



'ALĪ AŞĠAR ČEŠŤĪ

'ALĪ AŞĠAR ČEŠŤĪ, Mughal hagiographer, chiefly known for his *Jawāher-e Farīdī*, compiled in 1033/1623 during the reign of Jahāngīr (1014-37/1605-27). A descendent of Shaikh Badr-al-dīn Solaymān, who was the son of Shaikh Farīd-al-dīn Ganj-e Šakar of Pakpattan (d. 664/1265), 'Alī-Aşġar compiled *Jawāher-e Farīdī* to rectify errors that had crept into the genealogy of Shaikh Farīd's descendents. How far he could critically investigate patrilineal claims is unknown, since no earlier work on the subject is available. *Jawāher-e Farīdī* became popular in Češtī circles and was often quoted by later *taḍkera* writers, though 'Alī-Aşġar interpreted Sufism so as to appeal to credulous instincts. He refers to earlier writings, such as *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*, *Sīar al-awliā'*, and *Ḳayr al-majāles*, to lend his work an air of authenticity, while ignoring information counter to hearsay. Thus the author of *Sīar al-awliā'* states that Shaikh Farīd performed the *čella-ye ma'kūs* for forty nights (p. 70), but 'Alī-Aşġar extends the period to ten years. He ascribes preposterous miracles to the shaikh, e.g., that he made a woman pregnant with one glance, as a result of which her progeny were treated as his descendants. He declares that the shaikh had thousands of *kalīfas* on land, on sea, and in the air (*Jawāher*, p. 275) and cites *Sīar al-awliā'* as his authority although no such statement is found in that work. He generalized the practice of reciting the names of saints to fulfill the petitioner's desires, stating (*Jawāher*, pp. 296-98) that whoever recites the ninety-nine names of Shaikh Farīd would have his prayers granted. For the history of the Češtī *selsela*, *Jawāher-e Farīdī* has distinct value, since it consolidates accounts of the Češtī saints up to the time of the author. Used with caution, it can help in constructing an outline of the principal figures of the *selsela* after Shaikh



Farīd. ‘Alī-Aşġar’s depiction of tribes living in Ajodhan at the time of Shaikh Farīd (*Jawāher*, pp. 396-98) is also interesting, though evaluating the shaikh’s actual role in converting them is difficult. The influence of ‘Alī-Aşġar’s work is evident in Akram Barāsavī, *Eqtebās al-anwār* (Lahore, 1895), Ġolām Sarvar Lāhūrī, *Ķazīnat al-aşfīā’* (vol. I, Lucknow, 1873), and Moġammad Ḥosayn, *Waqā’e-e ḥazrat Bābā Farīd Ganġ-e Şakar* (Urdu; Lahore, 1302/1885).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jawāher-e Farīdī, Lahore, 1301/1884; the Urdu tr. Lahore, n.d., is inaccurate and full of interpolations. See also Storey I/2, pp. 986-87.

K. A. Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-u’d-din Ganj-i Shakar*, 2nd ed., New Delhi, 1973, p. 9.