, a military cadre and religious leader who settled in Tashkent around 780 and, together with his uncle and brother and descendants, promoted the spread of Islam to the north, among the Turks: Sayram, the middle Syrdarya, and the Karatau mountain region where today his tomb is venerated (*Baba Ata*). Around the X AD the religious expansion got the shape of a dissident Sufi sect, making of Ishaq Bab the ancestor of the Sufi lineages of Kazakhstan and of Ahmed Yasawi himself²⁷.

About the ethnic identification and lineages of the Khoja of Central Asia, illuminating are some recent studies. On the basis the Khoja genealogical records, four sub-clans are detected testifying four different lines of paternal ascent, in order of antiquity: to Abu Bakr (first caliph), to Umar (second caliph), to Ali (fourth caliph), and to Hanafiyah (Ali's son). In spite of the traditional Khoja pretension of

a common paternal ancestor, genetic tests of living members witness among the four sub-clans very pronounced Y-chromosome variations and different Y-DNA haplogroups: the Abu Bakr group, with Hp D, L, O, C3 and R1a, is genetically the most diversified, apparently related to the Naqshbandiyya order where not biological but spiritual transmission has always been fundamental; the Umar group has dominant Hp R2a, which is common in South and Central Asia; the Ali group, with dominant Hp J2, is the nearer to the original Quraysh tribe and probably also to the Ahmed Yasawi genotype; the Hanafiyah group has dominant Hp R1a and G1, acquired in the XIV AD with the spread of Islam among the Golden Horde and the Khoja admixture respectively with Kipchak and Argyn tribes. All together these differences exclude a common paternal ancestry and point instead to several unrelated forefathers, implying that the silsila (lineage) of the Khoja groups has not been strictly biological but largely accompanied by spiritual transmission (Zhabagin et al. 2017).

3 – Life and teachings of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi

The chronology, family lineage, life, spiritual affiliation, death, teachings and spiritual succession of Ahmed Yasawi are all surrounded by vivid legends. In the traditional hagiographic works, biographic data concerning Ahmed Yasawi are often distorted by quotations concerning his miraculous powers like bringing rain with the help of the magic *Yada-Tashi* stone, calling the dead back to life, turning into a bird (*perendelik*, possibly referring to the homologous Sufi dance), moving mountains, etc. (DeWeese 2006, p. xvii). Here below is expounded a blending of the Hazini's reliable accounts and of historical knowledge about the Yasawi life²⁸.

3.1 – Life of Ahmed Yasawi (1093-1166)

Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (later also known as *Hazrat-i Turkistan* or *Pir-i Turkestan*)²⁹ was born in Sayram (Ispijab, South Kazakhstan)³⁰ in 1093 AD. His father, Sheikh Ibrahim ibn Mahmud, was a famous learned man (*mullah, ulama, sheikh*) and religious master (*pir, sultan*) of the Khoja community, pertaining to the *Hanafi* school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*)³¹. His mother was Aisha Khatun Iftikhar, daughter of one of Ibrahim's disciples. With the help of another local Hanafi scholar, Bakh ad-Din Ispijabi, the father introduced the son from early childhood to the religious life and to the study of sciences.

At the age of 7 Ahmed became orphan of both parents and moved with his older sister, Gawhar, to the town of Yasi (or to Otrar) located on the Middle Syrdarya and renamed in the XVI century as Turkestan. Here – the legend says – while walking in the fields with the Quran on his head and backward as not to turn its back to Mecca, was watched by Arystanbab (*Arslan Bab*, meaning in Arabic ‘lion gate master’), a two and half meters high man of dark complexion very popular among the Turkic people, at first Zoroastrian cleric (*mobed*, ‘master of magians’) and then Muslim leader of the local Mubayyidite movement. Aristanbab asked Ahmed to become his disciple and passed to him the date fruit that he expressly received from the Prophet and carried until that moment in his mouth (see also noteh 41).

Arystanbab accomplished his mission of providing spiritual guidance and died the following year when “70,000 weeping angels appeared transporting him to paradise” (Koprolov 2006, p. 21). Ahmed remained in Yasi (or possibly returned to Sayram) where he started performing miracles and composing verses in Arabic, Persian, and Chagatai-Turkic language. He married, had a son (Ibrahim) who died during his father life and a daughter (Gawhar) who will continue the family lineage (see note 43). Then, at the age of 27, feeling in love for God, decided to find an enlightened master and went to Bukhara, at the time considered the ‘dome of Islam’. Here he became student of Khoja Yusuf Hamadani (1049-1140), a gentle and strict sheikh related through 8 transmission links (*silsil*) to the spiritual authority of the prophet and inspirer of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order. He probably traveled with him to Merv and in various countries, received the authorization (*ijazah*) to preach Sufi doctrines and, counted among the three nearer disciples, after the death of Hamadani and of his first successor became sheikh of the Bukhara lodge³². In that way the establishment in early XIV AD of the Naqshbandiyya order and its very successful history are indebted also to the Yasawi spirituality.

Finally, already mature in age, Ahmed decided to follow the Arystanbab example and diffuse Islam beyond the Syrdarya, among the Turks. So he returned to Yasi (from which comes his title *Yasawi*) at the northern borders of the Central Asian urbanized region and free refuge for persecuted intellectuals and mystics. In his mission at first he encountered some obstacles but finally received high recognition as a venerable scientist³³, poet, preacher, spiritual guide (*sheikh*, *murshid*) and mystic (Fig 2). He praised the ascetic life and meditation on

death and adapted the Islamic message to local customs in ways unusual even among Sufi masters, embracing the Turkic shamanistic background: he abolished differences between men and women (see note 41), showed tolerance for other religions and for local ritual practices like ancestors worship and pilgrimages to mausoleums, and emphasized individual freedom and knowledge.

He practiced and taught the mystic way (*tasavvuf*) and had 10000 followers, many good students and novices (*murid*) and an uninterrupted line of successors (*khalifah*), becoming in that way the spiritual ancestor of all Turkic tribes. A popular brotherhood rose around him and ended up as a school (*tariqah*) called *Yasawiyya*, representing one of the three important Sufi orders of Central Asia.

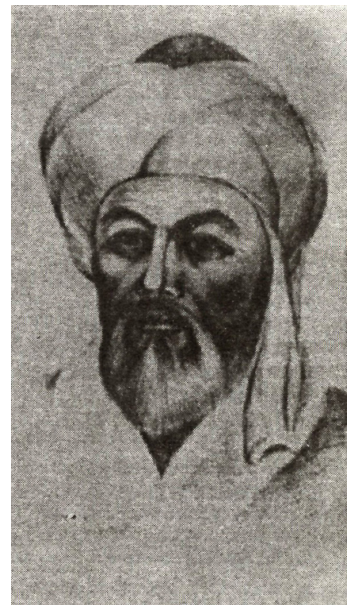


Figure 2 – Khoja Ahmed Yasawi
(image freely distributed on the internet).

In 1166, at the age of 63, lamenting for the death of Muhammad the prophet, Ahmed Yasawi withdrew in an underground cell (*khilluet*, *chillakhona*)³⁴ dug on one side of his lodge in Yasi-Turkestan (Fig. 3).

*It is a tradition for lovers to die alive:
Khoja Ahmed Yasawi heard it, read it,
and went underground.
May I be annihilated on the path of love, oh Lord.
Whatever You do, make me be in love.*

*At 63 it was said to be a tradition,
so, lamenting for Muhammad, I came down here.
My friends on earth fell into mourning,
the whole world cried saying ‘my Sultan’.
The real Sufis in the truth greatly suffered when,
lamenting for Muhammad, I came down here (H47³⁵)*



Figure 3 (left) – Entrance of the Yasawi's underground cell. **Fig 4 (right)** – Yasawi's sarcophagus in serpentine stone.



Figure 5 – Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkestan, hosting the Yasawi's tomb under the smaller dome on the back of the central axis, and also a mosque, juridical hall, library, well, kitchen and dervish lodges.

The construction was promoted by Emir Timur in 1385 and realized by the architect Khoja Husayn Shirazi, but after Timur's death in 1405 the façade was left unfinished and in 1591 was only partly reinforced by the Amir of Bukhara.

The mausoleum represents one of the best preserved Timurid monumental complexes (kulliya), the largest dome in Central Asia and, due to innovations in building technology, also the prototype of Timurid architecture that inspired similar constructions in Central Asia, Khorasan, Azerbaijan and North India. The outer walls are decorated by faience tiles and by an upper band of Arabic inscriptions of holy names and Quran verses (al-An'am 6: 59-63).

(Aerial photo by R. Sala, view to W).

From that cell Ahmed never returned back. The underground retirement has been by far the most significant event of his life and his deepest spiritual teaching: down there – the legend says – he lived 10 or 22 or 60 years longer and transmitted 99000 (i.e. ‘many’) spiritual verses.

His dead body could not be touched and buried by anyone but another contemporary saint called ‘*Karabura*’, meaning ‘black Bactrian camel’, which remembers the central role played by the camel in the life and death of the mythical musician Korkut

and, as a whole, in the medieval funerary rituals of Middle East and Central Asia.

Ahmed was buried in Yasi one hundred meters north of his chillakhona, under a small mausoleum (*turbe*) that immediately became an important pilgrimage destination. Emir Timur in 1366 conquered Yasi, became a Yasawi devotee (Koprulu 2006, p.29) and in 1385 started building on his tomb a grandiose mausoleum that became and still is one of the most visited places in Central Asia (Fig. 4, 5, 6).



Figure 6 – Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi: back entrance leading to the tomb (photo G. Bedenko).

3.2 – *The Yasawiyya order*

The Yasawiyya order started to be structured along family lineages and then increasingly by spiritual transmission, in accord with the results of Y-DNA tests of Khoja members quoted in section 2.2. The first direct disciples, all endowed of miraculous powers, have been Hakim Suleiman Baqirghani (Hakim Ata), Muhammad Danishmand³⁶, Mansur Ata (quoted by some sources as son of Arystanbab and first Yasawi successor) and the legendary Shopan Ata. They respectively diffused the order among the Turkic

tribes of Khorezm, the Middle-Low Syrdarya, the pre-Caspian region, and West Kazakhstan³⁷, which all together always represented the geographic stronghold of the order. By the XIV AD the Yasawiyya diffused in Transoxiana (until the XIX century it held a prominent position at the court of Bukhara) and farther in all directions: among the Northern Turks of the Volga; in the form of offsprings like the Khalwatiyya and Bektashiyya among the Western Turks of Azerbaijan, Anatolia and the Balkans³⁸; and to Khorasan, Kashmir and Xingjiang³⁹ (Fig. 7).

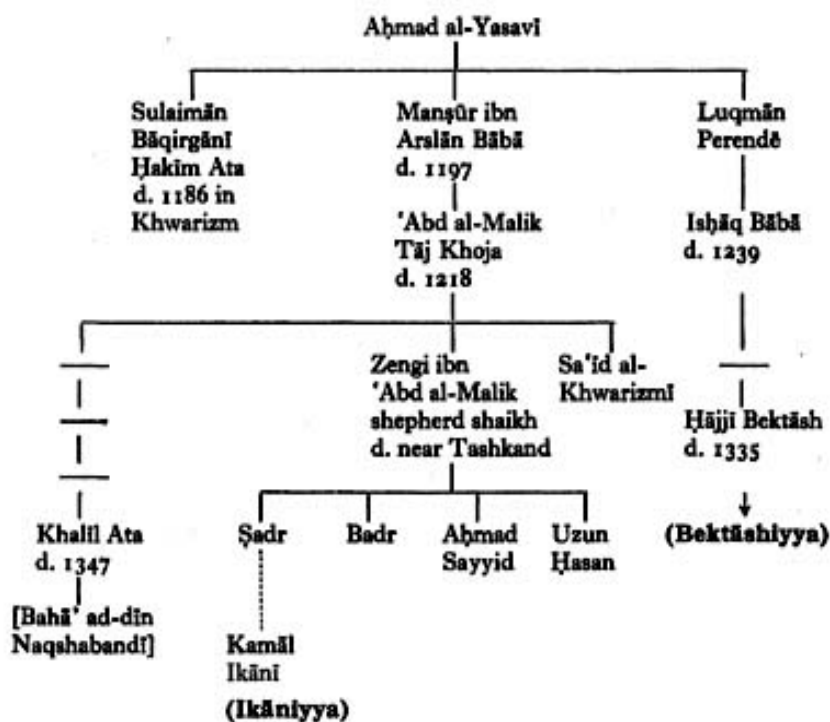


Figure 7 – Reconstruction of the Yasawiyya lineages and offsprings from XI to XIV AD according to Trimmingham (1971, p. 59).

“The Yasawiyya was a tariqah of wanderers, with few distinctive branches and permanent settlements, except those associated with tombs of sheikhs to which pilgrimage became a permanent feature of Central Asian Islam” (Trimingham 1971, p. 59). Some offsprings like the Bektashiyya adopted extreme positions, “looking upon Islamic religious obligations as externals of little or no spiritual value in the quest for knowledge of God... and developing eclectic believes from Gnosticism, Yoga, Shamanism and Christianity” (Moosa 1988).

The Yasawiyya order developed with uninterrupted lineage until at least the XVI AD when some communities started joining the Naqshbandiyya and became totally absorbed in it by the end of the XIX century⁴⁰. Today only few Yasawiyya offsprings are still active, of which 2 in the Fergana valley: the ‘Lachi’ sect in Osh, and the ‘Hairy Shan’ in Arslanbob⁴¹. They both control entire villages and have been serious opponents of the Soviet regime.

3.3 – Teachings of Ahmed Yasawi

3.3.1 – Works of Yasawi and of his descendants

The tradition attributes to Ahmed Yasawi several works, of which only three arrived to us: *Paqirnama* (or *Fakr-name*, ‘Epistle to the poor-dervish’), *Risala dar adaby Tariqat* (‘Teachings on Tariqah

ethics’) and *Divan-i Hikmet* (‘Book of Wisdom’). The first two works are instructions to students and dervishes about the stations (*maqam*) of the spiritual training⁴². The *Divan-i Hikmet* (Book of Wisdom) is a collection of spiritual poems (*hikmet*) that have been transmitted to us in different transcriptions from an unknown original form.

These three works are quoted by legends as composed in the underground cell, which seems to be true for the *Divan-i Hikmet* but not so for the other 2 doctrinal works that probably had their basic contents orally transmitted or written by the master during his entire spiritual mission and, by containing explicit quotations of Yasawi words, have been clearly compiled and manipulated after his death. The three works are analyzed in detail in section 3.3.2 and 4.

Fragments of Yasawi teachings are also expounded indirectly in small treatises and hagiographical compilations written by disciples and sheikhs of the Yasawiyya order or branching sects or in works of Naqshbandi and Kubrawi rivals, together with narratives, genealogies and precious citations of original Yasawi’s sayings (Hasan 2017). The most important are the following six texts.

The “*Nasabnama*” (genealogy book) is a genealogical history and hagiography of the master

and of his ancestors who spread Islam in Transoxiana written during Yasawi time. It reports a large amount of historical and legendary narratives about his life⁴³, the habit of 40 days solitary retreat, his relation with mentors, students and the immortal saint Khizr, his miracles (the imam Marwazi, the bushered ox, the jar of love, etc) all looking as edifying parables.

Most significant is the *'Mirat ul-Qulub'* ('Mirror of the Heart'), a doctrinal work ascribed to his direct disciple Muhammad Danishmand (XII AD), of which the title points to its power of making the reader aware of his errors. The book is divided in 3 chapters explaining the first 3 stations of the spiritual progression (shariah, tariqah, aqiqah) with numerous quotes of aphorisms of Yasawi and of other great sheikhs. Two manuscripts are today preserved: in Uppsala and Tashkent. (Danishmand XII AD)

Similar content is found in 2 other later manuscripts stored in the ACD library of Tashkent: the *"Risala dar tarjima-i Ahmad Yassawi"* (Interpretation of Ahmed Yasawi) by Imam Husamiddin Sighnaki (+1311), mainly of hagiographic character (Sighnoqi XIII AD); and the *"Hadiqat al-arifin"* (The Garden of the Saints closer to God) of Is'haq Ata, a 14th century descendant, which provides precious information about the initiation rites and devotional practices of the order (Is'haq Ata XIV AD).

The *Jawahir al-abrar min amvaj al-bihar* (Gems of the pious believers) and other manuscripts of Ahmad Hazini, a XVI century Tadjik poet and sheikh of the Yasawiyya order, give information about the history, rules and spiritual techniques of the order, accompanied with frequent quotes of Yasawi verses. The Hazini's manuscripts are stored in Istanbul, Berlin and Paris libraries (Hazini XVI).

Important sources are also two works from masters of the Nashbandiyya: the *Rashahat-i ain al-Rayat*, a XVI hagiographic compilation concerning the Yasawi spiritual affiliation; and the *Lamahat min nafahat al-quds* of Alim Shaykh Azizan (+1632) who, even if representing a rival order, praises the theological and juridical skills of some sheikhs of the Baqirghani lineage (Zarcone 2003, p. 776).

3.3.2 – Yasawi's spiritual system

By referring to the works of Yasawi and of his followers it is possible to sort out the doctrine and practice originally taught by the saint. Yasawi teaches a path of disciplined mysticism and final holiness of which the general lines are in accord with the teachings of all Sufi schools. But he introduces some original innovations concerning the advanced

stages of spiritual training and, as a whole, excels by the supremacy of his living example and by the enchanting power of his poetry and prose.

Paqirnama

It is a manuscript of 5000 words, of which copies are preserved in the Tashkent, Dushanbe and Almaty National Libraries. It consists of a detailed analysis of the path of salvation. (Yasawi, Pakirnama; Eraslan 2016)

The text starts with the description of the 4 main stations (shariah, tariqah, aqiqah, magrifah), each divided in 10 substations.

Fear, knowledge and love are the forces pushing toward the path, but is humility (*tawasu*, synonym of surrender – *islam*) the virtue that, by consisting in awareness of the inferior human position to Allah, allows the progression along the path. So, the text continues analyzing the central role of humility in ripening the fruits of the 40 substations, now listed under different names and in different order: 10 'stages' (magrifah), 10 'luminaries' (shariah), 10 'ways' (tariqah) and 10 'qualities' (aqiqah).

Along the text are praised the names of Allah, Gabriel the archangel, Adam, 7 biblical prophets, of Muhammad and Ali. Specific eulogies to humility are selected from sentences of 16 different Sufi sheikhs⁴⁴. Of Ahmed Yasawi are quoted 3 sentences and 40 verses similar by poetic style and content to the ones of the *Divan-i Hikmet*.

*At 14 I suffered, I humbled my pride erasing it in the sand,
I spoke the zikr 'hu', suffering by exhaustion.
I gave everything, everything dear I had.
After that I skyrocketed, my friends.*

The text ends with the description of the life of the dervish, made of external suffering and of internal bliss.

Risala dar adaby Tariqat

It is a manuscript of around 2500 words including 6 explicit long quotations of Yasawi sayings, of which few copies are preserved in Tashkent (Yasawi Risala; Tosun 2016). The text, more discursive than the Pakirnama, clarifies some important topics of the spiritual training: the main characters of the path⁴⁵, the 6 virtues of the mentor, the importance of love and passion⁴⁶, and the supreme ecstatic knowledge of Magrifah. It ends with a mysterious poem:

*Paradise is gratitude to the mothers,
It is at the mothers' feet.
If you want the Allah merci
Do what the mother would be pleased with.*

Traditional accounts on the Yasawiyya spiritual training

The Yasawiyya training is basically similar to the one of all the Sufi orders, but here some elements are particularly emphasized.

The *murid* (disciple), as soon as he enters the tariqah, must follow very severe rules of perseverance and of total submission to the master. Hazini lists them as 10 in number (Hazini XVI AD: p. 120). Special instructions are given about daily habits, gestures, body positions, vocal tones and prayers in the context of different situations and actions (Koprulu 2006: p. 97-99).

Zuhhd (ascetism) and striving are basic practices of the true Sufi, in particular fasting. "If voluntary fasting is done for three days, dust and darkness will be lifted from the inner self; if done for five days, the divine secrets (*mughayyabat*) of the jinns and the good spirits will be subdued, i.e. made obedient; if done for six days, the springs of the heart's seas will open and begin to flow; if done for nine days, it results in the revealing of hearts (*qulub*) and the uncovering of tombs (*qubur*)" (Hazini XVI AD: p. 58-60).

Dhikr is the main devotional practice in all Sufi orders, consisting of intimations of holy names based on consciousness of breath (every breath of the dervish is equivalent to the last breath) and accompanied by body movements. Yasawiyyas were famous for their use of loud *dhikr*⁴⁷, of which Ahmed is said to have introduced a secret form called *dhikr-i arra* or *dhikr-i minshary* ('*dhikr of the saw*' on the account of the rhythmic repetition of the guttural utterance 'ha' or 'hay') intended for obtaining an ecstatic withdrawal from senses and for unlocking the access to esoteric universes. Because that, this *dikhr* was also called *khatm khajagan*, 'seal of the masters'. During its performance the use of loud sounds (ha-ha, hay-hay) was superposing and eventually merging with the out-breath and in that way driving to silent *dikhr*. Several kinds of *dikhr* were in use and several different ways to perform them⁴⁸.

Khalvat (spiritual retreat) of the Yasawiyya order are two: canonical (*shariah k.*) and mystical (*tariqah k.*). The canonical is preliminary and consists of repentance and purification. The mystical became famous for its intense 40 days training: the waking hours were filled with *dhkr* and *hikmet* reciting and the resting time focused on dreams to be interpreted (Hazini XVI: p. 51-56).

Divan-i Hikmet

The language of the doctrinal works quoted above is not just prose: it is rather prose poetry and,

accompanied by metaphors and verses disseminated in the text, stimulates imagination and emotional lifts.

Divan-i Hikmet is definitely expressed in a language even higher, not only on the account of its poetic form but by being spoken from an uninterrupted ecstatic state of mind. The Hikmet are the pearls of a saint already underground, with self and body turned into earth and the soul totally freed above the senses. They seem spoken from the highest attainment of the path, the marifah, in mystical union with God, with syllabic rhythms and rhymes as phonetic angels of the divine attainment. They are the songs of a pure soul at the verge of death.

In spite of the fact that Sufi doctrines have some points of conflict with orthodox Islam, the Yasawi words from the underground cell are a spiritual expression rising above contrasts. This is due to the power of the chillakhona pulpit, the dramatic importance of the topic and the straightness of the words⁴⁹. Prayer is secret and all possible points of misunderstanding and doctrinal friction are carefully discarded or kept secret. No pearls to the fool.

*If you are a lover, seek love day and night:
worship, wake at night and never rest.*

*If you are a sage, reveal not your knowledge to the fool:
the real dervish is he who prays in secret (H43)*

It is in that way, by keeping secrecy, that high men and messages can rise everywhere and spread undisturbed in space and time.

4 – Divan-i Hikmet

Of the legendary 99000 verses only few thousands arrived to us, at first transmitted orally and then collected in different versions, as manuscripts or printed editions, under the title of *Divan-i Hikmet* (Book of Wisdom). The earliest manuscripts are lost; the oldest version that arrived to us is dated to 1684 AD and kept in an Istanbul library; the others are deposited in various archives and private collections.

4.1 – Manuscripts, editions, translations

The existing manuscripts and editions of the Divan-i Hikmet show deep similarities together with significant differences. All versions present a text written in Arabic alphabet and spoken in Turkic-Chagatai language with Kipchak dialect, which is the original language spoken by Ahmed Yasawi⁵⁰; but each of them is the result of collections

assembled in different times by different authors and composed by a different number of poems, called and numbered as *hikmet* and parted in stanzas and verses. Many poems appear identical in more than one version but also show particularities and linguistic and chronological anomalies, suggesting the existence of a lost common source transformed by subsequent omissions and interpolations.

The Turkic Chagatai language of the text is among the oldest examples of Turkic dialect and the second-oldest example of Islamic Turkic poetic composition⁵¹.



Figure 8 (on the left) – Divan-i Hikmet, Istanbul manuscript: title page (freely distributed on the internet).

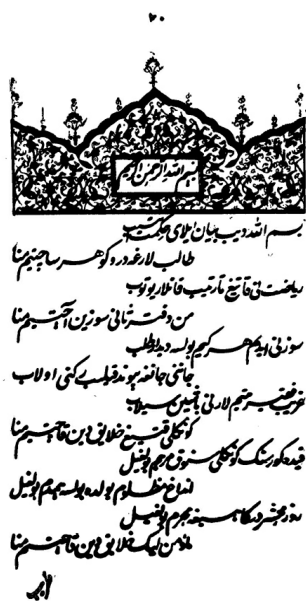


Figure 9 (on the right) – Divan-i Hikmet, Kazan edition: Hikmet 1 (from Yasawi 1998a).

A total of 14 manuscripts exist, dated between the XVI and XVIII AD and preserved in different libraries (Istanbul, Konya, Tashkent, Almaty, Cairo, St. Petersburg, Cambridge, Paris, Berlin); and several lithographic editions have been printed during the XIX-XX AD in Kazan, Tashkent, Bukhara and Istanbul.

The oldest manuscript arrived to us is the Istanbul manuscript, with 69 hikmet (poems), compiled in 1684 AD and kept at the Istanbul Vafik-Pasha library (Fig. 8). The Turkestan manuscript (XVII AD) with 49 hikmet could be a shortened version of it (see section 4.2). Other apparently important but still inaccessible manuscripts are: the manuscript recently discovered in the Kokshetau library (of which is suspected an even earlier date of XVI AD)⁵²; and some manuscripts of the Almaty library (XVI-XIX AD), which are said to include a XIX AD version of 119 hikmet⁵³.

Printed editions are relatively recent. The first has been published in Kazan in 1878 with 67 hikmet, and the most complete with 149 hikmet always in Kazan in 1904 (Fig. 9).

As a whole, the existing versions of the Divan-i Hikmet include from 49 to 149 hikmet, each hikmet averaging 10 stanzas made of quatrains (4 verses, 4 *beys*), and ending with one *mujanat* (prayer, psalm) of 50-70 couplets (*mesra*). Most of the prosody consists of long verses in 7 or 10 syllables metric patterns that, together with rhymes and repetitions, confer to the poems a special rhythm as if they were recited as songs⁵⁴.

Translations of the Divan-i Hikmet in modern languages are rare: few in Turkish and Arabic, very rare in Uzbek, Kazakh, Russian and English languages. In fact the Yasawi's words, in spite of their spiritual and historical importance, are by now still poorly accessible to the western world.

Main object of translations have been the 69 hikmet of the oldest Istanbul manuscript (1684 AD): in modern Turkic in 1897; 7 hikmet from the same manuscript into Russian by N.S. Lykoshin (1860-1922) at the end of XIX century; the entire 69 hikmet into Kazakh language by M. Zharmukhamed-uli and al. in 1993 (Yasawi 1993).

The Turkestan manuscript (49 hikmet, XVII AD), basically a shortened version of the Istanbul manuscript, has been translated in English language by Tek-Esin in 1994 (Yasawi 1994).

The Kazan edition (149 hikmet, 1904) has been translated in Kazakh by A. Ibatov et al. and in Russian by N. Sagandykov in 2000 (Yasawi 2000).

During the last 20 years the growing interest in Ahmed Yasawi words favored in Uzbekistan and

in lesser extent also in Kazakhstan the reediting of former translations as well as the publishing of new popular translations from undeclared sources⁵⁵.

4.2 – *The Turkestan manuscript*

Here below are analyzed the structure and contents of the Tek-Esin English translation of the Turkestan manuscript, ending with the quotation of few most significant verses. The English text is quite poor but represents the only existing direct translation from Turkic into an European language.

The manuscript has been found in Turkestan and brought to Istanbul by the turkologist Kemal Eraslan in 1954. It consists of a selection of 49 poems that are found identical in other longer versions (i.e. in the Istanbul manuscript of 1684)⁵⁶ and approximately dated to the XVII AD. All together the 49 poems count 424 stanzas of 4 verses (quatrain), i.e. a total of 1688 verses. The hikmet are followed by one *munajat* (prayer) titled “*Prayer to God Almighty, fulfiller of all our desires*”, made of 48 couplets where Ahmed asks God to bless the spiritual value and inspiring power of his hikmet.

The content of the poems doesn't leave doubts about the fact that they were spoken from an underground cell of self-immurement.

Ahmed Yasawi, when reciting the Hikmet from the underground cell where he retired to death, sends to all humanity an ultimate message in an extremely simple and sharp language. The verses are not concerned with doctrinal but with phenomenological issues. They point out the evident fact that everyone tends to keep veiled in a childish way: the future death of each of us; and they

underline that dying is a difficult threshold requiring some spiritual preconditions. In order to dispel the mental biases and resistances that hinder a firm consciousness of such unavoidable event, Yasawi is using firing words, rhymes and repeated sentences that remember the enchanting obsessive sounds of the kobyz played by Korkut-Ata in exorcising death, or the unending repetitions of the Jesus name of the Orthodox monks.

The text emphasizes as spiritual precondition the primary importance of compassion for poor and orphans, of meditation on death, of dispassion for mundane life, of love and annihilation in God, and the universal significance of his underground retreat. From down there, Yasawi reveals that at the verge of death the only sustainable mental state is a total detachment from sensuous objects and representations (which sounds obvious) and a level of faith developed to the point of totally transforming the mental self into an impersonal timeless radiation of love and wisdom.

Yasawi expresses a high esteem of his own verses: he calls them “*orders from god*” carrying the “*meaning of the Quran*” (H1, *Mujanat*); and designates their collection as *Daftar-i Sani-i*, i.e. ‘Second Book’ (H13), reserving the title of ‘First Book’ for the Quran. His Sufi Central Asian followers did the same and extended that praise to the Yasawi's spiritual hierarchy whom considered second only to Muhammad, and to his tomb in Turkestan which is still considered a main *hajj* destination, second only to Mecca⁵⁷.

DIVAN-I HIKMET

Hikmet 1 starts exposing the intent of the poems and proceeds recommending compassionate love for orphans and poor, which will constitute a main theme all along the book.

*Thanking God I express myself with hikmet.
I scattered gems and pearls to students here.
Having severely ascetic discipline,
I began upon the Second Book here (H1)*

*Poor and orphans are known to the Prophet.
That night He ascended and saw the revelation,
returning, descending, He inquired for poor and orphans.
Following after the poor, here I have come (H1)*

*I came to the door of love when my lord opened.
He turned me into earth, He said “Be ready”.
He pressed down my neck: arrows of blame struck me like rain,
I picked an arrowhead and pierced my heart (H1)*

Hikmet 2-7 (and also H22, H36 and H47⁵⁸) recall the Ahmed's spiritual curriculum from birth to the underground retirement, year by year from the age of 1 to the age of 63, with precious information about his reference masters and the spiritual progression across the stations of the path (*tariqah*). His sources are the Quran, the Hadith and the words of few saints. He prizes the most *Allah* and *Muhammad* (Master of prayer), and some mythical sages, possibly of Zoroastrian origin, like *Pir-i Mugan* (the Elder of the Magians, the one who distributes love) who guards from evil, and the mythical immortal *Khizir Baba (Khidr⁵⁹)*, the servant of god who initiates the saints. He quotes with veneration *Moses* and, most significant, five Sufi saints: *Majnun*, the 'demented one', a legendary ascetic of the VII century AD who, starting as passionate lover of a girl called Layla, converted into pure love and spent the rest of his life in wildness among animals; *Adham* (+780), a very rich sultan who, like Buddha, renounced to everything and embraced the poorest life; *al-Bistami* (+874), a formerly Zoroastrian priest who became an ecstatic Sufi wanderer preaching the annihilation of the self as precondition of the highest mystical attainment; *Ash-Shibli* (+946), a Sufi master who taught senses dispassion and techniques of ecstatic breath; *Mansur al-Hallaj* (executed in 992), the 'martyr of love' who got beheaded because manifested his spiritual attainments by exclaiming 'I am the truth'. He recognizes as master *Arystanbab* and places him in the highest heaven, and apparently quotes his Bukharan tutor *Yusuf Hamadani* as "my great teacher". The metaphors of wine and of date or persimmon seeds point to ecstatic initiations, the metaphor of fire to physical and psychical transmutations, the metaphor of the dew or of the Mecca's sacred spring (*Zemzem*) to the pure mind that can afford to go underground.

*At seven my Arslan Baba sought and found me,
and covered under veils all secrets he noticed:
"Thanks God I saw" he said, and kissed my forehead,
hence I went underground at 63 (H2)*

*At forty-three I looked for God and sobbed,
I shed tears, and tears turned to morning dew.
Wandering in deserts I became a madman.
My exalted mentor, I came and took refuge in you.
At forty-four, in the bazaar of love,
holding my collar I went crying in a rose-garden:
like Mansur I lost my head in the gallows of love.
My exalted mentor, I came and took refuge in you (H5)*

*At forty-nine your love rained over me, and I burned:
Like Manjun I renounced and fled from kith and kin
and suffered disasters with acceptance.
My exalted mentor, I came and took refuge in you (H5)*

I wish to burn like lovers, turn to ashes (H7)

*Soil is over my head, me and my body are earth.
My soul is excited by the communion with God.
I burned and could never return above,
I turned to morning dew and entered underground (H7)*

*Like Shibli, I whirled and relinquished life,
Intoxicated I restrained and fled from people,
I turned into Zemzem and entered underground (H7)*

Hikmet 8-17 provide details about the ecstatic state of Ahmed in his underground cell, and intimations about dispassion and spiritual love.

*One must absorb my words as gems and pearls;
I explained how things are and gave it to those in love (H9)*

*The roads of tariqah are difficult,
many in love turn to dust on them.
Whoever enters the path of love is in trouble,
I went around asking the Enlightened for the road (H10)*

*The world is garbage: desiring and chasing,
we wander like dogs (H12)*

Love is king: the lover is a poor being and keeps quiet (H14)

Hikmet 18-27 remember the approach of death, and address to Allah and Muhammad praises, prayers and words of self-criticism (*malamat*) and repentance (*tawba*).

*When my life comes to an end, what shall I do, oh God?
When the Angel of Death comes, what shall I do, oh God? (H18)*

*The love for Muhammad echoes in my head,
I love the court of grace of Muhammad (H20)*

*At fifty I heard a voice saying "Dying is easy
on condition that the light of faith is in you.
If tomorrow you go to meet him, He will receive you".
Khoja Ahmad heard and read it, and went under earth (H22)*

Hikmet 28-36 are addressed to friends and devotees, criticizing the rotten dervishes and corrupted sheikhs who...

*having ignored devotion and worship, having ruined their natures,
having read as blessings the dreams of an obvious sleep,
in the Judgment Day will try to make up their faces (H33)*

Hikmet 37-44 praise the life and merits of the right dervishes, and underline the importance of the spiritual transmission.

*Harmonizing the inner and outer world, happy are the dervishes.
Since the time of the prophet there have been dervishes (H37)*

Real dervishes choose mountains and deserts to dwell (H43)

*When the world comes to an end the wise will go
and people will set about eating each other (H44)*

The last poems of the book (H45-49) are dedicated to the lovers, the wise (gnostics), the poor, the ones who can face *Azrail* (Angel of Death) and cross the hair-narrow *Sirat* bridge that brings to heaven (*Jannah*).

*With his power my God gave an order:
"No living creature will remain on earth or sky";
and for the world He created Azrail, Angel of Death (H46)*

*Who gets up early morning will remember death
And fly to the sky for fear, early in the morning.
Only the lovers know the taste of the early morning:
they see the God presence, early in the morning (H48)*

*My head is on the pillow, I am about to lose this place,
my body will go and lie in the tomb...
I didn't know that I would go from this world
I didn't know that I would lie in a tomb (H49)*

The concluding Psalm (*Mujanat*) praises the importance of the hikmet themselves.

*My hikmet are orders from God;
read and understand: that is the meaning of Quran*

*My hikmet are as the thrill of the lover,
his tears will wash him before the prayer*

*Without a sage setting his trap on the pass,
the unwise speaks deceit and his task is forgery*

*My hikmet are sweet as sugar and honey,
They are irreplaceable among words*

*Do not read my hikmet to one free of pain,
do not sell priceless gems to those who ignore them (Mujanat)*

Explanation

¹ This first chapter describes the general characters of the Kazakh spirituality. The reader can find more detailed and precise reports on the subject in the works of Kazakh ethnographers. See: Konuratbaev 1987, 1991.

² In Turkic and Kazakh languages *ata* means father, old man, male ancestor, and *ana* means mother, old woman, female ancestor.

³ When asked how she could arrive to transform in few years such place into a holy site, Bifatima answered: "It has been very simple, the entire world is holy".

⁴ Meditation on death holds a central place in all religions and initiation rites. Any religion resides on the pretension of giving a meaning to both life and death and even of making death pleasurable and desirable. Apparently such centralized religious service became compulsory during I millennium BC in the context of crowded urban aggregations that, deprived of the previous natural scenarios, required the artificial building of an indelible civil self-consciousness.

In Hinduism death is omnipresent but its inevitability is softened by faith in cycles of meritorious reincarnations. Its impact is also filtered in Christianity where not your individual death stays at the center of scriptures and iconic representations but the death of a redeemer or a collective doomsday. In Buddhism death is faced directly and considered, together with suffering and aging, the angel of liberation, which is accomplished through dispassion for worldly affairs and brings to ultimate knowledge. It plays a most important role in the Quran and is absolutely basic in Sufism where the remembrance of death is the only messenger driving to its solution: the remembrance of God.

Initiation rites of young males through the world (in primitive tribes, Old Egypt, Mithraic cults, Templars, Masons, etc) most often include the terrifying performance of a ritual death intended for dispelling fear of the real death and supporting 're-birth' in a wider state of consciousness.

⁵ A resurgence of Tengrism was documented in the Gorno-Altai region at the beginning of the XX century, in the form of a syncretistic phenomenon called Burkhanism, combining elements of ancient pre-Shamanist, Shamanist, Lamaist and Orthodox Christian beliefs. It was suppressed by the Soviet regime for fear of its potential nationalistic propaganda among Siberian Turks.

⁶ Mysticism is defined as the belief that direct knowledge of God, the ultimate reality, can be attained through subjective direct experience. A mystic is someone devoted to such personal transformation. Asceticism (*zuhd*), consisting in abstinence

from sensuous pleasures, is ranged among the first steps of the Sufi mystic path.

Mysticism and asceticism don't characterize mainstream Islam. Monasticism shares only external similarities with Sufi circles and is totally forbidden by the Quran.

⁷ At the exception of the Naqshbandiyya order that, strictly Sunni oriented, traces its lineage to the first caliph Abu Bakr, all the Sufi orders trace their lineage (*silsila*) to Ali, prophet's cousin and son-in-law and fourth caliph, and a few, like the Central Asian Kubrawiyya, through Ali to the prophet Muhammad. In spite of the central reference to Ali, most of the Sufi orders are adherent of Sunni Islam and only few, like the Yasawiyya, Kubrawiyya and their offsprings, fall within the ambit of Shia Islam.

⁸ In the region the Naqshbandiyya is the only Sufi sect based on non-hereditary succession and, together with the Suhrawardiyya, the only one Sunni-oriented. It is also the largest with wide international diffusion, most engaged politically and most exposed to branching, schisms and mergers. During the XIX AD it ended up absorbing the members of the other two Central Asian sects (Zarcone 2003, pp. 760-768). Today it is still operative in India, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Daghestan, W-China and N-Tibet.

⁹ Sufi orders that diffused to Central Asia from Iran and India have been the Suhrawardiyya originated in Iran from Abu 'n-Najib as-Suhrawardi (Iran, 1097-1168), and its Indian derivative Ishqiyya (or Shattariyya) from Abdullah Shattari (Bihar, +1472).

¹⁰ The popular and tolerant character of Sufism created excellent conditions for the blending of Islam with local shamanic practices and religions (Melikoff 1996).

¹¹ The most important among modern active Sufi orders are: Ba Alawiyya, Bektashi, Chishti, Khalwati, Kubrawiyya, Naqshbandi, Nimatullahi, Oveyssi, Qadria Noshahia, Qadiriya Boutshishia, Qadiriyyah, Qalandariyya, Sarwari Qadiri, Shadhliyya, Shattariya and Suhrawardiyya (Wikipedia, History of Sufism).

¹² The term *tariqah* can mean 3 different objects: a Sufi spiritual lodge (*tekke*) or school (*medresa*); the Sufi spiritual training in general; or, more specifically, just the second of its 4 stations when the novice consciously adheres to the mystic community by entering an order and accepting a mentor.

¹³ Sufi schools can be distinguished on the basis of their emphasis on different stations of the training. 'Sober Sufis' are dervishes observing the courtesy (*adab*) demanded by the Lord-servant relationship, so that they emphasize the rationality of the first shariah station, becoming dominant in jurisprudence. 'Drunken Sufis' are dervishes who emphasize the ecstatic at-

tainments (*mast*, 'drunkness') of the last 2-3-4 stations of the path, becoming dominant in Sufi poetry.

¹⁴ 's.w.a.' and 'a.s.' are abridged versions of the honorific formulas *sallallahu alayhi wa salaam* (God's bliss and peace be with Him) and '*as-samad*' ('perfect one'), postponed respectively to the names of the prophets and of Allah.

¹⁵ Movements accompanying the spiritual training normally consist in a dance mimicking the dance of the crane (*turnalar semai*), made of beating wings, vertical jumps and bending-whirling body movements. The involvement of the body in devotional practices is a distinguishing character not only of Sufism but more in general of Islam and has become the most popular attribute of the Sufi training itself.

¹⁶ *Jahri*, when collective, ends up sounding quite similar to Lamaist recitations.

¹⁷ *Sama* ('listening') is called the hearing of a sound that is not being played, a kind of auditory hallucination leading to an exalted state of mind. When accompanied by spontaneous movements it is called *raqs-i sama* ('movements rising from listening').

¹⁸ Besides the circulation of ideas, the hagiographies of Sufi saints witness also cases of conversion or deep influences from Zoroastrianism (al-Bistami, Mansur Hallaj, Arystanbab), Christianity (Kharki) and Hinduism (Habash Suhawardi).

¹⁹ The manuscript of the Al-Biruni translation was found in the early 1920-ies in the Köprülü Library of Istanbul by L. Massignon (Massignon 1922)

²⁰ The term *hadith* ('traditions') refers to any of the various traditional records of words, actions and habits of the Prophet Mohammad during his lifetime.

²¹ Controversies existed between the Naqshbandiyya and the other Sufi orders, being that the first is the only school tracing its relation to Muhammad not through Ali but through Abu Bakr. In particular, in spite of their close connections, the Naqshbandiyya had occasional disputes with the Yasawiyyas, blamed for their loose adherence to the Quran words (against the literal interpretation of the Nashbandiyya), for their devotional practices favoring the loud dikhr (against the silent dhrk of the Naqshbandiyya) and as a whole for their Shia ambit.

²² Concerning the spread of Islam and Sufism in Central Asia. See: Deom 2009; De Weese 2012.

²³ The *Mubayyidiites* ('wearers of white') were among the most radical of the early heterodox Islamic movements of Central Asia, grouped around a master claiming to be the reincarnation of Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad all together. Defeated in 779 AD in Transoxiana, they moved north of the Syrdarya and converted the Qarluq tribes before disappearing in XII AD (Deom 2009, p. 102).

²⁴ Their name comes from *khwaja*, a Persian honorific title that the tribe members started receiving in Pakistan during the XIII AD.

²⁵ The politico-military orientation of the Khoja tribes of Central Asia endured during subsequent times. In Late Middle Ages the Khoja became rulers of holy sites and waterworks, both activities being freed from taxation; under the Soviet empire they lost past privileges but, quickly adapting to the new regime, ruled kolkhozes and sofkhazes; after perestroika they recovered controlling positions in managing spiritual shrines and pilgrimages. The descent, history and character of the Khoja are shared by another Central Asian tribe, the Sunak. Still today these two tribes maintain a privileged position among the no-

madic populations of Transoxiana and, like the Genghis Khan's descendants, are treated as nobility.

²⁶ The popular custom of applying the title *Bab* in front of the name of Sufi saints of Central Asia appeared during these early times of the religious spread (see note 29).

²⁷ About the origins and history of the Khoja, see: Virani 2007. About the Khoja of Kazakhstan, see: Muminov 1998; De Weese 1999, p. 507-530

²⁸ The most legendary accounts of the life of Yasawi are the compilations of legends of the Bektakshi tradition (XVI AD), in particular the *Velayetname-i Hajji Bektash Veli* (The saintly exploits of Hacı Bektaş Veli) [Haji Bektash Veli (1209-1271) was a Yasawi disciple founder of the Bektakshi order (see section 3.2)] and its summary provided in (Koprulu 2006, p. 20-57). The *Jawahir al-abrar* of Hazini (XVI AD) is nearer to reality (see section 3.3.1). Scientifically founded historical accounts are the works of DeWeese (2000), the rich but Turkish centered account of Koprulu (1890-1966) (Koprulu 2006, p. 57-89) and the short descriptions of Baitenova (2012) and Tosun (2015).

²⁹ *Khoja Ahmed Yasawi* means 'Khoja Highly-praised of Yasi'. *Hazrat*, which in Arabic means 'presence', is an honorific title applied to high clergy with the meaning of 'His holiness'. Synonyms are *Pir* ('saint'), *Shaikh* ('guide, mentor, master') *Khwaja* ('master') and *Bab* ('father', 'sir', 'gate'), all marks of respect commonly applied to Sufi masters. The title *Mahdi* ('rightly-guided') was at first given to knowledgeable persons and then acquired messianic significance. *Ibn* means 'son of', *al* means 'the' or 'of the'.

³⁰ "The tradition that Yasavi was born in Sayram is first attested in the Ottoman Turkish *Jawahir al-abrar* of Hazini from the late 16th century...but earlier sources identify the town of Yasi/Turkistan as Yasavi's birthplace." (DeWeese 1999, note 25)

³¹ The *Hanafi* is the majoritarian and relatively most flexible of the 4 *fiqh* schools of Islam, allowing analogical interpretation of ambiguous passages of Quran and Hadith. About the history of the Hanafites in Central Asia see: Muminov 1999.

³² Another version of the Yasawi formation is given by the XVI century poet Hazini (see below section 3.3.1) who states that in Bukhara Yasawi was student of the Persian Sufi Abu al-Najib Surahwardi (1097-1168), founder of Surahwardiyya order, Sunni oriented like the Naqshbandiyya.

³³ Yasawi is in Turkestan remembered as developer water management techniques and karez, which in Central Asia have always been specialized tasks of Khoja clans (Sala 2016).

³⁴ *Chilla-khona* in Arabic means 'forty (days) retreat'. The tradition of retiring in a crypt or cave for meditation or for final self-immurement was common practice among the Islamized Turkic saints of South Kazakhstan. Besides Ahmed Yasawi, another reported case of self-immurement is the one of Sighnaq-Ata, a Sufi master contemporary with Yasawi of whom chilla-kona and mausoleum are located in the immediate surroundings of the medieval town of Signak, on the Middle Syrdarya 150 km west of Turkestan. Cave mosques and collective prayer-halls are quite numerous in the calcareous cliffs of Mangyshlak (West Kazakhstan) where they developed as analogues of underground individual cells.

³⁵ Here and in following similar cases, H47 plays as abridged formula for referring to Hikmet 47 of the Turkestan manuscript.

³⁶ The most outstanding of his direct disciples was Hakim Suleiman Baqirghani (+1186), Sufi sheikh and author of the

treatise *Bakrgan Kitabı*, who spread the Yasawiyya school to Khorezm and the Caspian shores, driven to that place by sitting passively on a camel (from which his surname Baqirghani, 'brayer'). He is spoken as the father of Aisha Bibi, a 16 years beauty, unlucky lover of the Karakhanid governor of Taraz who converted to Islam and dedicated to the dead fiancée a most beautiful mausoleum. Danishmand preached in Otrar and is the author of the *Mir'at al-qulub* (see below).

³⁷ It is said that once Ahmed Yasawi summoned his disciples in a yurt (circular tent) and told them to shoot an arrow through the round hole of the roof (*shanrak*) and go to spread Sufism as shepherds in the place where the arrow would land. The arrow of Danishmand reached the Otrar oasis and the one of Shopan-Ata the Mangyshlak peninsula. Today Mangyshlak and the neighboring Ustyurt plateau are hosting a large concentration of mausoleums of Sufi saints of the Shopan-Ata spiritual lineage, remembered and honored on the account and their educational, thaumaturgic and politico-military skills.

³⁸ The history of the diffusion of the Yasawi lineage to Anatolia is provided by the Turkish historian Evliya Chelebi (1611-1682) (Evliya Chelebi XVII AD) who, like many Turkish Sufis and intellectuals, pretends to be himself a descendant of Ahmed Yasawi.

³⁹ The existing reconstructions of the Yasawiyya lineage are quite contradictory and debatable. On the basis of Tosun N. (2015), between the XII and early XV AD Yasawi successors (underlined are the most famous for their teachings and literary works) have been sheikhs of the Mansur Ata and Baqirghani (Hakim Ata) lineages [Zengi Ata; Hasan, Seyyid Ata, Sadr Ata and Badr Ata (XIII); Elemin Baba; Ali and Menduk Sheikh], of the Danishmand lineage [Suzuk Ata, Ibrahim, Ismail and Ishaq Ata], and other Central Asian sheikhs like Husamaddin Sighnaqi +1311, Hazret Besir +1463, Şerif Buzurgvâr +1556. During the XV AD the order divided in 2 branches, and then again in several branches, which favored its geographical spread in Turkic speaking regions as well as the merging with other orders: the first branch (Ikaniyya) was started in Tashkent by Sheikh Kamal Ikani [Seyyid Ahmed, Sheikh Uveys, Abdulvasi and Abdulmuhammin]; the second branch by Hadim Sheikh [Kaşğari Buhari, Süleyman Gaznavi, Seyyid Mansur Belhi +1557, Ahmad Hazini, Alim Sheikh Azizan +1633, Serif Buhari +1697, Muhammed Buhari +1801, Omer Isan]. At the turn of the XX AD the Yasawiyya order completely disappears from Central Asia, absorbed by the Naqshbandiyya, but Yasawi hikmet are still recited today at the door of his tomb and in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz yurtae, and the 'dhkr of the saw' is still practiced by two offspring sects (Lachi and Hairi-Shan) active in the Fergana valley. Alternative versions of the lineage are described by Koprulu (2006) and Trimmingham (1971) (Fig. 7).

⁴⁰ An account of the early rules and historical development of the Yasawiyya school can be found in (Muminov 1993). See also the works of the XVI century Sufi poet Ahmad Hazini (Hazini XVI AD).

⁴¹ 'Hairy Shan' is the only Sufi sect admitting women in the practice of collective dhkr, in accordance with the Yasawi miracle where cotton and fire were put together without interacting (Koprulu 2006, p. 24). It has a lodge in the Arslanbob village at the NE piedmonts of the Fergana valley where it rules two mausoleums: one dedicated to the founder of the sect and the other to Arslanbab (a duplicate of his mausoleum in Otrar). Here is also spoken a variant of the legend of the fruit seed given to Arslanbab by the prophet: in this case not a date is given but a nut

seed from which originated the majestic primeval walnut forest surrounding the village.

⁴² Some scholars attribute to Yasawi also another similar doctrinal work, the *Maqāmāt-i Arba'in* ('Forty Stations'), of which the only existing manuscript is preserved in the Public Library of Kutahya (W-Turkey) and is generally attributed to the famous Sufi mystic and poet Abū-Sa'īd Abul-Khayr (Khorasan, 967-1049). It consists of a short description of the four stations of the path (shariah, Sufi order, knowledge, divine truth) each divided in 10 substations, representing as a whole one of the finest Sufi accounts of the maqamat.

⁴³ 'Nasabnama' are numerous, they vary according to Khoja clans claiming descent from the saint and his ancestors through a brother or daughter lineage. The oldest reliable version is included in the 'Hadiqat al-arifin' of Ishaq Khwaja ibn Ismail Ata (see under) dated to the XIV AD (DeWeese 1999, p.510; DeWeese and Muminov 2013, p.55). Some versions speak even about a Yasawi's son, *Ibrahim*, who was murdered in young age, and a daughter, *Gevher Khushnas*, who continued the lineage. It is also described the way Yasawi was earning his life by making wooden spoons and carrying them to the market with an ox: "Whenever someone bought a spoon, he would put the money into the saddlebag. When someone did not pay for the spoon, the ox would follow that person wherever he went until he would pay the money. At night, the ox would return home." (Tosun 2015, p. 99)

⁴⁴ Among the names of these 16 sheikhs, 3 are just honorific titles or names that cannot be identified, and 4 refer to Sufi saints who lived after Yasawi, evidencing the fact that our Parkirnama text comes from a compilation of Yasawi teachings that not only followed his death but had also been enriched by subsequent inclusions. The other 9 names include few personages who have been distrusted or even executed on the account of their nonconformist behavior, like ab-Din Haydar and Mansur Hallaj. The Persian Sufi saint Qutb ab-Din Haydar (+1221) became notorious for promoting during the spiritual training, besides self-mortification, the use of cannabis in order to obtain a state of "restfull joy". His irreverence was criticized and his disciples called 'low life', but anyhow the habit became popular and the use of the herb migrated all over the Middle East under the name of 'Haydar wine'. Mansur Hallaj, a Persian mystic of Zoroastrian descent, left his Sufi order for becoming a lay mystic and spreading mysticism among the masses. He proclaimed that there were nothing wrapped in his turban but God, that 'the important Kaaba is placed in the heart', and finally was decapitated by saying the outrageous utterance 'I am the truth' (*al-Haqq*, which is also one of the 99 names of Allah). His name appears also among the 5 Sufi saints quoted in the Divan-i Hikmet: "...like Mansur I lost my head in the gallows of love" (H5).

⁴⁵ The path is here described by a list of 6 disciplinary rules (general virtues, lassos for the student, duties to God, sacred scriptures, virtuous actions toward guests, behavioral rules towards masters and elders), each made of 6 qualities.

⁴⁶ The text includes a beautiful passage describing the mystic relation between the lover and the beloved: "When Allah created Love, He turned to him: 'Oh, Love, settle on the great Arsha (above the seven layers of heaven)'. But Love did not agree. Then he was offered kursi (the legs of the throne): he did not agree to this place either. Then a benevolent voice sounded: 'Oh, Love! Why don't you settle on these makam? (4 steps of the disciplinary training)'. And Love prayed: 'Oh, Creator and Mentor of 18 thousand worlds! In order Love settles on

these makam, the Seekers need an object to look for (matlub): the Lover needs the Beloved (ma'shuk) as Zulaikha longed for Yusuf (the biblical Joseph, son of Jacob), as Khadija for Muhammad – *sallallahu alayhi wa sallam* –; the disciple (murid) needs the mentor (pir); the dervish needs the master”. Allah said: “Allah loves them, they love Allah”.

⁴⁷ ‘Loud’ in Arabic is said *jahri*, from which comes *Jahriyya*, another name of the Yasawiyya order (Tosun 2015).

⁴⁸ Besides the dikhr of the saw, another most simple loud dhkr was the *dhkr-i kebûter* (‘dhkr of the dove’) performed by pronouncing ‘Hu, Hu’. Another dikhr was just uttering the name Allah.

Remarkable was the practice of a complex sixfold dikhr system. In an anonymous Chagatai Turkic book titled *Risale-i Zikr-i Hazret-i Sultân al-Arifin* (Interpretation of the Dikhr of His-Holiness Sultan the Saint) is stated that the Yasawiyya order had 6 kinds of dhkr, of which are described the words and sounds in use, their synchronicity with breath in and out, and in some cases also accompanying body poses, hand gestures and percussion instruments. The first 4 dhkr consist in the repetition of the name ‘Allah’, alone or together with *Hayyan* (‘exists’), intercalated by the sounds ‘Hu, Hay, ha, ya’ with different allusions (‘Hu’ and ‘Hay’ can also mean ‘He’ and ‘She’, and ‘ha’ and ‘ya’ are pure interjections echoing the sound of the name Allah and Hayyan). The fifth dhkr, called *Dhkr-i Chayqun* (‘dhkr of the awaken’) pronounces no words but just interjections accompanied by the “use of an instrument like a rattle to make a ‘chak-chak’ noise for keeping rhythm, balance and music in harmony, resulting in a dhkr performed as ‘Hu (chak) – Hu (chak)’”. The sixth dhkr (*Chahar darb*, ‘proclaiming the path’) uses just interjections without rhythmic percussions: ‘Hay, ah ah ah, Hay, Hu’ (Tosun 2015). Briefly, going from the first to the sixth dhkr, words disappear, and interjections and rhythms gradually merge with out-breath sounds and get interiorized. In that way the ‘remembrance’ changes from verbal to silent – moves “from the mouth to the heart”.

⁴⁹ The Yasawi’s language is basically denotative and gives space to only few clear metaphors.

⁵⁰ Turkic Chagatai was a language of interethnic communication of peoples living on the territory of Central Asia, resulting from the mixing of elements of the languages of different tribes – Tukhshi, Karakhanids, Chigils, Uighurs and Karluks. During the Tamerlane reign, it became the state and court language of the Chagatai ulus. (Baitenova 2012, p. 1)

⁵¹ The *Divan-i Hikmet* is the second-oldest work of Islamic-Turkic literature after the *Qutadġu Bilig* (‘Wisdom which brings happiness’). The *Qutadġu Bilig* is written by Yusuf Khass Hajib of Balasagun around 1070 AD in Qarluq Karakhanid language and Old Uyghur alphabet. It consists of a didactic-ethical dialogue, intended for correcting social disorder,

between 4 personages (king, vizier, sage, dervish), each representing an abstract principle (justice, fortune, wisdom, man’s last end). The text is composed in masnavi style, made of 6645 rhyming couplets of prosodic 11-syllables lines. (Yusuf 1070).

⁵² The Kokshetau manuscript is written on the both sides of 90 pages made of Bukhara paper. It has been found in 2007 in the storages of the Kokshetau museum, where ended up after perestroika following a campaign of popular donations.

⁵³ The referred collection of manuscripts of the National Library of Almaty consists of 1400 pages of works attributed to Ahmed Yasawi, Bakyrġani and Danishmand, among which a 412 pages version of the *Divan-i Hikmet* (1834), a 23 pages version of the *Pakyrama*, and a 89 pages version of the *Mirat-ul kulub* (XVI AD) (National Library of Almaty 2002).

⁵⁴ Hazini at the start of the XVI AD writes in its *Jawahir al Abzar* that one of the daily devotional practices of the 40 days retreats (*khalwat*) of the Yasawiyya order was the chanting of hikmet (Hazini XVI AD).

⁵⁵ In Kazakhstan, after perestroika, have been published 17 translations of Yasawi’s Hikmet in Kazakh language. Among them, besides the ones quoted in the text, have been published: in 1995, 42 Hikmet translated in Kazakh by V. Golubtsova from an Uzbek edition apparently based on the Turkestan manuscript (Hakkulov I. 1991, Tashkent, Gafur-Bulom) (Yasawi 1995); in 1998, 71 Hikmet translated in Kazakh by E. Duisenbai from an anomalous partition of the Istanbul 69-hikmet manuscript (Yasawi 1998a, 1998b); in 2008, 149 Hikmet translated in Kazakh by E. Duisenbai from the Kazan edition (Yasawi 2008); in 2011, the same 149 Hikmet translated in Kazakh and Russian by Anurbek Bokebay, and from Russian to English by V. Trapman (Yasawi 2011); etc.

⁵⁶ In the Turkestan manuscript, 23 entire stanzas and 16 verses randomly scattered along the text are evidently omitted from a previous version. Moreover, the manuscript was badly bound and some leaves were misplaced, so that the order of poems had to be reestablished and the job has been done in an unsatisfactory way.

⁵⁷ Very widespread in Central Asia is also the ‘blasphemous’ popular saying that 3 pilgrimages to Turkestan are equivalent to 1 pilgrimage to Mecca.

⁵⁸ Some manuscript leaves have been evidently misplaced (see note 56).

⁵⁹ In the Sufi tradition the immortal al-Khidr has been associated with personages of various religions: the Zoroastrian Soroush; the Biblical Elijah; the Armenian Christian saints John the Baptist, Saint Sarkis, Saint George, etc.

The article is written on the target project «History and Culture of the Great Steppe»

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