

Reading Babur's Dreams: Religiosity and Kingship in Early-Modern Central and South Asia

HENRY BRILL

Kenyon College

May 27, 2019

Introduction: Babur and His Time¹

A DESCENDANT OF BOTH Chinggis Khan and Amir Temür, the Muslim ruler Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur laid the foundations for the Timurid-Mughal Empire in the early tenth/sixteenth century.² He was born in 888/1483 in Andijan, a city within the boundaries of modern-day Uzbekistan. The Central Asia in which Babur spent his youth was marked by “extreme political fragmentation,” with a number of royal families, related to varying degrees through the Chinggisid line, striving for political supremacy.³ Babur’s Chaghatay-language memoir—entitled *Vaqaʿiʿc* or *Events*, but often referred to as the *Baburnama*—is a particularly rich historical source due to the complex politics of the milieu in which it was composed.⁴ In his largely autobiographical memoir, Babur depicts himself as an ambitious prince and poet tasked with navigating the tensions between his own Turko-Mongol, Muslim customs and those of the people whom he ruled in northern India.

Although Babur was a Muslim ruler who established an empire in which Islam was a minority religion, there is relatively little direct discussion of religion in his memoir.⁵ Accordingly, expressions of religiosity have remained a relatively understudied aspect of this important text. While Babur scarcely refers *directly* to Islam, his Islamic religiosity is very much evident in his dream narratives, which describe his oneiric encounters with Sufi *ʿawliyyāʿ* (sing. *walī*) or “Friends of God.” Viewing

¹Acknowledgments: This paper reflects research conducted through the Kenyon College Summer Scholars Program (2017). I presented versions of the project in poster format at the national ASIANetwork Conference (April 2018) and the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association (January 2019). An earlier version of this paper was awarded the Robert L. Baker Prize (April 2019) for best historical essay submitted during the academic year by the History Department at Kenyon College. I am indebted to Professors Nurten Kılıç-Schubel and Vernon James Schubel, both of whom challenged and encouraged me during the research process, in addition to providing valuable feedback on earlier drafts. Thanks are also due to the editorial team of *Harf: A Journal of South Asian Studies* at McGill University, to which the present article was originally submitted but later withdrawn for scheduling reasons.

In this paper, dates from the Islamic calendar precede Gregorian dates, which are separated by an oblique. The Islamic calendar, or *Hijrī* calendar, is a lunar system of dating that takes the *Hijra*, or migration, of the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) in 622 CE as its starting point. Many early-modern authors from the Islamicate world, including Babur, used the lunar Islamic dating system.

²Babur is associated with what is often referred to as the “Mughal Empire.” However, Babur would have self-identified as a Timurid, that is a patrilineal descendant of the great warlord Temür, or Tamerlane. The appellation “Timurid-Mughal” stems from these two preoccupations. For a further discussion of the derivation and usage of this label, see: Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 15–17.

³Maria Eva Subtelny, “Bābur’s Rival Relations: A Study of Kinship and Conflict in 15th–16th Century Central Asia,” *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 102.

⁴Although now extinct, Chaghatay was an important literary language in Turko-Mongol Central Asia and part of the Turkic language family. The closest modern equivalent is the Uzbek language, spoken mainly in present-day Uzbekistan as well as other parts of Central Asia.

⁵As Stephen Dale comments: “Bābur scarcely refers to Islam” in the *Baburnama*. For which, see: Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, 172.

the *Baburnama* as a reflection of the political and religious milieu in which Babur lived, I analyze one of the two principal dream narratives included in his memoir as an articulation of late-Timurid religiosity and kingship.⁶ When properly contextualized, this particular dream narrative emerges as a textual space in which understandings of *walāya*, or saintly authority, and Turko-Mongol kingship are negotiated. Analysis of the dream narrative suggests that in Babur's milieu, *walāya* and royal sovereignty were two closely connected forms of authority—with royals competing for the support of politically-involved Sufi *ʿawliyāʾ* and, conversely, with members of Sufi groups vying for the loyalty of various royals. Ultimately, this brief study attempts to provide new perspectives on the role of Islam in Timurid-Mughal conceptions of political legitimacy and kingship.

The Samarkand Dream Narrative

Babur's first dream narrative appears before his attempt to take Samarkand, a symbolic center of the Timurid state in Central Asia, from the Chinggisid-Uzbek prince Shibani Khan in 906/1500. At this point in the narrative, Babur's prospects for empire do not look particularly promising. Sultan-Ali Mirza—one of Babur's paternal cousins—had recently given Samarkand to Shibani Khan.⁷ This was a particularly devastating event for Babur, who regarded Shibani Khan and his men as “an old enemy” and “a foreign people,” respectively.⁸ Babur, in his characteristically forthright style, provides a good sense of his political and personal desperation after Shibani Khan captured Samarkand: “There we were, deprived of city and province, not knowing where to go or where to stay.”⁹ By assuming control of Samarkand in 906/1500, Shibani Khan ushered Babur into a period of particular political uncertainty.

Soon after Shibani Khan conquered Samarkand, Babur and his advisors decided to attack the city on the premise that the Chinggisid-Uzbek prince had yet to establish affective bonds with its inhabitants.¹⁰ After recounting the meeting during which that decision was made, Babur writes:

⁶There are two principal positions concerning the authorship of the *Baburnama*, which markedly impact the ways in which scholars have approached the text. Stephen Dale locates the *Baburnama* within the genre of autobiography. For an overview of Dale's interpretation, see his: “Steppe Humanism: The Autobiographical Writings of Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, 1483–1530,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 1990): 37–58; and “The Poetry and Autobiography of the Bābur-nāma,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (August 1996): 635–664. A. Azfar Moin, on the other hand, argues that Babur was not the sole author of the *Baburnama*. He suggests that Jahangir, Babur's great-grandson, added to the text. For Moin's engaging argument, see his “Peering through the Cracks in the *Baburnama*: The Textured Lives of Mughal Sovereigns,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 4 (2012): 493–526.

It is ultimately difficult to resolve the issue of authorship due to the lack of early manuscripts of the text written in its original Chaghatay. In this study, I sidestep the question of authorship, and instead view the *Baburnama* as a reflection of royal Timurid-Mughal political and religious worldviews. In effect, this methodological approach reconciles the divergent positions of Dale and Moin; both scholars would agree that the text is reflective of the Timurid-Mughal milieu in which it was written and (eventually) became influential.

⁷Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 94. Thackston's translation is cited hereafter as *BN-T*.

The aforementioned English translation was first published as part of a trilingual edition of Babur's text, for which see: *Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, Bāburnāma: Chaghatay Turkish Text with Abdul-Rahim Khankhanan's Persian Translation*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1993). Here, I use the 2002 edition, as it is more accessible than the 1993 original.

⁸*BN-T*, 257.

⁹*BN-T*, 96.

¹⁰*BN-T*, 98. The establishment of affective bonds between ruler and ruled was an important aspect of Timurid political culture. Beatrice Forbes Manz has provided a particularly engaging discussion of this theme during the reign of the Timurid Shah Rukh, who ruled Persia and Transoxiana (a region in Central Asia that corresponds roughly to modern-day Uzbekistan) in the early ninth/fifteenth century. See her *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially chapter four.

About that time I had a strange dream. I dreamed that Khwaja Ubaydullah had arrived and I had gone out to greet him. He came and sat down. The tablecloth had been laid somewhat unceremoniously before him, for it seemed that he was offended. Mulla Baba looked at me and motioned. I looked back as if to say, “It’s not my fault. The steward is to blame.” The khwaja understood and accepted the apology. Then he rose, and I rose to escort him. In the entryway he took me by the arm, the right or left, I don’t remember which, and lifted me so that one of my feet was off the ground. In Turkish he said, “*Shaykh Maslahat berdi* [Shaykh Maslahat has bestowed (Samarkand)].” A few days later I took Samarkand.¹¹

Khwaja Ahrar and the Naqshbandi-Timurid Connection

The Khwaja ʿUbaydullah to whom Babur refers in the Samarkand dream narrative was born Nasir al-Din ʿUbaydullah Ahrar in 806/1404.¹² Khwaja Ahrar is perhaps most remembered for his “high degree of political and worldly activity” as a member of the Naqshbandiyya, a key Sufi group in early-modern Central Asia.¹³ The political activities of Khwaja Ahrar began when he successfully recruited Chinggisid-Uzbek troops to support the Timurid prince Abu Saʿid, who was Babur’s paternal grandfather, in an inter-dynastic dispute over Samarkand in 855/1451.¹⁴ However, the relationship between Abu Saʿid and Khwaja Ahrar was not forged solely from the politics of expediency. Shortly after he secured control of Samarkand, Abu Saʿid entered into a spiritual relationship with Khwaja Ahrar, becoming a *murīd*, or follower, of the Naqshbandi *pir*, or spiritual guide.¹⁵ The historical Khwaja Ahrar thus emerges as figure involved deeply in the interrelated religious and political realms during the late-Timurid period.

Although Abu Saʿid and Khwaja Ahrar shared a long-lasting connection, the relationship between Khwaja Ahrar and Babur was a relatively short-lived one; Khwaja Ahrar died in 895/1490 when Babur was only seven years old.¹⁶ However, Khwaja Ahrar is very much present in the *Baburnama*. The Samarkand dream narrative, which occurred some time after Khwaja Ahrar died, represents the most notable interaction between the spiritual guide and Babur recorded in the latter’s work. In the dream narrative, it is through invoking the figure of Shaykh Maslahat that Khwaja Ahrar seems to foreshadow Babur’s successful capture of Samarkand, referenced directly after the narrative.¹⁷ That Khwaja Ahrar, as recorded in the dream narrative, seemingly predicts the ascendancy of Babur in Samarkand parallels how the historical Khwaja Ahrar supported the political aspirations of Abu Saʿid to take the same city in 855/1451. That is to say, the role of Khwaja Ahrar in the Samarkand dream narrative corresponds to his historical function as a kingmaker in Transoxiana.

¹¹ *BN-T*, 98–99; 99n136. I refer to this particular episode as the “Samarkand dream narrative” due to its connection to Babur’s takeover of the city.

¹² Hamid Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order” in *Naqshbandis: Cheminements et situation actuelle d’un ordre mystique musulman*, ed. Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarcone (Istanbul: Éditions ISIS, 1990), 13.

¹³ Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order,” 14.

¹⁴ Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order,” 13–14.

¹⁵ Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order,” 13.

¹⁶ Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order,” 15.

¹⁷ *BN-T*, 99. For further analysis of Shaykh Maslahat, see below.

Although modern readers may express skepticism concerning such a divinatory dream narrative, scholars have long noted the role of predictive dreams in Islamic religiosity. Nile Green, for example, classifies the dream that “provides glimpses of future events” as one of the three major categories of dream described by Muslim dream-theory in his survey of the subject. For which, see: Nile Green, “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dream and Visions in Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 13, no. 3 (2003): 291.

The ways in which Khwaja Ahrar and Babur interact in the Samarkand dream narrative further mirror the historical alliance between Khwaja Ahrar and Abu Sa'īd. The extent to which Khwaja Ahrar influenced Abu Sa'īd has led some scholars, such as Hamid Algar, to claim that Khwaja Ahrar functioned as the “virtual ruler of the eastern Tīmūrid realm.”¹⁸ While the Samarkand dream narrative does not suggest that Khwaja Ahrar functioned as the de facto ruler of the city in place of Babur, Babur plays a subordinate role to Khwaja Ahrar in the dream narrative. For instance, Khwaja Ahrar is the first to both sit and rise and is the only individual in attendance to speak, indicating his hierarchical position vis-à-vis Babur. In addition, Babur describes how Khwaja Ahrar “lifted” him off his feet at the close of the dream narrative, further suggesting the Khwaja's *walāya* over Babur in an overtly physical sense.¹⁹ Thus, the ways in which Babur is physically situated relative to Khwaja Ahrar in the Samarkand dream narrative further parallel the historical alliance between Abu Sa'īd and Khwaja Ahrar.

That Khwaja Ahrar assumes a privileged position relative to Babur takes on particular significance when compared to the relatively self-aggrandizing portions of the *Baburnama*, in which Babur boasts about his achievements and status. As Stephen Dale has commented, this particular ethos, in which “warriors usually reveled in their egotism and trumpeted their triumphs,” was an important aspect of Turko-Mongol political legitimation, one connected to the epic poetry tradition of Central Asia and Arabia.²⁰ Recounting a meeting with his cousins in Herat, for example, Babur adheres closely to this mode of self-representation; he writes: “although I was young in years, my rank was nonetheless high. Twice by dint of the sword I had recaptured and sat on my ancestral throne in Samarkand [...] To delay in honoring me was inexcusable.”²¹ Here, Babur justifies the indignation he felt in Herat by referencing his accomplishments. Although just one instance among many in which Babur appeals to the Turko-Mongol warrior ethos so important to political legitimation in early-modern Central Asia, the Herat episode represents a markedly different Babur than that of the Samarkand dream narrative, which depicts a comparatively more reverent young prince.²²

With its portrayal of a deferential Babur vis-à-vis a powerful Sufi *walī* in the form of Khwaja Ahrar, the Samarkand dream narrative calls to mind the literary genre of Sufi hagiography.²³ In fact, Sufi hagiographical literature from the early-modern period often features dream narratives. By using the *Rashahat-i 'ayn-hayat* (*Dewdrops from the Elixir of Life*), a tenth-/sixteenth-century hagiography of Khwaja Ahrar written by Mawlana 'Alī ibn Husain Safi, as a case study, Shahzad Bashir has examined the place of dream narratives in early-modern Sufi literature. Bashir notes:

In the *Rashahāt* and other such works, dream narratives preserve the hierarchy of relationships between God and human beings—dead or alive—that one finds replicated in

¹⁸ Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandī Order,” 13.

¹⁹ *BN-T*, 99.

²⁰ Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, 33.

²¹ *BN-T*, 224.

²² There are, however, a number of passages in which Babur does not appeal to this method of political legitimation. Stephen Dale has commented on the “humanizing” passages that can be found in the *Baburnama*, which influence his designation of the text as an autobiography. For a discussion of some of these passages, see: Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, 36–51.

²³ For example, A. Azfar Moin proposes that the *Baburnama* “contains elements of hagiography (*tazkira*), a type of text that typically highlighted the miraculous life of a sacred and foundational figure,” on account of another dream narrative that Babur included in his memoir. For which, see: Moin, “Peering through the cracks of the *Baburnama*,” 497.

In referring to “Sufi hagiography,” I follow the usage of Shahzad Bashir, who has recently provided a reevaluation of the genre. As Bashir suggests, “In the basic sense, Sufi hagiography is best described as an argument for sanctity made on behalf of a friend of God by her or his disciples.” For which, see: Shahzad Bashir, “Naqshband's Lives: Sufi Hagiography between Manuscript and Genre,” in *Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, 15th–21st Centuries*, ed. Devin DeWeese and Jo-Ann Gross (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 91.

other representations of socio-religious activity as well. In nearly all cases that I have noted in the *Rashahāt*, seers of dreams stand in subordinate positions to the individuals or beings that are seen [...] Whenever dreams are reported to have occurred to men known as great exemplars, the narratives are placed in the early stages of their careers, before their acquisition of high religious status.²⁴

On the whole, the Samarkand episode fits well within the larger genre of hagiographical dream narratives. The actions Khwaja Ahrar and the relative complacency of Babur reaffirm the hierarchical position of Sufi teacher vis-à-vis follower. For example, the way in which Khwaja Ahrar lifts Babur off his feet serves as the most evident means by which Khwaja Ahrar asserts his status relative to Babur in the dream narrative.²⁵ In addition, much as the dream narratives of exemplary religious figures come at the beginning of their careers, the Samarkand dream narrative is positioned toward the start of Babur's, long before the Timurid prince reached political ascendancy in Hindustan. Thus, the Samarkand dream narrative shares important structural and contextual similarities to the genre of Sufi hagiography from the early-modern period.

While the Samarkand dream narrative appears to have been crafted in a fairly common hagiographical mode, significantly it was Babur himself who recounted the oneiric episode—and not the disciples of Khwaja Ahrar. Here, Babur acts as both dreamer and dream-interpreter, representing the great degree of authorial control he exerted over the narrative. By recording and interpreting his own oneiric interactions with Khwaja Ahrar, Babur—a royal member of the Turko-Mongol elite—staked a claim in a larger Sufi conflict. As Devin DeWeese has demonstrated in his many studies of hagiographical literature from various Sufi traditions in Central Asia during the late-medieval and early-modern periods, this particular milieu was marked by intensive rivalries between competing Sufi groups.²⁶ Khwaja Ahrar in particular, as others have argued, was an important figure in the early-modern competition between Sufi groups, responsible for strengthening the communal consciousness of the Naqshbandiyya through his economic and political activities.²⁷ That Babur authored the Samarkand dream narrative thus emerges as a meaningful act in which the Timurid prince advanced the claims of the Naqshbandiyya, while supporting his own political project.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, conflict existed both within and without Sufi groups during the late-Timurid period. Narratively, the Samarkand dream narrative comes amid conflict within the Naqshbandi lineage associated with the descendants of Khwaja Ahrar. As Babur notes, Khwaja Ahrar's two sons supported competing Timurid princes.²⁸ The Samarkand dream narrative appears soon after Babur records how his liegemen appealed to one of these sons, Khwaja Yahya, for support. Babur describes the advice of his advisors and the subsequent outcome of their counsel, writing:

They said, “Even Khwaja Yahya supports the padishah. And if the Khwaja agrees, Samarkand can easily be taken without fighting or battle.” Based on that counsel, we sent people to hold discussions with Khwaja Yahya several times. Khwaja Yahya did not send word absolutely that he would admit us into Samarkand, but neither did he

²⁴Shahzad Bashir, “Narrating Sight: Dreaming as Visual Training in Persianate Sufi Hagiography,” in *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*, ed. Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 236.

²⁵*BN-T*, 99.

²⁶See especially: Devin DeWeese, “Khojagānī Origins and Critique of Sufism: The Rhetoric of Communal Uniqueness in the *Manāqib* of Khoja ʿAlī ʿAzīzān Rāmītanī,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 492–519; Devin DeWeese, “The *Mashāʾikh-i Turk* and the *Khojagān*: Rethinking the Links Between the Yasavī and Naqshbandī Sufi Traditions,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 180–207.

²⁷For a thoughtful articulation of this argument, see: Jürgen Paul, “Forming a Faction: The *Himāyat* System of Khwaja Ahrar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 533–548.

²⁸*BN-T*, 45

speak discouragingly.²⁹

Babur and his advisors thought that Khwaja Yahya had the ability to give them Samarkand, much as Khwaja Ahrar had supported Abu Sa'ïd in his successful designs on the same city. However, Babur could not benefit from the promised support of Khwaja Yahya, who was killed by Shibani Khan before Babur took Samarkand in 906/1500.³⁰ Following the death of Khwaja Yahya, Khwaja Ahrar—who had died ten years prior—intercedes in the narrative to promise the city to Babur, thus heightening the comparatively tepid support of his son and representing his perceived ability to influence the political situation from beyond the grave. By narrating a dream in which the deceased Khwaja Ahrar promises political support, rather than siding with one of his living sons, Babur appeals skillfully to the spiritual and political legacies of Khwaja Ahrar, while avoiding the potentially negative consequences of allying himself with one of the competing Ahrari sons over the other.

Although Khwaja Yahya was not able to support the political aims of Babur to the same extent to which his father bolstered the ambitions of Abu Sa'ïd, the Naqshbandi-Timurid connection was still very much evident at Babur's court. Some descendants of Khwaja Ahrar, both spiritual and lineal, served Babur as close advisors. Khwaja Mawlana Qazi, for example, was "a disciple of Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar," and acted as Babur's tutor during his youth.³¹ Khwaja Qazi was also responsible for organizing the defense of Andijan for Babur in 903/1498, a major responsibility considering that the city was a base from which Babur launched attacks on other cities in his early years.³² In other episodes, Khwaja Qazi takes on a more diplomatic function; for example, Babur sends him to quell a particularly threatening mutiny after capturing Samarkand in 903/1497.³³ The presence of politically involved Naqshbandi Sufis in the Timurid-Mughal court was not, by any means, exceptional during the early-modern period. Scholar Richard Foltz goes so far as to suggest that "by the end of the fifteenth century in Central Asia it had become imperative for anyone with political aspirations to have Naqshbandi support," an imperative that included some Chinggisid-Uzbek rulers, who Babur considered as longtime foes.³⁴ On the whole, Babur (and his adversaries) looked to members of the Naqshbandiyya for political support in securing and maintaining sovereignty in early-modern Central Asia.

The Samarkand dream narrative suggests that there was also an underlying religious dimension to Naqshbandi-Timurid interactions. Indeed, viewing Babur's oneiric interactions with Khwaja Ahrar in the larger framework of late-medieval Sufi religiosity highlights the religious significance of such dreamful visitations by departed Sufi shaykhs, or teachers. As Jonathan Katz notes:

Pious Muslims routinely sought these visitations for the dead and for good reason: News of the afterlife provided reassurance that the departed's life of faith had been rewarded. Moreover, dead saints were naturally conceived as intercessionary figures for those who would come after them. Appearing in dreams, dead shaykhs provided symbolic robes and other tokens of initiation, and in general their appearance confirmed for the seer his spiritual status.³⁵

²⁹ *BN-T*, 93.

³⁰ *BN-T*, 96.

³¹ *BN-T*, 65.

³² *BN-T*, 64.

³³ *BN-T*, 63.

³⁴ Richard Foltz, "The Central Asian Naqshbandi Connections of the Mughal Emperors," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 230.

³⁵ Jonathan G. Katz, "Dreams and Their Interpretation in Sufi Thought and Practice," in *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*, ed. Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 190.

With the status and function of dreams in contemporaneous Islamic religiosity in mind, the Samarkand dream narrative authorizes both the spiritual state of Babur and that of Khwaja Ahrar. This is not the only instance in which Babur communicated with members of the *ʿawliyāʿ*. In the Hindustan section of the *Baburnama*, which is regrettably unfinished, Babur mentions an “admonition” he received in his heart from “the words of the Ahlullah.”³⁶ Although Babur leaves the reader in want of greater detail, the passing reference to intimate and esoteric communication with unidentified *ʿawliyāʿ* suggests that Babur associated with “Friends of God” out of personal piety, and not merely political pragmatism.

While the aforementioned “admonition” is representative of *ʿawliyāʿ* initiating communication with Babur, Babur himself also turned consciously to Khwaja Ahrar. For example, while suffering from a bout of illness, Babur decided to render the *Risala-i validiya* (*A Treatise for My Father*), a text written by Khwaja Ahrar, into verse.³⁷ Babur describes his decision to versify the treatise: “I put my confidence in the saint’s intercession and said to myself, ‘If this intention is acceptable to the saint, then too, just as the author of the *Burda*’s poem was accepted and he was cured of his paralysis, if I am delivered of this illness it will be a sign of my poem’s being accepted.’”³⁸ Here, Babur highlights his belief in the healing power of Khwaja Ahrar, representative of a direct, saintly intercession in his life. However, Babur did not believe that the intercessory power of holy figures was limited to Khwaja Ahrar. In citing “the author of the *Burda*’s poem,” Babur refers to the well-known poetry of al-Busiri (d. 694/1295), which was thought to be responsible for the recovery of the poet.³⁹ On the whole, the religious worldview that Babur held can be described as one in which *ʿawliyāʿ*, both living and dead, played active and oft-transformative roles in the lives of believers.

The early-modern milieu in which (and about which) Babur wrote was thus one in which royal rulers and Sufi adepts were closely connected. Babur himself was associated with the Naqshbandi-Ahrariyya—that is, the branch of the Naqshbandiyya associated with Khwaja Ahrar and his descendants. While he communicated with members of this particular Sufi group in esoteric ways, including dreams, Babur also maintained a comparatively more corporeal relationship with living followers of Khwaja Ahrar, who served as his political advisors. By including the Samarkand dream narrative in a text meant to circulate among members of the Turko-Mongol ruling elite, Babur appealed to the legacies of Khwaja Ahrar as part of his program of political legitimation, while supporting the Naqshbandi order in a Sufi environment defined by intensive factionalism.⁴⁰ On the whole, an examination of Khwaja Ahrar in the Samarkand dream narrative, when contextualized in terms of the Naqshbandi-Timurid connection, suggests how *walāya* and kingly power were two sides of the same coin, with Babur attempting to assume rhetorically the political and spiritual support of Khwaja Ahrar and with members of the Naqshbandiyya benefiting from Babur and his imperial successes.

³⁶BN-T, 433. “Ahlullah” and *ʿawliyāʿ* are different transliterations of the same word. For which, see: BN-T, 433n218.

³⁷BN-T, 420. A translation and extensive discussion of this treatise can be found in A. J. E. Bodrogligeti, “Bābur Shāh’s Chaghatay Version of the *Risāla-i Vālidīya*: A Central Asian Turkic Treatise on How to Emulate the Prophet Muhammad,” *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 56, no. 1 (1984): 1–61.

³⁸BN-T, 420.

³⁹BN-T, 420n193.

⁴⁰Stephen Dale provides a representative treatment of Babur’s intended audience: “As its tone and content implicitly demonstrate, the legitimizing audience for the text was comprised, most importantly, of the Islamized, literate, Turkī-speaking Timūrid and Chaghatay Mongol elite, and beyond them, the broader society of Turco- Mongol military aristocrats.” For which, see: Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, 41.

Dale’s analysis is not far removed from the text in that Babur frequently references his circulation of portions of the *Baburnama* among members of the Timurid ruling elite. In 935/1529, for example, Babur sent a copy of his text to Khwaja Yahya. For which, see: BN-T, 438.

The Curious Character of Shaykh Maslahat

Aside from Khwaja Ahrar, Babur references another Sufi figure in the Samarkand dream narrative: Shaykh Maslahat. The rather curious character of Shaykh Maslahat is first mentioned in passing toward the beginning of the *Baburnama*, when Babur notes that Shaykh Maslahat was from Khujand, a city west of Andijan.⁴¹ The next and final reference to Shaykh Maslahat comes at the conclusion of the Samarkand dream narrative, at which point Babur writes: “In Turkish he [Khwaja Ahrar] said, ‘*Shaykh Maslahat berdi.*’ A few days later I took Samarkand.”⁴² Wheeler Thackston translates the Turkic phrase as “Shaykh Maslahat has bestowed.”⁴³ The Victorian translator Annette Susannah Beveridge similarly renders the phrase as “Shaikh Maslahat has given (Samarkand).”⁴⁴ Thackston and Beveridge provide slightly different translations probably due to the rather odd construction of the Turkic sentence. However, that Babur references his capture of Samarkand directly afterward suggests that Khwaja Ahrar predicts political success in the dream narrative.⁴⁵ In addition, the very name of Shaykh Maslahat may suggest the divinatory character of the Samarkand dream narrative; the Chaghatay term *maṣlaḥat* refers to either a “prudent measure” or an “advisable thing,” a term Babur certainly would have used to classify his subsequent victory in Samarkand.⁴⁶ Thus, Babur provides just two brief treatments of Shaykh Maslahat.

Although the *Baburnama* is not particularly helpful in understanding the finer points of his biography, Shaykh Maslahat is referenced in a number of early-modern hagiographies, which are helpful in beginning to appreciate his place in the Samarkand dream narrative. Devin DeWeese recounts a story included in an eleventh-/seventeenth-century hagiography in which Baba Machin, a Central Asian *walī*, performed a miracle that was reported to Chinggis Khan, after which:

“Chingiz Khān ordered that Bābā Māchīn should lead the army, proceed to the realm of Mawarannahr, and seize that country;” Bābā Māchīn demurred, however, insisting that he would do no more than point out the other saint who would in fact lead the Mongol army. This other saint he identified as “the holy *Qutb* of the age, Shaykh Maslahat Khujandi,” and the Mongols thus left him, took Shaykh Maslahat, and set off toward Mawarannahr under this saint’s leadership.⁴⁷

Here, Shaykh Maslahat is invested with both religious and political authority in that he is identified as the *Qutb*—“a human manifestation of divine consciousness, only one of which exists in any age, and around whom the spiritual life of the age revolves, that is, through whom spiritual knowledge

⁴¹ *BN-T*, 6.

A. Azfar Moin also draws from the *Baburnama* to note the provenance of Shaykh Maslahat in his brief examination of the Samarkand dream narrative, for which see: A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship & Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 71–72.

⁴² *BN-T*, 99.

⁴³ *BN-T*, 99n136.

⁴⁴ Zahiru’-din Muhammad Babur [Padshah Ghazi], *Babur-nama (Memoirs of Babur)*, ed. and trans. Annette Susannah Beveridge (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1912–1921; reprint, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989), 132. All citations refer to the 1989 reprint, which is subsequently cited as *BN-B*.

⁴⁵ The Chaghatay verb with stem *ber-* means “to give” and shares a similar meaning to the modern Turkish (i.e. *Türkçe*, the national language of Turkey) verb with stem *ver-*. For the meaning of the Chaghatay verb, see: János Eckmann, *Chagatay Manual* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1966), 283.

The construction of the Turkic sentence is odd in that much as in the modern Turkish, an object usually follows the Chaghatay verb that means “to give,” while there is no object following this verb in Babur’s text.

⁴⁶ Eckmann, *Chagatay Manual*, 301.

⁴⁷ Devin DeWeese, “‘Stuck in the Throat of Chingiz Khān:’ Envisioning the Mongol Conquests in Some Sufi Accounts from the 14th to 17th Centuries,” in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 33–34.

is gained”—and is tasked with leading the Mongol troops into battle.⁴⁸ Although the narrative appears in a manuscript from the eleventh/seventeenth century, it probably circulated orally before being written down.⁴⁹ While it is impossible to know if Babur had first-hand knowledge of this particular tradition, it would not be surprising to learn that he did, especially considering that Temür, the titular founder of the Timurid dynasty, is said to have circumambulated the tomb of Shaykh Maslahat in 790/1390.⁵⁰ Thus, the Baba Machin narrative highlights the religious status and accompanying political contributions Shaykh Maslahat during the lifetime of Chinggis Khan.

In both the hagiographical story described above and the Samarkand dream narrative, Shaykh Maslahat plays a pronounced political role. Khwaja Ahrar’s reference in the dream narrative to Shaykh Maslahat having given Samarkand to Babur further functions to support the legitimacy of a *walī* invested with both religious and political power. Interestingly, the dual religious and political role of Shaykh Maslahat is not unlike that of Khwaja Ahrar and his descendants. Indeed, the *Baburnama* contains many episodes in which prominent members of the Naqshbandi lineage seemingly act as kingmakers. In one such instance, Khwaja Yahya is described as having the ability to give Samarkand to Babur “without fighting or battle.”⁵¹ When contextualized in terms of his political activities and religious status, Shaykh Maslahat emerges as a sort of archetype of a politically involved Sufi shaykh, the support of whom Babur seems to have both needed and welcomed.

The place of Shaykh Maslahat in the Samarkand dream narrative takes on additional significance when considering the Chinggisid lineage of Shibani Khan, who Babur was preparing to fight for Samarkand at the time during which the dream is reported to have taken place. Although his mother was a Chinggisid princess, Babur was a non-Chinggisid Timurid because lineage was determined through the male line.⁵² On account of his paternity, Babur did “not possess the charismatic birth right [i.e. patrilineal Chinggisid lineage] that was such an important factor in Turko-Mongol legitimizing practices, and one, moreover, that gave those in contention for power with him (namely, the Moghuls and Uzbeks) a distinct advantage.”⁵³ Babur records the Samarkand dream narrative during a period in which he was preparing to fight the Uzbek prince Shibani Khan, who laid claim to the ever-important Chinggisid birthright, for the city. The reference to Shaykh Maslahat—who, according to the hagiographical story discussed above, was trusted by Chinggis Khan to lead the Mongol army—perhaps functioned as a means to give Babur a degree of Chinggisid charisma, much needed for his political legitimacy.

Although considered only briefly, the identification of the Shaykh Maslahat referenced in the Samarkand dream narrative as the historical Shaykh Maslahat from Khujand provides a possible glimpse into how Babur and his Turko-Mongol contemporaries might have understood the underlying significance of the oneiric narration. Indeed, Shaykh Maslahat plays an important part in the dream narrative, with Khwaja Ahrar referencing the figure of Shaykh Maslahat to seemingly foreshadow Babur’s takeover of Samarkand. Khwaja Ahrar and Shaykh Maslahat appear as two *ʿawliyāʿ* cut from the same proverbial cloth; Shaykh Maslahat seems to have played a dual religious and political role similar to that of members of the Naqshbandi-Ahrariyya. The reference to Shaykh Maslahat, especially considering his connection to Chinggis Khan, highlights a now familiar theme: the important role of *ʿawliyāʿ* in princely politics. On the whole, the figure of Shaykh Maslahat reflects the ways in which *walāya* was connected to the politics of the early-modern period during

⁴⁸ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. “Qutb.”

⁴⁹ Orality is central to the genre of Sufi hagiography. Shahzad Bashir has recently proposed the concept of the “narrative fund” to account for “the very significant issue of transfers between oral narrative and written texts” within this genre. For which, see his “Naqshband’s Lives,” 89–91, quoted at 89.

⁵⁰ *BN-B*, 132n2.

⁵¹ *BN-T*, 93.

⁵² Subtelny, “Bābur’s Rival Relations,” 113.

⁵³ Subtelny, “Bābur’s Rival Relations,” 114.

which Babur ruled.

Conclusions: Reconsidering Babur and his Islam

In attempt to better understand the religious worldviews and political cultures of early-modern Central and South Asia, I have attempted to analyze a singular dream narrative in the *Baburnama*, one of the principal sources in the study of the late-Timurid period. Specifically, I have taken a contextual approach to a dream narrative in which Babur recounts his interactions with Khwaja Ahrar, a *walī*, or “Friend of God,” from the Naqshbandiyya, a key Sufi group in Central Asia. Analysis of this particular dream narrative, which I have termed the “Samarkand dream narrative,” suggests that Babur adhered to a Sufi worldview in which devotion to and reverence for members of the *ʿawliyāʿ* was closely connected to the world of Turko-Mongol political legitimation.

Although *walāya* is, by definition, reserved for the *ʿawliyāʿ*, Babur was able to appeal to this form of saintly authority by authoring a dream narrative in which a Sufi *walī* appears to support his political project. In a broader sense, this study of dream narratives in the *Baburnama* highlights how saintly and kingly interests often intersected in the late-Timurid milieu; Babur supported the claims of the Naqshbandiyya in a myriad of ways—inter alia, rhetorically through his dream narratives and structurally with Naqshbandi teachers acting as his closest advisors—and similarly, members of the Naqshbandiyya allied themselves with various princes, politicizing their *walāya* in order to support kingly goals. Furthermore, the hagiographical mode Babur assumed as he authored the Samarkand dream narrative implies that saintly authority was an important aspect of political legitimation for aspirant rulers during this epoch.

Although there remains considerable work to be done on the subject of Islam in the *Baburnama*, this study of has analyzed the connections between kingly and saintly authority in attempt to understand better the cultures of the Turko-Mongol elite during the formative stages of the Timurid-Mughal Empire.⁵⁴ Analysis of this type not only has the potential to further our understandings of one of the principal early-modern Islamicate empires; reading Babur’s dreams humanizes their author as well as the empire he founded and its associated civilization.

⁵⁴Babur’s wine-drinking, for instance, requires further study. A. Azfar Moin has suggested Babur’s proclamations concerning his wine-drinking should be seen as public articulations of his kingship. For which, see: Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 67–68. Although often seen as an explicitly un-Islamic act, wine-drinking can be analyzed as an articulation of the drinker’s Islamic religiosity, as the late scholar of Islam Shahab Ahmed has recently discussed. For which, see: Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), especially 57–71; 417–424.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Babur [Padshah Ghazi], Zahiru'd-din Muhammad. *Babur-nama (Memoirs of Babur)*. Edited and translated by Annette Susannah Beveridge. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1912–1921. Reprint, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989. Cited as *BN-B*.
- Babur, Zahiruddin Muhammad. *Bâburnâma: Chaghatay Turkish Text with Abdul-Rahim Khankhanan's Persian Translation*. Edited and translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1993.
- Babur, Zahiruddin Muhammad. *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*. Edited and translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. New York: Modern Library, 2002. Cited as *BN-T*.

Secondary Sources

- Ahmed, Shahab. *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Algar, Hamid. "A Brief History of the Naqshbandî Order." In *Naqshbandis: Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman*, edited by Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarcone, 3–44. Istanbul: Éditions ISIS, 1990.
- Bashir, Shahzad. "Narrating Sight: Dreaming as Visual Training in Persianate Sufi Hagiography." In *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*, edited by Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh, 233–247. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Bashir, Shahzad. "Naqshband's Lives: Sufi Hagiography between Manuscript and Genre." In *Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, 15th–21st Centuries*, edited by Devin DeWeese and Jo-Ann Gross, 75–97. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Bodrogligeti, A. J. E. "Bâbur Shâh's Chagatay Version of the *Risâla-i Validîya*: A Central Asian Turkic Treatise on How to Emulate the Prophet Muhammad." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 56, no. 1 (1984): 1–61.
- Dale, Stephen Frederic. "Steppe Humanism: The Autobiographical Writings of Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, 1483–1530." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 1990): 37–58.
- Dale, Stephen Frederic. *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bâbur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Dale, Stephen Frederic. "The Poetry and Autobiography of the Bâbur-nâma." *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (August 1996): 635–664.
- DeWeese, Devin. "Khojagānī Origins and Critique of Sufism: The Rhetoric of Communal Uniqueness in the *Manāqib* of Khoja °Alī °Azīzān Rāmītanī." In *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke, 492–519. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

- DeWeese, Devin. “The *Mashāʾikh-i Turk* and the *Khojagān*: Rethinking the Links Between the Yasavī and Naqshbandī Sufi Traditions.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 180–207.
- DeWeese, Devin. “‘Stuck in the Throat of Chingīz Khān:’ Envisioning the Mongol Conquests in Some Sufi Accounts from the 14th to 17th Centuries.” In *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods*, edited by Judith Pfeiffer and Sholeh A. Quinn, 23–60. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006.
- Eckmann, János. *Chagatay Manual*. Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1966.
- Foltz, Richard. “The Central Asian Naqshbandi Connections of the Mughal Emperors.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 229–239.
- Green, Nile. “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dream and Visions in Islam.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 13, no. 3 (2003): 287–313.
- Katz, Jonathan G. “Dreams and Their Interpretation in Sufi Thought and Practice.” In *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*, edited by Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh, 181–197. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Manz, Beatrice Forbes. *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Moin, A. Azfar. “Peering through the Cracks in the Baburnama: The Textured Lives of Mughal Sovereigns.” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 4 (2012): 493–526.
- Moin, A. Azfar. *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship & Sainthood in Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Paul, Jürgen. “Forming a Faction: The *Himāyat* System of Khwaja Ahrar.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 533–548.
- Subtelny, Maria Eva. “Bābur’s Rival Relations: A Study of Kinship and Conflict in 15th–16th Century Central Asia.” *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 102–118.