


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pashtun homelands in an Indo-Afghan hagiographical collection

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Abstract

The article explores the ethnocultural aspects and ideological implications of a hagiographical collection from the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī* (1613), a book on the general history of the Pashtuns compiled in the Indo-Afghan diaspora. This article primarily focuses on the stories that either presumably originate from or directly relate in content to Pashtun tribal areas to the west of the Indus. Being foremost a supplement to the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*'s genealogical section, the hagiographical anthology was included in this book to highlight and illustrate the idea of the Pashtuns' continuous adherence to Islam throughout many centuries. However, its narratives suggest that Islamic traditions in the Pashtuns' collective memory can be traced back as far as the turn of the thirteenth century. While the genealogies maintained the principle of patrilineal descent as the basic attribute of Pashtun identity, the hagiographies affirmed the profession of Islamic faith as another integral component of this identity and also brought to light its linguistic criterion. One of the article's sections offers a survey of the cases where the Pashto language as well as Pashto lexemes and phrases are mentioned in the Persian text of the hagiographies. The article also attempts to locate the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*'s hagiographical collection among similar works in Indo-Persian literature; it also considers such still-understudied issues as the emergence of spiritual lineages in Pashtun tribes and the entwining of folklore and conventional Islamic elements in the stories about Pashtun religious leaders.

Keywords: Pashto hagiographies; Pashtun identity; tribal spiritual lineages; Indo-Afghan diaspora; *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*

Introduction

The first and very consequential work that made an essential contribution to the institutionalization of Pashtun identity in the early modern period—the Indo-Afghan historiographical compilation *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī*—still needs a closer reading and more accurate interpretation to clarify which particular criteria of this identity it intended to promote and how its varied and multilayered content

as well as ideology related to Pashtun tribal areas proper.¹ This article examines the hagiographical material included in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* with the aim of providing concrete textual evidence of the then-ongoing process of constructing the confessional component of Pashtun identity in its interconnection with genealogical and linguistic criteria.² With a particular focus on the stories originating from or thematically pertaining to Pashtun homelands in the southeast Hindu Kush, the article attempts, on the one hand, to demonstrate how the contrived concept of Pashtuns' early conversion to Islam was sustained and popularized over several centuries through a mixture of folktales, hagiographical narratives, and historical facts. On the other, it offers a discussion of a number of specific issues addressed in the heterogeneous stories of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*'s hagiographical anthology that are important for further enquiry into the understudied history of the Islamization of Pashtuns.

The article begins with a consideration of the place and functional role of the hagiographical collection within the large corpus of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*. The second section contains an analysis of its position among the works of a similar genre in contemporaneous Indo-Persian literature, bringing out some parallels and emphasizing its specificity as a specimen of ethnically oriented storytelling. In the other four parts of the article, the texts of selected stories are scrutinized to bring out how and for what purposes the image and socio-cultural traditions of Pashtun homelands, perceived in a broader sense than a mere territory, were treated in the hagiographical narratives created in Indo-Afghan milieus. These parts deal with such topics as the incorporation of genealogical legends into hagiographical stories implicitly buttressing the political ideology of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* (in the third section), the formation of spiritual lineages in Pashtun tribes (in the fourth section), and the entwining of folktales and popular Islamic beliefs in the stories which are set in the tribal areas (in the fifth section). The last section traces sporadic mentions of the Pashto language in the hagiographies, thus touching upon the rarely discussed issue of the use of Pashto within the Indo-Afghan diaspora before the rise of Pashto written poetry in Mughal India in the mid-seventeenth century.

¹On the significance of this authoritative source of documented genealogies for Pashtun rulers of Rohilkhand who sought to preserve their ethnic identity and reclaim their Pashtun tribal legacies in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire c. 1710–1780* (Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 160–71; see also Jos J. L. Gommans, 'Afghāns in India', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam 3*, (eds) K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and E. Rowson, 2007, available at https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/afghans-in-india-COM_0013, [accessed 22 September 2022]. Robert Nichols, *Settling the Frontier. Land, Law, and Society in the Peshawar Valley, 1500–1900* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 25–47, and Robert Nichols, 'Reclaiming the Past: The *Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani* and Pashtun Historiography', in *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, (ed.) N. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 211–34. The basic attributes of Pashtun identity are described in Fredrik Barth, 'Pathan Identity and its Maintenance', in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, (ed.) F. Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), pp. 117–34.

²For a comprehensive study of the social realities underlying the stories from Ni'matallāh's hagiographical collection, see Nile Green, 'Blessed Men and Tribal Politics: Notes on Political Culture in the Indo-Afghan World', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 3 (2006), pp. 344–60; and Nile Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2008), pp. 187–97.

A hagiographical section in Ni‘matallāh Harawī’s book on the history of the Pashtuns

In early 1613 (10.12.1021 AH), in the Indian town of Burhānpūr, a modest Mughal court secretary Ni‘matallāh Harawī (d. after 1615) finished working on an ambitious book on the general history of the Afghans (Pashtuns). The book was formally dedicated to Khānjahān Lodī (d. 1631), the Mughal general of Pashtun descent and Ni‘matallāh’s employer at the time. Its double title *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī* (‘The Khānjahān’s History and the Afghan Treasury’) was perhaps not just a typical rhetorical embellishment, but an indication that Ni‘matallāh’s work combined two series of narratives. A few decades later, the book’s abridged version began to circulate widely under the title *Makhzan-i Afghānī*. Lacking some sections of the larger version, such as the laudatory biographies of Khānjahān and Emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627), which corresponded well to the first part of the book’s official title, the *Makhzan-i Afghānī* received greater acclaim among an educated Pashtun readership both in India and in Pashtun tribal areas to the west of the Indus.³ In 1720–1721, the *Makhzan-i Afghānī* was rendered into Pashto in the town of Lakki (present-day Lakki Marwat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan) by the ruler of the Khatak tribe Afzal Khān (1665/1666–circa 1740/1741) who expected that this important book would be more accessible to his countrymen in their native language.⁴

As may be inferred from Ni‘matallāh’s introductory comments, initially the book was conceived as an original essay on the almost unknown history of the Pashtuns before the reign of the Lodī (r. 1451–1526) and the Sūrī (r. 1540–1555) dynasties in the Delhi Sultanate. Its preliminary draft (circa 1610), which became the framework for the subsequent voluminous compilation, was a mixture of mytho-histories, folk stories, and tribal genealogies. The author’s remarks in the introduction and the afterword to the book’s official version also tell that it was written on the initiative and with the direct assistance of Haybat Khān Kākar, a nobleman from the Indo-Afghan diaspora.⁵ In the preface to the *Makhzan-i Afghānī*, it is stated that Haybat Khān provided Ni‘matallāh with unique material on Pashtun genealogical traditions.⁶ The genealogies, collected and arranged by Haybat Khān, seem to have reflected historical realities from around

³The critical edition of the book’s extended version is Ni‘matallāh Ibn Ḥabībullah al-Harawī, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī*, Vols 1–2, (ed.) S. M. Imāmuddin (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960–62). The English translation of the *Makhzan-i Afghānī* is by Bernhard Dorn, *History of the Afghans: Translated from the Persian of Neamat Ullah*, parts 1–2 (London: The Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1836). Valuable notes on the interconnection between the book’s two versions and a selected English translation from the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* are found in Henry M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India, as Told by its Own Historians. The Muhammadan Period*, Vol. V (London: Trübner and Co., 1873), pp. 67–115. The *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*’s place in Indo-Persian historiography is briefly evaluated in Stephen F. Dale, ‘Indo-Persian Historiography’, in *Persian Historiography*, (ed.) Ch. Melville, Vol. X of *A History of Persian Literature*, (general ed.) E. Yarshater (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 578–79.

⁴Afzal Khān Khatak, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣa‘*, (ed.) D. M. Kāmil Momand (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1974), pp. 14–15.

⁵Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 5–6, 828, 831.

⁶Dorn, *History of the Afghans*, part 1, p. 3.

the mid-twelfth century when the Ghūrīds began to overpower the Ghaznawīds in the southeast Hindu Kush.⁷

Nī‘matallāh’s brief explanation of the reasons for composing the book suggests that its main goal was to fill lacunae in the early history of the Pashtuns and prove their ancient origins which allegedly went back to the pre-Islamic patriarchs Ya‘qūb (bibl. Jacob) and Ṭālūt (bibl. Saul).⁸ Of course, the scholarly tasks of this ‘research project’ were paired with the poorly concealed political objective to legitimize the claims of the Indo-Afghan elite to supremacy in India. The original enquiry into the remote past of the Pashtun people was extended by longer narratives recounting the well-studied histories of the Lodīs and the Sūrīs. Formally dedicating such a pretentious and rather ambiguous essay to Khānjahān Lodī was aimed foremost at obtaining the endorsement of a high-ranking Mughal officer in order to secure its public release.

At the final stage of preparing the book’s official version, its main concept was also revised to highlight the idea of the primordial and continuous adherence of Pashtuns to Islam. This idea was formulated in a passage ineptly inserted into the previously written introduction. The assertion that Afghans were permanently attached to ‘the laws of Islam’ (*sharā‘i-i islām*) through the assiduous efforts of their spiritual masters (*ṣāhib-i walāyat wa arbāb-i hidāyat*) immediately follows the statement that they had been living in their mountains and wastelands since the times of Mūsā (bibl. Moses) and Bakhtnaṣr (bibl. Nebuchadnezzar). After a note stating that accounts of these men of religion are included in the book’s closing part (*khātima*), the author continues to speak of biblical times.⁹ Thus, by adding this note to the already written text, Nī‘matallāh announced the inclusion of a large hagiographical section on the Afghan sheikhs (*mashā‘ikh-i tā‘ifa-i afghāniya*) as a supplement to his book.¹⁰ In the abridged and slightly restructured *Makhzan-i Afghānī*, this ideologically significant supplement has become a chapter, while tribal genealogies have taken its place at the end of the book. A short prayer for Haybat Khān Kākar, which opens the hagiographical section in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, suggests that he was the mastermind behind this part of the book as well and, as in the case of genealogies, supplied the author with relevant data and documents.

Nī‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection and Indo-Persian hagiographies

While the conceptual decision of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*’s co-authors to complement the essay on the history of the Pashtuns with hagiographies was motivated by the desire to add stronger argumentation to justify the rights of the Indo-Afghan elite to political leadership in Muslim India, the very idea of combining historiographical and hagiographical narratives is likely to have been borrowed by them from authoritative

⁷For a recent discussion of the genealogical material from the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* in comparison with some later sources on the subject, see Sajjad Nejatī, ‘The Pearl of Pearls: The Abdālī-Durrānī Confederacy and its Transformation under Aḥmad Shāh, Durr-i Durrān’, PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2017, pp. 32–35, 153–57, 160–65, 178–81; and Sajjad Nejatī, ‘Reflections on the Prehistory of the Abdālī Afghans’, *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 4 (2019), pp. 554–59.

⁸Nī‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 2–5.

⁹Ibid., pp. 3–4.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 707–833.

works of Mughal court literature, such as the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* (1592) by Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Harawī (d. 1594) and the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* by Abu 'l-Faẓl 'Allāmī (d. 1602).¹¹ The former is mentioned in the introduction to the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, among a few other main reference sources of this book. Along with chapters that recount the history of Islamic dynasties in India, beginning with the Ghaznavids, the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* contains a series of biographical dictionaries (*tazkira*), two of them listing the names of about 170 religious scholars (*'ulamā wa fuḍalā*) and spiritual masters (*mashā'ikh*) in order to illustrate the intensity of religious and intellectual life in India after the rise of the Mughals.¹² Unlike Niẓām al-Dīn's brief biographical dictionaries that reported on contemporaneous sheikhs and scholars, the work of Abu 'l-Faẓl more closely followed the long-standing traditions of the hagiographical genre per se canonized in Persian literature by such popular books as Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's (d. circa 1220) *Tazkirat al-awliyā* and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) *Nafaḥāt al-uns*.¹³ Included in his voluminous 'gazetteer' *Ā'in-i Akbarī* under the self-explanatory title 'Saints of India' (*Awliyā-yi Hind*), Abu 'l-Faẓl's anthology was not only a collection of biographies, but also a brief excursus into the history of Sufi communities in India over five centuries.¹⁴

The approach employed by Niẓām al-Dīn in the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* was repeated by 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'unī (d. circa 1615) in his *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh* (1596), though this work might have been unknown to Ni'matallāh since it was presumably put into circulation in the mid-1610s, having been kept secret for about two decades because of its anti-Akbar rhetoric.¹⁵ Due to Badā'unī's originality and talent as a polemicist, his anthology of contemporaneous spiritual masters and learned men represented a further step in adapting the hagiographical genre to the secular contents of court historiography.¹⁶ In many ways, Badā'unī's anthology occupies an intermediate position between Niẓām al-Dīn's dictionary and the exemplary Indo-Persian collection

¹¹For the latest general surveys of Indo-Persian historiography in the Mughal empire, see Dale, 'Indo-Persian Historiography', pp. 579–602; and Blain Auer, 'Persian Historiography in India', in *Persian Literature from Outside Iran: The Indian Subcontinent, Anatolia, Central Asia, and in Judeo-Persian*, (ed.) J. R. Perry, Vol. IX of *A History of Persian Literature*, (general ed.) E. Yarshater (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 120–36. Notes on Indo-Persian hagiographical collections regarded as memorative communications are in Marcia K. Hermansen and Bruce B. Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu. Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, (eds) D. Gilmartin and B. B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 160–68.

¹²*Khawājah Niẓāmuddīn Aḥmad, The Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī (A History of India from the Early Muslim Invasions to the Thirty-Eighth Year of the Reign of Akbar)*, Vol. II, (ed.) B. De (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1931), pp. 457–80; English translation: *Khawājah Niẓāmuddīn Aḥmad, The Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, Vol. II, (trans.) B. De (Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1936), pp. 684–710.

¹³For an overview of the classical works of the Islamic hagiography, see Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).

¹⁴Abu 'l-Faẓl 'Allāmī, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, Vol. 2, (ed.) H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1869), pp. 207–25; English translation: *Abul Fazl Allāmi, The Ain i Akbari*, (trans.) H. S. Jarrett (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891), pp. 349–78.

¹⁵Peter Hardy, 'Badā'unī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New edition*, Vol. I, (eds) H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramers, E. Lévi-Provençal and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p. 857.

¹⁶'Abd al-Qādir bin Mulūkshāh Badā'unī, *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*, (eds) M. A. 'Alī Ṣāhib and T. H. Subhānī (Tehran: Anjuman-i āṣār wa mafākhīr-i farhangī, 1379/2000), pp. 3–109; English translation: 'Abdu'l-Qādir Ibn-i-Mulūkshāh al-Badāonī, *Muntakhabu-t-Tawārīkh*, Vol. III, (trans.) W. Haig (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1925), pp. 1–223.

of Sufi hagiographies *Akhbār al-akhyār* composed around the same time, probably in 1590/1591, by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddiṣ Dihlawī (d. 1642).¹⁷ In turn, the *Akhbār al-akhyār*, a comprehensive anthology describing the evolution of all Sufi communities in India from the thirteenth through to the sixteenth centuries, updated the earlier Indo-Persian traditions of hagiographical literature initiated in the mid-fourteenth century by the *Siyar al-awliyā* of Amīr Khurd Kirmānī who had focused exclusively on the life stories of sheikhs associated with the Chishtiyya spiritual lineage.¹⁸ The final version of the *Akhbār al-akhyār* appeared only towards 1619 when it was officially presented to Emperor Jahāngīr, but Badā’unī mentions it and discusses its author in one of the entries in his own anthology.¹⁹ This means that Ni‘matallāh, as well as Abu ‘l-Faḍl ‘Allāmī whose anthology echoes the content of the *Akhbār al-akhyār*, could also have access to the first edition of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s work.

Although the secularized versions of Sufi hagiographies in the works of Nizām al-Dīn and Badā’unī conformed better to Ni‘matallāh’s literary and extra-literary tasks in ideological terms, as regards style, the hagiographical accounts in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* to a greater extent emulated classical patterns of this genre in religious literature and shared more similarities with ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s *Akhbār al-akhyār*. Composed as a typical ‘anthology of saints’ (*tazkirat al-awliyā*), Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection consists of reports focusing mostly on the spiritual masters’ miraculous powers (*karāmāt*), extraordinary and marvellous deeds (*khawāriq al-‘ādāt*), and remarkable pious behaviours (*manāqib*). Each entry devoted to a particular individual is named *zīkr* (‘mention’) and most stories begin with the standard formula *naql-ast* (‘it is reported’).²⁰

On the other hand, Ni‘matallāh’s ‘Anthology of Saints’ demonstrates a certain breakaway from both Sufi hagiographies and their secularized versions since the selection of characters here is based on the criterion of ethnicity, namely, the real or purported affiliation of spiritual masters with Pashtun tribes. Moreover, Ni‘matallāh’s anthology is structured according to Pashtun tribal divisions, similarly to the genealogical section of his book. Sainly characters are grouped in it by the principle of descent from three major Pashtun tribal branches—Sarban, Beṭan, and Ghūrghusht—whereas their attachment to any particular religious community or spiritual lineage can be deduced only from occasional mentions of their alleged connections or discipleship with some well-known historical figures.²¹ In each of the

¹⁷‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddiṣ Dihlawī, *Akhbār al-akhyār fī asrār al-abrār*, (ed.) ‘Alīm Ashraf Khān (Tehran: Anjuman-i āsār wa mafākhir-i farhangī, 1383/2004). For an analysis of this work, see Sushmita Banerjee, ‘Conceptualising the Past of the Muslim Community in the Sixteenth Century: A Prosopographical Study of the *Akhbār al-Akhyār*’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 54, no. 4 (2017), pp. 423–56.

¹⁸Amīr Khurd al-Kirmānī, *Siyar al-awliyā* (Delhi: Maṭba‘-i Muḥib Hind, 1889). For a study of this work, see Jyoti G. Balachandran, ‘Exploring the Elite World in the *Siyar al-Awliyā*: Urban Elites, their Lineages and Social Networks’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 52, no. 3 (2015), pp. 241–70.

¹⁹Badā’unī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, pp. 77–79.

²⁰This formula was adopted as a definite marker of a narrative piece in hagiographies by ‘Aṭṭār in his highly influential *Tazkirat al-awliyā*; see Denise Aigle, ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tazkirat al-awliyā*’ and Jāmī’s *Nafahāt al-uns*: Two Visions of Sainthood’, *Oriente Moderno* 96, no. 2 (2016), p. 289.

²¹Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical anthology completely omits the part that would deal with the spiritual masters of the Karlānāy (Pers. ‘Karrānī’) tribes—the fourth branch of the Pashtun genealogical tree. From the brief and confused account of this branch in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* it appears that Ni‘matallāh’s

anthology's three subsections, Ni'matallāh attempted to introduce his characters in chronological order. However, because of the paucity of information about most of them and the inherent entwining of fiction and historicity in hagiographies, he failed to apply a coherent genealogical approach. Nevertheless, an obvious interconnection between the hagiographical and genealogical sections in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* testifies to the fact that tribalist ideology dominated the minds of the Indo-Afghan military-administrative elite whose views shaped the concept of Ni'matallāh's book through the co-authorship of Haybat Khān Kākār.

Among Ni'matallāh's Indo-Afghan companions and interlocutors were also men of religion, such as the sheikhs Bustān Bārets (Pers. 'Barīchī', d. 1593) and Aḥmad Shūn, who are described in his hagiographical anthology along with approximately 70 other spiritual masters and holy people. The notes on Bustān Bārets and Aḥmad Shūn reveal that both of them, while professing a cosmopolitan Islamic ideology, did not forget their ethnic background—the former used to sing Pashto verses and the latter defied the authority of Jahāngīr by refusing to bow before the emperor according to Chaghatay (that is, Turkic) custom. Their different tribal affiliations, identified by the patronymics 'Bārets' and 'Shūn', were the only grounds for discussing their personalities in the anthology's different subsections on the Sarban and the Ghūrghusht sheikhs respectively.²² Following the structure and the spirit of genealogies, Ni'matallāh's hagiographical collection deliberately underscored those aspects of his book that allow it to be considered not so much a variation of the Indo-Persian mainstream court historiography as, essentially, a rare attempt at research on ethnohistory.²³

Like the other original parts of the book, the hagiographical section of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* was intended to issue new, previously unrecorded material on the Pashtuns, in this case on their religious traditions. Niẓām al-Dīn's laconic biographical dictionary in the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* includes such names as Shaykh Khalīl Afghān and Mullā Qāsim Waḥīd al-'Ayn Qandahārī, but the first is left without comments, while the second does not necessarily indicate that this person had any connections with Pashtun tribes.²⁴ In Ni'matallāh's collection, three characters have the component 'Khalīl' in their names—Shaykh Mutī Khalīl, Miyān Qāsim Khalīl, and Shaykh Khalīl Batanī—but it is unlikely that any of them can be identified as Shaykh Khalīl Afghān from the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*.²⁵ It is more likely that Shaykh Khalīl Afghān is the same person as Shaykh Khalīl mentioned in the other section of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* as a descendant of the eminent

sources lacked reliable information about the Karlānays and their origins, considering them assimilated descendants of the Ormur people (Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 638–50). See also Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, 550 B. C.–A. D. 1957 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1958), pp. 20–24; and Sergei B. Andreyev, 'Notes on the Ōrmuf People', in *Peterburgskoie vostokovedenie. St. Petersburg Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 4 (St Petersburg: Peterburgskoie vostokovedenie, 1993), pp. 230–38.

²²Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 744, 809–13.

²³In his notes on the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, Dale rightly concludes that this work should be regarded foremost 'as an indication of 17th-century Afghan beliefs about their social and religious traditions', but it is by no means 'a traditional Perso-Islamic court history, in this case a panegyric dedicated to a Mughal general' (Dale, 'Indo-Persian Historiography', pp. 578–79). A more detailed and accurate appraisal of Ni'matallāh's book as a diasporic codification of Pashtuns' 'widespread oral ethnohistories' is Green, 'Trade, Diaspora, and Sainthood', pp. 183–85.

²⁴Niẓāmuddīn, *The Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, pp. 469, 467.

²⁵Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 759–60, 769, 775–76.

Chishtī sheikh, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Ganj-i Shakar’ (d. 1265), and a mediator in the negotiations between Shīr Shāh Sūrī (r. 1540–1545) and Emperor Humāyūn (r. 1530–1540, 1555–1556).²⁶

In his *Muntakhab al-tawārikh*, Badā’unī more accurately indicated the Pashtun descent of two sheikhs—Miyān ‘Abdallāh Niyāzī, a Chishtī master from the town of Sirhind in Punjab, and Shaykh Ḥamza from Lucknow. According to Badā’unī, the former came from the Niyāzays, ‘an Afghan tribe’ (*tā’ifa-yī-st az afghānān*), and the latter was a grandson of Malik Ādam Kākār, ‘one of the nobles (*umarā*)’ of the Lodī rulers Sulṭān Sikandar (r. 1488–1517) and Sulṭān Ibrāhīm (r. 1517–1526).²⁷ Both of them are included in Ni‘matallāh’s anthology and characterized in almost the same way as in Badā’unī’s notes, except that Ni‘matallāh calls Shaykh Ḥamza the son of Malik Ādam Kākār.²⁸ Ni‘matallāh also added to his collection a separate entry on Malik Ādam, but his remark that this nobleman at the court of the Lodī sultans ‘disguised himself as a man of the mundane world’ offered a very contrived explanation for listing him among the saints.²⁹ In fact, it was a popular anecdote portraying Malik Ādam and his patron Sulṭān Sikandar as divine rescuers who saved an abducted woman and restored to life her beheaded husband that motivated Ni‘matallāh to create a hagiographical character of an administrative officer and, thus, expand the list of Afghan saints.³⁰ In Badā’unī’s anthology, there is also a record about Shaykh Mubārak from Alwar, a town in the neighbourhood of Agra. Badā’unī tells that this blessed man, who claimed to be a *sayyid* (a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad), ‘enjoyed a great repute among the Afghans’, but the absence of his name in Ni‘matallāh’s anthology suggests that he was not affiliated to any particular Pashtun tribe.³¹

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī registered the name of Khwāja Ḥasan Afghān in the *Akhbār al-akhyār*, recorded by Ni‘matallāh as Shaykh Ḥasan Afghān among the spiritual masters of the Ghūrghusht branch.³² The authors of both anthologies call him a disciple of Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyyā (d. 1262), the famous founder of the Suhrawardī Sufi community in India, and retell the same story in which Shaykh Ḥasan reprimands an imam of a mosque for being unworthily engaged in the slave trade. Bearing in mind that the first version of the *Akhbār al-akhyār* came out in 1590/1591 and its final edition was released in the late 1610s, it is difficult to establish here the fact of direct borrowing. Besides, Ni‘matallāh related three other anecdotes about Shaykh Ḥasan that are absent in the *Akhbār al-akhyār*. Obviously, such personalities as Shaykh Ḥasan, or the above-mentioned characters from Badā’unī’s anthology, belonged to the common stock of popular hagiographical traditions which circulated widely in the Mughal empire.

Ni‘matallāh does not refer to any written or oral sources for his hagiographical accounts, which amalgamate historical realities, popular Islamic perceptions of piety,

²⁶Ibid., pp. 298–99; cf. Green, ‘Blessed Men and Tribal Politics’, pp. 353–54.

²⁷Badā’unī, *Muntakhab al-tawārikh*, pp. 32–33, 44. The Niyāzays belong to the Lodī tribal group (M. J. Syāl Momand, *Də paxtano qabīlo shajare* (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1988), pp. 181–82).

²⁸Ni‘matallāh, *Tārikh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 797–99, 818.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 813–17.

³⁰Cf. Green, ‘Blessed Men and Tribal Politics’, pp. 354–55.

³¹Badā’unī, *Muntakhab al-tawārikh*, p. 74.

³²‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, *Akhbār al-akhyār*, p. 146; Ni‘matallāh, *Tārikh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 801–03.

and pure fiction. Chronologically, these accounts cover the period after the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century, but various elements reflect predominantly the social and spiritual experience of Pashtun migrants in North India from when the Lodī dynasty came to power in Delhi, that is, a century and a half before the writing of the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*. As a product of the urban culture of Muslim India, Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection depicts its characters mostly in the contexts that are poorly consistent with rural life in Pashtun tribal areas and even less pertinent to the historical past of the tribes in their homelands.³³ The largest part of the book’s historiographical section is dedicated to the ‘Indian’ history of the Lodīs and the Sūrīs which is narrated on the basis of the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* and such works as ‘Abbās Khān Sarwānī’s *Tārīkh-i Shīrshāhī* (circa 1582) and Rīzqallāh Mushtāqī’s (d. 1581) *Wāqī‘āt* mentioned by Ni‘matallāh in the introduction. The latter work abounds in stories about miraculous events and therefore might have exerted a particular influence on Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection.³⁴ Authentic folk stories and legends related to Pashtun tribal territories can also be detected in Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographies. The sources of this kind of literary material were Ni‘matallāh’s friends from the Indo-Afghan diaspora, like his inspirer and co-author Haybat Khān Kākār or the sheikh and poet Bustān Bārets. Being very scarce and mostly fictional, the stories recounted by Ni‘matallāh’s informants about their ancestral homelands offered not so much evidence of real religious beliefs and practices among Pashtun tribes throughout several centuries as an abstract image of the tribal areas perceived as an indigenous domain of Islam in the collective consciousness of the Indo-Afghan diaspora.

Hagiographical substantiation of political leadership among tribal groups

A close reading of Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection brings one to the conclusion that, along with the main goal of proving the long-term and steadfast commitment of Pashtuns to the Muslim faith, it also pursued the aim of assigning the exclusive right of spiritual and, consequently, political authority to the Beṭan tribes. Both Pashtun ruling dynasties in the Delhi Sultanate, the Lodīs and the Sūrīs, as well as the dedicatee of Ni‘matallāh’s book Khānjahān, belonged to the Beṭan tribal group. Its legendary progenitor Beṭan (Pers. ‘Batani’), unlike his brothers Sarban and Ghūrghusht, two other sons of the common Pashtun ancestor Qays ‘Abd al-Rashīd Pathān, is introduced not only in the genealogical section of Ni‘matallāh’s book, but also in the hagiographies where, under the soubriquet ‘Shaykh Bayt’, he opens the list of the Beṭan spiritual masters.³⁵

In the hagiographical notes, Beṭan’s saintly behaviours are not specified, which can be an indication that in tribal folklore he did not enjoy the reputation of a holy man. In

³³The important ‘rural-urban’ dichotomy of Muslim saints in hagiographies usually has a different connotation for it is related more to the forms of Sufis’ engagement in social activities and the distinction between their ‘extravert’ and ‘introvert’ thinking and behaviour than to the ethno-cultural and social specificities of their milieu. Notes on this dichotomy are in John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 143–44, 244–45.

³⁴Cf. Green, ‘Blessed Men and Tribal Politics’, p. 348.

³⁵Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 770–74.

fact, the hagiographical section contains the same legends about Beʿān that have been told earlier in the genealogies. His only ‘miracle’ characterizes him more as an experienced and sagacious paterfamilias rather than a Muslim spiritual instructor. The story tells how Beʿān (Shaykh Bayt) returned with his family to their house in the mountains after spending winter in the warmer foothills and ordered his wife to bake bread without wasting much time on making a fire since, due to his heavenly insight, he knew that there were still burning coals in the oven. This episode precedes the story’s key point, which is a fanciful explanation of why the Lodīs were honoured with a special status among the Beʿān tribes. Beʿān’s youngest grandson Ibrāhīm displayed much dexterity to be the first among the children to bring a baked loaf to his grandfather who then blessed him by putting a piece of this loaf into his mouth and declaring that ‘he is great’ (*loy dāy* in Pashto). This epithet is said to have eventually replaced the boy’s first name and, owing to Beʿān’s good prayers, God granted his descendants (known later as ‘the Lodī lineage’ or *silsila-yi lodiya*) eminence, glory, and the right to rule people (*ḥaqq-i taʿālā dar in silsila saltanat-i ʿālam marḥamat namūd wa ba farmānrawāyi mukarram sākht*).³⁶ It is also important that according to genealogical legends Ibrāhīm ‘Lodī’ was of Pashtun descent only through his mother, Beʿān’s daughter Bibī Mato, while the origin of his alleged father Shāh Ḥusayn is rather vaguely traced back to ‘the rulers of Ghūr’.³⁷

Moreover, it is claimed that Beʿān was the true father of Ismaʿīl Sarbanī, the first spiritual master of the Sarban tribes. The legend goes that Beʿān’s elder brother Sarban, the progenitor of the Sarban tribal group, was a poor and destitute man who succeeded only after he adopted and raised Beʿān’s son Ismaʿīl who was endowed with divine blessing. If Beʿān’s country is imprecisely described as a mountainous area with cold winters which forced tribes to descend seasonally into the warmer plains, the homeland of Shaykh Ismaʿīl Sarbanī is directly identified as Roh and his tomb is said to be located in the Sulaiman mountains in a place named Wādikhwāh.³⁸ In other hagiographical stories, as also in the historiographical accounts and genealogies, Pashtun ancestral homelands (Paḫtūnkhwā) are always called ‘Roh’ which is associated primarily with the Sulaiman mountain range (Kūh-i Sulaymān) of the southern Hindu Kush and adjoining areas.³⁹

Another clear piece of evidence of Niʿmatallāh’s intent to underline the superior spiritual status of the Beʿāns is that the legend about Shaykh Ismaʿīl Sarbanī incorporates a fragment from the hagiography of Shaykh Aḥmad Sarwānī, a prominent

³⁶Ibid., pp. 771–72.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 594–601; for comments on this legend, see also Nejatīe, ‘The Pearl of Pearls’, pp. 160–61.

³⁸Niʿmatallāh, *Tārikh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 721–23. The name of this place resembles that of the district and the town of Wāzakhwā in the Paktika province (in present-day Afghanistan), these territories having been the main domain of the Sulaymānkhel tribe of the Ghilzay tribal confederation belonging to the Beʿān branch.

³⁹According to Caroe, ‘Roh’ is ‘a Multani and Baluch word for a mountain, applied by the people of Multan and the Derajat to the mountain wall of the Takht-i-Sulaiman, and so to the Pathan country’ (Caroe, *The Pathans*, p. 439 (cf. Henry G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan, Geographical, Ethnographical, and Historical* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888), p. 657; Andre Wink, ‘Rohilkhand’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New edition*, Vol. VIII, (eds) C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 571–72; Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire*, pp. 9–10, 104–13). However, the authentic etymology of this geographical appellation still requires further investigation.

spiritual master of Betan origin, who, according to genealogies, lived eight generations later, approximately at the turn of the fifteenth century. In a mixture of heterogeneous stories, Shaykh Aḥmad is portrayed as a powerful religious teacher of Roh who befriends Isma‘īl Sarbanī and shares with him the spiritual leadership of the local populace.

Tribal homelands and the formation of Pashtun spiritual lineages

For a number of reasons, the figure of Shaykh Aḥmad Sarwānī (also Aḥmad Jawānmarḍ or Shaykh Aḥmad Kakpūr) may help us to better understand the provenance, varied content, and intersecting ideologies of the Indo-Afghan hagiographies collected in Ni‘matallāh Harawī’s book. In the case of Shaykh Aḥmad, we are dealing with a typical example of how a real person could be mythologized, having been turned into a hagiographical character. In the Betan genealogies, Shaykh Aḥmad, a son of Mūsā Sarwānī, appears as a patriarch of an esteemed Indo-Afghan family. His numerous descendants preferred to choose the spiritual path, although some opted for military-administrative careers. One of his great-grandsons, ‘Umar Khān, reached a high rank in the service of Sulṭān Sikandar Lodī (r. 1489–1517), while another one, Shaykh Bāyazīd, became renowned for his piety in the time of Sher Shāh Sūrī (r. 1540–1545). However, in a series of hagiographical stories about the most outstanding members of his family, Shaykh Aḥmad is repeatedly called a disciple of the Suhrawardī sheikh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyyā, and his son and spiritual successor Shaykh Sulaymān Dānā was once said to have lived during the reign of the Delhi sultan ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1296–1316). In the *Makhzan-i Afghānī*, Shaykh Aḥmad Sarwānī is erroneously confused with another character, Shaykh Aḥmad Lohānī (Pashto ‘Lohānay’), who in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* is mentioned in a separate entry without an indication as to when and where he lived; this also proves that the image of Shaykh Aḥmad in Ni‘matallāh’s book combines features of several historical and fictional personalities.⁴⁰

In hagiographical narratives, the figure of Shaykh Aḥmad represents a link between the historical reality associated mostly with India after the rise of the Lodī dynasty and the obscured past of the indigenous Pashtun lands in the southern Hindu Kush. The stories about this sheikh in two different entries—the one dealing with him and the other with Shaykh Isma‘īl Sarbanī—share similar details, which point to a common folklore source and illustrate the same socio-economic background, more typical of the rural life of Pashtun tribes than the urban milieus of the Indo-Afghan diaspora. The main idea of both stories is to encourage the communalist practice of regular food distribution among all those in need, be they fellow tribesmen or outsiders accepted as guests. To soothe people’s natural anxieties about the shortage of livelihoods, the stories promoted a belief in the miraculous powers of the holy people responsible for the equitable distribution of meals and who are capable of restoring vital resources. One tale very briefly relates that 400 to 500 sheep were slaughtered daily in the kitchen of Shaykh Isma‘īl and Shaykh Aḥmad, but the next day the animals reappeared, alive again because their skins and bones were purposely kept intact. The other tale narrates in greater detail how in childhood Shaykh Aḥmad gave all the sheep of his family’s

⁴⁰Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 622–23, 776–77, 779–84, 903; Dorn, *History of the Afghans*, part 2, pp. 27–29.

small herd to a group of wandering holy men for subsistence, but when his father was about to punish him, one of the saintly strangers lent him his staff and explained that he could revive the animals by beating the leftover skins and bones with this staff and saying prayers to God. The content of these hagiographical tales does not relate specifically to Islamic realities. What actually connects Shaykh Isma‘il and Shaykh Aḥmad with Islam is a reference in both entries to Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyyā. The iconic figure of Bahā al-Dīn appears in these narratives only to integrate Isma‘il Sarbanī and Aḥmad Sarwānī within the framework of the institutionalized Sufi traditions. It is told in one story that as a token of appreciation for the missionary work of these Pashtun sheikhs Bahā al-Dīn sent them two sacred cloaks (*khūrqa*) and two prayer-mats (*sajjāda*) as his blessing. In the other story, young Aḥmad Sarwānī decides to become a disciple of Bahā al-Dīn on the advice of the holy men who consumed his family’s sheep. The conventional Sufi motif of blessing received through a garment is also repeated here: the same person who instructs Aḥmad how to revive the animals puts his own shirt (*pirāhan*) on him.

Of the 21 individuals classified in Ni‘matallāh’s book as the Betan spiritual masters, five men—Shaykh Aḥmad, Shaykh Sulaymān Dānā, Shaykh Mulhī Qattāl, Shaykh Maḥmūd Ḥāji, and Shaykh Bāyazīd—and a blessed woman (Bībī Dūya, or Dawiya?) represent four generations of the family of the Sarwānī sheikhs. The dispersed records about these people seem to be interrelated and derived from one source, supposedly a kind of a family archive or a draft of a familial hagiography. Similar sources were likely to have been used by Ni‘matallāh in the case of the Bakhtiyār, a family of spiritual masters associated with the Sarban tribal group. Ten men and two women from among the blessed people of the Sarbans represent this family in the likewise scattered hagiographical entries.⁴¹

Although the Bakhtiyār, unlike the Sarwānīs, do not have a clear position in tribal genealogies and appear to be of non-Pashtun ethnic origin, their patriarch Yahyā Bakhtiyār (Khwāja Yahyā Kabīr, d. 1430) occupies the most prominent place in Ni‘matallāh’s hagiographical collection. The stories about him constitute a disproportionately large number of texts which vary considerably in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* and the *Makhzan-i Afghānī*, the former even having an appendix (*zamīma*) with an additional selection of analogous accounts. Among the Sarban sheikhs, Yahyā Bakhtiyār comes third after Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī and the abovementioned Isma‘il Sarbanī. It is very probable that the well-known Chishtī sheikh Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī (d. 1235) tops Ni‘matallāh’s anthology, in both the list of the Sarban spiritual masters and the common list of all the Afghan saints, owing in part to the high esteem he enjoyed in the entourage of the Lodī sultans, but also because of the resemblance of his name to that of Yahyā Bakhtiyār. One of the founding fathers of the Chishtiyya community, Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn was a much-venerated personality among the Indo-Afghan elites, but there is no direct evidence that he had close ties with Pashtun tribes in the early thirteenth century.⁴² Ni‘matallāh also does not report any details that would at

⁴¹Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 723–40, 750–54, 764–66, 826–28, 889–97.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 712–21. In his account of Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Ni‘matallāh obviously relied not only on the stories about this sheikh in the *Siyar al-awliyā* and the *Akhbār al-akhyār*, but also on some other written sources (Amīr Khurd, *Siyar al-awliyā*, pp. 48–57; ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, *Akhbār al-akhyār*, pp. 47–50). On Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn, see also Gerhard Böwering, ‘Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New edition*, Vol. V, (eds) C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat (Leiden:

least hint at such ties, nor does he verbally admit any relationship between Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār and Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār.⁴³ On the other hand, it is evident that the popular hagiographical image of Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn became a model for creating the literary character of Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār. In Ni‘matallāh’s stories, both sheikhs travel along the same routes in the vast geographical space that stretches from Central Asia to southern Punjab and share some similarities in their wondrous deeds.

The fragmented hagiographies of the two devout Indo-Afghan families—the Sarwānīs and the Bakhtiyārs—exemplify two basic types of kinship groups that exercised spiritual leadership among Pashtuns. Such groups could be created either by ethnic Pashtuns with verified tribal lineages like that of the Sarwānīs, or by non-Pashtun incomers who, like the Bakhtiyārs, became affiliated with or wholly assimilated by a particular tribe. While the native claimants to spiritual guidance had only to prove their superior religious experience and extraordinary abilities to fellow tribesmen, the incoming preachers also faced the challenging task of naturalization in tribal society based on kinship ties. In the second case, a strong argument for legitimizing the status of blessed people to which they aspired was the claim to the title of *sayyid*, that is, to having the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad in their lineage. Among the patchy records at the end of the genealogical section of Ni‘matallāh’s book, there are a few notes on Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār’s lineage which state that he was a descendant of a *sayyid* named Ishāq who had come to Paḫtūnkhwā from the town of Ūch, had a son with a girl of the Shīrānī tribe, and died on the way back to his homeland.⁴⁴

To prove and secure the status of *sayyid* in Pashtun tribes was not an easy task. The recognition of this title depended mostly on the attitude of tribal chiefs, who were guided by expediency and considerations of prestige in each case. The legendary story of Abī Sa‘īd, the son of the abovementioned *sayyid* Ishāq and Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār’s ancestor, well reflects historical realities in terms of the difficulties encountered by claimants to this title. Having been adopted by a humble man from a clan of the Shīrānīs, his mother’s tribe, Abī Sa‘īd received the second Persian name Bakhtiyār (lit. ‘fortunate’) on the grounds that his blessed descent helped his foster-father to quickly become a wealthy person.⁴⁵ However, the latter then decided to divide his

Brill, 1986), pp. 546–47; Anna Suworova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 16, 66, 87–91; Balachandran, ‘Exploring the Elite World’, pp. 247–49; Banerjee, ‘Conceptualising the Past’, pp. 436–38.

⁴³In the phrase ‘Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn [Bakhtiyār Kākī] was from this people (*tā’ifa*)’, which is found in the short preamble to the hagiographical section in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, the word *tā’ifa* more likely refers to Sufis rather than Afghans, since it is used in the context where Ni‘matallāh wishes his co-author Haybat Khān Kākār to be rewarded for his labours by God with the protection of Sufi saints (lit. with ‘the love of this folk (*qawm*)’ and ‘the friendship of this people (*tā’ifa*)’) (Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 711); cf. another interpretation in Green, ‘Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood’, p. 188.

⁴⁴Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 642–44. In this fragment, Ūch is said to be a town ‘in the vicinities of Baghdād’, though it is more likely to be the well-known historic town (present-day Ūch Sharif) in Punjab to the south of Multān. Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī’s native town Ūsh, located in the east of the Farghāna valley (present-day Osh in Kyrgyzstan), is also erroneously placed by Ni‘matallāh ‘in the vicinities of Baghdād’ (Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 712). This coincidence betrays not only the confusion of two hagiographical characters with similar names, but also a popular idea that ‘true’ *sayyids* were expected to come from some ancient and eminent stronghold of Islam. On the Bakhtiyārs’ lineage, see also Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan*, p. 492, 525–26.

⁴⁵This is the same motif as in the story about Shaykh Isma‘īl Sarbanī who brings fortune to Sarban, allegedly his uncle and foster-father (see the previous section).

patrimony in favour of his own son, a full-blooded Pashtun, and only the interference of the tribal ruler (*raʿīs-i ān qabāʿil*) at the request of Abī Saʿīd Bakhtiyār's mother helped to confirm the property rights of this descendant of a *sayyid* and even increase his share in view of his high spiritual status.⁴⁶ In another story, the *sayyid* Abū Ishāq Dāwī, who lived in the times of Islām Shāh Sūrī (r. 1545–1554), is also acknowledged as a Pashtun only on the grounds of his mother's ethnicity.⁴⁷ Enumerating the clans of *sayyids* (*sayyid-zāda*) among various Pashtun tribes, Niʿmatallāh underscores the idea that they are considered and called Afghans only because of their relationship with these people on their maternal side (*ba wāsiṭa-yi nisbat-i mādarī ba afghān shuhrat dārand*).⁴⁸ If the title of *sayyid* was to a greater extent a matter of prestige and esteem, then verified Pashtun descent on both paternal and maternal sides guaranteed full legal and social status in Pashtun tribes and therefore lawful access to limited material resources, particularly land, which was especially important in the tribal areas.

The formation of spiritual lineages within the tribal structure in Pashtun indigenous territories can be examined more closely in the example of the Yāsīnkhel clan of the Khaṭak tribe. The family of the Khaṭak sheikhs belonging to this clan turned into the *stāna*, that is, the kinship group with the special status of tribal spiritual leaders, in the second half of the seventeenth century owing to the personal charisma and activities of Shaykh Raḥmkār (d. 1653). An original collection of hagiographical stories and memoirs about this sheikh, his family, and disciples was included by Afzal Khān Khaṭak in a supplement to his Pashto translation of Niʿmatallāh's anthology.⁴⁹ Other original sections of the *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ* written by Afzal Khān and his grandfather Khūshḥāl Khān (1613–1689) also provide very important information on the Khaṭak sheikhs and their involvement in the real politics of their tribe. All these accounts are based on first-hand evidence and may give a rough idea of how Pashtun *stāna*-clans emerged and exercised their powers in the tribal areas. Unlike the families of the Indo-Afghan sheikhs, such as the Sarwānīs and the Bakhtiyārs, Shaykh Raḥmkār and his numerous descendants were fully integrated into the social and economic life of Pashtun tribes in their indigenous territories to the west of the Indus. Towards the nineteenth century, the large and powerful *stāna*-clan of Raḥmkār's descendants became known as Kākākhel after the sheikh's honorary name 'Kākā Ṣāḥib'. On the grounds of its distinctive societal role and political influence, the Kākākhel clan was even separately indexed in the *Dictionary of the Pathan Tribes* by the British colonial administration.⁵⁰

Folktales and Islamic traditions in the hagiographical stories related to the tribal areas

The content of Niʿmatallāh's hagiographical stories that may be either directly or assumed to be associated with the tribal areas focuses above all on matters pertaining

⁴⁶Niʿmatallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 643; cf. Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood', p. 196.

⁴⁷Niʿmatallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 807.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 645.

⁴⁹Afzal Khān, *Tārīkh-i muraṣṣaʿ*, pp. 561–92.

⁵⁰*A Dictionary of the Pathan Tribes on the North-West Frontier of India*. Prepared by the General Staff Army Headquarters, India (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1910), pp. 71, 74.

to livelihoods and survival in the face of the scarcity of natural resources. Such narratives draw a picture of a society in which the primary issue is that of water supply and the main actors are not individuals but conflicting kinship groups. For example, a Betan legend relates that in order to reconcile two tribes (*qabila*) that struggled for fertile land, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Nabī enforced a rule according to which one tribe had to sow this land in the spring and the other in the autumn. The crops of those who violated the rule dried up even if they had been watered by heavy rains and snow and so could not be harvested.⁵¹ According to the note of the editor of *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, S. M. Imāmuddīn, the name of this semi-fictional sheikh, identified as a contemporary of Amīr Tīmūr (Tamerlane, d. 1405), in some manuscripts has an alternative variant—‘Abd al-Batanī’—which demonstrates that copyists hesitated in choosing between a familiar Islamic name and, probably, a corrupted original one. The conflicting tribes in the legend are called Nūhānī (Lohāñay) and Batanī (Betan), although the former is a subgroup of the latter, and it is ‘the Batanīs’, that is, an unspecified Betan tribe, who are said to have once transgressed the law of seasonal plowing. These facts suggest that a folk story about a usual conflict over land originated among the Lohāñays and was later adapted for the Indo-Afghan hagiographies with the primary purpose of highlighting the authority of the Betan spiritual leaders.

Another folktale of similar origin tells of how an unspecified Betan tribe, suffering from a lack of water and fertile soil, made an unsuccessful attempt to encroach on the estates of the well-off Sarwānīs with the help of Mulān Khiḏr, a putative descendant of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Nabī.⁵² The involvement of Mulān Khiḏr, apparently a personification of the legendary prophet Khiḏr, responsible in popular Muslim culture for water resources, crops, and fertility, transformed the story about a routine tribal conflict into a tale based on religious mythology.⁵³ Mulān Khiḏr travels through the Sulaiman mountains and on reaching the river Darābhan (?) in the lands of the Sarwānīs magically forces it to change its course and run to the territories of the disadvantaged Betan tribe. However, his miraculous powers are quickly neutralized by those of the Sarwānī spiritual guide Shaykh Sulaymān Dānā (see above) who orders the river to return to its natural course. A colourful detail in this story appears to be an allusion to the Qur’ānic legends about the prophet Mūsā: by the will of God, the mountains through which Mulān Khiḏr has to traverse open a passage for him, thus transforming a hard three-day journey into a one-hour walk along a creek. In the Qur’ān, Mūsā crosses the sea, which parts before him in the shape of ‘huge mounds’, and opens 12 springs in a rock to provide his thirsty people with drinking water (Qur’ān, 26:63, 2:57/60). Moreover, the anonymous ‘servant’ who accompanied Mūsā on his two mystical journeys to and over the sea is usually identified with Khiḏr (Qur’ān, 18:60/61–81/82).

⁵¹Nī‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 777.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 778–79; cf. Green, ‘Blessed Men and Tribal Politics’, pp. 354–55. The first part of this name can be a distortion, or even a combination, of the words *mullā* and *miyān* (‘spiritual intermediary’). The derivation of *mulān* from *mawlānā* (‘our lord’)—the variant kindly suggested by a reviewer of this article—is also possible, though the two abovementioned words appear to have been much more common as titles of Pashtun spiritual leaders in this period and later times.

⁵³A detailed study of Khiḏr in popular culture is found in Patrick Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr: Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im traditionellen Islam* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag: 2000).

Mulān Khizr's other 'exploit' has nothing to do with miracles at all. This is a rigid directive of a chieftain to protect his tribe's crops from being trampled by other people's cattle. Contrasting elements in the stories about Mulān Khizr testify that we are dealing here with a mixture of Pashtun tribal folklore and popular Islamic traditions. In Ni'matallāh's hagiographical anthology, the image of Mulān Khizr echoes three other legendary characters bearing the same name. These are Khwāja Khizr, evidently the oldest representation of the Islamic prophet in Pashtun folklore; Shaykh Khizr Sarwānī, the alter ego of Mulān Khizr; and Khwāja Khizr Kākar, the patriarch of the Ghūrghusht sheikhs. While the first two are said to be buried in the Sulaiman mountains, the 'original homeland' (*waṭan-i aṣli*) of Khizr Kākar is transferred to India to the banks of the Ganges.⁵⁴ A short folk legend connected with Shaykh Khizr Sarwānī tells of a miraculous jug of water always standing on his grave near the bank of the abovementioned river Darābhan. The jug served to resolve disputes, thus substituting for the late saint in his role of an arbitrator. The litigants had to drink water from this jug: the one whose claims were right remained alive and the liar died.⁵⁵

The prophet Khizr's archetypal function of discovering water resources is performed in Indo-Afghan hagiographies by a fair number of characters, such as Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār who touched a stone with his toothpick (*miswāk*) to cause water to flow in a dried creek in an olive grove, or Shaykh Bihdīn Bakhtiyār who discovered a spring in the foothills by striking his staff against a rock, or Shaykh Ḥamza who revived the well in his father's garden by throwing a brick into it and pronouncing an invocation.⁵⁶ However, among these individuals, besides Mulān Khizr, only Shaykh Thābit Barīch (Bārets), a Sarban spiritual master, is unambiguously described as a resident of Pashtun tribal areas.⁵⁷ The story goes that Shaykh Thābit protected his fellow clansmen against three dangers affecting the land where they settled after migration. The main trouble was that of the shortage of drinking water, which is highlighted in the land's name 'Shurāwak' (from Persian *shūrāba*, 'saline'). Two other threats were poisonous snakes and unfriendly Baloch tribes living in the neighbourhood. The toponym 'Shurāwak', as well as the vicinity of the Baloch people and the localization of Shaykh Thābit's grave in the mountain territories where the Tarīn tribes, including the Awdals (Abdālīs), resided after their migration imply that the legends about this sheikh could have emerged somewhere in the highlands to the west of present-day Quetta.⁵⁸

In one legend, Shaykh Thābit and his rival Shaykh Ilyās Barīch are presented as the disciples of Mawdūd Chishtī, a poorly known forerunner of the Chishtī community, who probably lived at the turn of the twelfth century.⁵⁹ The other legend transports Shaykh Thābit into the times of the Ṣafawids (r. 1501–1722), for it tells that the sheikh

⁵⁴Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 722, 791, 799, 817.

⁵⁵Cf. Green, 'Blessed Men and Tribal Politics', p. 350.

⁵⁶Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 734–35, 764, 818.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 754–57; cf. Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood', p. 190; and Nejatī, 'The Pearl of Pearls', pp. 174–75.

⁵⁸On Shūrāwak (Shorawak), a district in the middle reaches of the Pishīn-Lora river in present-day Afghanistan, see Ludwig W. Adamec (ed.), *Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Vol. 5: Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1980), pp. 439–54.

⁵⁹On a later folk legend about the purported ties between the early Chishtī masters and the Abdālīs (Awdals) who, like the Bārets tribes, are the Sarban Pashtuns, see Nejatī, 'The Pearl of Pearls', pp. 146–51; Nejatī, 'Reflections on the Prehistory of the Abdālī Afghans', pp. 552–54.

saved his people from the attack of the army sent by a Qandahār ruler identified as Qizilbāsh. Of particular interest is an anecdote in which young Shaykh Thābit predicts that the Afghan people (*mardum-i afghān*) invited by his father to the feast will not be able to digest the food. He proposes to bring other people, but his father insists and after the meal their Afghan guests vomit before leaving the house. To whatever degree the personality of Shaykh Thābit may have been mythologized, this anecdote seems to allude to a typical situation in which a family of Islamic religious missionaries with an ostensibly non-Pashtun ethnic background faces hardships in naturalizing itself in the tribal environment.

The fact that Ni‘matallāh and his sources had little knowledge of the real activities of Islamic spiritual teachers in the tribal areas throughout four centuries of Pashtun genealogical history is attested best of all by the hagiographies of the Ghūrghusht sheikhs whose residence and agency almost entirely pertain to India. This is particularly noteworthy since Haybat Khān Kākār, Ni‘matallāh’s main informant and co-author, was a Ghūrghusht Pashtun himself. As the domicile, or more precisely the burial place of the Ghūrghusht saints, Roh (Pakhtunkhwa) is mentioned once in a story about ‘the holy men of the Kākār tribe’ (*mardān-i khudā az qawm-i kākar*), unambiguously depicted as fairy-tale characters of unknown times.⁶⁰ The image of these nine Kākār saints was presumably inspired by the popular myth about ‘those of the cave’ from the Qur’ānic *sūra al-Kahf* (‘The Cave’), based in its turn on the Christian legend of ‘Seven Sleepers of Ephesus’ (Qur’ān 18: 9–26).⁶¹ Similar to the Qur’ānic *aṣḥāb al-kahf*, the nine Kākār saints retired in a cell (*hujra*) seeking both unhindered closeness with God and refuge from their ignorant fellow villagers. However, unlike ‘those of the cave’, they were sealed in their cell forever but promised to solicit God for fulfilment of people’s desires, provided that prayers and a donation of nine breads with sugar and oil are made by a supplicant. What forced them into seclusion was their fellow villagers’ inappropriate request to show miracles as a proof of their saintliness and hence earn the right to be spiritual guides in the community. The only miracle that the Kākār saints consented to demonstrate before their reclusion was indirectly related, like the above-mentioned donation, to the holy men’s basic function of supplying meals: they were boiled in nine buckets together with beef but stayed alive due to the intervention of divine powers. The cell in which the Kākār saints made shelter is said to have become a shrine and a popular place of pilgrimage. Thus, this story is a perfect example of how a place of worship in Pashtun tribal territories could acquire a ‘history’, thus explaining the reason why it became an Islamic sanctuary.

The miracle accomplished by the nine Kākār saints has its parallel in the story of Shaykh ‘Arif Tarīn Awdal, the ecstatic Sufi of the Sarban background, who allegedly lived in the vicinities of Qandahār on the banks of the river Arghān (Arghistān or Arghandāb) in the times of the Ṣafawid ruler Shāh Tahmāsp (r. 1524–1576). In this story, which appears as another folktale adapted for hagiographies, Shaykh ‘Arif is described as an ‘intoxicated and mad’ (*mast wa dīwāna*) seeker of divine truth. Such a characterization seems to have been aimed foremost at justifying his asocial behaviour in the story. On coming across a beautiful Mughal woman in the Qandahār bazaar (which means

⁶⁰Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 819–21; cf. Green, ‘Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood’, p. 192.

⁶¹Rudolf Paret, ‘Aṣḥāb al-Kahf’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New edition*, Vol. I, (eds) H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramers, E. Lévi-Provençal and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p. 691.

that the woman did not wear a veil and thereby also behaved against strict ethical and legal norms), the sheikh, enraptured by her good looks, hugged her without hesitation. As a punishment, they both were thrown into the burning oven by order of the city's governor Ḥusayn Mirzā. When, after a while, people enquired about their state, they discovered that the sheikh and the woman were safe and sound, and were enjoying the goat meat that was being fried in this oven. An attempt to punish the sheikh by hanging him also failed because all gallows-trees broke under his weight, indicating that this man was under God's protection. Ni'matallāh even reports the precise year of these miraculous events—974 AH (1566/67).⁶²

Pashtun tribal territories in the region of the Sulaiman mountains are also mentioned in a tale from a long series of stories about Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār. The revered Indo-Afghan sheikh acts in this tale as a defender of the residents of Pashtun indigenous lands against the army of Amīr Timūr who in 1398 launched an invasion into the Delhi Sultanate and marched through Pakhtunkhwa. To put the Pashtuns out of sight of Timūr's troops, Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār performed a miracle by creating a screen of dust which blinded the invaders. When Timūr found out that he had been challenged by Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār, he tried to show his respect to this renowned sheikh by sending him a horse as a gift. The refusal of Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār to accept the horse and, later, some other gifts reads as not only the common Sufi rejection of material goods, but also as an expression of political ideology related to the confrontation between the Mughals and the Pashtuns in the sixteenth century when this story is likely to have been invented.⁶³

The language of ancestors

F. Barth's empirical description of the main components of Pashtun identity, namely, patrilineal descent, Islam, and Pashtun custom, partly intersects with the well-known popular view that being Pashtun means 'having Pashto' (*paḫto larəl*), 'speaking Pashto' (*paḫto wayəl*), and 'doing Pashto' (*paḫto kawəl*).⁶⁴ While in Barth's anthropological taxonomy the language is not mentioned but implied as a part of a complex notion of customs, the popular view gives higher priority to the linguistic criterion of self-identity, obviously taking the confessional one for granted. As an important written document that articulates the perceptions of ethnic self-identity among the Pashtun diaspora of India in early modern times, Ni'matallāh Harawī's book lays stress only on the two above-indicated criteria—genealogical and religious—while for obvious reasons the issues of language and customs are touched upon only in passing. The book was composed in Persian in the vein of Indo-Persian historiography by a native Persian speaker who lived in the Persophone cultural environment far from Pashtun indigenous territories. However, Ni'matallāh's personal close contacts with various

⁶²Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 760–61; cf. Nejatī, 'The Pearl of Pearls', pp. 173–74.

⁶³Ni'matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 736–38; cf. Green, 'Blessed Men and Tribal Politics', p. 352.

⁶⁴Barth, 'Pathan Identity', p. 119; Lutz Rzehak, 'Doing Pashto: Pashtunwali as the Ideal of Honourable Behaviour and Tribal Life among the Pashtuns', in *Afghanistan Analysts Network* (2011), available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20110321LR-Pashtunwali-FINAL.pdf>, [accessed 22 September 2022]; see also Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, 'The Pashtun Counter-Narrative', *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 4 (2016), pp. 385–400.

representatives of the Indo-Afghan diaspora, beginning with his co-author Haybat Khān Kākar, resulted in his increased focus on the linguistic aspects of the folk material he had at his disposal.

Unlike most Persian authors, Ni‘matallāh sporadically employed in his accounts the Indo-Afghan ethnonym *pathān*, probably a distorted Indo-Arian or Indo-Persian rendering of the Pashto plural form *paṣṭānā* (‘Pashtuns’), as an equivalent of the conventional exonym *afghān*.⁶⁵ In the pseudohistorical account of how the Pashtun progenitor Qays visited the Muslim prophet in Medina and was converted by him to Islam, Ni‘matallāh tells that it was Muḥammad himself who gave Qays ‘Abd al-Rashīd the sobriquet ‘Pathān’ which was allegedly a special word for ‘keel’ in the language of a ‘sea-people’ (*mardum-i daryābār*). According to Ni‘matallāh, Muḥammad did this because he received a prediction from the archangel Jabra‘il (that is, a revelation from God) that the descendants of Qays (Pashtuns) would become ‘a pillar of the house of Islam’ (*sutūn-i khāna-yi islām*) like the keel of a ship.⁶⁶

In parallel to the ethnonym ‘Pathān’, Ni‘matallāh also occasionally used the authentic name of the Pashto language *pashtū* (or *zabān-i pashtū*) as a synonym of its common Persian literary variant *afghānī*. Of particular interest are the cases where Ni‘matallāh mentions Pashto lexemes and even phrases which point to the genuine, most likely oral, Pashto sources of his accounts. In some of these cases, the discretionary use of Pashto words directly confirms that the stories were told to Ni‘matallāh by bilingual Pashtuns, such as ‘[The sheikh] said to him in the Pashto language, “*Rāyishā*” that is “Come here”, or ‘Many years later his *tarbūr* (Pashto *tarbūr*), which in the Pashto language means “cousin,” has arrived.’⁶⁷ The political connotation of the folk etymology of the ethnonym ‘Lodī’ explained as a combination of two Pashto words—the adjective *loy* (‘big, great’) and the copula *dāy*—is mentioned above. In a note on Shaykh Mīchan Lodī, Ni‘matallāh explicated the meaning of this sheikh’s name or, more exactly, his moniker (*laqab*). According to Ni‘matallāh, when the sheikh once returned home swaying in a state of rapture because he was affected by a ‘wind of God’s generosity’ people said that he was rotating like a mill (*āsyā*), ‘and in the Pashto language *āsyā* is called *mīchan* (Pashto *mechān*, “grain grinder”).’⁶⁸ In a similar case, the moniker ‘Dankar’ (Pashto *dangar*, ‘lean, skinny’) of Shaykh ‘Alī, a purported brother of Yaḥyā Bakhtiyār, is properly interpreted in Persian as *lāghar*, *zā‘if*, *nazār*, but the original language of

⁶⁵On the etymology of both ethnonyms, see Johnny Cheung, ‘On the Origin of the Terms “Afghan” & “Pashtun” (Again)’, in *Studia Philologica Iranica. Gherardo Gnoli Memorial Volume*, (eds) E. Morano, E. Provasi and A. V. Rossi (Roma: Scienze e Lettere, 2017), pp. 31–50.

⁶⁶Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 111. In his didactical book *Dastār-nāma* (1665), Khushḥāl Khān Khatak repeated this popular etymology of the ethnonym ‘Pathān’ but with an important ‘correction’ that this name was given to Pashtuns by Maḥmūd Ghaznawī (r. 999–1030) for the great toughness and fortitude displayed by Pashtun warriors during his Indian campaigns: ‘Sultan said to them: “These [people] are the *patān* of my army.” And *patān* is a beam which is used in building ships’ (Khushḥāl Khān Khatak, *Dastār-nāma* (Kabul: Paṣṭo Tōlona, 1966), p. 85). Thus, despite fictional nature of this ‘etymology’, Khushḥāl Khān provided the more adequate historical chronology and localization of the appearance of the Indo-Afghan ethnonym ‘Pathan’ that is still being used even in academic literature.

⁶⁷Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 760, 823. The final short vowel *a* in the archaic (or dialectal?) imperative form *rāyisha* (modern *rāsha*) ‘come here, come on’ is designated here by the letter ‘alif’ as long *ā*.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 792.

this word is not indicated, for no other reason than that it was a self-evident fact for Ni‘matallāh’s Pashto-speaking informants.⁶⁹ In another case, a Pashto word is used without any explanation of its meaning as if it was a commonplace borrowing in the Persian language of the Indo-Afghans. It is said in the brief characterization of Shaykh Ḥasan Kīthar Kānsī that only a glance of resentment thrown by this stern man at a *galī* (?) or a *tūman* (‘people, tribe, populated area’ from Turkic ‘ten thousand’) could cause ‘forty funerals’.⁷⁰ The word *galī* here is very likely Pashto *kəlay* (‘village’).

An intriguing example of a Pashto quotation is found in the story about the nine Kākar saints (see the previous section). The prayer with the invocation to these holy men is said to have begun with Pashto words spelled as *awnitan zalgūzī* and translated into Persian as *nuh tan mard hāzīr shawīd* (‘Nine men, come into sight’).⁷¹ If ‘Zalgūzay’ in this quotation is the name of a Kākar tribe with whom these saints were allegedly affiliated, the phrase should be interpreted as *aw nəho tano zalgūzīo* (lit. ‘O the nine Zalgūzays’). However, taking into account its Persian translation, the invocation may be understood also as the incorrectly recorded Pashto phrase *aw nəho tano zalm(i)wuzay* (‘O nine young men, come out’), or even *owo nihāno zalm(i)wuzay* (‘Seven hidden young men, come out’). In the latter case, the words of the invocation better conform to the plot of the story and the number of the saints corresponds to that in the popular versions of the Qur’ānic legend about ‘those of the cave’ and the Christian legend underlying it.

Of special importance are two stories where Pashto is mentioned by Ni‘matallāh as a means of creative self-expression by the Indo-Afghan sheikhs. These hagiographical notes add the names of Bustān Bārets and ‘Īsā Məshwāñay (Pers. ‘Maswānī’) to the small list of the early Pashtun litterateurs known to us who composed verses in their native vernacular in the sixteenth century.⁷² As was said before in the second section of this article, Ni‘matallāh was personally acquainted with Bustān Bārets. He closely communicated with this sheikh for about two years, obviously attracted by his spiritual charisma, and even accompanied him on a sea trip to Goa. According to Ni‘matallāh, at a young age Bustān Bārets left his homeland in Roh for India where he settled in the town of Sāmāna, located in the vicinity of modern Patiala in Punjab, and for some time was engaged in trade. Ni‘matallāh does not provide any information on how Bustān Bārets attained the status of a blessed man and a renowned spiritual guide, but speaks of him as a highly emotional and sensitive man who ‘sometimes recited Pashto verses (*ash‘ār-i pashtū*) in such a sad and dolorous voice that could have made a stone cry’.⁷³ Bustān Bārets died, apparently of dysentery (*ishāl-i kabad*), right after travelling to Goa on 31 December 1593 (07.04.1002 AH), and Ni‘matallāh was among those who organized his funeral.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 740.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 759, 762.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 820.

⁷²A discussion of the emergence of Pashto written poetry in the seventeenth century and the early Pashto poets’ varying views on the motives behind their writing in the native vernacular is in Mikhail Pelevin, ‘The Inception of Literary Criticism in Early Modern Pashto Writings’, *Iranian Studies* 54, no 5–6 (2021), pp. 947–76.

⁷³Ni‘matallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 744.

Shaykh ʿĪsā Məshwānāy lived a little earlier, for he is called a contemporary of Shīr Shāh Sūrī (r. 1540–1545).⁷⁴ In one story, Shīr Shāh sends his emissary to check rumours that Shaykh ʿĪsā had a bad habit of drinking wine. However, a suspicious flask always standing beside the sheikh turned out to be filled with pure milk. In reply, Shaykh ʿĪsā reprimands the Pashtun ruler of India for his inappropriate enquiry into the personal life of blessed people and cites a meaningful verse from Ḥāfīz, ‘We display faithfulness and endure reproaches, but feel fine/since suffering on our Path is a blasphemy’.⁷⁵ Such quotations are rare in Niʿmatallāh’s hagiographical anthology. The reference to the eminent Persian poet distinguishes Shaykh ʿĪsā from other Indo-Afghan spiritual masters and characterizes him as a well-educated individual with a predilection for poetry.

Niʿmatallāh describes him also as a rich and powerful man who once performed the role of an arbitrator in a dispute over land. This folk story deserves attention because it aimed at explaining the reasons for transferring land ownership from one Pashtun kinship group to another. Its plot was probably based on some real events that may have taken place either somewhere in North India or in the tribal areas. The story goes that the sheikh granted a plot of cultivated land to a man from the Tarīn tribe, but then his own cousin, that is, a Məshwānāy, claimed his right to this land, presumably appealing to an old Pashtun custom of *wesh* that regulated the periodical redistribution of fertile soils and pastures between kinship groups.⁷⁶ At the public trial, Shaykh ʿĪsā awarded the land to the Tarīn man for a reason that imbues the story with hagiographical flavour: the Tarīn obeyed the order of the sheikh to bow at the feet of the claimant, while the latter refused out of pride to do the same to the defendant. It is noteworthy that Tarīn is a Sarban tribal division closely related to the Abdālīs from whom the Sadozay and the Bārakzay dynasties of the later Afghanistan rulers descended.⁷⁷ As for the Məshwānāys, Pashtun genealogical traditions differ in that they regard them either as the descendants of a *sayyid* affiliated with the Kākārs, or as a small branch of the Lodī tribes.⁷⁸

Niʿmatallāh asserts that ʿĪsā Məshwānāy was the author of a treatise on monotheism (*dar tawḥīd risāla*) written in three parts and in three languages—Pashto, Persian, and Hindustani (*hindawī*). In all three languages three quotations from this *risāla* are verses, so it is very likely that the ‘treatise’ was in fact a collection of poetry, the multilingual *dīwān* containing standard Sufi lyrics. The fragment in Pashto, transcribed in Persian letters, goes first. It consists of four rhymed lines which seem to be slightly corrupted, but nevertheless allow us to perfectly understand them as a Sufi prayer to God, ‘You do things on Your own, You reject [those striving for You] on Your own./I am astonished: sometimes You make me dear to You, sometimes You humble me./You are powerful over Your attributes (*ṣifatūna*); sometimes You put me in fire./ʿĪsā is amazed by this

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 822–25.

⁷⁵Cf. Ḥāfīz, *Dīwān-i Khwāja-yi Ḥāfīz-i Shirāzī*, (ed.) S. A. Anjawī (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Intishārāt-i Jāwīdān-i ʿIlmī, 1966), p. 216.

⁷⁶On this custom, see Rzehak, ‘Doing Pashto’, pp. 5–6.

⁷⁷Nejatīe argues that the relationship between the Tarīns and the Abdālīs was more like that of political allies than that of genealogically related ethnic groups as is stated in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* where the Abdālīs (Awdals) are introduced as a subdivision of the Tarīns (Nejatīe, ‘The Pearl of Pearls’, pp. 178–81).

⁷⁸Niʿmatallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, pp. 645–47; and Syāl, *Da paxtano qabilo shajare*, pp. 158–59, 188–89.

attribute: sometimes you make me Your friend, sometimes You make me an alien to You'.⁷⁹

While Pashto verses sung by Shaykh Bustān Bārets evidently had only an oral form and could be of folk origin in part, the specimens of Pashto poetry ascribed to the authorship of Shaykh ʿĪsā Māshwānāy were at the disposal of Nīʿmatallāh as written texts. This means that the Persian alphabet was being used from time to time by learned Indo-Afghans for personal records in Pashto, including their literary compositions. The earliest authentic texts in Pashto which have come down to us in two variants of Pashto script proper are didactic works by the founder of the Roshani community Bāyazīd Anṣārī (d. *circa* 1572), his follower and poet Arzānī Khweṣkay (d. after 1601), and the traditionalist theologian Ākhūnd Darweza (d. after 1615). Nīʿmatallāh's notes on the two Indo-Afghan sheikhs and poets, especially a quote from Shaykh ʿĪsā's lyrics, provide valuable facts for drawing a more detailed picture of the actual presence of the Pashto language and the circulation of Pashto literary texts in sixteenth-century India.

Conclusion

The large hagiographical section in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī wa Makhzan-i Afghānī*—a book without precedent on Pashtun ethnohistory compiled in the Indo-Afghan diaspora in the early seventeenth century—pursued two interconnected goals. First, it had to prove the idealized concept of the long-lasting and firm adherence of Pashtuns to Islam by both didactic and entertaining stories derived from various, mostly oral, folklore sources. Second, the affirmation of this concept aimed at supporting the claims of the Indo-Afghan elite to political leadership in Muslim India in the face of the ongoing competition with the Mughals. Following the structure of the book's genealogical section, the hagiographies also echoed its covert ideological objective and emphasized the supremacy of spiritual masters affiliated with the Beṯan tribal group to which the former Pashtun ruling dynasties of the Delhi sultanate—the Lodīs and the Sūrīs—belonged. With regard to its composition and stylistic features, the hagiographical collection in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* continued traditions of the *tazkīrat al-awliyā* genre in Indo-Persian literature and shared similarities with two kinds of works—the religious Sufi anthologies such as the *Siyar al-awliyā* and the *Akhbār al-akhyār*, and the biographical sections in historiographical books such as the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, the *Muntakhab al-tawārikh*, and the *Āʿin-i Akbarī*.

Despite its direct link with tribal genealogies and implicit reliance on the tribalist ideology of Pashtun segmentary society, the hagiographical collection in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* attests foremost to the cultural and spiritual experience of Indo-Afghans after the rise of the Lodī dynasty in the Delhi sultanate in the mid-fifteenth century, that is, in the period spanning the century-and-a-half before the book was written. The socio-cultural realities of Pashtun tribal areas to the west of the Indus are reflected in it only fragmentarily and do not shed much light on the factual religious beliefs and

⁷⁹Nīʿmatallāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, p. 825. In Zalmay Hewādmal, *Ḍa paṣto adabiyāto tārikh: larghūne aw māndzanay dawre* (Peshawar: Dānish Khparandoya ʿŪlona, 2000), p. 78, these verses are quoted with a few additional phrases that make the text more coherent both in terms of meaning and metrics; however, the source of this variant is not indicated.

practices of the Pashtuns over several centuries. In hagiographical stories, the tribal territories are depicted mostly as imaginary highland areas, associated mainly with the Sulaiman mountains, where spiritual masters often perform the functions of chieftains rather than saints. In some cases, hagiographical characters seem to be reinterpreted personalities of Islamic mythology such as the prophets Mūsā and Khizr, or 'those of the cave' (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*) from a Qur'ānic legend.

A number of stories allow us to distinguish two basic patterns of the emergence of spiritual lineages in the tribes. Before the Lodīs came to power in Delhi, spiritual teachers and blessed men among the Pashtuns were mostly incomers who often declared their descent from the Prophet Muḥammad, that is, they claimed to be *sayyids*, and strove to become naturalized in tribal society by obtaining permission to marry Pashtun women. Where their missionary services were accepted by tribal rulers, their progeny could be incorporated into the tribal structure with an emphasized proviso in the genealogies on applying the matrilineal kinship principle. The second pattern began to evolve in the fifteenth century when large-scale Pashtun migration to India gave ethnic Pashtuns more social opportunities to pursue careers as religious instructors or to exercise the sacral authority of inspired mystics in a cosmopolitan environment. The formation of spiritual clans (*stāna*) of Pashtun descent in the tribal territories can be traced in the available sources from the mid-sixteenth century, but the hagiographies in the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī* lack genuine information on this process.

The presence of Pashtun ancestral homelands in the Indo-Afghan hagiographies is most noticeable in those folk stories that contain some linguistic material related to the Pashto language, often referred to by its original glossonym *pashtū* instead of the common Persian appellation *afghānī*. This material includes not only single lexemes, mentioned to explicate the meaning of Pashtun personal names or unintentionally employed by bilingual narrators, but also a quote from a Pashto poem by the sheikh ʿIsā Māshwānāy. Similarly, the Indo-Afghan ethnonym *pathān* is occasionally used in the hagiographies as an equivalent to the exonym *afghān*, which had prevailed in Persian writings since its first appearance in the anonymous geographical work *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* in the late tenth century. Aimed at strengthening ideological grounds for the political claims of the Indo-Afghan elites, the *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*'s hagiographical collection significantly contributed to the conceptualization of the confessional criterion of Pashtuns' self-identity. However, recurring remarks on the Pashto language in the hagiographies imply that the linguistic aspect, defined in popular tradition as 'speaking Pashto' (*paṣto wayəl*), was also considered among the basic components of Pashtun identity at a time when this regional vernacular was gradually acquiring its written form.

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