

Mobile Pasts: Memory, Migration, and Place in Afghan Identity, 1451-1770

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

South & Southeast Asian Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Fall 2022

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Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes the writing of the first Afghan histories, which took place across regions between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Although Perso-Arabic authors had long identified groups of people as “Afghan,” those who belonged to this community did not write about themselves until a specific historical context. This context, I argue, was the interface between the emerging Mughal Empire (r. 1526-1857) and the Afghan-led Lodi (r. 1451-1526) sultanates of Delhi, “the capital of all Hindustan” in the mid-sixteenth century. In light of this conflict, the Afghans who called the Indian subcontinent home felt an urgency to define what it meant to be an Afghan and how their membership in this community related to their future in this space. They considered their possibilities through a series of historical texts written in multiple literary genres, each of which attested to the Afghans’ remarkable political and spiritual role in the history of Islamicate South Asia.

Although the arrival of the Mughals strongly determined the shape of Afghan claims to power and authority in India, this dissertation demonstrates the vast and varied discursive worlds that Afghans drew upon to imagine the historical significance of their community in the world. Engaging with the repositories of wisdom embedded in the classics of Persian prose and poetry, the discourses of Sufi sainthood, and Islamic historiography, the authors of the Afghan past demonstrated their familiarity with a cosmopolitan world of ideas that in turn shaped the contours of Afghan identity. Through their engagement with these resources, the writers of these texts imagined how “the Afghan way” made them ideal leaders in the diverse and distant contexts in which they might find themselves. By the end of the eighteenth century, Afghans emerged with a clearly articulated sense of identity inspired by their historical movement and animated with a desire to perpetuate that mobility in the future.

*For Sunil Kumar (1956-2021)
and all who came before in Hazrat-i Dehli*

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Acknowledgements

To begin, I am deeply grateful for the many generous grants that have supported me throughout the past eight years. I thank the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program for the incredible opportunity to learn Persian and Pashto; the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) for an unforgettable summer of language study in Dushanbe, Tajikistan; and the Fulbright-Nehru (IIE) fellowship for supporting my nine months of archival research in India. I also extend my sincere thanks to the Berkeley Institute of International Studies (IIS), the Mabelle McLeod Lewis Memorial Fund, and the UC Berkeley Center for Portuguese Studies, all of whom gave me the time and resources I needed to write my dissertation. In the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies, Kristen Brooks cheered me on and ensured that I had my ducks in a row every semester. I also cannot complete this project without offering my deepest thanks to Gina Blanco, who remained in touch with me over the years and consistently went above and beyond to make sure that my financial support reached me.

I would never have made it to Berkeley if it were not for the loving support of friends and mentors from my time in Delhi between 2012 and 2014. At the University of Delhi, Professors Seema Alavi, Shahid Amin, Farhat Hasan, S.Z. Jafri, Anshu Malhotra, Sanghamitra Mishra, and Prabhu Mohapatra welcomed this bewildered international student with open arms and gave me a priceless foundation in my field. My friends Amaal Akhtar and Sumaiya Khan gave me a home in Delhi, and countless memories in the city's parks, monuments, and cafes. My two mentors from this time, Majid Ahmady and Sunil Kumar, passed away while I was studying at Berkeley. To Aqa-yi Ahmady, I am indebted for my appreciation for all things Persian, and for the welcoming shelter in the city during the first difficult year of my Master's. I keep your copy of the *Taj al-Ma'asir* on my shelf and I am so happy to have this memory of you. To Sunil Kumar, I owe, among so much else, the tools to see my beloved Delhi with new eyes, a desire to never stop asking questions, and the impossible confidence that I needed to become a South Asia historian. I wish that you both could have seen this dissertation.

At Berkeley, so many people have offered me their friendship and guidance for nearly a decade of joy, sorrow, and everything in between. I am especially thankful for the companionship of Anurag Advani and Sourav Ghosh, both of whom have raised my spirits on countless occasions and who carefully read and commented on this dissertation with the aim of helping me improve it. Aria Fani has continually reached out and found ways to lift me up in academia. Hannah Archambault helped me navigate the mysteries of the job market and consistently modeled how a South Asia historian can be successful in whatever path she chooses. I have also been privileged by years of conversation and camaraderie with Katie Bruhn, Alex Ciolac, Aparajita Das, Kashi Gomez, Kat Gutierrez, Ali Hassan, Megan Hewitt, J.T. Jamieson, Thiti Jamkajornkeiat, Priya Kothari, Padma Maitland, Shaivya Mishra, Brent Otto, Sohini Pillai, Omar Qashoa, Krissy Rogahn, Mariam Sabri, Ahmad Rashid Salim, Waqqas Sajjad, Elizabeth (Lizzy) Thelen, Janet Um, Sophia Warshall, and Khenpo Yeshe. You all mean so much to me and I have learned more from you than I can say.

My tireless and enthusiastic advisor, Munis Faruqui, has seen this project through from start to finish with an uncommon warmth and intellectual generosity. I am so moved by the ways in which you have encouraged me to follow my instincts while pushing me to keep looking beyond my own boundaries. Abhishek Kaicker has shared in the joys of premodern South Asian history and performed the incredible task of helping me see and bring out the best in my work. Janaki Bakhle has been a steady source of support and encouragement since the beginning, helping me "find my way through the weeds" during this long process of growth and exploration. In 2015, Jeff Hadler introduced me to the work of Engseng Ho, which helped me reimagine my project in ways that I

never thought possible. Conversations with Gregory Maxwell Bruce, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Robert and Sally Goldman also shaped some of the central ideas in this dissertation. I am grateful to Wali Ahmadi for always believing in my (albeit deficient) grasp of Persian, and for taking the time to meet with me and help translate some of the most difficult manuscripts in my collection. Fateme Montazeri also kindly offered to check some of my translations at a moment's notice. From afar, I also extend my warm thanks to Rahman Arman of Indiana University for teaching me Pashto during the most difficult of circumstances in the summer of 2019.

During my fieldwork in India and the UK, I benefited immensely from the help of professors, librarians, archivists, and friends, all of whom ensured that I was able to complete my research with minimal struggle. Professor Asif Naqvi genially offered his time and resources to help me find a place in Aligarh, in addition to guiding me around the university campus and introducing me to the legendary Irfan Habib. Dr. Shayesta Bedar at the Maulana Azad Library made sure that I found all the materials that I needed, while Professor Gulfishan Khan warmly invited me into her home after a long day of archival work. In Kolkata, the staff of the Asiatic Society of Bengal provided me with several of the manuscripts that are central to my dissertation. In Tonk, I was appreciative of the earnest and enthusiastic welcome of Dr. Saulat Ali Khan and the incredible tour that we received of the APRI and all of its treasures. I also thank Amit Kumar Agnihotri at the Allahabad branch of the U.P. State Archives for answering all of my queries over the phone and helping me chase down a manuscript from Lucknow.

New friends that I made during fieldwork and writing remind me of the commitment, imagination, and compassion that so many young scholars bring to the field of South Asian Studies. In particular, I thank Hardeep Dhillon, Tiraana Bains, and Kelsey Utne for their kindness and conversations in the cafes and pubs of London. I also thank Ute Falasch for her much-needed companionship and words of support in Kolkata. I thank Amanda Lanzillo for navigating the trip from Jaipur to Tonk with me, and for sharing stories of work and travel over many-an oversized *thali*. I am grateful to Christopher Diamond and Kyle for offering me their couch and a series of delightful home cooked meals in Kolkata; my time with you is some of the most memorable from my fieldwork. More recently, presenting with Mou Banerjee, Aria Fani, Meigan Massoumi, Nicolas Roth, and Marjan Wardaki at the 2021 Madison South Asia Conference and 2022 Afghanistan Through Afghan Voices Lecture Series was the most incredible honor and inspired me to put my all into this work.

In New Mexico, the public libraries of Taos and Santa Fe provided the perfect space for reflecting and putting the finishing touches on this project. Sara Baca, Carlos Balladares, Jonathan Harrell, Aileen El-Kadi, and Danny Suazo kept me laughing and motivated me to finish. Thanks to you, this will not be the dissertation that never ends!

Last but certainly not least, I thank my parents, John Ferreira and Mary Smith, for letting me explore, scrape my knees, and follow my wildest whims from the very beginning. I would never have gone on this incredible journey if it weren't for you. Kyle Smith came to the rescue at an immensely challenging moment and lovingly supported me all the way. I also thank David Delano, kindred spirit and best friend who saw me through the entirety of this project and so many ups and downs in life. I'm so grateful for all that you have shared with me.

All errors in this dissertation are solely mine.

Note on Transliteration

All translations from Persian are mine unless otherwise specified. My transliterations typically follow those of Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. I have, however, omitted diacritics, with the exception of those marking the Arabic ‘ain (ع). Following Steingass, I also do not differentiate between the Arabic letters ز, ذ, ض, and ظ, which are indistinguishable in spoken Persian.

For names and titles, I use the more direct transliteration of suffix components—for example, “Nizam al-din” and “Shams al-din”—as opposed to the more common and contemporary “Nizamuddin” and “Shamsuddin.” I also utilize the most direct transliteration in names such as “Abd Allah,” opting for this spelling as opposed to “Abdullah.”

All dates listed in the dissertation are in the common era (C.E.).

“I am large, I contain multitudes.”
-Walt Whitman

Introduction: Mobile Pasts and Afghan Identity

In the early seventeenth century, an Afghan author named Muhammad Kabir wrote a collection of historical anecdotes (*afsana*) from his home in Bihar, in north India.¹ He called it *Afsana-yi Shaban*, or “Stories of Kings.” Completed during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), the *Afsana* told stories of South Asia’s fifteenth and sixteenth century monarchs, including the Afghan Lodi (r. 1451-1526) and Suri (r. 1540-1555) kings who ruled from Delhi. Yet Kabir’s account went further than a mere recounting of the region’s non-Mughal monarchs. It began at a time “in the beginning” (*anwal*) in a place called Roh, a mountainous territory hundreds of miles from north India and the central events of the *Afsana*.² There, Kabir says, the first Afghans lived like brothers along the Gomal River, sharing the fruits of their harvest and living in such a way that “no one oppressed the other.”³ Their livelihood came from the trading of horses, which they carried down into the rich agricultural plains of Punjab and northern India, where successive generations of Afghans then remained.⁴

A fascinating entry in a work otherwise dedicated to the kings of India, Muhammad Kabir’s opening passage communicated a great deal about the community to which he belonged. Marked by their humility, the Afghans of Roh lived by simple means and in a remarkably simple social arrangement: as kin existing alongside one another, free from the rule of a monarch.⁵ Yet this simplicity belied a rather extraordinary fact about them: that their chosen source of livelihood—the horse trade—regularly took them beyond the boundaries of their homeland. As the *Afsana* recounted, the Afghans of Roh earned their keep through movement, traversing great distances with their horses to then “scatter” (*parakanda*) and settle across India. A history of north India’s non-Mughal monarchs, Kabir’s work also showed that the Afghans who migrated to the subcontinent had a powerful role to play in its history. Brought to the region over the centuries, many Afghans stayed on and became enmeshed in the fabric of its social, political, and economic life: some even occupying the highest seat of authority in its most prestigious political center, the city of Delhi.

These dimensions of the “Stories of Kings,” as well as Muhammad Kabir’s own life story, provide an excellent starting point for the questions that lie at the heart of this dissertation. How was it that someone like Kabir—an Afghan gentry deeply rooted in the landscape of north India, descended from an eminent Sufi *shaiikh* of Bihar⁶—lived and wrote in this context? What motivated him to write a history of the Afghan kings and their contemporaries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and then to explore the Afghan past more broadly? Finally, what did it mean for Kabir to reflect on the humble origins of his people, who lived far away from India’s thriving urban centers and in a place where no king ruled?

As we will see, Kabir was far from unique in his identity, social position, and devoted interest in telling the story of Afghan origins. In the late sixteenth century, Afghans across South Asia began to write and share stories about where Afghans had come from and how their collective historical destiny had led them to such regions as Bihar, Bengal, Delhi, and the Deccan. Like Kabir,

¹ A region in eastern India, bordering Nepal and Bengal.

² Muhammad Kabir, “Afsana-yi Shahan,” Ms. Add. 24409, OIOC, British Library, London, fol. 5b.

³ Ibid. The Gomal River runs through present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. It joins the Indus River near Dera Ismail Khan, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, fol. 1b.

a local gentry and scholar, the Afghans who participated in this conversation were, for the most part, relatively unknown. These individuals, many of whom wielded clout in their own communities, were responsible for creating the first narrative of Afghan history: one that gave that shape and form to the emerging identity of “Afghan.” Writing of their own volition, these authors together imagined an Afghan “community” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, forging lasting ties between a transregionally located group of people largely without political sponsorship or the support of a ruling dynasty.

Afghan Beginnings

For many scholars, the existence of “Afghan” as a social identity has been taken as a historical given. This is in part because of the ample number of accounts, some dating back to the first millennium, referring to a people in the Sulaiman Mountain range⁷ as “Augan,” “Abgan,” or “Avgan.” One of the first of these accounts dates to the sixth century, when the Indian astronomer Daivajna Varahamihira referred to a group of people called “Awagana.” Not long after, the Chinese traveler and Buddhist monk Xuanzang wrote about a tribe named “A-po-kien” also living in the northern Sulaiman range.⁸ The intriguing resemblance between these names and “Afghan,” as well as the geographical location of these people, suggest that Varahamihira, Xuanzang, and others familiar with the region had in fact identified the crucible of an Afghan community dating back to the pre-Islamic era.

The first historical reference to “Afghans” with the contemporary spelling⁹ dates to the tenth century. This transformational period coincided with the rule of famed conqueror Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030),¹⁰ who attempted to extend his authority from his capital in Ghazni into the Afghans’ historical mountain strongholds. The text in question, the anonymous Persian geographical compendium *Hudud al-Alam*, or “Limits of the World,” described a place called Sawl as “...a village on a fertile mountain, inhabited by Afghans.”¹¹ A contemporary Arabic-language text, *Tarikh-i Yamini*, cited the “Afghans, Turks, and Khalaj” who joined the sultan in his invasion of Turkestan. In a pean to Sultan Mahmud, the Persian poet Farrukhi Sistani (c. 1000-1040) also referred to a weapon called *shal* used by the “Awgan” people.¹² This collection of tenth-century documents appears to confirm what earlier accounts led historians to speculate: that a group of people living in the mountainous regions bordering present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan had long identified with the moniker still in use today, “Afghan.”

What these accounts cannot tell us, however, is how these Afghans thought about themselves, and more importantly, *what* they thought about themselves. What, if anything, did it mean to be an Afghan in the eighth, tenth, or twelfth centuries, when travelers and chroniclers encountered them in the Sulaiman Mountains, and later, in the fortified towns surrounding Delhi? Such information, this dissertation contends, lies beyond our knowledge. This is because it was only in the late sixteenth century—around a thousand years after Varahamihira described the Awagana and Xuanzang wrote of the “A-po-kien”—that Afghans began to write about themselves as constituting a distinct community with shared origins. Afghans might have possessed their own vocabulary of belonging prior to this time; however, attempting to understand this would also be moot. Whatever Afghan identity looked like in this period, it was remade in the conditions of the

⁷ A north-south running mountain range that is part of the southern Hindu Kush mountain system. It is located in eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan.

⁸ Mohammad Asef Fikrat and Suheyl Umar, “Afghan,” *Encyclopedia Islamica*, online edition, ed. Farhad Daftary (2008).

⁹ افغان

¹⁰ A city in southern Afghanistan; the capital of an empire extending from present-day Iran to north India (r. 977-1186).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, when Afghan authors conversed with one another and first created a shared history for their own “imagined community.”¹³

The literature written about Afghans prior to this moment—such as the universal history and chronicle of the early Delhi sultans, the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* (1260) of Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani—fundamentally shaped how Afghans of the early modern period interpreted their past for contemporary audiences. These Persian-language texts, most written between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, coincided with the emergence of Delhi-based Muslim kingdoms (1206-1526) and the largescale influx of Afghans into northern India. During this period, sultanate bureaucrats—many of whom came from elite Persian families fleeing the devastation wrought by the thirteenth century Mongol invasions¹⁴—looked upon these Afghan newcomers (often themselves fleeing the Mongols) with disdain, describing them as beyond the pale of *adab*, or those social niceties prized in the Persianate cultural domain. Juzjani, for example, provided one such a memorable account following an encounter he had with Afghans in the frontier marches south of Delhi. Writing in 1260, Juzjani’s lack of familiarity with these people betrayed itself as he observed:

...the Afghans...each one of them, one could say, is like an elephant with two braided manes on [their] broad shoulders, or is like a bastion...and each one of them would seize a hundred Hindus, [whether] in the mountain or the jungle, and on a dark night would reduce a demon to helplessness.¹⁵

Over the centuries that followed, Afghans continued to migrate to the Delhi Sultanate, where they soon became fixtures in the sultanate capital as successive sultans deployed them as valued soldiers and guardsman.¹⁶ However, the reputation they had earned during Juzjani’s time remained. In the late thirteenth century, the soldier, poet, and courtier Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) bemoaned the time he was forced to spend in the company of Afghans, writing to his associate:

In this (?) fortress live the Afghans—nay, man-slaying demons, for even the demons groan in fright at their shouts. Their heads are like big sacks of straw, their beards like the combs of the weaver, long-legged as the stork but more ferocious than the eagle, their heads lowered like that of the owl of the wilderness. Their voices hoarse and shrill like that of a jack-daw, their mouths open like that of a shark. Their tongue is blunt like a home-made arrow, and flings stones like the sling of a battering ram. Well has a wise man said that when speech was sent to men from the sky, the Afghans got the last and least share of it.”¹⁷

In some scholarship, the remarks of observers like Juzjani and Khusrau have been interpreted as indicative of a truth about Afghan behavior and their place in the polite, Persian-speaking society of sultanate Delhi. Sunil Kumar, for example, identified the Afghans’ perceived “slave-like” qualities—namely, their alienation from their homeland and dependence on sultanate authorities in India—as one of the primary reasons that the Delhi sultans so aggressively recruited them to serve in the most precarious regions of the sultanate.¹⁸ However, Sultanate court chronicles and other contemporary texts betray the fact that Afghans quickly adapted in their new context. By the fourteenth-century reign of the Tughluq sultans (1320-1413) of Delhi, the moniker “Afghan”

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁴ Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

¹⁵ Sunil Kumar, “The Ignored Elites: Turks, Mongols, and a Persian Secretarial Class in the Early Delhi Sultanate,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

¹⁷ Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1935), 51-52.

¹⁸ Kumar, “Ignored Elites.”

appeared in the name of noblemen entrusted with significant administrative responsibility. These included individuals with names like Gul Afghan, Malik Makh Afghan, and Shahu Afghan.¹⁹ Although assertions of Afghan backwardness continued, the presence of these Afghan courtiers demonstrated that many had clearly mastered the Persian language and could mingle with other respected individuals in the sultan's circle.

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of the Afghans' adaptability in north India, however, was the ascension of Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489), an Afghan soldier and horse trader from Punjab who became sultan of Delhi in 1451. As retrospective sources recounted, Bahlul used a combination of diligence and tact to rise in the ranks of the sultanate until peacefully assuming authority from the then reigning sultan, 'Alam Shah (r. ?-1451). Bahlul's rule from Delhi, now the premier political center of north India, marked the beginning of nearly a century in which Afghans ruled as kings. This period was intensely productive in terms of state building, the creation of new social networks and infrastructure, and literary production in multiple languages.²⁰ Still, this dissertation argues, the reign of the Lodi and Suri sultans preceded any concerted attempt to narrativize the history of the community to which the monarchs belonged. The origins of this development lay instead in the very downfall of the Afghan sultanates, during a decades-long interface with the first three Mughal monarchs: Babur (d. 1530), Humayun (d. 1556), and finally, the true architect of the Mughal Empire, Akbar (d. 1605).

Beginning with this period, this dissertation examines the emergence of the Mughal Empire and its transformative impact on the Afghans who had long rooted themselves in South Asia. It contends that the absolute *uncertainty* of the Mughals' political rise—something that only occurred after years of battle with the Afghan kings of Delhi and Agra—provided the opportunity for Afghans to mobilize in ways that had perhaps never been necessary, but that permanently altered how they conceptualized their identity. It was during this period that Afghans and their allies began writing historical accounts that described where Afghans came from, where they might travel, and what it meant to belong to the Afghan community. As we will see, these efforts continued into the high period of Mughal rule in the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, as Afghan authors with varying relationships to the Mughal state contributed to a body of literature delving into such topics as Afghan origins, the relationship between different Afghan tribes (*qabayel*), and even the nature and merits of Afghan kingship (*padishahi*).

Fascinatingly, in a topic that I will explore in greater detail later, many of these Afghan histories carried echoes of the work of Persian authors like Juzjani and Khusrau—stories that incorporated references to Afghan social backwardness and their incongruence in polite Persianate society. However, these authors did so by using the range of discursive approaches at their disposal: the rich discourses of ethics, morality, and just governance shared across the Persian-speaking world. Molding these abundant discursive traditions to their own ends, Afghan authors constructed a powerful vision of Afghan identity that was at once uniquely “Afghan”—including their unsophisticated social background—and strikingly universal in its qualities. Indeed, audiences familiar with the vast repositories of Persian prose and poetry—themselves the vessel of centuries-old philosophical and theological traditions—could see their worldview, values, and beliefs represented in the first Afghan histories. “Becoming Afghan,” as it were, occurred in an

¹⁹ Athar Ali, “Ethnic Character of the Army During the Delhi Sultanate,” in *Medieval India 2: Essays on Medieval Indian History and Culture*, ed. Shahabuddin Iraqi (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 2008).

²⁰ For example, see Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1575* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics: Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

extraordinarily rich discursive world, and the nature of Afghan identity likewise reflected the abundance of the contemporary Persianate sphere.

Mobility, Community, and the State: Scholarly Significance

From the late sixteenth century until the end of the eighteenth, the story of Afghan origins expanded far beyond its original scope. Whereas the first Afghan histories began in a place called “Roh,” a region broadly coinciding with the Sulaiman Mountain range, later texts extended their reach to the very beginning of time, tracing the Afghans’ descent to the progenitors of all humankind: Adam and Eve. Afghans from various tribal backgrounds built complex genealogies connecting them to the first Afghan Muslim, Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid, then further back to such figures as the Biblical King Saul, Jacob, and Moses. Nonetheless, these texts all possessed a common thread—a concern, I argue, that animated the whole of the historical project. Whether written by an Afghan gentry from north India, or a servant of a wealthy and powerful patron of the Mughal court, the histories chronicled an extraordinary history of Afghan movement, suggesting that since the very beginning, it had been nearly impossible for Afghans to stay in one place.

The centrality of mobility to Afghan identity was at once a reflection of the Afghans’ own historical movement—a process that had long been documented by external sources—and an overarching desire to maintain that mobility. To be sure, as Afghans discussed how their ancestors once moved through and engaged with different communities, they projected a vision of how Afghans *should* move in the world; because, after all, that movement was inevitable. Yet these texts suggested something far more profound than Afghan movement. In weaving together stories of Afghan migration with tales of charismatic Sufis, the Afghan rulers of Delhi, and the auspicious biography of a prominent Afghan nobleman of the Mughal court, these writers imagined a diverse world not only inhabited by Afghans, but also governed with perfect justice by a sovereign descended from Saul, Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid, and the Solomon-like Afghan sultan of Delhi, Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517).

Curiously, however, this historical project—though abundant in discussions about the nature of Afghan kingship and Afghan genealogy—did not culminate in what may appear to be the logical outcome of such a vision: an Afghan state. As this dissertation demonstrates, the architects of the Afghan past left no stone unturned when it came to documenting the Afghans’ incredible capacity to migrate, integrate with and accommodate new communities, and serve as effective leaders wherever in the world they found themselves. They also recalled how Afghan Sufis led the way in marking distinctively “Afghan” spaces, infusing their saintly and Afghan identities with territories in the heartland regions—those territories straddling present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan where members of the community had long dominated. However, no Afghan ruler sat on the throne during this process of history-writing, nor did an Afghan monarch lead the way in imagining the possibilities of Afghan mobility, accommodation, and kingship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The “subaltern” origins of Afghan identity tell us something beyond what it meant to be an Afghan in this period. Indeed, the absence of the state in this process challenges one of the most persistent assumptions in South Asian historiography—that the state, particularly the Mughal state, determined the most important outcomes in the region’s history. Originating in the British colonial period, this focus on the Mughal state emerged when colonial authors and administrators sought both to understand the place they now governed and absolve themselves from their role in the decline of the great Mughal Empire. For example, Orientalist thinkers like Alexander Dow (1735/6-1779), scholar and army officer of the East India Company, concluded that it was the leviathan-like nature of the Mughal state that ultimately hastened its demise. Crushed under the burden of despotic rule, oppressed communities broke away from the Mughals, turning instead to the promise of the

more “enlightened” British interlopers.²¹ The implications of this argument—that the Mughal state was ultimately responsible for its own collapse—incited a fierce debate that continued well into the twentieth century. With the arrival of independence, historians in South Asia remained mired in this complicated colonial legacy, looking to the Mughal state to understand developments ranging from the rise of British power in the eighteenth century to the causes of the subcontinent’s violent partition in 1947.

Looking at the lives and legacies of a group living under Mughal authority, this dissertation aims to think beyond a state-centric lens—critical though it has been to studies of the period. Tapping into the stories of these individuals, who wrote communal histories from beyond the perspective of the state, it shows how primarily non-state actors possessed the same initiative to forge bonds with one another, write stories of their shared past, and imagine a world in which they played a remarkable role. It contends that some of the most impactful social processes in early modern South Asia, though certainly connected to developments in the Mughal court, did not unfold under the pressure of a top-heavy state. Instead, they took place through a group of geographically dispersed individuals hailing from a multitude of social backgrounds, each of whom contributed to an increasingly complex and detailed narrative of the Afghan past. Though so often viewed as the paramount force in early modern South Asia, the major determining factor in the lives of people in this space, the “State” with a capital “S”²² could not claim responsibility for one of the most significant legacies of the period: the bonds that tied together a transregional community of Afghans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The significance of this point extends beyond the immediate context examined in this dissertation. As empires and states came and went in the early modern period, structures formed during the tenure of their rule would endure long after their demise. Although no Afghan political administration existed during this time, what emerged from the efforts of these Afghans and their patrons might be interpreted as what Frank Perlin has called the “state with a small s,” or “the various systematic aspects which together and interdependently fostered the growth and development of complex societal orders, the ‘state.’”²³ In his study of the concept of *watan*, a semantically weighted Persian term often translated as “homeland,” Perlin imagines this kind of state formation as:

not merely geared towards taxation and rule, but possessing a distinct life of its own—one concerned with popular sensibilities, with the formation of distinctive kinds of category, and a language of terms and metaphors concerned with the relationship between quasi equals.

Although unconcerned with the nuts and bolts of political administration—the affairs of the “State”—the early Afghan histories built a common language of kinship that articulated what meant to “belong” to the Afghan community. As I also argue, these texts delved into the remembered aspects of the Afghan past, feeling the “pulse” of the community that they represented to construct a compelling and ultimately *relevant* vision of Afghan identity—one that, by virtue of these characteristics, could stand the test of time. It was for this reason that when the Mughal Empire met its demise in the eighteenth century, Afghans emerged on the other side with a developed sense of community and ways of relating to one another (the “state”) forged through centuries of movement, engagement, and the writing and circulating of texts.

²¹ Kumkum Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 913-948.

²² Frank Perlin, “State Formation Reconsidered: Part Two,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 3 (1985): 415-480.

²³ *Ibid.*

Historiographical Foundations and Structure of the Dissertation

Afghan history prior to the modern period has garnered relatively little attention compared to that coinciding with the nation-state of Afghanistan. Those scholarly works that have addressed the pre-modern Afghan experience—among them the detailed and pathbreaking work of historians like Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui,²⁴ and in a later generation, Jos Gommans²⁵ and Raziuddin Aquil²⁶—have, for the most part, engaged in analysis of two periods in Afghan history: that coinciding with the rule of the Afghan Lodi and Suri sultans of Delhi (the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), and the rise of the Afghan-led Durrani Empire in eighteenth-century Afghanistan. This focus can be attributed in part to the availability of historical sources; the eighteenth century in particular having a greater wealth of written accounts that remain accessible to us today. However, it also suggests that Afghan history has been deemed most worth studying when an Afghan occupied the highest seat of political authority. “Afghan history” happened when it was the history of the State with a capital “S”—beyond that, what Afghans did was comparatively inconsequential and did not merit a focused or detailed study. A noteworthy exception to this is the work of Nile Green, who has examined the phenomenon of Afghan mobility and history-writing from the beginning of the Mughal period up until the end of the eighteenth century.²⁷

Inspired by Green’s observations, this dissertation adopts the opposite perspective of this state-centric scholarship. It shows that some of the most consequential pieces in the making of Afghan identity occurred *between* the States—temporally and metaphorically. Chapter One begins with the origins of this process in the encounter between the Lodi sultans of Delhi and the approaching armies of the first Mughal emperor, Babur. It argues that the initiators of Afghan identity formation were not the Lodi rulers themselves, but a renowned Sufi master of South Asia’s prestigious Chishti order. Shaikh ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), who had long maintained ties to the Lodi sultans, intervened in this moment by linking his own identity to that of the monarchs and the broader Afghan community, arguing that the fate of each depended on the integrity of the other. Chapter Two turns to the aftermath of these events, looking at the life and textual legacy of another Sufi *shaikh* far from the center of the Afghan-Mughal conflict—Shaikh Qasim b. Qadam, hailing from the city of Peshawar.²⁸ Looking at various aspects of Qasim’s textual legacy, it shows how Afghan Sufis of the early seventeenth century laid claim to both blessed *and* Afghan space beyond the firm grasp of Mughal authority, leading the way in deepening the nascent Afghan communal consciousness.

Chapters Three and Four move forward in chronological time, focusing on two texts written in north India after the entrenchment of the Mughal Empire. The first attends to the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, or “Stories of Kings,” of Muhammad Kabir, the early-seventeenth century collection of stories referenced at the beginning of this introduction. Here, I will draw attention to the inspiration for Kabir’s work, Sa’di Shirazi’s (d. 1291/2) famed prose work *Gulistan*. Highlighting Kabir’s engagement with popular works of Persian literature like the *Gulistan*, I show how Kabir drew on various aspects of the Afghans’ historical experience—their imagined penchant for rusticity included—to make a powerful argument for the promise and broad appeal of “Afghan kingship.” Chapter Four turns to the contemporary work of Khwaja Nimat Allah Harawi, a news-writer of the Mughal court and close associate of the powerful Afghan courtier, Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631). Harawi’s *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, unlike the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, has garnered serious and detailed attention

²⁴ Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India* (Delhi: Three Men Publications, 1969) and *Composite Culture Under the Sultanate of Delhi* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2012).

²⁵ Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁶ Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics*.

²⁷ Green, *Making Space*.

²⁸ In modern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

from scholars since the nineteenth century. Historians like Nile Green have outlined the importance of Harawi's text, which traced the Afghans' descent to King Saul and the Prophet Jacob, in terms of Afghan identity formation.²⁹ This chapter extends Green's argument, reading the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* as a millenarian text: one that channeled the entire fabric of Afghan history to predict the impending kingship of Harawi's patron, the politically ambitious Khan Jahan Lodi.

With his death in the 1630s, Khan Jahan's kingly future never came to fruition. However, as Chapter Five demonstrates, Afghans who lived during the reigns of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658) and his son Aurangzeb 'Alamgir (r. 1658-1707) continued to write and embellish the narrative of Afghan history. In the mid-1660s, an Afghan soldier by the name of 'Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi combined a long-durée history of the Afghan *qaum*,³⁰ or people, with a memoir of his own life growing up in Punjab and migrating to the Deccan borderlands in the service of the Mughal state. Through a close reading of this text, Chapter Five considers the complex and multi-faceted nature of Afghan identities at the height of Mughal imperial expansion. It shows that Afghans living in Mughal Hindustan—a place imagined as historically and culturally distinct from Roh, the Afghan “homeland”—navigated this diverse, multicultural terrain as mobile individuals who were also comfortably “at home” in the context of seventeenth-century India.

Chapter Six steps forward to a time when the entirety of South Asia came under the influence of profound and enduring transformations, the eighteenth century. This period witnessed both the decline of the once incredibly powerful and influential Mughal Empire and the emergence of numerous successor states, among them the Durrani Empire led by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1773). At this time, a new generation of Afghan writers continued to write histories of their community. Among them was Hafiz Rahmat Khan (d. 1774), an India-based Afghan who served as de facto ruler of his own polity and who accompanied Ahmad Shah at the momentous battle of Panipat, north India, in 1761. Reading Hafiz's work on Afghan history, the widely circulated *Khulasat al-Ansab*, or “Essence of the Family Lineages,” this chapter demonstrates that Afghan identity in the late eighteenth century had not yet been irrevocably tied to the territory that would become the modern nation-state of Afghanistan. Instead, it examines the multitude of ways in which Hafiz Rahmat Khan imagined the Afghan *qaum* as continuing to live, migrate, and meld with different communities in post-Mughal Hindustan.

To this end, *Mobile Pasts* considers not only the multitudes within Afghan identity in its past, but the many possibilities that remained for its future. Into the nineteenth century, mobility remained at the core of an otherwise complex and many-layered Afghan identity. What future, then, could have been possible for “being Afghan” in the world? In a set of historical circumstances other than what followed—the British colonial enterprise and the powerful redrawing of boundaries and identities across South Asia—what might “Afghan” have signified beyond an affiliation with the nation-state?

²⁹ Green, *Making Space*.

³⁰ From Steingass, a Persian word translating to “people, nation, tribe, family, kindred.” Afghan histories of the period frequently use this term to refer to the community.

Chapter One: Sufi *Shaikhs* and Afghan Becoming

Introduction

The central actors in this first chapter of the Afghan story—Sufi *pirs*—were ubiquitous in early modern South Asia. They were, in the words of Nile Green, “embodied blessed men”³¹ whose *barakat*, or “blessing power,”³² connected them in a genealogical link back to the Prophet Muhammad. In life, Sufi masters attracted widespread followings, their bonds capable of transcending social hierarchies as well as the boundaries of kinship. In death, their bodies were potent depositories of the blessing power that they had in life, so that the charismatic pull of the spiritual master could extend centuries beyond his passing. The renowned saints of the period in question were, in a sense, immortal figures; their memories enshrined in texts and gravesites that formed part of the everyday experience of people in South Asia.

In the tradition of *tasawwuf*, or Sufi mysticism, a saint’s legacy almost always began with a book.³³ The Sufi *shaikh* could, and did, occasionally gain notoriety merely through hearsay and the spread of word; however, a *pir*’s legacy was only truly established with the production and circulation of texts that attested to his *karamat*, or miracles. In the South Asian context, hagiographies appeared in a number of generic formats, revealing a host of details about the spiritual master’s past and identity: for example, the saint’s birthplace, how he found his own spiritual master, the orders in which he was initiated, and the places that he visited in his pursuit of knowledge. These details were significant in that they connected Sufi leaders to a larger constellation of people and places, each of which contributed to—and reaffirmed—his place as an authority figure. In this sense, the authenticity of the Sufi *pir*’s claims was predicated on his relationship to other spiritual masters, who collectively formed an imagined community of the *awliya*, or “friends of God.”

The texts that chronicled the miracles prominent saints generally enjoyed a long afterlife in South Asia. As we see throughout the Sultanate (1206-1526) and Mughal (1526-1858) periods, many documents get picked up again and again by followers of the mystical path—the *mafiuzat*, or conversations, of Shaikh Nizam al-din Awliya (d. 1325) of Delhi being one of the more outstanding examples. In many cases, the stories relayed in these texts were even worked into fresh mystical compendiums such as *tazkiras*, or biographical dictionaries. These creative endeavors effectively drew Sufi masters of the past—many of whom might have claimed no association to one another—into new organizations of spiritual brotherhood.³⁴ In some cases, these were imagined as a particular *silsila*, or spiritual lineage, one in which knowledge had transferred from master to disciple in a chain. In others, saints were organized along the lines of *tariqas*, or the spiritual “orders” that spanned disparate regions of the Islamic world. In effect, these models touted more narrowly defined badges of social and spiritual belonging, many of which gradually solidified as they were reproduced in mystical texts and through real-world connections.

The legacy of a saint, however, was not merely reducible to doctrine or spiritual affiliation. Sufi *pirs* were also public figures whose presence was interwoven with the everyday experience of lay communities. They represented, in Green’s words, “an Islam intimately concerned with life in the world,” and were imagined to “make sense of a life *between* worlds: between places of origin and

³¹ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

³² Green’s translation.

³³ My understanding of the important link between a Sufi’s legacy and the quality of texts written about him/her comes from Sunil Kumar, “Assertions of Authority: A Study of the Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi,” in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed. Muzaffar Alam, Francoise “Nalini” Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2000), 37-65.

³⁴ Pankaj Jha, “A Table Laden with Good Things: Reading a 14th Century Text,” in *Movable Type: Book History in India*, ed. Abhijit Guha and Swapan Chakravorty (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008), 3-25.

places of settlement, between places of written memory and places of lived experience.”³⁵ A cursory glance at texts like the *malʿūzāt*, or “conversations” of Nizam al-din Awliya, for example, will reveal the emphasis on saintly miracles—acts such as the granting of children, producing food and water, and shaping the physical environment. These miracles typically had important consequences for human livelihood, while serving as tangible evidence of a saint’s prowess that could be comprehended by those trained in the Sufi path as well as the uninitiated. To borrow from the work of Vincent Cornell on the Sufis of Morocco, the legacy of a Sufi saint as a “friend of God” (his *wilayat*) was often deeply linked with his legacy as a spiritual authority over human communities (his *walayat*):³⁶ the individuals whose lives were impacted by him and who actively participated in the making of his memory.

Keeping in mind the saint’s historical malleability and his role as an embodied blessed man, this first chapter examines the earliest known interactions between Sufi *shaiḫs* and the Afghans of South Asia. In describing these encounters, it considers how Afghans from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries forged lasting bonds between themselves and some of the most prominent spiritual leaders of the age, creating repositories of memory that later generations of Afghans would draw upon as they wrote the history of their community. As we will see, however, Afghans of this period did not produce any distinguished or long-remembered spiritual leaders of their own, nor did Afghan *pīrs* create any noteworthy affiliations between themselves, a territory, and the broader Afghan community. Even during the seventy-five years in which a Lodi Afghan sat on the throne in Delhi—a period in which the Afghan kings as well as lay Afghans forged powerful relationships with Sufi *shaiḫs*—the connection between Sufi *pīrs* and Afghan identity did not manifest. Rather, the first Sufi master to speak of mobilizing an Afghan community came from beyond its pale, and only linked his spiritual authority to this group when the future of the Afghan sultanates was critically at stake.

Turning to this formative period, this chapter demonstrates how the collision of the Mughals and the Lodi Afghans in India became the catalyst for Afghan identity formation in the mid-sixteenth century. With the arrival of the armies of the first Mughal emperor Babur in the 1520s, it was a famed Sufi master of north India, ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), who first articulated the need to consolidate an Afghan “community”—one that, under his spiritual leadership, could repel the incoming administration and protect the integrity of the Afghan sultanates. Ultimately, the Afghans’ efforts to mobilize against the Mughals failed, and Babur’s grandson Akbar (r. 1556-1605) soon lay the foundations of a formidable empire that would endure until the eighteenth century. However, the groundwork laid by individuals like ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi would have a lasting impact as Afghans living under Mughal rule became intimately involved in telling the remarkable history of their community in Hindustan and beyond.

Sufi *Silsilas* and the Delhi Sultanate: Making the First Afghan Disciples

The envelopment of Afghans into the burgeoning Sufi networks of the eastern Islamic world began perhaps as early as the twelfth century, when the first Sufi masters made their way from the Persianate lands to northern India. As we learn from the first Mughal emperor Babur’s (d. 1530) sixteenth century memoirs, only four roads led from Kabul to north India: one crossing through Laghman, another through Bangash, a third through Naghar, and a fourth through Barmal.³⁷ Although settlement patterns likely shifted somewhat between the twelfth century and Babur’s time,

³⁵ Green, *Making Space*, 4.

³⁶ Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

³⁷ Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 155.

the emperor notes that all of these roads passed through areas inhabited by Afghans, and that securing passage through the region necessarily involved negotiation with these communities. Given the location of these routes and the vital link that they created between Khurasan³⁸ and Hindustan, it is likely that the earliest generations of pilgrims traveling to India encountered Afghans on their journey, even drawing them into the burgeoning spiritual networks that formed along this axis.

Down from the mountains leading to north India was the gateway city of Multan. Multan's significance as a frontier outpost and bustling trading center date back to at least the seventh century; however, the town earned a new reputation with the establishment of the hospice of the Sufi *shaiikh* Baha al-din Zakariya (c. 1170-1262) in the thirteenth. Originally hailing from Khurasan, Zakariya, who belonged to the Suhrawardi path of Sufism, settled in Multan during the reign of Nasir al-din Qubacha (r. 1210-1228), with whom he frequently consulted during the perilous years of the Mongol invasions.³⁹ Although political upheaval was rife in the region, Sufi texts refer to the hospice of the Suhrawardi *shaiikh* as thriving and prosperous, attracting an array of people of varying social backgrounds and occupations. For example, in the fourteenth-century *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad* as well as the later *Siyar al-'Arifin*, traveling men from cities such as Samarqand and Bukhara⁴⁰ appear prominently in Baha al-din's assemblies, many noting that they stopped in the city specifically to visit him.⁴¹ Considering this emergent stature of Baha al-din's *dargah* and Multan's close proximity to the Afghan heartlands, it is not surprising that one of the first Afghan Sufis acknowledged in South Asian hagiographical works was identified as a disciple of the famed Multani *shaiikh*: a man named Hasan Afghan.

The first account to describe Hasan Afghan was the *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*, the *malfuzat*—or “conversations”—of the Delhi-based Chishti *pir* Nizam al-din Awliya (d. 1325). Compiled in the early fourteenth century by his disciple Amir Hasan Sijzi, Nizam al-din's *malfuzat* provides a fascinating glimpse into the diverse worlds brought together under the spiritual authority of north India's Sufi *pirs*, including Baha al-din Zakariya. In one of his assemblies, Nizam al-din identified Hasan Afghan as a close affiliate of the Multani *shaiikh*, describing his remarkable spiritual qualities that set him apart among those who followed the mystical path. For one, unlike many of the learned men who formed the assemblies of these Sufi *pirs*, Hasan Afghan was unlettered. However, if one were to place a page of script in front of him containing one verse from the Qur'an amidst a spattering of other text, Hasan could point to the Word of God. When shocked spectators asked him how he could do this, Hasan claimed that he knew that those lines must be from the Qur'an because there was a light in them that was not present in the others.⁴²

In addition to this singular ability, Nizam al-din noted Hasan Afghan's special relationship his *pir*. According to him, Baha al-din Zakariya was known to say that, “if tomorrow they ask me to bring forward one person from my *dargah* (court) as a representative to face judgment on behalf of all the others, I would select Hasan Afghan.”⁴³ If Hasan's humble origins were still perceived as any impediment to his spiritual acumen, Nizam al-din shared yet another anecdote demonstrating

³⁸ In this period, Khurasan was a region frequently referred to by geographers and historians but was ill-defined. As C.E. Bosworth notes, it generally covered “parts of what are now Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan; early Islamic usage often regarded everywhere east of western Persia... (it) might even extend to the Indus Valley and Sind.” C.E. Bosworth, “Khurasan,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (2012).

³⁹ Qamar-ul Huda, *Striving for Divine Union: Spiritual Exercises for Suhrawardi Sufis* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

⁴⁰ Both in present-day Uzbekistan.

⁴¹ Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Morals For the Heart (Fawa'id al-Fu'ad): Conversations of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

⁴² *Ibid*, 91.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 90.

Hasan's uncanny ability to identify hypocrisy, especially among those occupying a higher position in the social and spiritual hierarchy. One day, he says, Hasan was passing through an unfamiliar town when he stopped to listen to the *imam* speak in the congregational mosque. When the prayer concluded, he approached the *imam* and protested:

Respected Sir, you began the prayers and I fell in with you. You went from here to Delhi and bought some slaves, came back, then took the slaves to Khurasan, and afterward left there for Multan. I got my neck twisted trying to catch up with you. What has all this to do with prayer?!⁴⁴

These stories about Hasan Afghan, though few in number, reveal a great deal about the imagined place of Afghans in the world of fourteenth-century Sufi mysticism. For one, the note that Hasan Afghan was unlettered hints that the Afghans of this period were probably quite new to the elite, scholarly circuits that connected the mystically inclined across Central and South Asia. However, as Nizam al-din would argue, those lowly social origins lent Hasan an unequivocal humility that distinguished him from others who followed the Sufi path, granting him the ability to see beyond the hypocrisy of the more learned to understand the interior meaning of the faith, or the *batin*. Nizam al-din's account of Baha al-din Zakariya's famed disciple, while teaching a powerful lesson about wisdom and power that could be applied in a wide range of contexts, also stands out from contemporary accounts of the Afghans. Indeed, while courtly chronicles of the era consistently referred to Afghans as wild and terrifying figures incapable of comprehensible speech,⁴⁵ the *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*, in stark contrast, suggested how they could be accommodated into, and even flourish, on the mystical path.

We know next to nothing about Hasan Afghan aside from what is recounted here by Nizam al-din, and the characteristics that define him in this text are only repeated in later *tazkiras*.⁴⁶ However, Hasan's story would not be recounted merely by future generations of Suhrawardis, nor would his legacy be determined solely by his relationship to Baha al-din Zakariya. As we will see, Hasan also assumed a place of significance in the larger narrative of Afghan history: one in which his miraculous feats were linked much more explicitly to his identity *as* an Afghan, with important ramifications for how Afghan identity was imagined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before we look at this development, however, it is necessary to examine the role of Sufis in the formative period of this process: the Lodi Sultanate (r. 1451-1526) of Afghan rule in Delhi. It has been established that Sufis were a fixture of social life in early modern South Asia, and that their influence was felt by communities from a broad array of ethnic, social, and regional backgrounds. However, the following section of this chapter will show how Sufi saints held a particular significance for Afghans during this period, and that any examination of Afghan identity formation must begin with an assessment of their lives and claims to authority.

Sufis and Sultans: The Intertwining of Kingship and Sainthood in the Lodi Sultanate

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Referring to descriptions proffered by Juzjani and Amir Khusrau, cited in the introduction to this dissertation.

⁴⁶ For example, Hasan Afghan appears in a seventeenth-century compendium of saints produced at the Mughal court, the *Akbar al-Akhyar* of 'Abd al-Haq Dehlavi (d. 1642). As we will see later, Afghan Sufis of the seventeenth century also incorporated Hasan Afghan into their work; however, their accounts largely offered a repetition of the details in Nizam al-din's conversations.

The establishment of the Afghan Lodi Sultanate in Delhi in 1451 catalyzed the unprecedented flow of Afghan migrants from the “heartland” region, referred to as “Roh,”⁴⁷ to the plains of northern India. In the words of sixteenth-century chronicles like the *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi* and the *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi*, for example, these people drifted into the Gangetic plain like “ants and locusts,”⁴⁸ all interested in taking advantage of the generous settlements offered by the first sultan, Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489). Although these retrospective accounts perhaps exaggerated the extent of Afghan immigration that occurred with Bahlul’s rise to the throne, it is nonetheless clear that by the fifteenth century, north India—not the Afghan “heartlands”—emerged as the fulcrum of Afghan political as well as spiritual activity. With this in mind, the following sections highlight important developments that took place in this period between Afghans and the Sufi saints of north India; in particular, examining the Lodi sultans’ relationship with the sacred landscape that they inherited in Delhi, their capital. As we will see, these relationships would have important consequences during the Lodis’ rapid political decline in the sixteenth century, when the question of Afghan identity assumed significance in the changing political conditions of north India.

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As Nile Green and other scholars have noted, from the very beginning of their tenure as monarchs of Delhi, the Lodis were dutiful patrons of Sufi saints, and each of them made efforts to recognize and respect the sacred geography of north India. Sainthood acquiescence, after all, was crucial: in a milieu with no strong institution of primogeniture,⁴⁹ Sufis were one of the most powerful state-building resources, and their blessings were usually essential for aspiring monarchs.⁵⁰ Thus not surprisingly, the “origin story” of the Lodi dynasty involves a saint “granting” the sultanate of Delhi to the horse trader-cum-soldier Bahlul Lodi, an individual who otherwise had no claim to the throne. In this story—one which appears consistently in chronicles of the Lodi period—Bahlul and two of his kinsmen had been on the road with their goods when they stopped at the *dargah* of a recluse (*majzub*) and Sayyid, or a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, in the town of Samana.⁵¹ While there, the Sayyid asked if anyone present would be willing to purchase the sultanate of Delhi from him for a sum of two thousand *tankas*. Bahlul fell short of the requested amount; however, he offered all the money he had: a total of 1600 *tankas*. While Bahlul’s companions gently mocked him for giving up all of his money, the Sayyid graciously accepted the amount, then told Bahlul: “you may go, for the *padishahi* (kingship) of Delhi has been bestowed on you!”⁵²

As predicted by the Sayyid *majzub*, Bahlul secured the throne largely without incident after many years of distinguishing himself in the previous political dispensation.⁵³ Nonetheless, when he finally took his place at the helm of Delhi, the Afghan monarch found himself contending with a

⁴⁷ As I will discuss in more detail later, India-based authors of Afghan history typically referred to the Afghan “homeland” as “Roh.” Their descriptions of the precise location of Roh, however, vary quite radically. For some, Roh was a much smaller territory defined by one particular geographical marker (such as the Gomul River, as we will see in Chapter Three). For others, it was an expansive territory spanning disparate regions of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi’s work, the 1572 *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, the author does not offer any particular geographical marker to describe Roh. He simply refers to it as a place from which Afghans migrated to north India when Bahlul Lodi came to power. Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, ed. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui and Waqarul Hasan Siddiqui (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library: 2002), 4.

⁴⁸ “*Mur o malakh.*” Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi*, ed. Sayyid Muhammad Imamuddin (Dacca: Dacca University, 1964), 6.

⁴⁹ The practice in which the first-born son inherits his father’s position.

⁵⁰ Simon Digby, “The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India,” *Iran* 28 (1990): 75.

⁵¹ A city in the Punjab.

⁵² Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

number of political competitors who threatened to dislodge him from his newly secured position. Perhaps the most formidable and enduring of these threats was Sultan Husain Sharqi (d. 1479), the independent ruler of the neighboring sultanate of Jaunpur.⁵⁴ For the first several years of his reign, Bahlul battled against the Sharqi sultan, occasionally gaining the upper hand and other times slipping perilously close to defeat. It was in this context, contemporary sources recall, that Bahlul turned to the sacred landscape of Delhi, praying for the intercession of the city's famed Sufi *pirs*. This is most memorably demonstrated in the account of Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, a late sixteenth-century chronicler of the Afghan sultanates. According to him, when Husain Sharqi arrived and laid siege to the city of Delhi, Bahlul spent the whole night praying at the tomb of Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235), a celebrated Chishti saint of the early Delhi Sultanate. The next morning, a man—presumably the *pir* himself—appeared before Bahlul and handed him a staff, commanding him to “go, and banish those who have come with this stick!” With the saint's blessing, Bahlul then went out from the *dargah* and met the Sharqi sultan, defeating him in a decisive victory that sent him fleeing back to Jaunpur.⁵⁵

Bahlul Lodi's son and successor, Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517), also actively engaged with the established Sufi networks of north India. In particular, he associated with *shaiikhs* of the Suhrawardi order, whose roots had been well established across the region by Baha al-din Zakariya's *silsila* in addition to that of another fourteenth-century *shaiikh*, Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahangasht (d. 1384). For example, when Bahlul passed away and left the throne open to competing successors, Sikandar sought out the blessing of Shaikh Sama' al-din Kamboh, a disciple of *shaiikh* Sadr al-din Raju Qattal, the son of Jahaniyan Jahangasht.⁵⁶ In addition, Sikandar fostered a close, yet somewhat fraught relationship with another Suhrawardi and student of Shaikh Sama' al-din, Jamali Kamboh (d. 1536). Indeed, Jamali's c. 1530 *tazkira*, the *Siyar al-'Arifin*, is rich with detail concerning how Sikandar and the other Lodi sultans interacted with Sufi *shaiikhs* both living and dead, placing the Afghan rulers within a much longer history of engagement between the Delhi sultans and the leading saints of their time.⁵⁷ Jamali's narrative, to that end, reveals how unremarkable the Lodis' interactions were imagined to be by a prominent *shaiikh* who lived contemporaneously with them. In engaging with these *pirs* revered from Multan to Delhi, Jamali suggests, the Afghan sultans were in many ways doing as their predecessors had done, and we can infer, had come to be expected from the Delhi monarchs, among whom the Lodis were counted.

Observing the Afghan rulers' associations with the diverse Sufi *silsilas* of north India, Nile Green has noted what he refers to as the “cosmopolitan” orientation of the Lodi sultanate. As he argues, the spiritual landscape of north India that the Lodis entered in the fifteenth century was already a rich one, “abundant...in the lineages and shrines of the Sufis” whose “idioms and networks...were able to transcend differences between Muslim groups.”⁵⁸ In connecting themselves with these entrenched figures, Green argues, the Lodi and Suri rulers became extensively integrated into a “Indian social and religious world,”⁵⁹ one in which Sufi saints mediated relationships between diverse communities of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.⁶⁰ Green's argument challenges notions of

⁵⁴ An independent kingdom located to the east of Delhi.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 31. Also Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics: Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

⁵⁷ Jamali Kamboh, *Siyar al-'Arifin*, lithograph, Rekhta Books, accessed 3 October 2017, <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/sair-ul-aarfeen-jamali-ebooks?lang=ur>. Shaikh Jamali also references Bahlul Lodi's many visits to Shaikh Sama' al-din Kamboh (as well as Sama' al-din's visit to the sultan's grave); a reminder that Bahlul was closely connected with Suhrawardi *shaiikhs* as well as Chishtis.

⁵⁸ Green, *Making Space*, 71-72.

⁵⁹ Ibid, emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Afghan insularity in India, drawing attention to the fact that the Afghans of the Delhi Sultanate were in fact actively involved in perpetuating the region's cosmopolitan culture. As engaging with Sufi saints necessarily meant to engage with a wider, cosmopolitan world, it is clear that the Afghans of north India, despite their purportedly "foreign" status in this context, extended their horizons well beyond the boundaries of their own kinship networks to become an integral part of the fabric of north Indian social life.

However, as I will propose in the following section, the spiritual associations cultivated by the Lodis would, in fact, become meaningful as *Afghan* associations in a particular historical context: that characterized by the rapid emergence of the Mughals in the mid-sixteenth century. In stark contrast to the early decades of Lodi rule, the period of uncertainty marked by the fall of the third sultan Ibrahim (d. 1526) brought new and potent significance to being "Afghan," a sentiment reflected in a Sufi *tazkira* of the era as well as in the Mughals' early approach to Delhi's sacred landscape. As I will now demonstrate, in the charged Mughal-Lodi interface that followed Ibrahim's defeat, the articulated or imagined allegiance of Sufi saints played a central role not only in shaping Mughal state-building efforts in the region, but in galvanizing an Afghan "community" whose fate was imagined to be contingent on that of the new political order. To demonstrate how this played out during the critical decades of the 1530s and 40s, I will first look to contemporary Mughal responses to the sacred landscape of Delhi, drawing attention to the Lodis' perceived imprint on these meaningful spaces. Then, I will turn to a close reading of a Sufi *tazkira* from the period, demonstrating how a solitary Sufi *shaiikh* projected his authority onto an Afghan "community" as it faced its uncertain future in north India.

The Lodis and Sacred Space in Delhi

To demonstrate one important manifestation of this development, it is necessary to look at the built environment of Delhi—the "capital of all Hindustan,"⁶¹ as described by Babur in his memoirs. As has been well noted, the Lodis were among the most prolific builders of all the Delhi sultans, offering their own contributions to the many sultanate settlements that had cropped up across the plains of Delhi. Indeed, Lodi tombs, stepwells, and mosques grace such disparate sites as the Bagh-i Jud (modern Jor Bagh and Lodi Garden), Kotla Mubarakpur (present-day South Extension), the Hauz-i Khas, and Dehli-yi Kuhna (the site of the Qutb *minar* and mosque, as well as the adjoining neighborhood of Mehrauli), making it difficult to traverse the modern landscape of Delhi without running into a Lodi monument.⁶² Arguably, the Afghans chose to build in these areas because of their associations with the previous Delhi sultans, many whom constructed and ruled from these settlements. As something of "upstarts" in this context, the Lodis could draw upon the legacy of figures such as Shams al-din Iltutmish (d. 1236), the first Delhi sultan, to embed themselves in the rich layers of the city's kingly past. However, as the Lodis undoubtedly recognized, the ground that lay beneath the city was also populated by the bodies of saints, including several of the Chishti *pirs* with whom Bahlul was remembered to have loyally associated.⁶³ Above all, I would argue, the Lodis' visible building efforts around Dehli-yi Kuhna gesture toward their efforts to develop lasting relationships between themselves and the prominent saints of the city—an effort that, we will see, appears to have been a successful one with important ramifications for the emerging Mughal imperium.

⁶¹ Babur, *Baburnama*, 330.

⁶² Y.D. Sharma, *Delhi and Its Neighborhood* (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1974).

⁶³ Some believe that Bahlul Lodi is buried near the tomb of Nasir al-din Chiragh-i Delhi (d. 1337), a disciple and successor of Nizam al-din Awliya. For more on this topic, see Simon Digby, "The Tomb of Bahlul Lodi," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 3 (1975): 550-561.

By the end of the Lodis' reign as sultans, the region referred to as Dehli-yi Kuhna, or "Old Delhi," contained perhaps the highest number of architectural remnants of the city's Sultanate heritage. Not only were the Qutb Minar and the first congregational mosque of Delhi located there, but it was also the site of the Hauz-i Shamsi—a reservoir built by Iltutmish, which purportedly contained water from Mecca's Zamzam well—in addition to the graves of Iltutmish, that of the sultan Balban (r. 1266-1287), and that of the sultan Ala al-din Khalji (r. 1296-1316). However, to once again adopt the mystical interpretation of this space's significance, it was not the brick-and-mortar structures of worldly rulers but the blessed body of a saint—Bakhtiyar Kaki—that granted this site its magnetism. To understand the perceived impact of Bakhtiyar Kaki on the space in which his body was interred, we need not look further than the *malʿuzat* of Shaikh Nizam al-din, the noted spiritual successor of Bakhtiyar Kaki who frequently referenced him in his conversations. As Nizam al-din once told his assembly, Kaki chose the site of his final resting place for a special reason: the *bu-yi dilba*, or "aroma of hearts," that he sensed emanating from the soil. As he recalled this moment, Nizam al-din began to cry and exclaimed, "That one who said, 'From this ground I scent the aroma of hearts,' look...look at how many persons are now resting there in that very place!"⁶⁴

Although "worldly" rulers themselves, the Lodis' noted interest in local Sufi *pirs*—and in particular, Bakhtiyar Kaki—strongly suggests that the Afghan sultans' construction in Dehli-yi Kuhna was spurred by their acknowledgement of the saint's preeminence in that space. Furthermore, by leaving traces of their own presence in such proximity to Bakhtiyar Kaki's body, the Lodis could effectively intertwine their own imperial memory with that of the Sufi *pir*. While we do not know if the Lodis intended this specifically, it still must be noted that they were remarkably successful in creating a recognized association between themselves and the old city. In an early 2019 lecture given at UC Berkeley, art historian Catherine Asher noted that the early Mughal emperors seemed to have carefully avoided constructing in this symbolically rich region of Delhi. Indeed, while first Mughal emperor Babur circumambulated Bakhtiyar Kaki's tomb in 1526 after his victory over Ibrahim Lodi,⁶⁵ neither he nor any of his close successors chose to establish themselves in this area. As Asher compellingly suggested, this decision was precisely *because* of the space's association with the Lodis, the imperial dispensation that the Mughals had replaced and that could still pose a challenge to them. It seems apparent, then, that the Lodis successfully lay claim to the legacy of Qutb al-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, and that the *pir's* support could still potentially manifest itself in opposition to the new Mughal order.

'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi: Community in a Time of Crisis

While the coming of the Mughals revealed that Dehli-yi Kuhna had become "Lodi" space, a close reading of a contemporary Sufi *taẓkirah* points to another important component of "Afghan becoming" at the moment of Lodis' demise. This text is the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, a multi-faceted work chronicling the life and miracles of Shaikh 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537). Gangohi was a Chishtī *pir* who experienced great popularity during the reign of the Lodi sultans. His influence in the court was such that, in Muzaffar Alam's words, he was "very nearly the royal *pir*" of the Afghans—his regular letters of advice to the sultans a clear marker of his involvement.⁶⁶ The *shaiikh's* cadre of trusted followers, however, went far beyond the Lodi royalty. As we see in the *Lata'if* itself, Gangohi also sought out and initiated much humbler Afghans, including one about whom we learn a great deal: a soldier by the name of Dattu Sarwani. To the extent of my knowledge, no other

⁶⁴ Sijzi, *Morals*, 360-1.

⁶⁵ Babur, *Baburnama*, 327.

⁶⁶ Muzaffar Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufis Shaikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 137.

contemporary references mention Dattu, suggesting that he was not a member of the upper ranks of the sultanate. However, in sharp contrast to his relative insignificance in the courtly domain, Dattu emerges as a figure of central importance in Gangohi's *tazkīra*. He does so not only as a devoted follower of his *pir* but also as an active enforcer of the deceased *shaiikh's* will in the living world. We gain this sense from Sarwani's own contribution to the text—a series of anecdotes appended to the *tazkīra* in the 1540s⁶⁷ in which Dattu details his final meeting with Gangohi and the numerous dreams he had in connection with his *pir* after the latter's death. Through his words, we can gauge the lingering impact of the Lodi Sultanate and the Sufi *pirs* of north India in cultivating a sense of Afghan community at a time of great political transition.

Although largely overlooked by scholars until Simon Digby in the 1960s, Dattu Sarwani's contribution to the *Lata'if-i Quddusi* consists of twenty-two anecdotes, each narrated from his perspective as “the writer.” In a preface to this section, Sarwani⁶⁸ explains his role in the *tazkīra* as such:

A soldier called Dattu Sarvani was a sincere disciple of Hazrat Qutbi (Gangohi) and had much exterior and interior connection with him. He used to have pure dreams and receive many messages from him. The Prophet—God's blessing and peace upon him—said, ‘The dreams of the pious believer are tidings from God’ and ‘I have departed and the message remains God, may he be exalted, has said, ‘They have messages in this world and the next.’⁶⁹

Through this introduction, Sarwani humbly yet sincerely puts forward his qualifications for undertaking such an endeavor. As a close companion of Gangohi—and one who shared the spiritually superior “interior” connection with him in addition to an “exterior” one—Dattu could share in the saint's visions, which he acknowledges as “tidings” from God. We can infer, then, that Dattu felt a pious obligation to share them. We can also surmise that his contribution to the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, most importantly, was an attempt to unveil the mysterious influence of the divine in real-world events; ones that were understood to be profoundly impactful on the people who shared in his world.

From Dattu Sarwani's perspective, everything that befalls the Afghans in north India revolves around their devotion—or lack thereof—to God. This is powerfully demonstrated in one of the first anecdotes in the series, in which Dattu describes an ominous dream that he had about a “fierce wind with much dust and darkness (that came) from the West...trees and houses were all torn up from the ground and flying through the air, going towards the east.”⁷⁰ Dattu explains how he was at first bewildered by the meaning of this dream until Gangohi—who was still alive at this time—revealed to him the truth of what it signified. According to the *shaiikh*, the wind had descended on account of the “weakness of spirit of the Afghans,” and that it was a signal that the “battle line of the Afghans would be curled up” while the battle of line of the “Turks” would stretch out among them.⁷¹ Gangohi did not, at that moment, disclose what the outcome of this battle would be; however, as we learn throughout the next several anecdotes, the continuing “demoralization” of the

⁶⁷ Simon Digby surmises that all of the anecdotes were composed around 1546 or 1547.

⁶⁸ Digby explains that he found this note at end of the *tazkīra*, in “miscellaneous matter” included after Dattu Sarwani's anecdotes. It is therefore unclear whether Sarwani himself wrote this introduction or if it is the work of a person who physically appended Dattu's anecdotes to the *tazkīra*.

⁶⁹ Simon Digby, “Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarwani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 2 (1964): 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Afghans prevented them from standing successfully against their enemies. A year after his dream, Dattu says, Babur was victorious over the last Lodi sultan, Ibrahim, and the Afghans who inhabited the core areas of the sultanate were forced to flee to the east.⁷² Briefly, the scattered ones gathered around Ibrahim's half-brother, Mahmud Lodi; however, this attempt to revive the Lodi sultanate also failed, ushering in a period of intense demoralization among the Afghans of northern India.

In Dattu's retrospective account of the rise of the Mughals, the failure of the "Afghans" looms prominently from the beginning, appearing as a kind of historical inevitability. However, Dattu's memories also emphasize the ability of Sufi blessed men—and in particular, 'Abd al-Quddus—to intervene and influence outcomes in this time of upheaval. This is illustrated in one harrowing story in which Dattu and his companions prepared to cross the Saru river in order to escape the advancing Mughal armies. The night before they planned to do so, Dattu explains, he had a dream in which Gangohi visited him and told him to look for a certain sheep in the flock of his companion, 'Isa Khan. The *shaikh* instructed him to take and slaughter that sheep in the name of the Prophet, feed it to the *faqirs*, and say the *fatiba*.⁷³ All of this would ensure the men's easy passing across the river. The next morning, however, the two men hesitated to follow the *pir's* instructions. Instead, they loaded up a boat with their belongings and prepared to leave. Before they could do so, another group of Afghans appeared and swiftly bore away their vessel. When night fell, Gangohi visited Dattu for a second time and warned him not to delay. Dattu heeded this advice and went to visit 'Isa Khan's flock the next morning, and surely enough, he saw the sheep that Gangohi had shown to him. He dutifully slaughtered it and fed it to the holy men while saying the *fatiba*. Once they had completed this task, Dattu says, "by the Grace of God," he and his companions crossed the river safely.⁷⁴

Significantly, the competition between *pirs* both living and dead also looms prominently in Dattu's account. Amidst the chaos of the Mughal advance and subsequent Afghan uprooting in north India, Dattu describes how, even after his death, his *pir* visited him many times in dreams and warned him not to associate with certain other *shaikhs*, even those belonging to the Chishti order. For example, in one anecdote, we learn that a certain Shaikh Ahmad, a descendant of Baba Farid (d. 1266), the great *pir* of Ajodhan, had joined the camp of Dattu's friend 'Isa Khan. According to Dattu, Shaikh Ahmad had expressed a specific interest in him, and had even summoned him for a visit. At first, Dattu conveyed his excitement at the prospect of such an honor and prepared to take leave. Before he could act upon Ahmad's request, however, Dattu had another dream in which Gangohi ordered him to stay put. His *pir* told him instead to write a letter to Shaikh Ahmad, saying, "The difficulty which is going to befall me...will, by the grace of God and the aid of the *pirs* of Chisht, be made easy; but as for the difficulty which is going to befall *you*, you should endeavor to bring that difficulty of your own to its end."⁷⁵ Shortly after reading Gangohi's words, Dattu reveals, he learned that "hostility" had grown up between the Chishti saint and the Afghans in the camp, prompting Shaikh Ahmad to leave their company for the fort of Chunar.⁷⁶

However, the most lively engagement between *pirs* occurred in the final few anecdotes, when Gangohi attempted to regulate Dattu's association with a long-deceased spiritual figure: Salar Masud Ghazi, the eleventh-century warrior-saint buried in the Himalayan foothills in Bahraich. According to Dattu, when he and his compatriots were camped within a short distance of Masud's *dargah*, he fell ill, and some of his friends suggested that he visit the tomb to ask for Masud's blessing. As if

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ The first surah (chapter) of the Qur'an.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 63.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 66.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

aware of the prospect of Dattu's arrival, Masud visited Dattu in a dream, showing him a magnificent vision of his tomb and exhorting him to come. Dattu hesitated, thinking it most appropriate to visit the tomb of his own *pir* first. As he continued to delay his decision, Gangohi and Salar Masud became entangled in a fierce competition for Dattu's favor, one that took place entirely within the soldier's dreams. While Gangohi commanded Dattu to remember his tomb and the *pirzadas*, or his sons who tended the shrine, Masud assured Dattu that "I and Shaikh 'Abd al-Quddus and his sons are one. Do not distinguish between us."⁷⁷ The conflict escalated to such a degree that Dattu dreamt of Salar Masud grabbing him by the hair and forcibly dragging him to his *dargah*, all before 'Abd al-Quddus swept down "like a hawk" and delivered him from the saint's grasp. In the end, it was an enchanting vision of his own *pir*'s tomb that convinced Dattu of the solution. When he saw an image of Gangohi's grave that rivaled all of the great palaces of northern India, Dattu resolved to travel to Gangohi first to see the tomb of his spiritual master, and only then take leave for Bahraich.⁷⁸

I have dwelt on Dattu Sarwani's account in such detail for the fascinating and rare insights that it offers about the connection between saintly leadership and Afghan identity in this moment of political transition. For one, it is in his contributions to the *Lata'if-i Quddusi* that we see, for the first time, an Afghan speaking of "Afghans" as a kind of community possessing a collective fate that is, at least at this point, hanging in the balance. As Dattu learns from Gangohi, the rise of the "Turks" in north India came at the expense of the "Afghans," whose shared lack of faith literally incited their violent displacement at the hands of Babur and Humayun's armies. Also importantly, just as the "Afghans" as a whole were being punished by God for their neglect, their failures were reflected in the change in political dispensation. Indeed, when the spiritual commitment of the Afghans failed, so, too, did the sovereignty of their sultans, the identified leaders of the community around whom the Afghans repeatedly attempted to rally. Dattu's contributions to the *tazkira*, therefore, establish an interconnected relationship between the Lodi (and later Suri) sultanate and *all* Afghans, suggesting that the survival of one was predicated on the flourishing of the other. It is for this reason that it came as no surprise to 'Abd al-Quddus that Ibrahim Lodi fell to Babur at Panipat, and that Mahmud Lodi failed to regroup the scattered Afghans later.

If this relationship between the sultanate and the entire Afghan community is posited in the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, so, too, does the Sufi *pir* play a role. It is important to note that this text comes from the mystical interpretation of events: one in which Sufi saints are intimately involved in worldly affairs, yet also aloof from the changing tides of history. In this perspective, 'Abd al-Quddus emerges as a quasi-omniscient figure with close access to divine knowledge; he alone is able to predict when the Mughals will secure a victory and when the Afghans will stand strong against them. Nonetheless, as both the *pir* and his disciple put forth, the knowledge that Gangohi provides most directly concerns the fate of the *Afghans*, and it is to them that the *pir* continually offers advice on how to navigate the changing circumstances brought on by the Mughals' arrival. As Dattu's dreams also testify, it is 'Abd al-Quddus alone who is capable of intervening in this regard, and it is he to whom the Afghans must defer to as they chart their uncertain future in the region. Nowhere is this illustrated more strongly than when Dattu rejects Salar Masud's assertion that all Chishtis are to be treated equally—they are "one and the same," and that the disciple of one Chishti *pir* need not privilege one master among the *tariqa* over another. In choosing to visit his own *pir o murshid* first, Dattu effectively confirms his master's assertions that Gangohi holds a special place among the Chishti saints, and that neither his authority nor his preeminence should be disputed.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 191.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 189-191.

Gangohi's *tazkira* thus offers testimony of an important spiritual alignment—and consequently, of identity formation—taking place in a moment of political crisis and dynastic transition. In the logic of the text and 'Abd al-Quddus's assertions, Afghans would no longer blend seamlessly into the fabric of north India's spiritual networks, nourishing the "cosmopolitan" connections described by Nile Green. Nor would they treat all of the subcontinent's saints equally as their masters or consider themselves vaguely as followers of the Chishti *silsila*. Rather, the Afghans would be followers of 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi—the saint who had access to the divine knowledge that concerned them and who possessed the unique ability to intervene on their behalf. As we know, the Afghan sultans ultimately failed to reestablish themselves in the subsequent decades—a development that Dattu Sarwani could not have foreseen, but that nonetheless diminished Gangohi's importance as a spiritual leader of north Indian Afghans. Nonetheless, the saint's intervention is crucial in that marked the beginning of a much longer narrative of Afghan singularity and community—one that would be echoed in the subsequent decades of Mughal establishment in the region.

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In this chapter, I argued that the defeat and displacement of the Lodi dispensation in north India created an opportunity for new spiritual alignments that had an important impact on Afghan identity. Following Nile Green's work, I began by demonstrating how the Afghan sultans of Delhi actively engaged in the cosmopolitan social world of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century South Asia. The most striking evidence of this was the Lodi and Suris' relationships with a broad spectrum of Sufi *pirs*; individuals who catered to heterogeneous audiences of followers and whose spiritual networks connected a vast geographical territory from Punjab to the Deccan. The Afghan sultans' associations with these men—not to mention their noted patronage of literature in north Indian vernaculars, as well as the diverse courtly cohorts that they assembled⁷⁹—belied that notion that the Lodis and Suri rulers privileged Afghans or consciously attempted to cultivate Afghan corporate solidarity. However, the rapid emergence of the Mughals in the 1520s transformed the Lodis and Suris' relationships with certain *pirs*—as well as specific sites in Delhi's sacred geography—into distinctively *Afghan* associations, and ones fundamentally in conflict with the goals of the new Mughal state. This was most powerfully demonstrated in 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi's *tazkira*, which takes the existence of an Afghan "community" for granted, yet imagined its fate as inextricably tied to the leadership of an Afghan sultan and the Sufi *shaiikh* himself—the only one who could deliver them from the "divine scourge"⁸⁰ of the Mughals. The moment of uncertainty created by the Mughals' arrival drove the development of Afghan communal consciousness in India, with a Sufi *pir* playing the most important role in forging these connections.

Writing in 1546/7, Dattu Sarwani did not—and could not—have foreseen the outcome of the Afghan-Mughal encounter that he described in the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*. However, the tension dramatized in the battles between the Lodis and Suris and the first two Mughal emperors would come to an end with the establishment of a centralizing and expanding Mughal state under the third emperor, Jalal al-din Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605). With the rise of Akbar in the second half of the sixteenth century, the possibility of an Afghan resurgence, glimpsed fleetingly in the *tazkira* of Gangohi, was virtually eliminated in the heartlands of north India. Nonetheless, Sufi *shaiikhs* beyond Akbar's empire would continue to play a central role in constituting Afghan communities and spaces, creating a rich pool of resources that Afghans of the high Mughal period would draw upon as they developed and inscribed their shared history.

⁷⁹ Green, *Making Space*.

⁸⁰ Alam, "Sufi Shaikhs," 139.

Chapter Two: Sufi *Shaikhs* and the Making of Afghan Space

Introduction

The rapid consolidation of an empire under the third Mughal emperor, Akbar, was accompanied by a powerful ideological program that placed the emperor at the helm of a cosmos knitted together under his divinely ordained authority. As Azfar Moin has compellingly argued, underpinning this ideology was the notion that the Mughal emperors were veritable “millennial sovereigns,” or saint-kings appointed to lead their subjects into the next Islamic millennium.⁸¹ These were grand assertions, and the extent to which the subjects of the empire accepted this vision of Mughal sovereignty is up for debate. Nonetheless, the all-encompassing scope of the Mughal imperial vision left little space for contradictory claims of authority—especially ones that mobilized Afghans, who, as we have seen, most threatened to destabilize the young Mughal imperium. It is for this reason that by the late sixteenth century, the most pronounced “Afghan” Sufi activity occurred not within the core areas of the empire, but on its fringes: in the Afghan heartlands to the northwest of Hindustan that, despite many efforts to the contrary, were rarely subjected to total imperial control. In this region, Afghans continued to forge indelible bonds with Sufi *shaikhs*, while spiritual masters claiming Afghan identity began to welcome diverse groups of followers into their spiritual fold. Linking their saintly authority and Afghan identity, these *pirs* had a lasting impact on the meanings ascribed to this space, reshaping a territory inhabited by loosely affiliated Afghan tribes into a singularly “Afghan” region; one that later came to be constituted as an Afghan “homeland.”

Turning to these developments, this chapter draws upon a body of scholarship linking Sufis to the generation of identities and territories in South Asia. As these studies have shown, the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in India—a period coinciding with the dissolution of the Delhi Sultanate—witnessed a remarkable effluence of Sufi activity at the level of the locality. In the sultanates of Gujarat (r. 1407-1573), Bengal (r. 1338-1576), and Malwa (r. 1392-1562), for example, Sufi *pirs* migrated and began to put down roots; their local legacies, in many cases, ensured through the support of regional dynastic lineages. In the case of Gujarat, for instance, Jyoti Gulati Balachandran has shown how patronage from the Gujarat sultans was critical to the formation of a local community of Muslim learned men including Shaikh Ahmad Khattu (d. 1445), a spiritually pedigreed migrant associated with the founding of Ahmedabad, Gujarat’s capital city. The sultans nourished close relationships with the *shaikh* during his life and oversaw the construction of his tomb complex in Ahmedabad, while two rulers of the lineage later chose to be buried alongside the spiritual master.⁸² These connected processes of kingly and saintly commemoration, historians have argued, were also a means through which regions like Gujarat first developed their distinctive identities; identities perpetuated through the ongoing circulation of memories surrounding Sufi saints.⁸³

As this chapter demonstrates, Afghan Sufi lineages of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries created enduring associations between their spiritual authority and an

⁸¹ Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sainthood and Kingship in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁸² K.A. Nizami, “Ahmad Khattu,” in *Encyclopedia Iranica* I/6, pp. 649-650.

⁸³ Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, “Texts, Tombs and Memory: The Migration, Settlement and Formation of a Learned Muslim Community in Fifteenth-Century Gujarat” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California-Los Angeles, 2012). In addition to Balachandran, see Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) and Nile Green, *Indian Sufism Since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books, and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

expansive territory surrounding the city of Peshawar—a predominantly rural environment described as the homeland of a multitude of nominally “Afghan” tribes. In contrast to places like Gujarat and the Deccan, however, these transformations occurred in the *absence* of support from a regional dynastic lineage, and, at times, in opposition to the reigning Mughal Empire. In order account for this distinction, this chapter looks at the hagiographical literature dedicated to a self-identified Afghan *shaikh* hailing from the city of Peshawar: Qasim Sulaimani, also known as Qasim Khalil. Composed at the height of Qasim’s spiritual career in the early seventeenth century, the panegyric texts dedicated to the *shaikh* were distinctive in that they emphasized the Afghan identity that Qasim and his ancestors shared with the diverse inhabitants of their spiritual territory. Through these assertions, I argue, *shaikhs* like Qasim and their panegyrists discursively grouped a number of tribes and communities under the protective umbrella of the Afghan *pir*, in turn shaping the region into both sacred and “Afghan” space.

The conditions in which Afghan communal consciousness first emerged—namely, at the heart of the conflict between the Lodis and the Mughals—determined how and where subsequent generations of Afghans merged claims of spiritual authority with powerful expressions of Afghan identity. Nonetheless, the vision of Afghan history and identity that arose in the seventeenth-century Afghan heartlands, far from ascribing to Mughal expectations or demands, consistently centered the Afghan community in a compelling vision of the *qaum*’s universal significance. As we will see, *shaikhs* like Qasim Khalil—though active agents in Afghan community building and space making—drew widely from the cosmopolitan discourses of Sufi sainthood prevalent in South Asia and the wider Islamic world. Building upon this rich legacy, these *pirs* imagined their authority not in the narrow terms of “kin,” “tribe,” or even “Afghan”; but as embodied blessed men presiding over an essentially boundless canvas of spaces and communities.

Sufi Origins in the Afghan Heartlands

Given the lack of textual and material evidence from before the sixteenth century, it remains difficult to pinpoint when exactly Sufi *pirs* began to gather significant followings in Afghan heartlands that straddled the mountain ranges of northwestern India.⁸⁴ One important early document, however, provides a fascinating glimpse into the spiritual horizons of the Afghans who populated the mountainous regions bordering Central Asia and Hindustan: the *Baburnama*, or memoirs of the Timurid prince and first Mughal emperor, Babur (d. 1530). In some respects, Babur’s account is complicated to work with for the historian interested in interpreting the Afghan experience. Babur, as is well known, clashed with many Afghan tribal communities as he advanced from his capital in Kabul down towards Hindustan, a fact reflected in the general antagonism that characterizes nearly all of his references to them. Nonetheless, the *Baburnama* is also rich in ethnographic detail concerning territorial and social organization in this region, in addition to

⁸⁴ I have chosen “Afghan heartlands” to describe this region with some deliberation. The texts that I use in this chapter provide no name to describe the region as a whole, nor do they refer to it as beginning or ending at a certain location. Initially, “Roh,” a term present in some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts, seemed to be a convenient moniker. However, as I will reiterate later, the use of this name was unique to texts written in the Indian subcontinent. Because this chapter concerns people and communities who lived most of their lives in the region itself, “Roh” did not seem like an appropriate choice. I also realize that a term like “Afghan heartlands” to describe the region *before* the transformations that I am describing seems somewhat contradictory. However, these *shaikhs* were not the first to identify the tribal lineages in question as “Afghan.” Much older accounts referred to the inhabitants of this region as such, and it is clear that many of these lineages had an existing understanding of their ancestral relationship to one another. Because of the predominance of these communities connected by a common (Afghan) ancestry, I have decided upon “Afghan heartlands,” and use it to describe the largely mountainous region extending across present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan (including, but not limited to, the Sulaiman Mountains, the White Mountains, the Hindu Kush, the valley of Swat, and down the Indus River to Dera Ismail Khan/Bhakkar).

offering tantalizing clues concerning the existence of local Sufi *pirs* in a period in which little other evidence is extant. Of particular interest in uncovering these early saintly activities in the Afghan heartlands is Babur's description of the tomb of Shahbaz Qalandar, which he encountered after storming the fort of Bajaur in 1519.⁸⁵

To recall these formative events in the emperor's political career, Babur's victory at Bajaur was a significant one for the peripatetic monarch as he established inroads in the region. It was a particularly conclusive victory; a bloody engagement in which many Bajauris were slain by the Mughals' superior matchlock weapons.⁸⁶ Defeating the holders of the fortress was crucial from the perspective of political and military operations, as it opened up one of the few routes from Kabul to north India—a path that Babur had already attempted to traverse twice without success. Finally, but perhaps not least significantly, defeating the Bajauris held an important symbolic value for the Timurid ruler who was in the process of developing his political reputation and imperial identity. This was because the fort's occupants were, in Babur's estimation, *kafirs* (infidels) who were "rebels, and infidel customs had spread among them."⁸⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that he recalled the resulting bloodshed in particularly glowing terms, marveling at the number of bodies that lay scattered across the fort's walls and alleyways in the aftermath of the battle.⁸⁸

While it is critical to take Babur's claims about the religious status of the Bajauris with a grain of salt, his description of these events is nonetheless reflective of how the fledgling monarch had come to understand his role in this region. As the stakes of battle increased and military victories signaled more significant achievements, Babur's operations increasingly took on the tone of a "holy war," with the rebellious Afghans and others who inhabited this territory cast as *kafirs* pitted against a righteous monarch. It is fitting, then, that when Babur later came across the tomb of Shahbaz Qalandar, he looked disdainfully upon the grave, remarking on how its occupant had "led a part of the Yusufzai and Dilazak⁸⁹ into heresy"⁹⁰ some thirty to forty years prior. In light of what he claimed to know about the holy man, Babur ordered the shrine be leveled to the ground, after which he and his men rested on the spot and enjoyed the scenery that the area had to offer.⁹¹

Although only fleeting mention of Sufi activity Bajaur, Babur's description of Shahbaz Qalandar offers a rare insight into the impact of mystical figures in this region as early as the sixteenth century. To be sure, not only does his story of Shahbaz reveal that Sufis and other spiritual figures were in fact present and had successfully mobilized their own followings; but the presence of a shrine demonstrates the existence of a "tomb culture," or the veneration of deceased saints at the site of their burial. In contrast to his usual attentiveness to tribal or other ethnic identities, Babur does not mention whether Shahbaz Qalandar was himself a Yusufzai or Dilazak Afghan, nor does he specify what exactly constituted the *qalandar's* heretical claims. However, his reference to the *shaikeb's* grave reveals that *pirs* had formed lasting ties to this landscape, while the monarch's visceral reaction to the tomb gestures to the perceived threat that such figures posed to one who harbored political ambitions in the region. Indeed, given Babur's tense history with the tribal communities of Bajaur and its environs, his leveling of the *shaikeb's* tomb was not simply a demonstration against "heretical" behavior; it was an acknowledgment of the power of Sufi networks in creating solidarities across the region. By destroying the tangible reminder of Shahbaz Qalandar's presence, Babur

⁸⁵ Bajaur is located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of present-day Pakistan, to the north of Peshawar.

⁸⁶ Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 264-5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Two tribes that Babur identifies as "Afghan." Both were settled in the Bajaur region.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

attempted to cut away at some of the most powerful circuits connecting the disparate tribal groups of Bajaur and Swat—connections that could potentially compromise his control over this strategic territory.

Shahbaz Qalandar and Akhund Darweza: Saint and Theologian

If Shahbaz Qalandar represented an inkling of the emergent mystical activity in the Afghan heartlands, the polemical works of the Sunni theologian and resident of Nangarhar,⁹² Akhund Darweza (d. 1638), confirm the extent to which Sufi *pirs* had staked their claims in the region between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Akhund Darweza is most noted as the arch-critic of the Roshaniyya, a millenarian Sufi movement that erupted out of the Afghan heartlands during Akbar's reign. Indeed, in works like his tellingly-titled *Tazkirat al-Abrar wa al-Ashrar*, or “Memorandum of the Pious and the Wicked,” the *akhund* marshals together various strains of theological and historical knowledge to refute the claims of the Roshaniyya founder and *pir*, Bayazid Ansari (d. 1572-3), and demonstrate that his Afghan followers were in fact doomed to an afterlife in hell.⁹³ Turning their focus to this region and the events that shaped it in the late sixteenth century, scholars like William Sherman have foregrounded the Roshaniyya as the predominant force shaping the historical process of “Afghan becoming,” or Afghan identity formation. However, Darweza's work is also rich in information concerning other *shaikhs* who participated in the Sufi-messianic scene in the Afghan heartlands, presenting a spiritual field that was far more complex than merely a Roshaniyya one. These other, non-Roshaniyya figures and their role in “Afghan becoming” will form the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Before moving on, it is important to discuss in more detail the significance of the Roshaniyya movement and how scholars have interpreted its significance. The founder of the Roshaniyya, Bayazid Ansari, was born in the town of Jalandhar in the Punjab. As a young man growing up in Kaniguram,⁹⁴ he experienced tension with his family and found himself disappointed in the religious leadership in his locality. Soon, he began to hear celestial voices, and gathered disciples as word of his spiritual message spread rapidly through the region. Those who witnessed his miracles felt him worthy of sainthood and gave him the title *Pir-i Roshan*, or “Illuminated Master.” However, not all of those who came into contact with him believed in the veracity of his claims. Local political authorities put Bayazid to trial for claiming to be a *mabdi*, or messiah—a charge which Bayazid, for his part, repeatedly denied. As the conflict with the *Pir-i Roshan* continued to escalate, the Mughal governor of Kabul set out to find the spiritual leader and bring him to justice, initiating years of drawn-out battles between Mughal imperial forces and Bayazid's following. The *Pir-i Roshan* eventually perished in 1572-3, while most of his biological descendants were either killed or incorporated into the Mughal political order. With the death of the “Illuminated Master,” however, military conflict between the Mughals and the Roshaniyya ended, and the *pir*'s following in the region rapidly dispersed.⁹⁵

Bayazid Ansari was not an Afghan himself, nor did he ever claim this identity. Rather, as his name suggests, the *pir* and his family considered themselves descendants of the Ansar—the community who offered assistance to the Prophet Muhammad during his historic flight from Mecca to Medina. Nonetheless, the *Pir-i Roshan* was remarkably successful in drawing in Afghan followers, and Afghans ultimately made up the core of his discipleship. It is perhaps for this reason that

⁹² A region in present-day Afghanistan, surrounding the city of Jalalabad.

⁹³ Akhund Darweza, *Tazkirat al-Abrar wa al-Ashrar*, lithograph (Peshawar: Manzoor-e Aam Press, 1940), 84.

⁹⁴ A town approximately 700 kilometers west of Jalandhar, in present-day Pakistan.

⁹⁵ My narrative is drawn from William Sherman's in the introduction to his dissertation, “Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, and Afghan Becoming” (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2017), 3-4.

scholarly literature—particularly S.A.A. Rizvi’s thorough work—has depicted the Roshaniyya as a quintessentially “Afghan” movement, one that spoke specifically to them and united the disparate tribes of Afghans under a common banner.⁹⁶ However, while scholars like Rizvi contended that the movement created Afghan solidarity out of tribal discord, the ultimate inability of the *Pir-i Roshan*’s followers to stave off the Mughal incursions signaled the failure of that solidarity to truly breach Afghan tribal differences. The “restless tribes”⁹⁷ might briefly be united to challenge imperial authority, but beyond that, there was simply nothing to sustain their connection. The Roshaniyya, therefore, should be considered merely a blip of cooperation in an Afghan history otherwise characterized by conflict and internecine feuding.

In his recent dissertation “Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, and Afghan Becoming,” William Sherman has taken up this scholarly consensus, arguing that there was, in fact, nothing distinctively “Afghan” about Bayazid Ansari’s vision, and that the appeal of his message cannot be understood through the lens of “tribe” or “ethnicity.” Rather, through a careful and insightful reading of Bayazid’s work, Sherman demonstrates how the community formed by the *Pir-i Roshan* was the spiritual community of participants in Bayazid’s revelation, one in which anyone could take part by participating in the stipulated *zikr*, or commemorative practice. Noting that Bayazid Ansari’s emissaries extended far beyond the region dominated by Afghans, as well as drawing attention to his use of Arabic, Persian, and Pashto in communicating his message, Sherman further demonstrates the vast horizons of the *Pir-i Roshan*’s spiritual imaginary. It was only through the work of the Roshaniyya’s detractors like Akhund Darweza, he notes, that the movement came to be constituted as an “Afghan” one, with the failure of the Roshaniyya seen as symptomatic of a distinctly Afghan “tribalism”—a characterization that has followed Afghans down into the present day.⁹⁸

In the remainder of his dissertation, Sherman examines the afterlife of Bayazid Ansari in the imagination of Mughal and later British imperial authorities to trace the long historical development of Afghan associations with “tribalism” and heretical spiritual movements. However, his work still raises the question: What did *Afghans* do or think about themselves after the defeat of the Roshaniyya? What happened to the Sufi-messianic scene in the Afghan heartlands after Bayazid? Was “Afghan” identity defined, most centrally, by detractors and critics of the Afghans, or did Afghans themselves continue play a role in this process in divergent, yet impactful ways? I will take up these questions through an examination of the life and work of a self-identified Afghan Sufi *pir*, Shaikh Qasim Khalil, and the incorporation of his memory into Afghan histories. As I will argue, *pirs* like Qasim and their panegyrists actively engaged in forging a sense of Afghan distinctiveness while envisioning a future for the community that did not restrict them to the bounds of tribe or territory. In the end, it was a vision with all the expansiveness of Qasim’s—not the limitations of Darweza’s—that shone through the Afghan literary canon, and that became central to how the community imagined their place in history and in the world.

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In his “Memorandum of the Pious and the Wicked,” Akhund Darweza depicts an Afghan countryside alive with spiritual ferment, as Afghan and non-Afghan holy men alike appeared and claimed to possess knowledge from the unseen (*ghaib*). In his judgment, many of these men were not to be trusted. Some had been deceived by whispers from the deceitful *jinn*,⁹⁹ whose words, without the proper knowledge and awareness, could be misinterpreted as inspiration (*ilham*) from the divine.

⁹⁶ S.A.A. Rizvi, *Ranshaniyya Movement*, ed. J. Bowman (Leiden: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1968).

⁹⁷ Rizvi’s characterization.

⁹⁸ Sherman, “Mountains and Messiahs.”

⁹⁹ Spirits made of fire.

Others were downright impostors who falsely claimed descent from famed spiritual masters, or even called themselves God (*kbuda*). In Darweza's assessment, these false saints preyed on the particular ignorance of the Afghans, whom he argues would accept anyone claiming sainthood as the rare *shaiikh-i kamil*, or "perfect" spiritual leader.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the text, Darweza frequently alludes to his own efforts and those of his compatriots to steer the gullible Afghans away from the doom awaiting those who followed such *pirs*. However, his belief in the inherent ignorance of the Afghans remains a fixture of his account. In the end, he claims, he could only hope that God "the great one" would carry them from "their suspension in the waves of deviance to the shores of guidance."¹⁰¹

In his account of the "pious and wicked" surrounding his home in Nangarhar, Darweza draws a connection between upright rulership and the spiritual state of the dominion. When the Sultans of Swat ruled over these environs (*budud*), he claims, some of the great Sayyids¹⁰² of the age, among them Baba Hasan Abdal, came to settle in the region.¹⁰³ Their tombs graced the landscape and were powerful holy sites that sanctified the space. However, changes took place when temporal authority passed to the Dilazak tribe of Afghans—a group whom Darweza frequently alludes to and denigrates in his chronicle. Early evidence of this shift, he says, was the arrival of none other than Shahbaz Qalandar, the same "heretic" whose tomb Babur desecrated on his way through Bajaur and Swat. Indeed, Darweza remarks, it was during the reign of the Dilazak that Shahbaz first came down from Khurasan "dressed in the garb of a *qalandar*" and took up residence in the vicinity of Langar.¹⁰⁴ As the Dilazak who resided there were famed for the extremity (*ghayat*) of their ignorance, they did not question the truth of the *qalandar*'s claims. When Shahbaz alerted his followers that he would one day become "*padishah-i jahan*," or "king of the world," those in his coterie readily agreed.¹⁰⁵

Darweza dedicates the bulk of his description of Shahbaz Qalandar to making a forceful case for the fraudulent nature of his claims and the foolishness of those Afghans who believed in him. However, his story of the *qalandar* and his legacy offer powerful evidence of how Sufis and other mystical figures had begun to alter this region's sacred landscape. In one particularly revealing story, Darweza explains how Shahbaz once visited the tomb of Sayyid Mahmud, one of the venerable Sayyid brothers who had migrated to the region during the time of the Sultans of Swat. Rather than paying his respects to the late spiritual leader, he transformed the spot into a drinking assembly, telling his followers that the grave belonged to him and that his body would rest there when he left the physical world.¹⁰⁶ Shahbaz's time amongst his Afghan followers was not long lasting; he was purportedly killed and then beheaded by a group who refused to accept his claims to spiritual authority and kingship. However, due to the efforts of his followers, the *qalandar* ultimately received the gravesite that he had determined would be his. After his execution, Darweza says, Shahbaz's followers located his decapitated body and carried it to the tomb of Sayyid Mahmud, where then they buried it according to their master's wishes. Later, Darweza's brother Mulla Asghar Ghazi traveled to Langar to "break the knowledge" of Shahbaz, undoubtedly an attempt to clear the site of the holy man's memory. Whatever success he may have achieved, however, did not last long. When the Mughal emperor Akbar arrived in the region some years later, he named the site surrounding

¹⁰⁰ Darweza, *Tazkirat*, 170.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 159.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. There is a small town of Langar in Swat in present-day Pakistan which I believe is the location to which he is referring.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 160.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Shahbaz's tomb "Shahbazgarh," not knowing the true nature of the cursed (*la'in*) one who rested there.¹⁰⁷

In many ways, this story of Shahbaz Qalandar evinces close parallels with that of the later and more well-known *Pir-i Roshan*. Like the Roshaniyya founder, the *qalandar* from Khurasan fostered ambitions beyond the realm of the Afghans and the vicinity of Langar. In his vision, and in the eyes of his followers, he was the *padishah-i jahan*, or emperor of the world—a title that, by its very nature, could only be claimed by one individual. However, it is also important to note that a figure with such lofty ambitions found Langar an appropriate site for his body to rest. If we recall the story of another mystical figure from the previous chapter, Delhi's foundational Sufi master Qutb al-din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235), we can begin to understand the import of this decision and what it signified not only about Shahbaz's self-presentation, but about the physical space in which he hoped to be interred. Indeed, as Bakhtiyar Kaki's spiritual successor Nizam al-din Awliya (d. 1325) once explained, Kaki chose his final resting place in Delhi based on the "aroma of hearts" that he sensed exuding from the soil.¹⁰⁸ The subsequent interment of his body in this spiritually significant place only made the site more meaningful, as it attracted legions of other pious individuals hoping to be buried near the great spiritual master. In the same way, Shahbaz Qalandar's choice to take up the place of Sayyid Mahmud's grave was almost certainly prefaced by his understanding of the sanctity of that space—a holiness that, at least from the perspective of his disciples, would only continue to grow with the addition of his physical body.

Although Shahbaz expressed his authority in universal, not "Afghan" terms, his story is nonetheless significant in the longer historical process of "Afghan becoming." As we see from Akhund Darweza's account, Langar, a nucleus of Afghan settlement, is identified as a true center of an aspiring *pir's* world—a place from which he could draw the core of his discipleship, and which would serve as the geographical fulcrum of his legacy long after his death. In stark contrast to the perspective of empire, which viewed the Afghan heartlands as a "periphery" or "frontier" to be managed, this region formed the very center of Shahbaz Qalandar's spatial imaginary. Akhund Darweza's *tazkirat* makes it clear that, despite the efforts of Babur as well as his successors, Shahbaz's memory ran deep in Langar and the surrounding regions, perhaps even surpassing that of the Sayyid brothers so revered by him. The *qalandar* from Khurasan, without a doubt, set a precedent in the locality of his burial. In the following decades, Sufis and mystics who gathered disciples in this region would not only mobilize the space to make claims of sainthood; they would soon identify it, quite centrally, as "Afghan" space.

Shaikh Qasim Khalil and Akhund Darweza

In addition to Shahbaz Qalandar, Akhund Darweza confronts some of the saintly figures of his own time in his *tazkirat*, usually with the aim of identifying and contradicting the core of their spiritual claims. One of these individuals, to whom I will direct my attention for the remainder of the chapter, was Shaikh Qasim Khalil. Unlike Shahbaz, who came from Khurasan and then settled amongst the Afghans of Langar, Shaikh Qasim was himself an Afghan, belonging to the Khalil subsection of the Ghuri Khail, or Ghuri "clan."¹⁰⁹ Fortunately for our purposes, the historical record concerning this figure is a dense one, and there is significantly more material documenting Qasim's

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 161.

¹⁰⁸ Sijzi, *Morals*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ The two primary terms used to denote familial groupings of Afghans—"qaum" and "khail"—are not easily translatable as the English-language "tribe" and "clan." However, in texts like the eighteenth-century *Khulasat al-Ansab*, the author, Hafiz Rahmat Khan, typically uses "qaum" to describe a larger and broader grouping of Afghans (hence the translation to "tribe") while using "khail" to describe the smaller subgroups that formed within larger "qaums." I also follow Nile Green's translations in using these terms.

life than many of the other men and women who appear in Darweza's account. Drawing upon several of these documents, I will now consider the most significant aspects of Qasim Khalil's textual legacy, demonstrating how Afghan *shaikhs* began to create powerful associations between their spiritual leadership, space, and Afghan identity in the heartland regions.

In his *tazkirat*, Akhund Darweza introduces Qasim in his account of the “wicked ones” who deceive the ignorant masses of ordinary people (*awamm*). He identifies Qasim by his clan identity—Ghuri Khail—as well as the location where he first made his spiritual claims—Peshawar. According to him, Qasim first drew attention to himself by sitting beneath a tree.¹¹⁰ From there, word of the holy man's “contradictory faith” quickly began to circulate, and Qasim began to attract curious followers as well as the attention and consternation of local Mughal authorities. Moving swiftly to put an end to Qasim's activities, the Mughal governor of Kabul, Mirza Hakim (d. 1585), dispatched his commander by the name of Shadman Khan to find the *shaikh* and kill him. Hearing the news of this impending arrival, Qasim hurriedly fled the scene—heading first to Qandahar, and then onto Mecca, where he went on the *hajj* as a pretense of avoiding the Mughal commander.¹¹¹

For reasons not specified by Darweza, Qasim eventually returned from his journey and arrived back home in Peshawar. It was then that he began to claim his sainthood (*piri*). He provided evidence of this state with a genealogical tree, or *shajara*, which he claimed to have obtained from the descendants of Shaikh Abd al-Qadir Gilani (d. 1166), the widely renowned Sufi master and founder of the trans-regional Qadiri order. Darweza describes how he intervened in this situation and protested to Qasim's followers, insisting that the information on the tree was not even relevant to Qasim's spiritual claims because “*shaikhdom (shaikhukhiat)* is not dependent on ancestry (*ansab*).”¹¹² When Darweza took a look at Qasim's missive himself, he was even more outraged by the *pir's* posturing. This is because, he says, the paper that Qasim flaunted to his disciples was not even a genealogical tree at all. Rather, it was an order written by one Shaikh Husain requesting that the guardians of the roadways refrain from molesting Qasim and stealing his possessions. Darweza marvels at the ignorance of the *shaikh* in passing this off as a genealogical tree, but nonetheless admits that the document had its value. As it were, Qasim's descendants could travel anywhere with it and be left undisturbed.¹¹³

Akhund Darweza attributes various other sins to Qasim Khalil such as wine-drinking, a penchant for dancing and listening to music, and going about with a bare head and shaven face.¹¹⁴ As with other “false *pirs*,” he attributes Qasim's popularity to a general enmity towards the *‘ulama*, or religious scholars; those with the proper spiritual knowledge and training who might otherwise have guided gullible individuals towards the correct path.¹¹⁵ To Darweza's satisfaction, however, the false *pir* Qasim Khalil faced a reckoning during the reign of the emperor Akbar—the righteous monarch of the *tazkirat* and one of Darweza's stated hopes for the Afghans' deliverance. Indeed, Darweza says, sometime during his reign, Akbar sought out Shaikh Qasim Khalil and brought him to the city of Lahore.¹¹⁶ It is not clear how long Qasim remained there, nor what happened to him—Darweza does not specify, although evidence offered later in this chapter suggests that Qasim once again returned to Peshawar. Nonetheless, Darweza and other contemporary sources reveal how Akbar's son and successor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) conclusively put an end to the spiritual leader's activities.

¹¹⁰ Darweza, *Tazkirat*, 183.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 184.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Most likely late in the emperor's reign, when the Mughal capital had shifted to the western frontiers of the empire.

As Darweza recalls in his *tazkirat*, and Jahangir mentions in his own memoirs,¹¹⁷ when the emperor learned of Qasim's activities in 1606, he imprisoned the *shaiikh* and sent him to the fort of Chunar, deep in the heart of Mughal India along the banks of the Ganga.¹¹⁸ Over a thousand miles from his home, Qasim Khalil died and was buried in the place of his captivity, where his tomb remains standing to this day.¹¹⁹

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While Akhund Darweza's account of Qasim Khalil paints a particular image of the *pir* and offers a strong condemnation of his activities, it nonetheless yields crucial insights on the discursive field in which Qasim made his claims of sainthood. As we see from just a cursory view of Qasim's story, the Afghan heartlands in the sixteenth century was a site in which definitions of "sainthood" were constantly being reformulated, tested, and contested. From Darweza's perspective, the testimony of 'ulama, of which he was part, was crucial for determining whether a saint's claims were true or false. As he repeatedly claims, the ignorance of the Afghans who inhabited the countryside beyond Nangarhar was due to the fact that they had "never known" the 'ulama, or had even taken them as "enemies." However, as we see in this very same account, *shaiikhs* like Qasim and Shahbaz sought verification of their authority from beyond the body of religious intellectuals. For Qasim, his authenticity as a *pir* was verified by his descent from Abd al-Qadir Gilani, implying an embodied sainthood that transferred itself through biological descent. Clearly, such claims did not need the verification of the 'ulama—they were, at least in Qasim's understanding, self-evident, and would speak for themselves concerning the sainthood of a claimant *pir*.

My intention here is not to establish a dichotomy between the orthodox/urban/'ulama and heterodox/rural/Sufi, as my argument is that Darweza saw himself as an authority when it came to veracity of saintly claims, wherever they might originate. Rather, my hope is to demonstrate the ways in which his *tazkirat* demonstrates how mystical figures were defining sainthood in ways that would shape the future of the region and of Afghan identity. In particular, these definitions were ones that increasingly framed *biological* or "blood" descent¹²⁰—not necessarily spiritual training and initiation—as a critical component of sainthood. As we see in Darweza's account, this claim of ancestry was central to Qasim's presentation of himself as an authorized Sufi *pir*—it was the *shajara* from Mecca that he flaunted to his disciples, and that his following accepted as evidence of his greatness and ability to provide spiritual leadership.

If we take Akhund Darweza's *tazkirat* alone as evidence of how Qasim chose to represent himself, it would seem that the *shaiikh*, in a desperate bid to gain legitimacy where he had none, opted to draw upon supralocal, pan-Islamic symbols of power to demonstrate his authority: an argument, as we have seen, commonly applied to Afghans who broke parochial boundaries in their claims of sainthood. However, a reading of the literary output produced by Qasim and his following depict a remarkably different vision of the *pir*'s identity as a saint. Although familial descent indeed plays an important, even central role in the panegyric literature addressed to Qasim Khalil, it is a

¹¹⁷ Nur al-din Muhammad Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61. Jahangir refers to a certain "Shaikh Ibrahim" here; however, the description strongly suggests that he is referring to Qasim Khalil. This entry is from the year 1606.

¹¹⁸ Darweza, *Tazkirat*, 184.

¹¹⁹ Catherine Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 149.

¹²⁰ I have also debated at some length what term to use to describe this relationship. I have settled on "biological" for the sake of clarity, though I am aware that this term has modern, scientific connotations that are not reflected in the language of my sources. I also deploy the phrases "blood descent" or "blood lineage" with some reservation. As we will see in Chapter Five, Islamicate texts from this period rarely refer to "blood" as something that links individuals to one another. In order to describe the relationships between Qasim and his ancestors as clearly and succinctly as possible, however, I have opted to use these terms.

geographically local lineage—not a pan-Islamic one—that figures most prominently in the most detailed extant accounts of the *pir*'s life. To see why Qasim's identity as a *shaiikh* descended from a line of locally rooted Afghan *pirs* is significant, we will turn to a text produced explicitly at his own instruction: the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, or "Gifts of Qasim."

"The Gifts of Qasim": An Introduction

To the extent of my knowledge, the most lengthy and detailed testament to Qasim Khalil's life resides in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, a Persian text completed in 1603 or 1604 by one of the *shaiikh*'s disciples, who refers to himself only as "Husaini." In many ways, Husaini's account stands out among the existing Sufi panegyric texts produced in South Asia. For one, the text does not clearly follow the format of the two dominant genres of eulogistic mystical literature from the period—the *tazkira*, often translated as "biographical dictionary"; or the *malʿuzat*, a *shaiikh*'s recorded "conversations." Rather, the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* appears to draw upon elements of the two, resulting in a narrative that radically oscillates between different times and spaces throughout its duration. The text begins with a brief "autobiography" of the author himself, in which explains how he became attracted to the mystical path and how he found his spiritual master. Then, the narrative shifts to the perspective of Qasim, a transition noted by Husaini's remark: "I heard from my knowledgeable *pir*..."¹²¹ Throughout the remainder of the text, it is occasionally difficult to interpret when one is reading Husaini's words, and when one is hearing from Qasim himself. In some cases, Husaini makes clear interjections in which he states his own name, signaling to the reader that he is now commenting on what his *pir* has said. However, Qasim's use of "I" and "me" sometimes produces confusion about who is the intended speaker; an issue that I have attempted to navigate with care.

In addition to these outstanding elements, the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* is an unusual Sufi biographical text in that it is not written in prose, but poetry: more specifically, as a *masnawi*, or a poem written in rhyming couplets set to a certain meter. It is unclear why Husaini chose the *masnawi* in particular to tell his story of Qasim. However, we learn that the *shaiikh* himself instructed Husaini to write the work in verse because he knew of his disciple's particular gift with words.¹²² This detail about the origins of the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* is important to keep in mind while interpreting its contents, as it draws attention to the central role of the author in developing Qasim Khalil's image as a Sufi *pir*. Indeed, when quoting the words that his master spoke in the assembly, Husaini must adapt them to fit the metrical and other stylistic requirements of the *masnawi*. As such, we should consider the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* a collaborative work between saint and disciple, one that relies on the skill of the author to create a compelling and meaningful image of the saint.

Lastly, to the extent of my knowledge, the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* is the first known text dedicated to telling the stories of Afghan Sufi *pirs* in particular. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, not only is Qasim Khalil himself identified as an Afghan; he is situated within in a local as well as broader community of Afghan *pirs*, all of whom play a role in reinforcing his spiritual authority. This feature of *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* is significant for many reasons which will be explored here; however, perhaps the most important is that it offers a glimpse into the world of Sufi sainthood in the heartlands through the perspective of an Afghan Sufi master and his Afghan disciple. As I have previously argued, the historiography of the central Afghan lands in this period has thus far lacked this kind of perspective, instead relying solely on texts like Darweza's to understand what Sufi saints meant to the Afghan inhabitants of the region. If, as William Sherman has argued, increasingly developed articulations of Afghan identity were indeed a response to the Roshaniyya and its failure, it is still worth considering what Afghans *themselves* did in the aftermath of these events, and what

¹²¹ Husaini, "Tuhfa-yi Qasimi," Ms. IvC 261, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, fol. 13.

¹²² Ibid, fol. 12.

their role was in articulating Afghan identity following Bayazid's movement. We will now then turn to a close reading of the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* to examine what it says about Sufi sainthood, "Afghanness," and space in the Afghan heartlands in the aftermath of Bayazid Ansari's revelation.

Reading the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*

In the introduction to his story of Qasim Khalil, the otherwise enigmatic Husaini offers a few key details about his past and his identity. Following the death of his father, he says, a scholar (*alim*) who imparted many lessons to him, he was inspired to seek out knowledge wherever it might reside. Striving to come out of the "eternal night" brought on by his loss, he immersed himself in study, turning to and mastering *usul al-fiqh*, or the roots of law. However, it was a chance meeting with a "man of the path" (*mardi-yi rah*), one Shaikh Ishaq from Heelan, that marked the true beginning of his spiritual transformation. Then it was that the voice of his own heart sounded in his ear, urging him to "hold fast to the *dargah* (hospice) of Qasim/because he has 100,000 disciples like you."¹²³ The voice ensured Husaini that if he were to accept Qasim's intercession, all of his work would become easy, and that he would be transported from the realm of existence (*basti*) to the realm of non-existence (*fana*). Agitated by this flash of inspiration, Husaini left the cell in which he had confined himself and headed resolutely towards Peshawar, the site of Qasim's residence.

When he arrived at the *pir's* hospice, Husaini witnessed an astonishing sight. Before him were innumerable faces in expressions of ecstasy: people sitting together wailing and groaning, some who seemed possessed by wild spirits, and others who had gone hoarse from speaking and supplicating.¹²⁴ As he waited, he became increasingly disquieted at not having seen the *pir* himself. When one of the *kehadims*, or servitors of the hospice, at last summoned him forward to see the *shaiikh*, Husaini was instantly transformed. With one look at the *pir*, he says, he became a follower of Qasim and his heart was "filled with the light of that believer."¹²⁵

Having introduced himself and the titular *shaiikh*, Husaini then transitions to a new narrative mode in which Qasim Khalil assumes the role as the primary narrator. Here, the Sufi begins by introducing his biological ancestor, Mir Dad—the founder of his spiritual lineage and one of the central figures in the text. Through the numerous recollections offered by Husaini's *pir*, we learn a considerable amount of information about Mir Dad's life and exploits, including the name of a woman he married as well as the name of *shaiikh* who was likely his own spiritual master. However, rather than detailing the particulars of Mir Dad's spiritual practice, Qasim and Husaini both elaborate most thoroughly on the saint's role as what Nile Green has called an "embodied blessed man"¹²⁶: one who enacts his will on physical geography and the human populations that inhabit it. This emphasis on the Afghan Sufi *shaiikh* as an interlocutor between the divine and the human would be shared across Afghan histories from the period, suggesting the powerful role that these *pirs* played in cementing a vision of Afghan identity intimately tied to the physical landscape of Peshawar and the lands surrounding it.

In one of the most fascinating accounts of Mir Dad's role as a blessed figure in this space, Qasim begins by explaining how his ancestor once saved the Afghans from their imminent doom at the hands of a ruthless or military commander. As Qasim recalled to his assembly, during the time of Mir Dad, "the Afghans" learned of an *amir* by the name of Zu'nun Arghun who had made plans to invade their territory and take captives.¹²⁷ Qasim does not elaborate on the identity of this

¹²³ Ibid, fol. 11.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, fol. 12.

¹²⁶ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

¹²⁷ Husaini, "Tuhfa-yi Qasimi," fol. 28.

Zu'nun; however, I have tentatively identified him as a real historical figure who lived during the time of Babur (d. 1530). In his memoirs, Babur refers to one Zu'nun Arghun as something of an adversary of his own house, the Timurids. He describes him as a chess-lover known for his "avarice and stinginess," recalling how the commander relished the title "Lion of God" supposedly given to him by a prominent *shaiikh* known as "the Qutb."¹²⁸ Whether or not this story refers to the same individual, the Zu'nun of the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* certainly fits Babur's description, suggesting the somewhat tangential point that the memory of the Arghunid dispensation,¹²⁹ usually absent from narratives of Afghan history, was alive and well among them during this period.

To return to Qasim's story: when the Afghans learned of this threat to their livelihood, they turned to the *shaiikh* Mir Dad and prayed for his intercession. Referring to him as the "*pir* of the faith" and the "location of the *qibla*,"¹³⁰ they claimed that no other path to their deliverance existed save the aid of the *shaiikh*.¹³¹ Mir Dad, for his part, accepted the Afghans' supplications, and began to pray for divine intervention that would cover the path of the enemy just as Sikandar, or Alexander the Great, had famously done to stop the invaders Gog and Magog.¹³² Willing that "never would anyone come from that side/to this side, to engage that people in battle,"¹³³ he asked that the snow would fall so heavily throughout the night that the way to the Afghans would not be visible from any direction. That way, if "Gog," or Zu'nun, came in pursuit of them, he would not be able to find the way.

That night, Zu'nun had a prophetic dream. In this dream, which occurred to him several times throughout the night, a man appeared before him and struck him across the face with a stick. Puzzled at the meaning of this vision, Zu'nun turned to one Mehtar Ibn Khalil, presumably an older and respected individual in his entourage, and asked about what he had seen. As an attentive individual hearing Qasim's story would have already surmised, Ibn Khalil concluded that the man in the dream must be Mir Dad, whom "even a lion could not defeat."¹³⁴ In his arrogance, the *amir* disregarded Ibn Khalil's warning and resolved to continue towards the mountain passes. Yet when Zu'nun and his army drew close to the Afghans' domicile, they found themselves surrounded by a blinding snowfall. They tried as they could to press on through the storm, but the road forward ultimately proved impossible to traverse. As Ibn Khalil had foreseen, and Mir Dad had willed, Zu'nun and his men were forced to give up their pursuit and they turned back to Qandahar in shame. "By the assistance of the heart of Mir Dad, this people/went on, by the striving of the people of God,"¹³⁵ Husaini humbly concludes.

This anecdote about the unfortunate fate of Zu'nun Arghun is just one among many demonstrating Mir Dad's spiritual prowess and authority in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*. However, I have singled it out here for the way in which it reflects the overall sentiment and overarching message of Husaini's work. As I have suggested, it is not the doctrinal aspects of the Sufi *shaiikhs'* identities that the author foregrounds in his account of Mir Dad and his successors; it is their position as earthly enactors of God's will and protectors of vulnerable human populations. In this particular story, the vulnerable ones are "the Afghans," who turn to the Sufi *pir* as their "only path to relief" in an hour of dire need. As the final outcome of the story also demonstrates, God was on the side of the *shaiikh*,

¹²⁸ Babur, *Baburnama*, 206. "Qutb," meaning "pole," was a common epithet for Sufi masters.

¹²⁹ The Arghunids were a Turco-Mongol dynasty who ruled in southern Afghanistan and Sind in the sixteenth century.

¹³⁰ The direction to which one directs his or her prayers.

¹³¹ Husaini, "Tuhfa-yi Qasimi," fol. 28.

¹³² *Ibid*, fol. 29.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*. This quote also resonates with the description of Zu'nun Arghun offered in the *Baburnama*, and seems to be a play on Zu'nun's title "Lion of God."

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, fol. 30.

with the miraculous snowfall confirming Mir Dad's role as the leader and protector of the community who called for his aid. Through this anecdote, Qasim and Husaini thus communicate a complex message about Qasim's ancestor and the individuals who sought his intercession. In addition to confirming the *pir's* closeness (*wilayat*) to the divine and power to unite the Afghans under his protection and authority (his *malayat*),¹³⁶ they suggest that the Afghans were in fact a blessed population by virtue of Mir Dad's leadership, which manifested itself in their favor during a time of incredible difficulty.

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To develop these ideas about Mir Dad, his family lineage, and the Afghans a little further, I would now like to draw attention to another anecdote told by Qasim about his exalted ancestor. In this case, "the Afghans" are not depicted as an undifferentiated community, nor are they cast as the collective victims of an external threat. Rather, this story recalls how Mir Dad was once prompted to discipline disobedient Afghans and subject them to his authority—something that he deftly accomplishes by exploiting his distinctive closeness to the divine.

This story describes the fate of one named Shaikh Ahmad, who appears to have been something of a *pir* or guide to Mir Dad himself. One day, Qasim says, Shaikh Ahmad unwittingly led his band of horses and sheep onto land owned by the Yusufzai—an Afghan tribe with extensive settlements around Peshawar who appear several times in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*. When the Yusufzai noticed that the *shaikh* had trespassed into their territory, they sent out a group of men who found Shaikh Ahmad and beat him severely with sticks.¹³⁷ Mir Dad heard the news of what had happened to the *shaikh* and was outraged, promptly intervening with his prayers. This time, however, Mir Dad channeled his invocations not towards redemption, but the punishment of those who had disrespected the miscalculating yet venerable Sufi *shaikh*. Turning his attention to the Baba Qasra, a river on which the Yusufzai relied for their livelihood, Mir Dad prayed that it would dry up so completely that "no birds (would even be) upon it, flapping their wings."¹³⁸

Once again, the divine answered Mir Dad's prayers for intercession. Above the Baba Qasra, the sun began to shine so intensely that all of the water within it evaporated, leaving nothing but a deceptive mirage in its wake. The next morning, the Yusufzai went down to the river and grasped at what appeared to be their life-giving water, only to find that it was an illusion.¹³⁹ Distraught and bewildered, the Yusufzai then turned to none other than Mir Dad, the same individual who brought this punishment upon them. They prayed "upon the soul" of the *shaikh* and insisted to him: "we are among the disciples of the *shaikh*!"¹⁴⁰ Accepting their supplications, Mir Dad instructed the Yusufzai on how they might restore their lost river. In order to bring it back, he told them, they must climb the mountains and go to the very source of the Baba Qasra, where they would be forced to break open the ice with picks until the water burst forth and refilled their empty river.¹⁴¹

This incident with Shaikh Ahmad is not Mir Dad's only encounter with the Yusufzai in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*—we learn somewhat later in the text that the *pir* lost his life a battle involving members of the tribe.¹⁴² However, the implications of this anecdote for Mir Dad's relationship with the Afghans, including the Yusufzai, is communicated clearly: that Qasim's ancestor possessed the capacity to bring even the most recalcitrant Afghans under the cloak of his authority. To be sure, as

¹³⁶ For more on the distinction between "*wilayat*" and "*malayat*," see Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

¹³⁷ Ibid, fol. 16.

¹³⁸ Ibid, fol. 17.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid, fol. 32.

Qasim was sure to remind his audience, it was only after those who had beaten Shaikh Ahmad subjected themselves to the *pir*—“we are disciples of the *shaikeb*!”—that Mir Dad saw it fit to revoke his punishment. Like the story of Zu‘nun Arghun, Mir Dad’s relationship to people and physical geographies is also central to his demonstration of spiritual power in this situation. Indeed, Mir Dad’s ability to transform the landscape and influence the fate of human individuals, especially those who defied him, only serves to verify that God is “with” him—that he could exploit this connection to punish and then redeem any Afghans who might venture to challenge him. To recall that these are the stories that Qasim Khalil *chose* to tell about his ancestor, we can infer once again that Qasim and Husaini were most concerned with, or considered it most effective for their purposes, to demonstrate Mir Dad’s role as an embodied blessed man *in this space*—not as the proponent of a specific strand or method of Sufi practice.

Sainthood, Ancestry, and Space

Now that we have seen two significant demonstrations of Mir Dad’s capacity as a *pir* of the Afghans, I will now turn to the significance of Qasim’s descent from this great *shaikeb*, and the imagined connection between this family of men and the specific place from which they came.

As mentioned previously, Qasim Khalil is the primary narrator in the *Tubfa-yi Qasimi*, with some additions made by his panegyrist and disciple, Husaini. As the name of the text also implies, the text is most centrally about Qasim himself, and is a demonstration of his knowledge, authority, and special relationship with the divine. However, Qasim’s repeated tales about the miracles of his ancestor, Mir Dad, as well as others in the direct biological and spiritual lineage,¹⁴³ are no doubt included because of how they contribute to and reinforce the image of the titular *shaikeb*. As it stands in the *Tubfa-yi Qasimi*, Mir Dad’s miracles are significant in part because they echo the remarkable spiritual abilities of his biological successor, Qasim, who, just as his great-grandfather before him, possesses the ability to both control and protect the Afghan populations surrounding Peshawar.

If this is not demonstrated through the anecdotes told about Mir Dad, it is confirmed through interjections in the text made by the author himself. In many instances in the *Tubfa-yi Qasimi*, it is Husaini’s commentary that underlines the importance of family ancestry in Qasim’s saintly identity, in addition to illustrating his intimate connection with the land where he and his ancestors were born. While we have considered the imagined influence of Qasim and his ancestors on physical geographies populated by Afghans, we will now look more specifically at how these spaces contributed to the spiritual greatness of this lineage in return, and how Qasim Khalil and his ancestors were imagined to ensure the longevity and sanctity of the place of their birth.

The city of Peshawar is mentioned multiple times in the *Tubfa-yi Qasimi*, first noted as the residence of Qasim Khalil and the location of his hospice.¹⁴⁴ It is mentioned again when Husaini recalls his first encounter with Qasim, during which he lists the names of the *shaikeb*’s male progeny who exhibited the same qualities as their father—four sons named Kabir, Farid, Noor, and Wasil.¹⁴⁵ Remarking on these men and the city of their birth, Husaini eulogizes:

A thousand praises on that land/where such men were born//from the land of
Peshawar/that place is their homeland//let this city be fortified by their footsteps/
let it be far from dearth and calamity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ibid, fol. 12-13.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, fol. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, fol. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

The city of Peshawar appears again in a third and particularly rich passage written, to my understanding, from the perspective of Husaini. In this part of the text, the author chronicles Qasim's journey from Peshawar to the Hijaz, where he was initiated into the Qadiri order by an unnamed, yet prominent Sufi *shaiikh*. If we recall Akhund Darweza's account of this journey from earlier in the chapter, it had been one taken out of necessity: Qasim fled westwards when threatened by Shadman Khan, Mirza Hakim's commander. In the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, however, no such mention of this threat is made. Rather, Husaini implies that Qasim traveled to the Hijaz out of spiritual thirst, where he was embraced by an eminent *pir* who accepted him as a disciple and *khalifa*, or successor.

After imbibing many lessons from this Qadiri *pir*, Husaini says, Qasim received permission to return home. He narrates his *pir*'s return to Peshawar as such:

In ending his journey, he set foot on the path/and came to his own city, after a long time//many congratulating Peshawaris/came forth together, passion and excitement (*shur o shar*) among them//each of them arrived with heavy steps/such fortune (*daulat*) they saw from God//thousands of people, from near and far/came upon him like ants and locusts//he took a disciple(s) and showed him the way/and pulled him from the well in which he was drowning//he made the path from form (*surat*) to meaning (*ma'ni*)/as such, full of perfection, he turned to the world//like his great-grandfather (*farjad*) and grandfather (*jad*) had done, and his perfect grandfather/to him, the friend of God, Qasim, was born//you the mountain (*kohi*), who is Mir Dad reborn.¹⁴⁷

Reading this passage together with the others that invoke the city of Peshawar, we can properly glean the important nexus between space or homeland, family lineage, and saintly authority in this text. Indeed, while Qasim's initiation into the Qadiri order is undoubtedly significant to his spiritual identity in his biography, it is not the stipulated path of the Qadiri way, nor of the unnamed Sufi who initiated him that is foregrounded. Rather, it is his descent from Mir Dad and the subsequent chain of *pirs* in this line, who as we have seen, were imagined to preside both over Peshawar and the broader imagined community of Afghans who inhabited the heartland regions. Qasim is, as Husaini says, "Mir Dad reborn": the literal reincarnation of his biological ancestor who enacted miracles to the benefit of all those who sought his intercession. More specifically, the story of Qasim's return to Peshawar reinforces the relationship of this lineage to the city in which all of its prominent male members were born. When Qasim arrives in the city—the place identified as his homeland (*mawa*) and the land of his ancestors—he is greeted with joy by its residents, whom he subsequently initiates as disciples and shows the way of the Sufi path. Once again, we must recall that this is the very place that Husaini, in the same breath in which he introduced Qasim's blessed sons, praised as the native land of such men, whose footsteps (*iqdam*) "fortified" the city from which they came. As the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* compellingly demonstrates, Qasim and his ancestors were blessed *because* they were born in Peshawar, and the continuation of their line would ensure its perpetuity and prosperity.

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The sentiments reflected in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* about sainthood, biological lineage, and space echo the research of el-Sayed al-Aswad conducted in the Nile delta of Egypt. In the city of Tanta and the surrounding localities, al-Aswad found that the biological genealogy of local *shaiikhs* had "transformed," in his words, into spiritual genealogy, a phenomenon that could be linked to "the inhabitation and perpetuation of the local landscape."¹⁴⁸ Demonstrating how this was imagined, al-

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, fol. 38.

¹⁴⁸ el-Sayed al-Aswad, "Spiritual Genealogy: Sufism and Saintly Places in the Nile Delta," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 501.

Aswad explains an assertion made by one named Shaikh Hasan, a local leader of the Shinnawiyya Sufi lineage. According to al-Aswad, members of this lineage in Tanta, including the *shaiikh* himself, often repeated the maxim: “the son of the *shaiikh* is a *shaiikh*.”¹⁴⁹ When al-Aswad questioned them about this, reminding his interlocutors that not all of one’s male successors would become *shaiikhs* themselves, Shaikh Hasan responded by establishing a difference between “sons of the mud,” or biological descendants, and “sons of the religion,” or spiritual descendants. The ideal situation, he claimed, would be one in which a *shaiikh*’s biological son—his “son of the mud”— followed the mystical path of his father, thus becoming a “son of the religion.” This prospect was a particularly promising because biological sons were primed to possess the “natural or innate (*fitri*) disposition” for the role of their fathers, something “without which all intellectual and practical efforts would be fruitless.”¹⁵⁰ As al-Aswad concluded, spiritual genealogy in Tanta appeared to be understood as if “it were part of the biological nature of people that should be nourished by religious or Sufi experience.”¹⁵¹

Without a doubt, neither Husaini nor his *pir* would have argued that all of Mir Dad’s progeny possessed the capacity to become great *shaiikhs*. However, in the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, biological descent from a great Sufi master equips the individuals in this line with an “innate disposition” that the remarkable among them fostered on their path to becoming Sufi *pirs*. The transfer of this disposition was also crucial to the perpetuation of Mir Dad’s legacy in Peshawar and the regions beyond. Indeed, as a blood descendant of the *pir*, Qasim Khalil was “Mir Dad reborn”; he alone could carry out the responsibilities entrusted to his great-grandfather—responsibilities which included ensuring the longevity and protection of the city of Peshawar and intervening on behalf of the broader community of “Afghans.” As I have argued, the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* is not merely a text about Mir Dad, Qasim, and this family lineage in Peshawar; it is about *all* Afghans, who, much like in the earlier *Lata’if-i Quddusi*, are constituted as a community by virtue of their subservience to a Sufi *shaiikh*. In the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, however, the binding Sufi saint is himself an Afghan, an identity that is repeatedly evoked as central to his identity and claims to authority. In the imagination of Husaini and his *pir*, it takes an Afghan to lead the community of Afghans, not only to ensure their physical safety on earth, but to shepherd them along the correct spiritual path and act as their most powerful and effective intercessors with the divine.

This importance of being *Afghan* as well as a descendant of Mir Dad is further demonstrated by the inclusion of stories concerning an array of other saints, past and present, who were also identified as such. This includes, perhaps most importantly, a lengthy reference to Hasan Afghan, the disciple of Baha al-din Zakariya mentioned in the previous chapter. In the middle of the text, Husaini quotes the *Fawa’id al-Fu’ad*’s contents nearly verbatim (though in verse), describing the unlettered Hasan’s miraculous ability to point out lines from the Qur’an as well as the other markers of his spiritual prowess mentioned in Nizam al-din’s *mal’uzat*.¹⁵² Another text by Husaini, the prose *Asrar al-Afghan*, even includes Hasan Afghan as a biological ancestor of Qasim—a fascinating coopting of a renowned fourteenth-century Afghan into the direct ancestral line of the Peshawari *pir*.¹⁵³ If we recall how the stories of great saints were incorporated into mystical literature to confirm

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 504.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 505.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Husaini, “Tuhfa-yi Qasimi,” fol. 19.

¹⁵³ Husaini, “Asrar al-Afghan,” Ms. or. oct. 1250, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Berlin. Understanding the “real” historical relationship between Qasim’s family and Hasan Afghan is a difficult one. While I acknowledge the possibility that Qasim’s family had long traced themselves to Hasan Afghan, it is also likely that this coopting was a relatively recent phenomenon to the production of the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* and *Asrar al-Afghan*. In the latter case—the one I believe to be

and bolster the authority of the text's central figures, it then becomes clear that Qasim Khalil's spiritual greatness is not solely about his familial relationship to Mir Dad. It was also crucially linked to his Afghan identity, and the fact that he is one among many remarkable Sufis who historically belonged to that community.

As I have suggested, attention to the discursive world of Sufi *shaiikh* rooted in the Afghan heartlands defies the notion that the association between Sufi sainthood and Afghan identity was primarily a preoccupation of Afghans in north India or that it emerged out of a concern to compete with the Afghans' Mughal overlords. As a close reading of the 1603/4 work on Qasim Khalil suggests, Sufi *pirs* and their panegyrists in Peshawar drew upon the legacy of their predecessors in the region, imagining a singular Afghan community with a privileged position in the cosmic order. The importance of the local environment in shaping Qasim Khalil's vision of sainthood and Afghan identity is again noted in his hagiography's emphasis on very particular spaces. As we have seen throughout the text, to be Afghan is not only to share in a heritage of renowned Sufi masters like Hasan Afghan or Mir Dad, but to share in a physical geography that becomes both sacred and Afghan space through the aegis of these blessed men. As Husaini argues in his text, as long as the biological lineage of Mir Dad's *silsila* persists in the region through his living descendants, it will be space will be one in which Afghans can live and flourish protected by their own Sufi *pirs*. The Afghans of Husaini's work are, to put it simply, rooted in an Afghan landscape, and their *pirs* are special because they share in that local connection.

Conclusion: Afghan and Universal

In his influential work on Afghans and Sufi sainthood, Nile Green has drawn attention to the critical role of *shaiikhs* in “making space” for Afghans who put down roots in the Indian subcontinent. In his analysis, the rise of the Mughals in the sixteenth century—and subsequent decline of the Afghan sultanates—changed the game for Afghans in Hindustan, whom he refers to as an Afghan “diaspora.”¹⁵⁴ He draws attention to this through an early seventeenth-century history of the Afghans, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* of Nimat Allah Harawi, which I will examine more closely in Chapter Four. Produced in the context of the Mughal court during the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), this text provided a long *durée* history of the Afghan *qaum* extending back to Biblical times as well as an account of historical Afghan *shaiikhs* categorized by their primary tribal lineage—Sarbani, Batni, or Ghurghusti. Attempting to explain why Harawi eschewed spiritual affiliation for tribal identity, Green situates the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* within what he describes as the “competitive encounter” between the “ethnic” groups who converged in the Mughal court in the early seventeenth century. According to him, this text was “inextricably bound to an early modern politics of appraisal of the self and denigration of the other.”¹⁵⁵ Given the Afghans' fragile position in the new Mughal order, it became incumbent upon Harawi to cultivate a “tribal ethos”¹⁵⁶ in order to uphold Afghan solidarity—an idea reflected in the “blur(ring of) the boundaries between religion and kinship as defined by a blessed man's tribal and Sufi lineage.”¹⁵⁷

Green calls this phenomenon “tribalizing sainthood,”¹⁵⁸ and argues that it had important ramifications for Afghans in the Mughal period. In categorizing Afghan Sufis based on their tribal identities as opposed to their spiritual affiliation, the *tarikhs* essentially demonstrated that henceforth,

more probable—the assertion of a family connection between the two individuals demonstrates, to me, a powerful, discursive linking of a historical Afghan “community” with a long history of mystical distinction.

¹⁵⁴ Green, *Making Space*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 88.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 89.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 82.

an Afghan's *pir* would be determined by the tribe of his or her birth: Sarbanis would follow Sarbani *pirs*, Batnis would follow Batnis, and the same would apply to Ghurghustis.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, this vision of sainthood stood in rank contrast to Afghan spiritual engagements during the Lodi and Suri periods, during which, we have seen, Afghans blended seamlessly into the spiritual fabric of northern India. In the end, Green's analysis suggests that the outcome of the Mughal-Afghan interface in South Asia ultimately involved erecting new boundaries that limited the scope of Afghan engagement with the world. To be Afghan in this environment of competition necessarily involved accepting an ethnic insularity—one that even Sufi *shaiikhs* were imagined to reinforce.

This interpretation of the relationship between sainthood and Afghan becoming finds some resonance in the dissertation of William Sherman. As his work demonstrates, "becoming Afghan" in the Mughal period and beyond entailed the adoption of tribe as the pre-eminent ordering category of Afghan identity, a trend that could be traced to Akhund Darweza's critique of the Roshaniyya. This model, too, suggests something of an inward turn amongst Afghans who, through their participation in millenarian movements like Bayazid Ansari's, had once dared to break free from the limitations of kin and tribe, only to adopt those constraints when the Roshaniyya were defeated. To some extent, these arguments make sense—the vast majority of Afghan texts of this period incorporate tribe into their narratives of Afghan history, and it is clear that tribal identities were an important orientation for communities in the heartlands as well as in north India. However, as I have argued in this chapter, Afghans and their Sufi *pirs* who lived in the post-Bayazid context did not readily resign themselves to the "tribal" fate that imperial forces would attempt to impose upon them. Rather, Afghan *shaiikhs* like Qasim drew upon the cosmopolitan legacy of Sufi sainthood long in existence among the Afghans, once exemplified by individuals like Hasan Afghan and Shahbaz Qalandar. In the rich imaginary of the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, Afghans were not provincial, or even "tribal" people—they were brought in close contact with God through the intercession of their Sufi *pirs*, who in turn imagined Afghan space as a veritable center of the cosmos; a fitting location for a saintly figure with universal ambitions to root himself.

If the expansive dimensions of Qasim's spiritual vision remain unclear from the previous analysis of his hagiography, one additional anecdote from the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi* should demonstrate it clearly. This particular story involves Mir Dad and one of his followers, Allahdad. In this section of the work, the disciple Allahdad, sitting in Mir Dad's assembly, offers to go and visit the cosmic mountain in the Islamic tradition, the Koh-i Qaf, to bring back news to his *pir*. With Mir Dad's permission, he does so, then returns to the *majlis* to describe what he saw. Husaini narrates Allahdad's story as follows:

After some time, he returned from the mountain// and expressed the conditions (present) on that mountain/ he delivered this news to a crowd of people// that I saw on that great mountain/ a river flowing like the tears of an orphan (*yatim*)// also a meadow, and in it, a house/ in that house an intoxicated good man// ... I asked of him, who is your *pir*?// he said, "I am a *murid* of the guiding *shaiikh*/ whose name is Khwaja Mir Dad// from the grace of that friend of God (*wali*) Mir Dad, this *faqir*/ became a prince of the land of unity."¹⁶⁰

As this memorable anecdote relays to Qasim Khalil's audience, the leading *shaiikh* of his lineage—his flesh and blood ancestor, as well as the transmitter of his spiritual knowledge—attracted followers from beyond the local or even Afghan community as a whole. Mir Dad's message extended to and accommodated by figures who inhabited an entirely different (and quite literally, more "universal") terrain: the cosmic mountain that encompassed the entire world. Taking

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 91.

¹⁶⁰ Husaini, "Tuhfa-yi Qasimi," fols. 18-19.

this story into account, we can see that there is no imagined contradiction between being a locally rooted, Afghan *pir* and being one whose message extends far beyond the boundaries of that region. Mir Dad is *both* the guide of the Afghans, and an active participant in the unlimited world of Sufi engagement with the divine.

Chapter Three: Sovereignty

Introduction

In the previous chapters, we saw how the demise of the Lodi sultanate (r. 1451-1526) introduced an urgency to forge an Afghan identity and community in north India. As the emerging Mughal dispensation threatened to displace entrenched Afghans and their allies, those with ties to the ruling Lodi elite gathered around the spiritual master Shaikh ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), who actively advocated for Afghan solidarity to repel the threat of Babur and Humayun’s armies. When the Mughals finally emerged victorious in the 1550s, establishing an empire over which they ruled as “millennial sovereigns,” the nascent Afghan community was forced to shift its attention elsewhere. They chose the region that India-based authors referred to as “Roh,” a loosely defined territory on the northwestern fringes of the Mughal empire where tribal lineages of Afghans had lived for centuries. There, Sufi masters drew disparate groups of Afghans as well as non-Afghans into the fold of their protection, laying claim to physical spaces for the benefit of an imagined Afghan community. Through the perpetuation of their blessing power in tombs, texts, and the living lineages of their descendants, these individuals transformed the region into an Afghan “homeland” par excellence, mapping out the territories that would occupy a central location in the Afghan communal imaginary for years to come.

In this third chapter, we will shift our attention to another group of Afghans distinct from Qasim Khalil’s followers: those who remained in northern India following the rise of the Mughals. In spite of the restrictions on Afghan activity brought about by the emergence of Mughal authority, the Afghans of Hindustan continued to offer significant contributions to the forging of Afghan identity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In particular, their work took the form of historical chronicles documenting the events of the Lodi (r. 1451-1526) and Suri (r. 1540-1555) periods of Afghan rule. In a departure from much contemporary scholarship, I will argue that these early Afghan histories were far from straightforward recollections of the past. Rather, they were productive ruminations on what it meant to be an Afghan in light of the rise and fall of Lodi and Suri political leadership. The result of these efforts was the creation of a distinct vision of “Afghan” kingship—one believed to have been embodied in the eclipsed sultans of Delhi whose fortunes, in turn, were inextricably tied to that of the greater Afghan community. As this chapter will also demonstrate, this emergent vision of Afghan kingship was borne of a sustained engagement with some of the most significant political and ethical discourses of the day. In using these resources to explain the particularities of their past, Mughal-era Afghan historians not only laid out the narrative building blocks of their shared history, but also made a strong ethical case “the Afghan way:”¹⁶¹ one that would quietly, yet powerfully challenge Mughal claims to authority in the seventeenth century.

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Histories of the Afghan sultanates of Delhi written from the perspective of the Mughal period have typically been approached in one of two ways. Most commonly, scholars have assessed and used them as historical sources based on their perceived “reliability” in relating events of the past. This reliability is based on the author’s perceived ability to accurately recall dates and keep events in chronological order. For example, scholars like Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, one of the foremost authorities on early modern Afghan history, have preferred texts like the *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi* of Abbas Khan Sarwani and the *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi* of Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi for precisely these reasons. By contrast, texts like the *Afsana-yi Shaban* of Muhammad Kabir, referenced in the

¹⁶¹ “The Afghan way” is borrowed from Engseng Ho’s “the ‘Alawi way,” used to describe the moral and ethical vision constructed by the Hadrami Sayyids of Yemen. I will delve into this idea in greater detail in Chapter Four. See Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

introduction to this dissertation, have been pegged as “unreliable” due to their noted lack of these features. This enduring fixation on the “reliability” of texts points to one central assumption about them: that they are either straightforward (or inaccurate) recollections of the past, or potential mines of “facts” that must carefully be parsed from the extraneous and inaccurate details around them.

Beyond a resistance to chronology, the excess of “fantastical” stories within many of these histories—tales of Sufi miracles, strange happenings (*aja'ib*), and mysterious moments of divine intervention—have also rendered some texts unusable by contemporary historians.¹⁶² Fortunately, a few contemporary scholars have provided important correctives to this issue, offering insights on how the “non-factual” details of the past can shed light on important aspects of socio-cultural relations and spiritual life in South Asia. For example, in their work on Sufis and Sufi practice in the early modern world, Nile Green and Shahzad Bashir have pointed to the charismatic power of Sufi leaders in forging durable social networks and mediating relationships between earthly communities and the divine.¹⁶³ These authors have found productive ways to work with the supernatural elements and historical inconsistencies of premodern texts. Still, many recent works on Afghan history continue to read “reliable” texts as trustworthy, factual representations of life in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Indeed, some of the most important contemporary histories of the Lodi and Suri periods—Raziuddin Aquil’s meticulous work for example—continue to use these histories written well after the fact of Afghan ascendancy as depictions of life “as it was” during the reign of the Afghan sultans.¹⁶⁴

To the extent that historians have kept the context of the Afghan histories close to their investigation, many have concluded that these narratives represented “Afghan history through rose-colored glasses.” In light of the defeat of the Lodi and Suri sultanates, and the subsequent second-class status that Afghans assumed in the Mughal order, these histories were at most a pining for the “good old days” in which Afghan authors forewent any memories of violence or dissidence for those which depicted the past in the brightest colors.¹⁶⁵ In a similar vein, some scholarship has suggested that these texts be read in the same way as contemporary community histories produced by the Rajput clans of Mughal Rajasthan. For example, as Cynthia Talbot has argued for the Qayam Khani community of Rajputs, and Ramya Sreenivasan has shown for the Rajputs more generally, the exalted, albeit false genealogies produced by Rajput ruling lineages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emerged out of a competitive attempt to gain favors in the Mughal court.¹⁶⁶ As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Nile Green situated the early Afghan histories—particularly the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—similarly: as texts borne of the “competitive encounter between ethnic groups” that converged in Mughal India, in which communities of lower social status sought to ingratiate themselves with the new hegemonic power.¹⁶⁷

While the work of Talbot and Sreenivasan offer excellent tools for approaching Rajput histories, and scholars such as Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui have made important contributions to our

¹⁶² Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, “Shaikh Muhammad Kabir and His History of the Afghan Kings,” *Indo Iranica*, 19, no. 4 (1966): 57-78.

¹⁶³ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Professor Aquil’s work is a bit complicated in this respect because it does call for the need to keep these sources in their context (p. 14-16), and often does so. However, throughout his book, Aquil makes arguments about the Lodi and Suri periods primarily on the basis of these Mughal-era texts.

¹⁶⁵ See Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics: Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

¹⁶⁶ Cynthia Talbot, “Becoming Turk the Rajput Way: Conversion and Identity in an Indian Warrior Narrative,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 211-243; Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India, c. 1500-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁷ Green, *Making Space*, 86.

understanding of the Lodi and Suri administrations, I nonetheless propose to approach these Mughal-era Afghan histories differently. Before doing so, I acknowledge the possibility that the information in them was faithfully transmitted from the Lodi and Suri periods; that the details recounted by individuals like Mushtaqi and Kabir had been passed down from the fifteenth century through oral tellings or texts that are no longer available to us. Still, I argue, the plentitude of accounts written about this period in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries gesture to its imagined significance for Afghans *living in the Mughal period*. Keeping this in mind, I will approach these texts first and foremost as dynamic repositories of memory, remembering Ramya Sreenivasan’s observation that “memory... is forged and transmitted deliberately, and forgotten because no longer reiterated, or when no longer relevant to the perceived needs of a community.”¹⁶⁸ What were the memories that Afghans of the Mughal period drew on again and again as they inscribed their past? What interpretations did they offer, if any, on these significant events and people? Considering Sreenivasan’s question about the “needs of the community,” what bearing were the events of the Lodi and Suri periods understood to have for the larger community of those who called themselves “Afghan” and who lived in Mughal India or beyond its boundaries?

As I suggest in this chapter, the kinds of memories evoked in these accounts of the Lodi and Suri sultans also belie the fact that such histories were merely, if at all, competitive attempts to garner the attention of the Mughal authorities. This is most evident in the way that these texts remember Afghans and the Afghan sultans, particularly in relation to their humble social origins. Even the negative stereotypes of Afghans repeated in Sultanate and Mughal court chronicles—characterizations like those referenced in the introduction to this dissertation, that Afghans are rustic, uncouth, and lacking in social niceties¹⁶⁹—are also to be found rather starkly exhibited within these narratives. Moreover, many of these accounts contain tongue-in-cheek comments directed at the Mughals themselves, rhetorical gestures that effectively pit the more prosperous, just age of Afghan rule against the Mughal present. This fact makes it tempting to conclude that the early Afghan histories are, simply, a recounting of the past “through rose-colored glasses”: an imagined, highly embellished history in which Afghans—not the Mughals—ruled the roost. Nonetheless, I believe that there is still more to be asked of these chronicles. If they are, indeed, presenting an idealized version of their community’s history, then in what moments, people, and practices do they locate that “better” past? What was it precisely that made Afghan rule superior to that of the Mughals? Taking these questions into account in my reading of the *Waqi’at-i Mushtaqi*, the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, and others, I show that, for many of these authors, it was exactly what made Afghan kingship distinct that also made it a compelling alternative model of political leadership suited to the context of early modern South Asia.

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My analysis in this chapter will center around the contents of one text: the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, or “Stories of Kings,” by Muhammad Kabir, completed in the early seventeenth century.¹⁷⁰ Although no other sources known to me reference Kabir, the author explains in his introduction that he is related to two Sufi *shaihs* of Bihar: Shaikh Ismail Hizyani, his father, and Shaikh Khalil Haqqani, his father-in-law.¹⁷¹ He describes how he began writing his history after the sudden,

¹⁶⁸ Sreenivasan, *Many Lives*, 6.

¹⁶⁹ See the *Akbarnama* of Abu al-Fazl, for example.

¹⁷⁰ I have yet to identify the date of the text’s completion. However, historian Hussain Khan, who has looked at the two extant copies of the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, noted that the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) was named at the end of one copy. This led him to conclude that it was probably completed during Jahangir’s reign. See Hussain Khan, “Afsana-i-Shahan, a Critique,” *Islamic Studies* 26, no. 4 (1987): 351-372.

¹⁷¹ Muhammad Kabir, “Afsana-yi Shahan,” Ms. Add. 24409, OIOC, British Library, London, fol. 2b.

shocking death of his son, who was bitten by a snake and failed to receive the proper treatment.¹⁷² The *Afsana-yi Shaban*, he explained, was in part a project meant to distract him from his grieving. I have chosen to place this text at the center of a conversation on kingship for a few reasons. First, Kabir's text is one of the first—if not *the* first—of the Mughal-period Afghan histories to begin not with the rise of the first Afghan sultan Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489), but at a time “in the beginning,” in the Afghan homeland of Roh. From Kabir's perspective, this narrative choice indicates that Afghans have a history reaching beyond Hindustan, and that their pre-history in Roh had an important bearing on how an Afghan became king in north India. The chosen format of the text—a collection of anecdotes about north India's fifteenth and sixteenth century monarchs—also makes it an intriguing source of comparison. Through it, we can glean how someone like Kabir not only comprehended the phenomenon of Afghan kingship, but how he situated it within the broader context of Islamic kingship practices in India.

Focusing on the work of Kabir and his contemporaries, this chapter also argues that the sources used to imagine and interpret Afghan kingship in this context were vast and multiple. In exploring this topic, I engage primarily with the work of Muzaffar Alam and Shahab Ahmed, both of whom have offered important contributions on the topic of kingship and political Islam in South Asia and beyond. In his pathbreaking work *The Languages of Political Islam*, Alam has argued that Persian advice literature—particularly *adab*, or “mirrors for princes” texts, and the *akblaqi* digests, or moral and ethical treatises—were some of the most significant works underpinning Mughal political philosophy. In these texts, he argues, successive generations of Mughal rulers found the inspiration and material to create an accommodative political order that embraced their South Asian dominion in all its diversity.¹⁷³ While Alam's contributions perhaps unwittingly create a sense of Mughal exceptionalism in the history of Islamic kingship in India, I aim to demonstrate that the Afghan and Afghan-sponsored authors of the Mughal period—including Muhammad Kabir—were also intensely engaged in these broader discourses shared across the Persianate world. Diverging somewhat from Alam's work, I will also show how that Afghans found inspiration not only in *adab* or *akblaqi* literature, but more broadly in the classical works of Persian letters read and memorized by students across the Persianate world: namely, the prose and poetry works composed by the likes of Sa'di Shirazi (d. 1291/2), Firdausi (d. 1020), Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1390), and Farid al-din Attar (d. 1221).¹⁷⁴

To be sure, texts like Muhammad Kabir's *Afsana-yi Shaban* and Mushtaqi's *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi* draw heavily upon these works of literature in their attempts to explain the defining moments of Afghan history. Their influence is particularly evident in Kabir's account, which in form bears a striking resemblance to Sa'di Shirazi's *Gulistan*, arguably the most influential piece of Persian prose in early modern Iran and South Asia.¹⁷⁵ Kabir quotes Sa'di's work liberally throughout his text, in addition to citing it at the very beginning when explaining why he chose to write his history.¹⁷⁶ Much as Sa'di had done for his *Gulistan*, Kabir's history of kings is also organized as *bikayats*, or “stories,” many of which include sections of verse geared towards elucidating the deeper meaning of the prose section. By these accounts, I would wager that Kabir even considered the *Afsana-yi Shaban* his own

¹⁷² Ibid, fol. 3a.

¹⁷³ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁷⁴ I am incredibly grateful for conversations with Gregory Maxwell Bruce on this topic; they inspired me to begin thinking about the Afghan histories in this way.

¹⁷⁵ For more on the cultural significance of the *Gulistan*, see Wheeler M. Thackston's introduction to his translation. Shaykh Mushrifuddin Sa'di of Shiraz, *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Kabir quotes the *Gulistan*: “the purpose of writing is that we will last/for I do not see life as lasting,” “Afsana,” fol. 2b.

sort of *Gulistan*: a rose garden (*gulistan*) of advice about past monarchs that would continue to bloom longer after his death.¹⁷⁷ Through their participation in these discourses, Afghan authors first found ways to explain what made “the Afghan way” distinct, yet also perfectly in harmony with the principles imbibed by writers such as Sa‘di.

This point leads, finally, to the work of Shahab Ahmed and *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*. In this influential book, Ahmad suggests that themes such “heroism, ideal kingship, or love” in Muslim artistic and literary production must be situated within “a larger socially- and discursive-diffuse matrix of meaning-making in terms of Islam.”¹⁷⁸ As I have previously argued, the *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi*, the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, and other Afghan histories were precisely that: acts of meaning-making for Afghans who were intensely involved in articulating what it meant to belong to the Afghan community at the height of Mughal power. Beyond this, I demonstrate, the terms in which this engagement occurred—whether drawing from Sa‘di’s *Gulistan* or the mystical principles embodied by Sufi shaikhs—were decidedly “Islamic.” Significantly for the case of the Afghans, this was also not limited to those parts of the past that appeared most flattering or uncontroversial. As we will see, even those features of Afghan society most maligned in Mughal chronicles—its tribal social organization and a certain reputation for “rusticity,” for example—were explored as possible repositories of wisdom for living and governing ethically *as Muslims*. It is precisely this fact, I suggest, that made their vision of Afghan kingship and “the Afghan way” such a formidable challenge to the Mughals, whose projected status as “millennial sovereigns” evinced their claims to an unparalleled position in the realm of Islamic kingship.

The Origins of Afghan Kingship: The Rise of Kala Lodi and How an Afghan Became King

Kabir’s *Afsana-yi Shaban*, unlike any Afghan-centered texts preceding it, begins in a time and place quite far removed from the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Afghan sultanates of northern India. The author goes back to an otherwise unspecified time “in the beginning” (*anwal*), when the Afghans brought their horses from their home region (*wilayat*) to Bajwara, Punjab for the purposes of fattening them, because “everything was cheap in Bajwara,” including corn and grain. This *wilayat* of the Afghans, he specifies, was known as “Roh,” and there it was that the Afghans lived in a particular way:

The land that was there, they divided among brothers, and they ate what they cultivated from the land, and no one oppressed the other. They were not subject to anyone, nor (were they subject) to the command of a king. It is like that to this day.... In their tribes there was an elder...and no one was his master, and neither was (he under) the rule of a *padishah*.¹⁷⁹

As Kabir carefully repeats in his description, the Afghans in Roh lived—and continue to live—very much in their own way: one that carefully evaded the kind of political authority enacted by a *padishah*. Tribal leaders managed the most important affairs; but among the Afghans, there had also been a general tendency towards self-reliance and for the members of the community to share their resources with one another.

¹⁷⁷ See the aforementioned quote from Sa‘di, as well as the *Gulistan*’s prologue as a whole. Please note here, however, that there are also many stylistic distinctions between the *Gulistan* and the *Afsana-yi Shaban* that demonstrate Kabir’s creative agency (for example, the *Afsana-yi Shaban* is not divided into chapters or sections, and unlike the *Gulistan*, it primarily concerns real historical actors and their exploits).

¹⁷⁸ Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 410.

¹⁷⁹ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 5b.

As one might recall from the previous chapter, the subject of kingship, or *padishahi*, among the Afghans proved a particularly thorny subject in the context of the Roshaniyya, the millenarian movement led by Bayazid Ansari during the height of Akbar's rule. In his work on the Afghan tribes of the heartland regions, Akhund Darweza, the Sunni theologian and arch-critic of the Roshaniyya, pinpointed the lack of kingly leadership among the Afghans as one of the primary sources of the kind of heretical behavior that he attributed to Bayazid Ansari's followers. In his polemical *Tazkirat al-Abrar wa al-Asbrar*, Darweza went so far as to assert that the Afghans' reluctance to accept a king had been identified as a curse by the Prophet Muhammad, who, during his lifetime, predicted that the Afghans' descendants would all be sent to hell on the day of judgement (*qiyamat*). When the Afghans, distressed and heartbroken, asked the Prophet why this was so he replied:

Your sons will fall into downright ignorance because they will little accept *padishahi* (the rule of a king). And the existence of Muhammad's religion is not possible without a *padishah* of Islam...Close are the wisdom of kingship and prophethood, like two jewels in a ring. All of your children will be interested in grass fields and pastures, from house to house they will wander. And they will be scattered to the direction of the world.¹⁸⁰

In making this remark, Akhund Darweza posited a deep connection between kingship and the perpetuation of Islam in the world—an idea widely shared in the imaginations of elite Muslims across the early modern Persianate world.¹⁸¹

For Kabir, however, this stated fact of Afghan life in the *wilayat* of Roh takes on an interesting twist: immediately after re-stating that a *padishah* never held sway over the Afghans, he embellishes his observation by adding, “as the honorable Shaikh Sa'di has said:

Neither am I riding atop a camel/neither am I beneath a load like a camel//neither am I a master over people/neither am I a slave of a monarch.”¹⁸²

This quote comes from Sa'di's seminal *Gulistan*, the prose work which I have argued served as one of the primary inspirations and models for the *Afsana-yi Shaban*. It is included in the section “On the Character of Dervishes,” and its context offers some intriguing insights on how precisely Kabir might have made a connection between the *Gulistan* and the notable absence of Afghan kingship in Roh. In the story, the seventeenth *hikayat* in Sa'di's section on dervishes, a bareheaded and barefooted man set out from Kufah, Iraq with a Hijaz caravan, joining the company of the author and some of his companions. Although he had nothing with him, the dervish walked along with a proud strut as he recited the aforementioned couplets. Seeing this, a man riding on a camel said to him, “dervish, where are you going? Turn back, for you will die of hardship!” But the dervish only continued on into the desert. Later, the caravan reached an oasis, and the wealthy man on the camel had died. The dervish, for his part, rolled over on his pillow and said: “We did not die of hardship (*sakhti*), and you died on a Bactrian camel (*bakhti*)!”¹⁸³

As his inclusion of these couplets indicates, Kabir's interpretation of the absence of kingship in Roh was, in fact, markedly different than that of someone like Akhund Darweza: though with some important similarities also worth noting. It is, first of all, intriguing that both Kabir and Darweza probe the question of Afghan kingship (or the lack thereof) as a topic of great relevance

¹⁸⁰ Akhund Darweza, *Tazkirat al-Abrar wa al-Asbrar*, lithograph (Peshawar: Manzoor-e Aam Press, 1940), 84.

¹⁸¹ For more on the historical relationship between kingship and Islam, see Shahab Ahmad's *What is Islam?*

¹⁸² Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 6a.

¹⁸³ Sa'di of Shiraz, *Gulistan*, 54.

and something that needs to be explained to contemporary audiences. However, whereas Darweza explicitly rejected the idea that Afghans could both be without kingship and properly uphold the tenets of Islam, Kabir draws upon the political and spiritual wisdom of the *Gulistān* to demonstrate that Afghan way of life was indeed, contrary to Darweza's assertions, Islamic. He does this by drawing upon the powerful, mystical content of the text, in a point that is demonstrated with both humor and tact by the dervish: that wealth and status do not guarantee—and can even impinge upon—one's ability to see situations for what they are. In comparing the kingless Afghans to the carefree dervish in the story, Kabir therefore locates among them not tendency to go astray in matters of the faith, but state of being that, viewed through the mystical framework unpinning the story, actually evinced great spiritual wisdom and closeness to the divine.

While the absence of kingship in Roh remained a fixture “to this day,” it also happened that an Afghan *did* become a *padishah*: a question which Kabir and his contemporaries would explore in considerable detail. As we will now see, Kabir's musings on this topic—as in the aforementioned case of the Afghans' kingless state in Roh—demonstrate the author's engagement with both the historical realities of north India in which the Lodis rose to power and the discourses of political sovereignty that had linked a much broader Persianate world. In this case, again, it was not necessarily the traditions embedded in *akbhaqi* literature that Afghans found meaningful material. Rather, it was within the immensely popular works of poetry and prose by the likes of Sa'di, Hafiz, and Attar, read and memorized by perhaps all educated elites from the Balkans to Bengal.¹⁸⁴ Through the wisdom embedded within such texts, Kabir and others living in the height of Mughal power found meaningful ways through which to make sense of the particularities of Afghan history and kingship, and to carve out a special place for themselves in a shared world of norms, ethics, and mystical discourse.

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Kabir sets the stage for the Lodis' rise to power in a fifteenth-century context in which a number of different soldering groups of relatively inconsequential social origin were in competition with one another for control over people and territory. In this setting, the Delhi sultan, once the preeminent monarch of Hindustan, occupies only a marginal role. As Kabir explains, the last sultan of the Sayyid dynasty, 'Alam Shah (r. 1445-1451), was “so busy seeking pleasure” that he received no news from the *mulk*, or country, that was ostensibly under his control. The land bordering the mountains and deserts had been wrested from his authority, and many of the people began to mock and resent him. Quoting an old saying, one applied to 'Alam Shah as early as the sixteenth century, Kabir says that the sultan's negligence inspired the adage: “the patch (*dirwa*) of Shah 'Alam (the king of the world)/(is) from Delhi to Palam”: the joke being that the Palam was only about a *kuroh*, or two miles,¹⁸⁵ distant from Delhi.¹⁸⁶

It is in this context that we are introduced to Kala Lodi, descended from Lodi, one of three brothers who Kabir identifies as “the first of the Afghans to earn a great name.”¹⁸⁷ According to him, Kala belonged to the Shahu Khail subsection of the Lodi tribe. He lived peacefully in Roh until he found himself in a feud with the neighboring Sambhal lineage of Afghans, from which he decided to flee. Kala then traveled to Bajwara in Punjab, where, after fighting with some local non-Muslim communities, he managed to wrest some territory for himself and his people. During this time, however, he managed to attract the attention of a local chief: Rao Dasrath, also known as Jsrath

¹⁸⁴ Drawing from Shahab Ahmed's “Balkans to Bengal complex” in *What is Islam?*

¹⁸⁵ This calculation of the *kuroh* comes from the Steingass Persian-English dictionary.

¹⁸⁶ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 10b. This saying follows 'Alam Shah across the centuries, but is applied to a new context in the eighteenth century. Then, it was applied to the Mughal emperor Shah 'Alam (r. 1759-1806), who ruled over a rapidly deteriorating empire and failed to thwart encroaching powers such as the Afghans and the British.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, fol. 7a.

Khokhar, the famed fourteenth- and fifteenth-century leader of the non-Muslim Khokhar tribe of the Punjab.

As Delhi chroniclers such as Yahya b. Ahmad Sirhindi recorded over a century and a half before the *Afsana*, Jusrath Khokhar had a fascinating, yet checkered career as a military and tribal leader in the frontier marches of northern India at the turn of the fifteenth century. According to some sources, he was even captured and brought to Samarqand by the aspiring world conqueror Amir Timur (d. 1405), after which he escaped and launched a briefly successful occupation of Delhi. In the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, Kabir places Rao Dasrath in a somewhat different role. Here, the Khokhar leader serves as a rather formidable equal to Kala Lodi—another political and military leader nominally under the authority of the Delhi sultan, yet acting increasingly independently in light of the imperial center’s weakness. As Kabir explains, when ‘Alam Shah retreated from political affairs and took up residence in Budaon,¹⁸⁸ he granted control of Lahore to Rao Dasrath, while entrusting the neighboring territory of Bajwara to Kala Lodi.

For Kabir, this newfound political independence had different effects on the two leaders. Once left to his own devices, Kabir writes, Rao Dasrath began to covet money and property, and eventually refused to redistribute these honors to the members of his household. These included servants who had been given *mansabs*, or status positions, by the *padishah* of Delhi himself. Quoting from the eleventh-century *Shahnama*, or the “Book of Kings” that chronicled the lives of the pre-Islamic rulers of Iran, he adds: “all of those close to him became lowly (*kehwar*)/his heart became a slave to the treasure of *dinars*.”¹⁸⁹ Unable to withstand this oppression, many of Dasrath’s followers made their way to Delhi, where they took shelter with a contingent of military slaves whom ‘Alam Shah had left to guard the city.

Hearing the news of his deserters, the Khokhar chief sent an angry letter to the capital, demanding that the *ghulams*, or slaves, send his men back to Lahore. To his dismay, however, the *ghulams* only penned their own letter in response, one which elucidates a certain expectation of kingship. They said to him:

This is a strange thing that you say. The *padishah* had given them positions of power and they were entrusted to you, but you harmed them. That which was their due share, you took. Yet you say we must capture them and send them to you. How can we bind them and send them to you? Because when one who has taken refuge in the throne of the *padishah*, how can they be bound?¹⁹⁰

This cheeky response only further provoked Rao Dasrath and he, too, made his way to Delhi, where he found the authors of the letter and killed them. He justified his actions ‘Alam Shah, explaining that they were appropriate because the sultan’s slaves were corrupt and incapable. Far from the capital and disconnected from its affairs, the sultan commended Rao Dasrath for his efforts and sent him back to Lahore. The Khokhar leader, however, only continued to seek out and imprison members of his household.¹⁹¹

Having established the extent of Rao Dasrath’s oppressive behavior and the Delhi sultan’s inability to intervene in the situation, Kabir describes how the Khokhar chief’s followers now began to flee to Bajwara, where they sought refuge with Kala Lodi.¹⁹² This time, Rao Dasrath attempted to use flattery and the pretense of goodwill to lure Kala into returning to the refugees, sending him a

¹⁸⁸ A town some 200 kilometers east of Delhi, the birthplace of Nizam al-din Awliya (d. 1325).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, fol. 11a.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, fol. 11a-b.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid, fol. 12b.

sweetly-worded missive. Kala sensed trickery on the part of the Khokhar chief, and refused to comply with his requests. Rao Dasrath then brought his army to Bajwara and attacked the Lodi leader, initiating a drawn-out series of battles in which many Afghans were captured and physically tormented. According to Kabir, Kala managed to save himself and those in his shelter by pleading for the assistance of his *qaum*, or “people,” many of whom rallied to support him.¹⁹³ Kabir adds that a Nuhani and Sarwani Afghan were among the first to come forward, an important note suggesting that the “*qaum*” did not merely signify members of the Lodi tribe, but rather, the much broader community or “tribe” of Afghans—a claim that Kabir repeats throughout the *Afsana*.

In a momentous victory, the Afghan army summoned by Kala defeated and killed Rao Dasrath in battle. Kabir’s extensive use here of passages from the classical works of Persian literature points to the significance and richness of meaning that this moment was imagined to contain: a richness that could only be encapsulated by these popular and revered sources of political wisdom. First, Kabir draws upon Sa’di’s *Gulistan*. To use Wheeler Thackston’s translation of this passage, he writes:

Not everyone who possesses the strong arm of office can use his power to consume the people’s property with impunity//It is possible to get a large bone down the throat, but when it gets stuck in the belly it will rip the stomach to shreds//No evil oppressor lives forever, but curses upon him last eternally.¹⁹⁴

Then, he says, Kala plundered Rao Dasrath’s goods and horses, and all of Punjab submitted to him. Local horsemen and peasants, too, pledged their allegiance to the Afghan chief, which is elaborated with a *ghazal*, or poem, from Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1390):

Not every enlightened face knows captivation of the heart/not every mirror-maker knows Alexander//Not everyone who wears a crooked cap and sits aloft/ Knows the possession of a hat and lordship of a mirror//A thousand points finer than hair are present here/ Not everyone who shaves his head knows the way of a *qalandar*/ Loyalty and obligation are good if you learn them// And if not, everything that you see knows oppression (*sitamgari*).¹⁹⁵

After reiterating how the people willingly turned to support Kala Lodi “because of the justice that they saw,” Kabir then concludes with a couplet from Sa’di’s poetry work, the *Bustan*: “To nurture the people and lead an army/is not the work of the playground and folly,” as well as two couplets from *Asrarnama* of Farid al-din ‘Attar: “If you have land and water, plant a seed in it/become a farmer and do this work//if you nurture this (act of) farming/ in that harvest, there will be fine millet.”¹⁹⁶

Reading these lines and couplets together, at least one central aspect of Muhammad Kabir’s vision of political sovereignty becomes clear: that while kingship or political leadership might come into anyone’s hands, the proper execution of the role is contingent on the cultivation of one’s character. Indeed, simply taking one’s place on the throne (sitting “aloft,” as Hafiz writes) does not mean that the person possesses what it takes to understand the complexities of the position, which are constituted by a thousand points “finer than hair.” Instead, the power that the position brings can incite covetousness and greed in the heart of a leader, the enactment of which results in the ruin of all—including the oppressive ruler himself, upon whom “curses live eternally.” Rao Dasrath, for

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, fol. 13a. Sa’di of Shiraz, *Gulistan*, 32.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, fol. 13b.

Kabir, embodies this kind of corruption that power engenders, and, we are led to believe, he would suffer accordingly for it; conversely, Kala attracted people to him by enacting the responsibilities that come with political leadership. The Lodi chief became the first Afghan king in a community so long without kingship because he personified the duties of a just ruler as represented in the rich tradition of Persian didactic literature, answering the call at precisely the right moment.

Intriguingly, however, once Kala ascends the throne of Delhi, the description of his behavior deviates from the more generalized image of the just king to something more distinctly “Afghan.” According to Kabir, once the people confirmed to Kala Lodi that the *padishahi* had been bestowed upon him, the newly crowned sultan ordered that the imperial throne be constructed in the “right way, so that all of my brothers can sit upon it.”¹⁹⁷ The esteemed ones in his company, of course, were astonished that he made such a claim, insisting that the *padishah* must sit alone; besides, there were at least fifty or sixty thousand *sepahis*, or armed horsemen, in Kala’s entourage. How would it be possible to make a throne that could fit them all? In the end, Kabir says, Kala conceded to a throne that would seat thirty or forty men. In a *masnawi*, or poem, of his own creation that closes the *hikayat*, the author again stresses Kala’s incredible generosity, especially to his fellow Afghans. “Every Afghan who came before him” was given a horse and weapons, and the sultan fostered each of them with his “honey and harvest” (*shabd o banush*).¹⁹⁸ By the end of his thirteen-year reign, the anecdote concludes, Kala had wrested the territory from Sirhind in the Punjab to the borderlands of Kashmir in Jammu Pathan,¹⁹⁹ all to the benefit of the larger Afghan community.

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As I have argued, for the likes of Muhammad Kabir, the question of how an Afghan from Roh—the place where no *padishah* had ever held authority—became sultan of Delhi was a particularly complex one. Nonetheless, in the *Stories of Kings*, the coming of Afghan kingship is comprehended within what the specific political and social context that characterized north India in the fifteenth century. In this setting, the weakening of the Delhi Sultanate—the traditional center of political authority in South Asia—opened up an opportunity for the leaders of previously humble groups to assume a new position of power. Many, as we see, were poised to take it, including the Khokhar chief of Punjab, Rao Dasrath. What enabled Kala to rise to the occasion, however, was his enactment of justice in a way that would have been familiar to any acquainted with the discourses embedded in the classical works of Persian literature. As Kabir encourages his reader to remember, factors such as social pedigree are of little real consequence for a monarch who does not strive for prudence and the perfection of one’s moral character. It is to those individuals that supporters will flock in great numbers, and those individuals that are distinguished from other rulers in their perception of the duties and responsibilities of kingship.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Kabir’s work offers a suggestion that the “Afghan way”—despite its supposed foreignness in the context of Persianate social niceties—has lessons to contribute to this discourse of kingship. Indeed, not only does Kala exemplify some of the classic expectations of a Persianate monarch such as generosity and honoring one’s salt, but he does so in a way consistent with the ideals and practices notably cherished by the Afghans in the context of their homeland. Just as Kabir imagined an Afghan way of life in Roh as embodying a certain egalitarian camaraderie, Kala is lauded among the tradition of Persianate monarchs for bringing that very sensibility to his kingship. The *Afsana-yi Shaban*, therefore, makes a compelling case for the social mores of Afghans: one that, whether intentionally or not, challenges the vision of critics like Akhund Darweza.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. fol. 14a.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, fol. 14b.

¹⁹⁹ “Jammu Pathan,” as Kabir describes it, probably means the territory from Jammu to Pathankot in Punjab.

As we will see in the following section, Kala Lodi's son Bahlul, more often identified as the first Afghan ruler of Delhi, held a similar place in the imagination of the Afghans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Like his father, he was imagined as rising from humble origins to the pinnacle of political power—but not without rather consistent doubts about his ability to do so. As the next section demonstrates, what made memories of Bahlul Lodi distinct in this narrative of Afghan history was their refraction through the lens of humor. Through a fond remembrance of the ways in which Bahlul Lodi proudly maintained his identity in spite of the pervasiveness of unflattering stereotypes about Afghans, the early cadre of Afghan historians again probed the ways in which an Afghan simplicity could in fact provide insights for Muslims striving to cultivate an ethical way of life in this period.

The Reign of Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489): Humor and Rusticity in Afghan Kingship

As some contemporary scholars have recently suggested, the subject of humor has long been overlooked as a critical site of meaning-making for historical Muslims. Yet as Shahab Ahmed aptly reminds us in *What is Islam?*, humor “takes place precisely in a social and discursive complex...of shared meaning.”²⁰⁰ For a joke to be funny, one must know the context; otherwise, “the joke falls flat.”²⁰¹ This section of the chapter on the sultan Bahlul Lodi, who is frequently depicted in humorous situations, takes into account just these assertions. As we will see, in the *Afsana-yi Shaban--* as in many texts produced after the eclipse of Afghan rule—Bahlul Lodi is presented both marred by the negative stereotypes of Afghans, yet also as unfailingly affable and capable of subverting those assumptions in humorous ways. These stories have often been interpreted as strictly factual accounts and evidence of an extant Afghan rusticity in the fifteenth century. By contrast, I will now consider how the jokes and humorous situations associated with Bahlul Lodi served as means through which Afghans of the Mughal period made sense of their community's historical marginalization. In doing so, I suggest, these authors began to imagine an Afghan kingship that embraced the very elements once used to discredit the participation of Afghans in the elite networks of the Persianate world.

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Despite the fact that, according to Kabir, Bahlul Lodi's father Kala ruled as the sultan of Delhi, Bahlul was not immediately selected as his successor. Rather, he says, a certain Jalal al-din Muhammad Khan, who is described as the uncle of Bahlul,²⁰² became the next ruler upon Kala's death. The one *hikayat* dedicated to Jalal al-din's ascension sheds little light on the sultan's identity, tenure of rule, or the major events of this period, and seems more geared towards demonstrating how Bahlul became king. As Kabir writes, the sultan Jalal al-din had two wives: one who was an Afghan and the other who was a Rajput. From his Afghan wife, he had a daughter named Firdausi, who was married to Bahlul Lodi. From his Rajput wife, he had a son named Qutb Khan. On his deathbed, Jalal al-din called both his son and son-in-law to his side, and entreated them to rule in a way that “does not destroy their house,” and to always turn to the opinion of the just ones (*rai-yi aqilan*) rather than their own judgment (*kbud-rai bargiz na kbwabad kard*).²⁰³ Then, he turned to his son and said: “Bahlul is from the womb of an Afghan. You are from the womb of a Rajput. The Afghans are an ignorant (*jabil*) people (*qaum*); they will be obedient to you.”²⁰⁴ Having said this, he took the turban from his own head and placed it on Bahlul's, then transferred Bahlul's turban to

²⁰⁰ Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 321.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Later in the story, Kabir says that Bahlul was Jalal al-din's nephew born of his brother.

²⁰³ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 15a.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Qutb Khan. “Bahlul is your *padishah*, and you are the *wazir* (prime minister) of Bahlul,” he declared. A few days later, the ailing Jalal al-din passed away, and Bahlul Lodi became the sultan according to his father-in-law’s wishes.

Embedded within the description of this moment are a number of intriguing insights related to the understanding of kingship present in the text, and they are worth unpacking here in detail. First, in designating Qutb Khan the prime minister precisely *because* the “ignorant Afghans” would be obedient to him, Jalal al-din implies that it is the *wazir*, not the king, who carries the true responsibilities of rule. As long as the vizier is an upstanding person, he can bend even the monarch to his will. Second, the declaration that “Afghans are an ignorant *qaum*” points to a presumed stereotype about the imagined community of Afghans. Here, the use of “ignorance” to describe the nature of Afghans might also call to mind its prominent role in Islamic discourse—in particular, was its use to refer to the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula prior to the Prophet Muhammad’s message. Jalal al-din’s supposition, therefore, equates the Afghans as a whole to a time and a people without Islam. However, taking into account what happens in the *Afsana* after this declaration, it is appears that this statement was in fact intended to be humorous. On the one hand, Jalal al-din’s claim—and Kabir’s supposed reiteration of it—operates on the assumption that the Afghans’ ignorance is something *known*, at least among those in courtly circles of the fifteenth century. His comment, therefore, would likely elicit knowing laughter from the reader well-acquainted with stereotypes of Afghans. However, as we will also see, the behavior that the fledgling sultan Bahlul Lodi exhibited during his rule would fly into the face of every assumption that Afghans are without intelligence or, to read a little deeper into this terminology, without Islam. These developments, which I will describe in the following section, would lead the reader of the *Afsana* to reflect upon the reality of Jalal al-din’s assertion.

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In the next set *bikayats* which describe the years of Bahlul Lodi’s rule, the new Lodi monarch encounters many of the same prejudices as his father Kala; prejudices that manifest themselves in the response of local political players to his sudden rise to the throne. As Kabir explains, the first individual to concoct a plan against Bahlul was Malika Jahan, the wife of Sultan Husain Sharqi of Jaunpur, a neighboring sultanate of Delhi and one of the Lodis’ chief adversaries in the fifteenth century. In the many chronicles of Bahlul’s reign, including the *Afsana* and the *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi*, Malika Jahan is represented as a figure of great cunning and intellect; she is, essentially, the brains and the control behind her intellectually inferior, somewhat pliant royal husband. In the *Afsana*, Kabir says that Malika Jahan was actually the daughter of the incompetent Shah ‘Alam, the last Sayyid (r. 1414-1451) ruler of Delhi, and that she believed her brothers were more entitled to the throne than “weak among the Afghans”—in her view, Bahlul Lodi.²⁰⁵ As such, she commanded that her husband to rally an army to attack Delhi and forcibly reclaim the title. Sultan Husain complied with his wife’s wishes, and when the Sharqi forces arrived in Delhi, Bahlul realized that he did not yet have enough support to protect the kingdom. He fled westwards towards Sirhind in the Punjab, while Sultan Husain (and later the sons of Shah ‘Alam) realized Malika Jahan’s ambitions and occupied the throne in Bahlul’s stead.²⁰⁶

In the next *bikayat*, the reader is introduced to yet another group keen on exploiting Bahlul’s potential weakness: the Qayam Khani clan of Rajputs. As Cynthia Talbot has explored in her work, the Qayam Khanis were a community of Indian Muslims of Rajasthan who proudly began to claim their Rajput status in the seventeenth century. According to her, the Qayam Khanis articulated an identity that was at once rooted in their home region of Fatehpur in Rajasthan, yet also

²⁰⁵ Ibid, fol. 15b.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

fundamentally linked to the Mughal court's hegemonic status in determining standards of social hierarchy and decorum. Qayam Khani identity, therefore, was crucially shaped by the rise of Mughal power and the complex relationship between the Rajputs and their Mughal sovereigns.²⁰⁷ Turning to Kabir's text, however, we are offered yet another glimpse of the social identity and broader perception of the Qayam Khanis: that of an early seventeenth-century Sufi of Bihar looking back on the community as they once were, *before* the rise of Mughal power. In this view, the Qayam Khanis play the role of yet another martial group casting their lots in the moment of opportunity opened up by the decline of Delhi's power.

Indeed, Kabir continues once the Qayam Khanis noticed Sultan Husain's victory and the apparent weakness of the Afghans, they decided to try and manipulate the situation to their favor. First, they approached Bahlul Lodi with a large army and commended his people for ridding the region of Rao Dasrath. They then tested the waters further by proposing a marriage alliance between Bahlul and a Qayam Khani woman—a proposition to which, Kabir explains, Bahlul was wholeheartedly opposed, but that Qutb Khan attempted to navigate somewhat more delicately.²⁰⁸

On the pretense of brokering peace, Qutb Khan arranged for a meeting between Bahlul Lodi and the Qayam Khanis “to remove the resentment from both of your hearts.”²⁰⁹ However, the Afghans harbored somewhat different intentions than Qutb Khan implied. Among the contingent sent to accompany Bahlul, Kabir continues, was a musician named Daur. Although Daur was responsible for playing martial music that rallied the troops and raised their spirits for battle, it was also known that he “sat far from *adab*,” suggesting his lack of decorum of Persianate courtly settings.²¹⁰ Before the Afghans entered the court of the Qayam Khanis, Bahlul directed one group of his followers to remain outside, and said to them, “when there is a great commotion inside, begin to beat the drums loudly.”²¹¹ The other part of his contingent then went into the palace and sat down, though Daur sat apart and far away from the others. Later, the call to prayer sounded and everyone stood up to exit the room. Daur came up last in line, then suddenly brandished a knife and struck down two Qayam Khani soldiers. The other Afghans also unleashed their weapons and began to fight, creating a great noise that queued the waiting drum beaters. As the commotion rose higher, Qutb Khan led another group of armed men into the palace and commenced to slaughter the Qayam Khanis. In the end, Kabir says, Bahlul's men won the battle, taking home a great deal of loot.²¹²

To the extent of my knowledge, this story of Bahlul Lodi's surprise attack on the Qayam Khanis does not appear in any other seventeenth-century accounts of his reign. However, in content and spirit, it bears striking similarities to another anecdote widely applied to Bahlul in contemporary Afghan chronicles of the period, and seems to be drawn from the same pool of memory. That story concerns Bahlul's defeat of Hamid Khan, the prime minister of the final Sayyid sultan, 'Alam Shah. As it is told in Mushtaqi's *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, in the wake of 'Alam Shah's famed indulgence and neglectfulness, the *wazir* Hamid Khan betrayed his king by searching out and offering the throne to other candidates. These included Bahlul Lodi and one named Qayam Khan Nagauri.²¹³ Bahlul, Mushtaqi says, nobly resisted these advances, and hatched a plan to bring the prime minister to justice. He and his companions formulated this scheme on a day when Bahlul, now a high-ranking

²⁰⁷ Talbot, “Becoming Turk.”

²⁰⁸ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 16a-17a.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid, fol. 17b.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ An interesting note suggesting connection to memories recalled in the *Afsana-yi Shaban* about the Qayam Khanis and Afghans.

official in the Sayyid administration, was expected to visit Hamid Khan in his palace. Before they arrived, Mushtaqi continues, the Afghans in Bahlul's entourage agreed amongst one another that they should all behave as foolishly as possible so that no one would suspect anything from them. They did so by acting in outlandish and humorous ways: chewing loudly and spitting out betel leaf when it burned their mouths, putting their shoes on their heads, and begging the *wazir* for pieces of carpet to take home to their children. Baffled at this behavior, Hamid Khan turned to Bahlul and asked him what kind of people these were. Bahlul responded: "they are wild (*wahshi*). They know nothing except eating and dying."²¹⁴ Later, Hamid Khan invited Bahlul's contingent to come inside for a second visit. This time, with the prime minister off his guard, the Afghans launched a surprise attack. At the opportune moment, Bahlul and his kin surrounded the prime minister, then handed him a chain and brought him to prison. Shortly after this event, Mushtaqi says, 'Alam Shah willingly ceded the throne, and Bahlul Lodi became the next sultan of Delhi.²¹⁵

While Kabir's story of the *Afsana* is, again, a bit of an outlier, its similarity to the account of Bahlul Lodi and Hamid Khan is suggestive of a few considerable ideas about the shared memory that seventeenth-century Afghans had of Bahlul Lodi's rise to power. First, it gestures to the awareness of a certain stereotype of Afghan naiveté, one that—whether true or not—could be successfully affected to convince others. Second, and more importantly, it subtly serves as confirmation that the uncouth Afghans were not what they appeared to be in the eyes of north India's Persianate elites. Far from the "wild" rustics who knew nothing aside from "eating and dying," they were actually clever and self-aware, and could use the stereotypes held against them to turn the tables on the political authorities. From the perspective of Mughal-era authors like Mushtaqi and Kabir, the story of Bahlul's defeat of the Qayam Khanis (or of Hamid Khan) could serve as a powerful reminder of the Afghans' political brilliance in the face of adversity and elite assertions that Afghans were, as Sultan Jalal al-din proposed, "an ignorant *qaum*."

However, the centrality of this story in nearly all contemporary accounts written by Afghans (or for Afghan patrons) raises the question: if these texts were meant as a competitive move to receive favors in the Mughal patronage system, why wouldn't Afghans reject or alter such memories in favor of more complimentary ones? Why, in a time when the Mughals set standards on social comportment, would they feel compelled to recall these unappealing stereotypes of their forebears? Here, my inclination is to assert that the significance of these stories for Afghans lay beyond the field of elite competition for representation. Rather, in telling and retelling such accounts of their kingly antecedents, I argue that authors like Mushtaqi and Kabir found a subtle, yet powerful form of resistance against Mughal claims to cultural hegemony—one which would be of use to them throughout the tenure of Mughal rule. Such resistance might have been dangerous, even foolhardy, if stated openly in other contexts; however, in the medium of the historical chronicle or *tarikb*, Afghans had means through which they could both explore the meaning of their lost kingly history and do so in way that compellingly evaded Mughal claims to cultural and social superiority.

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To elaborate more on prevalence and importance of these stories in the Afghan historical imagination, I will turn again to the *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi* and its account of Bahlul Lodi, which is replete with humorous anecdotes evoking Afghan simplicity or lack of proper comportment. As we see in this early Afghan history—completed in 1572—the newly crowned king Bahlul is met with harsh judgments at every turn, especially by the religious authorities of Delhi, who consistently express surprise that such a person managed to sit at the pinnacle of imperial command. Mushtaqi describes one such occasion from the early years of Bahlul's reign, when the newly crowned sultan

²¹⁴ Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, ed. Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library), 5-7.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

arrived at the city's congregational mosque. When he entered this space, Mushtaqi says, the prayer leader, Bandagi Miyan Qadan Danishmand, came down from his pulpit and declared:

Praise be to God! What strange people (*qaumi*) have arrived. I don't know whether they are forerunners of the Antichrist (*dajjal*), or they are the Antichrist themselves, as they call the mother "mur," the brother "rur," the house "gur," the village "shur," black "tur," and everything else "nur!"²¹⁶

The *imam's* insulting words have intriguing implications. First, Mian Qadan suggests, rather directly, that the Afghan *qaum's* presence in Delhi is signaling the end of times. Even more damning, they are possibly *themselves* Dajjal, the Antichrist(s) who will *bring* the worldly apocalypse. In addition, the *imam* makes a reference to the Pashto language presumably spoken among Afghans in Delhi—in particular, a select group of one-syllable words that all rhyme with one another—as a sign of their ominous identity. It is unclear how Mulla Qadan meant his insulting words to be received by the sultan; however, Mushtaqi says, Bahlul simply smiled at the insult and reminded him, "Stop it, Mulla Qadan! We are all servants of God."²¹⁷

Following this anecdote, Mushtaqi tells another story involving Bahlul and a different mulla. In this case, the mulla was a man who was short in stature and had a ruddy (*surkeh wa safid*) complexion. Because of this, Bahlul would jokingly refer to him as "pinda lubiya," presumably a kind of bean (*lubiya*). When the mulla heard Bahlul's joke, he scolded the sultan and ordered him to repent for what he had done. He justified his request for an apology by insisting that is unbelief (*kufr*) to humiliate a man of learning and mock one of God's creations. The sultan, Mushtaqi says, promptly repented for his actions and apologized.²¹⁸

While the intended lessons within these stories are layered and multiple, I would like to draw attention to one particular facet for the purposes of this chapter. This is the prevalence of these imagined encounters between the Afghan Bahlul and a mulla: a religious specialist and an imagined repository of spiritual authority in the Persianate and early modern South Asian context. A large body of scholarship has addressed the topic of "mulla jokes" from early contexts like Jami's fifteenth-century didactic text the *Baharistan* to the contemporary worlds of Afghanistan and Pakistan.²¹⁹ As studies such as these have demonstrated, the figure of the mulla has long been a model for the critique of power and claims to religious authority and in the eastern Islamic world. Given their position in society, mullas and figures with similar religious training are sometimes depicted as harboring great wisdom and prudence; other times, however, they are caught in the act of hypocrisy, and are essentially stripped of their authority by a figure of lower social status or spiritual accreditation. Within stories such as these, spiritual authority is radically asserted to reside within the most unexpected of locations: usually the poor, itinerant, or marginalized who are made the object of ridicule by their social superiors.

The first anecdote about Mulla Qadan falls poignantly into this kind of mode. In Mushtaqi's telling, Mulla Qadan's comments are charged with insult, and come from an imagined position of spiritual authority. Not only is the mulla insulting the sultan; he is directing his offensive comments to the sultan himself, in his very presence. Considering the potential dangers that doing so might entail, it is likely that Mushtaqi's mulla meant for his comments to be humorous, and was using this opportunity in order to elicit knowing laughter from his congregation. Joking, as has been argued,

²¹⁶ Ibid, 10.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 10-11.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ See Margaret Mills, *Rhetoric and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

holds the potential to mobilize communities, who could together critique Bahlul's community without directly challenging his authority. However, because of Bahlul's quick ability to turn the comment on its head, the joke ends up not falling on him or the Afghans, but the mulla himself, and any who might have agreed with what he said. Indeed, by smiling and quietly reminding the mulla that "we are all servants of God," Bahlul steps into the position of spiritual authority that had been denied to him. In the end, with a deceptively simple response, the "Antichrist" Afghan reminds his audience that their shared subservience to God outweighs distinctions that others might capitalize upon to assert their superiority.

As regards the second anecdote, Bahlul seems to be caught in the act of doing precisely what he deemed improper in the previous story: poking fun at another because of some aspect of his or her identity. However, putting this story into conversation with the story of Mulla Qadan, it appears that Mushtaqi is once again playing with humor and the Afghan stereotype of rusticity to evoke empathy for Bahlul. Indeed, although the sultan is ultimately identified as being in the wrong for his uncivil joke on the part of a religious authority figure, he is also absolved from his mistake when he humbly agrees to repent. With some of the responsibility removed from the sultan, the story then becomes a chance for Mushtaqi to both highlight Bahlul's humility and remind his audience that the Lodi sultan could in fact be very funny. When the Afghan sultan ends the encounter by gracefully accepting the charges against him, the joke once again falls on someone else: the short-statured mulla who would henceforth be remembered as resembling a bean.

Following this story, Mushtaqi adds one more anecdote about a mulla and the sultan that further fleshes out this dynamic. One day, he says, Bahlul was cleaning himself when a certain Mulla Tughluq appeared. Although the mulla sensed that Bahlul wanted to avoid him, he followed the sultan, grabbed his arm, and then pulled him in such a way that the sultan's bathing towel (*futa*) began to fall down. Bahlul quickly sat down on the ground and covered himself, then asked the man: "Mulla, what are you afraid of?" to which the mulla replied, "I am doing the work of God, and you are avoiding me!" Bahlul demurred and explained to him that he had just been on the way to do some charitable work. Mulla Tughluq, however, demanded to know what work "was more necessary than that of the faith." Bahlul ceded, and agreed to do whatever the mulla asked him. The mulla then said, "I have brought a deserving person with me. Bestow a pension upon him." At that very moment, Mushtaqi says, Bahlul fixed a stipend for that man, then went on to complete the other task he had been asked to do. In the end, Mushtaqi concludes: "if there were such a ruler today, how would he behave?"²²⁰

Together, these stories of Bahlul and Delhi's religious authority figures reveal compelling details about the imagined nature of Bahlul's kingship. As we see in this final story, the mulla is once again caught behaving disrespectfully: he follows the sultan and physically cajoles him into listening to his request for a stipend. However, just as he had done in the situation with Mulla Qadan, Bahlul Lodi brings into perspective the discourteous attitude of a mulla in contrast to his own manners. Also importantly, the sultan is depicted as doing so in a way that maintains an effective, productive tension between his Afghan identity and the expectations of kingship. To be sure, when Bahlul is faced with Mulla Tughluq's condescending power play—likely an indication of how the mulla perceived himself vis-a-vis the Afghan sultan—Bahlul responds precisely as a ruler should: by bestowing a stipend upon a worthy individual. Finally, with the inclusion of the rhetorical question, "how would a ruler today behave?" Bahlul Lodi's singularity is further marked by his contrast to another: the reigning Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Here, in a rather direct comment, Mushtaqi questions whether or not Akbar would fairly dispense patronage; perhaps even hinting that the emperor was not capable of recognizing who might be worthy. In marked contrast to this,

²²⁰ Ibid.

the sultan Bahlul Lodi fulfills his kingly duties with an aplomb, drawing into sharp relief the disparity between himself and both the condescending mulla and reigning emperor of Mushtaqi's day.

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In his account of Bahlul Lodi's reign, Mushtaqi's *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi* shows the special place that the first Afghan sultan of Delhi held in the memory of Mughal-era Afghans. As I have argued, it was precisely through this figure of the humble, often marginalized sultan that Afghans processed one significant aspect of their experience in South Asia: the persistent maligning of Afghans as possessing a lingering social backwardness, even well after their integration into the elite worlds of the north Indian sultanates. Instead of rejecting these perceptions, however, authors such as Mushtaqi and Kabir meaningfully incorporated them into their stories about Bahlul, finding a way for the sultan to both comfortably inhabit his Afghan identity and challenge negative stereotypes with his political and as well as spiritual acumen. Moreover, this balance was achieved through the understated medium of humor—through stories that might raise a knowing chuckle from audiences acquainted with Afghans, or within a community of elites knowledgeable of Persianate social mores. Through these anecdotes, authors like Mushtaqi and Kabir went beyond the façade of humor to reach into a deeper repository of meaning concerning the ideal practice of kinship in the Islamicate tradition. Bahlul Lodi, for his part, remains an Afghan of questionable, low social origin; however, through his skillful punches at the hypocrisy of the Qayam Khanis, Hamid Khan, and the misinformed mullas, he reveals something profound about the wisdom that can reside within humble interiors. As these stories effectively argue, Bahlul Lodi is an ideal ruler precisely *because* of the lowly social origins associated with his Afghan identity—this is not an impediment to his rule.

While it is possible that Mughal-era Afghans told these stories to faithfully narrate the past, their appearance in these texts signifies their perceived importance and utility in that historical moment. They remained significant because of the Afghans' continued experience of social marginalization in the Mughal sphere, as well as the power that embracing these stereotypes—at least to some extent—allowed. In remembering the times when those who doubted Bahlul were stunned by his understated political and spiritual wisdom, Afghans like Kabir forged a sense of solidarity both as the objects of such criticism and the successors of one who so memorably overcame them. This solidarity is strengthened by the multiple meanings allowed by such stories, and how they might be read by different audiences. While a Mughal reader encountering these tales might find them confirmation of everything they thought they knew about Afghans—that they tend to be lacking in social mores, but that a few among them might have tricks up their sleeves—for an Afghan reader, these stories could serve as a powerful in-joke with important connotations for their contemporary context. As long as a textual record of these stereotypes persisted, Afghans could potentially use them to their advantage—just as Bahlul Lodi had done in the fifteenth century.

The Justice of Solomon in Hindustan: The Reign of Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517)

If Bahlul Lodi conjured lighthearted images in the imagination of Mughal-era Afghans, Bahlul's son Sikandar (r. 1489-1517) occupied a decidedly different space. Indeed, while Afghan histories typically imagined Bahlul humorous situations, lovingly referring to him by the nickname "Ballu,"²²¹ his son Sikandar took on a title with expansive connotations of majesty and power in the literary traditions of the Persianate world: Alexander the Great of Macedonia. As we will see, in texts like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, Sikandar Lodi is depicted as a larger-than-life monarch with incredible imperial ambitions. Under his rule, the sultanate began by Kala and Bahlul truly came into its own, with Sikandar beating out some of his most prominent competitors to secure a hold on the traditional seat of political authority in India. In these memories of Sikandar's rule, however, the

²²¹ See Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 3.

Lodi sultan was not imagined as wielding sheer power over his contemporaries. Rather, the Sikandar Lodi of these chronicles was an insightful, oftentimes level-headed monarch whose justice made him comparable to his namesake, Alexander, as well as the Biblical king Solomon—references frequently made in Mughal-era texts. Beyond this, I argue, the enactment of Sikandar’s justice was understood to have important implications for the broader Afghan community, especially as they settled in disparate regions of the sultanate. These representations not only demonstrated Sikandar’s imagined potential as an ideal Afghan ruler, but positioned him as particularly suited to governing the multi-religious, multi-ethnic space that was Hindustan.

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In one of Kabir’s first *hikayats* on Sikandar Lodi’s reign, the author establishes a key fact about the sultan’s rule in an encounter between Sikandar and the heirs of Ahmad Khan Jilwani, a wealthy Afghan who ruled over an independent sultanate in Bayana, south of Delhi. According to Kabir, Ahmad Khan Jilwani had been given permission to take the title of *sultan* by Bahlul Lodi, in exchange for the monetary support that he offered during the latter’s campaign against Sultan Husain Sharqi.²²² Shortly after Sikandar ascended to the throne, however, the new sultan opted for a different approach. When he heard of Ahmad Khan’s death, he personally travelled to Bayana and found Ahmad Khan’s sons and heirs, to whom he said: “This is not Roh, where every village (*kali*)²²³ and every tribe (*qabileh*) has a different master. This is kingship (*padishahi*).”²²⁴ Sikandar then began to give out land assignments—the historical prerogative of a monarch—and remained in Bayana for some time to check the Rajput rajas who ruled in the surrounding mountain ranges.²²⁵ Through this story, the *Afsana* establishes an important idea about political life in north India: that it was not right for different communities and different regions to have their own rulers. Sikandar’s responsibility, then, would be to centralize political authority over people and territory in his own person—a task which, we learn, he took up with poise as he rapidly cleared away old Lodi adversaries such as the Sharqis.

In Kabir’s history, however, the sultan’s assertion of his unique privilege to rule is tempered by a deep commitment to the well-being of his fellow Afghans. This idea is reinforced again and again in chronicles of the period, and, I argue, became one of the central features of Sikandar Lodi’s reign. Indeed, in the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, the *Tarikh-i Shahi*, and other Mughal-era texts, Sikandar Lodi is remembered for the many occasions in which he catered to the needs of those who came to him in search of *naukari*, or military service. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, military service was one of the primary pull factors bringing Afghans to Hindustan, and securing of such positions was often seen as the key to putting behind a life of poverty. While many Afghans purportedly came to Hindustan in earlier years to support Kala and Bahlul Lodi, Sikandar was described as self-consciously continuing this tradition, perpetuating the settlement of Afghans in a region increasingly brought together under the sultan’s able leadership.

In one particularly memorable example from Kabir, Sikandar Lodi was engaged in a game of polo when a group of Afghans approached him requesting to join his service. While some of the men were on horseback and offered their bows to the sultan, a few came only foot—including a man who offered the humble sum of seven ears of corn (*tawka*).²²⁶ Sikandar accepted this amount, and sent the man to his newly assigned territory, an unassuming location on the outskirts of a village where the man married, had a son, and amassed a respectable sum of four thousand rupees. Three

²²² Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 16a and 23a.

²²³ The Pashto word is used here.

²²⁴ Ibid, fol. 25a.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ The Pashto word for a corncob.

years later, that man was obliged to return to Roh, where he had been asked to marry his uncle's daughter. He spent seven long years away from India during which he had three more sons and managed to spend all the money he earned. So it was that he decided to return to Hindustan with the entire new branch of his family in tow. When he arrived in his former revenue assignment, however, the man was met with a surprising sight: the land was cultivated and prospering (*abadan*), and the home where he had left his wife and son had been transformed into a great palace (*mahal-i azim*). He desperately sought to find out whether the masters of such a place could be his own family members; an idea difficult to believe given the state of poverty (*kehmar*) in which he had arrived in India. His questions were answered when villagers confirmed the identity of the local lord, and when the Afghan witnessed the members of his own *haram* inside the palace, richly dressed in gold-threaded robes and seated on a dais (*charpay*).

It was then, Kabir says, that the man and his new family exchanged their tattered robes from Roh with new, embroidered ones, bought a few horses, and went to visit Sikandar Lodi. Once in the sultan's court, the Afghan explained that he was an old servant who had been away for many years, and for that reason had come to pay obeisance (*qadam didan*). Sikandar, however, was said to know the entire story without the man explaining any further. "Yes," the sultan said to himself, "the master of seven ears of corn has come. Perhaps he will say that 'in those days I was only one, but now we have become five people.' He has come for an assignment." Accordingly, Sikandar assigned the man to a village adjacent to the previous one and instructed him to go there, adding "what need is there of meeting? When work comes to us, we will call you."²²⁷ In Kabir's concluding words: "they call Sikandar the master of the supernatural (*sahib-i kharig*), and it is for this reason that they say so."²²⁸

This story offers a few important insights on Sikandar Lodi's significance in the imagination of Mughal-era Afghans. For one, this particularly memorable anecdote echoes many stories—particularly from the *Afsana-yi Shaban*—that connect Sikandar's leadership to the mobility and settlement of Afghans in disparate regions of the subcontinent. In this vision, the space of Roh—the Afghan "homeland"—becomes deeply intertwined with the space of Hindustan through Afghan political leadership. Although Sikandar Lodi insisted that kingship resided solely within his person, his ongoing interest in the needs of his fellow Afghans ensured that they found opportunities for advancement that did not exist in the relatively impoverished region from which they came. As a *padishah*, it is Sikandar's responsibility to distribute land and resources to those in need—and it is this action which is defined as one of the hallmarks of his rule as a monarch.

In addition, this anecdote is just one of many in Afghan histories of the age that attests to the imagined supernatural faculties of Sikandar Lodi. These skills range from his perceived gift of foresight—as in the story of the impoverished Afghan coming back from Roh—to a remarkable ability to bring the dead back to life, described by Rizq Allah Mushtaqi in his *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*.²²⁹ Some accounts even rumored that Sikandar possessed a *jinn*, or spirit made of fire, who whispered truths to him like the Biblical King Solomon—a figure remembered as an ideal monarch in the tradition of Persianate kingship. It is unclear to what extent these assertions about Sikandar Lodi's capabilities were shaped by contemporary Mughal and Safavid claims to saintly kingship, which drew upon similar kinds of imagery to depict the sovereigns as possessing qualities akin to those of renowned Sufi masters.²³⁰ However, records of these events in Mushtaqi's chronicle, completed at

²²⁷ Ibid, fol. 41b-42b.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ See Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 44-46.

²³⁰ See Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

the moment of the emperor Akbar's rise to significant power, suggests that competition with the Mughals perhaps had little to do with this; that memories of Sikandar Lodi's abilities had long been floating among circles of Afghans and north Indians. An early sixteenth-century poem written by Shaikh Jamali Kamboh, the prominent Suhrawardi Sufi and companion of Sikandar Lodi, describing the monarch as the "Solomon of the age,"²³¹ further attests to the longer existence of these comparisons.

Many contemporary scholars looking back on Sikandar Lodi's reign have highlighted what appears to be his rather narrow focus on propagating the *shari'a*, or Islamic law. In *The Languages of Political Islam*, Muzaffar Alam notes how "Sikandar Lodi...is sometimes remembered as a bigot,"²³² while an earlier cadre of scholars have pointed to Sikandar's banning of events like the procession of the spear of the Salar Masud Ghazi as evidence of his rather orthodox outlook on "un-Islamic" practices.²³³ These depictions imply that Sikandar Lodi was particularly comfortable in his identity as a Muslim—something which is in fact belied by chronicles like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, which point to incidents where Sikandar's Islamic credentials were actually called into question by his contemporaries.²³⁴ Mughal-era chronicles do indeed reference, across the board, Sikandar's commitment to upholding the principles of *shari'a*—perhaps leading to the rather singular focus on the sultan's orthodox bent as a ruler. However, as I will now show, what also distinguishes these late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century accounts of the Lodi sultan's reign are the many stories showcasing Sikandar's justice in the context of the multi-religious space that was his north Indian dominion. As we see embedded in these memories, religious identities were not imagined as a central factor when it came to who turned to Sikandar Lodi for justice. Similarly, Sikandar's Solomonic justice was depicted as particularly attuned to situations that arose in this space.

To give one example from *Afsana-yi Shaban*—a chronicle which is itself replete with non-Muslim and an array of different Muslim actors—Kabir recalls a time when Sikandar's dispensed justice to a wronged Brahmin *peshwa*, or deputy, of a Hindu raja from Bihar. According to him, the raja of Siwar, located in the hilly regions of Bihar, had a Brahmin (*zunnar-dar*) deputy who was once an Ottoman (*usmani*) *qazi*, or judge trained in the Islamic tradition.²³⁵ One day, however, an enmity arose between the two, leading the raja to kill the *peshwa's* entire family and leave no one alive but the *peshwa* himself. The deputy fled to Sikandar's court, where he claimed that he had come "before the *padishah* to seek the requisition of justice."²³⁶ Sikandar promptly asked the man—who stood before the sultan with his Brahmanical thread, the physical marker of a Brahmin—to explain himself, and upon hearing his story devised a solution. To grant the Brahmin's request, Sikandar sent an army of thirty thousand Afghan horsemen to accompany him back to Siwar, where they killed the raja's entire family except for one person. In the end, Kabir says, the raja's one remaining kinsman became the new king, while the deputy's descendants prospered in Siwar down until the present day.²³⁷

Although this might serve as a gruesome, if non-partisan example of Sikandar's justice, many other stories most often told about the Lodi monarch involve non-Muslims as well as Muslims, and address the proposition that criminals can, and should, be reformed to serve as an example to

²³¹ Jamali Kamboh, *Siyar al-'Arifin*.

²³² Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 42. Raziuddin Aquil also draws attention to this in *Sufism, Culture, and Politics*, 125.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 125-6.

²³⁴ For example, Kabir recalls an episode where Ghiyas al-din Khalji, the Sultan of Malwa, threatened to bring Sikandar into servitude "if he is not a Muslim." See Kabir, "Afsana," fol. 43b.

²³⁵ The story of the Ottoman *qazi* possibly abandoning his identity to become a Brahmin sounds unusual in this context. It is possible that my translation is incorrect; however, my point about the story remains the same.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 29b.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

others. These stories typically have no identifiable relationship to religious identities, and seem more attuned towards demonstrating the responsibility of monarchs to make decisions that best benefit their subjects. In the *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, for example, Mushtaqi describes a time when Sikandar was encouraged to kill a thief who had stolen a horse from the royal stables. The sultan, Mushtaqi says, refused to do so claiming that his gate was the Dar al-Aman, or the abode of peace, and opting to send the man to prison instead. After seven years, Mushtaqi continues, Sikandar released the man from prison on the condition that he convert to Islam. The former thief claimed that he would do so of his own volition. He was released, and the sultan then recruited him to investigate cases of theft. Later, Mushtaqi says, just such an incident took place in the bazaar of Agra, for which a group of Meos²³⁸ from the sultan's army were deemed responsible. Instead of simply turning the thieves over to Sikandar, however, the convert pleaded for the sultan to be lenient towards them, and paid the bazaar's merchants for their losses. He also urged the Meos to never again commit such an act, a request that appears to have been duly noted: according to Mushtaqi, afterwards, no other theft occurred among the sultan's army.²³⁹

Finally, one of the most commonly narrated stories of Sikandar's justice—one which appears in the work of Mushtaqi, Nimat Allah Harawi, and others—involves the sultan's resolution of a dispute between two Hindu brothers and one of their wives. In this story, two men who belonged to the Kuruva community were engaged in military service when they each collected a ruby and some other precious items as booty. When one of the brothers decided to return home after the campaign, the other entrusted his own share of the spoils to him, asking him to bring the precious items home to his wife for safekeeping. The brother did as requested; however, he secretly kept the ruby for himself. When the first brother finally arrived home, he asked his wife about the condition of the precious gem. She, of course, denied ever having seen it—moreover, she did not know what a ruby was. Her husband, however, did not believe her, and he and his brother brought her to the court of Sikandar Lodi's prime minister, Miyan Bhua, for punishment. When the woman's brother-in-law produced two false witnesses to the transaction—men from a nearby gambling hall who he had dressed up in the garb of Brahmins—Miyan Bhua concluded that the woman must have been lying, in spite of her continued protestations.

The woman fled to the court of Sikandar Lodi and told him what had happened. The sultan, for his part, devised a clever plan to ascertain the truth. After receiving verbal confirmation from the two brothers and the two witnesses that they had all seen the ruby, the sultan asked the two brothers to make wax models of the gem. Because they had both seen the stone, their models were nearly identical. Sikandar then called the two witnesses forward and asked them to make their own models of the ruby. Neither man, of course, could make an accurate representation. Having determined the guilty party, the sultan then admonished Miyan Bhua “for unjustly calling this woman a thief,” and called upon her brother-in-law, informing him that he would be pardoned from execution only if he returned the stone. The sultan turned again to the two witnesses and chastised them for daring to bear false testimony in his presence. When the false Brahmin witnesses explained that their poverty drove them to engage in such activities, Sikandar's concluding act of justice was to declare that they must have their faces aggressively rubbed on the ground to serve as a warning to others.²⁴⁰

Together, these stories reveal the ways in which Sikandar's Solomonic justice encompassed a space of astonishing religious and ethnic diversity. Not only do individuals ranging from Meos to

²³⁸ In this period, the Meos were a tribal community who lived in Mewat and the Aravalli hills surrounding Delhi. By the Mughal period, however, many had adopted agriculture and established *zamindaris*, and cooperated with the Mughal authorities. See Surajbhan Bharadwaj, “Migration, Mobility and Memories: Meos in the Processes of Peasantization and Islamisation in Medieval Period,” *Indian Historical Review* 29, no. 2 (2012).

²³⁹ Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 32-35.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 36-40.

Kuruva Hindus to Sayyids figure in this landscape, but the justice of the sultan is depicted as capable of accommodating the multitude of perplexing situations that arise amongst them. Even more than this, this enactment of justice was consistently identified as one of the central imperatives of Sikandar Lodi's reign, regardless of the social background or identity of the one seeking it. It is for this reason that Sikandar criticized his beloved *wazīr* Miyan Bhua, who had critically overlooked the needs of an unnamed Hindu woman who had nonetheless been wronged and came before the state seeking help. As it were, the Afghan ruler Sikandar Lodi—although depicted as fiercely devoted to the principles of the *shari'a*—was not remembered as a monarch who presided over a world in which Muslims (or even other Afghans) were privileged at the expense of others. Rather, the sultan's powers of insight and sense of fairness were particularly suited to the conditions of his kingdom: a patchwork realm of "Hindustan" that is knit together through the *padishahi* of a "second Alexander."²⁴¹

To restate the significance of these memories, stories of the sultan's justice stress the idea that Afghan kingship came into being in the specific conditions that defined the fifteenth century in north India. Kingship was not, as it were, something intrinsically "Afghan," and it would not hold its own in the Afghan homeland of Roh. However, as the fluid political and social conditions following the Timurid invasions allowed, Afghans increasingly sought a better life elsewhere, and Sikandar Lodi's political sovereignty ensured their growth and prosperity in the opportunity-rich lands of India. The sultan's commitment to the members of the Afghan *qaum*, in addition to his ability to provide for them, served as one of the hallmarks of his kingship. Still, these stories demonstrate, Sikandar's reign was not attuned to the needs of Afghans alone. Rather, like both Alexander and Solomon, the most exalted Lodi sultan possessed the capability to rule judiciously in the complex landscape in which Afghans increasingly found themselves. In the imaginary presented in texts like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, Afghan kingship came into its own in Hindustan; likewise, it was construed as expansive enough to encompass the entire gamut of experiences that might present themselves in the context of pre-Mughal north India.

The Tragedy of Ibrahim Lodi (r. 1517-1526), the Final Lodi Sultan

If the "second Alexander" Sikandar Lodi represented, in the eyes of many Mughal-era Afghan chroniclers, the ideal Afghan sovereign, Sikandar's son and successor Ibrahim embodied the opposite qualities as his father. Rash, unpredictable, and according to some chronicles, having an unhealthy penchant for the drink,²⁴² Ibrahim was most famously remembered for losing the sultanate in 1526 in a dramatic battle with the first Mughal emperor Babur (r. 1526-1530), dying on the battlefield as he defended his kingdom with a formidable army of over a hundred thousand men.²⁴³ The perceived historical significance of Ibrahim's failure at the hands of the Mughals—one that is attested to in the accounts of contemporary witnesses such as Abd al-Quddus Gangohi—appears to have profoundly shaped the last sultan's Lodi's historical image, making it difficult to piece together a faithful historical representation of him. Nonetheless, this section suggests that the manner in which later, Mughal-period Afghan historians comprehended Ibrahim Lodi's defeat offers important clues concerning perceptions of Afghan kingship in the seventeenth century. In particular, I will argue, it shows us what Afghans deemed kingship should *not* be. By honing in on the precise criticisms that chroniclers made of Ibrahim Lodi, we catch a glimpse of how these individuals

²⁴¹ Ibid, 100. As Mushtaqi refers to him as such in a poem at the end of his account of Sikandar's reign: "a king of kings like a Zu al-qarnain ("the two-horned one," another name for Alexander the Great)/it is certain he is the second Alexander."

²⁴² This is particularly alluded to in Kabir.

²⁴³ Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 324.

comprehended what went wrong for the Afghans after the success of Bahlul and Sikandar, and how the avoidance of such actions might have ensured greater longevity for the sultanate.

Considering the intense political competition that accompanied succession in the sultanate period, it is likely that Ibrahim in fact had a number of powerful allies who supported his claim to the throne in 1517.²⁴⁴ The mere fact of his ascension in these conditions gestures to the fact that he was most likely considered a strong candidate by many of his contemporaries, probably fought valiantly in battle, and possessed many of the gentlemanly qualities cultivated in royal princes from a young age.²⁴⁵ However, the archive of Afghan histories attests that from the very beginning of his reign, Ibrahim began to behave in ways decidedly unbecoming for someone in his position. For Mushtaqi, this was first and foremost that the sultan mistreated all of his brothers (*awmal ba hama-yi biradaran ma'ash-i bad kard*). One of his most serious offences in this case involved his full brother Jalal al-din, with whom Ibrahim had made a pact (*'abd*) to divide the kingdom into two parts, each of which the brothers would rule independently. Instead of honoring that promise, however, Ibrahim exiled Jalal al-din from the sultanate, and imprisoned his other brothers in the fort Hisar Firoza.²⁴⁶

It should be noted here that while the proposal to divide the kingdom between Ibrahim and Jalal al-din appears in nearly every Afghan history of the period, Mushtaqi's is the only one, to my knowledge, that depicts Ibrahim's termination of this agreement negatively. In contrast, works like the *Tarikh-i Shahi*, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, and the *Afsana-yi Shaban* all argue for the necessity of a single kingship within a particular dominion—in this case, “Hindustan,” or the core territories of the Indo-Gangetic plain. There are perhaps any number of reasons to explain this diversion between Mushtaqi, considerably earlier chronicle, and the remainder of the Mughal accounts, including a possible shift in understandings of this component of Afghan rule. However, the texts at hand nonetheless unanimously attest to Ibrahim's mistreatment of those who were close to him, ranging from biological kin to members of the old Lodi nobility. In histories like Mushtaqi's, the nobility, many of whom were not kinsmen of the sultans or belonging to an Afghan lineage at all, were often depicted as treading the fine line between servants (*naukars*) and brothers (*biradars*) of the Lodi rulers: a fact which exacerbated the perceived treachery in Ibrahim's dealings with them. With the exception of one Afghan history—the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—this fact of Ibrahim's kingship is portrayed in a decidedly negative light, throwing Ibrahim's reign in sharp contrast to that of his father and grandfather.

Of all the accounts considered here, Kabir's *Afsana* provides perhaps the most damning assessment of the final Lodi sultan, and nods to the perceived folly and viciousness in Ibrahim's treatment of those who had been honored by his father. Among the most important of these wronged individuals was Sikandar's prime minister Miyan Bhua, a close companion of the late sultan as well as renowned scholar²⁴⁷ and military recruiter. While Mushtaqi does not provide any reasoning for why Ibrahim targeted Miyan Bhua, the *Afsana-yi Shaban* argues that it was a petty disagreement that evoked Ibrahim's unsolicited rage towards the well-meaning *wazir*. Indeed, Kabir says, Ibrahim had come to favor one of his servants, and ordered that a considerable sum of money from the royal kitchens be given to him. Miyan Bhua stepped in and warned the sultan that the money from those coffers should not be wasted without careful consideration. At this suggestion, Ibrahim became angry and threw Miyan Bhua into prison, where he was later killed for his transgression.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ See Munis D. Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁴⁵ This is attested to by Ahmad Yadgar, who in his *Tarikh-i Shahi* noted that Ibrahim was Sikandar's preferred successor precisely because he was beautiful (*bush*) in appearance and character, and he knew the ways of generosity and bravery.

²⁴⁶ Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 101.

²⁴⁷ Miyan Bhua was the author of the *Tibb-i Sikandari*, a medical treatise combining the traditions of Yunani (Greek) and Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine.

²⁴⁸ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 46a.

Another honored nobleman from Sikandar’s reign, ‘Azam Humayun Sarwani, faced a similar fate. In the *bikayat* following the tale of Miyan Bhua’s death, Kabir describes a time when the sultan called ‘Azam Humayun to Delhi from his revenue assignment in Kara. ‘Azam Humayun was not able to come and made excuses for his absence, writing to the sultan that he would travel to the imperial capital when he was able. Ibrahim, for his part, took this as an act of rebellion (*ghadar*). Enraged at what he took for the commander’s insolence, Ibrahim sent a chain to ‘Azam Humayun as a symbol of his imprisonment—a fate which the old imperial servant willingly accepted. Claiming that he would remain a *sepahi*, or soldier, of Ibrahim until the end of time,²⁴⁹ ‘Azam Humayun traveled to the capital and appeared before his monarch. Ibrahim sent ‘Azam to prison, while dishonored nobleman’s son launched a rebellion from his father’s stronghold in Kara. Ibrahim put down the Sarwani forces and sent ‘Azam Humayun the decapitated head of his son as punishment; however, it was not long before the sultan killed ‘Azam Humayun as well. Soon, as all of those close to the deceased Sikandar Lodi began to fear for their lives, a few followed the example of ‘Azam Humayun’s son and entered into open rebellion in the eastern territories of the empire.

Although Ibrahim did not lose the sultanate fighting those *amirs* he had betrayed, the imagined connection between the last Lodi sultan’s treatment of his nobility and his failure in 1526 is stated with remarkable clarity in one of the final *bikayats* describing his reign. Here, we learn from Kabir’s perspective on why it was that a faithful Lodi servant—Daulat Khan Lodi, stationed on the western fringes of the sultanate in Lahore—betrayed his monarch by inviting Babur to launch an invasion of Hindustan from his capital in Kabul. As the author explains, when Daulat Khan received word that ‘Azam Humayun and Miyan Bhua had been killed and that other parts of the sultanate were in open rebellion, he sent a plea to the sultan, asking him to rethink his behavior. “Padishah,” he wrote:

Your ancestors collected these Afghans one by one, and ordered that they be shown affection. You have adopted such behavior that you have made all of these people hopeless. It is necessary that you adopt the behavior of your ancestors.²⁵⁰

Unfortunately, Kabir reveals, these words of advice were lost on the sultan. Ibrahim, in line with his established character, was overcome with rage at Daulat Khan’s attempt to advise him, and killed the governor’s two sons who had come bearing the letter.²⁵¹ It was at this moment, in shock and grief, when Daulat Khan turned to Babur, making a pact with the fledgling Mughal emperor vowing to support him in his fateful military excursions into north India.²⁵² The result marked the end of the Lodi sultanate—Ibrahim could not hold his own, and succumbed to Mughal forces at Panipat in 1526.

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Attempting to understand the failure of the Lodis in 1526, historians like Dirk Kolff have pointed to the inherent tribalism of north Indian Afghans and their inability to accept the rule of a single *padishah*. In this vision, tribal leaders—who formed the core of the Lodi nobility—resented Ibrahim’s attempts to rein them in under the umbrella of his authority; an action that both Bahlul and Sikandar avoided by intentionally fostering a more inclusive, decentralized system that would not offend the “aristocratic sentiments” of Afghan leaders.²⁵³ While this assessment, which appears

²⁴⁹ Ibid, fol. 46b.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, fol. 53a.

²⁵¹ Ibid, fol. 53a-b.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market of Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

to be drawn largely from Abbas Khan Sarwani's *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi*, might have historical validity, it does not take into account how historical Afghans more broadly processed this significant event in their history. Indeed, while tribal pride might well have hastened the downfall of the Lodis, the vast majority of Mughal-era Afghan histories pointed to a different source when interpreting the sultanate's failure. Rather than questioning the Lodi sultans' right to sole kingly authority, these authors in fact repeatedly emphasized the prerogatives of each of them to centralize authority within their own person—an idea which Sikandar had confirmed at the beginning of his reign, in the encounter with Ahmad Khan Jilwani's sons. What distinguished the "failure" Ibrahim from his ancestors was not, therefore, an attempt to suddenly claim that power, nor were the sultan's actions singled out as an offense to some long-held notions of tribal privilege. Rather, as Daulat Khan's words so clearly revealed, it was Ibrahim's betrayal of those who had been *given* honors by previous generations of Lodi sultans—those who had "eaten of their salt." It was this action that threw the body politic into tragic disarray, opening the gates for Babur's invasion and the consequences for Afghan power that ensued.

The Suri Interregnum (r. 1540-1555): Continuity and Conflict

As explored in the first chapter, the fall of the Lodi sultanate during the reign of Ibrahim Lodi was viewed by many, including the Afghan soldier Dattu Sarwani and his spiritual preceptor, Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, as a loss for the Afghan greater community. Locating another Afghan sultan to lead the *qaum* came to be viewed as an act of tantamount importance; nonetheless, as Gangohi revealed to his disciple in a series of foreboding dreams, the Afghans' collective lack of faith in God would doom them to an uncertain fate at the hands of the "divine scourge"²⁵⁴ that was the Mughals. However, as both Dattu and Abd al-Quddus witnessed in their own lifetimes, an Afghan from a decidedly different ilk than the Lodis—Farid Sur, a native of Bihar in eastern India—would engage in a number of astonishing military victories that drove the Mughals away from their newly established seat in Hindustan. In doing so, later generations of Afghans surmised, he brought a brief restoration of Afghan power in India, creating the conditions in which his Afghan brothers could flourish while extending his authority over a vast, well-connected north Indian dominion.

In his influential work on the military labor market of the Sultanate and Mughal periods, Dirk Kolff has carefully demonstrated the many ways in which Farid Sur, who took the regnal name of Sher Shah Sur (r. 1540-1545), forged some of the advanced administrative institutions that would later be adopted to great success by the Mughals. These practices—such as the branding of horses in the imperial army, or *daqh*—allowed for Sher Shah to create a highly formalized system of administration in which even the lowliest soldier's pay was overseen by the ruler himself. These aspects of the Suri administration are amply mused upon in texts like the *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi*, the *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi*, and the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, as well as in the work of contemporary scholars like Kolff and Raziuddin Aquil.²⁵⁵ However, in this concluding section of the chapter, I aim to look more closely at how these earliest sources of the Suri interlude interpreted the significance of this moment to the making of Afghan kingship. In their depictions of Sher Shah's reign, we will see, the sultan's imperial majesty was consistently tempered by a keen awareness of his humble social origins. Like Kala Lodi and Bahlul, the first Suri sultan was remembered to comfortably inhabit that identity, bringing a certain sensibility to his reign that brought benefits not only to the Afghans of north India, but to the broader community of sultanate subjects.

In his introduction to the reign of Sher Shah, Mushtaqi writes that during Lodi period, no Afghan from the Sur clan was ever included in the Lodi nobility. This was because Bahlul Lodi had

²⁵⁴ Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation," 139.

²⁵⁵ See Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics*, 39-80.

once warned his son Sikandar never to trust a Sur, because they all “had ambitions for sovereignty.”²⁵⁶ Because of this, Sur Afghans who migrated to or lived in India usually found service with members of the nobility stationed in different regions of the sultanate. This was precisely the story of Sher Shah’s father, Miyan Hasan, who had traveled from Roh to serve one Jamal Khan Lodi Sarangkhani, the governor of Hisar under Sikandar Lodi.²⁵⁷ When he was a young man, Sher Shah fell into disagreement with his father, and decided to strike out on his own in the fluid political environment of eastern India. First, he entered the service of a powerful Nuhani Afghan leader of Bihar, then gradually branched out to an elevated position under Muhammad Khan Junaidi, another local warlord who struggled to exert his sovereignty in the aftermath of Ibrahim Lodi’s defeat. Under both leaders, Sher Shah was deputed to lead strategic military operations against regional adversaries, and consistently found himself on the winning end. Within a matter of time, he had wrested control of both Chaund and Sahsaram in Bihar, earning such a name for himself that even his patrons began to suspect his desire for kingship.²⁵⁸

As Mughal-period Afghan authors culled through their memories of Sher Shah, the sultan-to-be’s stunning victories were typically chalked up to one characteristic: his extreme dedication to his duties as a military servant. Whenever he was needed, it seems, the young Farid Sur was at the ready to serve his patrons—sometimes when no one else was there to take the call.²⁵⁹ This determination, as well as the lengths that it took him to rise to a position of power, are frequently alluded to in texts recalling his reign: even by Sher Shah himself. Indeed, even after becoming a formidable regional ruler with far-reaching imperial ambitions, Sher Shah referenced his humble origins and openly spoke of how his success was attributed to raw initiative and determination. To catch a glimpse into the importance of this idea, we need merely turn to a series of imagined encounters that occurred between Sher Shah and Mallu Khan, a warlord and governor of Malwa²⁶⁰ who concurrently strove for power in the region and variously resisted the Afghan leader’s imperial ambitions. As in the stories of Bahlul Lodi and the mullas, these stories draw into sharp contrast the disparity between individuals who failed to achieve their ambitions—namely, Mallu Khan—and those who succeeded: in this case, the “lion” (*sher*) Sher Shah Suri.

In a few stories narrated by Mushtaqi, upon reluctantly entering the service of Sher Shah during his campaigns in Malwa, the headstrong Mallu Khan was consistently in awe of the tactics that the sultan employed with his army. On one occasion, he observed the sultan and all of his men in full military gear, even in the midst of the warm season. He turned to Husain Khan Panni, one of Sher Shah’s trusted servants, and queried: “how are you feeling in his hot sun?... (even) my clothing (feels) heavy on my body. What must your condition be wearing iron (armor)?” They explained that it was no matter: they had been riding in the same formation since leaving Bengal, and they were happy and comfortable. When Mallu Khan expressed his surprise, asking if Husain Khan had ever known any other comfort, the commander just smiled and said: “There is a famous saying: ‘whenever a master (*khudawand kasi*) lies on the ground, his servant (*khadim*) sleeps in the grave.’ Because the *padishah* has taken it upon himself, we do not find it difficult or impossible.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Mushtaqi, *Waqi'at*, 119.

²⁵⁷ Hisar in present-day Haryana, north and west of Delhi.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁶⁰ Mallu Khan was a servant in the employ of the Sultans of Gujarat. Some sources also suggest that he took the title of “sultan” in Malwa, calling himself Qadir Shah. See Upendra Nath Day, *Medieval Malwa: A Political & Cultural History, 1401-1562* (Delhi: Munshi Ram Manohar Lal Oriental Publishers & Booksellers, 1965), 330-331.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

On another occasion, Mushtaqi says, Sher Shah spoke frankly with his rival about where he had come from and how he gotten to where he was now. “In the beginning, it was such that no one had heard my name,” he admitted,

When the people came to know me, (it was because) I threw myself into adversity and hardship. I did not take an opportunity or rest, and every day I walked with my arrow and bow and went to hunt, and having hunted I returned home. I consorted with thieves and brigands, and I traveled throughout the region. One day, I was in a boat with my companions when some enemies overtook us, and I fought them as I could. When I saw that they were winning, I put the arrows and bow on my head and jumped into the water. I swam for three *kurohs* through the water.”²⁶²

Mallu Khan, was reportedly astonished (*hairan*) at the conclusion of this story. Later, we learn that he suffered a humiliating defeat against the Afghans after turning his back against them in his own territory of Malwa.²⁶³

Once again, much like Sikandar Lodi, Sher Shah’s role as a generous patron of those seeking military service is also called upon repeatedly in historical accounts of the Suri ruler. The famed personal touch that the sultan brought to his reign, namely by personally overseeing the enrollment of his soldiers, also brings a fascinating new presence to accounts about the period. Indeed, rather than merely including stories of relatively privileged Afghans or military servants, narratives of Sher Shah often feature unnamed individuals of lower social origin who engage directly with the Suri ruler. In many of these cases, these stories appear to be aimed at drawing attention to Sher Shah’s famed insight when it came to discerning who was worthy of receiving the honor of service. For example, in a few memorable moments in Mushtaqi’s text, we encounter a few individuals of outward humble appearance, whose looks or social status presumably earned them immediate rejection from other recruiters. Sher Shah, however, is depicted as giving some of these men a chance to prove themselves. Sometimes, these individuals impress the sultan with their sharp wit or other overlooked skills, and are immediately given positions. Others, however, are quickly identified by the sultan as incapable of what they claimed, and were dismissed from his presence.²⁶⁴

The ongoing theme of patronage in military service, however, still does not counter one of the central arguments of the *Afsana-yi Shaban* and other Afghan chronicles: that kingship in Hindustan is the prerogative of one individual. Kabir’s work draws particular attention to this idea in one *bikayat* describing the aftermath of Sher Shah’s battle with the Mughal emperor Humayun at Qannauj, in the Indo-Gangetic plain. At this moment, with Humayun scurrying away in defeat, a few Afghans and their leader, a certain Sayyid Shamsabadi, saw an opportunity for “their names to be known until the end of time.”²⁶⁵ So they decided to ferry themselves to the banks of the Ganga and let the Mughal emperor pass. When Sher Shah heard of this, he was outraged and hastened in their direction. He found and killed the Afghans who had plotted to take matters into their own hands, and cut off the ears and gouged out the eyes²⁶⁶ of Sayyid Shamsabadi. Kabir concludes the anecdote with two sobering maxims: “It is said that in the affairs of kings, there is neither sayyid nor *alavi*”²⁶⁷

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid. The story of Mallu Khan is somewhat different in Kabir. We don’t learn much about him other than that he was stationed in Mandu, Malwa when Sher Shah called him to his presence. Mallu Khan did not respond, so Sher Shah made his own way in his direction. When Mallu Khan heard this news, he fled to the Deccan. See fol. 127a.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Kabir, *Afsana*, fol. 121b.

²⁶⁶ Note that disfigurement in this way was a common means of delegitimizing a political opponent.

²⁶⁷ Descendant of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

(*dar kar-i padishaban na sayyid na alavi*),²⁶⁸ just as Khwaja Nizami Ganjavi (d. 1209) has spoken: ‘there are plenty of dangers in the affairs of kings/so no one has a relationship with him’ (*kbatarba dar kar-i shaban basi/ke ba shah khweshi na darad kasi*).²⁶⁹ While Sher Shah might sleep on the ground in solidarity with his men, there was never to be any doubt that he alone was the monarch, and he alone carried the oftentimes heavy burden of rule.

Similarly, when describing the convoluted political maneuvers that resulted in the downfall of the second Afghan sultanate, the collection of Afghan histories points to the problems that arose when some of Sher Shah’s successors failed to adequately enforce their sole authority in Hindustan. This typically occurred when the Suri princes failed to do adequate justice to their nobility, or when the nobility themselves became overly ambitious and threatened to overpower a weak monarch. This is precisely what occurred following the death Islam Shah Suri (r. 1545-1554), the son and successor of Sher Shah who enjoyed the longest rule of any Suri monarch. Although Islam Shah’s son, Firoz Shah, was the first to take the throne after his father, he only occupied his position for a few days before he was murdered by ‘Adil Shah, his cousin and another Suri aspirant for the throne. The situation intensified when two other Suri heirs positioned themselves as sultans, or “*padishabs*,” within a short time. One of these was Sultan Sikandar, a brother-in-law of ‘Adil Shah who declared authority from Lahore.²⁷⁰ Another was Sultan Ibrahim, crowned as *padishah* in the old Lodi capital of Agra. Although ‘Adil Shah was quickly routed and removed from the scene, Sikandar and Ibrahim continued to challenge one another, meeting on the field of battle to settle the score between them. Before they could determine a winner, however, Ibrahim sued for peace, then made an uncannily familiar suggestion: that he take the land of Punjab while Sikandar rule from the city of Agra.²⁷¹

Once again, however, the proposed division of territory—a strong echo of the situation following Sikandar Lodi’s death—was never realized. This time, Kabir says, the plan failed due to the meddling of a small group of Suri nobility led by Habib Khan, a manumitted slave who had served Sher Shah Suri.²⁷² First, Kabir explains, Habib Khan and his companions betrayed Ibrahim in his peace-making efforts with Sikandar, sabotaging the plan to divide the kingdom. Later, they abandoned Sikandar for Humayun when the two waged battle with one another in some of the final confrontations between the Afghans and the Mughals.²⁷³ Although Sikandar managed to escape with his life, some of his remaining men noted at a crucial point in the battle, “*padishah*, there is nothing (to be done) now. The kingship is gone.”²⁷⁴ With some of his most important men lost, Sikandar fled to the mountains, where he managed to regroup some of his soldiers for one final engagement with Humayun’s son and successor, Akbar. However, as the *Afsana* suggests, the die had since been cast for the Suri ruler. Significantly weakened by the loss of his followers, Sikandar was unable to stave off the Mughal advances, finally fleeing eastwards away from Akbar’s forces.²⁷⁵

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²⁶⁸ There might also be something to say here about Kabir’s understanding of Sayyids becoming kings. As we know, this happened many times in history and Sayyid identities were often used to bolster claims to kingly authority. However, it appears that Kabir is suggesting that such individuals have no business in ruling—it is best left to those of a different ilk, such as the Afghans.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, fol. 171a.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Mushtaqi, *Waqi’at*, 209.

²⁷³ Kabir, “Afsana,” fol. 174b.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. From my copy of the manuscript, this last sentence looks like “*padishah rahi shavand*,” which I think translates better to “the king has gone/is going.” However, Hussain Khan, a scholar of the Afghan sultanates who consulted another manuscript copy of the text, has translated it to “the kingship has gone.” Khan’s translation makes more sense in context; therefore, I have opted to use it. See Khan, “Afsana-i Shahan,” 360.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, fol. 176b.

In contrast to depictions of the Lodi sultanate's fall in 1526, it is somewhat more difficult to ascertain where the blame—if being assigned at all—is imagined in this story of the Suri failure. If we remember the case of Ibrahim Lodi, the sultan's despicable behavior and betrayal of those who had eaten the Lodis' salt was identified as provoking Daulat Khan Lodi's betrayal. Although the commander's actions were mostly likely viewed with complicated emotions by those invested in the Lodi sultanate, it is for this reason that Daulat Khan nonetheless emerges as a sympathetic figure; indeed, the *Afsana* even remembers Sher Shah Suri expressing deep regret for the ruin of Daulat Khan's family when the Mughals brought him into their friendship.²⁷⁶ In the case of the Suris, however, those who turned their back on the sultan are targeted much more pointedly for their treachery. In a *bikayat* following the defeat of Sikandar Shah Suri at the hands of Humayun, for example, Kabir recalls how the sultan later found Habib Khan and executed him for what he had done, evoking the latter's former identity as a slave as he did so.²⁷⁷ Nonetheless, it is still Sikandar and Ibrahim's proposal to divide the kingdom that is identified as the root of political chaos: with the opportunity to pit two weak sides against one another, Habib Khan and his followers ultimately played the situation to their advantage, with the undesirable consequences of Afghan political failure.

Despite these differences, it is important to first point out that once again, contrary to the assessment of Kolff and others, Afghan tribal leaders are not identified as the agents of the Suris' downfall. Rather, it is the Suri heirs themselves—none of whom were capable of establishing sole *padishahi*—and a group of leading military servants who were not even Afghan at all, such as the former slave Habib Khan. As these details suggest, the reasons for the Suri overthrow once again circles back to two deeply intertwined understandings of kingship: first, the often-asserted notion that Hindustan is a region that must be united by one king, and second, that a monarch must cultivate a certain kind of relationship with the members of the nobility. Indeed, as the Mughal-era Afghan chronicles consistently recalled, Afghan rulers from Kala Lodi to Sher Shah Suri were generous patrons to Afghans and the many others whom they encountered in their north Indian dominion. Their patronage also came with a decidedly more egalitarian character—Kala and Bahlul Lodi shared the throne with their most trusted followers, while Sher Shah Suri reclined in the mud alongside those in his employ. Although the sultan always held his position at the helm, what made him exemplary was the kind of camaraderie and almost familial connection that he established with his servants, especially those who were closest to him. It was for this reason that Daulat Khan Lodi felt most betrayed by his monarch Ibrahim, who had wantonly killed members of his family and others who had loyally served the Lodi sultans. In the case of the Suris, the inability of any sultan to claim sole authority opened a window for ambitious noblemen—particularly those with fewer reserves than Daulat Khan—to take advantage of the situation, which they were able to do to the detriment of the Afghan sultanate.

The fact that the mastermind of the final betrayal of the Afghans was a former slave opens up another question: if tribal feuding was not unanimously identified as a cause of the Suri decline, what place were enslaved individuals imagined to have in the Afghan sultanate? Do authors like Kabir draw a contrast between Afghans, who must recognize and reap the benefits of service with an Afghan sultan, and the “naturally alienated and socially dead”²⁷⁸ individuals who had never known or could not recall the bonds of kinship, and were presumably less likely to be motivated by such appeals? Ultimately, the answer to this question is not directly addressed in the Afghan histories, nor would it likely be depicted in unambiguous terms. However, as these early Afghan histories suggest, the emergence of Afghan kingship took place in a context in which the ties of service, often

²⁷⁶ Ibid, fol. 131b.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, fol. 175a.

²⁷⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

expressed in the language of kinship, had assumed a new level of significance in the political culture of north India. These kinds of bonds began to supersede those of the master and slave, the central dyadic relationship that characterized the formative years of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²⁷⁹ Indeed, as texts from Mushtaqi's 1572 work to the Afghan histories of the eighteenth century demonstrated, the bonds created by the service with honor, offered by free agents, held a special place in Afghan political discourse, with important implications for how Mughal-era Afghan chroniclers remembered the Afghan sultanates and represented their own identities in the context of the Mughal world.

Conclusion

Rising to political greatness in north India nearly a hundred years apart from one another, the Lodi and Suri Afghans came from surprisingly distinct tribal and social backgrounds. Getting their start in Punjab, the Lodis had been intertwined with the affairs of the Delhi Sultanate for decades, while Bahlul Lodi occupied a position of authority in the Sayyid administration before assuming the kingship himself. The Surs, by contrast, had put down roots in the eastern reaches of the Sultanate, slowly working their way upwards through excellent military service offered to a number of powerful patrons in the politically fluid years of the 1530s and 1540s. Nonetheless, in Afghan histories like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, the nearly one-hundred-year reign of the Lodi and Suri sultans represented a single period of Afghan rule, one whose success was linked to the sultans' ability to govern "in the Afghan way."

Indeed, in telling stories of Bahlul Lodi's humor and humility, Sikandar Lodi's perfect justice, and Sher Shah's inspiring leadership, Afghan authors of the Mughal period mused on the valuable contributions to political sovereignty that an Afghan leader could offer. Although depicted as quite different from one another in their primary characteristics—Bahlul Lodi lighthearted and witty, Sikandar Lodi mysterious and committed to serving his subjects—representations of each of the Afghan monarchs drew upon aspects of their Afghan identity to demonstrate the merits of the sultans' political leadership in the context of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century north India. Together, these depictions of the Lodi and Suri sultans represented a single, coherent vision of Afghan kingship: one rooted in humility and solidarity with one's most trusted servants, yet also marked by an imperial majesty and the ability to confer justice to a diverse community of subjects. It was through these stories that Afghans of the early Mughal period developed the material that inspired later generations of Afghans hoping to restore Afghan political sovereignty in India, a topic we will now turn to in the fourth chapter.

²⁷⁹ Sunil Kumar, "Bandagi and Naukari: Studying Transitions in Political Culture and Service Under the North Indian Sultanates, 13th-16th Centuries," in *After Timur Came: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Chapter Four: Genealogy

Introduction

In the 1420s, some thirty years before Bahlul Lodi took the throne of Delhi, a grandson and successor of the conqueror Amir Timur (d. 1405) positioned a massive block of jade at the head of his grandfather's tomb, the Gur-i Amir, in Samarqand.²⁸⁰ This precious stone, carried from China at great expense to adorn the *amir's* grave, served more than a decorative purpose. Engraved on its surface was a remarkable inscription—a genealogy that traced the deceased Timur's ancestry back to Buzunchar, the son of the legendary Mongol princess Alanquva. As the text showed, Timur's ancestor was no ordinary man, nor was he conceived in an ordinary way. Rather, in a creative adaptation of the Qur'anic passage describing the Virgin Mary's miraculous conception, the inscription claimed that “no father was known” to Timur's ancestor. Instead, the princess Alanquva, a “righteous and chaste” woman like Mary herself, had been visited by a beam light that entered her and assumed “the likeness of a perfect man.” The light revealed its identity as one of the sons of ‘Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth caliph of Islam.²⁸¹

In *The Millennial Sovereign*, Azfar Moin has argued that Timur's sacred persona—projected in sources like the Gur-i Amir genealogy—served as the inspiration for a new style of kingship rooted in the widely-held millennial expectations that characterized the post-Mongol world. While the centuries preceding Timur's arrival had witnessed devastating upheaval and the dramatic uprooting of traditional institutions of authority from Anatolia to South Asia, the approach of the second Islamic millennium—set to arrive in 1591 C.E.—prompted increased speculation that a *mahdi*, or messiah, would soon arrive to lead all of humankind into a new era. Although millennial movements had historically grown around non-imperial figures such as Sufi *pirs*, in the post-Timurid context, aspiring monarchs, too, began to draw upon millennial expectations as they fashioned their imperial identities and made claims to universal empire. Chief among these individuals were the Mughals, the biological successors of Timur and some of the most creative adapters of his sacred power. Through architecture, public display, and perhaps most significantly, sacred genealogies, the Mughals represented themselves as the heirs of a divine and kingly past, positioning themselves not only as the undisputed rulers of an earthly empire, but the ideal candidates to lead humanity into the next millennium.²⁸²

While the Mughals channeled the power of sacred genealogy as rulers of a diverse polity stretching from Afghanistan to central India, another group living under the shadow of Mughal authority became embroiled in a parallel project. Indeed, indeed, shortly after the production of Abu al-Fazl's *Akbarnama*, an epic tome that compellingly illustrated the Mughal emperor Akbar's (r. 1556-1605) divine genealogical heritage and pre-ordained fitness for universal rule, another ambitious text emerged that imagined the Afghan past and Afghan kingship in a remarkably similar manner. This was the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* of Khwaja Nimat Allah Harawi, a history written in honor of the Afghan nobleman and respected friend of the emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631).

Unlike earlier Afghan histories which almost exclusively focused on the reigns of the Lodi and Suri sultans, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* embarked on the ambitious project of uncovering the genealogical origins of the Afghans, positioning them within the grand narrative of human history beginning with Adam and Eve. In tracing this history, Harawi revealed that the Afghans were

²⁸⁰ In present-day Uzbekistan.

²⁸¹ Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 37-38. ‘Ali was the fourth caliph in the Sunni tradition, the first in the Shi’a.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

descended from a well-known figure in the Islamic tradition: the Biblical King Saul, the shepherd appointed by the prophet Samuel to deliver the tribes of Israel from Goliath. The text also described how the Afghans embraced Islam during the life of the Prophet, how they occupied the mountain passes of the Sulaimain range and transformed them into an Afghan “homeland,” and finally, how a humble Afghan of the Lodi tribe rose to the throne of Delhi in the fifteenth century, initiating nearly a century of Afghan rule in northern India. Essentially, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* is the original Afghan history, a work evincing a specifically Afghan historical consciousness on a scale never before articulated.

In assessing the historical significance of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, scholars have typically reduced its project to a vain attempt on the part of Afghans to establish a remarkable lineage for themselves—one that could hide their embarrassing social origins. These conclusions have, in part, been based on a rumor from the mid-seventeenth century that Khan Jahan Lodi had the *tarikb* commissioned after a visiting nobleman taunted him, claiming that Afghans were the descendants of the *jinn*.²⁸³ Considering the demonization of Afghans in chronicles ranging from the thirteenth-century *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* to Mughal texts like the *Akbarnama*,²⁸⁴ it is certainly plausible that Afghans who joined the Mughal court were forced to fight the weighty stereotypes that had accrued against them. One means that individuals like Khan Jahan Lodi could use to rectify this problem was the creation of a prestigious genealogy—a tactic also deployed by the Rajputs, another group who entered Mughal service and competed with a number of other social groups for the favor of the Mughal sovereign.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, Afghan chronicles both preceding and contemporaneous with the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* looked to the Afghan past as a source of wisdom and ethical guidance that did not always conform to the standards set by the Mughals. In texts like the *Waqi'at-i Mushtaqi* of Rizq Allah Mushtaqi and the *Afsana-yi Shaban* of Muhammad Kabir, for example, Afghans embraced the stereotypes of social backwardness leveled against them in Sultanate and Mughal sources, examining the historical reality of their humble origins as a repository of moral insights for living and governing with *adab*. If the earliest Afghan histories appear to be speaking to any audience in particular, it is an imagined Afghan audience—one that would find solidarity reading stories that reflected on their shared experiences, and who could be instilled with sense of pride at the accomplishments of those among them who rose to the pinnacle of spiritual and temporal leadership. Nimat Allah's *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* imagined Afghan history on a scale never before conceived; nonetheless, it emerged after more than seventy-five years of Afghan kingship from South Asia's hallowed political center, as well as decades of conversations about Afghan history and identity that, I have argued, cannot be easily reduced to an attempt to meet the demands of the Mughal patronage system.

Keeping this historical context in mind, this chapter situates the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s historical genealogy of the Afghans within the same conversations around sacred kingship and millennial expectations in which the Mughals and their imperial neighbors in Iran, the Safavids (r. 1501-1736), actively engaged.²⁸⁵ While no Afghan sat on the throne when Harawi composed his history, some of its most prominent features—for example, its abiding interest in the role of kingship in Afghan history, as well as the cyclical, Prophetic time in which it situates its story of the Afghans—indicate that it is a decidedly millenarian text itself: a historical account marked by a

²⁸³ Spirits made of fire. Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85.

²⁸⁴ Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, Culture, and Politics: Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29-31.

²⁸⁵ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

powerful sense of anticipation for the role that Afghans will continue to play in the unfolding of the Prophetic revelation. In this vision, Afghan kingship is not an incidental phenomenon that emerged in fifteenth-century north India. Rather, it is an institution with deep roots reaching back to Biblical time, when the Afghans' ancestor Saul became the first king of the Israelites and delivered them from a cycle of moral degeneration and idol worship. Drawing attention to these features of Harawi's work, this chapter explores the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* identified the institution of kingship as central to both Afghan history and a more all-encompassing Islamic history, portending a future in which an exceptional Afghan would again take the throne at a time of imagined cosmic significance.

More broadly, this chapter considers the meaning of *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* for the greater Afghan community living at the height of Mughal power. More than a history of its namesake, Harawi's text also demonstrated how the greater Afghan *qaum*, or community, had been remarkably mobile throughout its history, and how their movement had historically ensured the spread of the Prophetic message. Turning my attention to these features of the text, I show how Harawi's work imagined the historical fluidity of the Afghans' communal boundaries as they moved to far flung regions of the world. As we will see, that fluidity that allowed the Afghans of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* to both maintain a strong sense of identity and embed themselves wherever they chose to settle. Building upon the work of scholars of other historical contexts, I will further argue that Harawi's presentation of Afghan history revealed the ethical possibilities of *continued* Afghan mobility in the context of the seventeenth century. By uncovering precisely how Afghans had acted as trailblazers throughout history, Harawi offered a model for how the Afghan community could continue to put down roots in new places as they fulfilled their role in perpetuating the faith, both in South Asia and beyond.

Reading the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*: From Origins to the Lodis

Beginning with the story of Adam, the progenitor of all humankind and the first prophet of Islam, the introductory sections of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* recall a story at once prior to Afghan history and yet intimately linked to its eventual realization. Indeed, before arriving at the story of Afghana—King Saul's grandson and arguably the first "Afghan" in Harawi's history²⁸⁶—the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s narrative centers around the unfolding of the Prophetic revelation: a history of cosmic significance into which the Afghans would become inexplicably drawn. From the first man and prophet Adam, to Noh (Noah) and Dawud (David) onwards, the transmission of the prophethood from individual to individual is the guiding thread of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s genealogical and historical account, one in which the ancestors of the Afghans make appearances fulfilling various duties that ensure the critical perpetuation of God's message. Harawi never identifies an Afghan as a prophet,²⁸⁷ yet their significance in this history resides more clearly in their role as kings: a position that, in the imagination of Harawi as well as many of his contemporaries, was understood to intimately connected to prophethood in ensuring the propagation of the divine will on Earth.

In the long-established tradition of the Perso-Arabic *tarikb* format,²⁸⁸ the events in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* move forward in chronological time, evincing a powerful sense of cause and

²⁸⁶ The question of "Afghan" origins in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* is a complicated one that I will discuss in greater detail throughout this chapter. On the one hand, the Afghans, as all other humans, are descended from Adam as well as Noh (Noah), two prophets who could thus arguably be called "Afghan." However, my understanding is that Afghan origins in Harawi's text more clearly reside in King Saul—and more particularly his grandson Afghana—and become increasingly articulated in subsequent generations.

²⁸⁷ See previous footnote.

²⁸⁸ For more on the history and functions of a *tarikb*, see the entry for "Ta'rikh" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzei, W.P. Heinrichs, 2012.

effect in their narration. From the introductory account of the first humans, Harawi follows the genealogical lineage that eventually gives rise to a recognizable community of Afghans, who slowly emerge from the deep, prophetic time of figures like Ibrahim (Abraham) to a more immediate “historical” time when Afghans helped to conquer Delhi under the command of Sultan Muiz al-din Ghuri (d. 1206). However, within this prophetic history is a more complex passage of time than the straightforward, chronological movement of events.²⁸⁹ In Harawi’s history of humankind’s origins, the people consistently become estranged from God who then punishes them for their actions, later presenting them with the opportunity for their deliverance—usually through the intercession of a prophet or other divinely appointed figure.

Indeed, from its very beginning, Harawi’s prophetic genealogy recalls how prophets would arrive at a time of great suffering to redeem humankind from their intransigence. This phenomenon begins with the first two human beings, Adam and Hawa (Eve). As Harawi writes, God, in the beginning, created Adam out of nothingness and invested him with the dignity of prophethood. He then created Hawa from Adam’s left side, and the two of them lived as companions in Paradise. Two hundred years later, however, God dispatched Satan to tempt Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. The first man and prophet capitulated. As punishment, God separated Adam from Eve and cast him to the island of Serendip (Sri Lanka), from which he wandered for hundreds of years in shame. God later chose to forgive Adam, who renewed his assurances of faith in the Prophet to come—Muhammad—and was reunited with Eve after their long separation. When the time came for the “prophetic light” (*nur-i nabvi*) to be transferred from Adam, the angel Jibrail (Gabriel) visited him bearing the news, and Eve became pregnant with their son. Within a short time, the man who would be the next prophet, Sheth, came into the world.²⁹⁰

According to Harawi, Adam lived for over a thousand years. By the time of his death, he had also fathered some forty thousand children, who were all “of one religion and faith of Islam” (*hame bar yak din wa millat-i Islam budand*).²⁹¹ However, this unity of humankind in faith, the marker of an ideal state of affairs in this story, was soon replaced by corrupt practices and divisions within the community of Adam’s descendants. Perhaps the most persistent and troublesome among these was the worship of idols, a custom that Harawi claims began during the life of Anush, Adam’s grandson and successor as prophet.²⁹²

Harawi does not elaborate on the manifestations of this early form of idol worship. However, he says, by the time the prophethood transferred to Noh, it had reached such proportions that “all of the people (had become) idol worshipers (*but parasht*) and infidels (*kafir*).”²⁹³ Like he had done with Adam, God intervened and offered humanity an opportunity to return to the faith. This time, he did so through the intercession of Noh, who passed over nine hundred years attempting to guide the people back to the proper forms of worship. As Harawi explains, however, the prophet’s efforts came to naught: by the end of his many hundred years of proselytization, only “seven or seventy” people had accepted his counseling. This caused Noh to lose hope in the Muslim

See also Peter Hardy, “Some Studies in Pre-Mughal Muslim Historiography,” in *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, ed. Cyril H. Philips (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

²⁸⁹ There has been academic work on the concept of cyclical time in Islam, usually identified as a phenomenon in Ismaili Shi’a thought. I am hesitant to ascribe the cyclical nature of events in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* to this source; however, as Azfar Moin has shown, the Timurid model of sacred kingship was deeply influenced by Shi’a models of authority and heroism, which may be coming into play here.

²⁹⁰ Nimat Allah Harawi, *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani wa Makbẓan-i Afghani*, Vol. 1, ed. S.M. Imamuddin (Dhaka: Ziku Press, 1960), 10-13.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

community (*Islam qaum*), who he then cursed, asking for a force to intercede so that no non-believer would remain on Earth.²⁹⁴ In answer to his prayers, a great storm swept across the land, leaving no one alive save for Noh, three of his sons, and their three wives—the last remaining individuals to have rejected the practice of idol worship. When the deluge receded, the prophet and his family were left to propagate the world with their descendants, prompting Harawi to recall the saying: “because of this, they call him (Noh) the second Adam (*Adam-i sani*).”²⁹⁵

A reckoning of such proportions never occurred again after Noh. As Harawi recalls, the straying of Adam’s descendants did not again prompt such divine punishment that humanity was forced to begin again from one ancestor. However, as he explains in the following sections of his *tarikb*, the ancestors of the Afghans who emerged after the storm of Noh found themselves repeating the mistakes of Adam and his doomed progeny, and ultimately faced a divine reckoning of their own. Specifically, these ancestors were the tribes of Israel, descended from Yaqub (Jacob), the grandson of Ibrahim (Abraham). With Yaqub and his brother Ishaq, the author claims, the genealogical lineage of the Afghans truly begins,²⁹⁶ and the story of their plight and deliverance by one of their own locates the origins of Afghan kingship in time of the first prophets.

The Bani Israel and Saul: A King for the People

From his account of the Afghan progenitor Yaqub, Harawi continues down the prophetic line to describe the various trials, tribulations, and triumphs of his descendants, known as the Bani Israel. As the *Tarikb-i Khan Jahani* recalls, the Bani Israel, also known as the Israelites, possessed a propensity for internal dissension that followed them through several generations. In the beginning, their inability to agree amongst themselves prompted the divine punishments of the Pharaoh, who enslaved and oppressed the Bani Israel until their deliverance by the Prophet Musa (Moses). After Musa, the Israelites traveled across distant regions proselytizing the faith, and eventually settled back in Egypt—free dwellers in the place where they were once enslaved.²⁹⁷ However, their persistent inability to agree prompted a new and terrible form of divine retribution, the “powerful unbeliever” (*kafigi qavi*) Banya of the people of Jalut, or Goliath.²⁹⁸ Under Banya, Harawi says, Jalut’s people terrorized the Israelites and occupied their lands, seizing one of their most precious belongings: the Tabut Sakinah, or the “Ark of the Covenant.” The Tabut, Harawi continues, was a wooden box (*tabuti bud az chub-i shamshad*) that contained the relics of different prophets, and that had originally been entrusted to Adam when he resided in Paradise. It also served as protection for the Israelites whenever they engaged in battle. Citing his predecessor, historian Ibn Abbas Tashti, he adds that the box looked like a cat with glowing eyes who made a great roaring sound when the Israelites were in combat. When the Bani Israel heard it, they knew that victory was imminent, and they followed the Tabut wherever it led them.²⁹⁹

Without the prophetic relic, the tribes of Israel were newly hopeless against their powerful foe. However, the *Tarikb-i Khan Jahani* continues, God once again felt mercy for those whom He had punished. This time, while the Bani Israel languished against Jalut, God deputed the prophet

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 16. Here, Harawi evokes the Qur’an’s iteration of this event:

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذُرْ عَلَيَّ الْأَرْضَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. Harawi says: “*chun silsila-yi nasab-i in taifa be hazrat Ishaq wa Yaqub farzandan-i Ibrahim montabi mi shavad, binabar in be ziker-i abwal-i ishan isbtighal mi namayad*,” or “because of the genealogical lineage of this clan/group ends (i.e., begins) with Ishaq and Yaqub, the descendants of Ibrahim, I will occupy myself with a recollection of their affairs.”

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 35.

²⁹⁸ According to Harawi, Jalut’s people resided along the Mediterranean Sea (*darya-yi Rum*) between Egypt (Misr) and Palestine (Filastin).

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 37-38.

Ishrael (Samuel),³⁰⁰ also descended from Yaqub, to guide them in their time of need. The Bani Israel, however, did not immediately accept this intercession. At first, they balked when they heard Ishrael's calls to reform their ways. The reason for this, they claimed, was that Ishrael was still a young man, and because of this did not possess the prophetic merit (*hanoz kudaki wa liyaqat-i nabvat na dari*).³⁰¹ However, they offered him a proposition, saying that they would believe him if the prophet could fulfill a certain request. "If you are telling the truth (about your prophethood)," they challenged him:

Supplicate that God who has sent you as a prophet, so that he will also send us a king (*malik*) and *padishah*, who can help us wage holy war (*jihad*) with Jalut and his people...and the remainder of those ordinary people who are still idol worshippers (*but parasit*) and have enmity with the Bani Israel...(for) the ordering (*intezam*) of the affairs of the Bani Israel is done by kings, and the power and prosperity of kings is by the order of God, who makes it possible. And the rule is such that soldiers and the army are under the command of kings, and all of them are under the command of the messenger (prophet), who rights the affairs of the country by the command and path of God, and who ensures the growth of that which God has given.³⁰²

As we know, Ishrael ultimately delivered on the wishes of the Bani Israel; however, it is worth pausing here to comment on the significance of the Israelites' request. As this passage suggests, the institution of kingship as separate from prophethood had never before existed among the Israelites, and consequently, among the people of Islam: while pagan groups such as the Egyptians had their Pharaoh, those who were guided by the prophets had never lived under the rule of a monarch. In this moment, however, Bani Israel made the argument that kingship was in fact a necessary ingredient for the prosperity of their people. Projecting a vision somewhat akin to the classic Persianate "circle of justice" model,³⁰³ they placed their soldiers under the command of a *malik* or *padishah*, who, as a subordinate to the prophet, would ensure the enactment of the divine will on Earth.

As soon as Ishrael prayed for the Bani Israel's request, Harawi writes, God sent down a rod filled with holy oil, and a revelation (*wahy*) came to the prophet that "that *malik* (king) that you choose will be the *padishah-i 'alam* (king of the world),"³⁰⁴ and his height will be equal to that of the anointing rod. If a man were to enter Ishrael's presence and the oil in the rod begin to boil, the prophet was then to anoint that person's head and see if it took the shape of a halo or diadem (*akli*). If it did, the man would be the *padishah* of the Israelites. Talut—a shepherd's son nicknamed so for his remarkable height—fulfilled these requisites. One evening, Harawi says, the shepherd Talut sought shelter in Ishrael's house after a violent storm carried away many of his sheep. When he entered the prophet's domicile, the anointing oil in staff immediately began to boil. Ishrael then

³⁰⁰ The Qur'an does not specify Ishrael as the prophet who appointed Saul; the prophet is not named.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 39.

³⁰² Ibid, 39-40.

³⁰³ The "circle of justice" refers to a political aphorism and concept of the state often depicted as a circle. According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the earliest reference to what would later be referred to as the circle of justice appeared in an anonymous Arabic encyclopedia text from the tenth century, the *Sirr al-Asrar*. According to this text:

"The world is a garden, hedged about by sovereignty/ Sovereignty is lordship, preserved by law/ Law is policy, governed by the king/ The King is a shepherd, supported by the army/ The army are soldiers, fed by money/ Money is revenue, gathered by the people/ The people are servants, enfolded by justice/ Justice is harmony, the well-being of the world." In this "circle of justice," there is a strong sense of "reciprocity and accountability" among the different strata of society governed by a king, ensuring the "justice and well-being of the world."

See Linda Darling, "Circle of Justice" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 3, ed. by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, Brill Online, 2012. Accessed 1 November 2020.

³⁰⁴ Harawi, *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, 40.

poured it on Talut's forehead, and no sooner had he done so than it formed a crown—revealing to him that the king desired by the Israelites had at last been found.³⁰⁵

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To Ishmuel's dismay, the discovery of Talut did not put an end to the Israelites' skepticism. When the prophet presented Talut to descendants of Yaqub as their divinely anointed king, they again scoffed at the proposition, arguing that Talut would never rule over them because they themselves were more worthy (*sazamar*) of kingship.³⁰⁶ They called upon genealogy to support their assertions, stating that among the Israelites, there were two esteemed tribes: the prophetic one and the kingly one (*yaki sabb-i nabvat wa digari sabb-i mamlakat*). While the prophetic line descended from Yaqub's son Lawi, and included the prophets Musa, Harun, and Ishmuel, kingship resided in the lineage of another of Yaqub's sons, Yahuda, whose descendants included the kings yet to come: Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon). Talut, however, was descended from a third son of Yaqub, Binyamin (Benjamin), whose descendants had been cursed by God for their sinful and corrupt behavior. Because of this history, their names had even been stricken from the book of kings (*bari ta'ala...nam-i ishan az diwan-i muluk mahw sakbt*), while the line of Binyamin no longer accepted God's revelation. On the basis of this, the Bani Israel refused to accept the man Ishmuel had chosen, insisting that their king must possess what the shepherd Talut undoubtedly did not: wealth, grandeur, and the proper genealogical heritage.³⁰⁷

To the Israelites' surprise, the humble Talut ultimately proved capable. After initially being shunned by his own people, Talut joined Ishmuel in prayer for the return of the Tabut Sakinah, which floated down from the sky and rested in front of them.³⁰⁸ When the Bani Israel witnessed this miraculous event, all twelve tribes became convinced of Ishmuel's prophethood and submitted themselves to Talut's leadership. The return of the Tabut and Talut's inauguration as king brought about a new period of prosperity for the Israelites, who, as Harawi recalls, had long suffered under divine punishment and at last found peace with their prophet and king.³⁰⁹

Not long after Talut's rise to power, however, another divinely appointed figure created complications for the *malik* of the Bani Israel. This individual was Dawud, a man also from the tribes of Israel whom God selected to defeat Jalut in battle. As is well known in both the Biblical and Islamic traditions—and as is here recounted by Harawi—the young Dawud demonstrated that he was uniquely fit for this monumental task. In an incredible show of strength and tact, Dawud engaged Jalut in combat and slayed the enemy of the Bani Israel with a single stone.³¹⁰ God rewarded Dawud for this feat, commanding that he be wed King Talut's daughter and that as son-in-law of the king, he assume command of the territories formerly occupied by Jalut. Dawud's accomplishments and generosity earned him the admiration of many among the Bani Israel, whom Harawi notes began to flock in great numbers to his command, inciting the envy of the first king appointed to lead the Israelites.³¹¹

In some contemporary scholarship, King Talut's intense jealousy of Dawud and subsequent descent into tyrannical rule have been interpreted as part of a tragic legacy haunting the Afghan past.³¹² As is well known, the first of monarch of the Israelites embarked on a perilous journey,

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 42-43.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 44.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 44-45.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 46.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 54.

³¹¹ Ibid, 56-57.

³¹² See William Sherman, *Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, and Afghan Becoming* (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2017), 298-314. As Sherman points out, scholars such as Thomas Barfield have understood the

resolving to kill his son-in-law rather than share power with him and threatening any and all whom he believed were standing in his way. After the death of the prophet Ishmuel, Harawi says, Talut's depredations against his own people only increased, earning him the ire of the Israelites and the reputation of a tyrant with a penchant for bloodshed. Yet in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jabanī*'s telling, the story of the first monarch of the Bani Israel ultimately proved to be one of powerful redemption. This redemption began in Saul's lifetime, continuing on through his genealogical lineage.

Indeed, Harawi writes, after witnessing how God had punished a man for hunting throughout his life, the king of the Bani Israel visited Ishmuel's grave and sought forgiveness for his cruel behavior. He asked the prophet what he might do to rectify his wrongs. Hearing Talut's supplications, Ishmuel burst forth from the tomb and recounted the ways in which the king had sinned:

Talut, remember that day you arrived at my home in search of your lost sheep, and the truth of God brought those signs into being? And I strove to prove your kingship to the Bani Israel... (but) when you reached the rank of command, you reached out the hand of injustice towards the people, and killed thirty thousand innocent ones. From your tyrannical hand, cries for safety shook the earth and reached the kingdom of the heavens. You tried to kill Mihtar Dawud, the slayer of Jalut and who is the chosen of God, and who became a prophet, and (you) dispersed (*mutafarraḡ sakbtī*) the Bani Israel. Talut, turn again in the direction of God, who is the only God in the universe...lament for your sinful actions.³¹³

Grief stricken, Talut again asked Ishmuel how he might be spared a horrible fate. Reiterating the sheer extent of the cruelty that the king had perpetrated, Ishmuel concluded that the only way for Talut to redeem himself was to resign the kingship to Dawud, then march into battle with his ten sons and die a martyr.³¹⁴ Acknowledging that no other path to his salvation existed, Talut resigned himself to this fate, finding Dawud and commanding his people to be obedient to him as king. Saul then marched into battle with his ten sons by his side, each of them valiantly fighting the infidel (*kafīr*) armies until they at last “(drank) the sherbet of martyrdom.”³¹⁵

Had Talut no other heirs, the lineage of the first king of the Israelites would have been terminated. However, Harawi notes, on the eve of Talut's martyrdom, two of his wives were expecting their own children. Realizing that these yet-unborn sons represented the future of his lineage, Saul entrusted the two women to Dawud, asking his successor to ensure the proper upbringing of their boys, Berkhia and Ermia.³¹⁶ In accordance with his character, Dawud raised Talut's sons to have all of the qualities of good conduct, and throughout his tenure as king, “tranquility and contentment arose among all of the Bani Israel, and the cultivation and prosperity of the people in cities and towns increased twofold.”³¹⁷ Within a matter of time, Berkhia and Ermia also had their own sons—Berkhia's named Asif, and Ermia's named Afghana. Asif and Afghana both enjoyed great respect during the reign of Dawud's successor Sulaiman, the famed just monarch

King Saul narrative as confirmation of the “parochial and enduringly tribal nature of Afghan society”; i.e., that the Afghans' inclusion of this story in their shared history somehow reflected their actual historical penchant for internal divisiveness. Sherman rightly sets himself apart from these arguments, yet nonetheless concludes that Akhund Darweza's discussion of King Saul ultimately served the same ends: namely, to demonstrate that tragedy was deeply ingrained in the Afghans' genealogical heritage, with Talut bequeathing to his descendants such ill characteristics as “a tendency to break promises.”

³¹³ Ibid, 62-63.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 63.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 66.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 65-67.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 68.

who, according to Harawi, assigned the administration of civil affairs in his kingdom to Asif and the command over the army to Afghana.³¹⁸ During Sulaiman’s reign, Afghana—from whose name, we are beckoned to observe, the appellation of “Afghan” surely originated—was also assigned the meritorious project of completing the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem: the hallowed site where the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven during his Night Journey (*mi’raj*).³¹⁹ It was said that the great monarch Sulaiman never completed any of his duties without properly consulting the judicious Afghana,³²⁰ through whose deeds Talut’s line began at once to redeem itself from the transgressions of its progenitor.

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In this story of King Talut, Harawi text demonstrates the powerful connection between kingship and the prophetic revelation—a continually unraveling phenomenon around which all of human history subsequently revolved. If we recall the words of Akhund Darweza (d. 1637), the Sunni theologian from Nangarhar, it is clear that the imagined significance of this link was not unique to Harawi’s text. As Darweza explained in regards to the Afghans’ purported resistance to monarchical authority: “close are the wisdom of kingship and prophethood, like two jewels in a ring.”³²¹ By accepting the authority of a king or *padishah*, he argued, the Afghans—so prone, in his assessment, to accepting false spiritual leaders and falling into heresy—found their best hope for redemption, as a righteous monarch’s leadership provided them with them with the closest access to God’s true message. Without this kind of guidance, the Afghans would forever be “suspended in the waves of deviance”; doomed to an afterlife in hell.³²² In his own exploration of Afghan ancestry, the the *qaum*’s descent from Saul was further indicative of their deep penchant for fissiparousness and divisiveness—a legacy reaching back to Prophetic time that would only continue to perpetuate itself.

Yet returning to the previous chapter, we saw how Afghan authors like Muhammad Kabir, challenged the criticisms of individuals like Akhund Darweza, making a compelling case for the Afghans’ kingless state by drawing upon the rich ethical discourses that animated the classics of Persian letters.³²³ In Kabir’s imagination, there was deep spiritual wisdom in the Afghans’ desire for freedom from the rigid hierarchies of monarchical authority. Although an Afghan one day did become king in Delhi—an achievement celebrated in its own right—the centuries-old history of Afghan resistance to this kind of leadership did not detract from their connection with the divine; rather, it evinced their own means of living ethically and achieving proximity to God. This incorporation of kingship into the story of the Afghans bears marked difference to Harawi’s account, which, as we have seen thus far, makes no mention of the Afghans’ rejection of or lack of this institution. Rather, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahan*’s story of Saul reveals that imperial sovereignty had been a central component of the Afghans’ shared history, as well as the greater Islamic and human history. When the Israelites who asked for prophetic intercession in the form of a king (*malik* or *padishah*)—the first of these was Saul, the ancestor of all Afghans.

Although completed at approximately the same time as Kabir’s *Afsana*, Nimat Allah’s text thus evinces a remarkably different understanding of kingship and its role in the Afghan past. A local notable chronicling *afsanas*, or anecdotal stories in an effort to assuage his grief, Kabir drew inspiration from the classics of Persian prose and poetry, presenting an Afghan community that embraced its historical reputation for “rusticity” and social backwardness with wit, humor, and humility. Harawi, for his part, composed his history from the heart of the Mughal court,

³¹⁸ Ibid, 69.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Akhund Darweza, *Tazkirat al Abrar na al-Asbrar*, lithograph (Peshawar: Manzoor-e Aam Press, 1940), 84.

³²² Ibid, 170.

³²³ See Chapter Three.

constructing an epic narrative in which Afghan glory was underwritten at every turn. As I have argued and will continue to demonstrate, Harawi's vision of Afghan kingship differed from Kabir's because it stemmed from an engagement with a different set of discourses shared across imperial formations at the height of Mughal power. These were the discourses of millennial kingship, which contended that a "saint-king" from a divinely ordained lineage would be appointed to guide all of humanity into the next Islamic millennium. We have thus far seen how Harawi channeled genealogy and prophetic history to connect Afghans to a deep kingly and sacred past; now we will consider how his text revealed the imagined significance of the Afghan kings yet come.

"Ibrahim Lo Di," or "Ibrahim is Great": Kingship in the Lodi Lineage

While King Saul's martyrdom inaugurated in a new era in which no ancestor of the Afghans occupied the throne, Harawi's history shows how kingship returned to this lineage many centuries later, in the more tangible "historical" past. In this narrative, it was not political acumen or commitment to justice alone that led to Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489), the first Afghan monarch's, rise to power. Rather, it was destined to be so, as a prominent Sufi *shaiikh* foretold generations prior to his birth. Moving forward to the concluding chapter of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, a collection of biographies of prominent Afghan Sufi saints, we learn of how the Lodi tribe assumed the mantle of kingship due to the blessing of Shaikh Bait, one of the first Afghan Sufi masters and ancestor of many whom belonged to the greater Batni lineage.³²⁴

According to the *tarikh*, Shaikh Bait and his family lived on the top of a mountain. Yet ne year, the snow fell so heavily that the *shaiikh* saw fit to abandon his home for the winter and build a dwelling in a warmer location. When spring arrived again, Shaikh Bait went back up the mountain to prepare his residence again for the family's habitation. Once they arrived, the *shaiikh* turned to his wife, who was the mother of his children, and asked that she prepare some warm bread for the family to help them recover from their difficult journey. His wife noted that since they had only just arrived, there was no fire yet burning in the house; but that she would prepare the bread as soon as she could light the *tundur*. Shaikh Bait then replied that there was no need to wait: if his wife were to put her hand over the remaining ashes and pronounce the *bismillah* ("in the name of God"), a fire would appear. The woman did so, and as her saintly husband had predicted, the *tundur* instantly lit aflame. The *shaiikh's* wife busied herself baking bread for her weary family as they recuperated.³²⁵

While Shaikh Bait's wife was at work, he requested that she hand first cooked piece of bread over to him. Hearing this, the *shaiikh's* three grandsons gathered around the *tundur* and waited, each hoping to be the first to snatch a piece and bring it to his grandfather. As it where, the youngest son of his daughter Bibi Mato, a boy named Ibrahim, had the quickest hand. When his grandmother removed the bread from the oven, Ibrahim took it and went before Shaikh Bait, where he placed the bread respectfully in front of his grandfather. Seeing that Ibrahim's foresight and dauntlessness surpassed that of his brothers, Shaikh Batni announced, "Ibrahim lo di."³²⁶ As Harawi explains, "in the Pashto language, 'Lo' means 'great' (*kalan*) and 'di' means 'is' (*hast*), meaning 'he (Ibrahim) is great (*khub*)'."³²⁷ The *shaiikh* then took Ibrahim in his embrace, kissed his forehead and his eyes, and divided the bread into pieces, the first of which he handed to his youngest grandson. He said a prayer upon the newly entitled "Lodi," and "from that prayer (made by his) excellent grandfather, he (Ibrahim) had many children and descendants, and (they) excelled in glory over the other tribes, and

³²⁴ I will explain the origins and significance of the Batni lineage later in this chapter.

³²⁵ Harawi, *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Vol. 2, 770-771.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid, 772.

greatness was in the lineage of the Lodis...and God the great One entrusted the kingship/lordship (*sultanat*) of the universe to this line.”³²⁸

Weaving this remarkable origin story of the Lodi lineage into his chapter on the great Afghan Sufis, Harawi reveals how the Afghan tribe who one day sat upon the throne of Delhi emerged from the most auspicious origins. Indeed, as it was willed from the time of Shaikh Bait—himself the ancestor of the Lodis and a significant portion of Afghans belonging to the greater Batni “tribe” or “clan” (*taiifa*)—the Lodis would be a distinguished lineage among others, their rise to power the fulfillment of a prophecy made long before the fifteenth century. As will be noted with reference to the first chapter, this wedding of saintly authority with Afghan identity was a relatively recent development—in earlier chronicles like the *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi*, it was non-Afghan Sufis who gave their blessing to the sultans Bahlul and Sikandar, predicting in their own lifetimes that these men would achieve political authority. In Harawi’s text, this blessing came from within the Afghan community itself; by an eminent Sufi *pir* who not only selected the Lodi *taiifa* for greatness, but who, as such a blessed ancestor, strengthened the Lodis’ fitness to rule. As might be worth mentioning here, while the Mughals developed their sacred personas on the model of the Sufi *shaiikh*,³²⁹ Harawi and his Afghan contemporaries intimately incorporated Sufi sainthood into their ancestral legacy. In this manner, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* offered a pointed demonstration of the Lodis’ particular capacity to take the reins of imperial authority; an argument that would clearly resonate in the transregional discursive field of millennial kingship.

Returning to the *tarikb* portion of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Harawi eventually arrives at the emergence of Lodi sultanate in the fifteenth century. As I have argued thus far, Harawi’s presentation of these events suggests to the reader the historical inevitability of their rise to power—an eventuality whose signs and premonitions were written from the time of the first prophets. In line with the remainder of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*’s analysis of the divine purpose of the Afghan *qaum*, the section on the Lodi and Suri monarchs of Delhi—while drawing, in many cases, from earlier documents like the *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi* and the *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi*—nonetheless downplays the more embarrassing associations of “Afghanness” present in the world of its time, presenting the Afghan monarchs instead as generally fitting the mold of the great Persianate monarchs, yet tragically doomed due to such factors as the ambitions of the nobility. However, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*’s historical narrative does not end with the removal of the Suri Afghans and the establishment of Mughal power. Rather, Harawi transitions to a new chapter of the text in which he chronicles the genealogical and personal history of Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631), the author’s patron and the namesake of the chronicle.

The lengthy chapter on the origins and life of Khan Jahan Lodi, which includes five *fasts*, or sections, is not included in the English translation by Bernhard Dorn, who published the most extensive translation of Harawi’s text in 1829.³³⁰ This omission stems, perhaps, from the fact that Dorn and his contemporaries did not find Khan Jahan’s biography of particular interest in light of the other components of the *tarikb*—more specifically, the sections describing the Afghans’ origins from the Lost Tribes of Israel—an idea which has captivated Orientalist sensibilities since the

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

³³⁰ Bernhard Dorn (d. 1881) was a German Orientalist who specialized in the history and languages of the Afghans and communities of northern Iran. As Imamuddin, the editor of the 1960 edition of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, also noted, Dorn consulted a series of uncollated manuscripts of the *Makhzan-i Afghani*—the abridged version of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—for his translation.

nineteenth century³³¹—and the account of the Lodi and Suri monarchs, which might be mined for “facts” about the pre-Mughal period. However, the biography of Khan Jahan Lodi offers crucial insights on the vast imaginative horizons the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* and the Mughal courtier’s perceived significance in an Afghan as well as grander prophetic history. As we have seen, the central thread running throughout Harawi’s history of the Afghans is the story of the prophetic revelation—a history in which Afghans played an indispensable role as enactors of kingly authority. This position was deeply embedded in their genealogical lineage from the time of King Talut, who, in spite of his failures, ultimately sought and found redemption for the injustice he had perpetrated. As the *tarikh* also demonstrates, kingship never departed from the Afghan community, as it later descended to the line of the Lodi Afghans, the *taija* first blessed by Shaikh Bait and who rose to power in the political center of Hindustan.

As we have seen thus far, in spite of the Afghan kings’ loss of Delhi and the entrenchment of Mughal power in the sixteenth century, Afghans of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries became involved in a collective effort to inscribe stories of the Lodi and Suri monarchs, constructing compelling visions of “Afghan kingship” that challenged Mughal claims to authority and assertions of greatness in the realm of Islamic kingship. Building upon these ideas, I will now consider how Harawi’s inclusion of Khan Jahan Lodi’s genealogical history and accomplishments in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* serve not only to bolster the image and authority of his patron, but to outline the Mughal nobleman’s striking potential to restore Afghan kingship and complete the trajectory established in the *tarikh*’s account of the prophetic revelation.

Khan Jahan Lodi: The Origins of an Exceptional Afghan

Harawi begins his chapter dedicated to Khan Jahan Lodi with his ancestor, Malik Ahmad. From here, the author takes his readers on a journey across space and time, demonstrating how the Mughal nobleman’s ancestors journeyed from the Afghan “homeland” of Roh and came to be intimately incorporated into the fabric of the Mughal Empire. According to Harawi, this story began with four sons of Malik Ahmad who, as many Afghans before them, desired to seek out economic opportunities in Hind during the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517). They established themselves there under the care and protection of Daulat Khan Lodi, the governor of Lahore and a kinsman of Malik Ahmad who was familiar with him and his sons. While in Lahore, we learn, one of Malik Ahmad’s sons soon distinguished himself above all the others—a man also by the name of Daulat Khan, who earned the title “Sher Khan,” or the “lion khan,” after apprehending and killing a lion during a hunt. During this time with their kinsman, Sher Khan and his brothers also traveled to Agra, the Lodi capital, and were received with honor by Sultan Sikandar before returning to Lahore to live in the company of Daulat Khan Lodi.³³²

With the arrival of the first Mughal emperor Babur, however, Khan Jahan Lodi’s ancestors found themselves in an uncomfortable position in their residence in the Punjab. Due to the “complete divisiveness that found its way to the Lodi *silsila*,”³³³ or lineage, Sher Khan and his brothers fled the region and took up residence to the east in Bihar,³³⁴ where they became embroiled in the local competition for political power. At first, Harawi says, the brothers took up service under

³³¹ In his introduction to the translation of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Dorn writes extensively about his scholarly interest in the proposition that the Afghans descended from the tribes of Israel. H.G. Raverty (d. 1906), a British colonial official with an abiding interest in Afghan history (and most widely known for his translation of Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani’s *Tabaqat-i Navā’ir*), also completed extensive research on this topic, and his notes are littered with references to this idea. See H.G. Raverty, “Papers of Henry George Raverty,” MS 193300, School of Oriental and African Studies.

³³² Ibid, 441-449.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Harawi says they fled to Patna, which he describes as being part of Bengal.

Sultan Mahmud, the son of Sikandar Lodi who made a bid for the throne following Ibrahim Lodi's (d. 1526) defeat at Panipat. Within a short time however, Sultan Mahmud was defeated in battle by an upstart, another "Sher Khan" from the Sur clan of Afghans who took the regnal title "Sher Shah" Suri (r. 1540-1545). In spite of the fact that Sher Khan and his brothers had initially fought against him, the victorious Sher Shah acknowledged the men's excellent service to Sultan Mahmud, and requested that they now join his own entourage. The sons of Malik Ahmad did so, and Sher Shah elevated them to the respectable status of *amirs*, or military commanders.³³⁵

In a tragic turn of events, Sher Khan resolved to die on the battlefield after failing in his charge to protect Qutb Khan, Sher Shah's son who perished in a military engagement in Bengal. Moved by this sacrifice and Sher Khan's commitment to his family, Sher Shah called all of the deceased commander's sons and honored them with Iraqi horses, the standard, and the kettledrum, and sent them back to the Punjab to administer their own territories. One son, however, he kept in his own service: Umar Khan, the grandfather of Khan Jahan Lodi. According to Harawi, Umar Khan held the privilege of spending most of his time in Sher Shah's company, and the sultan even arranged his marriage to the daughter of one of his own esteemed military servants in Bengal, a man by the name of 'Alam Khan.³³⁶

In time, Sher Shah passed away and acceded the throne to Islam Shah Sur, the longest reigning Suri monarch (r. 1545-1554). During this time, Umar Khan and his wife were blessed with a son, an "auspicious" (*kebijasta*) child whom they named Daulat ("fortune") Khan.³³⁷ Here, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* embarks on a lengthy description of the conditions in which Khan Jahan Lodi's father was born—one that bears a striking resemblance to Abu al-Fazl's *Akbarnama*, which recounted the remarkable occurrences that characterized the Mughal emperor Akbar's entry into the world. As detailed by Azfar Moin, the *Akbarnama's* recollection of Akbar's birth drew upon notions of an embodied sacrality to demonstrate that "the emperor had been born—or more precisely, reborn—to inaugurate the millennium."³³⁸ After revealing how Akbar's ancestor, the Mongol princess Alanquva, was impregnated by a beam of light that revealed itself to be 'Ali, the *Akbarnama* also recalled how the emperor's father, Humayun (d. 1556), "bequeath(ed) a rich legacy of omens and sacred premonitions to his heir."³³⁹ According to the text, Humayun was the first to recognize that the astrological conditions during his son's birth were even more promising than those of his ancestor Amir Timur (d. 1405), the famed "Lord of the Conjunction" (*sahib qiran*) and inspiration behind contemporary visions of millennial kingship.³⁴⁰ These factors, in addition to other auspicious signs such as the child Akbar's ability to speak from the cradle, foretold the future monarch's greatness and that he would one day take the place of—and even surpass in magnificence and power—his sacred and kingly ancestors.³⁴¹

Returning to Harawi's account of Khan Jahan Lodi's father, the author describes the fortuitous circumstances that accompanied Daulat Khan's arrival into the world:

When the astronomers and those with knowledge of the stars and the Brahmins consulted the calendars and astrolabes concerning the hour of his birth, the majority of the planets were at the pinnacle of their greatness. Cheerful tidings reached their intelligent ears—that this child will be the most fortunate and decorated with fortune/wealth (*daulat*) in this great

³³⁵ Ibid, 450-451.

³³⁶ Ibid, 452-4.

³³⁷ Ibid, 455.

³³⁸ Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 137.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

lineage (*silsila*). He will become one of the great ones of the age, who will be eminent and among the nobles of that time and will reach a high stature. And many beautiful acts and praiseworthy actions will be manifested from him. And he will be one of the fortunate (*daulatmand*) ones and achieve high rank among those possessing fortune and greatness.³⁴²

For his part, the father, Umar Khan, was overjoyed at the news of his son's predicted stature, and worked to raise and nurture the remarkable child to the best of his abilities.³⁴³

Unfortunately, the happiness and success of Khan Jahan Lodi's family was soon tempered by a growing enmity between them and Islam Shah Suri's successor, 'Adil Shah. Unable to build a harmonious relationship with the new sultan and then seeking shelter beyond his reach, Umar Khan fled first to the *qasaba* of Aryal, controlled by a king named Raja Bhatta. Within time, however, the young emperor Akbar arrived in the region to confront the last of the Suri rulers—signaling the beginning of the end of the Afghan sultanates. After one particularly gruesome battle between Akbar and the Afghan forces, Umar Khan was alarmed to learn that his brothers had been killed. Hearing “of the martyrdom of his brothers and the coming of the Mughals and the disunity of this lineage (*silsila*), he (Umar Khan) did not see it appropriate to remain in the territory (*wilayat*) of the enemy.”³⁴⁴ Thus, Khan Jahan Lodi's family once again relocated from their place of residence, directing their attention this time towards the province of Gujarat.³⁴⁵

Out of the influence of Mughal political control, Umar Khan strove to continue raising his son according to the finest principles. During Daulat Khan's childhood, Harawi notes, “many marks of fortune (*daulatmandi*) became evident in him, and the signs of his greatness and excellence were evident on his blessed forehead.”³⁴⁶ When came of age, true to the expectations of his family, Daulat Khan entered the service of one of the *amirs* of the Gujarat, and began to administer people and territory of his own accord. Another telling sign that occurred was Daulat Khan's marriage to a daughter of Miyan Haibat Khan, one of the great military commanders of the Gujarat Sultanate. As Harawi explains, Miyan Haibat Khan himself knew that the allegiance was “an unexpected gift from God,” and arranged for the marriage to take place at an auspicious time.³⁴⁷

Importantly, Harawi's description of Daulat Khan's birth and youth is littered with references to his *daulat*, a Perso-Arabic term usually translated as “fortune.” In the context of seventeenth-century South Asia, *daulat* carried important connotations in terms of political sovereignty. As Abhishek Kaicker has noted, for Mughal thinkers, *daulat* implied fortune “both in the sense of the divine endorsement to rule, and the possession of worldly wealth.”³⁴⁸ A power given to the sovereign by God, *daulat* gave rulers the distinguished ability to ensure justice, something imagined by many in this context to be one of, if not “the greatest virtue.”³⁴⁹ For Khan Jahan Lodi's father to be decorated with *daulat*, both in his name and character, implies the nobleman's divine gift to impart justice in the world—an assertion that, as part of Harawi's account on Khan Jahan's genealogical origins, draws attention to his patron's own inherited power to assume the mantle of political authority.

³⁴² Harawi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, 455-6. I translated this passage somewhat loosely to avoid repetition of words and phrases.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 457-458.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 459.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 462.

³⁴⁸ Abhishek Kaicker, *The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 8.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

Returning to Harawi’s narrative: following the Mughal conquest of Gujarat in 1572, Khan Jahan Lodi’s ancestors fled again to the port town of Surat, where they were welcomed by the local ruler. It was at this point, however, that their fortunes began to change as the family attempted to negotiate a new relationship with the Mughals, who were now clearly establishing themselves in Hindustan. As Harawi details in this section, after fleeing to Surat, Daulat Khan returned to Gujarat and took up service with the Mughal *navab* of the region, at the invitation of a local *amir* appointed by Akbar. From then onward, the family of Khan Jahan Lodi—though long resistant to the Mughal incursions—accepted positions of honor in the Mughal Empire. Indeed, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* reveals, Daulat Khan himself was greatly distinguished from the very beginning; Akbar’s confidant and panegyrist Abu al-Fazl learned of his deeds and praised him in an assembly, and the Afghan *amir* was later honored by the Mughal emperor himself, who granted him a prestigious rank (*mansab*) commensurate with his stature. Also at this time, Daulat Khan had two sons—the first, Muhammad Khan, and the second, Pir Khan.³⁵⁰ Again, Harawi elaborates on the special conditions in which Pir Khan, the man who would become Khan Jahan Lodi, was born:

When the astronomers of precise knowledge noticed the birth of that auspicious male child, happiness and good tidings reached the ears of Miyan Daulat Khan that this child would be one of the most prosperous of his age, and that he would be close to the special caliph (*khaliif*) of the age, and would be raised to a great status, and that the people would be fortunate and profit from him...Daulat Khan...bloomed like a flower and thanked God for this, and named him Pir Khan at an auspicious hour, and held a magnificent gathering and invited many great *khans*.³⁵¹

For the remainder of his life Daulat Khan enjoyed great privilege in the Mughal court. First, he served under ‘Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan (d. 1627),³⁵² and then under Akbar’s son Daniyal (d. 1605), who personally requested his service after the latter took his position as *navab* of the Deccan.³⁵³

Following Daulat Khan’s death, Akbar’s son Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) ascended the throne. Hearing of the “bravery and valor and beautiful nature and beautiful deeds done by Pir Khan, and the favor of Prince Daniyal who had observed this in him,”³⁵⁴ the emperor sent two letters to the Deccan requesting that Daulat Khan’s son come to court. Pir Khan met Jahangir at an auspicious time, and, according to the author, the famed bond between the two was immediately sealed. “Within the least amount of time,” Harawi writes, “he (Pir Khan)...was among the friends (*sahiban*) and companions (*nadiman*)”³⁵⁵ of the emperor, who granted the Afghan nobleman the title Salabat Khan (“Firm” or “Steadfast” Khan) and honored him with a considerable *mansab* of two thousand. Later, when Jahangir traveled to Kabul to see the autumn flowers, Pir Khan received the distinct honor of accompanying him on this intimate journey, and was “everyday honored afresh.”³⁵⁶ When the party returned to the Mughal capital of Lahore, the emperor elevated Pir Khan further, giving him the special title of *farzand*, or “son,” and naming him Khan Jahani, or “khan of the world,”

³⁵⁰ Harawi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, 461-473.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, 473-4.

³⁵² *Ibid*.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, 477-9. According Harawi, Daniyal requested that Khan-i Khanan transfer Daulat Khan to his own service. This was apparently an emotionally fraught process, as Khan-i Khanan claimed that the relationship between himself and Daulat Khan was “like a father and a son.” Realizing that Daniyal would not be contented unless Daulat Khan came into his service, Khan Jahan Lodi’s father eventually capitulated and joined the Mughal prince.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 491.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 492.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 493.

raising his rank to the outstanding number of five thousand.³⁵⁷ According to Harawi, Jahangir also presented his associate with a special ring, engraved with a letter from himself to the Afghan nobleman:

A special son of the shah he became, by the will of God/
Khan Jahan, disciple (*murid*) of Jahangir Padishah.³⁵⁸

Throughout the remainder of his account of Khan Jahan Lodi's exploits, Harawi reveals how the Mughal nobility became divided on the subject of Jahangir's choice to grant an Afghan with such high honors. Indeed, he writes, when the emperor presented Khan Jahan with the engraved ring, many of the *amirs* in Jahangir's entourage became jealous of the favors that he had been granted, and said such things amongst themselves as "showing affection to an Afghan is far from reason."³⁵⁹ However, the author reassures his reader of the closeness achieved between Khan Jahan and the emperor, asserting:

The writer of the *Tarikh-i Ibrahim Shahi*³⁶⁰ writes that during the time of Sultan Sikandar and Sultan Ibrahim (Lodi), the greatness, etc. of Qutb Khan Lodi and Khan Jahan Lodi and Khan-i Khanan reached a stage that no *amir* had reached in past ages, and it would never again be so. But if that man were in this age, and observed the special favor and limitless grace and special honor that the Bandagan-i Hazrat (Jahangir) (showed to) the Nawab Khan Jahan Lodi, and (his) growing fortune, etc. that God increased day by day, they would become distressed at what they had said, and would wash those pages from their books and efface them.³⁶¹

As narrated by Harawi and contemporary historians, in spite of the odds against him, Khan Jahan Lodi went on to have a successful career after becoming a boon companion of Jahangir. He distinguished himself most notably in the Deccan—the same region where his father had migrated to work in the service of the Mughal prince Daniyal, and where Khan Jahan himself had spent many of the formative years of his youth. It was precisely in this region, too where Khan Jahan Lodi—some twenty years after the completion of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—turned against the Mughal sovereigns whom he and his father had once served. Only a few years after the death of Jahangir and the ascension of his son, Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1658), the erstwhile companion of the emperor fled to the Deccan with his extended household and retainers in tow. Shah Jahan and his forces followed Khan Jahan there and pursued him for some months, until apprehending him in a battle near the banks of the Chambal River.³⁶² As memorialized in a well-known painting produced under Shah Jahan to accompany the *Badshahnama*, or the official history of his reign, imperial forces then beheaded Khan Jahan and some of his close associates,³⁶³ effectively terminating the connections between this lineage and the empire in the first month of 1631.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 494.

³⁶⁰ A history of the Lodi sultanate (r. 1451-1526) that Mughal-era chroniclers often reference, but that has since been lost.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 495.

³⁶² The Chambal River is a tributary of the Ganga that flows through central India.

³⁶³ Ibid, "The Death of Khan Jahan Lodi," Image, 1656-57, (Royal Collection Trust), <https://www.rct.uk/collection/1005025-q/the-death-of-khan-jahan-lodi-3-february-1631>.

³⁶⁴ Hannah Lord Archambault, "Geographies of Influence: Two Afghan Military Households in 17th and 18th Century South India" (Doctoral dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2018), 2.

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Writing at the pinnacle of Khan Jahan Lodi's power in the Mughal Empire, and a time when the nobleman enjoyed a particularly close relationship to the emperor Jahangir, Harawi in all likelihood did not foresee his patron's future break with the imperial formation that had raised him to political distinction. Can we, however, read the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* in light of Khan Jahan Lodi's eventual break from the Mughals? An assessment of a historical chronicle completed twenty years after Khan Jahan's death, the *Zakbirat-al Khawanin* (1651) of Farid Bhakkari,³⁶⁵ offers insights not found elsewhere on the significance of Lodi's flight to the south, giving compelling evidence of the expansiveness of the Afghan nobleman's political ambitions. As Bhakkari recalls, Lodi and his compatriots embarked on their journey from Hindustan to the Deccan filled with hope for the future. They imagined that once the party crossed the Narmada River—the traditional boundary marking the borders between Hindustan and south India³⁶⁶—Khan Jahan would carve out a new, independent principality and rule as king. Under his stead, Khan Jahan's companion Bahlul Khan Miyana claimed, each of the Afghans who accompanied him would be accorded the rank of twelve thousand—an exceedingly high status never before attained by a member of the Mughal nobility. This dream, of course, never came to fruition. For Bhakkari, this outcome was due to Khan Jahan Lodi's own doubts about the feasibility of his mission. Sometime during their journey southwards, he says, the appointed leader of the Afghans began to feel the weight of his responsibility. Lamenting that in the event of the rebellion's failure, the Mughals “would expel and kill each and every Afghan from the towns and villages,”³⁶⁷ and that the Afghans would blame him for the death and destruction, Lodi tarried on his way to greener pastures. While Bahlul Khan Miyana and others eventually forged onwards, Khan Jahan lingered in the Deccan borderlands until Mughal imperial forces finally found him, defeating him in battle and swiftly carrying out his execution.³⁶⁸

Due to the efforts of Mughal imperial chroniclers, Khan Jahan Lodi's legacy became enduringly defined by his rebellion against the empire and failure to defy the authorities who had once raised his family to political distinction. However, Bhakkari's account nonetheless offers an invaluable perspective on the future that Khan Jahan had imagined for himself—a future in which many of his contemporaries, including men like Bahlul Khan Miyana, had invested their confidence. To be sure, as the *Zakbirat al-Khawanin* reveals in this emotionally affective passage, Khan Jahan Lodi distinguished himself as the first individual to make a serious attempt at restoring Afghan kingship since the decline of the Suris. If we return to the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, as well as the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, this effort on the part of Khan Jahan becomes particularly meaningful. As I have thus far suggested, Mughal-era authors of the first Afghan histories evinced a particular fascination with the institution of Afghan kingship, adding detail and richness to their shared vision of this phenomenon in ways that demonstrated its perceived significance in the authors' present. In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Harawi imagined these ideas on the grandest scale yet, enfolding the institution of Afghan kinship within a sweeping history of the Prophetic revelation to suggest that the story of Afghan imperial sovereignty, though interrupted with the fall of the Lodis and Suris in the sixteenth century, had not yet come to a conclusive end.

From his cyclical history of human suffering and deliverance to the blessed family lineage of Khan Jahan Lodi, Harawi channeled the power of genealogy to indicate that kingship could manifest itself once again within an exceptional Afghan; with Lodi himself possessing all of the qualities to

³⁶⁵ While little is known about the life and career of Farid Bhakkari, the *Zakbirat al-Khawanin* reveals that he was in the bureaucratic service of Mughal elites including 'Abd al-Fath Dakkani, Nur-un-Nissa Begum, Khan Jahan Lodi himself, and Mahabat Khan Khan-i Khanan. See “Farid,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 1999, Accessed 1 November 2020.

³⁶⁶ Archambault, “Geographies,” 1.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

carry out this role. These qualities ranged from the perfection of Khan Jahan's character foretold at his birth (and in the accounts of his exceptional ancestors like Daulat Khan), to the fact that he himself was a member of the Lodi tribe: a lineage distinguished long ago by the Afghan Sufi master and grandfather of the first Lodi, Shaikh Bait. As Bhakkari's chronicle subsequently revealed, the aging Khan Jahan understood himself to be the bearer as of this responsibility, setting his sights on the regions beyond Mughal imperial control where he might one day restore Afghan kinship—to the benefit of all those in his *qaum* who ventured to cast their lots with him. Khan Jahan Lodi's abandonment of this goal, tragically recounted in the *Zakhirat al-Khawanin*, perhaps signaled the death knell of these dreams for many of Lodi's contemporaries. Nonetheless, his vision of what *could* be reflected decades of effort on the part of Afghans and their supporters—prominent among them chroniclers like Mushtaqi, Kabir, and Harawi—to imagine a place for Afghan imperial sovereignty at a historical moment shaped by millennial expectations and competitive claims to authority in Islamic kingship.

Tribe and Mobility in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*: The Way Forward

Moving forward in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, in a compelling narrative decision, Harawi does not end his chronicle with the personal history of its namesake. Rather, Harawi dedicates the next chapter of his text to chronicling the descent of each of the Afghan tribes from their three progenitors: brothers named Sarbani, Batni, and Ghurghushti. In this lengthy section of his work, Harawi does not offer a linear recounting of who begat whom. Rather, he embellishes his account with stories of how historical Afghans defied social expectations and married beyond the boundaries of kith and kin, subsequently incorporating other ethnic and tribal lineages into the greater Afghan *qaum*. In the following sections, I will offer an analysis of these stories of exchange in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, questioning how they reflect the text's broader vision of Afghan history as well as the possibilities for the community's future. I will argue that Harawi's recollection of this genealogical history worked to chart a path forward for the Afghans of the Mughal period, who continued to imagine the horizons that they might traverse after the decline of the Lodi and Suri sultanates.

In developing this interpretation, I draw upon the insights in Engseng Ho's transregional history of the Hadrami Sayyid diaspora of Yemen, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*. In his work, Ho describes genealogies as “a constant incitement discourse about things moving.”³⁶⁹ Examining how members of the Hadrami diaspora carried genealogies with them as they traveled to far reaches of the Indian Ocean world, Ho reveals that family histories are anything but “dead” texts. Rather, they facilitate the creation of “societies,” inciting movement both outwards and back to the geographical origin point shared by all of its members. When carried to new social contexts, genealogies served in another capacity, offering guidelines for proper behavior and regulating relationships between the home community and new social groups. In this understanding, the writing and sharing of genealogies contributed to the creation of a normative identity and sense of common direction for its members, wherever in the world they might put down roots.

As I have previously suggested, those who called themselves “Afghan” had long traversed landscapes far from their “homeland,” the geographical region known as “Roh.” Much like the Hadrami Sayyids of Yemen, Afghans, too, began to inscribe and circulate detailed genealogies of their community—one of the first and most enduringly popular examples laid out in Harawi's *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*. As mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation, Nile Green has interpreted these efforts on the part of Afghans as “an attempt to stamp order onto the Afghan

³⁶⁹ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 19.

world by weaving a weft of uneven patterns of social organization into the faultless kilim of historical narrative—a series of heroic yarns whose underlying warp was a perfected model of tribal genealogy.”³⁷⁰ In Green’s assessment, the Afghan interest in producing genealogies emerged out of the intense ethnic competition taking place in the Mughal court; one in which Afghans participated by moving away from earlier forms of social fluidity and presenting the boundaries of the Afghan community as historically stable and even rigid in their formation. Underpinning and ensuring the structural integrity of this Afghan community was the tribe: a unit of social organization presented as immutable in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, and to which the text implicitly demanded the loyalty of Afghans at every turn.³⁷¹

To be sure, Afghan genealogies like those presented in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* depict an Afghan identity that had been in existence long before the first Afghans arrived in Hindustan, the location in which Harawi wrote his chronicle in the seventeenth century. The fact that such a communal identity as “Afghan” even existed is presented as a given in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*; it is, as Harawi clearly lays out, an identity always in the making and that belonged to a community with a specific and cosmically significant historical destiny. However, through a close reading of the content of Harawi’s Afghan genealogies, I will demonstrate how the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*’s presentation of Afghan history reveals the ways in which the boundaries between tribes and those of the Afghan community as a whole had been historically fluid, shifting and remolding themselves to meet the demand of situations that Afghans encountered as they ranged beyond the boundaries of their home and kin. Incorporating these stories of exchange into his account of Afghan genealogy and history, Harawi offers insights on how the Afghans of his own time might draw upon their heritage of geographical and social mobility to migrate, settle, and integrate “as Afghans” in the seventeenth century context and beyond.³⁷²

Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid: Conversion to Islam and the First Pathan

In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, the origins of the three primary Afghan lineages of Sarbani, Batni, and Ghurghushti lie in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, when an Afghan chief by the name of Qais traveled from his home in the mountains of Ghur to accept the Prophetic message in Arabia. The story of Qais is included in the “*tarikh*” section of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, placed chronologically after the history of the first prophets. Before delving more deeply into the tribal genealogies and their role in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, however, a brief reflection on this figure and his place in the *tarikh* is in order. His story offers important clues as to the role of conversion to the faith in the Afghans’ understanding of their shared past as well as their future as agents of the Prophetic message.

As Harawi explains, Qais was one of the descendants of the Bani Israel who were scattered to the mountainous region of Ghur by the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar—the tyrannical king who famously persecuted the tribes of Israel and sent them into exodus in disparate parts of the globe. In a fortuitous turn of events, another of these dispersed descendants was a figure well-known in the Islamic tradition: Khalid ibn al-Walid (592-642), the famed companion of the Prophet who fought alongside him during his battles against the Quraysh.³⁷³ After joining Muhammad on his military campaigns in the Arabian Peninsula, Khalid sought to propagate the message of the Prophet, writing letter to his distant relatives in Ghur to inform them that the last of the Prophets

³⁷⁰ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² The arguments that I make in the following sections are drawn from my Master’s thesis completed at UC Berkeley, *Becoming Afghan in Medieval India: History and Memory in Afghan Identity, 1206-1631* (2016).

³⁷³ The Quraysh were the ruling tribe of Mecca during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet himself belonged to the Hashemite clan of the Quraysh.

had arrived.³⁷⁴ The Afghans, for their part, responded enthusiastically to the call, sending a group of eminent men to embark on the journey for Arabia. The greatest among them was Qais, whom Harawi notes was thirty-seven generations removed from his ancestor, King Saul.³⁷⁵

Once the party arrived in Medina, Khalid arranged for Qais to meet the Prophet. Keenly observing Qais's qualities, Muhammad distinguished him with the Arabic name 'Abd al-Rashid ("servant of the right-minded"), a name by which he would subsequently be referred in Afghan histories. The Prophet also remarked that because Qais was one of the descendants of King Saul, and that the Quran had designated that man as *malik* (king), it was only appropriate that Qais 'Abd al-Rashid also take this title.³⁷⁶ Thereafter, the Prophet departed from Medina to engage in battle with the people of Mecca, a fight in which both Khalid and Qais 'Abd al-Rashid fought valiantly. Noting the truth and bravery of Qais in this encounter, the Prophet heaped further blessings upon the Afghan ancestor, predicting that "from the offspring of this man a great *silsila* will come into being, who in abundance of tribes (*qabayel*) and association with and commitment to the faith will surpass all other people."³⁷⁷ Muhammad also revealed how the angel Jibrail, or Gabriel, had likened this commitment to the foundational wooden board of a ship, known in the language of seafaring folk as "*pathan*."³⁷⁸ That being so, the Prophet gave Qais the second name of "Pathan," claiming that "until the day of judgment" his descendants would remain firmly committed to the faith, and that countless great *shaihs* and dervishes would be counted among them. In a final significant gesture, the Prophet took Qais Abd al-Rashid's hand in his own and recited a prayer for him.³⁷⁹ After this auspicious encounter, Qais returned to his homeland and dutifully promoted the faith of Islam in Ghur, where he was also granted with three children: sons whom he named Sarbani, Batni, and Ghurghusht.³⁸⁰

As the remainder of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* reveals, the moment of conversion to Islam marks a crucial new beginning in Afghan history; one after which the Afghans began the many-layered and significant destiny assigned to them by the Prophet Muhammad. It is worth noting, however, how this story stands in contrast to that, for example, of the Mongols from Devin DeWeese's pathbreaking work.³⁸¹ To be sure, the Afghan history charted in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* begins and ends with Islam—unlike the Mongols of the Golden Horde, there is no memory of Afghans practicing pagan or other non-Abrahamic traditions; from the very beginning of time, Afghans followed the path of the "faith" (*din*) until the arrival of the last Prophet, when an invitation from Khalid ibn al-Walid pulled them in the direction of the Arabian peninsula. As we also see in this story, the propagation of Afghan "tribes" (referred to here as *qabayel*), the unit of social organization so often linked to notions of Afghan internecine feuding, was itself a prediction and blessing of the Prophet—a destiny which, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* attests, was fulfilled throughout the centuries.

Returning to Qais Abd al-Rashid's arrival in his homeland, Harawi continues to chart an Afghan history characterized by its mobility and commitment to Islam. After noting how the sons of the first "Pathan" went on to propagate new lineages in Ghur, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* moves

³⁷⁴ Harawi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, 107.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 110.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 111.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. For the significance of handshakes and corporeal contact in Islam, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 112.

³⁸¹ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in History and Epic Tradition* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

forward chronologically in history to connect the Afghans to Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030), the great sultan of the Ghaznavids memorialized for his eleventh-century campaigns into the Indian subcontinent. According to Harawi, during the time of Mahmud, several Afghans approached the sultan and offered their services to him, some even accompanying him on his famous journey to the temple of Somnath on the coast of India.³⁸² Some years later, the Afghans were also linked to Muiz al-din Ghuri (d. 1206), the leader of the Ghurid conquest of north India whose successors went on to establish the Delhi Sultanate. In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, it was he who relocated the Afghans from the mountains of Ghur to the Sulaiman Mountain region; the territory that became the Afghan “homeland” par excellence. Indeed, Harawi says, after his victory over Rai Pithora in north India, Muiz al-din moved some twenty-thousand Afghans to the “*kobistan* (mountain range) of Roh and the *kobistan* of Sulaiman...to cultivate (*abadan sakt*) it.”³⁸³ The third time Muiz al-din campaigned in north India, Afghans, too accompanied him; one Malik Mahmud Lodi appointed to lead the troops on this crucial campaign.³⁸⁴

As the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s narrative of Afghan history from the time of Qais to the rise of the Lodis and Suris thus demonstrates, Afghans had been central to the historical movement of Islam from its origin point in the Arabian peninsula to South Asia, the same location in which the Mughals were concurrently making their claims to millennial kingship. To consider how this idea manifested itself throughout the remainder of Harawi's work, we will now turn to his account of the Afghans' descent from the three tribal progenitors: Sarbani, Batni, and Ghurghushti, the sons of the first Afghan to embrace Islam.

Kinship and Mobility in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*

In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s recounting of the genealogical descent of the Afghan tribes from Qais 'Abd al-Rashid, marriage and the exchange of children are two phenomena that are fleshed out in considerable detail. As we will see, weaved carefully throughout these lists are anecdotes which explain how Afghan chiefs once exchanged sons with one another, or reckoned with the consequences of welcoming new members into their tribe. While such anecdotes may have been drawn from the Afghans' shared historical memory—a compelling suggestion made by Nile Green³⁸⁵—I argue that they also indicate an insistence on working out the inherent contradictions of the Afghans' historical mobility. How, for example, could the descendants of Qais 'Abd al-Rashid move outward from Ghur and the Sulaiman Mountain range while maintaining the distinctiveness of their identity? How could a community be both mobile and capable of putting down roots wherever they landed? As I demonstrate in this section, in revealing how Afghans reshaped the contours of their community as they spread across globe, Harawi's work considers how Afghans could continue to migrate and settle as they carried out the destiny of their blessed ancestor Qais.

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Throughout his genealogical chapter, Harawi makes a number of references Afghan women, citing their role expanding the boundaries of the Afghan community. In most cases, these women are not named; as such, it is difficult determine whether or not they were real historical figures. Typically, however, the women described are those who married outside of their tribe, or, in many cases, outside of the Afghan *qaum* altogether—yet only when the marriage arrangement was with a Sufi *shaiikh*, *sayyid*,³⁸⁶ or other individual of a high religious pedigree. Indeed, while Harawi might be

³⁸² Harawi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, 116-118.

³⁸³ Ibid, 120.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 121.

³⁸⁵ Nile Green, *Making Space*, 83.

³⁸⁶ Descendants of the family of the Prophet Muhammad.

uninterested in Indian or other women who married *into* an Afghan lineage, explaining the circumstances in which Afghan women were permitted to marry *out* adds another dimension to the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*. In the context in which Harawi wrote his chronicle, a social group who married its women out of the community—as Rajput women were married to Mughal men—occupied an inferior position to the group that received her. The greater number of social groups into which a woman was allowed to marry, the lower the social standing of her own group. By the revealing the limited and special number of situations in which an Afghan woman could in fact marry out, Harawi not demarcates the boundaries of the Afghan community, but argues that the Afghans in fact occupied an enviably high status position within the greater Muslim social hierarchy.

Once account appended to the genealogy of the Sarbani lineage is useful in understanding the nature of these exchanges and their reflection on Afghan social status. In this passage, the author describes how a group of four wandering holy men came upon the house of Harun, a Sarbani Afghan. Although a poor man with little to offer, Harun recognized the piety of the men and gave his horse as well as his daughter's hand in marriage to one of them.³⁸⁷ The saints graciously accepted Harun's offer, and pleased with his behavior towards them, said a prayer for him. They also entrusted to his care an orphaned Sayyid boy who was accompanying them. According to Harawi, the descendants of Harun's adopted Sayyid son thereafter became known as the Sayyidzais,³⁸⁸ a new Afghan lineage that subsequently branched off from the main Sarbani line.³⁸⁹

Although only occupying a brief portion of the text, the story of Harun and the Sayyid boy offers several clues concerning Harawi's vision of Afghan identity in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*. First, it is important to note that Harun is not described as a wealthy man of privileged social background—he in fact has very little to offer to the dervishes, but is rewarded for his humility, piety, and the gracious gift that he gave to the holy men. In this respect, Harawi makes a rare accession to the less than illustrious social background of the Afghans; all the while gesturing to how their religiosity presented them with the opportunities for social mobility. It is also significant that in this story of Harun and the dervishes, the Sayyid orphan boy becomes a full-fledged member of the Afghan community. In explaining how this transpired, Harawi thus interweaves the concerns of communal integrity and status, envisioning a social privilege for Afghans that put them on an equal par with the descendants of the Prophet.

Throughout the remainder of the genealogical chapter of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, we come across several other anecdotes that describe marital links between Sayyids and Afghans, many of which add further complexity to this relationship. Like the story of Harun, these stories build upon the capacity of the Afghan community for taking in Sayyid members; a remarkable fact given the distinction of the Prophetic bloodline and widely acknowledged “low” social origins of the Afghans. In another important example of how these engagements occurred, Harawi recalls how a pious woman from the Shirani lineage of Afghans once married a Sayyidzada man, bearing one of his children before her husband's untimely death. Later, the woman married a second husband from her own tribe and gave birth to another son, who, unlike his older brother, was not of Sayyid heritage. When the younger brother grew up, his father wanted to make him the master of the household (*kad-khuda*), while his wife argued that it was only appropriate for her first son, the Sayyidzada, to receive this honor. When the Shirani man brought the issue before the tribal chief, the latter proposed to divide the estate between the two sons; however, he still nominated the Sayyid-descended boy as the primary master.³⁹⁰ In this case, the Sayyidzada's membership in the tribe, or

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 558-559.

³⁸⁸ The “Sayyid-born.” Harawi also writes this as “Sayyidzada.”

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 642-3.

“Afghanness,” was never contested by his family group; however, as this passage makes clear, Sayyid heritage continued to play a central role in how other Afghans in his community perceived and treated him in relation to others.

A third and particularly fascinating account of these exchanges is recounted in the passage dedicated to the Afghan lineage of the Kerranis. Here, Harawi brings into his account a fifteenth-century Sufi figure well-known outside the Afghan context—Banda Nawaz Gesudaraz (1321-1422), “the long-haired” *shaiikh* noted for his Sayyid ancestry and role in carrying the Chishti Sufi tradition from northern India to the Deccan. According to Harawi, on his journey southwards after Amir Timur (d. 1405)’s sacking of Delhi, Gesudaraz settled in a village that was inhabited by three Afghan tribes. When a time of hardship befell the village, the chiefs of each of the three tribes approached him, asking Gesudaraz to pray for their safety and well-being. When Gesudaraz complied, the tribal chiefs each offered a daughter in marriage to the *shaiikh*. As Harawi narrates it, Gesudaraz accepted these women, and their union—as in the case of Harun’s Sayyid son—resulted in the inauguration of three new Afghan lineages. These lines could each claim Sayyid ancestry, and their members proudly remembered their connection to the Sufi *shaiikh*. However, as Harawi takes care to point out, the members of these lineages were known first and foremost as *Afghans*, not Sayyids.³⁹¹ As this story thus suggests, the Afghan community had a particular capacity to accept Sayyid members (and Sayyids, consequently, would find it attractive to forge marital alliances with Afghans); however, these kinds of unions did not threaten the integrity of or eclipse the primacy of an Afghan identity.

While these connections between the Sayyids and the Afghans allow Harawi to make a powerful statement about the social status of Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid’s descendants, including them in his history also places him in a difficult position. As we learn from the anecdote about the Sayyidzada boy and his fully Afghan brother, incorporating Sayyids into the Afghan community came with a risk: that respect for a Prophetic bloodline would undermine the prestige of Afghan identity. Harawi’s inclusion of this story, I believe, indicates his awareness of this issue, and his acknowledgement of the potential challenge that the universally recognized reputation of the Sayyids could pose to the status claims of Afghans. Harawi’s stories of the new Sayyidzada lineages formed from Harun, as well as those from Gesudaraz, further complicate this narrative. By arguing that a Sayyid man could not only marry into the Afghan community, but found a new Afghan lineage, Harawi lays bare the fluidity of the Afghan *qaum*’s social boundaries—a reality that could potentially destabilize the internal cohesion of Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid’s descendants.

If the Afghans were in fact capable of bringing Sayyids fully into their fold, it was thus incumbent upon Harawi to temper this prestigious identity so that it in no way challenged the strength of “Afghanness.” It is this concern, in all likelihood, that prompts the author to conclude his passage on Gesudaraz with such a disclaimer—that the Afghan lineages that subsequently branched off the Sufi *shaiikh* considered themselves ultimately to be Afghans, not Sayyids. While these comments might appear insignificant in the grand scheme of Harawi’s capacious work, they are, in fact, critical to reinforcing his broader claims about the identity and status of the Afghan community in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*. Through this commentary on Sayyids and their membership in the Afghan *qaum*, Harawi manages to delicately balance seemingly conflicting claims, making a pointed argument about the Afghans’ social status as well as the historical integrity of their communal boundaries.

As the genealogical chapter of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* demonstrates, the boundaries between the Afghans and other communities were historically porous ones; however, it was one’s tribal, Afghan identity that subsumed all others. Only in this manner could Afghans move to regions far from their homeland and intermarry with new social groups while honoring the blood ties that

³⁹¹ Ibid, 644-5.

bound them together as a community. Beyond this, in telling multiple stories of the Sayyids, the Afghans, and their marriage alliances, Harawi manages to both acknowledge and temper the prestige of the Prophetic heritage, revealing that even a descendant of the Prophet's family would find honor in belonging to the Afghan community. Linking the Afghans to Sayyids in this manner, Harawi's text consequently locates the Afghans among the most respectable members of the Islamic *ummah*—one in which the prestige of the Prophetic bloodline could be equaled by or even challenged by that of the first Pathan Qais 'Abd al-Rashid.

Sufi Masters in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*: Making Afghan and Sacred Space

In the final section, or *khatima*, of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Harawi draws once again upon the paradigm of genealogy to group and share stories of prominent Afghan Sufi *shaiikhs*. The presentation of their lives and miracles in this passage, however, stands in contrast to the remainder of the *tarikb*. In these concluding passages of Harawi's work, there is no sense of chronological time moving forward, bringing the Afghans from Ghur to the Arabian peninsula and on to their destinations in South Asia. Rather, the text reads like a Sufi *tazkira*, or biographical dictionary, organizing Sufi masters within the three main tribal lineages of Sarbani, Batni, and Ghurghushti. Here, Sufis who lived centuries before and after one another occupy the same pages of text; categorized carefully within their tribal community, but often without attention to dates or to who lived before whom. As such, the Sufis in Harawi's text appear to exist simultaneously with one another, their presence attaching durably to the geographical spaces that they claimed as their *wilayat*, or spiritual territory.

To be sure, while the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* might disregard chronological time in its recollection of famed Afghan *shaiikhs*, it almost always roots the Sufis to a space. It is these spaces that the saints imbue with their sacred charisma (*karamat*), and which become nodal points on the map of an ever-expanding Afghan world. In many cases, these *pirs*, in claiming space for their own spiritual domains, make it inhabitable for other Afghans, whose "origin stories" are traced back to intercession of a Sufi *shaiikh*. To give one example from the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, an excerpt from its passage on the life Khwaja Yahya Kabir offers a fairly standard demonstration of these events. One winter evening, the author says, Khawja Yahya and some of his companions were returning from a journey and looking for a place to rest when they arrived at a grove of olive trees. The *shaiikh* asked his companions as to whether there was a spring in the vicinity; his followers pointed out that while there was no flowing river, there was, in fact, a dried-up riverbed. When the time of the afternoon prayer approached and the party needed water for ablutions, Khwaja Yahya went to the banks of the dry river with a brush in his hand. He struck the brush against a stone until, miraculously, "sweet and cold" water burst forth. To this day, Harawi says, that stream continues to flow, and would never dry up "until the end of time, God willing."³⁹²

In another anecdote, Harawi describes the Afghan origins of the town of Bahraich, a north Indian city popularly known as the site of the tomb of Salar Masud Ghazi, the saint and legendary nephew of the sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Similar to his story of Khan Jahan Lodi's ancestors, Harawi begins this tale with two young Afghans belonging to the Bahraich lineage, both of whom left their homeland and traveled to north India. Once there, he writes, the Afghans came across a place called Sharavak which they intended to make their new home. Within a short time of settling there, however, they found many threats to their livelihood including a lack of water, poisonous snakes, and a community of Baluch hostile to their presence. In the hope of overcoming these difficulties, the Afghans called upon their *shaiikh*, Sabit Bahraich, and asked for his intercession. The *shaiikh* prayed for a water source for the Afghans, willed that the poison of the snakes would not

³⁹² Ibid, 734-735.

affect them, and ensured that the present residents would never reach out a hand to disturb them. Thereafter, the men settled peacefully in that place, henceforth called “Bahraich” in honor of the *shaikh* and the Afghan kinsmen.³⁹³

In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*'s Sufi biographies, stories like that of Shaikh Sabit Bahraich not only show how Sufi *shaikhs* enabled Afghan settlement in spaces beyond the Sulaiman Mountains. They also greater texture one of Harawi's central arguments in the *tarikhs*: that Afghans had played a central role in carrying Islam to the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, as the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* recalls, some of the earliest Afghan migrants to India were the Sufi saints who arrived during the sultanate of Shams al-din Iltutmish (r. 1210-1236). One of the most outstanding examples of this is the thirteenth-century Chishti saint Qutb al-din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235), whom Harawi identifies as an Afghan belonging to the Sarbani lineage.³⁹⁴ To understand the importance of this declaration, it is noteworthy to recall Bakhtiyar Kaki's imagined role in the history of Islam in South Asia—a role acknowledged well beyond the Afghan community and for centuries prior to the emergence of Harawi's text. According to other sources which predate the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Qutb al-din was born in the Ferghana Valley and participated in the early wave of migrations from the heartlands of Central Asia to Iltutmish's sultanate. His *barakat* (blessing power), along with that of his successors like Nizam al-din Auliya (d. 1325), transformed the city from a frontier settlement into “*Hazrat-i Delhi*,” or the “venerable” city of Delhi, a veritable “sanctuary of Islam” in the time of repeated Mongol invasions of the central Islamic lands.³⁹⁵ The first Mughal emperor Babur's circumambulation of the shrine in 1526,³⁹⁶ as well as the many Mughal tombs and structures that cropped up around the saint's *dargah* in the centuries that followed, suggest the importance and longevity of Kaki's saintly charisma in Delhi: one that is here attributed to an Afghan *shaikh*.

In the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, the Afghan Sufis of South Asia interact with other Delhi sultans as well; encounters that are typically depicted as cooperative and auspicious. For example, Harawi recalls multiple instances in which the sultans of Delhi showed their respect to and reverently bestowed land grants upon Afghan *shaikhs* who were their contemporaries. In one illustrative story, Harawi describes how a Sarbani Sufi named Malik Yarparan built his hospice in Delhi with the support of sultan Ghiyath al-din Balban (r. 1266-86). One day, he says, the *shaikh* was passing by a location near the city that he desired to make the site of his hospice. As it turned out, the location was already the residence of another Sufi *shaikh* named Abu Bakr Tusi. Keen on transforming the spot into his own *wilayat*, Malik Yarparan approached the *shaikh* and asked how he might come to acquire the location, to which Abu Bakr replied, “this place is the residence (*makan*) of the *padishah*, I don't have authority over it.”³⁹⁷ The two men then struck an agreement that if Balban were to give his consent for a transfer, Malik Yarparan could claim the land as his own. The Afghan *shaikh* flew through the air on an ethereal seat (*takht-i pariyan*) to Balban's camp in Thatta,³⁹⁸ where he seated himself directly before the sultan. Upon witnessing the *shaikh*'s miraculous arrival and hearing his request, Balban immediately accepted Malik Yarparan's appeal and issued him five hundred bighas of land to settle in the vicinity.³⁹⁹

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³⁹³ Ibid, 754-5.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 711.

³⁹⁵ Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

³⁹⁶ Zahir al-din Muhammad Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: The Modern Library, 2002).

³⁹⁷ Harawi, *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Vol. 2, 747.

³⁹⁸ In Sind, the northwestern frontier of the Delhi Sultanate.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

In each of these stories of Afghan Sufi *shaiikhs* and their miracles, Harawi focuses his attention on the geographical region of South Asia, offering evidence of the ways in which eminent Afghans shaped the political and spiritual history of this space. When we recall the Mughal's concurrent claims to millennial kingship emanating from the Hindustan, we can fully appreciate the significance of these stories. As we have seen throughout this chapter, not only does Harawi's story of the Afghans begin and end with the faith of Islam; it shows that the community's imprint on South Asia preceded and thus *surpassed* that of the reigning dynasty, the great Mughals. Because of historical Sufi *pirs*, great military commanders, and even ordinary Afghans seeking greener pastures, the Afghans of seventeenth-century India could boast connections to the region deeper and more complex than those of the house of Babur. Interweaving these stories with those of Afghans in the more distant past, Harawi further illustrated how this community, though deeply embedded in the landscape of South Asia, were actually unhindered by its boundaries. As reflected in the blessings of the Prophet Muhammad and the community's historical capacity to incorporate new members, the Afghans were destined to continue moving outwards as they fulfilled their prophetic destiny.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, Nimat Allah Harawi's presentation of the Afghan past powerfully evinces seventeenth-century Afghans' active and creative participation in the discourses of sacred kingship. Like the Mughals and their Timurid predecessors in Central Asia, Afghans living *under* empire developed a sacred and kingly genealogy for themselves, ruminating on both the past and future possibilities of universal Afghan political leadership. It was this very same vision that animated Khan Jahan Lodi's fateful flight from the Mughal capital of Delhi to the fluid borderlands of the Deccan in the 1630s. Yet while for the Afghans genealogy may have served a familiar purpose—that of bolstering grand imperial ambitions—Harawi's work also represented a novel use of genealogy uniquely adapted to the patterns of Afghan history. In describing how the Afghans of times past adapted to and melded into new communities, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* demonstrated how Afghans could continue to move and form durable social relationships wherever they traveled. Just as the universal monarch imagined the world as boundless, so, too was the “Afghan world” charted in Harawi's epic work of history open and unlimited.

The next chapter will turn to the aftermath of Khan Jahan Lodi's failed expedition to the Deccan, the very same location where a new generation of Afghans would settle and write histories of the Afghan *qaum*. It focuses on the transformative decade of the 1660s, when a new Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb 'Alamgir (r. 1658-1707) made a series of attempts at incorporating new territories within the Deccan into the Mughal Empire. In this context, an Afghan of a decidedly different ilk than Khan Jahan Lodi—a Sufi-minded soldier from Punjab, 'Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi of Qasur—continued to ruminate on the historical and spiritual significance of his community in the world. A loyal servant of the Mughal state, Khweshgi represented a group of Afghans with deep connections to the reigning lineage and expressed acceptance of Mughal rule. Nonetheless, the following chapter argues, Khweshgi's work on Afghan history demonstrated the Afghans' continued, imagined capacity to move and be “at home” in different regions of South Asia. Even as a faithful servant of empire, Khweshgi's presentation of the origins and historical movement of the Afghan community starkly demonstrated the transregional nature of Afghan identity in the mid-seventeenth century. Afghans who accepted imperial authority at the height of Mughal power, of whom there were many individuals and lineages, continued to lay claim to the Indian subcontinent and imagine a privileged position for Afghans in that space.

Chapter Five: Origins

Introduction

Moving forward to the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ‘Alamgir (r. 1658-1707), this chapter examines the question of Afghan “origins.” It does so from the perspective of mobile Afghan and servant of the Mughal state, ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi of Qasur. Though born and raised in the Punjab, Khweshgi traced his ancestry to the Afghan homeland of Roh, a mountainous region to the northwest of the Mughal Empire where Afghan lineages had lived for centuries. In his adulthood, Khweshgi felt called to travel to different parts of the Mughals’ South Asian dominion, leaving Qasur and landing up in regions such as Gujarat, Bengal, and finally, the Deccan, an ever-shifting border region between the Mughal Empire and several independent kingdoms. In his 1666 work *Akbar al-Awliya*, or “Narratives of the Friends of God,” Khweshgi explored each of these migrations in detail. Through this narrative—one which included the story of King Saul, the Afghans’ migration to Roh, and many prolific Afghan saints—he created a complex story of both his own personal origins and the origins of the broader Afghan community. In doing so, he traced the Afghans’ roots from the Biblical heartlands, to Roh, and finally onto the Indian subcontinent, where his own story began.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the architects of the Afghan past conceptualized a firm distinction between “Roh,” also known as “Afghanistan,” and “Hindustan”—a term commonly used to refer to certain areas of north India, but that could connote the Indian subcontinent more broadly.⁴⁰⁰ For example, in Muhammad Kabir’s *Afsana-yi Shaban*, the author described how the Afghan sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517) distinguished between practices of sovereignty in Roh and Hindustan. According to Sikandar, in Roh, kings either did not rule at all or they shared power with others. In Hindustan, however, only one monarch could claim authority—something that Sikandar himself tried to establish.⁴⁰¹ Yet in the bulk of these early histories, neither Hindustan nor Roh were described as possessing concrete boundaries. The determined beginnings and ends of these conjoined regions fluctuated depending on the perspective of the author, and none described them as defined spaces encircled by lines in the sand. Among other factors that we will consider here, the fluidity that characterized conceptions of these regions—a fluidity that, it has been extensively argued, defined ways of thinking about space in the medieval and early modern periods⁴⁰²—raises questions about how Afghans in the Indian subcontinent thought about their identities in relation to this space. Were these communities somehow distinct from the Afghans of Roh? Or did something happen to their “Afghanness” when they put down roots in Hindustan, a region with its own unique social and cultural profile?

The imagined link between identity and geographical “homeland,” or origin place, has strongly characterized contemporary scholarship on Afghans in South Asia. This idea is reflected in such monikers as “Indo-Afghan,” a name that historians have long applied to Afghans who were born in or lived most of their lives in the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁰³ While in some ways useful for incapsulating what were likely the markedly distinct experiences of Afghans in Bajaur and those in the Deccan, the use of a hybrid term to describe Afghans in India nonetheless carries the

⁴⁰⁰ See Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan, The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁴⁰¹ See Chapter Three.

⁴⁰² For example, see Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Finbarr Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁰³ For example, see the work of Iqbal Husain, Simon Digby, Jos Gommans, and Nile Green.

assumption that those who resided in the homeland were somehow more authentically “Afghan” than their India-based peers (they are, after all, merely “Afghans”), while those who dwelled beyond were a specific *type* of Afghan, set apart from the “original” (i.e., most authentic) group. Symptomatic of a general scholarly tendency to separate “India” and “Afghanistan” as discrete cultural and historical units, these traditions of naming, however—and the attendant assumptions about “origins” that they carry—solidly contradict the arguments I have made thus far about what it meant to be an “Afghan” in this period, as well as the growing body of scholarship that has illustrated the highly mobile nature of the early modern world. In this context of fluid boundaries and the continual movement of people across great distances, affiliations with territories such as “Hindustan” and “Roh” are simply not capable of incapsulating the articulations of Afghan selfhood expressed in texts like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, and the *Akhhbar al-Anliya*—the latter account which I will consider for the duration of this chapter.

Completed in 1666, ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi’s *Akhhbar al-Anliya* was a remarkable history of the Afghans reaching back into Biblical time and culminating in the author’s present.⁴⁰⁴ Divided into six *babs*, or chapters, the work begins with an account of prominent Sufi *shaiikhs* of the Khweshgi lineage, the author’s own ancestral community. The second chapter examines the lives and miracles of Afghan *pirs* more broadly, including such renowned individuals as Delhi’s foundational Sufi *shaiikh*, Qutb al-din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1221).⁴⁰⁵ The third chapter recalls the stories of pious Afghan women—an outstanding addition to this story of Afghan origins and migration. The fourth chapter offers a long *durée* history of the Afghan community, within which the author situates the story of his own lineage—the Khweshgis of Qasur. The fifth chapter looks at lives of other “friends of God,” or *Sufi shaiikhs*, who also lived in Qasur. Finally, ‘Abd Allah concludes his account with a story of his own life. This begins with his early scholarly and spiritual training in Qasur, concluding with his itinerary across South Asia as a soldier in the Mughal army and his final destination in the Deccan frontier. Places, particularly urban settlements, feature prominently in all of these chapters of the *Akhhbar al-Anliya*. Yet as I will argue, Khweshgi’s conceptions of place—both in his own history and that of the greater Afghan community—reflect Mana Kia’s argument that “origins were multiple.”⁴⁰⁶ In other words, Khweshgi’s history—like many others produced at this time—insisted that Afghan origins were not defined by a single “homeland” of Roh, but that they could encompass a wide array of places, affiliations, and experiences.

In her recent work *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*, Mana Kia represents Khweshgi’s historical setting as a highly mobile, yet culturally interconnected “Persianate world” encompassing an extensive geography including present-day Iran, India, and other regions in which Persian was a *lingua franca*. In this context, she argues, understandings of self and community were not determined by modern concepts like “nationality” or “ethnicity.” Rather, origins were “aporetic,”⁴⁰⁷ depending in large part on one’s individual relationships and subject to change depending on the person’s specific context. Those who inhabited and moved through this Persianate world found more in common than not, while the rich Persianate culture that connected them elicited the creation of new networks and communities of affiliation. For her part, Kia eschews the notion of “identities” to describe articulations of selfhood in this world, perhaps a result of the imagined fixedness that accompanies ideas such as “identity.”⁴⁰⁸ I will continue to maintain that an Afghan “identity” existed in Khweshgi’s time. After all, it was an enduring community of affiliation

⁴⁰⁴ In present-day Pakistan.

⁴⁰⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, Nimat Allah Harawi also counted Qutb al-din as an Afghan *shaiikh*.

⁴⁰⁶ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 102.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 11 and throughout.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 164.

that individuals used to describe themselves and others, while authors like Khweshgi even saw fit to write about them as a distinct collective. However, using other insights from Kia's work, I will argue that the Afghan "identity" imagined by seventeenth-century authors—though individuals like Khweshgi remained assured of its integrity—possessed the same richness and multitudes that Kia identifies in her own "Persianate" subjects.

Prior to Khweshgi's time, individuals ranging from Sufi *pirs* to India-based historians had been instrumental in building "Afghan" spaces on the northwestern frontiers of the Mughal Empire. *Shaikhs* like Qasim Khalil, through the textual contributions of their disciples, forged durable links between their biological lineages and cities like Peshawar, while scholars in the Indo-Gangetic plain identified Roh as the place where Afghans lived "in the beginning."⁴⁰⁹ By the time that Khweshgi wrote his *Akhbar al-Awliya*, Afghans living across South Asia largely concurred that their "origins," at least in part, lay in a region beyond Hindustan, where Afghans and their saints dominated and blessed the landscape with their *barakat*. Yet how do texts like Khweshgi's—a far-reaching history of the Afghans written by an Afghan from the Punjab, who built a new home in the Deccan—disrupt the notion that Afghan origins were somehow defined by being "of Roh" or "Afghanistan?" And what do these more complex and layered representations of descent, community, and self say about the possibilities of being "Afghan" in the seventeenth century?

Imagining Roh in the *Akhbar al-Awliya*

Composed approximately fifty years after Nimat Allah's *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, 'Abd Allah's *Akhbar al-Awliya* draws extensively from his predecessor's narrative. It is safe to assume that Khweshgi read or in some form received stories from the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, including its account of the Afghans' descent from the Biblical King Saul.⁴¹⁰ This detail, among others, finds its way into Khweshgi's story, as well as other anecdotes that I have not identified in any Afghan histories written prior to this time. To begin analyzing Khweshgi's presentation of Afghan origins, we will first look at its account of the earliest chapters of the Afghan past, culminating in its description of the *qaum*'s arrival and settlement in the region known as Roh. Through a close reading of Khweshgi's account of this space, we will consider precisely what significance the author assigned to this locality and how these details reflect the text's imagination of Afghan belonging and identity.

In the fourth chapter of the *Akhbar al-Awliya*, "On the Lineage (*nasab*) of the Afghans and the Cause of their Coming from the Bait al-Muqaddas to the Mountains (*kobistan*)," Khweshgi sets up his history of the greater Afghan community by foregrounding their mobility, explaining the *qaum*'s historical movement from the holy land of Jerusalem (Bait al-Muqaddas) to the mountainous region of Roh. Here, he begins by citing his predecessors, unnamed narrators (*raviyan*) and histories (*akhbar*) that attested to the Afghans' descent from King Talut (Saul), the first monarch of the Israelites, and Saul's eventual martyrdom.⁴¹¹ He continues by explaining how Talut's two grandsons, Asif and Afghana, received positions of honor under Saul's imperial successor Sulaiman (Solomon), and later, how the monarch Nebuchadnezzar seized power in the holy land and terrorized Asif and Afghana's descendants, rendering the region desolate and taking many of the Israelites prisoner. During this time, he says, some groups (*qabayel*) from the *qaum* were banished to the Arab lands, while another were brought to a specific region to the east: the mountains "extending from Ghur and Ghazni and Kabul to Firuz Koh⁴¹² and Qandahar."⁴¹³ Here, the descendants of those men and

⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter Three.

⁴¹⁰ Khweshgi also directly references the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*. See fol. 249a-b.

⁴¹¹ For details on this story, see Chapter Four.

⁴¹² "The Turquoise Mountain," located in Ghur province in present-day Afghanistan, which served as the capital of the Ghurid dynasty (r. 1170s-1206).

⁴¹³ 'Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi, "Akhbar al-Awliya," IVASB 273, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, fol. 238a.

women took up residence and engaged in the meritorious act of subduing the infidel (*kafir*) populations, eventually bringing that place under their control (*tabt wa tasarrof awardand*).⁴¹⁴

After a brief mention of the Afghans' ancestor Qais 'Abd al-Rashid—the first “Pathan” who met and was converted to Islam by the Prophet Muhammad—Khweshgi moves on to a new chapter in his story, stating: “and how this group (*taija*) came to live in the mountain ranges of Roh and the Koh Sulaiman is this...” The impetus of the migration, he says, was the campaigns of Muhammad bin Qasim (d. 715), the military commander of the Umayyad caliphate who led the Muslim conquest of Sind⁴¹⁵ in the early eighth century.⁴¹⁶ Laying out a detailed visual “map” of the caliphate's eastward journey, Khweshgi describes how the general Hajjaj bin Yusuf (d. 714) first dispatched the commander Muhammad Harun to Takhir, a place in the *wilayat* of Tabustan. Harun passed through Shiraz in southern Iran, fighting and defeating the local king (here termed “*raja*”). During this battle, however, Harun perished and was replaced by Hajjaj's “sister's son” and son-in-law, Muhammad bin Qasim. “After cutting off the opposition,” Khweshgi writes, Qasim led the army of the caliphate eastwards until they passed through the mountains of Ghur—the very place where the descendants of Afghana and Qais 'Abd al-Rashid had settled. Acknowledging the fighting abilities of the Afghans he found there, Qasim asked some of them to accompany him to Sistan, further south towards the Persian Gulf. They joined him and aided in his defeat the local *raja*, and Qasim ruled as governor (*bakim*) of that place for eight years.⁴¹⁷

Like Harawi before him, Khweshgi continues threading together his intertwined narrative of Afghan origins and the eastward expansion of Islam. This leads him to the rise of Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030), the most powerful sultan of the Ghaznavid Empire (c. 977-1186). Once again, Khweshgi paints a detailed and precise picture of land as a political dominion—stating that when:

Mahmud Ghazni bin Sebuktegin bin Alptegin...was given rule over the sultanate of light and honor, he brought the land of Iraq and 'Ajam to Khurasan and beyond, up to the borders of Kabul and Ghazni and the river Sind (the Indus River) under his authority.⁴¹⁸

When he did so, Khweshgi says, a group of eleven Afghan nobility (*ru'asa*) went to meet Mahmud, who was so impressed that he “arranged special favors for them, and clothed them in sumptuous garments that were hemmed in gold and silver...and gave each of them a horse and a golden belt and a sword studded with gems.”⁴¹⁹ Those Afghans then accompanied Mahmud on his famed trip to Somnath, where they together defeated the local *raja* and remained seated for three years. In return for their service, Mahmud raised each of those men to the rank of *amir*, or military commander, and “brought (each of) them into the group of the pillars of state (*arkan-i daulat*).”⁴²⁰

Echoing Harawi's account once again, Khweshgi then connects the decline of the Ghaznavid state to the rise of the Ghurid dynasty in the twelfth century, stating: “the lamp of the sultanate of Sebuktegin (i.e., the Ghaznavid dynasty) was for 169 years. Then the throne...passed to the sultans of Ghur, and Sultan Shihab al-din, known as Sultan Muiz al-din Muhammad bin Sam Ghuri, sat on the throne of Ghazni.”⁴²¹ In an intriguing echo of the first Mughal emperor Babur's (d.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ The Indus Valley region.

⁴¹⁶ For more on the history and significance of Muhammad bin Qasim in modern understandings of Muslim origins in South Asia, see Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁴¹⁷ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 235a-b.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, fol. 236a.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., fol. 236b-237a.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

1530) memoirs, Khweshgi says that Muhammad Ghuri firmly set his sights on the Indian subcontinent, and “three times attempted to come to Hindustan.”⁴²² The first time, he made it to Lahore in the Punjab. The second time, he pressed yet further, eventually turning back to Multan, a city south of Lahore and closer to the Indus River. Finally, with a magnificent army that included many Afghans, he moved forward and secured victory over the *raja* Pithora⁴²³ near Delhi, fulfilling his ambitions and securing a great deal of loot for the “army of Islam.”⁴²⁴

After this victory, Muiz al-din Ghuri returned to his capital. Yet he continued to engage the infidel (*kafir*) populations who inhabited the lands in between Hindustan and Ghur, described as “the mountains of Roh, the Sulaiman mountains, the mountains of Swat, the surroundings of Kabul and Ghazni, up to the foot of the Nilab river, and (the area) from Qandahar to Multan and Badan.”⁴²⁵ He appointed some twenty thousand of his best *amirs* to subdue these territories, which they “made inhabitable” (*abad kardand*),⁴²⁶ or secure for practitioners of the faith of Islam.⁴²⁷

Clarifying this geography that he has just laid out for his readers, Khweshgi then offers more detail on this space doled out to the Afghans:

They say ‘Roh’ specifies a specific mountain range that begins in the rural districts around Bajaur, and (goes) to the *qasabas*⁴²⁸ of Sibi and Bhakkar, from the latitude of Hasan ‘Abdal to Kabul and Qandahar. It is located in these mountains, and they call the people here ‘Rohillas.’ The Sulaiman mountains and the Ashfar mountains are at the bottom of this range.⁴²⁹

It is important to pause here and consider how Khweshgi’s representation of Roh differs the descriptions of this space we have seen thus far. Indeed, while earlier authors such as Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi, who completed his *Waqi‘at-i Mushtaqi* in 1572, described “Roh” as a place where Afghans lived and from where many had migrated to Hindustan,⁴³⁰ it was not until the *Tarikh-i Khan Jabani* that a historian offered details on the precise location of this significant place in the Afghan story.⁴³¹ Because of this lack of detail, one might have concluded that that “Roh” was simply a town, or a small collection of towns—not the considerably vast territory sketched out in seventeenth century histories like the *Akhbar al-Anliya*.

Khweshgi’s geographically vast conception of Roh is thus a noteworthy development in the imagining of Afghan history. As I argued in Chapter Two, emerging conceptions of an “Afghan” geography in the early seventeenth century emerged independently of sustained political patronage. Unlike regions like Gujarat and the Deccan,⁴³² where regional monarchs maintained long-term ties to local Sufi saints, the Afghan heartland regions developed their distinctive identities primarily through the work of respected Sufi *pirs* like Qasim Khalil. Khweshgi’s memoir, therefore, testifies to the strength and wide circulation of these Sufis’ memories, as well as the intense efforts of historical chroniclers like himself who continued to expand on their vision of Afghan space. To be sure, at

⁴²² Ibid, fol. 237b.

⁴²³ Raja Pithora, also known as Prithviraj Chauhan, was the ruler of the Chauhan dynasty of northwestern India (including the area surrounding Delhi).

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, fol. 237b-238a.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ A *qasaba* is a fortified settlement.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, fol. 238a-b.

⁴³⁰ For more details on this text, see Chapter Three.

⁴³¹ Harawi’s dimensions are quite similar to Khweshgi’s. See *Tarikh-i Khan Jabani*, Vol. 1, p. 120.

⁴³² See Jyoti Balachandran, Nile Green, Carl Ernst.

least in the world sketched out by ‘Abd Allah in the 1660s, a remarkably detailed understanding of an Afghan “homeland” had been articulated; one that was defined by well-known territorial markers such as Kabul and Qandahar, and that spoke to a richer sense of belonging than the vaguely defined “Roh” referred to by India-based historians only a century earlier.

It is also important to note that Khweshgi’s use of the term “Roh” to describe an Afghan “origin place,” something many of his predecessors had done, was in fact unique to texts written from the perspective of Hindustan. To the extent of my knowledge, only individuals writing about Afghan history from *beyond* its boundaries ever referred to the locality as “Roh,” or to its inhabitants as “Rohillas.” As Khweshgi’s work appears to confirm, one was only considered a “Rohilla” from the perspective of the outside, while “Roh” only existed for individuals looking at the region from beyond its boundaries. Interestingly, Khweshgi’s recollection of the Afghans’ settlement in Roh reflects this same kind of “outsider” perspective. The author, after all, identifies himself as an Afghan; however, in describing Roh and the Rohillas to his audience, his language suggests that he is reflecting on a community at once his own but ostensibly different and removed from himself.

If, as the text seems to suggest, Khweshgi was in some ways an outsider to the place so central to the Afghan past, does his work otherwise challenge the notion that a personal, natal connection to Roh was the epitome of “being Afghan?” In the following section, we will examine the remainder of Khweshgi’s account of the Afghans’ historical migration and consider how his vision *Afghaniyat*, or “Afghanness,” incorporated spaces, homelands, and affiliations well beyond the region known as Roh.

Khweshgis on the Move: The Journey from Roh to Hindustan

Khweshgi’s attention to detail in his description of Roh—including his dedication of a full chapter to explaining the Afghans’ arrival in this region—might suggest the preeminent significance of the space in the imagination of Afghans like Khweshgi. However, as the following sections of the *Akbbār al-Anliya* indicate, Khweshgi identified a multiplicity of places in his lineage’s own “origin story”—suggesting that Roh by no means exhausted the possibilities of an Afghan “homeland.” In these final passages of the chapter “on the lineage of the Afghans,” the author takes it upon himself to explain how his own kinship group, the Khweshgis, left this region to put down roots in Qasur—a town in the Punjab located in the arid, northwestern reaches of the Indian subcontinent.

Following his account of the Afghans and Muiz al-din Ghuri, Khweshgi continues: “and (the story of) the coming of the Khweshgis from Arghistan⁴³³ and their settlement (*tawattun giriftan*) in Qasur was this...”⁴³⁴ During the time of Ibrahim Lodi (r. 1517-1526), he says, the Khweshgis’ homeland of Arghistan was under the authority of a group with close genealogical ties to the them, the Jamands.⁴³⁵ At one point, however, another subgroup of Afghans, the Tarins, challenged the Jamands’, inciting a war between the two communities. Although the Khweshgis neighbored the Jamands, ‘Abd Allah says, the leading collective looked down upon them and did not try to make them accomplices in the conflict. When the armies of the Jamands and Tarins met one another, the Jamands were unable to stand their ground and were forced to retreat into the mountains.⁴³⁶

Following their success, the Tarins took over Arghistan and ruled as governors (*bakims*). Yet the Jamands were not prepared to give up the fight. Realizing the cost of their previous mistake, they sought the military assistance of the Khweshgis, who helped the Jamands reclaim the land they once

⁴³³ Near Qandahar in present-day Afghanistan.

⁴³⁴ Ibid, fol. 242a.

⁴³⁵ Later in the text, Khweshgi notes that the first Khweshgi was the son of one named Jamand. Presumably, therefore, the descendants of Khweshgi thereafter distinguished themselves from the larger Jamand collective. “Khweshgi” and “Jamand/Zamand” are also two tribal identities that remain in use today. See fol. 249a.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, fol. 242a-b.

called their own. The victory, however, proved bittersweet. In light of the series of conflicts that had driven the Jamands and Tarins in and out of the region, those who remained did so with a sense of unease. “War was continual,” Khweshgi writes, “causing disturbance (*fitna*) and corruption (*fisad*).”⁴³⁷ Contemplating a solution, the Jamands approached the Khweshgis and asked them, “what would you say about this—if we went to Hindustan and left this country (*mulke*) to the Tarins?” The Khweshgis concurred but concluded that in the end, “the decision really lies with God.” In order to aid in their decision-making, they turned first to the Qur’an, then consulted one whom ‘Abd Allah calls “Hazrat-i Shaikh”—presumably an elder of high spiritual stature in the community.⁴³⁸

Hazrat-i Shaikh, for his part, agreed with the Khweshgis’ and Jamands’ decision, and offered them advice on how to go about with the transition. He presented the group with an iron nail and told them that wherever in Hindustan the nail happened to land, “that (place) will be your *watan* (territory/homeland).”⁴³⁹ With this blessing, the Khweshgis and Jamands set out on their way, not reaching Hindustan before they encountered the Mughal emperor Babur, presumably stationed in his capital in Kabul. Pausing there, the Khweshgis respectfully paid obeisance to the emperor and asked for his permission to settle in Hindustan. Babur warmly accepted their request, showering them with gifts as well as granting them a *farman*, or imperial order, affixed with his own special seal (*muhr-i kbass-i kbud*). The Afghan kinsmen departed Kabul, then renewed their commitment to Babur in the north Indian town of Panipat, where they fought and aided him in his defeat of Ibrahim Lodi in 1526. According to ‘Abd Allah, many of Khweshgi’s *qaum* fought and were killed in this battle—some seven hundred Khweshgis and Jamands perished in the fight.⁴⁴⁰

The Khweshgis’ assistance to Babur in this critical battle did not go unnoticed. Following his victory in Hindustan, ‘Abd Allah says, Babur granted the Khweshgis one-fourth of the Delhi harvest; a deal that Babur’s son and successor Humayun (r. 1530-1555) also honored. We do not learn exactly what happened to his *qaum* after this time; however, the narrative implies that they remained in Delhi or a nearby vicinity for ten or more years until the emergence of Sher Shah Suri (r. 1540-1545), the Afghan upstart from north India who unseated the emperor Humayun and drove him into exile. Interestingly in this case, Sher Shah’s Afghan identity did not create a sense of innate connection or understanding between himself and the party of Jamands and Khweshgis. Rather, ‘Abd Allah says, when Salim Khan, a Jamand leader, went to pay his respects to Sher Shah, the sultan offered him a scathing rebuke. “If I open Salim Khan’s belly,” Sher Shah retorted, “Sultan Ibrahim (Lodi) will come out of it.”⁴⁴¹ He added, “I have to punish (this man), because Babur Shah was an accomplice in the killing of Sultan Ibrahim.”⁴⁴² Khweshgi does not reveal the outcome of this encounter; however, it is clear that the Afghan kinsmen no longer found it feasible to remain in Sher Shah Suri’s sultanate. He continues, “the Khweshgis and the Jamands went to find a place to settle, (but) every place they tried to drive that nail into the ground, it wouldn’t go in. Then they came to Qasur, and when they drove the nail into the ground, it easily went in.”⁴⁴³

As Hazrat-i Shaikh had predicted, the Khweshgis and Jamands at last found their new *watan*. Yet the Afghans’ days of searching in Hindustan were not yet over. At that time, Qasur was already

⁴³⁷ Ibid, fol. 242b.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, fol. 243a.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. Khweshgi adds that there are actually two different stories concerning the Khweshgis’ migration to Hindustan. He claims that the first one, and the one stated here, is the accurate version. The other story, he writes, is that the children of the Tarins had been harassing the children of the Khweshgis. In light of this, an elder of their *qaum* advised the Khweshgis to go to Hindustan. The part about the elder granting them an iron nail is included in both versions.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 243b-244a.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 245a. Implying, I believe, that Salim Khan had “eaten” the last Lodi sultan.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

inhabited, by “Hindus” (a description not necessarily indicating religious affiliation, but connoting residence in Hindustan and a non-Muslim identity)⁴⁴⁴ who were unhappy with the newcomers’ decision to alight in their territory. Their reason, we learn, was not because they perceived the Khweshgis as “foreigners” encroaching on a land that could not by right ever be theirs. Rather, ‘Abd Allah explains, the Hindus informed the Khweshgis and Jamands that an imperial order—presumably the one that Babur had granted them in Kabul—was not sufficient grounds for establishing residence there. They informed them: “this land is in our *milkiyat* (possession). If you (can) bring (it) into your possession, then stay here. If you cannot, then think of your own place, because in a foreign land (*zamin-i ajnabi*) seeking the decree of kings and establishing residency is not permitted.”⁴⁴⁵ If the Afghan newcomers wanted to claim the land as their own, they would need to take possession of it through a military victory. As the reader of the text would have surmised, the Khweshgis and Jamands eventually achieved this goal, and from them on onwards, “no one (else) would take the leadership of Qasur and the surrounding areas.”⁴⁴⁶

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In this fourth chapter of the *Akbbar al-Awliya*, ‘Abd Allah sets out by charting a transregional, many generational-history of Afghan movement from the time of King Saul down to the Khweshgis’ settlement in the Punjab. Throughout this history, we get a vivid and clear picture of land—at every turn, Khweshgi describes well-known territorial markers as he sketches out the Afghans’ ever-expanding geographical trajectory. He also includes stories, like that of the Khweshgis and the Hindus, in which he discusses the question of rightful ownership over land in detail. What do these passages reveal, if anything, about Khweshgi and his vision of Afghan identity as it related to geographical territory?

Land, to be sure, is central to the *Akbbar al-Awliya*’s story of “Afghan origins.” In his account the Afghans’ lengthy history prior to his own time, Khweshgi must necessarily explain how many among them claimed new spaces far afield from Ghur and Roh, as well as how his own *qaum* ended up in Hindustan. In many cases, Khweshgi describes land as the domain of kings—whether that of the Umayyad caliph, conquered under the agency of Hajjaj bin Yusuf (d. 714) and Muhammad bin Qasim (d. 715), or of the sultan of Ghur, Muhammad Ghuri (d. 1206). Here, as in accounts before it,⁴⁴⁷ sultanates and empires facilitate the movement of Afghans to new territories. Imperial rulers, impressed by the Afghans’ fighting ability and commitment to military service, appoint them to new posts along the frontiers of the Islamic world, typically imagined as the boundaries of the imperial formation itself. As we also see, imperial authorization could also play a significant role in justifying resettlement. The Khweshgis, having paid obeisance to the emperor Babur, received an imperial order granting them permission to settle in Hindustan; a move that was nonetheless challenged by the residents of Qasur, who only ceded the land after the Khweshgis and Jamands were able to win it through military victory.

In this sense, Khweshgi’s story of Afghan movement under the aegis of empire echoes Mana Kia’s assertion that origins could be “multiple.”⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, in the story of Afghan beginnings as told by Khweshgi, the Afghan community’s past—if anything—was defined by their movement from locality to locality, whether as part of an expanding empire or for reasons specific to an individual lineage. Roh still emerges as one of the most significant places in this work—this particular chapter of the *Akbbar al-Awliya* is meant to describe how the Afghans came to Roh (the “*kobistan*”) in the

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., fol. 245b.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., fol. 246a.

⁴⁴⁷ See Chapter Four.

⁴⁴⁸ Kia, *Persianate Selves*.

first place, and it is clear that the author conceptualizes Roh as a distinctly Afghan space or even “homeland.” However, as Khweshgi’s story of his own *qaum* also suggests, “Afghan space” was *by no means limited* to Roh, nor was Afghan identity based on a privileged connection to it. The Khweshgis and Jamands moved onwards from their *watan* when it became untenable for them, and eventually brought a new space in Hindustan into their uncontested possession.

The story of the Khweshgis and the Hindus of Qasur lends further credence to this argument. When the Khweshgis first arrived with Babur’s order in hand, the Hindus at first acknowledged that the Afghans were “outsiders”; after all, they urged them to “think of their own place” if they could not take the land through force of arms. However, by opening the playing field to the Afghans in this way, the Hindus also suggested that possession, or *milkiyat*, was something that could be won—that ownership of land was not immutable based upon one’s identity, i.e. “who arrived there first,” but it was ultimately be owed to those who could take it in a fairly-fought battle. Although I would not assume that this understanding of *milkiyat* was broadly applied across South Asia at this time, it nonetheless powerfully echoes an understanding of land and belonging echoed elsewhere in the *Akbar al-Awliya*: that Afghan identity was not tied solely to a territory beyond Hindustan, but that Afghan origins could be many and layered, encompassing regions generally assumed to be distinct from one another. A space where no Afghans had trod could transform into a “homeland” (*watan*) due to the blessings of a Sufi *shaiikh* and a military victory. These new homelands, too, were not any less significant than the “original” origin place. As we will see in the following section, the Khweshgis soon established an indelible bond with Qasur, one that only deepened with the presence of their own blessed men.

Living “At Home” in Qasur: The Khweshgis in the Mughal Punjab

As a cursory view of the *Akbar al-Awliya* and its contents reveals, ‘Abd Allah’s text is at its heart about Qasur; and in particular, the relationship between various Sufi saints (the titular “friends of God,” or *awliya*) and that space. To be sure, ‘Abd Allah Khan dedicates the first chapter of his book specifically to Khweshgi Sufis, the majority of whom are depicted as being born in or inhabiting Qasur. He also sets aside another chapter, the third in the anthology, to the biographies of Sufi *shaiikhs* who resided in that region. Echoing the *tarzikiras*, or Sufi biographical dictionaries, produced in the subcontinent as early as the fourteenth century, these chapters of the *Akbar al-Awliya* are deeply concerned with concepts such as *wilayat*, or a Sufi *shaiikh*’s claim to spiritual authority over a particular geographical space.⁴⁴⁹ For example, in stories of some of the founding saints of the Khweshgi lineage, two men named Shaikh Watu and Shaikh Batak, these individuals are depicted as traveling around the environs of Qasur in their waking lives as well as in their dreams, meeting individuals on the road whom they then initiate as disciples.⁴⁵⁰ People in need, too, are described as traveling to Qasur specifically to meet these holy men, while passersby on their way to bigger cities such as Lahore find their journeys punctuated by precipitous encounters with the Khweshgi *shaiikhs*.⁴⁵¹

However, in rather remarkable contrast to the Sufi panegyric literature from Peshawar explored in Chapter Two, the *Akbar al-Awliya* presents Qasur as being subject to overlapping layers of authority including but not limited to its esteemed Sufi *pirs*. In particular, agents of the Mughal state—largely absent from Husaini’s work on Qasim Khalil—coexist with the Khweshgi *pirs* and their local disciples, interacting with them in various, complex ways. For example, in one passage of the first chapter, “Of the Circumstances (*ahwal*) of the Khweshgis,” ‘Abd Allah describes a time

⁴⁴⁹ For more on the interrelated concepts of Sufi *wilayat* and *milkiyat*, see Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*.

⁴⁵⁰ For example, Khweshgi, “Akbar al-Awliya,” fol. 40b-41a.

⁴⁵¹ For example, fol. 42b.

when Qasur was part of the *jagir* of Raja Rai Singh Bikaneri (r. 1573-1614). A key part of the Mughal state apparatus, a *jagir* was a form of land grant given to elite participants in the state. The individual who held a *jagir* was given the authority to collect revenue from the region, the surplus of which would be returned to the Mughal imperial coffers. Raja Rai Singh Bikaneri, as it were, earned his *jagir* as one of the earliest Rajput chiefs to ally with the Mughals, accompanying the emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) on his military excursions into Gujarat—a campaign culminating in a series of victories that secured Akbar’s uncontested authority in northern India. Raja Rai Singh’s family also formed marital relations with the Mughal emperor, as one of the Raja’s female relatives eventually married Akbar.⁴⁵²

According to ‘Abd Allah, Raja Rai Singh and his Rajputs had great respect for one of the prominent Khweshgi Sufis of Qasur, a man named Shaikh Akhund Said Hakkani.⁴⁵³ They allegedly called him “Miyān Badaula,” and would say that “wherever Miyān Badaula goes, the mannerless (*bi adabana*) do not go.”⁴⁵⁴ One day, he says, Shaikh Hakkani was in a gathering with some Rajputs who “fell into mannerlessness,” jovially drinking glasses of wine and *bhang*, an intoxicating beverage containing part of the cannabis plant. Shaikh Hakkani memorably chastised them for their behavior, grabbing one of the cups and saying to them, “this is not wine, it is milk. Look, if you don’t believe us!” When the Rajputs looked inside and saw that the *shaiikh* was correct, they were astonished and “believed greatly in his truth (*haqq*).”⁴⁵⁵

This particular story mirrors many told in contemporary Sufi panegyric literature, as it highlights the Sufi *shaiikh*’s ability to outshine all others in his spiritual prowess. As scholars such as Sunil Kumar and Simon Digby have argued, these kinds of claims generally took place on a shared symbolic field in which spiritual masters competed with political figures such as sultans, each of whom made their own claims to spiritual authority (*nilayat*).⁴⁵⁶ Typically, these kinds of assertions were made with a particular geographical territory or community in mind, over which the Sufi master (or, in some cases, the sultan) was argued to wield unshared authority. At first glance, this particular story appears to support the Sufi *pir*’s authority above all; even the Rajputs, whom ‘Abd Allah implies held some form of political power in Qasur, acknowledged the greatness of the Khweshgi *shaiikh* Akhund Said, who in turn demonstrated miracles above and beyond their own by transforming their wine into milk. If any individual could rightly claim supremacy over this locality and these people, this story suggests, it was the “friend of God,” the Khweshgi Sufi Akhund Said.

However, in another story not marked by competition between Sufi *shaiikhs* and local political authorities, Khweshgi describes an amicable encounter between the Afghans of Qasur and Tansen (d. 1586), the legendary Hindustani classical musician and close confidant of the emperor Akbar. According to the text, Tansen once held a revenue assignment in Ruswan, a village near Qasur, and was a friend of many of the local Afghans. One day, some of the Afghans approached the musician and said that they had heard about his regular sessions of *sama*, or Sufi devotional music, as well as sessions in which he played *raags*.⁴⁵⁷ They confided to him that they, too, were

⁴⁵² Shalin Jain, “The Centre and the ‘Locality’ in Mughal India: The Case of Mantri Karam Chand Bachhawat of Bikaner,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68 (1): 2007, pp. 332-339. Raja Rai Singh’s daughter also married Prince Salim, who would become the emperor Jahangir.

⁴⁵³ In this text, Hakkani is spelled with a double “ك”.

⁴⁵⁴ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 46a.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ See Simon Digby, “The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India,” *Iran* 28 (1990): 71-81 and Sunil Kumar, “Assertions of Authority: Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi- ‘Ala al-din Khalji and Nizam al-din Auliya,” *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, ed. by Muzaffar Alam, Francoise Nalini Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000).

⁴⁵⁷ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 50b. A *raag* is a melodic mode in the classical music tradition of India.

“*abl-i sama*” or “people of the *sama*,” and that they wanted to hear something from him. Tansen acknowledged the truth of their claims and began to play a *raag*, until everyone started dancing—even the floor, which began to shake beneath their feet. The Afghans presented Tansen with a coin (*ashrafī*) in appreciation, which Tansen respectfully gave back to his companions.⁴⁵⁸

If we recall the story of Babur granting the Khweshgi and Jamands a portion of the Delhi harvest, the anecdote about Tansen and the Afghans, as well as the story of Shaikh Hakkani and the Rajputs, presents an image of Qasur in which Mughal political authority and the power of the Afghan saints were deeply intertwined. After all, while *shaiḳhs* like Akhund Said Hakkani continually made their spiritual wisdom evident, the Khweshgi Afghans, as well as the other Afghans of Qasur, are depicted as enjoying relationships of mutual respect with Mughal political authorities in the region. What to make, however, of the dramatically different depiction of Afghan-Mughal relations in Khweshgi’s text and what we saw earlier—for example, the conditions in the Afghan heartlands as described in the panegyric literature of Shaikh Qasim Khalil?

In answering this question, it is important to consider that Khweshgi’s depiction of the Afghan saints and their spiritual authority in Qasur was not, in all likelihood, echoed in Mughal imperial documents. From my own research, I do not have any evidence that the Mughals even wrote about Afghan *pirs* like Shaikh Watu, nor that they patronized the shrines of the individuals whose miracles are described in the *Akbbār al-Awliya*. However, just as Khweshgi’s history recalls, Afghan settlement in South Asia had been linked to the rise and spread of empires, including that of the Mughals, whom we know from a number of sources directly patronized individual Afghans during this time.⁴⁵⁹ It would not necessarily be surprising, then, that people like Khweshgi—whose own *qaum* settled in the Punjab with Babur’s blessing—recalled the importance of this relationship to their past, and articulated their identities at least partly in terms of their connection to the Mughal rulers.

Nonetheless, Khweshgi’s work might sit strangely alongside the more “anti-Mughal” or anti-state bent of accounts like the *Tuhfa-yi Qasimi*, which, as we have seen, presented individuals like Babur in the least as adversaries and threats to Afghan livelihood. However, if we maintain the tension between these two rather different versions of the Mughal-Afghan past (rather than privileging one as the “authentic” Afghan viewpoint), we can come through with a rather significant takeaway: that Afghans who were deeply imbricated in the Mughal imperial project imagined themselves as comfortably “at home” in the Mughal-inflected social worlds of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Hindustan as their Afghan counterparts were at home in the mountains of the Roh—the Afghan homeland par excellence in texts ranging from the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* to the *Akbbār al-Awliya* itself.

In order to grasp the significance of this point, we might return to the topic of monikers—often translated as “ethnic” identities—and how they have been used as a means of interpreting important political, social, and cultural dynamics in early modern South Asia. As Mana Kia has pointed out, not only have many social groups been assumed to hold “natural loyalties” to one another, but their names as recorded in Mughal documents—“Irani,” “Turani,” and “Hindustani,” to name a few—have persistently been read as indicators of an “origin place” holding preeminent significance in the minds of its members. In some cases, groups like the Iranians and Turanians—whose names evoke regions beyond the Mughal Empire—have been regarded as posing a particular problem to the Mughal state and its functioning. As individuals whose ancestors presumably came

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, fol. 50b-51a.

⁴⁵⁹ One example shared between the *Akbbār al-Awliya* and Mughal imperial accounts is the figure of Nazar Bahadur, a prominent Khweshgi Afghan who served and was honored under the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). See Khweshgi, “Akbbār al-Awliya,” fol. 244b.

from Iran or Central Asia, their loyalty must have lay with their “home” regions, not, in the end, with Hindustan or, by extension, the Mughal state that governed it. In Michael Axworthy’s study of the eighteenth century, for example, this fact held significant ramifications for the very existence empire, even hastening its ultimate demise. Eventually unable to shore up the morale of Iranians, Turanians, and others whose hearts hearkened back other places and communities, the Mughals weakened and fell prey to the Afsharid invader Nadir Shah, who sacked the city of Delhi and dealt a devastating blow to the empire in 1739.⁴⁶⁰

In contrast to the Iranians and Turanians of Axworthy’s work, scholarly interpretations of Afghan solidarity have relied less on an origin place (“Afghanistan”) and more on the assumption of kinship ties and their power to influence individual and group decisions, a point which I will take up in the remainder of this chapter. Nonetheless, monikers like “Indo-Afghan” reflect the notion that Afghan identity, in spite of thousands of years of Afghan settlement in what are now India and Pakistan, is not intrinsically “of” this space. The insistence that Afghans with roots in the subcontinent might somehow be “different” or “less Afghan” than those residing in what is now Afghanistan has also, without a doubt, led to the exclusion of texts like Khweshgi’s from studies professedly about Afghan history. However, the *Akhbar al-Awliya*’s incredible story of the Khweshgi lineage, as well as the author’s own assumed authority to narrate a history of the Afghan past, ask us to consider how Afghan identity in the seventeenth century could encompass many different places, trajectories, and communities. Moreover, as individuals like ‘Abd Allah—a professed “Afghan” born and raised in the Mughal Punjab—contributed to this transregional conversation on Afghan origins, they constructed a vision of their *qaum*’s identity at once firm in its integrity and immanently malleable in the context of continued migration and mobility.

Kinship and Tribe in the *Akhbar al-Awliya*

Just as the Khweshgis of the *Akhbar al-Awliya* demonstrated how Afghan origins could be layered and multiple, ‘Abd Allah Khan’s history consistently describes an Afghan community whose own internal boundaries were neither easily fixed nor readily definable. Indeed, despite the possible motivations behind these histories as efforts to create order out of a chaotic past—or, as Nile Green has memorably put it, to “weave” the familial complexities engendered by mobility into a “faultless kilim of historical narrative”⁴⁶¹—Khweshgi’s work also betrays a sense of confusion about the precise details of a lineage’s origins, among other details. In some cases, the seemingly strange interweavings of groups even come across less as “slips” in an otherwise neat and tidy recollection of what happened, and more as straightforward explanations of the past—a fact suggesting that some of these “embarrassing” details were actually construed as significant rather than problematic or “improper” in the first place. Like in Nimat Allah Harawi’s *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, these “out of the ordinary” stories of marriage and adoptions—often intentionally inscribed into Afghan histories—attest to the intrinsic malleability of Afghan identity as imagined by Khweshgi and its other most influential designers.

In the *Akhbar al-Awliya*, ‘Abd Allah is careful to outline the relationship between the various, genealogically interrelated Afghan collectives that inhabited Qasur. As mentioned previously, he says that “Khweshgi,” the namesake of his own *qaum*, was the son of Jamand—the ancestor of another, distinct collective of Afghans who also made the trek from Arghistan to Hindustan. The man Khweshgi also had six sons: Shura, Salamhak, Achu, Kazlani, Aziz, and Umar.⁴⁶² In his chapter on the “lineage of the Afghans,” ‘Abd Allah frequently alludes to independent collectives named after

⁴⁶⁰ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 155-158.

⁴⁶¹ Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84.

⁴⁶² Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 249a.

several of these sons; most frequently, the Salamhaks, the Achuzais, and the Azizzais.⁴⁶³ Their names suggest that Khweshgi's sons, too, spawned new subgroups that later distinguished themselves from the original paternal group. According to him, however, these subgroups of the Khweshgis—though connected by a common ancestor—did not always coexist harmoniously. In particular, he depicts Salamhaks as an often aggressive, undesirable presence that threatened other communities in Qasur.⁴⁶⁴ At one time, he describes how the Khweshgis once became tired of their behavior and removed them from the place by force, only to let a few to return at a later time.⁴⁶⁵

In another passage, 'Abd Allah describes how the majority of the subgroup referred to as the "Amchuzais" were originally called the "Achuzais," after Khweshgi's son "Achu." The *meem*, or "m"-sound, was only added on later, due to a long-term "error of speakers."⁴⁶⁶ The other part of the Amchuzai collective, he adds, was actually a distinct group called the "Nokhiyan."⁴⁶⁷ "This problem (of naming) occurs often," he says; but "because of the intensity of their connection (the Nokhiyan to the Amchu/Achuzais), they are Khweshgis."⁴⁶⁸

Following this point, Khweshgi calls the reader's attention to another important moment in the *qaum's* history involving a young Sayyid, or descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. This particular story concerns one named Batak, whom 'Abd Allah says was one of Khweshgi's sons. According to him, Batak is referred to in Nimat Allah Harawi's *Makbzan-i Afghani*⁴⁶⁹ as a "true son" (*pisar-i ash*) of Khweshgi. However, this was not actually the case. Batak was in fact a Sayyid whose real father was a man named Sayyid Umar. As a child, Batak traveled from the provinces (*wilayat*) to serve Shaikh Watu, one of the most prominent Khweshgi Sufis described in the *Akhbar al-Awliya*. The two developed a close bond and the boy grew up in the Sufi's care. Moreover, because the boy referred to the *shaikh* as "aka," a Pashto word for "uncle," Batak thereafter "referred to himself as a Khweshgi."⁴⁷⁰ As the name of another Afghan subgroup in the *Akhbar al-Awliya*, the "Batakzais," also suggests, the Sayyid boy's progeny eventually broke off from the Khweshgi group and assumed their own identity as a distinct kinship collective.⁴⁷¹

These observations about the intricacies of Afghan social life call to mind Talal Asad's analysis of the complex nature of "kinship" in Islamic contexts. In his work in this topic, Asad describes how the Qur'an includes no words that easily correspond to the English word "kinship."⁴⁷² While there do exist words for "near relatives, spouses, and members of larger social collectives"⁴⁷³ in addition to those related through marriage, these terms could be employed in a number of ways to refer not only to wives, brothers and sisters, and other biological kin, but to close friends or companions as well. Moreover, he notes, the Arabic word for "blood," or *damm*, is "never used in the Qur'an to denote that which relatives share in common."⁴⁷⁴ Rather, the text merely relates that "God has endowed human beings in this world with bonds of descent and affinity (*nasaban wa*

⁴⁶³ The suffix "zai" meaning "son of," or "born of."

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, fol. 248b. He says that the Salamhaks were long "in a state of *fitna*," or disturbance.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, fol. 248a.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Khweshgi refers to the work as the *Makbzan-i Afghani*, not the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*.

⁴⁷⁰ Khweshgi, "Akhbar al-Awliya," fol. 250a.

⁴⁷¹ As mentioned earlier in the chapter, one of the most commonly referenced Sufi saints in the text is named "Shaikh Batak." I am not sure if this man is the same as the Sayyid boy named Batak; however, his closeness to Shaikh Watu (mentioned throughout the text) suggests that it may well be the same person.

⁴⁷² Talal Asad, "Kinship," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University).

⁴⁷³ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 137.

⁴⁷⁴ Asad, "Kinship."

sibran)—that is to say, with enduring relations that are inherited as well as *voluntarily*⁴⁷⁵ undertaken.”⁴⁷⁶ Those who are believers (in the faith of Islam), for example, “are bound by their common faith and the union of their hearts, which makes them brothers to one another (Q 3:103; 49:10).”⁴⁷⁷ On the day of judgment, all of these bonds are dissolved. One stands alone before God and reflects on the life that he or she has lived.⁴⁷⁸

Asad’s arguments in this article are not to say that historical Muslims have never evoked concepts of blood kinship. To choose a random example, in his *Arab-English Lexicon*, the nineteenth-century anthropologist E.W. Lane recalled how his interlocutors often quipped “blood is thicker than milk”⁴⁷⁹—an adage implying that even adopted kin could not evoke the same loyalty as biologically related brothers and sisters. As the aforementioned passages of Khweshgi’s text suggest, however, early modern Afghan authors consistently described their ancestral lineages as evolving and even capable of “making” new members. This was in part because different Afghan collectives—whether they be Salamhaks, Khweshgis, or Jamands—were constantly moving, whether as the result of a feud or a group’s interest in seeking more favorable living conditions elsewhere. Individuals and communities from the outside, too, consistently made their way to the territories occupied by Afghans, as evidenced by the Sayyid boy Batak’s journey from the “provinces” to Qasur. While it is perhaps most significant that Batak, as a result of this movement, was remembered to have “become” a Khweshgi Afghan, ‘Abd Allah’s narration of this event is also remarkable in that it suggests that a Sayyid boy’s original identity could be forgotten by his Afghan descendants. Indeed, as he recalls, the *Makhsan-i Afghani* remembered that Batak was a “true” son of Khweshgi.⁴⁸⁰ ‘Abd Allah’s own recollection of these events thus suggests the ties forged through friendship or companionship in the Afghan community could become indistinguishable from what were supposedly the most powerful links of all—those forged through blood.

If we take these stories and Talal Asad’s argument into consideration, it encourages us to reflect on how Afghan identity came into being as a result of longer processes of integration between otherwise distinct communities. As stories like those of Batak reveal, Afghan “becoming” was accompanied by numerous instances of obligation by those already considered “Afghan” towards those beyond the pale of the community. These “obligations,” as it were, could have a transformative impact on the tapestry of the Afghan *qaum*; “voluntary” or forged bonds of affinity were not merely a fact of life to be swept under the rug of memory—they were deemed as central to deepening the Afghans’ already high spiritual pedigree and added further depth and richness to what it meant to be an “Afghan.” “Kinship” in this context thus demands to be considered as a plethora of different possibilities and connections, each capable of pushing open the boundaries of a community and shaping its distinctive identity. In other words, “Afghan” and even “tribal” identities were not, at least in ‘Abd Allah’s imagination, borders to be maintained; rather, they were remembered to be shaped by new bonds created through obligations between individuals who had no blood connection.

Afghans and Mughals: Kinship in Another Form?

As ‘Abd Allah’s work also reminds us, “Afghan” need not have been and diametrically opposed to the category of “Mughal.” While I have noted that Afghans, to a large extent, remained

⁴⁷⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Peter Parkes, “Fosterage, Kinship, and Legend: When Milk Was Thicker than Blood?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46, no. 3 (2004): 587-615.

⁴⁸⁰ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 249a-b.

removed from the highest echelons of the Mughal state, and Mughal court chroniclers frequently denigrated Afghans as uncouth rustics or formidable enemies, the Afghan identity of the *Akbbar al-Awliya*'s subjects did not contradict their many generations-deep connections with the empire. As 'Abd Allah argues, the Khweshgis and the Mughal dynasty even possessed a special form of what could arguably be understood as a "kinship" bond—that of "*khanazadegi*." According to him, this relationship was noted by a famous Khweshgi named Nazar Bahadur, who we know from multiple documents of the era served the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). In Khweshgi's telling, Shah Jahan's grandfather Akbar (r. 1556-1605) had forgotten about this tie between the two families. One day, however, Nazar Bahadur approached the emperor with Babur's *farman* in hand and respectfully asked that he remember their historical bond.⁴⁸¹ Shah Jahan was "astonished" to hear Khweshgi's story, but warmly granted him his request.⁴⁸²

"*Khanazadegi*," or the state of being "house-born," refers to a practice central to Mughal state formation that began in earnest during the reign of Akbar. In her work on Mughal masculinity, Rosalind O'Hanlon has described the institution as a means through which Akbar established imperial control while also appealing to members of the nobility, who could imbibe the emperor's model and act as "fathers" in their own domains. Those selected to be *khanazads* were carefully trained to embrace certain elements of Mughal imperial culture and as such, were defined above all by the depth of their loyalty to the royal family. However, she says, the image of the ideal male courtier began to shift radically in the seventeenth century. Rather than emphasizing their unabashed commitment to the empire, the new Mughal gentleman was "man as sophisticated gentleman connoisseur, cosmopolitan in experience, refined in literary and poetic sensibility, elegant in person, fastidious in dress, and intent on his own bodily cultivation with a greater degree of individual self-concern."⁴⁸³ Imperial service, in this model, could at worst be a "risk, thankless trouble and distraction" and "degrading compromise of a gentleman's independence."⁴⁸⁴ As Munis Faruqi surmises, this new ideal of Mughal manliness was possibly even weaponized against new admits to the court. Those who could demonstrate independence through connoisseurship took aim at newcomers welcomed into the court precisely *because* of their demonstrations of loyalty.⁴⁸⁵

It is interesting that 'Abd Allah Khan's recollection of Nazar Bahadur and his claims of *khanazadegi* emerged at precisely the historical moment when tensions between *khanazads* and the new nobility seemed to be reaching a noteworthy degree. However, what is also intriguing about this passage is the both questions that it raises about what it meant to be a "house-born" in Mughal India, and how this relationship might have shaped the identities of social collectives who were in the Mughals' orbit. On the one hand, while scholars have traditionally understood *khanazads* as those raised in the court and who imbibed its particular social niceties, the Khweshgis of the *Akbbar al-Awliya* do not fit this mold. As Nazar Bahadur put it, the Mughals had "forgotten" about this relationship between their own family and the Khweshgis. Bahadur's *qaum*, therefore, had presumably spent the past several decades estranged from the house of Babur, and did not receive

⁴⁸¹ He acknowledges the bonds of both "*khanazadegi*" and "*bandagi*"—the latter term literally meaning "servitude." But as military slavery became less prominent in South Asia (and by the time Khweshgi wrote his text), "*bandagi*" was more often used in the spiritual domain and implied servitude to God or one's spiritual master. See Sunil Kumar, "*Bandagi* and *Naukari*: Studying Transitions in Political Culture and Service Under the North Indian Sultanates, 13th-16th Centuries," in *After Timur Came*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁸² Khweshgi, "Akbar al-Awliya," fol. 244a-b.

⁴⁸³ Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, no. 1 (1999): 68.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ Munis D. Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

the kind of training that would shape them into a loyal lineage with all of the trappings of Mughal respectability.

It is not clear what Nazar Bahadur hoped to gain from Shah Jahan's confirmation of their past other than, perhaps, privileges and favors from the emperor. If we imagine the speaker as a kind of mouthpiece for Khweshgi himself, it is also possible that the story marked an effort of the part of 'Abd Allah's to re-affirm his own commitment to the Mughal state. However, it is still striking that Nazar Bahadur—whether speaking for 'Abd Allah or for himself—chose a term that strongly implied a kinship bond between the Khweshgis and the Mughal dynasty. Indeed, rather than opting for "*naukari*," a term generally translated as "service" yet connoting a much richer concept of service with honor,⁴⁸⁶ the author of the *Akbbar al-Awliya* conflated his lineage's service to Babur's house with a kind of natal relationship. The Khweshgis were, as the term *khanazadegi* literally implies, "born" into the Mughal house, and it was important to them that Shah Jahan recall this historical connection.

As this story of Nazar Bahadur and Shah Jahan thus suggests, assertions of loyalty—though perhaps frowned upon in some circles—remained deeply meaningful to some communities in South Asia as they crafted their own sense of communal identity in the seventeenth century. In this account of the Khweshgis, for example, the ties between themselves and the Mughals are an integral part of the community's origin story—when emphasizing the relationship of *khanazadegi* between his own *qaum* and Babur's dynasty, 'Abd Allah charts a complex, layered history of the Khweshgi lineage that stretches to encompass individuals and communities extending beyond the boundaries of blood descent. In this case, it is honorable service that cements these bonds, demonstrating the range of relationships that could, at least in his imagination, create kinship-like ties of obligation that blurred the lines between distinct communities. This is not to contradict O'Hanlon's argument about gentleman connoisseurship in this period; however, Khweshgi's representation of his own identity and consequently, that of his *qaum*, draw attention to the enduring currency of kin and service relationships at this time and how they could be mobilized to make significant claims about identity and belonging, even among the Afghans.

Additionally, stories like that of Nazar Bahadur and Shah Jahan underline how a capacious understanding of "kinship"—an idea, I have argued, that is reflected in the language of early modern documents themselves—can help us understand the transformative impact of many different kinds of relationships on group identities. To be sure, while 'Abd Allah seriously concerns himself with questions of birth and what might be considered "blood" ties, he also shows deep respect for those bonds created through service or other obligations—even those shared with the Mughals, the group often imagined as pitted against the Afghans in a primordial and irresolvable conflict. As I also interpret the story of Nazar Bahadur, such assertions of *khanazadegi*—while perhaps at least in part aimed at procuring economic and social gain for the Khweshgis—were not merely or even primarily animated by these concerns. Indeed, 'Abd Allah nowhere indicates whether he even intended his text to be read by the emperor, the one who would dole out favors in the first place. His broader focus on Afghan and Khweshgi history also suggests that his work was more likely consumed by others who considered themselves a part of this "Afghan" story. Reading the *Akbbar al-Awliya* with this audience in mind (as well as the expansive audience of Persian-literate individuals who could access it), it is possible to see the more far-reaching ambitions of the Afghan community in its contents; ambitions that ranged far beyond monetary or "prestige" concerns.

Indeed, taking these elements of the text and context into consideration, Khweshgi's anecdote of service contributes to what I have identified as the central animating idea of the *Akbbar al-Awliya*: that of a mobile community of Afghans laying claim to roots from the mountains of Roh

⁴⁸⁶ Kumar, "*Bandagi* and *Naukari*."

to the heart of Mughal Hindustan. As they enfolded the Mughal dynastic lineage irrevocably into their own, the Khweshgis attested to the profound geographical and ancestral scope of their community in the mid-seventeenth century.

Self and Community in the *Akhbar al-Awliya*: Afghan “Selves” in an Expanding World

In the concluding chapter of his *Akhbar al-Awliya*, ‘Abd Allah neatly ties together his history of the Afghan *qaum* with an account of his own life—a passage that one might call an “autobiography.” This story, however, does not begin with an account of his birth and childhood. It starts with a recollection of the author’s own experiences as a student on the path to deeper knowledge of the faith. As we learn, this search eventually led him to serve as a soldier in the Mughal army, a period that ‘Abd Allah recounts in detail by describing the many places he visited across the Indian subcontinent and the influential individuals that he met on the way. Like the remainder of the *Akhbar al-Awliya*, I do not intend to interpret this section as a purely “factual” and faithful account of ‘Abd Allah’s life. Rather, I will look at this passage, and its place in the *Akhbar al-Awliya* as a whole, as an example of what Taymiya Zaman has called an “auto/biography,” and Mana Kia calls a “commemoration.”⁴⁸⁷ Citing Zaman’s similarity to her own work, Kia notes that both of these terms point to the “overlap between writing one’s life, composing a history of one’s times (which often includes biographical accounts of eminent men of letters) and locating one’s authorial self within social, political, familial, and literary circles.”⁴⁸⁸ While I would not necessarily ascribe the *Akhbar al-Awliya* to the *tazkira* genre, the primary genre that Kia refers to in her work, ‘Abd Allah Khan’s text nonetheless mirrors this format in many ways, and interpreting it as a kind of *tazkira* yields interesting insights on how Khweshgi imagined his plural “self.” Indeed, in addition to writing a long *durée* history of the Afghan *qaum*, biographies of prominent Afghan Sufis of different lineages, and an account of his own life, the author effectively situates himself within the number of different interrelated collectives including “Afghan,” “Khweshgi,” and arguably, the Mughal state apparatus.

As Kia argues, cultivating memory through the composition of *tazkiras* was an act of mindfulness, a “deliberate action” that accompanied an individual’s search for morality and proper conduct. As the authors of commemorative works sifted through their own memories of eminent individuals and committed their stories to paper, they in turn created for themselves and others a repository of moral and ethical behavior; one that could be drawn upon in any number of complex social situations. As such, these compilations of memories were “instructive and collective”—texts like the *Akhbar al-Awliya* not only offered a guide for individuals looking to uphold a life of *adab*, or “proper ethical and aesthetic form,” but in grouping noteworthy individuals together in this manner, writers were often part of a collaborative process that engendered the creation of new imagined communities.⁴⁸⁹ Reading ‘Abd Allah’s own story as part of the *Akhbar al-Awliya* thus offers important clues as to what it might have meant for Khweshgi to be an “Afghan” in seventeenth-century Mughal Hindustan. How did an individual negotiate his identity as a Khweshgi, an Afghan, and a mobile servant of the Mughal state, all at a time of great political and social change?

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In the concluding chapter of his lengthy work, ‘Abd Allah begins his personal narrative when he was nine years old—the time when he first attached himself to a teacher at the *madrasa*. There, he received all of the basics of a young Muslim’s education, studying the Arabic alphabet and the rules of grammar; *kalam*s, or “the science of discourse”; and classic works of prose and poetry including the *Gulistan* and *Bustan* of Sa‘di Shirazi (d. 1291) and the *divan* of Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1390).

⁴⁸⁷ Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 163.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

By his account, ‘Abd Allah excelled in his studies and was no ordinary student. It was not long before his instructor appointed him as teacher over all the other students at the *madrasa* and bestowed upon him the distinguished title of “*kehalifa*,” or successor. After memorizing the classics, ‘Abd Allah continues, the precocious student yearned for more. In particular, he was keen to learn Arabic and to access all of the knowledge that accompanied the study of the language. When he told his father of these plans, however, the patriarch initially doubted his son’s abilities. His father warned him: “in studying Arabic, there is a great deal of difficulty (*basi mushkil ast*). Only a few...reach the shores of their goal. If you do begin your study, do so in a manly way (*mardana shuru kon*). But if you cannot, abandon this (idea), because beginning the pursuit of ‘*ilm* (knowledge) is like waging war with infidels—fleeing from it is a mistake.”⁴⁹⁰

Though discouraged by this counsel at first, ‘Abd Allah nonetheless threw himself into his study of Arabic. He first entered tutelage of his uncle; a man named Miyan ‘Abd al-Samad. When a number of “difficulties and obstacles” presented themselves, he then transferred to Lahore “to attend on the *‘ulama* (religious scholars) and teachers of the age,”⁴⁹¹ including Miyan Muhammad Sadiq, Muhammad Said, and Shaikh Nimat Allah. There, he continued to apply himself in his study of language and the faith, spending the majority of his time in meditative contemplation. This time in Lahore was particularly difficult for him, he says, as his dedication reached such a degree that he slept little throughout the night, waking early to continue studying and appear at classes before the rest of his classmates. ‘Abd Allah’s companions warned him that this treatment of his own body was not sustainable. However, he remained fervently committed to his work until the completion of his studies, returning to Qasur at the age of twenty-three.⁴⁹²

Back in his hometown, ‘Abd Allah continued to feel deeply drawn to matters of the faith. In addition to beginning his study of the rational sciences, he composed an original work: the *Bahr al-Firasat*, a commentary (*sharh*) on the *divan* of Hafiz (d. 1390). Soon, the “essential love” (*mahabbat-i asli*) began to boil over within him, challenging him to move onwards yet again and seek new roads in his pursuit of knowledge. So Khweshgi committed himself to serving “every *dervish* and every great person that I had heard of,” and passed his days reading the great *malfu‘at*, or “conversations,” of the Chishti Sufi *shaiikhs* of old.⁴⁹³ In this early section of his autobiographical account, ‘Abd Allah quickly establishes his particular favor of the Chishti order, the spiritual lineage who first rose to prominence in Delhi and later spread to urban centers of the Deccan. Nonetheless, true to his inclination to meet “every dervish and great person” of whom he knew, ‘Abd Allah soon embarked on a journey that would take him as far as Bengal and the Deccan in search of a multitude of *shaiikhs* who would offer their own nuggets of wisdom to the seeker.

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According to the author’s recollection, it was not a desire to serve in the Mughal army that first brought him to distant corners of the Indian subcontinent. Rather, it was the pursuit of knowledge driven by his own spiritual thirst. During this period of his life, ‘Abd Allah writes, he first traveled to a place that he calls the “*kol*” (fort) of Bukhari—possibly the site of the Bukhari Pir *dargah* in Kuchh, a city on the coast of Gujarat in western India. ‘Abd Allah does not specify how he arrived there, nor if he traveled with any companions; however, he describes how he committed himself to *zikr*, or meditation, throughout the trip and derived permission from his superiors to engage in higher levels of this practice.

⁴⁹⁰ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 276b-277b.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid, fol. 278a-279b.

⁴⁹³ Ibid, fol. 280b.

Soon, he landed in Ahmedabad, the bustling urban heart of Gujarat which boasted its own prestigious community of Sufi masters. Not least among these individuals was Shah-i ‘Alam (d. 1475), arguably the most famous and beloved *pir* of the region. Once there, ‘Abd Allah says, he sought out the spiritual successor of Shah-i ‘Alam, a man named Shaikh Fath Allah. Perhaps in an effort to boast of his own spiritual acumen, ‘Abd Allah describes how *shaiikh* Fath Allah was known for his habit of sequestering himself in his cell and only entertaining the worthiest of visitors. “At an unknown time,” the *shaiikh* would leave his chamber to offer *namaz* (prayer) and visit the tomb of his spiritual predecessor. Afterwards, he would shut himself away and refuse any visitor who came to his door. When “this contemptible one” (*abqar*) appeared at the *shaiikh*’s abode, however, Fath Allah cordially welcomed him inside.⁴⁹⁴

Once seated together, ‘Abd Allah says, Fath Allah plied him with questions, asking of “my birth (*maulid*), my homeland (*mautin*), and my lineage (*hasab wa nasab*).” Apparently, the *shaiikh* was greatly pleased by his response, and offered the traveler a gift before granting him some advice on approaching the phenomenon of human mortality.⁴⁹⁵ While ‘Abd Allah does not explain how he described his birth, homeland, and lineage, his remark demonstrates how strangers might have familiarized themselves with one another in this context, and what attributes were deemed valuable in distinguishing oneself from others. As the *shaiikh*’s questions indicate, factors such as birth and place of origin could, in fact, carry significance in the highly mobile world of early modern Hindustan. In addition, Fath Allah’s pleasant response to the author suggests that some lineages, birth places, and homelands might be perceived as superior to others. If we also believe ‘Abd Allah’s reckoning (that the *shaiikh* was indeed delighted by his response), the range of possible answers to his questions—“Khweshgi,” “Afghan,” “Qasur,” or any other birth, spiritual, or scholarly lineages with which the author might have identified himself—indicate that the author’s identity was something that the Sufi *shaiikh* of Gujarat could understand and appreciate; they were identities which conjured images and social affiliations that made sense to the *pir* and were, at least according to ‘Abd Allah, deemed worthy of his respect.

The author remained for some time in Gujarat, meeting other prominent spiritual leaders including Shah Siraj al-din, described as one of the descendants of Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori (d. 1562), as well as one Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahman Rafi.⁴⁹⁶ As one might note, these *shaiikhs* that ‘Abd Allah met early on his travels represented an array of regional backgrounds as well as spiritual orders. The famed Shah-i ‘Alam (the spiritual predecessor of the elusive Fath Allah) had attached himself the Suhrawardi order, while Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori had been a member of the Shattari order. As ‘Abd Allah alludes to throughout his autobiography, he personally chose to follow the Chishti *tariqa* (path). However, just as he established early on, his desire to derive spiritual wisdom motivated him to seek the counsel of whatever “great” *shaiikhs* he knew; and these are revealed to be individuals with divergent backgrounds and spiritual training.

It is important to note here that this inclination was not an uncommon phenomenon in South Asia. As we know from the earliest Sufi panegyric literature from the subcontinent, great Sufis were incredibly expansive in their understanding of which blessed men deserved their respect and admiration.⁴⁹⁷ Those inclined to the Sufi way were also more often than not initiated into multiple spiritual orders, despite generally adhering to or being affiliated with a particular path or teacher. However, as we approach the *Akhhbar al-Awliya* as a kind of “auto/biography” or “commemoration,”

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, fol. 282a-b.

⁴⁹⁵ About the inevitability of death: “Oh ‘Abd Allah, you must think of the grave, because there is no other choice but to alight in that place.”

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, fol. 283a-284a.

⁴⁹⁷ For example, see Amir Hasan Sijzi’s recordings of the conversations of Nizam al-din Awliya, the *Fawa'id al-Fa'ud*.

‘Abd Allah’s recounting of his experiences thus far is noteworthy in that it reflects the diverse lineages and histories that a Khweshgi Afghan might incorporate into his own “origin story.” As we will continue to see in his account, the author’s meetings with Sufi *shaiikhs* were transformative in that Khweshgi studied under the tutelage of these men and gained their permission to engage in new methods of spiritual practice. In recording these encounters, Khweshgi represents his “self” not simply as the product of birth or ancestral connections (which, interestingly, ‘Abd Allah hardly elaborates upon), but as one shaped by individuals from as far afield as Gujarat and representing an incredible diversity of both ancestral and spiritual backgrounds. To elaborate more on this point, we will look to the next portion of ‘Abd Allah’s auto/biography, during which he continues his path of spiritual growth as a soldier in the Mughal army.

Khweshgi the Soldier: From Bengal to the Deccan

After studying with the *shaiikh* ‘Abd al-Rahman Rafi in Gujarat, ‘Abd Allah received permission to return to his *watan*, or “homeland.”⁴⁹⁸ Not long after this, however, he felt compelled to depart Qasur again: this time, to travel to the capital city of the Mughal Empire, Delhi, to perform *naukari*,⁴⁹⁹ or “service,” for someone he refers to as the *navab-i mustatab*, or his “excellent Highness.”⁵⁰⁰

Although ‘Abd Allah never identifies this “excellent *navab*” by name, details offered throughout remainder of the text strongly suggest that he is referring to Dilir Khan Daudzai—a respected Afghan general who secured a number of significant victories for the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) in the latter half of the seventeenth century. As we will see, Dilir Khan (like ‘Abd Allah) followed an incredible itinerary across the Indian subcontinent, first founding a new settlement in present-day Uttar Pradesh and later leading Mughal forces in the contested terrain of the Deccan frontier. It is also notable that Dilir Khan’s father, Darya Khan, had been a close associate of Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631), fellow Afghan and favorite of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627). This was the same Khan Jahan Lodi who once made his own way to the Deccan in search, as one contemporary text hinted, of the freedom to carve out his own independent kingdom.⁵⁰¹ As a quick tracing of these relationships thus tells us, Khweshgi—while guided by his own spiritual searching—was part of a complex yet highly-interrelated community of Afghans establishing roots across South Asia at the pinnacle of Mughal power.

Immediately after recalling his relocation to Delhi, ‘Abd Allah describes how he accompanied the *navab* to Lucknow, the regional center of Awadh located to the east of Delhi. He expresses his awe and admiration at the sheer number of spiritually pedigreed people who inhabited this city, among them Shaikh Pir Muhammad Lakhnavi.⁵⁰² According to him, Shaikh Pir Muhammad took an interest in him and graciously read his *Babr al-Firasat*, achieving *zauq*, or “ecstasy,” from it.⁵⁰³ ‘Abd Allah says that he spent a great deal of time studying under the tutelage of the *shaiikh*, who was a renowned master of particular branches of spiritual knowledge (*‘ilm*).

Next, ‘Abd Allah’s service led him farther east, into what he calls “the Purab and Bengal,”⁵⁰⁴ or the farthest reaches of the Mughal empire. There, he went to attend on the Mughal prince Shuja (d. 1661), the brother of Aurangzeb who served as the governor of Bengal and Orissa from the

⁴⁹⁸ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 284b.

⁴⁹⁹ Khweshgi uses the expression “*naukari ba wuqu painawast*.”

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ See Chapter Four.

⁵⁰² Whose name, Lakhnavi, implies his association with the city of Lucknow.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, fol. 284b.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, fol. 285a.

1640s until his death in 1661.⁵⁰⁵ Judging from ‘Abd Allah’s own account, the author was present with Shuja during some of his campaigns into the densely forested regions of Bengal, during which, he claims, Shuja struggled to extricate himself from the influence of his Shi‘a companions (an influence that, the author boasts, he counseled Shuja to notice and soundly reject). Ultimately, the prince and his forces were successful, and they secured several areas of the region for the “people of Islam” (*ahl-i Islam*), staying on in Bengal for some time. Yet it was not long before a fresh series of challenges threatened the group’s ability to maintain morale and social cohesion.⁵⁰⁶ At this time, the Mughal camp was suddenly overwhelmed by a virulent disease (*maraz waba*) that killed many of the people in Shuja’s entourage. Some in the camp detested the extreme weather conditions and opted to make their way back to Hindustan, only to lose more individuals on the journey. Others gave up on the trek and turned back to Dhaka.⁵⁰⁷

The author survived these trying times, and soon made his back westwards towards Delhi. On this part of the journey, he continued to serve a number of Sufi *shaiikhs* across the Indo-Gangetic plain, highlighting his encounters with them in telling his story. First, he says, he attended upon a man named Mawla-yi Khwaja Ali, whom he identifies as one of the *murids* (disciples) and *khalifas* (successors) of Maulana-yi Shahbaz Bhagalpuri, whose name indicates association with the town of Bhagalpur.⁵⁰⁸ In the Sufi’s hospice, ‘Abd Allah sat with many other curious individuals and inquired after matters of the faith, even touching on questions about the permissibility of the New World product tobacco (*tambaku*). As ‘Abd Allah reveals, it was also a word from Mawla-yi Khwaja Ali that determined the next stop itinerary, hinting at how his journey across Hindustan was in large part charted through existing networks of blessed men. At the time of their departure, he says, Khwaja Ali informed him of another great *shaiikh* named Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rashid who lived in Jaunpur. According to him, “God had bestowed much favor and grace” upon the *shaiikh*, and it would behoove the author to go and see him.⁵⁰⁹ Heeding the *pir*’s advice, ‘Abd Allah asked for permission to leave the prince Shuja and made his way towards Jaunpur, another urban center of the north Indian plain with its own robust history of Sufi masters.⁵¹⁰

To his dismay, Khweshgi arrived in the city only to find that Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rashid had gone on a journey to Gujarat.⁵¹¹ He grieved at this missed opportunity, but notes that ‘Abd al-Rashid’s son, Muhammad Irshad, did his best to welcome him and even wrote to his father about ‘Abd Allah’s visit. The author departed and stopped again in Lucknow, then returned at last to Qasur, where he quickly applied himself to new project under the supervision of one Daud Khan Husainzai.⁵¹² According to him, Husainzai—likely a local elite and also a fellow Afghan—had been engaged in the meritorious work of collecting stories from the life of Shaikh ‘Abd al-Latif Burhanpur, a famous Sufi *pir* of the Deccan. Husainzai entrusted ‘Abd Allah to the task of re-recording the stories for posterity. Khweshgi describes how he proudly took up this honor, calling his second work the *Jami‘ al-Kamalat*, or the “collector of perfections.”⁵¹³

Although an incidental note in the grand scheme of his story, ‘Abd Allah’s mention of his work on an eminent Deccani Sufi is one of the first indicators of his close relationship with this

⁵⁰⁵ Find citation.

⁵⁰⁶ Khweshgi, *Akhbar al-Awliya*, fol. 285b-286a.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ In Bihar.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, fol. 286b-288b.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² I have not been able to verify the identity of Daud Khan Husainzai. However, his name, with the Pashto suffix “-zai,” indicates that he was an Afghan of the “descendants of Husain” lineage.

⁵¹³ Ibid, fol. 293b-294a.

space and the strong connections between the Afghan communities of Qasur and the spiritual networks that undergirded the Deccan. Indeed, it is striking that ‘Abd Allah, a soldier and scholar with natal origins in the Punjab who had not, at least at this point in his life, even visited the Deccan, felt himself an appropriate choice for chronicling the miracles of Sufi *shaiikh* who had attracted legions of followers to Burhanpur, not least among them the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.⁵¹⁴ Looking at ‘Abd Allah’s work as an act of fashioning his own moral self, his completion of the *Jami’ al-Kamalat* testifies to a strikingly transregional and multivalent “self” in the making—one that was at once “Khweshgi,” “Afghan,” and “of” Qasur, but that also possessed the authority to comment on the secrets of a great Shattari *shaiikh* of Burhanpur.

To delve more into these threads of affiliation, we can now turn to the final section of Khweshgi’s autobiographical addendum, during which he describes how he at last traversed the great distance from Qasur to the spiritual territory of Shaikh ‘Abd al-Latif Burhanpur. The first stop on his journey was the town of Shahabad, which he refers to as the “*watan* of the *nawab-i mustatab*,” or the “homeland” of Dilir Khan—the respected Afghan general whom I have identified as the “excellent Highness” of this history.⁵¹⁵ Shahabad was a settlement adjacent to Shahjahanpur, the latter founded Dilir Khan in 1647 following the *nawab*’s defeat of the local Rajputs.⁵¹⁶ Nestled in present-day Uttar Pradesh between Delhi and Lucknow, these places quickly became identified with the various Afghan lineages who settled there—a fact reflected in the *Akhbar al-Awliya* itself. It is, in fact, intriguing that ‘Abd Allah referred to Shahabad as Dilir Khan’s “home” (*watan*) as opposed to his natal region—a place which is nowhere referenced in the text. ‘Abd Allah explains how the “emperor (*padishah*) of the time,” Aurangzeb, then honored Dilir Khan by nominating him to serve in the Deccan. When the khan “turned his attention to that district,” ‘Abd Allah received the honor of accompanying him on the journey.⁵¹⁷

When the party at last arrived in the Deccan, ‘Abd Allah says, they first went to pay their respects to the local Sufi *shaiikhs*. Among them was Shaikh Burhan, whom he describes as one of the successors of Shaikh Isa Sindi (whose name indicates origin from Sind, an arid coastal region to the southwest of the Punjab).⁵¹⁸ From Shaikh Burhan, ‘Abd Allah received permission to perform many of “occupations” of the Shattari path—a method of Sufi practice, one might note, with which he had already demonstrated comfort with the *Jami’ al-Kamalat* as well as his meetings with the successors of Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori in Gujarat. Following these visits, Dilir Khan turned his attention to the town of Aurangabad, from which he then focused on the fort of Pumad,⁵¹⁹ a stronghold of the Maratha leader Shivaji (1627-1680). “After some days,” Dilir Khan was successful in his campaign, capturing Shivaji’s fort in a victory for the Mughals.⁵²⁰

The Afghan commander followed up on his success by setting his sights on another regional, independent kingdom: Bijapur, located further south in the Deccan frontier.⁵²¹ In the year 1679/1680, Dilir Khan failed in his attempt to bring this kingdom under Mughal control; however, we never learn this outcome from the *Akhbar al-Awliya*, which was completed in the 1660s. Instead,

⁵¹⁴ Aurangzeb Alamgir, *Ruka’at-i Alamgiri: Or, Letters of Aurangzeb*, translated by Jamshid H. Bilimoria (Bombay: Cherag Printing Press, 1908), 28.

⁵¹⁵ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 294a.

⁵¹⁶ Iqbal Husain, “Pattern of Afghan Settlements in the 17th Century,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 39, 1 (1978), 330.

⁵¹⁷ Khweshgi, “Akhbar al-Awliya,” fol. 294a.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ The fort of Purandar?

⁵²⁰ Ibid, fol. 294b. Although ‘Abd Allah simply states “the fort was conquered,” the Mughal victory here (if I am identifying the correct one) was a far more complicated process of negotiation. See Richard Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age, 1000-1765* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 317.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

‘Abd Allah closes his auto/biography—and the text as a whole—with a lengthy meditation on how he and other soldiers in the camp committed themselves to the teachings of the *khwajagan-i Chisht*, or the great Sufi masters of the Chishti lineage.⁵²² True to his choice of title, “Narratives of the Friends of God,” ‘Abd Allah brings his history to a close by highlighting his deep reverence for the saintly men and women who guided him on his own journey of spiritual growth.

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Concluding his account at this point, ‘Abd Allah leaves us with little information to interpret what his own lived experience might have been in the rapidly shifting social and political terrain of the Deccan. However, the rich details that the author included in telling his life story—in addition to how these details fit into the broader project of the *Akbbār al-Anliya*—can help us draw several compelling conclusions about the role of place and “origins” in the seventeenth-century Afghan experience. As we have seen, ‘Abd Allah undoubtedly devotes the lion’s share of his attention to the Khweshgi lineage of Qasur—in his greater history of the Afghan *qaum*, he continually refers to this community’s unique geographical and genealogical trajectory, with a special focus on the Sufi blessed men who claimed this identity. The city of Qasur also holds a place of special significance in this story, not only as a domain that the Khweshgis procured through their own military success, but one that became theirs through the predictions and blessings of the collective’s Sufi saints—as illustrated by the memorable story of Hazrat-i Shaikh and the iron nail.

However, ‘Abd Allah’s account of his own journey across Hindustan and beyond its boundaries also reflects a complex “self” in the making—one that was bound to his ancestral lineage and hometown of Qasur; yet was also fundamentally shaped by Khweshgi’s travels and encounters with individuals across a strikingly diverse geographical and social terrain. In some ways, ‘Abd Allah does convey a sense of his own “foreignness” in the new contexts in which he finds himself. His comments on the unpleasant weather of Bengal, and the Mughals’ difficult excursion in that area, offers one notable instance of disconnect between himself and a particular locality. Nonetheless, Khweshgi’s depiction of his identity as he traveled from Gujarat to the Deccan was one that was immanently recognizable and respected by others—Sufi saints from far-flung lands and diverse spiritual training warmly acknowledged his affiliations, however he chose to represent himself. Similarly, as Khweshgi remains focused on his own inner journey of the heart, we see how it was imagined as capable of absorbing whatever knowledge the author deemed valuable for himself as an individual struggling to live a moral life of *adab*.

While we cannot verify that ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi was ever received as graciously by famous Sufi *pirs* of Hindustan as he claimed, his work nonetheless betrays a firm sense of *both* his “Afghan” identity and a self that was as expansive as the Afghans’ historical itinerary from Ghur, to the mountains of Roh, to the hills and plains of the Punjab, and finally to the very heart of the Indian subcontinent. Khweshgi’s Afghan predecessor in the Deccan, Khan Jahan Lodi, failed to establish an Afghan state beyond the reach of Mughal authority. Nonetheless, the *Akbbār al-Anliya* demonstrates the ways in which Afghans of the mid-seventeenth century found ways to coexist with the reigning Mughal authorities while charting new paths for themselves that were unencumbered by geographical boundaries. As we will see in the following chapter, the strength and integrity of Afghan identity evinced in Khweshgi’s work, as well as the author’s firm conviction in the historical and spiritual significance of his *qaum*, ensured the longevity of Afghan identity and solidarity into the late eighteenth century in the wake of the great Mughal Empire.

⁵²² Ibid, fol. 295a-297b.

Chapter Six: Land, Language, and Community in The Eighteenth Century

Introduction

Following the imperial army into the Deccan in the mid-seventeenth century, ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi experienced the Mughal Empire at the historical pinnacle of its power. By the long reign of the emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), the imperial polity founded by the first Mughal rulers in the sixteenth century had grown to encompass a territory stretching from the city of Kabul in the northwest to nearly the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent. Khweshgi, an Afghan hailing from the city of Qasur, actively participated in one of the most remarkable periods of this expansion, becoming one of many in a long line of Afghans who joined the Mughal fold and built new lives in the Deccan. There, increasingly entrenched communities of Afghans flourished as independent power brokers throughout the remainder of the century, their influence withstanding the successive waves of political powers that vied for control of the region.⁵²³

Moving forward to the eighteenth century, this chapter examines one of a new generation of Afghan histories produced following the decline of the Mughal empire, the once great imperial polity that ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi witnessed at the peak of its political power. Writing in the 1770s, Hafiz Rahmat Khan (d. 1774), an eminent Afghan and de facto ruler in north India, wrote a history of his *qaum* that drew upon the rich textual legacy of his forbears. In his *Khulasat al-Ansab*, or “Essence of the Family Lineages,” he wrote this history for the benefit of his own descendants in India, communities of Afghan migrants who made the subcontinent their home in a period of political fragmentation and the existence of numerous Mughal successor states. Although Hafiz’s work evinced a new focus on the Afghan *wilayat*, or the heartland regions that lay beyond Hindustan, this chapter nonetheless argues for the incredible endurance of a transregional Afghan identity in the eighteenth century. Forged in large part through successive waves of Afghan migration to India, Afghan identity remained strongly connected to this territory. As the eighteenth century ended in politically uncertain times, Afghans like Hafiz Rahmat Khan continued to articulate their identities and futures in relation to the land that was Hindustan.

Situating the *Khulasat al-Ansab*: South Asia in the Eighteenth Century

By the closing years of Aurangzeb’s reign in the late seventeenth century, the Mughal empire faced a new series of challenges that transformed the political landscape of South Asia. Within the realm of the Mughal court itself, the elderly Aurangzeb’s many heirs—children as well as grandchildren—all began to vie for the throne that only one could capture. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the emperor himself had been engaged for decades in the Deccan, pouring resources into a failed attempt to stretch the empire yet further into the southern Karnatak and Tamil country. As some historians have argued, Aurangzeb’s redirection of revenue to the imperial coffers—an attempt to fund his deepening military excursions in the South—placed the Mughal state apparatus in peril, as money usually reserved for nobles responsible for administering different regions of the empire became increasingly difficult to procure. In the words of Richard Eaton, at the end of Aurangzeb’s long and once illustrious career, the emperor’s extraordinary drive towards expansion produced such consequences that “the entire fiscal-political structure (of the empire) was approaching collapse.”⁵²⁴

Following Aurangzeb’s death in 1707, a fierce competition for the throne came an end with the coronation of his son, Muhammad ‘Azam Shah (d. 1707). Yet ‘Azam Shah’s brief reign—a total

⁵²³ See Hannah Archambault’s argument in “Geographies of Influence: Two Afghan Military Households in 17th and 18th Century South India” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2018).

⁵²⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 327.

of two months—served as a harbinger of the many successive challenges to come. In addition to a particularly fraught series of years in which Mughal successor after Mughal successor occupied the throne, the early eighteenth century witnessed the devastating invasion of the Afsharid emperor of Iran, Nadir Shah (d. 1747), in 1739. Numerous Indian successor states, many of them enabled by the rich resources previously generated by the Mughals, also engaged in outright war with the sovereigns of Delhi, who proved largely incapable of subduing new forces like the Sikhs of the Punjab, the Marathas in the western Deccan, and the Jats of the Punjab and Indo-Gangetic plain. By the middle of the eighteenth century, during the relatively lengthy reign of Shah ‘Alam II (r. 1760-1788, 1788-1806), the Mughals’ widely acknowledged decline in power followed the ruler in the adage: “the sultanate of Shah ‘Alam (literally, ‘the king of the world’) is from Delhi to Palam.” Coined in the fifteenth or sixteenth century to mock the imperial misfortunes of another, pre-Mughal ruler, this rhyme encapsulated the incredible loss of Mughal territory since the era of high empire. Palam, a suburb of contemporary Delhi, lies some ten miles to the west of the Qutb mosque and minaret.⁵²⁵

One of the most successful groups to emerge in the wake of Mughal decline, however, were the Afghans—who, in a fantastic reversal of the fate assigned to them in the sixteenth century, became the preeminent power brokers in the former territories of the Mughal empire. Indeed, as historians such as Jos Gommans have demonstrated, the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of a vibrant new economy linking the Afghan “homeland” in present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan with the Indo-Gangetic plain, where new communities of Afghan migrants began to settle and put down roots. Largely bypassing the Mughal imperial centers of Delhi and Agra, the routes of trade established by these individuals later underpinned what Gommans has called an “Indo-Afghan empire”⁵²⁶—one of the most influential imperial forces of eighteenth-century South Asia. Founded in the 1740s with the coronation of the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali (r. 1747-1772), the Durrani Empire⁵²⁷ quickly came to incorporate much of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. In a stunning show of power, Ahmad Shah assumed authority in the wake of Nadir Shah’s passing in 1747, centering his capitals around the thriving urban centers of Kabul and Qandahar. Only a decade after taking the throne, he pushed onwards to the Mughal capital of Delhi, sacking the city in 1757 and repelling the Marathas from north India in an astonishing victory in 1761.

Also present at this battle against the Marathas was an Afghan from a remarkably different background than the Durrani emperor, yet who formed a powerful alliance with Ahmad Shah that helped seal the ruler’s victories in north India. Hafiz Rahmat Khan (d. 1774) belonged to an Afghan clan known as the Kuta Khail, who began to migrate to the Gangetic plain from their homeland near Peshawar in the early eighteenth century. Once in Hindustan, Hafiz assumed authority over what has been described as a “decentralized” Afghan polity spread across the region of Katehr, later known as “Rohilkhand”; an area to the east of the Ramganga, a tributary of the river Ganges.⁵²⁸ Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, this region had been settled by a diverse array of Afghan tribes and clans, largely from the rural areas surrounding Peshawar, who entrenched themselves through an open recruitment strategy in which anyone performing excellent service—variously referred to as *naukari*, *chakari*, or *khidmat*—could claim membership in the community and rise within its ranks.⁵²⁹ As a result of this, Afghan chiefs including Hafiz Rahmat Khan came to administer a diverse, multi-ethnic group in north India referred to as the “Rohillas,” named for the

⁵²⁵ See Chapter Four.

⁵²⁶ Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (New Delhi: E.J. Brill, 1995).

⁵²⁷ Named so for Ahmad Shah Durrani’s epithet, “Durr-i Durrani,” or “Pearl of Pearls.”

⁵²⁸ *Ibid*, 113.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, 135.

land of “Roh”—a nebulous term, as we have seen in previous chapters, used primarily by authors in Hindustan to refer to the region from which Afghans had long migrated to the subcontinent.⁵³⁰

As scholars like Gommans have contended, the key to Rohilla success in north India was their recruitment of an assortment of individuals—“Afghan” or otherwise—into the Rohilla political apparatus; an action perfectly coherent with Afghan relationship-building in previous centuries. At the same time, however, the period of Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s reign in India witnessed a new flurry of literary production aimed at illuminating the precise genealogical origins of the Afghans. For example, Nimat Allah Harawi’s epic *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, analyzed in Chapter Four, was brought to new life as scribes across South Asia copied its contents and circulated it for new audiences.⁵³¹ Two anonymous works on Afghan history, the *Risala dar ansab-i Afghanan*, or “Treatise on the Ancestry of the Afghans,” as well as the *Tavarikh-i Afghani*, or “Afghan Histories,” contributed to the growing discourse on Afghan origins.⁵³² Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, was a treatise composed by Hafiz Rahmat Khan himself: the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, or “Essence of the Family Lineages.” Completed in 1770, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* offers perhaps the most detailed account of the various Afghan lineages, their relationships, and the regions that they inhabited produced to date. The final text was not as lengthy as the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*; however, with an almost encyclopedic precision, Hafiz brings together extensive research to present a map of Afghan origins that one scholar has described as “not merely a genealogy, but a detailed ethnology.”⁵³³ In this sense, the text possessed an arguably “modern” sensibility that set it apart from its predecessors.

In his analysis of the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, Nile Green has characterized Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s work as the end point of a centuries-long process in which the Afghans, tugged between their tribal social organization and the “cosmopolitan contradictions” of maintaining that organization in India, ultimately retained “the ideal of tribe...as the historical bulwark of Afghan historical identity.”⁵³⁴ Indeed, he points out, the middle-aged Hafiz—nearing the age of fifty at the time of writing his history—stated that he wrote his work to educate his own children and grandchildren, who, having been born in Hindustan, had forgotten the genealogical lineages that connected them to the greater Afghan community. Ruminating on this problem, Hafiz wrote:

...No one knew who was closer to whom and who was more distant. They only knew that they were from this *khail* (clan) or that *qaum* (tribe).⁵³⁵ Since, as fate had it, my ancestors came to Hindustan and settled, this one (I) also came with them. And the rest of the Kuta Khail came to settle there too, so that none of the Kuta Khail remained in the *wilayat* (homeland)...And as we had children, we became separated. Whenever we asked our fortunate children or their children about their ancestry, or asked them about their close kin, they knew nothing.⁵³⁶

In quite a fascinating contrast from earlier Afghan histories like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* or the *Akbbar al-Amliya*, therefore, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s work betrays a sense of loss that accompanied the Afghans’ migration to the Indian subcontinent. While an earlier generation of mobile Afghans

⁵³⁰ See Chapter Three.

⁵³¹ Nile Green, *Making Space. Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108.

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ Iqbal Khan, “Primitive Ethnography in Early Modern India,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 59 (1998): 659.

⁵³⁴ Green, *Making Space*, 111.

⁵³⁵ As discussed in Chapter Five, Hafiz most commonly applies the term “*qaum*” to larger groupings of Afghans. For smaller lineages that break off from those groups, he typically uses the word “*khail*.” Although imperfect translations, it is for this reason that I translate “*qaum*” as “tribe,” and “*khail*” as “clan.”

⁵³⁶ Hafiz Rahmat Khan, *Khulasat al-Ansab*, ed. Sayyid Muhammad Ahmad, trans. Mohammad Nawaz Tair (Peshawar: Hameediya Press, 1973), 22-24.

like ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi—though deeply concerned with understanding and illuminating the Afghan past—moved seamlessly through their environs in Hindustan, the author’s introduction to the *Khulasat al-Ansab* strongly suggests that for Hafiz Rahmat Khan, the Afghans’ “home” fundamentally lay beyond India, in the region where Afghans were dominant. As he reiterates in the conclusion, “Afghans born in the *wilayat* have no need of this account;”⁵³⁷ only those born in Hindustan, at least in his judgment, had lost awareness of the links between them, and it was imperative for reasons of Afghan solidarity that they remember these ties.⁵³⁸

Similar to Green, Jos Gommans describes the *Khulasat al-Ansab* as an effort to “address the...phenomenon of tribal conquest of a civilized and urbanized world.”⁵³⁹ In order to preserve the integrity of his own state, Hafiz, aware of the possibly competing loyalties that his diverse subjects possessed, attempted to create unity among his “tribal” following by highlighting their illustrious, shared heritage; one in which each Afghan *qaum* could be perfectly linked to such figures as King Talut (Saul), the prophet Yaqub (Jacob), and Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid, the Afghan who embraced Islam during the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Somewhat ironically in this argument, reminding Afghans of the tribe to which they belonged could help foster that sense of common “Afghanness,” which in turn would ensure the prosperity of Hafiz’s own Rohilla state—a thriving polity that was nonetheless one of many attempting to survive in the shifting political terrain of eighteenth-century north India.

Keeping the work of Gommans and Green close to my analysis, this chapter nonetheless turns the conversation away from the Afghan preoccupation with “tribe,” instead situating Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s *Khulasat al-Ansab* within the centuries-long conversations surrounding Afghan mobility. As both Green and Gommans have argued, Hafiz’s text presented imagined problems with Afghan migration that needed to be resolved. However, this chapter argues that the issue at hand was not one of fundamentally tribal Afghans colliding with the cosmopolitan context of India, but an already deeply cosmopolitan Afghan identity transforming in a world in which the Mughal empire was no longer dominant. In this changing context, I will demonstrate, Afghan identity became increasingly tied to the “homeland”—referred to as the “*wilayat*”—and the language of Pashto, which Hafiz Rahmat Khan calls “Afghani.” Nonetheless, eighteenth-century histories like the *Khulasat* bore a marked similarity to their predecessors in their insistence on *mobility* as the hallmark of the Afghans’ historical experience. Focusing on this feature of the text, this chapter shows how Afghans of the period continued to think of their community in transregional terms; as one possessing a seemingly limitless capacity for movement and integration in new societies. Moreover, I will argue, works like the *Khulasat al-Ansab* revealed how Hindustan—though distinct from the Afghan homeland—would continue to play a meaningful role in the Afghan story as both a key destination for members of the *qaum* and a locality that had been fundamentally shaped by their presence.

Introducing the *Khulasat al-Ansab*: Afghans and the Prophetic Example

Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s work, while essentially a genealogical account of Afghan history, begins with a lengthy introduction in which the author reflects on the life and example of the Prophet Muhammad. Drawing upon lines from the Qur’an as well as the hadith, or “traditions” of the Prophet, he explains that the very reason that God created the universe was for Muhammad,

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 157.

⁵³⁸ Gommans compares this idea to the argument made by Ibn Khaldun.

⁵³⁹ Gommans, *Rise*, 163.

who was the greatest among men.⁵⁴⁰ So it was, too, that when the light (*nur*) of the Prophet became manifest, the world was also filled with light, and the darkness “put on the clothes of departure when his rays appeared.”⁵⁴¹ When God made humankind and *jinn*s, he made them for no other object than that they worship Him, and He sought to appoint someone who would be His deputy on Earth. God offered this responsibility to many—the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they “could not bear this burden and were afraid to accept it.”⁵⁴² Humankind, however, was able to accept this offer. They possessed a superior love for God, and for this reason they were bestowed with *khilafat*, or the all-important duty of prophethood.⁵⁴³

Hafiz continues by emphasizing the necessity that humans continually praise God. In a fairly lengthy passage, he recounts how many of the prophets received a blessing because they spoke God’s name. “When Hazrat Noh (Noah) said His name, he was saved from the storm,” he writes, and “when Hazrat Dawud (David) said His name, he put the foot of ambition on the throne of *khilafat* (prophethood).”⁵⁴⁴ Hafiz embellishes this point with Persian quatrains referencing the Prophets Musa (Moses), Masih (Jesus), and others. He concludes saying that because of this one utterance, the Prophet David “was adorned from head to toe (*zīnat yaft sar ta pa-yi o*).”⁵⁴⁵

Yet in spite of humanity’s distinction, God “in His perfect wisdom” separated these people into “groups” and “clans,” so that they would “know each from another.”⁵⁴⁶ Some of these were “perpetually elevated in Islam,” while others were “doomed to unending infidelity.”⁵⁴⁷ As Hafiz implies, the Afghans belonged to the former group—yet it was still imperative that they remember this and know their heritage more fully. He explains: “it is not useless (for the Afghans to know their ancestry) as...it begins with the time of Hazrat Ibrahim (Abraham) and Hazrat Yaqub (Jacob)...until Malik Talut (Saul), and from Talut to Afghan and from Afghan to Qais, and from Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid, it has come down branch by branch, group by group, and clan by clan.”⁵⁴⁸ As one might note, in this particular representation of the past, to be Afghan was to be part of a community that not only included one of the first individuals to embrace Islam—Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid—but also the prophets Ibrahim and Yaqub, who were invested with the responsibility of being God’s deputies on Earth. The *Khulasat al-Ansab* was not, as we have seen, the first to emphasize this component of the Afghans’ heritage; however, as I will consider in more detail later, Hafiz’s text draws particular attention to this history and ruminates on the special role of prophets in carrying out God’s will on Earth.

Hafiz concludes his introduction by lamenting that his descendants no longer knew their ancestry. He emphasizes that God made the prophets of noble (*sharif*) background so that they could be easily distinguished, and continues by stressing the Prophet Muhammad’s example of marrying one’s children to those of the right pedigree.⁵⁴⁹ Once again, Hafiz draws heavily from the Qur’an

⁵⁴⁰ Khan, *Khulasat*, 4. Hafiz cites the hadith here: لولاك لما خلقت الافلاك. “But for thee (the world would not have been called out of non-existence).” “Saahib-e laulaak,” *Rekhta Dictionary*, Rekhta Foundation, 2022, <https://www.rekhtadictionary.com/meaning-of-saahib-e-laulaak>.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁴² Ibid, 10. This is a translation from Shaykh Muhammad Sarwar, “Chapter (33) surat l-ahzab (The Combined Forces),” *Quranic Arabic Corpus*, Kais Dukes, 2009-2017, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=33&verse=72>.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 24-26.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 26-30.

and hadith as he makes these points, betraying a particular concern that Afghans do not stray far from the precedent established by the Prophet.

Yet in the main body of the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, Hafiz Rahmat Khan's work begins to mirror previous Afghan histories in significant ways. Following this introduction, Hafiz records detailed genealogies of the Afghans using some of the same symbols, figures, and rhetorical tools long used to describe them as a transregional, mobile community. Moreover, the distinctive elements of the work—for example, its greater focus on Islamic discourse, as well as the marked inclusion of Pashto poetry and prose—also offer Hafiz rich pools of material for imagining Afghan movement in the late eighteenth century.

Sufi *Shaikhs* and Afghan Mobility in the Eighteenth Century

As Nile Green has noted, Sufi *shaikhs*—so central to texts like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—are demonstrably absent from Hafiz Rahmat Khan's *Khulasat al-Ansab*.⁵⁵⁰ Aside from brief nods to non-Afghan Sufis like Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624),⁵⁵¹ the only Afghan *pir* to receive any significant attention in the text is Hafiz's own great-grandfather: a man named Shaikh Shihab al-din. We learn about the *shaikh* very early on in the text, immediately after the introduction. Here, Hafiz includes a fairly detailed description of his ancestor's life, then moves on to trace his own descent from the illustrious *pir*. In an intriguing narrative choice, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* thus begins with the history of the Kuta Khail, one that itself starts with the life and miracles of Shaikh Shihab al-din, also known as “Shaikh Kuta.”⁵⁵²

Shaikh Shihab al-din's prominence in the text confirms the enduring significance of Sufi *shaikhs* to imaginings of Afghan origins. To be sure, Hafiz Rahmat's story could have begun with any individual; however, it begins with a Sufi *pir*: those individuals who had long initiated processes of Afghan identity formation in South Asia. In contrast to histories written in the seventeenth century, however, Hafiz's focus remains solely on the life of his own saintly ancestor, largely at the exclusion of other Afghan *shaikhs*. As we will see in this section, Hafiz's work continued to depict Sufi *pirs* as both mobile and rooting figures. However, as his attention to Shaikh Kuta's life alone implies, the lives of one's *own* Sufi ancestors had begun to garner more significant attention. Writing in 1770, Hafiz Rahmat Khan thus appears far less interested in telling the stories of Afghan Sufis as a whole. It was his own ancestor, Shaikh Kuta, that provided him the key to understanding his own identity and that of his broader *khail*.

For the most part, however, Shaikh Shihab al-din's story fits together seamlessly within the longer tradition of Afghan writing about Sufi *pirs*. We see this from the very beginning of Hafiz's account, during which he explains how the *shaikh*—colloquially known as “Shaikh Kuta”—provided the namesake for his own *khail*, the “Kuta Khail.” According to him, Shaikh Shihab al-din earned the sobriquet “Shaikh Kuta” because of his extreme passivity (*rah shikastagi-i khud*) in his devotion to the Prophet Muhammad—a love which likened him to a dog, or *kuta*.⁵⁵³ As in many other parts of the *Khulasat*, Hafiz embellishes this point with a couplet in Persian: *nisbat-i khud ba sagat kardam wa bas munfa'lam/ zan ke nisbat ba sag-i kury tu shud bi adabi*,⁵⁵⁴ or “I have made myself your dog, and am utterly helpless/in making myself your street dog, I have become mannerless (*bi adabi*).”

This introduction to the life and legacy of the *shaikh*—one of the few Sufis in the *Khulasat*—calls to mind the stories of the Afghan sultan Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451-1489), discussed in Chapter three.

⁵⁵⁰ Green, *Making Space*, 112.

⁵⁵¹ Nile Green notes this reference.

⁵⁵² Khan, *Khulasat*, 34.

⁵⁵³ Interestingly, it is not the Persian word for “dog” (*sag*) or the Pashto word (*spey*), but the Hindustani term for “dog” that gives the clan its name.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Reminiscent of the tales surrounding Bahlul's rise to political power, Hafiz's description of his ancestor evokes the notion of "*bi adabana*," or "mannerlessness," as means of expressing an individual's intense devotion to and connection with the divine. In the case of Bahlul Lodi, I argued, historians embraced these stereotypes of Afghan social backwardness, yet powerfully subverted them through stories about the sultan's tactful humor. In the case of Shaikh Kuta, Hafiz appears to embrace his ancestor's "mannerlessness" with less irony. Nonetheless, his description of his ancestor's reputation, couched within a narrative of Afghan origins, gestures to the Afghans' continued engagement with these discourses in the eighteenth century. Compilations like the *Khulasat al-Ansab* may, at least in part, have been geared towards illuminating the Afghans' illustrious origins in Biblical time; however, the story of Shaikh Kuta hints at how authors like Hafiz Rahmat Khan continued to meaningfully reflect on the *qaum's* historical association with these qualities. As in the case of Sultan Bahlul Lodi, too, that association was projected as an asset to the *shaikh*. Shaikh Kuta's doglike passivity in his devotion to God—a spiritual state reflected upon in the Persian couplet—hints at the divine secrets to which he was privy as a Sufi *pir*.

In addition to this connection with previous Afghan histories, the story of Shaikh Shihab al-din also underscores the enduring relevance of Sufi *shaikhs* to the story of Afghan mobility. As we learn from his biography, it was Shaikh Shihab al-din's migration that set the stage for what would become the long-term, multigenerational movement of the Kuta Khail from Roh to Hindustan. As Hafiz writes, Shaikh Kuta originally came from a region adjacent to the villages of Pushin and Shoravak near Qandahar, a place that was "the original *watan*" of the shaikh's *qaum*, the Bahraich. The *pir* was displaced from his ancestral region, so he moved to the villages of Atak and Langarkot in Swat, because the residents "also spoke the Afghani language."⁵⁵⁵ The *shaikh* also spent time in Samah, where many tribes from within the Bahraich *qaum* had already settled. According to Hafiz, the disparate groups of Afghan migrants who had taken up residence in the region married one another and had children. Those Afghans also embraced the Qadiri Sufi path and "spent the majority of their time remembering God, and were the masters of discovery and perfection."⁵⁵⁶

Following this account, the author continues with a description of Shaikh Kuta's *karamat*, or miracles. Like many *shaikhs*, he writes, his ancestor was renowned for his periods of ecstasy, which drove him to wander through the wilderness. Wild animals such as lions and leopards came to pay homage to him, and there were even rumors that the *shaikh* could ride on the backs of these creatures. The highly mobile *shaikh* spent the final moments of his life in Chach Hazara, a fertile agricultural region between Peshawar and present-day Islamabad, where he "walked on gracefully" to the next world. He was buried in Shahi Der beneath the shade of *tsard* and *palus* trees that possessed remarkable, self-protective qualities. In addition to his own *qaum*, Hafiz concludes, the *shaikh* was also revered among the Yusufzai Afghans, especially those who belonged to the Mandar *qaum*.⁵⁵⁷

Certainly, this description of Shaikh Kuta's life reveals, Afghans like Hafiz Rahmat Khan continued to look to the example of their own blessed ancestors as the agents of mobility and space making. The Bahraichi *pir* and founder of the Kuta Khail relocated several times, while his saintly charisma helped seal the bonds between distinct Afghan *qaums* as they settled in new places. As Hafiz was also at pains to show, even the Yusufzai—a separate *qaum* entirely from the Bahraich to which Shaikh Kuta belonged—embraced the *pir* as their own, venerating him at the site of his burial in Shahi Der. Such an account of Sufi *shaikhs* in the eighteenth century challenges the assumption that tribal identities, though perhaps still important for Afghans of the period, had subsumed all

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 36-38.

others in shaping Afghan relationships to Sufi *pirs*.⁵⁵⁸ Also significantly, Shaikh Kuta's story suggests that integration between Afghan as well as non-Afghan groups could be achieved through yet another means: shared language and custom. As Hafiz explained, Shaikh Kuta relocated from Shoravak to Atak and Langarkot because their residents "spoke the Afghani language." He does not describe the residents of this locality as "Afghan"; it was enough that they spoke the language identified with that community. Fascinatingly, the story of Shaikh Kuta's movement shows how the language of Pashto—not necessarily "being Afghan" itself—facilitated the movement and integration of his own ancestor and provided the foundation through which distinct communities could bond with one another.

It is also important to consider that Shaikh Kuta, though described as an individual of eminent stature who invoked great respect amongst a multitude of Afghan tribes, has no ancestry to speak of, at least not in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*. The account of the *shaikh*'s life begins during his adulthood, and Hafiz leaves no clues as to his parentage other than the larger *qaum* (Bahraich) and more specific *khail* (Badalzai) to which he belonged. In his references to these groups, Hafiz also does not recall any other historical saints who belonged to them. *Pirs* like Shaikh Sabit Bahraich, the mobile Sufi and purported founder of Bahraich described in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, are absent from the text, and thus appear to have no bearing on Shaikh Kuta's own spiritual greatness.⁵⁵⁹

At a glance, this particular presentation of the *shaikh* differs from the stories of distinguished men like Qasim Khalil from Chapter two. While the panegyric literature dedicated to Qasim repeatedly invoked his blessed ancestors, the story of the Kuta Khail begins just a few generations prior to the author's present, assuming its identity at the moment of Shaikh Kuta's dislocation from Shoravak. As the story of the *pir*—the foundational story of the Kuta Khail—thus suggests, individual Afghans of accomplishment like Shaikh Kuta could be capable of creating new identities for their descendants, identities that in turn evoked great respect within the broader Afghan community. Shaikh Kuta, at least in this telling of his life, did not need saintly ancestors to confirm his spiritual power; his life and miracles sufficed to transform him into a remarkable figure and progenitor of a distinct Afghan *khail* that took his name. From this passage of the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, we see that Sufi *pirs* remained central figures in representations of Afghan identity and mobility in the eighteenth century. However, their legacies as *pirs* had assumed greater significance for their immediate kin community, for whom they provided the basis of new identities surrounding their purported miracles, travels, and the diverse communities who venerated them.

Naming and Language in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*: Describing the Mobile Community

As Hafiz describes early in the *Khulasat*, the Kuta Khail assumed its name from the life and legacy of his ancestor, Shaikh Kuta. Intriguingly, this history of the Afghans—as well as earlier works like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*—include many more references in which historical Afghans assumed a new name or underwent a transformation in name. In one of the oldest examples of these events, Hafiz recalls how the descendants of the Prophet Yaqub (Jacob), among whom the Afghans were included, assumed the name by which they were known: the "Bani Israel," or "Descendants of Israel." In an aside, he says that while "*bani*" translates fairly directly to "descendants of," the name "Israel" had a significant origin. "Israel" was one of Yaqub's Hebrew names, and it meant "servant of God" (*asr*, he explains, means "servant" in Hebrew, while *wa il* means "God"). Immediately

⁵⁵⁸ See Nile Green's hypothesis, the "tribalization of sainthood," described in more detail in Chapter Two.

⁵⁵⁹ See Chapter Four. According to Harawi, Shaikh Sabit Bahraich helped found the north Indian town of Bahraich, the site of Salar Masud Ghazi's tomb and pilgrimage site.

following this point, he adds, “and let it not be hidden that God called Talut (Saul) ‘*malik*.’ Because of that, to this day, they call the commander (*sardar*) of the Afghans ‘*malik*.’”⁵⁶⁰

Perhaps the most significant reference to a name change in the text, however, is that of the first Afghan Muslim—Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid. As described in Chapter four, Qais, an Afghan chief who lived in the Sulaiman Mountain range, famously traveled from his homeland to meet to the Prophet Muhammad. Hafiz reiterates this story in the *Khulasat*, recalling how the Afghan chief, together with the auspicious number of seventy Afghans, went to the Arabian peninsula and assured the Prophet of their belief in his message, and were subsequently “raised up with Islam.”⁵⁶¹ Because Qais spent the majority of his time in the “illuminated presence,” the Prophet also granted him the epithet ‘Abd al-Rashid, meaning “servant of the rightly guided.”⁵⁶² Qais also earned another name from the Prophet: “*Patan*.” Echoing the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Hafiz explains: “*patan* was the name of the foundational board underneath a ship, that (which) a ship is built upon.”⁵⁶³ The Prophet granted Qais this name along with the responsibility that it carried—that the chief and his descendants would be tasked with enforcing the faith of Islam in the world. In accordance with this commandment, Qais and his party returned to their home in the Sulaiman Mountains, where they then spread the light of Islam (*nur-i Islam*) to far flung regions of their homeland.

Early on in the *Khulasat*, Hafiz also identifies three different names for the Afghan *qaum* itself. Referring to this community as “the descendants of Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid,” he says “(they) are called ‘Afghan’ in Farsi. . . in Hindustani, they are called ‘Pathan,’ and in the Afghani language they are called ‘Pashtun.’”⁵⁶⁴ With, perhaps, the exception of “Pashtun”—a word with murky origins that Hafiz does not explain—it is noteworthy that two appellations for the Afghan community refer specifically to an ancestor. In the case of the Persian term, “Afghan,” the community assumes its identity from Afghana, the grandson of Malik Talut. Their name in Hindustani can be traced to the name “*patan*,” given to the first Afghan Muslim, Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid.

This method of describing the Afghan *qaum* as one with many names highlights both the real and imagined diversity of the Afghan experience, as well as the continued remaking of Afghan identity through the lives of the *qaum*’s illustrious ancestors. Indeed, at least according to Hafiz’s representation, there is no one “true” name for the Afghans. Although they constitute a community as the descendants of Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid, they ultimately assume different designations depending on their linguistic context. The world that the Afghans inhabit in the text is, in this sense, a decidedly multilingual one—Pashto does not necessarily assume a place of privilege, nor does Persian, the lingua franca of the Eastern Islamic world and the language that Hafiz chose to write his history. In referring to these multiple designations, Hafiz Rahmat Khan thus implies that Afghans of his time are moving through Persian, Hindustani, and Pashto-speaking spaces, each of which recognizes them as a distinct community. Moreover, the way in which each of their names refers to a specific ancestor offers a powerful reminder of the esteemed figures who shaped the profile of their *qaum*. As these appellations for “Afghan” also imply, it is the legacy these kings, prophets, and early Muslims—not a land or a language—around which Afghan identity cohered.

Kingship and Prophethood in *Khulasat al-Ansab*: The Two Jewels in a Ring

In his long *durée* history of the Afghan *qaum*, Hafiz also deals extensively with the phenomenon of kingship, variously referred to as “*sultanat*” or “*padishahi*,” and its bearing in the

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 62.

⁵⁶² Ibid, 64.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 66.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 48.

Afghan past. As was the case for earlier texts as well, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* considers the close connection between the work performed by kings and that entrusted to prophets—those individuals whose tremendous responsibility Hafiz described in the introduction to his account. In this case, the author considers how these stations had been intimately connected with the entire fabric of Afghan history. These positions also appear to have assumed new significance in the eighteenth-century context, defined by the fairly precipitous decline of the Mughals and the remarkable spread of Ahmad Shah Durrani’s empire. Through an examination of these aspects of the text, I will argue that Hafiz Rahmat Khan drew extensively from the deep, Qur’anic past to serve as a guide for the Afghans of the present, who he imagined as carrying on the legacy of their ancestral prophets and kings in the transformational context of eighteenth-century South Asia.

Hafiz devotes special attention to the interconnected, yet distinct work of prophets and kings in his description of Malik Talut’s selection as the *padishah* of the Bani Israel. Recalling how the Israelites had asked the Prophet Ishmuel (Samuel) for a king, he writes, “the prophet was the prominent one, but the *sultanat* was not given to him. He was the master of command and affairs (*sabib-i hukm wa aul l-amr*⁵⁶⁵), and they did not have need of a *padishah*. In truth, they were the *padishahs* themselves.”⁵⁶⁶ He then explains how an earlier prophet, Musa (Moses), was not versed in the affairs of war in spite of being a prophet.⁵⁶⁷ It was because they faced a particularly daunting foe that the Bani Israel needed a *padishah* who could lead them in a military engagement—the kind of task prophets had not historically performed.

Hafiz picks up the threads of this conversation again when describing Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid’s famous meeting with the Prophet Muhammad. Because Qais and his group of Afghans all converted to Islam during this encounter, he says “they were all original Muslims, and prophets and *padishahs* were from and among them.”⁵⁶⁸ He then quotes from the Qur’an, evoking the Prophet Musa: “then Moses told his people, ‘Recall God’s favors to you. He made Messengers and Kings out of your own people and gave you what He had not given others.’”⁵⁶⁹ Hafiz elaborates on this historical saying:

Because of this, prophets are appointed in order to convey the commands of the *shar’ia*.⁵⁷⁰ *Padishahs* are the enforcers of the etiquette of Islam and the ordering of the affairs of society... Like twins in wisdom are kingship and prophethood, like two jewels in a ring.⁵⁷¹

He also points out that the Bani Israel had the particular distinction of having many prophets and kings counted among them. The eleven sons of Yaqub, including Hazrat Yusuf (Joseph), were all prophets. Moreover, “Hazrat Harun (Aaron) and Hazrat Dawud (David) and Hazrat Sulaiman (Solomon) and Hazrat Masih (Jesus), etc.” were all appointed among the Bani Israel, so that “124,000 more or less prophets were sent (to the people), and of all of those, 70,000 prophets were of the Bani Israel.”⁵⁷²

Hafiz’s assertion that kingship and prophethood coexisted “like two jewels in a ring” calls to mind the writings of the Sunni theologian Akhund Darweza, to whose work I referred in Chapters two and three. Darweza, one of Hafiz’s cited sources for the *Khulasat al-Ansab*,⁵⁷³ used the same

⁵⁶⁵ اولوالامر

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 52-54.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 62.

⁵⁶⁹ Translation from Muhammad Sarwar, “Chapter (5) surat l-maidah (The Table Spread with Food),” *Quranic Arabic Corpus*, Kais Dukes, 2009-2017, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=20>.

⁵⁷⁰ Canonical law based on the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, 62-64.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, 66 and 92.

metaphor in his account of the Afghans who lived in the region surrounding his home in Nangarhar.⁵⁷⁴ In Darweza's case, this image served as a potent means of both highlighting and critiquing what he viewed as the Afghans' historical inability to accept the rule of a monarch. According to him, this rejection prompted the Prophet Muhammad's devastating prediction that the Afghans would be doomed to an afterlife in hell because of their refusal to submit to *padishahi*.⁵⁷⁵

In contrast to Darweza's work, Hafiz Rahmat Khan emphasizes the incredible responsibility deputed to prophets—one that neither the mountains nor the heavens could bear—and the sheer number of these individuals counted among the Afghans' forebears. In addition to those ancestors, *padishahs* like Malik Talut also graced their ancestral lineage, revealing that the “two jewels” had long ago appeared among the Afghans' progenitors. In a compelling side note, Hafiz emphasizes that this fact did not make Bani Israel equal in nobility (*sharafat*) to another *qaum*, the Arabs. This is because the Prophet Muhammad, an Arab, “was the superior of all creation,” so “the *qaum* of that honored one is the best of all *qaums*.”⁵⁷⁶ Clearly, though, Hafiz believed that the Afghans' heritage could put them in a close second to the Prophet's community. “Aside from the Arabs,” he continues, “God also granted the Bani Israel with nobility, as the *kalam-i majid* (the Qur'an) has narrated in many places...and they never abandoned the faith. From the beginning, generation after generation, the majority of them became Muslims. And great things were done by them.”⁵⁷⁷ They may not have been able to outshine Arabs in matters of the faith, yet the many prophets and kings deputed them—a blessing from God, as explained by Moses—distinguished them as a favored *qaum* who continually committed themselves to the faith.

Moving forward in time to the first Islamic millennium, Hafiz shows how the “Afghans”—now understood as the descendants of Qais 'Abd al-Rashid—continued to perform the work of Islam as their ancestors had done. Echoing earlier texts like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* and *Akbar al-Awliya*, he explains how Afghans first arrived in Hindustan with the armies of Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030) and Sultan Muiz al-din Ghuri (d. 1206), both of whom extended their reach from present-day Afghanistan to north India. He goes on to describe how the Muslims who steadily immigrated to Hindustan in this period—among them “Sayyids, Mughals, Afghans, and *shaikhs*”—performed the duty of “extend(ing) the illuminated faith and making it widespread.”⁵⁷⁸ The Afghan *wilayat* was also a space in which Afghans fought against the forces of infidelity. He credits the Afghans with the conversion of all the non-Muslims of “Dara Laghman and Dara Pich and Dara Kuhindi, as well as (those in) the surroundings of Kabul and Jalalabad, and...of Talashar (?) and Panjkora and Chamla and Buner and the mountains of Matur of Pakhali, etc. and the area around Peshawar and Langarkot.”⁵⁷⁹ Hafiz describes the difficult path often taken by the Afghan warrior of the region, who would pick up his belongings when necessary and travel many days from home to engage in battle. This behavior, he notes, was rewarded by the Prophet, who distinguished those who served as *ghazis* and ensured that martyrs for the faith would enjoy “everlasting fortune.”⁵⁸⁰

As Hafiz witnessed in his own time—and as he writes shortly after this description of Afghan warfare in the *wilayat*—an Afghan *padishah* also rose prominence in the very place that he called home. As he reminds the reader, the name that the Prophet bestowed upon Qais 'Abd al-Rashid had signified that his descendants would include “great friends of God (*awliya*) and generous wise men, and sultans of the stature of Alexander...and respected leaders and poets of sweet

⁵⁷⁴ Akhund Darweza, *Tazkirat al-Abrar wa al-Asbrar*, lithograph (Peshawar: Manzoor-e Aam Press, 1940), 84.

⁵⁷⁵ See Chapter Two.

⁵⁷⁶ Khan, *Khulasat*, 66-68.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

words.”⁵⁸¹ One of these individuals was his contemporary, the emperor Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1773), whom Hafiz introduces thus:

In the *qaum* of the Afghans, particularly in the *qaum* of Sarban, and particularly in the *qaum* of Abdal, the incomparable *padishah*, the lord of Hindustan and Iran and Turan, of the rank of Alexander, Sultan Ahmad Shah Padishah Ghazi, Pearl of Pearls...the entirety of the country (*mulke*) of Iran and Turan and Hindustan is in the grip of his sovereign power. And all of the outskirts (of those places) have also submitted to him.⁵⁸²

In the age of this sovereign, Hafiz adds, “the *kafirs* have been dominated,” and “the entirety of Hindustan from the Deccan to the Purab and Punjab are under his control. None of the other *padishahs* and *amirs* and *rajas* have the opportunity to oppose him.”⁵⁸³

Moreover, it was the danger that these competing rulers posed to Katehr, the location of Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s own political dominion, that motivated Ahmad Shah Durrani to come from his foothold in Kabul and Qandahar to Hindustan, where “he went...to help those among the Afghans who were people of faith and shame and honor.”⁵⁸⁴ This confrontation led to the dramatic battle of Panipat in 1761, when Ahmad Shah Durrani made an encampment around the Mughal capital of Shahjahanabad and defeated the opposing forces of the Marathas, the Deccan-based power that had since threatened the weakening Mughals. “Because God’s success was a friend of the Afghans,” Hafiz recalls, Ahmad Shah routed his enemies from their Deccan stronghold. In the aftermath of this battle, all of the non-Muslims of Hindustan—among whom he names Sikhs, Franks, Jats, and Marathas—“submitted to the faith of Islam, due to the Afghans of Islam.”⁵⁸⁵ The conclusion of this passage once again iterates the Afghans’ role in perpetuating Islam in their chosen home of Hindustan, as well as beyond its boundaries. Hafiz writes: “and the name of infidelity has been purged so that the name of ‘Patan’ will be fixed and abiding until the end of time. And the flourishing of the faith of Islam will manifest because of them.”⁵⁸⁶

Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s account of Afghan history—and in particular, the role of kings and prophets within it—possesses a circular quality similar to that present in Nimat Allah Harawi’s *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, described in Chapter four. As we have seen, Hafiz describes the *padishah* and prophet as the two intensely connected figures whose guidance ensured the movement and stability of Islam on Earth. When the powers that be threaten, at least in the author’s imagination, the ability of Muslims to thrive in the place where they live—for example, in the case of the Pharaoh in Musa’s time, or with the Maratha incursions that occurred in Hafiz’s own life—the work of these individuals allows the “light of Islam” to continue shining. What distinguishes Hafiz’s text, however, is the role of Afghans in bringing this peace and stability to fruition in the author’s own present. Indeed, in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*’s representation of humankind’s shared history, the great Afghan monarch (with the broader Afghan community sharing in his victories) had united the territories of Iran, Turan, and Hindustan under the banner of Islam. Afghan kingship, therefore, was a not a remote, future possibility to be realized by someone like Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631)—the view, I argued, that Nimat Allah Harawi articulated in this seventeenth-century *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*.⁵⁸⁷ It had

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, 86.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid, 88.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid, 90.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. This is again a poignant commentary on Afghan naming. The flourishing of Islam is likened to the sound of “patan,” the name given to Qais ‘Abd al-Rashid and his descendants by the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁸⁷ See Chapter Four.

been achieved in the eighteenth century by the “incomparable *padishah*” Ahmad Shah Durrani, who fulfilled Muhammad’s prediction for his ancestor Qais and whose kingship resonated in distant corners of the eastern Islamic world.

As noted earlier in this chapter, both Jos Gommans and Nile Green have described the *Khulasat al-Ansab* in terms of the “tribal” context that north Indian Afghans inhabited in Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s Rohilla polity. Caught in the pull of the cosmopolitan world of Hindustan—a world whose mores conflicted with Afghan tribal organization—Hafiz felt it incumbent to tell a history that would induce pride in the heart of his followers and encourage them to feel a sense of solidarity with one another, lest his leadership fail in the decentralized context of eighteenth-century Rohilkhand. To the contrary, I argue that Hafiz’s representation of Afghan origins, like that of his predecessors Nimat Allah Harawi and ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi, more powerfully demonstrates the enduring significance of mobility as the defining characteristic of Afghan history, and consequently, of Afghan destiny. If we call to mind the framing of the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, which begins with the creation of the light of the Prophet Muhammad, the Afghans’ role in this story of cosmic significance becomes clear. Due to the leadership of the Afghan *padishah*, as well as the all-important fact of Afghan movement to new pastures, that same light (*nur*) of Islam that first covered the world continued to extend to distant regions of the Earth. Although the time of the prophets had come and gone, the Afghans of the eighteenth century were able to achieve that same stability and security for the world’s Muslims as their ancestors had done, both in Hindustan and the *wilayat*.

While the *Khulasat al-Ansab* may well have served the purpose of magnifying the Afghans’ historical achievements, Hafiz’s text can be better understood as a reflection on the continued merits of Afghan movement in the eighteenth century—something that strongly applied to the author’s own life story. As Hafiz recalled, he himself was a migrant from the Afghan *wilayat* who joined a diverse community of residents in Katchr. He feared that his descendants would forget their roots in the homeland; nonetheless, he presents his family history as yet another important example of Afghan movement in the service of the faith—a move without which, he implies, even a *padishah* like Ahmad Shah Durrani may not have triumphed. The migration of the Kuta Khail, therefore, was necessary to the Afghans’ larger destiny as described in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*: that the post-Mughal world be filled with the illuminated faith “due to the Afghans of Islam.”⁵⁸⁸

Place and Home in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*: Towards an Afghan Diaspora?

The *Khulasat al-Ansab*’s insistence on the importance of Afghan migration places the text clearly within the established lineage of Afghan history-writing. It is distinguished, however, by the novel sense of displacement evinced by the author. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Hafiz claimed that the purpose of his work was to educate his fellow Afghans in north India, who, unlike those who lived in the *wilayat*, had lost all awareness of their genealogical roots. Clearly, the middle-aged Hafiz believed that something had been lost in his *khail*’s migration to Hindustan, and he considered it his responsibility to keep his fellow Afghans connected to the geographically dispersed members of their *qaum*.

In *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire*, Jos Gommans concluded that Hafiz’s concern for the fate of his *khail* stemmed from a sense of anxiety about north Indian Afghans marrying outside of their tribe. Presumably, life in Hindustan would make such decisions more difficult than in the *wilayat*—in an unfamiliar context, it would be much harder to judge whether members of a certain community would make worthy partners for marriage. Hafiz explicitly acknowledges this problem. In his introduction to the *Khulasat*, he emphasizes the importance of following the Prophetic

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

example by only marrying one's family members into groups of the proper moral pedigree.⁵⁸⁹ The Afghans, therefore, must know how they belong in the larger *qaum*, as their narrower, tribal or group identities largely determine who might be a suitable match for whom. In describing each *qaum* and *kbail*, however, Hafiz Rahmat Khan devotes significantly less attention to their defining moral characteristics, and much more to the regions that these groups historically inhabited—in other words, their place of origin in the Afghan *wilayat*.

Indeed, throughout the *Kbulasat*, Hafiz Rahmat Khan carefully traces each Afghan *qaum* and *kbail* to Sarban, Baitan, and Ghurghusht: the three sons of Qais 'Abd al-Rashid.⁵⁹⁰ He often acknowledges that the descendants of these individuals are simply too many to count; therefore, he does not list the name and identity of every *kbail*, especially those of which he claims to have little knowledge. However, for the groups of which he does claim to possess some awareness—a great number of *qaums* and *kbails* in each branch of Qais 'Abd al-Rashid's descendants—Hafiz demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the geography of the Afghan *wilayat* as well as the historical movement of different groups throughout this space. For example, in his description of Zamand—the progenitor of the Zamand or Jamand *qaum* of Afghans—he names five sons: Muhammad, Khweshgi, Tokhi, Niko, and Katani. The descendants of Muhammad, he writes live in “Hashtnagar along the Jindi River between Doaba and Langarkot.”⁵⁹¹ Khweshgi's progeny live “in the country (*mulk*) of Qalat and Tarang, some in Ghurband, and some in different parts of Hindustan.”⁵⁹² As for Tokhi's descendants, he writes, they live “between the *mulk* (country) of Kurma and Khost,” Niko's “near the upper part of Bangash,” while the Katani “do not have one fixed residence...they have a few homes in different places.”⁵⁹³ For nearly all of his accounts of Afghan *qaums*, Hafiz provides this same level of geographical detail, highlighting this aspect of tribal identity above and beyond essentially all other factors.

This focus on the geography of the Afghan *wilayat*, as well as the movement of different *qaums* within it, distinguishes Hafiz from his seventeenth-century predecessors. As we saw in previous chapters, authors like Nimat Allah Harawi and 'Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi spoke more generally of an Afghan homeland called “Roh,” the site of the Sulaiman Mountains and a few other recognizable geographical markers.⁵⁹⁴ No earlier author exhibited the same command of—or perhaps, interest in—describing precisely where different groups within the Afghan *qaum* lived, and how they had relocated to different regions in the *wilayat*. One possible reason for this difference is that Hafiz—unlike nearly all of the Afghan authors considered thus far—was born and raised in the *wilayat*, and only migrated to Hindustan during his adulthood. Perhaps for this reason, Hafiz possessed a far deeper knowledge of the Afghan heartlands and had a particular interest in describing the region to his north India-born descendants.

This distinction, however, also appears to demonstrate something new in the scheme of Afghan history: that by the late eighteenth century, a true “diaspora consciousness” had begun to emerge among north Indian Afghans. In the previous chapter, I argued quite the opposite for earlier generations of Afghans. A key aspect of my reasoning was the fact that the very first “Afghan” histories—themselves indicative of an emerging communal consciousness—were for the most part not composed in the *wilayat*, but in the heart of the Indian subcontinent. Because the process of

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, 28-30.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, 122-124.

⁵⁹⁴ For example, both Nimat Allah Harawi and 'Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi describe Roh as extending from Kabul and Qandahar in the west to Hasan Abdal in the east, and from Bajaur in the north to Sibi and Bhakkar in the south. See Chapters Four and Five.

Afghan becoming first crystallized in Hindustan, it did not make sense to consider the Afghans of north India a “diaspora” whose identity cohered around a singular “homeland” that they had left behind them. For individuals like ‘Abd Allah Khan Khweshgi and the ill-fated Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631), Hindustan *was* their home and the primary location with they identified: a fact, I argued, that did not make them any less “Afghan” than their *wilayat*-based cousins.

By contrast, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s ideas about “Afghanness,” home, and belonging reflect a changing understanding of what it meant to be an Afghan in the world. As I have argued thus far, Hafiz ultimately presented migration as the original “Afghan” imperative. His work, therefore, does not betray the sense that north Indian Afghans should return to their homeland, or that such an option would be more morally or ethically desirable. Nonetheless, it is clear that Hafiz looked the *wilayat*—and not any locality in Hindustan—as the font of all things “Afghan.” After all, the Afghans who lived in this region did not need histories to help them understand their identities. Only the Afghans who ventured onwards had lost that essential knowledge, and needed guides like the *Khulasat al-Ansab* to bridge the gaps that geographical distance had created.

It is unclear why diaspora consciousness might have emerged among India-based Afghans in the mid- to late-eighteenth century. My inclination, however, is to see the fall of the Mughals as the preeminent political and cultural power in Hindustan—accompanied with Ahmad Shah Durrani’s striking rise to power in the Afghan *wilayat*—as key to changing understandings of Afghan relationships with the subcontinent. If we return to the high Mughal period examined in Chapter four, it is noteworthy that the aspiring Afghan monarch Khan Jahan Lodi looked not to the Afghan *wilayat*, but to the Deccan as an appropriate location to establish himself. As his logic reveals, an “Afghan” kingdom did not need to take root in the place where Afghans dominated, but could find fertile ground in the very heart of the Indian subcontinent. Khan Jahan Lodi’s efforts, of course, ultimately proved unsuccessful, and the world did not witness the emergence of an Afghan-led empire until Ahmad Shah Durrani, who, as fate would have it, rose to power in the Afghan *wilayat*. As a result of Ahmad Shah’s success—and not, I argue, because of some inherited Afghan association with the space—the locus of Afghan identity began to shift to the heartlands: the same place where Hafiz Rahmat Khan came into the world and with which he strongly identified following his migration to Katehr.

Indeed, during his reign from Kabul and Qandahar, Ahmad Shah Durrani transformed the region with all the “scaffoldings of sovereignty” necessary to bolster his rule. This included the construction of “new mosques, caravanserais, gardens, and forts,”⁵⁹⁵ those tangible reminders of his kingly power. Moreover, the emperor’s reign marked a novel push to institutionalize Pashto, reflected in the drafting of the first Pashto grammatical texts designed for the state’s functionaries.⁵⁹⁶ All of these developments, I believe, lay the groundwork for an enduring sense of Afghan identification with the *wilayat*: a fact reflected in Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s intricately detailed notes on the physical geography of this space. Nonetheless, it is critical to remember that the *Khulasat al-Ansab*—though novel in its insistence of the centrality of the Afghan *wilayat*—reverberates with the same discourses of mobility that had long characterized Afghan history-writing. In the logic of the text, the importance of north Indian Afghans maintaining a connection to the homeland by no means contradicted the destiny assigned to them: that they continue moving to serve as some of the most powerful agents of the faith of Islam. At least for this late eighteenth century moment, an emerging diaspora consciousness did not preclude Afghan integration in places such as post-Mughal

⁵⁹⁵ Neelam Khoja, “Competing Sovereignties in Eighteenth Century South Asia: Afghan Claims to Kingship,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 6 (2020): 559.

⁵⁹⁶ Green, *Making Space*, 112.

India; the locality that, in spite of centuries of Afghan settlement in the region, would become largely extracted from Afghan identity in the age of the nation-state.

Towards the Islamic, Towards Pashto: Shifting Orientations of Afghan identity

Like Nimat Allah had done in the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, Hafiz Rahmat Khan situates his history of the Afghan *qaum* within the history of the created universe. Central to his story in particular is the light, or *nur*, of Islam, which first shone on the Earth after being embodied in the Prophet Muhammad—the figure whom Hafiz repeatedly evokes in his work. Comparing the *Khulasat al-Ansab* to its predecessors, Nile Green has noted the particular “scripturalist tendencies”⁵⁹⁷ of the text—another means, perhaps, of explaining Hafiz’s marked use of an Islamic idiom. I have argued throughout this dissertation that such a means of describing Afghan history was not new; early modern Afghan historians often found Islamic discourse fruitful ground for understanding their past and charting a roadmap for the future. Nonetheless, in a noticeable distinction from the earlier generation of authors, Hafiz Rahmat Khan draws much more consistently from sources like the Qur’an and hadith, and appears to gather less inspiration from the classical literary canon in Persian—works like the *Gulistan* of Sa’di, which, I have argued, inspired Afghan or Afghan-allied writers like Shaikh Rizq Allah Mushtaqi in the sixteenth century and Muhammad Kabir in the seventeenth century.

While Hafiz Rahmat Khan certainly refers to famed Persian litterateurs like Hafiz, Sa’di, and Maulana Rumi in the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, if there is any truly noteworthy source of inspiration in his text, it is the Prophet Muhammad. As Hafiz suggests in his work, it is the example of this “most perfect” of individuals that his fellow Afghans would do well to emulate. For the most part, his telling of Afghan history suggests, they certainly did so; it is difficult not to draw parallels between the creation of the Prophet’s *nur* at the beginning of time and the light the Afghans repeatedly restored to Hindustan and the borderlands of the *wilayat*. However, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s engagement with the Islamic is not to imply that Afghans had exited the realm of the “Persianate,” or that “Islamic” and “Persianate” are mutually exclusive categories. After all, Hafiz chose to write his history in Persian, and he even composes Persian couplets intended to illuminate the significance of certain points in his narrative. Nonetheless, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* stands quite clearly apart from the Afghan histories studied thus far in this dissertation for its particular interest in the historical example of the Prophet and the foundational texts of Islam, both of which clearly serve as Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s primary means of interpreting the historical significance of the Afghan *qaum* in the world.

The greater focus on Islamic discourse in the *Khulasat al-Ansab* echoes, to some extent, Neelam Khoja’s observations about the Afghan monarch Ahmad Shah Durrani’s imperial identity, fashioned in court chronicles like the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*. As Khoja has argued, the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, completed a mere two years after the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, deemphasizes what she identifies as the typical “Persianate and Islamic conventions” in early modern Persian-language historiography. For example, she notes, unlike the panegyric texts that had attested to the Mughals’ sovereign power, the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* significantly downplayed such factors as Ahmad Shah’s genealogy, instead focusing on the emperor’s *ilham*, or the divine inspiration granted to him by God. According to her analysis, this was an interesting development, as *ilham* was typically assigned to “prophets and saints,” not to worldly monarchs like himself.⁵⁹⁸ Khoja does not directly ascribe this idea of *ilham* to “Islamic” discourse; however, such a suggestion strikes me as squarely within the realm of this

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Khoja, “Competing Sovereignities,” 556.

discursive world. If nothing other than divine inspiration qualified Ahmad Shah for sovereignty, how could his right to rule *not* be “Islamic?”

Unlike the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* was, in fact, deeply concerned with genealogy—a convention broadly identified as central to the Persianate tradition. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to interpret Ahmad Shah Durrani’s *ilham*, as well as Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s marked interest in the Qur’an and historical example of the Prophet, as part of a broader, changing trend in Afghan representations of their identity—one that was becoming increasingly understood through the lens of the “Islamic.” As I believe Khoja would also argue, however, these developments did not signal an Afghan abandonment of the cosmopolitan world of the “Persianate.” Khoja reflects on this, although tangentially, in her conclusion:

Based on this, one is led to question the value of imposing ethnic identities on rival contenders for power. In other words, how “Afghan” is this text and what does this say about how al-Husaini (the author of the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*) wanted his immediate and future audiences to imagine Ahmad Shah and his empire?⁵⁹⁹

As Khoja’s question suggests, al-Husaini’s use of *ilham* reflects the more “universal” terms in which Ahmad Shah Durrani’s sovereignty was imagined. The *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* does not describe any “Afghan” or other narrow “ethnic” criteria for sovereignty; his divinely ordained power speaks for itself to an audience not marked by such divisions. For Hafiz’s *Khulasat al-Ansab*, I would make a similar claim. Unlike the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*, this text frames the Afghans as a “group” possessing particular characteristics. However, what unites them are not merely genealogical relationships, but their shared mission to carry the *nur* of Islam to distant regions of the world. In this sense, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s work reflects less an instance on Afghan “ethnic” singularity and a far greater interest in the possibilities created by the *qaum*’s movement in the service of Islam. The *Khulasat al-Ansab*, at first glance, might appear less “Persianate” than earlier Afghan histories. Nonetheless, it is the Islamic paradigm that enables Hafiz Rahmat Khan to write a past, present, and future of his community just as his predecessors had done: one that was unencumbered by the restrictions of location, “blood” ties, or ethnic identity.

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In addition to the Islamic discourse, Hafiz’s work also demonstrates a newfound attention to the language of Pashto, which he refers to as “Afghani.” The *Khulasat al-Ansab* is abundant in Pashto sentences and phrases, usually translations of Persian couplets that Hafiz chose to include in his history.⁶⁰⁰ Hafiz was not alone in his interest in the language; the Afghans’ growing attention to Pashto in the eighteenth century has been recognized by many scholars and included the contributions of individuals both in the *wilayat* as well as in Hindustan. For example, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s own son, Ilahyar Khan, had the honor of composing “one of the foundational works of Pashto linguistics”: the *Aja’ib al-Lughat*, or “Wonders of Words,” completed in 1813.⁶⁰¹ Writing in four different languages, Ilahyar Khan declared that the purpose of his Pashto dictionary was so that his fellow Afghans in Hindustan would “know their own language (*zaban-i khud*).” Born and raised in India, Ilahyar Khan did not grow up speaking Pashto but had learned it from the older generation of migrants from the *wilayat*. While Hafiz Rahmat Khan had argued for genealogy (*ansab*) was essential for understanding of one’s identity, Ilahyar Khan asserted that *language* was of the utmost importance for his fellow Afghans. It provided, in his words, “a guide to one’s rootedness and

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 580.

⁶⁰⁰ There are also a few noteworthy selections of Pashto poetry from Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689), one of the foundational and most renowned Pashto poets.

⁶⁰¹ Green, *Making Space*, 113.

nobility (*asalat wa najabat*),”⁶⁰² a point that underlined the growing association between belonging to the Afghan *qaum* and speaking a specific tongue.

In extant scholarly work on rise of Pashto, the Afghans’ new identification with the language in the eighteenth century has been contrasted with their long historical use of Persian, the cosmopolitan language typically understood as a vehicle for intercultural connection from the Ottoman lands to Bengal.⁶⁰³ To be sure, the Afghans’ marked participation in Persian-language writing—a topic explored in great detail in this dissertation—had included them within a rich, shared space that engaged people from all walks of life in early modern South Asia. Pashto, however, has not been associated with this same inclusivity. As a primarily “Afghan” language, the rise of Pashto instead signaled an inward-looking turn among Afghans who sought to distinguish themselves from their many political competitors in the post-Mughal context. As Nile Green has described this transformation: “enveloped by the clamor of languages around them” in eighteenth-century Hindustan, Afghans ultimately found themselves pulled between the “cosmopolitan status of Persian” and the language of Pashto—the latter ultimately winning out while the “old cosmopolitan realm of Persian...survive(d) ironically in the old Mughal outpost of Kabul.”⁶⁰⁴

Yet returning to the *Khulasat al-Ansab*, this chapter has argued that Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s use of Pashto—though identified as closely related to Afghan identity—demonstrated the expansive possibilities within the discursive realm of the language, challenging the notion that Pashto somehow contrasted with the “cosmopolitan” language of Persian. Indeed, as we saw previously, Hafiz’s references to “Afghani” do not cast the language as some primordially understood tongue to which a narrowly defined group of Afghans maintained sole access. In the case of Shaikh Kuta, for example, it was Pashto that enabled long-term social connections between the mobile *shaiikh* and the many different locales to which he migrated. Similarly, as Hafiz Rahmat Khan outlined the exceptional role of the Afghans in Islamic history, his use of Pashto couplets to emphasize his points suggests that Pashto, like Persian or Arabic, could adequately communicate the mysterious work of the divine in the world. Coming back to Ilahyar Khan’s dictionary, his choice of title—“Wonders of Words”—similarly demonstrates his understanding of the fantastic and even supernatural worlds embedded within language, including Pashto.

Furthermore, the multilingual nature of both texts highlights the imagined inclusive capacity of Pashto in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Ilahyar Khan’s insistence that north Indian Afghans could learn their “lost” language reveals the rather simple point that Pashto was something that could be acquired. By including three other languages in his *Aja’ib al-Lughat*—Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani—Ilahyar Khan also opened the door for a linguistically diverse community to gain access to the language associated with his *qaum*. Writing in 1813, Ilahyar Khan inhabited a decidedly different Hindustan than his father, who wrote his *Khulasat al-Ansab* prior to the death of Ahmad Shah Durrani and the British victories in the Anglo-Maratha wars—the latter which marked the entrenchment of British colonial power in much of South Asia. Nonetheless, the *Aja’ib al-Lughat* is an important work in that it offers meaningful insights on the enduring fluidity and transregional nature of Afghan identity, even as late as the early nineteenth century. Situating Afghans and their language in a multilingual world, Ilahyar Khan, like his father Hafiz Rahmat Khan, revealed that his

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Referring to the “Balkans to Bengal complex” coined by Shahab Ahmad in *What Is Islam?* While Ahmad described this space as united by a shared “Islamic” lexicon, Mana Kia makes the apt point that this geographical region “depends on the transregional reach of the Persian language.” See Shahab Ahmad, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 14.

⁶⁰⁴ Green, *Making Space*, 114.

qaum still had a future in Hindustan, not merely in the Afghan “homeland” that would fall within the boundaries of the modern nation-state of Afghanistan.

Conclusion: Afghans and the Question of the “Modern”

In the ways that it differs from its predecessors, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s *Khulasat al-Ansab* possesses many characteristics that one might identify as “modern.” For example, the author’s careful and highly detailed rendering of Afghan history—one that includes the precise geographical details of each *khail*’s historical dominion—marks a noteworthy departure from earlier narratives; a feature, I argued, that reflected a growing link between Afghan identity and the heartland territory. This focus on the homeland in the *Khulasat* was also part and parcel of a posited connection between land, or the Afghan *wilayat*, language, or Pashto; and people, the Afghan *qaum*—the three associations long understood to form the underpinnings of national identity.⁶⁰⁵ Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s particular interest in the history of his own immediate ancestors also hints at the emergence of a more “individualized” understanding of the self; the notion that one’s *khail* and biological family are imagined to hold the keys to interpreting the individual’s past, present, and future, and that obtaining such knowledge might be important or desirable.⁶⁰⁶

Although built on the backs of earlier histories like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, the *Khulasat al-Ansab* thus points to a changing, and one might argue, strikingly “modern” communal consciousness among the Afghans of the late eighteenth century. Indeed, both Hafiz Rahmat Khan and his son Ilahyar Khan frame Afghan identity in ways that comfortably situate them within their broader global context—for example, in how they reflect on the individual, the importance of a “homeland,” and the idea that language could connect one to something like a primordial, shared community. As Hafiz composed the *Khulasat* prior to the entrenching of British power, however, it is apparent that these developments were not a product of British rule or the imposition of colonial forms of knowledge.⁶⁰⁷ Instead, it appears to reflect broader trends in Hafiz’s context of eighteenth-century Hindustan, where regional identities linking language, land, and people had begun to emerge in the wake of the Mughal Empire with the rise of regional successor states.

Yet for all of these “modern” features of Afghan identity, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s vision of the Afghan *qaum*’s past lacks the inflexibility that characterizes most modern understandings of self and community. This is reflected perhaps most plainly in his description of the multiple legitimate appellations for his people: “Afghan,” “Pathan,” and “Pashtun.” Moreover, Hafiz Rahmat Khan’s focus on the *qaum* maintaining their movement belies the notion that his community’s identity had become inextricably linked to the territory comprising modern-day Afghanistan and by extension severed from India, the place where Afghans had lived and written about themselves for centuries. In this late eighteenth-century moment, Afghan identity contained more shared histories, personal narratives, and defining characteristics than ever before. For the time being, however, their future had yet to be written. As Hafiz Rahmat Khan proposed, the *qaum*’s distinctive character would only continue to grow and evolve as Afghans moved wherever the call of the faith might lead them.

⁶⁰⁵ From the foundational argument made by Benedict Anderson. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For the context studied in this dissertation, Mana Kia has also described the modern link between land, language, and people in South and Central Asia in *Persianate Selves*.

⁶⁰⁶ In *Making Space*, Nile Green describes an eighteenth-century manuscript of the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani* similarly. According to him, this version included a “tract on genealogy” (*kaayfiyat-e shajara*) that “included instructions on how to locate the particular clan in the text from which a reader understood himself to descend but lacked knowledge of its wider genealogical implications, so transforming the *Tarikh-e Khan Jahani* into a tool of individual self-knowledge.” Green, *Making Space*, 108.

⁶⁰⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Epilogue

Shortly after Hafiz Rahmat Khan completed his genealogical history, the Rohillas of Katehr faced a crushing defeat supported by an emerging and formidable power in South Asia, the British East India Company. Led by Shuja al-Dawla, the Mughal-endorsed *nawab*, or “deputy” of the region of Awadh, a coalition of troops comprised of British and Indian soldiers descended on the Rohilla strongholds in Katehr, defeating the middle-aged Hafiz and claiming his life on the battlefield in 1774. Only a year prior, the emperor Ahmad Shah Durrani passed away from an injury near the city of Qandahar. In the wake of his death, the “incomparable *padishah*” left behind “a sprawling, if loosely held, empire,” one that remained “unwieldy and difficult to govern” for many of the emperor’s successors. Although the Afghan polity survived for many decades, those who followed Ahmad Shah Durrani quickly lost many of the territories that the founding emperor had secured, embarking on a decades-long tug of war with emerging contenders for authority in the region such as the Russians and the British.⁶⁰⁸

By the early nineteenth century, the “Indo-Afghan empire” that once connected the Afghan heartlands to the Indian subcontinent had shrunk to a shadow of its former self. Within India itself, the increasingly powerful British authorities, keen to understand the region and its people for the purposes of governance, engaged in increasingly complex efforts to define and categorize the subjects of the empire on the basis of such factors as language, religion, and territory. Afghans—the highly mobile community with roots across South Asia—defied easy categorization in this context. Nonetheless, the British preoccupation with affairs in the Durrani lands—part of a lengthy, often fraught engagement that led to a violent British defeat in 1842⁶⁰⁹—among other factors, resulted in a proliferation of literature relating Afghans to this geographical territory. Included among these works was Mountstuart Elphinstone’s “An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul,” a generously detailed and popular text from the early part of the century that accounted for the many Afghan tribes and communities who inhabited the region.

Drawing upon texts like Elphinstone’s, European historians and geographers of the nineteenth century increasingly referred to the core territories of the Durrani Empire as “Afghanistan.” Some of the groundwork laid during Ahmad Shah’s reign—the increased use of Pashto in the political administration, and the building of the “scaffoldings of sovereignty” that stamped his imperial identity on the landscape—were also picked up by the architects of the Afghan nation-state, who imagined the boundaries of this political entity as largely overlapping with the dominion once claimed by the Durrani emperor. By the turn of the twentieth century, associations between Afghan identity and the burgeoning nation-state of Afghanistan became more noticeably crystallized, while Afghans in the Indian subcontinent became one among many “ethnic” groups whose imagined roots lay beyond the territory that they called home.

Nonetheless, the Afghans who lived through this transformative period continued to fulfill the vision laid out in texts like the *Afsana-yi Shaban*, *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, and *Akbar al-Awliya*. As Robert Crews has demonstrated, the emergence of the Afghan nation-state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, far from an isolated development, was “part of a global process.”⁶¹⁰ Afghans living in this space cast their net widely for inspiration as they imagined what the Afghan nation-state could be, while Afghans originating from this territory were perhaps more mobile than ever before. As in previous centuries, Afghans, too, continued to migrate from Afghanistan to what would become the Republic of India, establishing bonds with communities there prior to political

⁶⁰⁸ Robert Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 56.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

independence and remaining beyond 1947. The Afghan mobility described in seventeenth century texts like the *Tarikh-i Khan Jahani*, therefore, carried on into the modern era, with individuals claiming Afghan identity now living in over seventy countries and with Afghans making up one of the largest refugee populations in the world.⁶¹¹

With the advent of the modern period, Afghan ways of relating to their identity, territory, and community changed irrevocably, as expressions of Afghan identity no longer refer to the Indian subcontinent as significant to the story of Afghan origins. Nonetheless, the precedent set by the authors of the Afghan past, themselves a scattered and dispersed community with a deep interest unveiling in the ties that bound them, survived in its essence. As Crews has noted, “Afghans of various backgrounds... (have) expressed a deeply held conviction that what lay ahead for Afghanistan would have an immense impact on the world. This notion has persisted as one of the central threads of Afghan nationalist ideology.”⁶¹² True to this account, Afghans of the modern world—though far removed from the context in which Khan Jahan Lodi once aspired to restore Afghan kingship—continue to imagine themselves in relation to a wider world; one waiting to be shaped by the contributions of their community.

⁶¹¹ Mir Hekmatullah Sadat, “Hyphenating *Afghaniyat* (Afghan-ness) in the Afghan Diaspora,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2008): 329-342.

⁶¹² Crews, *Afghan Modern*, 311.

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