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## THE SCHOLARLY PERSONA IN DAGESTANI ARABIC BIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

**Abstract.** This article explores the construction of scholarly personas in 20th-century Arabic biographical and hagiographical literature from Dagestan. Drawing on the conceptual framework of persona as formulated by Mineke Bosch and further developed by Herman Paul, the study treats persona not as a fixed social role or stereotype, but as a culturally embedded repertoire of scholarly virtues, practices, and dispositions. Paul's tripartite model – micro, meso, and macro levels of scholarly identity – serves as a useful heuristic, though this article privileges the meso-level: the articulation of time- and place-specific ideals of scholarly subjectivity. However, the Dagestani case reveals that such models are often shaped less by institutional norms than by ethical preferences, such as the valorization of Sufi piety, legal expertise, or rational inquiry. Through close textual analysis of four key Arabic works – *Nuzhat al-adhhān* by Nadhīr al-Durgilī, *Tarājim ‘ulamā’ Dāghistān* by ‘Alī Kayaev, *Ṭabaqāt al-khwājagān* by Shu‘ayb al-Bāghinī, and *Sirāj al-sa‘ādāt* by Ḥasan al-Qaḥī – the article demonstrates the plural and contested nature of scholarly ideals in Dagestani Islam. Al-Durgilī constructs a harmonized model of the ideal Muslim scholar, while Kayaev adopts a critical stance, selectively praising or censuring figures based on rationalist or ethical criteria. Sufi authors such as al-Bāghinī and al-Qaḥī frame scholarly legitimacy around spiritual charisma, ecstatic experience, and miracles. By juxtaposing these works, the article reveals how different genres (biography vs. hagiography), authorial intentions, and theological commitments shape the representation of scholarly identity. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on Islamic intellectual history, the social production of religious authority, and the localization of Islamic scholarly ideals in the North Caucasus.

**Keywords:** scholarly persona; Islamic biographical literature; Dagestan; hagiography; intellectual history; Islamic manuscript culture

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Исследовательская статья

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## РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ УЧЁНОГО В ДАГЕСТАНСКОЙ АРАБОЯЗЫЧНОЙ БИОГРАФИЧЕСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается формирование научных персон в арабоязычной биографической и агиографической литературе Дагестана XX в. Основываясь на концепции персоны, предложенной Минеке Бош и развитой Германом Полом, автор рассматривает научную персону не как фиксированную социальную роль или стереотип, а как культурно обусловленный репертуар научных добродетелей, практик и диспозиций. Трёхуровневая модель, предложенная Полом – микро-, мезо- и макроуровни научной идентичности, – используется в качестве аналитического инструмента, при этом основной акцент в статье сделан на мезоуровень, то есть на артикуляцию локальных и временно обусловленных моделей научной субъективности. При этом дагестанский материал показывает, что указанные модели формируются не столько в рамках институциональных норм, сколько под влиянием этических предпочтений – таких, как акцент на суфийской этике, правоведческой компетенции или рационалистическом подходе к знанию. Путём текстологического анализа четырёх ключевых сочинений – «Нузхат ал-азхан» Надзира ад-Дургили, «Тараджим ‘улама’ Дагистан» Али Каяева, «Табакат ал-хваджаган ан-Накшбандиййа» Шу‘айба ал-Багини и «Сирадж ас-са‘адат» Хасана ал-Кахи – в статье демонстрируется множественность и конкуренция представлений об идеале учёного в дагестанской исламской письменной традиции. Если у ад-Дургили образ учёного унифицирован и идеализирован, то Каяев придерживается критического подхода, избирательно одобряя или порицая персонажей на основании рационалистических и этических критериев. В суфийской литературе, представленной ал-Багини и ал-Кахи, легитимность научной персоны строится на духовной харизме, переживании экстатического опыта и чудотворствах (карамат). Сопоставительный анализ этих текстов позволяет выявить, каким образом жанровая специфика (биография vs. агиография), авторские интенции и теологические установки влияют на конструирование образа учёного. Тем самым статья вносит вклад в исследование исламской интеллектуальной истории, механизмов формирования религиозного авторитета и локальных моделей учёности в исламском обществе Северного Кавказа.

**Ключевые слова:** научная персона; исламская биографическая литература; Дагестан; агиография; интеллектуальная история; исламская рукописная культура

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## Introduction: Scholarly Persona

The figure of the scholar has long held a central place in the Islamic intellectual tradition, not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a moral exemplar whose conduct embodies the ideals of piety, learning, and social responsibility. In the Dagestani context, biographical and hagiographical literature composed in Arabic reflects this enduring concern with scholarly character, not merely by recounting individual life stories but by articulating models of scholarly subjectivity – idealized templates of what it meant to be a scholar in specific historical and cultural settings.

To conceptualize these representations, this study draws on the notion of the scholarly persona as developed by Herman Paul and Mineke Bosch. Bosch defines persona as “a cultural identity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and creates a collective with shared and recognizable physiognomy” – a formation that occupies the space between individual biography and institutional roles [1, p. 15]. Persona should not be equated with stereotypes or social roles; rather, it denotes a shared way of thinking, judging, and conducting scholarly work.

Herman Paul further refines this concept within the context of intellectual history and the philosophy of science, distinguishing between three analytical levels: the micro-level, which pertains to the articulation of scholarly identity in individual texts; the macro-level, which encompasses widely accepted ideals of scholarly conduct; and the meso-level, where time- and place-specific models shape particular scholarly styles and competencies [3, p. 3; 4, pp. 3–6].<sup>1</sup> The present study aligns primarily with Paul’s meso-level analysis, focusing on how Dagestani biographical writings construct and transmit distinct, culturally embedded models of scholarly behavior.

In contrast to Paul’s emphasis on methodological and institutional norms, this article approaches persona through the lens of more abstract scholarly preferences, such as an emphasis on Sufi ethics, a commitment to legal reasoning, or a rationalist orientation in the natural sciences. From this perspective, persona refers to the repertoire of traits, skills, and moral dispositions that a scholar is expected to embody within a given cultural model. Accordingly, multiple personae may coexist within a single tradition, and the same behavioral model may cultivate divergent scholarly types.

Through a close reading of several 20th-century Dagestani Arabic biographical and hagiographical works – including *Nuzhat al-adhhān* by Nadhīr al-Durgilī, *Tarājim ‘ulamā’ Dāghistān* by ‘Alī Kayaev, and *Ṭabaqāt al-khwājagān* by Shu‘ayb al-Bāghinī – this article explores how different authors mobilize narrative, emotional tone, and evaluative commentary to craft images of the ideal Muslim scholar. While some authors, such as al-Durgilī, present a unified and idealized scholarly model across disciplines, others adopt a more discriminating approach, explicitly endorsing some scholars while critiquing others. In the case of Sufi hagiographies, the ideal scholarly persona is inseparable from sanctity and charismatic authority, manifest in miraculous acts (*karamāt*) and emotional intensity. This inquiry thus sheds light on the plural and often contested nature of the scholarly persona in Dagestan, a region whose Islamic intellectual history is shaped by local pedagogical practices, Sufi affiliations, and reformist impulses.

I suggest that biographical and hagiographic literature (*tarājim*, *ṭabaqāt*, *manāqib*) extends beyond mere descriptions of individual life stories. In the context of examining the Muslim subjectivity, biographical authors portray the ideal Muslim persona, or, in the case of following below Dagestani biographical and hagiographic literature, the ideal scholarly persona. In biographical works, authors craft a portrayal of the scholarly persona but through the accounts of others. In the subsequent discussion, I will explore several Arabic-written biographical dictionaries and hagiographic works of Dagestani scholars from the 20th century.

<sup>1</sup> For more details about the scholarly persona, see: [5, pp. 135–154; 6, pp. 348–371; 2, pp. 33–54].

## *Harmonised model of the ideal Muslim scholar by Nadhīr al-Durgilī*

The first one is Nadhīr al-Durgilī's *Nuzhat al-adhhān fī tarājim 'ulamā' Dāghistān* which covers the biographies of over two hundred Dagestani scholars between the 11th and 20th centuries<sup>2</sup>. These biographies are arranged in chronological order, starting with 11th-century Derbend scholars and finishing with Nadhīr al-Durgilī's own contemporaries. Al-Durgilī evidently finished *Nuzhat al-adhhān* at some point after 1931, as transpires from a passage relating the biography of the Tatar scholar Bayazid Khayrullin [10, pp. 240–251], where al-Durgilī writes as follows: “In 1319 [1901–02] Bayazīd Mullā b. Khairallāh came to Dagestan, where he settled down in the city of Anjī [Makhachkala] and became an imām and mu'adhdhin for the residents of Tatar and Kazan origin. As of this day, in 1349 [1930–31] he is still alive and resides in the city of Anjī with his family”.<sup>3</sup>

The draft of the work is held in Muḥammad-Said Saidov's archive at the Institute of History in Makhachkala. This draft is notable for including the biographies of several scholars which are not included in his main edited work, and for appending some strikingly critical comments about the individuals in question. For instance, regarding a scholar by the name of Ghazanūf al-Gubdānī (1871-1942) he writes as follows: “He held fanatical beliefs and was hardened in his convictions... He never completed his education, or he would have become one of the pearls of his time”.<sup>4</sup> When describing the life of the above-mentioned Bayazid, Nadhīr writes: “Bayazīd Mullā b. Khairallāh is not very skilled in Arabic, but he draws knowledge from the Tatar books written in his own language”.<sup>5</sup> In relation to his contemporary Abū Sufyān Akaev, Nadhīr al-Durgilī writes as follows: “He wrote a book called *Du'ā' majmū'*, which contains multiple lies, as many scholars know. The Tatar scholar Ismā'īl Gasprinsky wrote a negative review of this book and published it in his newspaper *Terjimān*: It would have been better if Abū Sufyān had never published his book”<sup>6</sup>.

In making such comments, al-Durgilī shows himself to be capable of sharp critical judgments. Strikingly, however, he omitted these entries from the main edited text of *Nuzhat al-adhhān*, where Nadhīr al-Durgilī is entirely positive about all the individuals under discussion. In this latter telling, nearly all the scholars were accomplished major Muslim scholars who penetrated into “the subtleties of sciences”. This discrepancy in coverage and tone between his draft and edited text can be explained as follows.

Al-Durgilī used his drafts and biographical notes about Dagestani scholars as his supplementary materials. Since he was using these drafts for his own work on the main text, he allowed himself some critical comments about certain scholars. But his completed work was probably intended for a wide audience. In this context, scholarly biographies were more than just a source of information for his contemporaries and future scholars. The biographies of scholars cited in *Nuzhat al-adhhān* were evidently meant to serve as edifying exemplars that everyone who studied Islamic sciences should strive to emulate. Al-Durgilī clearly intended the *Nuzhat al-adhhān* to be a didactic message to all those who would read his book in the future. Towards this end, all the scholars whose biographies are included in *Nuzhat al-adhhān* are presented as ideal figures. Indeed, the biographies in *Nuzhat al-adhhān* serve to articulate distinct ideal scholarly persona reflecting a range of various models: legalists, a Sufis, linguists, scholars with an in-depth knowledge of logic, exact or occult sciences. Thus, in al-Durgilī's understanding, his completed work on the biographies of Dagestani scholars would serve both as a source of knowledge, including historical information, but also as an articulation of the image of an ‘ideal Muslim’ as personified by various scholars (lawyers, linguists, madrasa teachers and so on), each of whom is carefully disassociated from any of the negative characteristics that he mentions in his drafts. Any individuals towards whom in his drafts he is more generally critical, meanwhile, he omits from the final text.

It is evident that al-Durgilī in his work presents a broader concept of the ‘ideal Muslim,’ which transcends any particular scholarly category. In his perspective, the ideal Muslim is inherently a scholar, with specialization

<sup>2</sup> Nadhīr b. Muḥammad al-Durgilī, *Nuzhat al-adhhān fī tarājim 'ulamā' Dāghistān*. Institute of History, Makhachkala, Muḥammad-Said Saidov's collection, Inv. 1, no. 95. The manuscript was translated into German and Russian, and published, see: [8, 9].

<sup>3</sup> Nadhīr b. Muḥammad al-Durgilī, *Tarājim 'ulamā' al-dāghistāniyyin*, fols. 35b–36a.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., fols. 55b–56a.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., fol. 35b.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., fol. 44a.

in a specific domain of knowledge – be it law, linguistics, or poetry – being of secondary importance. The paramount criterion is the scholar's ability to deduce ethical and moral precepts from sacred texts, discerning between what conforms to *sharī'a* law and what is prohibited, thereby fostering personal morality and adherence to Islamic principles.

### *Selectively Approach by 'Alī Kayaev*

Another work of biography that was produced at much the same time as al-Durgilī's *Nuzhat al-adhhān* was *Tarājim 'ulamā' Dāghistān*, by 'Alī Kayaev. Three versions of this study have survived in Arabic, Lak and Azeri Turkic respectively, with the two latter ones written in Arabic characters. The Arabic and Lak versions of this work are housed within the collection now possessed by his grandson, Ilias Kayaev.<sup>7</sup> The Turkic version of his work is preserved at the Institute of History.<sup>8</sup>

In writing his book, he drew upon written sources, collected letters and amateur biographical essays, interviewed elders, and analysed the data he collected based on a critical approach to his collected sources. The structure of 'Alī Kayaev's work is similar to that of al-Durgilī's. The biographies of Dagestani scholars are here arranged in chronological order.

In his work, 'Alī Kayaev generally focuses on the positive qualities of the scholars whom he describes, but unlike the edited text of al-Durgilī's *Nuzhat al-adhhān* he also adds some critical comments about certain individuals. Thus, when recounting the lives of several Dagestani theologians and characterizing them as accomplished specialists in the fields of law, astronomy, mathematics, and logic, 'Alī Kayaev writes as follows: "*Sa'īd al-Harakānī would occasionally drink alcohol and allowed rulers to use it until they were lightly inebriated, despite the fact that these rulers did not stop at this and reached extreme stages of intoxication in their use of alcoholic beverages... Although Shaytān-'Abdallāh al-Ṣughūrī reached great heights and perfection in astronomy and mathematics sciences, he was nevertheless fond of alcoholic beverages, did not have the willpower to restrain himself, and went so far in his craving for alcohol that he had to sell household utensils. He would then sink so low as to steal whatever came into his hands from his wife's belongings and to sell them in order to buy alcohol... 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Tsuishī, like his teacher Sa'īd al-Harakānī, drank alcohol in moderation and issued a fatwā that allowed this. He made a habit of drinking alcohol before the start of lessons, then would anoint himself with fragrances and begin the lesson. He said that alcohol made him more active in teaching... Najm al-Dīn al-Ḥūtsī spent most of his time working with poetry and literature so that he reached considerable heights in this compared to his contemporaries. His poetry is very eloquent and demonstrates that he was greatly talented, indeed one of the best versifiers among numerous Dagestani poets. At the same time, he was engaged in literary and poetic plagiarism. I heard from many of those who read and analysed his poetry that Najm al-Dīn used to steal from the works of ancient poets, especially from the collection by the well-known al-Abyūrdī [d. 1113]. He selected whatever he liked, sometimes borrowing the text itself and sometimes its meaning, presenting them as his own compositions.*"<sup>9</sup>

This inclusion of negative material might seem to imply that 'Alī Kayaev had a more censorious outlook than Nadhīr al-Durgilī, who as we saw above was careful to omit any such criticisms from his own final text.

Simultaneously, within Kayaev's work, there is a discernible inclination towards certain scholars whose biographies he portrays with a profound emotive touch. His narratives are most extensive and emotionally charged when he discusses scholars specializing in the natural sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and medicine.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, Kayaev provides a more detailed account of the biography of the afore-mentioned Muḥammad al-Quduqī, adorning him with commendatory epithets and conferring upon him the title of an 'eminent scholar,' a distinction rarely bestowed upon others. For instance, Kayaev writes: "*Al-Quduqī stood as an outstanding luminary in the sphere of rational and traditional sciences. Brilliant proficient in Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence, the theory of Islamic law, arithmetic, geometry, algebra,*

7 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ghumuqī, *Tarājim 'ulamā' Dāghistān*. Makhachkala, private collection of Ilias Kaiaev, nos. 9 (in Arabic), 188 (in Lak).

8 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ghumuqī, *Terājim-i 'ulemā-i Dāghistān* (in Turkic). Archive of the Institute of History, Makhachkala, *Fund* 25, *Inv.* 1, no. 1. This manuscript was translated into Turkish, see: [14].

9 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ghumuqī, *Tarājim 'ulamā' Dāghistān*, fols. 55a, 69a, 79b, 139a.

10 Ibid., fols. 4b–5a, 9a–11b, 17b, 34a–35b.



*astronomy, philosophy, and logic, he was also a craftsman of scientific instruments like astrolabes and sine quadrants. Moreover, al-Quduqī assumed a pivotal role in orchestrating the dissemination of knowledge within his community. Scholars from diverse domains gravitated towards him, their numbers rivalling that which congregated around any other scholar of his era, with none in Dagestan attaining his scholarly eminence.”<sup>11</sup>*

Kayaev’s interest to personality al-Quduqī can be explained by al-Quduqī’s ideas concerning the theory of Islamic law, his critique of adherence to legal schools, and his endorsement of *ijtihād*, a parallel that Kayaev meticulously highlights in his work: “*The eminent scholar al-Quduqī, during his pilgrimage to Mecca, encountered shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Yamanī, who had emancipated himself from the yoke of taqlīd, selectively adopting the rulings of four legal schools (madhhab) in harmony with fundamental principles while eschewing innovations. Al-Quduqī became his student and acquired a wealth of knowledge from him. Al-Quduqī was profoundly impressed by shaykh Ṣāliḥ’s methodology, path, and ideas, which he embraced with fervor. Upon his return to Dagestan, al-Quduqī brought back several new books by his newfound mentor. Al-Quduqī initiated a call to action for scholars, encouraging them to embrace independent reasoning and the study of sciences, all the while grounding their analysis in the foundational sources – the Qur’ān and hadīths – scrutinizing them in light of shari’a principles, and selecting what aligned with these norms. Consequently, al-Quduqī became the first among Dagestani scholars to rouse himself from the dormancy of taqlīd and instruct his contemporaries to employ their intellect, encouraging intellectual freedom for the discernment of truth from falsehood. Regrettably, his call resonated with but a few, while the majority countered it with refutation and aversion, owing to their frail confidence in their own intellect and their exaggerated reverence for madhhab they ardently followed.*”<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to al-Durgilī, Kayaev displayed little inclination to present the biographies of all Muslim scholars as embodying the image of the ‘ideal Muslim scholar.’ Consequently, he reserved the prerogative to selectively designate those deserving of the status of an ideal scholarly persona and those who fell short.

I suggest that these differences between al-Durgilī’s and Kayaev’s works reflect the two men’s differing priorities. Whereas al-Durgilī sought to present all those scholars whose lives he regarded as offering examples to be emulated by his readership, ‘Alī Kayaev, by contrast, adopted a discerning approach in his biographical narratives. He delineated scholars who should not serve as examples, alongside those whom he deemed worthy of emulation. As a consequence, Kayaev’s work encompasses two contrasting archetypes: ordinary scholars, symbolized by adherents of *taqlīd* who opposed al-Quduqī’s notions of intellectual freedom and do not exemplify the ‘ideal Muslim,’ and the ideal scholarly persona, embodied by al-Quduqī, his disciples and scholars in the natural sciences. When narrating the biography of al-Quduqī, ‘Alī Kayaev unmistakably conveys his endorsement of the concept of *ijtihād*, which involves the hermeneutical interpretation of the Qur’ān and Sunna.

In other words, unlike al-Durgilī, Kayaev posits that merely being a scholar is insufficient to aspire to the status of an ‘ideal Muslim.’ The emotional resonance in the portrayal of the biographies of scholars specializing in the natural sciences distinctly shapes the archetype of the ideal scholarly persona, with a pronounced emphasis on rationalism.

Critiquing *taqlīd* and prioritizing rationalism, both in the domain of Islamic jurisprudence and the natural sciences, forms the defining feature of Kayaev’s representation of the ideal scholarly persona. Emphasis upon rationalism, accompanied by an advocacy for the hermeneutical comprehension of the Qur’ān and Sunna, aligns with the reformists model of Islam.

### ***Scholarly Legitimacy in Hagiography: Charisma and Miracles***

The biographical works discussed above all contain references to certain scholars being Sufis or shaykhs. But none of these above authors focuses specifically on Sufism. The earliest text that is specifically dedicated to the lives and miracles of Sufi shaykhs is the afore-mentioned treatise *Ṭabaqāt al-kh<sup>w</sup>ajagān al-Naqshbandiyya*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fol. 6a

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

by Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī [15, pp. 149–160].<sup>13</sup> In this work, al-Bāḡinī recounts in chronological succession the biographies of shaykhs following the Naqshbandi chain of spiritual transmission within his branch (*silsila*). At the same time, he also notes the biographies of shaykhs and scholars who were somehow related to the Naqshbandi shaykhs mentioned in the text.

The third part of the book is original and contains al-Bāḡinī's biographical accounts of various shaykhs of his own branch who lived in the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia. Alongside these biographies, he also recounts certain historical events that took place in the North-East Caucasus, about which he freely expresses his opinions.

While recounting the biographies of the Dagestani Sufi shaykhs, Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī was unable to avoid mentioning also those scholars who were not Sufis but still enjoyed considerable authority in Dagestan. Given that al-Bāḡinī's original purpose in producing the work was to compile the biographies of Naqshbandi shaykhs, the lives of these other Dagestani scholars who had nothing to do with Sufism were in a sense extraneous to the main logic of the text. Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī found an ingenious way out: in the midst of his narrative, he abruptly introduces a unique categorization for scholars who, while not Sufis, held significant authority in Dagestan, and he bestows upon them the title of 'shaykhs among scholars'. He also wrote about those who were not affiliated with the Naqshbandi branch, as well as those who declared themselves to be shaykhs without having the authority to do so. He writes as follows: *"The rest of the Dagestani shaykhs are divided into three categories. The first are the shaykhs among scholars, who were not connected to Sufism but reached the knowledge of God through their deep study of sciences and strict adherence to the canons of Islam, the cleanliness of their bodies, thoughts, and asceticism. The second ones are those who did not possess deep religious knowledge but approached God because of their irrepressible love of God (jadhba). The third ones are those who pretend to be shaykhs (tashayyakha), but have no religious knowledge that could guide them in their everyday life, or a genuine shaykh to lead and guide them in the ṭarīqa. They are lost and lead many others astray; they are hypocrites, liars... and those who follow them are like those who worship idols."*<sup>14</sup>

In the first category of scholars he includes such individuals as the afore-mentioned Muḥammad al-Quduqī, Abū Bakr al-'Aymakī and others who were not Sufis.<sup>15</sup> In his second category, al-Bāḡinī lists the famous Qādiri shaykh Kunta-hājji as well as Dagestani Khalwati shaykhs who died before the author's lifetime. In his opinion, these shaykhs did not possess deep knowledge and were not linked by the chain of spiritual continuity (*silsila*) with the Naqshbandi branch, but were nevertheless holy because of their irrepressible love of God, their obedience, humility, asceticism, and impeccable conduct.<sup>16</sup> In the third category, meanwhile, comprising what he calls 'false shaykhs', he includes certain followers of shaykh Kunta-hājji, as well as a number of Dagestani Naqshbandi shaykhs from a parallel, rival branch.<sup>17</sup>

In constructing and organising the *Ṭabaqāt al-khwajagān al-Naqshbandiyya*, Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī draws on entirely different principles from those informing the biographical works by Nadhīr al-Durgilī and 'Alī Kayaev that we discussed above. He does not, for instance, distinguish between Dagestanis and scholars of other origins; the continuity of the Sufi branch is more important to him than the origins of certain scholars or shaykhs. For this reason, we see a very broad geography in his work, including the Sufi shaykhs of Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, Shirvan, Azerbaijan, Iran, and the Volga-Ural region. As far as al-Bāḡinī is concerned, the location or origins of individual shaykhs or their affiliation with this or that legal school is irrelevant.

Another difference between Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī's work and the other biographical works is its focus on emotions and even sensory perceptions. In this regard, his description of his own emotions following the death of his father is quite telling. Besides, in his work al-Bāḡinī describes instances of shyness when confronted by others, profound shock when witnessing the miracles (*karamāt*) performed by the shaykhs, the palpable hostility and anger directed towards the shaykhs by Dagestani imperial officials, the deep reverence accorded to the shaykhs, the sensory delight and warmth experienced during the practice of Sufi rituals, a profound fear of God resulting in tears, and numerous other sentiments.

The emotionally charged narrative is clearly more typical of the genre of hagiography, with its signifiers of how a reader is expected to respond to mystical demonstrations of divine will, than of the biographical works

13 Shu'ayb b. Idrīs al-Bāḡinī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khwajagān al-Nakshbandiyya wa sādāt al-mashā'ikh al-khālidiyya al-maḥmūdiyya*. Damascus: Dār al-nu'mān lil-'ulūm, 1996.

14 Shu'ayb b. Idrīs al-Bāḡinī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khwajagān al-Naqshbandiyya wa sādāt al-mashā'ikh al-khālidiyya al-maḥmūdiyya*, 397

15 Ibid., 397–415

16 Ibid., 416–418.

17 Ibid., 419–421.

by Nadhīr al-Durgilī or ‘Alī Kayaev. For instance, al-Durgilī’s various biographical accounts embedded into a historical narrative serve as straightforward examples of an ‘ideal Muslim scholar’, without any expressive embellishments. Al-Durgilī does not attempt to influence readers’ emotions, and instead simply recounts the lives of the people whom he discusses, highlighting the shaykhs’ achievements in certain subjects, and thereby conveying a sense of what any Muslim can achieve and should strive for. By investing his hagiography with emotional power, Shu‘ayb al-Bāginī is thus choosing a very different course of action from these other two authors.

Another Dagestani hagiographical text that covers the biographies of Sufi shaykhs is *Sirāj al-sa‘ādāt fi siyar al-sādāt* by the afore-mentioned Ḥasan al-Qaḥī,<sup>18</sup> who was the successor of shaykh Shu‘ayb al-Bāginī. The author completed his work on 2 Sha‘bān 1338 / 20 April 1920, approximately at the same time when Nadhīr al-Durgilī and ‘Alī Kayaev were writing their own biographical essays.

The *Sirāj al-sa‘ādāt* is in large part an abbreviated retelling of Shu‘ayb al-Bāginī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-khwajagān al-Naqshbandiyya*. Therefore, al-Qaḥī’s work can predominantly be viewed as a compilation. When describing the life of shaykh al-Bāginī, he repeats nearly verbatim the autobiographical material that al-Bāginī wrote down in *Ṭabaqāt al-khwajagān al-Nakshbandiyya*. Meanwhile, here we can see one scholar’s autobiography, al-Bāginī, becoming a biography when narrated by another scholar, al-Qaḥī.

Unlike Shu‘ayb al-Bāginī, Ḥasan al-Qaḥī chose to omit the biographies of all shaykhs unrelated to the specific spiritual lineage (*silsila*) to which he himself belonged. What further sets al-Qaḥī’s work apart is the dedicated section that delves into the biographies of two shaykhs who personally granted him the *ījaza*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Asawī (d. 1904) and Sayfallāh-qāḍī Bashlarov; this is a feature not found in al-Bāginī’s work.

Although al-Qaḥī presumably had the opportunity of producing a full biography of his teacher Sayfallāh-qāḍī Bashlarov, since they were both in frequent correspondence and in personal communication [18, pp. 60–71; 19, pp. 171–175], he nevertheless offers only a very concise summary of Bashlarov’s life. He omits to mention a range of factual biographical data about Bashlarov, such as his date of birth, his studies at different madrasas, his exile, or his career as a doctor, and gives only the bare minimum of information concerning Bashlarov’s Sufi path. For the most part, Bashlarov’s biography as told by Ḥasan al-Qaḥī consists of descriptions of miracles performed by shaykh Bashlarov himself. Drawing on letters from Bashlarov that he had collected and copied into a separate book,<sup>19</sup> Ḥasan al-Qaḥī tells the story of Bashlarov’s miracles as recounted by Bashlarov himself.

Thus, Sayfallāh-qāḍī Bashlarov wrote to him in his letters that he had had dreams about God, angels, prophets, including Adam, Ibrāhīm, Nūḥ, Mūsā, ‘Īsā, and repeatedly Prophet Muḥammad, with the latter offering him a glass of milk, walking him home and praying with him in his dreams.<sup>20</sup> Ḥasan al-Qaḥī presents these dreams of Bashlarov as testimony to the shaykh’s high level of sanctity, and proof that shaykh Bashlarov was following the way of legitimate *ṭarīqa*. At the same time, however, he relates some of Bashlarov’s dreams as warnings for the reader not to stray from the path of righteousness, and as evidence of both the truth of their own branch of *ṭarīqa* and the error of alternative, rival branches. Let us consider, for instance, a dream described by Sayfallāh-qāḍī in his letter to Ḥasan al-Qaḥī: “On the night between Saturday and Sunday of 17 October, I had a dream that I was performing the Friday prayer in the mosque with other people. While I was seated and recited ‘al-Taḥiyya’, people interrupted their Friday prayer without finishing it and arose. As for me, I did not interrupt it and continued to pray. At the end I heard: “May God accept [your prayers] for the sake of Sayfallāh’s sanctity”. After the prayer ended, I turned back to see what had made Muslims interrupt their prayer. Someone said: “Our shaykh Muḥammad-hājjī al-Kikunī has come to the mosque, and this is why we arose, interrupting our prayer.” Then I understood that these people were most ignorant in their religion, for they had interrupted a mandatory prayer for no reason. Then I saw Muḥammad-hājjī sitting in the mosque, who greeted me warmly and embraced me. We spoke long together, and I made him understand that his disciples (*murīds*) had behaved inappropriately when they interrupted their prayer. He agreed with me.”<sup>21</sup>

This passage is instructive for several reasons. Muḥammad-hājjī al-Kikunī (1836–1913) [21, pp. 21–36; 22, pp. 22–35], who appears in Bashlarov’s dream, was a shaykh of a parallel Khālidiyya branch of the

18 Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qaḥī al-Dāghistānī, *Sirāj al-sa‘ādāt fi siyar al-sādāt*. Makhachkala: Dār al-risāla, 2012.

19 Mir Khālīd Sayfallāh b. Ḥusayn al-Nitsubakrī, *Maktūbāt Khālīd Saif Allāh ilā fuqarā’ ahl Allāh*. Damascus: Dār al-nu‘mān lil-‘ulūm, 1998.

20 Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qaḥī al-Dāghistānī, *Sirāj al-sa‘ādāt fi siyar al-sādāt*, 196.

21 Ibid., 217.



Naqshbandiyya brotherhood, whose legitimacy was questioned by both Shu'ayb al-Bāginī and Ḥasan al-Qaḥī himself who belonged to the other, Maḥmūdiyya branch of the same brotherhood [23, pp. 43–56]. In Bashlarov's recounting of the dream as reported by Ḥasan al-Qaḥī, the fact that shaykh al-Kikunī's disciples interrupted a mandatory prayer is evidence that al-Kikunī's branch is illegitimate. The fact that Bashlarov pointed out how inappropriate it was for shaykh al-Kikunī to interrupt the prayer and that the latter agreed with Bashlarov's argument also indicates that al-Kikunī essentially acknowledged his own illegitimacy. As for the warm reception given by al-Kikunī to Bashlarov, as well as his prayer to God to accept their prayer for the sake of shaykh Bashlarov's sanctity, this detail serves to communicate to readers that shaykh Bashlarov stood at a far higher spiritual and moral level than al-Kikunī. Thus the account of this dream, like those of all the dreams described by Bashlarov and recounted by Ḥasan al-Qaḥī, serves to demonstrate to the readers the image of an ideal shaykh, who is so true of heart that he is able to commune with God, angels, prophets, and most Islamic authorities.

Thus, the hagiographic works mostly focus on one scholarly persona: that of an ideal Sufi shaykh, whose legitimacy and righteousness are founded on the miracles or special metaphysical abilities demonstrated by a shaykh as a result of his special sanctity and/or his adherence to that particular *ṭarīqa* which the author in question regards as authoritative and legitimate.

The hagiographic works by Shu'ayb al-Bāginī and Ḥasan al-Qaḥī articulate their vision of an ideal Sufi persona by drawing the readers' attention to the performance of miracles. The miracles performed by shaykhs and described in hagiographic works serve in these hagiographic narratives as manifestations of divine grace and favour; indeed, Ḥasan al-Qaḥī explicitly states that a shaykh's performance of miracles is a direction reflection of his sanctity.<sup>22</sup> The various miracles described by Shu'ayb al-Bāginī and Ḥasan al-Qaḥī in their works are quite typologically diverse, and include clairvoyance, the ability to become invisible, the ability to tame wild beasts, the ability to turn one material object into another, the ability to move through time and space, the ability to produce food during a bad harvest, and the power to heal the sick.

Thus, in the hagiographic works by Dagestani shaykhs, miracles served to express the image of an ideal Muslim, who has acquired the ability of making supernatural things happen (moving through time and space, turning one object into another) as a result of his struggle against his inner vices and his impeccable obedience to his instructors' requests. In the Sufi hagiographic works by Dagestani Sufis, the shaykhs serve as an example of what they believed to be an 'ideal Muslim.'

When we compare biographical and hagiographic works, we can also point out their authors' different views when it comes to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in the most general sense. Thus, Nadhīr al-Durgilī and 'Alī Kayaev considered it necessary to add to their biographical works the names of scholars who had become accomplished in the learning of various fields of knowledge: linguistics, law, logic, rhetoric, medicine, natural sciences. Shu'ayb al-Bāginī included in his *Ṭabaqāt al-kh<sup>w</sup>ajagān* the biographies not just of Sufi shaykhs, but also of those scholars who reached high degrees of the knowledge of God due to their profound expertise in various subjects. As for Ḥasan al-Qaḥī, he dedicated his work to the description of just the lives of shaykhs of his own branch (*silsila*), and spoke of the negative experience of those who followed the Sufi way but simultaneously studied other subjects as well.

## Conclusion

The analysis of extant works dedicated to the biographies of Dagestani scholars and Sufi shaykhs allows us to draw the following conclusions. While all these works were written in a genre which the European Orientalist and Muslim traditions would define as 'biography', the approaches selected by the authors operating within this genre are somewhat different. Nadhīr al-Durgilī, constructed his text on the chronological principle and included the biographies of all the scholars representing different areas of knowledge. Nadhīr al-Durgilī's work omits mention of any unpleasant episodes in the lives of these scholars, whom he presents as having attained profound knowledge in various different areas of study. 'Alī Kayaev, despite using a structure similar to that employed by Nadhīr al-Durgilī, nevertheless also includes critical notes with regard to certain scholars. Shu'ayb al-Bāginī structures his work around his main Sufi branch, describing the lives of Sufi shaykhs along the chain

22 Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qaḥī al-Dāghistānī, *Sirāj al-sa'ādāt fi siyar al-sādāt*, 194.

of Naqshbandi continuity. At the same time, he deviates from the main topic somewhat in his work as he also provides information about shaykhs from other brotherhoods or even non-Sufi scholars. With reference primarily to the work by Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī, Ḥasan al-Qaḥī rejects everything that is not directly related to the chain of Naqshbandi shaykhs with which he aligned himself. But while the works by Nadhīr al-Durgilī and 'Alī Kayaev contain hardly any description of supernatural deeds performed by shaykhs, the works by al-Bāḡinī and al-Qaḥī primarily focus on these miracles.

It is quite clear that all of these authors had their own purposes and notions of their own potential audiences who they address in their text. For Nadhīr al-Durgilī, Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī, and Ḥasan al-Qaḥī, the purpose of their work is to evoke for their readers the image of an ideal scholarly persona. Whereas Nadhīr al-Durgilī presents as ideal exemplars those who attain mastery in a wide range of sciences, Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī and Ḥasan al-Qaḥī identify such exemplars only among practitioners of Sufism. At the same time, it is obvious to Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī that the 'proper' image or Muslim persona can exist in other *ṭarīqas* as well, and can even be demonstrated by those scholars who reached the degree of knowledge of God because of their profound knowledge. In this respect, his notion of an ideal scholarly persona is close to the view of Nadhīr al-Durgilī. However, Shu'ayb al-Bāḡinī excludes from this image all those who claim to belong to a certain brotherhood without possessing a true spiritual bond and permission to teach obtained directly from their shaykh. Ḥasan al-Qaḥī is more categorical in his own work and excludes anyone who had no relation to his particular branch of *ṭarīqa*.

As for 'Alī Kayaev, it appears that he did not set out to portray an image of an ideal scholarly persona. Instead, he attempted to depict the biography of various scholars, highlighting both their positive and negative qualities. In his narrative Kayaev tried to focus more clearly on his own brand of historical objectivity: he is critical of his sources and compares spoken testimonies about scholars collected by him with the extant written evidence.

At the same time, one distinctive aspect of Kayaev's work reveals his personal preferences and demonstrates his concept of the ideal scholarly personas. Thus, Kayaev offers more comprehensive and detailed biographies of scholars specialising in the natural sciences, while reducing the coverage and, at times, omitting the biographies of certain scholars who were Sufi shaykhs or engaged in occult practices. Furthermore, it becomes evident that he permits himself to express emotions, often speaking with enthusiasm, as is the case with his portrayal of Muḥammad al-Quduqī. This suggests that despite Kayaev's primary aim of delivering an unbiased narrative, factual and historical account, nevertheless, he inadvertently and contextually identifies individuals who epitomise ideal scholarly personas – those who adhered to rationalistic principles.

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