



## AḤRĀR, K̲vĀJA 'OBAYDALLĀH

**AḤRĀR**, K̲vĀJA 'OBAYDALLĀH B. MAḤMŪD (806-96/1404-90), influential Naqšbandī of Transoxania. Surprisingly little is known of his career, and the sources are often contradictory or biased. He was born in 806/1404 at Bāḡestān in the *welāyat* of Tashkent, into a family of hereditary shaikhs with agricultural and commercial interests. He studied in a *maktab* and later in a *madrasa* in Samarkand, though this he left after two years, claiming that he had not even mastered two pages of Arabic grammar (*Rašahāt*, p. 232). His works, however, show him to have been by no means uneducated, and he may have played down his book learning to emphasize the heaven-sent quality of his inspiration.

K̲vāja Aḥrār first appears in Samarkand at the age of twenty-two (*Rašahāt*, pp. 93ff., 250). Two years later he set off for Herat in search of a *pīr*. He found one instead in Čaḡānīān, in the shape of a Naqšbandī from Badaḡšān, Ya'qūb Čarkī (*Masmū'āt*, fols. 138b-39a; *Rašahāt*, pp. 66, 241). He returned to Tashkent ca. 835/1431-32 to live on the family estates (*Masmū'āt*, fol. 189b; *Rašahāt*, p. 235). His activities at this time are obscure, but he evidently aroused the opposition of the local 'olamā', since the hagiographies are liberal with accusations of heterodoxy on both sides (*Rašahāt*, passim; see pp. 302-03, 354; *Masmū'āt*, fol. 199b, primarily based on *Manāqeb*, fols. 62a, 83a-b). Since such accusations were a commonplace of theological disputes at the time, there is no necessity to take them at their face value.

After the judicial murder of Uluḡ Beg (Bartol'd, *Ulugbek*, pp. 165ff., largely following Dawlatšāh), the Timurid ruler Abū Sa'īd finally gained control of



Samarkand in the summer of 855/1451. The *Tārīk-eAbu'l-Ḳayr Kānī* presents as Abū Sa'īd's savior the Uzbek Abu'l-Ḳayr, one of the leaders of the campaign on Samarkand, whose name appeared for an unspecified period in the *koṭba* and the coins of Samarkand. The *Rašahāt*, however, gives all the credit to K̲vĀja Aḥrār, who, on condition that Abū Sa'īd uphold the *Šarī'a*, threw the weight of his following to his side. Abū Sa'īd was evidently already acquainted with K̲vĀja Aḥrār (*Maṭla' al-sa'dayn*, MS LGU, fol. 298a) and obedient to his precepts, though the *Rašahāt* (p. 288) records K̲vĀja Aḥrār's unsuccessful journey in 854/1450 to see Abū Sa'īd in Samarkand, evidently in a bold attempt to displace the local 'olamā' as the upholder of the *Šarī'a*. An alternative version (*Rašahāt*, p. 20), that he met Abū Sa'īd in Tashkent and/or that he then aided him in the latter's campaign against Mīrzā 'Abdallāh, is evidently an a posteriori explanation of K̲vĀja Aḥrār's rise to favor at the Timurid court in the face of opposition from Samarkand Sufis such as Elyās b. Sayyed 'Ašīq and 'olamā' such as the *šayk-al Eslām* of Samarkand, K̲vĀja Mawlānā 'Ešām-al-dīn (*Rašahāt*, pp. 301-05, 345-46, 354; *Selselat al-ārefīn*, fols. 155b-57b, 173b-74b).

Bartol'd (*Ulugbek*, pp. 122-23) emphasizes that Sufism in Central Asia, in marked contrast to the situation in Western Asia at the time, had considerable claims to being the upholder of orthodoxy and the *Šarī'a*. Sufis were not necessarily unlearned, and the 'olamā' could sometimes be viewed as delinquent in their religious duties. Bartol'd surmises (op. cit., p. 166) that K̲vĀja Aḥrār, as head of the Tashkent Naqšbandīya, probably had connections in Bokhara, which would have made him specially useful to Abū Sa'īd, though the absence of information on the latter's movements before 853/1449 presents an insoluble problem.

By 858/1454 K̲vĀja Aḥrār was solidly established at Samarkand, organizing the defense of the town and reinforcing Abū Sa'īd's morale in the face of attack by Abu'l-Qāsem Bābor from Khorasan (Chekhovich, "Oborona"). His declaration that he was the mediator between the townspeople (*mardom-e šahr*) and the ruler on the occasion of the suppression of an uprising at Samarkand in 862/1458 (*Masmū'āt*, fol. 131) shows the evolution of his political role, though his insistence on the maintenance of fixed strata of society in which Sufis existed to inspire the love of God and the established order shows his influence to have been essentially conservative. His success may well have been due to a forceful personality and is not necessarily symptomatic of the triumph of *taṣawwof*. There is so far no good explanation for the attraction of Timurid and other Turkish rulers to Sufi *pīrs*. But the current explanation, as



advanced by Chekhovich (*Samarkandskie dokumenty*, p. 22), that in Transoxania Sufism was an instrument of state power to control the masses, who were temperamentally more inclined to superstition than to the observance of the *Šarī'a*, does not fit the known facts of K̅vāĵa Aĥrār's career at this period.

Following the execution of Gawhar Šād in 861/1457 for alleged complicity in a plot against his life, Abū Sa'īd made Herat his virtual capital (Bartol'd, *Ulugbek*, pp. 171ff.). K̅vāĵa Aĥrār's influence remained restricted to Transoxania. He visited Herat, however (23 Šafar-11 Rabī' I 865/8-25 December 1460), when he persuaded Abū Sa'īd to lift the *tamġā* and other "forbidden taxes" in Samarkand and Bokhara (*Maṭla' al-sa'dayn*, MS LGU, fol. 325a). This evidently refers to the fear that, as had occurred following Abū Sa'īd's defeat at Otrār (*Rawzat al-šafā'*, p. 1342) in 1455, a special tax, the *dūdī*, would be reimposed to pay for the reequipment of the army. The rebellion of Moĥammad Jūkī b. 'Abd-al-Laṭīf at Šāhrokiya and the ensuing protracted siege of that fortress between 865/1461 and 868/1463 (see especially *Tārīk-eAbu'l-Kayr Kānī*, fol. 469b) caused Abū Sa'īd to use both the *šayk-al-Eslām* of Samarkand, Borhān-al-dīn, and K̅vāĵa Aĥrār as diplomatic emissaries. The latter was ultimately successful in imposing the condition that the rebels' lives would be spared, though Moĥammad Jūkī was imprisoned at Herat and died there in 869/1464. In the winter of 872/1467-68 Abū Sa'īd summoned K̅vāĵa Aĥrār, having become totally dependent upon his advice (*Maṭla' al-sa'dayn*, MS LGU, fol. 338b), to discuss the possibility of a campaign in western Persia, following the death of the Black Sheep ruler, Jahānšāh. The decision was a disaster. Abū Sa'īd (*ibid.*, fol. 339b) set out in early Ša'bān, 872/late February, 1468; his army was annihilated, and he himself was killed. The *Rašahāt* (pp. 323ff.) reports that this bad advice brought K̅vāĵa Aĥrār some unpopularity. However, in the disorders in Transoxania following Abū Sa'īd's death, K̅vāĵa Aĥrār actively preached the restoration of order (*Masmū'āt*, fols. 131a, 194a); in a letter to Sultan Maĥmūd Mīrzā, who besieged Samarkand in 1470, he warned against further oppression of the people but offered his aid in the pacification of the town (*Maktūbāt*, MS 146/11, fol. 76a). His temporary eclipse and the triumph of the '*olamā'*' was brought, in any case, to an end under Abū Sa'īd's son and successor, Sultan Aĥmad, who became even more dependent upon K̅vāĵa Aĥrār than his father had been. Even so, Bābor observes power was not in K̅vāĵa Aĥrār's hands so much as in the begs', even in Transoxania (*Bābor-nāma*, fols. 18b-19a), and despite the shift of political power from Samarkand to the court of Sultan Ḥosayn at Herat (*ibid.*, fols. 188a, 177b). Though we have



Bābor's testimony that K̲vĀja Aḥrār's influence as a Sufi adviser was paramount, he appears only infrequently on the political scene thereafter. He died in Rabī' I, 895/February, 1490 (*Masmū'āt*, fol. 173b; *Raṣaḥāt*, p. 360) and was buried in his funerary *kānaqāh* at Samarkand in the suburb of Kafšīr. This probably remained in existence till the 11th/17th century, when a *madrasa* (begun in 1040/1630-31 and completed in 1045/1635-36) was erected on the spot by the *dīvānbeḡī*, Nāder Mirzā'ī Ṭaḡā'ī (Pletnëv and Shvab, "Arkhitekturnyĭ ansambl"). This houses the dated cenotaph of K̲vĀja Aḥrār (Veselovskii, "Pamyatnik," p. 330).

The hagiographies, and even contemporary chroniclers, may have exaggerated K̲vĀja Aḥrār's political importance. Bābor notwithstanding, there were other Sufi shaikhs who had authority under Abū Sa'īd, for example, Esmā'il 'Aṭā' (Bartol'd, *Ulugbek*, p. 23). K̲vĀja Aḥrār's interventions were not always well judged, and he had some signal failures. In 864/1460 he failed at Nūrātā to win over the rebellious Nūr Sa'īd; the peace of Šāhroḡīya in 867/1463 resulted in the cession of Tashkent to the Mughals; and his appeasement of Abu'l-Qāsem Bābor led to the loss of vast territories from the Oxus to the Morḡāb. Thus his preaching against the political quietism of his Sufi rivals (*Masmū'āt*, fols. 156a-57b, 161a, 217b) was on occasion decidedly injudicious.

New light has been cast on the importance of K̲vĀja Aḥrār in 9th/15th century Transoxania by the recent publication of documents relating to his *waqf* endowments (Chekhovich, *Samarkandskie dokumenty*). In fact the hagiographies (for example, *Manāqeb*, fols. 7b-8a) indicate the landholdings of K̲vĀja Aḥrār and his immediate descendants as being even greater, located not only in the *welāyats* of Qaršī, Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bokhara but in the Andejān and Esfījāb/Sayrām areas too. There are no precise details of their area, or even type, in the surviving documents; but notional estimates based on taxes paid or demanded on various occasions make it certain that they were vast. Chekhovich concluded from an analysis of the names, ranks, and classes of those who offered (*nīāz kardan*) or sold land to the K̲vĀja, that they were principally small peasants or petty craftsmen, but the spectrum of donors is far wider, and it is unclear that small offerings indicate small holdings. Most interesting is the appearance of *mawlānās* among them (a title used primarily by the higher 'olamā'), since this fact testifies to the respect in which K̲vĀja Aḥrār was held even by those classes traditionally most opposed to the expansion of Sufi power. The evidence these documents provide for the fragmentation of land in later 9th/15th century Transoxania is inconclusive;



but *pari passu* the *waqfiyas* do not suggest that K̲v̲ā̲ja Aḥrār was concerned to reunify landholdings in the form of *awqāf* for their economical exploitation. Nor, finally, is an accusation (*Raṣaḥāt*, p. 302) that lands were improperly acquired either cogent or necessarily typical.

The recorded works of K̲v̲ā̲ja Aḥrār are the following: 1. *Majmū'a-ye morāsalāt*, autograph manuscript in the Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences, Uzbek SSR, no. 2178 (see A. A. Semēnov, "Dva avtografa Khodzhi Akhrara," *Epigrafika Vostoka* 1951, pp. 51-57). 2. *Maktūbāt*, non-autograph MSS, Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences, Tajik SSR, nos. 548/6, 146/11; Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences, Uzbek SSR, no. 296; Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences, Leningrad, no. C-326. 3. *Resāla-ye wāledīya*, a treatise on Sufi ethics. Chaghatay translation by Zāhīr-al-dīn Bābor (Bregel-Storey, III, p. 829). 4. *Resāla-ye korāya*, possibly apocryphal commentary on the quatrains of the 11th-century Sufi mystic, Abū Sa'īd (V. A. Zhukovskii, *Tainy edineniya s Bogom v podvigakh startsa Abu Sayyida. Tolkovaniye na chetverostish'ya Abu Sayyida*, St. Petersburg, 1899, pp. 489-93). 5. *Selected letters*, incorporated into the *enšā'* anthology, the *Šaraf-nāma* of 'Abdallāh Morvārīd (ed. and tr. H. R. Roemer, *Staatsschreiben der Timuridenzeit*, Wiesbaden, 1952, fols. 52a-55a, pp. 115-17, 188-90).

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