

Final Research Report
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My research centers on Islam in Central and Inner Eurasia, where one of its prominent features has been the activity of the mystical or Sufi groups. The Naqshbandiyya, a Sufi order established around Baha' ud-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) became one of the prominent orders regionally. This order spread from Bukhara through India and into the Arabic and Turkish regions, even eventually to the United States. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seem to have been a period of systemizing the order. My research seeks to delineate the ideas – religious and social – flowing through the spiritual teaching of a sixteenth-century member of the Naqshbandiyya, Ahmad ibn Mavlana Jalal ad-Din Khwajagi Kasani “Makhdum-i A'zam” (d. 949 AH/1542 CE).¹ While most seem to agree that he was an important figure, his writings have not been published in any form, nor have any significant surveys of his work been written. It is this gap in our knowledge that I plan to fill.

Typically, approaches to Sufism in this region have explored its political connections, particularly in the period immediately preceding Makhdum-i A'zam's florescence, such as in the work of Joanne Gross. The competition among the religiously minded, and the instances in which Makhdum-i A'zam's descendents seem to have used their own “religious” heritage, needs to be understood and incorporated into our ideas about Islam and social reproduction. As can be seen in the work of Michael Chamberlain, competition was often seen in the Middle East as part of an attempt to acquire prestige and social capital. Even within a single order, competition surrounded issues of biological descent versus spiritual descent from earlier figures. Makhdum-i A'zam himself delineates the biological versus spiritual or merit-based heritage: biological “honor” is derived by “grant[ing] greatness and favor upon others.”² Examples of this competition within the Naqshbandiyya are found between groups connected to the biological descendents of Khwaja Ahrar (d. 1490) and others, like Makhdum-i A'zam, who represented a spiritual lineage from Khwaja Ahrar.

We presently have few primary sources upon which to base our understandings of the Naqshbandiyya in the sixteenth century. Without some idea of how the order grew and changed over time, we have little upon which to base our understandings of the Naqshbandiyya in the post-Sirhindi era (the early seventeenth century), to say nothing of the nineteenth century, when its impact was still wider. Since Makhdum-i A'zam's work was still being copied – and therefore read – during the nineteenth century, it must have had a continuing impact on the thinking of Sufis during these later periods as well.

Makhdum-i A'zam wrote approximately thirty short treatises, none of which have been published in a critical edition. (The exact number cannot be determined without examining all of the known manuscripts in the world, as many of the titles do not match

¹ The name includes several parts typical of medieval Persian names; his nickname was “Makhdum-i A'zam” (the great master).

² Bankipore ms., Folio 75a, translation mine.

and opening lines are lacking in the catalogues; I still need to see codices in Islamabad, Pakistan and Moscow.) Ideally, the first phase of this research would be to complete a draft version of a critical edition for each treatise. However, after working in Tashkent now for nine months, I have seen how divergent the manuscripts are in some cases. While a critical edition still needs to be done, I plan to focus on typing one of the Tashkent manuscripts so it can be indexed. Once this is done, I can determine how these works fit into an oeuvre so that other scholars can more quickly determine which of Makhdum-i A'zam's writings might fit into their studies. This should help the field advance more quickly while the basic work continues.

I began this research with the only copy of Makhdum-i A'zam's work available in the US, a microfilm of a manuscript from Bankipore, India held at the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies (RIFIAS) at Indiana University. This is a relatively late manuscript. I started typing this manuscript (in the Arabic script) before I left the US, but in most cases the typescript I completed was not useful, except as a learning tool because of the extensive differences with the Tashkent manuscripts.

Three codices of Makhdum-i A'zam's work are catalogued in the *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR* of the Sharqshunoslik instituti (Near Eastern Studies Institute), mss. #501, 1443 and 10626. I have as yet been unable to gain access to ms. 501, which is in the hands of Bakhtiyor Babajanov and he has been unwilling to let anyone, American or Uzbek alike, spend more than an hour with it. I completely copied by hand ms. 1443, since the Institute would not allow me to type from manuscripts in the reading room. (This task alone took approximately 5 months, to copy and then proof the manuscript.) I photographed ms. 10626. Since the computer I brought with me failed and then was stolen, I was unable to continue typing the manuscript, although when a new one arrived in April, I began once again. (Backups meant that no information was lost, simply rendered inaccessible.) My manuscript will form the basis of typescripts; I have already given one complete set of the manuscript to one of the other students studying Makhdum-i A'zam here who has been very helpful. To ensure that the photographs of ms. 10626 are useable, I have also completed one tract, comparing the 1443 version to the 10626 version, and found the differences to be minor.

In addition to these catalogued manuscripts, I have identified two more codices of Makhdum-i A'zam's collected works in private hands in Uzbekistan, one in Samarqand, apparently the one identified in Pulati, A. and A. E-A. Khatipov. "O Traktatakh Makhdumi A'zama (predbaputel'noe soobshchenie)" *Voprosy istorii matematiki astronomii*. Samarqand: Izdatel'stvo Samarkandskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, new series, vypusk. 229 (1972): 19-24. The other is located in Jizzak. I will photograph these manuscripts to add to the RIFIAS collection.

Reading the tracts has been exciting. They are quite varied in form and tone; Makhdum-i A'zam clearly wrote with a particular audience in mind, and the audience varied. In order to facilitate working with the tracts, I have been categorizing them. Some I have termed "academic," as they summarize information and ideas in a way that indicates they were for a highly educated audience. Within this academic group are those tracts which

are clearly argumentative, meant to prove a point that the author does not necessarily think his readers hold. Others are literary, designed to explicate poetic works, although for an audience interested in the mystical content of those verses. Another group introduces apparent novices to the doctrines of the order. The last group, which tends to overlap with the previous one, is “*adab*”, that is, proper behavior, again, mostly for novices. Sometimes works fit into more than one category. In addition, a great deal of indexing work needs to be done, and this I have already started, since the content of the works is not necessarily obvious from the title, and sometimes the more interesting information is lurking in another tract. The tract entitled “*Dhikr*” (a part of the Sufi religious experience), for instance, does not cover the actual act in any depth; for that one can look in other tracts, which describe in detail how one performs *dhikr*. I have already indexed the poetry Makhdum-i A’zam employs. This facilitates locating references (most of the poetry for which he gives a citation is from Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi or ‘Ubaidullah Khan), and cross-referencing ideas within the oeuvre, since verses are likely to be used in places where the same ideas reoccur. One result of this indexing has been seeing that multi-line poetry often consists of lines from various places and much more seldom represents multiple lines from the same place.

For content, there is an over-abundance of material. Makhdum-i A’zam discusses “*fana*”, annihilation, a stage of the Sufi experience, in many places and as part of many other stages. He delineates some of the groups of Sufis based on how they practice Sufism. He discusses Adam and Eve (Havva) at some length in several tracts, with a slightly different emphasis each time. He also discusses Moses (Musa) in several places. He mentions both *dhikr-i jahriyya* and *dhikr-i khufiyya*, which most scholars believe to have been competing forms during the two previous centuries. His use of supporting texts – sometimes Quranic, sometimes Hadith, sometimes neither – needs closer examination. While some of the tracts are quite short, only a few folios, others are extensive, up to forty folios (eighty pages) long (28 pages typed). These extensive tracts could be the basis of entire dissertations alone, although I think in the end a better understanding of Makhdum-i A’zam as a thinker will come from cross-referencing his ideas rather than looking at just one tract.

There is so much work to be done with the manuscripts from Central Eurasia that future research agendas could read “just start, anywhere!” Significant thinkers like Muhammad Parsa, one of the early systemizers of the Naqshbandiyya or ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, have only a few of their works in any edition, and critical editions are still lacking. While scholars of Europe and America made find the lack of these basic tools shocking, it is just this work, tedious and expensive, that needs to be done so that systematic research can move forward.

As for American policy, it seems clear to me from my discussions with religious teachers here that there is a thirst for information about local religious intellectuals. Everyone wanted to know everything I could tell them based on my reading of the original works. The more the United States supports the dissemination of information about local Sufi figures, the less likely that true “Wahhabi” teachings can have any hold here, since Wahhabism is anathema to Sufism as understood in Central Eurasia. This could be as

simple as funding publications in the local languages on these figures. For instance, there is only one book-length work on Makhdum-i A'zam in any language, and it happens to be in Uzbek. The work was published in 1996; I was unsuccessful in locating a copy when I came to Uzbekistan in 1997, and I still cannot find anyone who would willingly part with his copy. Only 1000 copies were published. If the publishers had been able to produce more, certainly they would have sold more, albeit only a “popular” (not scholarly) work like this. If, as the Uzbekistan and American governments claim, they want to avoid fundamentalism here, supporting the dissemination of information on “orthodox” Sufi figures could only help.