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**Confessional Perception of Historical Memory:  
Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi through the Eyes of the 18th c.  
Sunni Author  
(Based on Manuscript B720 from the IOM RAS Collection)**

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*Abstract:* This article examines contradictory assessments of the activities of Shiite preacher Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi (1441–1526) in the religious history of medieval Kashmir. The study analyzes fundamental differences in interpretation of his role between contemporary Iranian historiography, which presents him as an outstanding religious reformer, and 18th c. Kashmiri Sunni sources that critically evaluate his missionary activities. Based on a comparison of the manuscript “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” by Muhammad A‘zam Didamari from the IOM RAS collection with works written by contemporary Iranian researchers, this study demonstrates how authors’ confessional affiliation influences the formation of historical memory regarding religious figures of the past.

*Key words:* manuscript, “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir”, Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi, medieval Kashmir, Shiism, Nurbakhshiyya, religious history, historical memory

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Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi (1441/1442–1525/1526 CE) stands as one of the most controversial figures in the religious history of medieval Kashmir during the 15th–16th cc. This Shiite preacher, whose activities unfolded during a period of intense confessional conflict in the region, receives markedly different assessments across various historiographical traditions. Contemporary Iranian scholarship consistently depicts him as an outstanding religious reformer who made significant contributions to the spread of Shiite teachings and the spiritual development of Kashmiri society.

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However, such unambiguously positive assessments contrast sharply with substantially different testimonies recorded in local Kashmiri sources. The mid — 18th c. manuscript titled “Waki‘at-i Kashmir” authored by a Sunni writer, demonstrates a fundamentally different perspective on Mir Shams’ personality and activities, expressing clear disapproval of his religious endeavors. This divergence in evaluations presents researchers with an important methodological problem: to what extent does confessional affiliation of historical source authors influence the formation of historical memory regarding religious figures of the past.

Muhammad, son of dervish Ibrahim, known as Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi, was born in Iran in the 9th c. AH (15th c. CE). His epithet “‘Iraqi” has misled scholars to classify him as originating from Iraq. However, during the Seljuk era, the mountainous provinces including Kermanshah, Hamadan, Ray, and Isfahan were called “*Iraq-i Ajam*” (Persian Iraq) to distinguish them from Arab Iraq.<sup>1</sup> There are disagreements regarding Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi’s exact birthplace, but the epithet “‘Iraqi” may support the hypothesis centered on the village of Kan, belonging to Solgan. Today Solgan is a part of Kan district in Tehran, and in ancient times it was considered a part of Ray and the *Iraq-i Ajam* region.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars differ in their opinions regarding ‘Iraqi’s religious affiliation. Some consider him a Shiite.<sup>3</sup> Others suggest that he was both a preacher of Shiism and a follower of the *Nurbakhshiyya*<sup>45</sup> tariqa. Still others view him exclusively as an adherent of the *Nurbakhshiyya* tariqa.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, contemporary Iranian researchers agree on one point — Mir Shams al-Din played a key role in spreading Shiism throughout Kashmir.

Mir Shams al-Din traveled to Kashmir twice. He made his first journey in 882 AH (1477–1478 CE) as an envoy of Sultan Husayn Bayqara<sup>7</sup> to the court of Kashmir rulers, and after eight years in Kashmir he returned to Khorasan. Since he served as an ambassador during this trip, he engaged

<sup>1</sup> DEHKHODA 1998: 15786.

<sup>2</sup> MATU 1389: 170.

<sup>3</sup> RIAKHI 2014: 11.

<sup>4</sup> Nurbakhshiyya is a Sufi brotherhood of Shia orientation that emerged in the early 15th c. from the Kubrawiyya brotherhood as its Shia branch. See: PROZOROV 1991: 193.

<sup>5</sup> MATU 1389: 171.

<sup>6</sup> DAVARPENAH 1397: 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sultan Husayn Bayqara was a ruler of Khorasan (1469–1506) from the Timurid dynasty.

little in religious activities. However, when he arrived to Kashmir twelve years later, in 902 AH (1496–1497 CE), Mir Shams al-Din began active missionary work.<sup>8</sup>

The Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities of Bu-Ali Sina University (Hamadan, Iran) ‘Abd Allah Atayi, the specialist in Iranian history and the spread of Shiism Muhammad Husayn Riahi, and the Kashmiri author Ghulam Muhammad Matu analyze in their works activities of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi in the context of spreading Shiism.

‘Abd Allah Atayi writes that Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi embarked on his journey to Kashmir to assume leadership of the *Nurbakhshiyya* Sufi order there. ‘Iraqi remained in Kashmir until the end of his life, and his activities became the main factor in spreading Shiism in this region: “To this day, the influence of his activities is evident in the beautiful land of Kashmir”.<sup>9</sup>

Muhammad Husayn Riahi reports that Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi converted influential figures and statesmen of Kashmir to Shiite Islam.<sup>10</sup>

According to Ghulam Muhammad Matu, Mir Shams al-Din established friendly relations with local population after arriving in Kashmir, introduced them to Islamic teachings, and called for conversion to the Shiite *madhab*. Since he had previously lived in Kashmir for eight years, Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi studied the tribal lifestyle of the Kashmiris and understood that decisions of tribal leaders were unquestioningly accepted by society. Considering that Kashmiri society had deep mystical traditions and spiritual inclinations, he focused his preaching activities precisely on these aspects.<sup>11</sup>

The specialist in Persian literature Dr. Gulara Davarpanah, while considering Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi a follower of the *Nurbakhshiyya* tariqa, notes that Shiism in Kashmir also spread through efforts of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi: “During his second journey, ‘Iraqi more openly and seriously engaged in calling people to his madhab and was able to convert influential figures from the rulers of the local Chak dynasty to his faith. With their support, he openly engaged in spreading Shiism”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> MATU 1389: 171.

<sup>9</sup> ‘ATAYI 1392: 228.

<sup>10</sup> RIAKHI 2014: 10.

<sup>11</sup> MATU 1389: 173.

<sup>12</sup> DAVARPENAH 1397: 9.

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It should also be noted that Iranian researchers compare these activities of Mir Shams Iraqi with those of Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani,<sup>13</sup> whose role in spreading Islam in Kashmir has never been questioned. The same epithets and praises are addressed to ‘Iraqi: “Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi was an influential religious, mystical and political figure in the Kashmir region, who lived in the 9th and early 10th cc. AH and, like Sayyid Muhammad Hamadani, he played an important role in spreading Islam, especially the Shiite madhab and the *Nurbakhshiyya* tariqa”.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, research of contemporary Iranian scholars shows a clear tendency to emphasize the exceptional significance of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi in the context of spreading Shiism. Researchers consistently present him as a key figure in religious transformation, focusing attention on his missionary activities and his role in forming the region’s Shiite identity.

However, such a persistent tradition in Iranian historiography makes the existence of texts with fundamentally different assessments of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi’s activities all the more remarkable. In the context of universal praise, the mid — 18th c. Kashmiri manuscript “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” appears particularly surprising. Its author, being a Sunni and adherent of the Sufi tradition, forms a critical narrative about the Shiite preacher’s activities. This source does not merely supplement the established narrative, but radically overturns it, presenting Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi not as an enlightener, but as a figure who provoked serious criticism and dissatisfaction among the local religious community.

The creator of this work is Muhammad A‘zam Didamari (died 1765). The work’s full title is “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” (Events of Kashmir) or “Tarikh-i A‘zami” (A‘zami’s Chronicle). Biographical data about Muhammad A‘zam is extremely limited. It is established that his father was Khayr al-Zaman (B720, f. 3.b), and he himself belonged to the Naqshbandi Sufi order and showed interest in poetry. His main *murshid* (spiritual guide) was the *Mujaddidi* sheikh Muhammad Murad.<sup>15</sup> According to the data provided by the author, he started working on the manuscript in 1735–1736 CE and completed it in 1747–1748 CE.

<sup>13</sup> Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani was a Persian Sufi philosopher from the Kubrawiyya tariqa. In Kashmiri historiography, he is known as one of the main Iranian theologians who spread Islam in Kashmir in the 14th c.

<sup>14</sup> DAVARPENAH 1379: 20; MATU 1389: 180.

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Murad is the author of “Hasanat al-Abrar”. See: AKIMUSHKIN 2001: 62.

The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences holds a manuscript copy of “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” under call number B720, dated 1171 AH (1757/58 CE). The manuscript has cardboard covers bound in dark brown leather on the outside and white leather on the inside, without a flap. Both covers show identical decorative tooling: a central medallion (*turunj*) with diamond shapes above and below, corner decorations, border frames, dotted patterns, and plant motifs within the stamped areas. The 298 ff. text is written in black ink using *nastaliq* script with no decorative elements. Red ink is used for proper names, poetry, and Arabic quotations. The work is structured into Introduction (*muqaddima*) describing Kashmir, three main sections covering the origins of Hindu rulers, the history of Muslim kings, and Kashmir under the Timurids, followed by Conclusion (*khatima*).

In describing the activities of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi, the manuscript “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” represents an analytical reworking of sources, methodologically comparable to contemporary studies of this historical figure. Muhammad A‘zam, like present-day historians, carried out critical selection of information from various testimonies, chronicles, and possibly oral traditions, forming an understanding of ‘Iraqi’s role and influence in Kashmiri history.

In the manuscript “Waqi‘at-i Kashmir” a significant section is devoted to the activities of Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi (B720, f. 76a–76b; 85b–87b), with Muhammad A‘zam demonstrating a critical stance toward this figure. When describing ‘Iraqi’s character and methods, the author portrays him as a “cunning” deceiver and conspirator who employed diplomatic methods to realize his religious designs. Emphasis is placed on his duplicity: outwardly ‘Iraqi appeared as a Sufi and follower of Sheikh Isma‘il, but secretly he implanted Shiite views among the Kashmiri population.

The author begins his narrative with a formulation that immediately sets the tone for the entire subsequent exposition: Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi arrived in Kashmir “ostensibly on a diplomatic mission” on behalf of Sultan Husayn Mirza (Husayn Bayqara). The use of this phrase casts doubts on the official status of the visit and the legitimacy of ‘Iraqi’s presence in Kashmir. This opening of the narrative programs the reader’s perception: everything that ‘Iraqi did in Kashmir should be viewed through the lens of initial deception and malicious intent. The narrative reaches its culmination in the episode of exposure: “When Sultan Husayn Mirza learned of his treachery and inner depravity, he dismissed him from service” (B720, f. 76a). The author legiti-

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mizes his accusations through an appeal to the authority of Husayn Bayqara, an outstanding ruler and patron of the arts. The use of the term “treachery” (خیانت — *khiyanat*) points to a breach of trust and betrayal of one’s patron. Even more significant is the accusation of “inner depravity” (فساد باطنی — *fasad-i batini*) — a term that in Sunni polemics is associated with heretical movements practicing esoteric teachings. The dismissal from service represents a public acknowledgment of ‘Iraqi’s moral bankruptcy and his expulsion from the circle of worthy individuals. The concluding touch to the portrait is added by the phrase: “...and for this reason he returned to Kashmir” (B720, f. 76a). Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi’s second journey, which in Shiite historiography is presented as a missionary vocation, is here completely stripped of heroic motivation and interpreted as a forced flight following a disgraceful exposure.

According to Muhammad A‘zam’s assessment, Mir Shams al-Din ‘Iraqi undertook deliberate actions to legitimize his status in Kashmir through a falsification of his spiritual lineage. Having preliminarily studied the religious-political situation in the region, he established contact with the local spiritual elite, claiming affiliation with the Sufi tradition and reception of *khilafat* (spiritual succession and the right to transmit Sufi teachings) from Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh.<sup>16</sup> The author qualifies these assertions as conscious deception, substantiating his position by pointing to the absence of any genuine spiritual succession between ‘Iraqi and Nurbakhsh. The accusation is reinforced with a Quranic citation (24:16), which indicates that these actions were perceived as a religious transgression.

The author raises serious accusations regarding the destruction of state unity. ‘Iraqi is accused in spreading “skillful intrigues and sedition” among Kashmiri emirs, which provoked confessional conflicts and weakened central authority. From the Sunni chronicler’s perspective, ‘Iraqi’s activity is interpreted as “religious delusion” and “corruption” of the popular masses. The narrative abounds with negative characteristics: “inner depravity”, “treachery”, “heretical views”, “maliciousness”. The author includes poetic fragments to emphasize condemnation and create emotional impact on the audience.

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<sup>16</sup> Mir Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh (1392–1464) was a mystic (Sufi) who laid the foundation of the Noorbakshia school of Islam. See: PROZOROV 1991: 193.

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For example:

از ره مرد بظاهر هموار مردمان  
در خاکهای نرم بود دام بیشتر

On the path that seems smooth for people,  
In soft lands there are more traps<sup>17</sup> (B720, f. 85b)

or:

بود عده های تو دل بسته ام چه ساده دلم  
که آب خضر طمع دارم از سراب غلط

I attached my heart to your promises, how naive I am  
That I thirst for Khidr's<sup>18</sup> water from a mirage by mistake<sup>19</sup> (B720, f. 86b)

Consequently, Muhammad A'zam interprets the activities of Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi as a destructive factor that, under religious cover, disrupted the political stability and spiritual harmony of Kashmir. This position reflects a characteristic Sunni assessment of Shiite missionary work in a region where Shiism was viewed as a challenge to the existing religious order.

Regarding the comparison between Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi and Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani in terms of their roles in spreading Shiism in Kashmir, Muhammad A'zam deliberately avoids drawing any parallels between these two historical figures. In his historiographical framework, Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani is presented as a significant figure within the context of Sunni Islam, whose activities in Kashmir were legitimate in nature and contributed to consolidation of mainstream religious traditions. Hamadani is positioned by him as an authoritative Sufi master and exponent of Sunni doctrine who made a constructive contribution to the Islamization of the region (B720, f. 48b, 50a-b).

In contrast, Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi is characterized by Muhammad A'zam exclusively as a disturber of religious order, whose activities were directed toward undermining established Sunni traditions and imposing Shiite views (B720, f. 85b–87b). The author sees no similarity between them in

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<sup>17</sup> Translation by A.M. Smirnova.

<sup>18</sup> Khidr (variants: Khidir, Khizir, Khizr, Khyzyr, al-Khadir) is a character in Islamic mythology who incorporates features of various mythological figures from the pre-Islamic Near East. Sufis believe that Khidr, like Muhammad in his time, inherited divine knowledge directly from Allah, and since then the spirit of Khidr teaches this divine knowledge to Muslim mystics. See: PROZOROV 1991: 262.

<sup>19</sup> Translation by A.M. Smirnova.

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terms of status, historical role, or religious legitimacy. This demarcation reflects the historiographer's confessional bias and his effort to represent Shiite influence in the region as a destructive, marginal phenomenon, opposed to the "true" Sunni tradition embodied by the figure of Hamadani.

It should be noted that for studying the biography of Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi, both the 18th c. author and contemporary researchers use approximately the same list of sources. Among them are:

The anonymous text "Baharistan-i Shahi" (1614) — the first dated work on Kashmir's history in Persian that is extant in its entirety;<sup>20</sup>

"Tarikh-i Haydar Malik Chadura" (1618–1621) — one of the most famous local Kashmiri chronicles. Its Shiite author, Haydar Malik, wrote impartially, criticizing religious intolerance of local rulers;<sup>21</sup>

"Tarikh-i Rashidi" by Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat, written in the 16th c. Being an independent study, the work focuses mainly on the history of Moghulistan and Eastern Turkestan, as well as adjacent territories of Central Asia in the 14th–16th cc. Kashmir in this context only appears as one of many regions the author visited during his travels.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, some contemporary Iranian researchers also cite the work of Muhammad A'zam, but do not take into account his negative assessment of Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi's personality and activities.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it can be said that although using the same source base, contemporary Iranian Shiite researchers and the 18th c. Sunni author Muhammad A'zam Didamari present diametrically opposite assessments of Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi's activities.

In conclusion, it should be said that confessional affiliation of source authors does, indeed, fundamentally influence historical assessments of religious figures, as vividly demonstrated by the example of Mir Shams al-Din 'Iraqi. The contrast between his image as an enlightener in contemporary Iranian Shiite historiography and a destructive figure in the 18th c. Sunni Kashmiri tradition confirms the relativity of historical memory.

However, it is important to note that confessional assessments are not static and can transform over time. Despite the historically negative perception of 'Iraqi in the 18th c. Sunni environment, contemporary discourse shows a tendency toward more positive interpretation of his activities.

<sup>20</sup> PANDIT 1991: 27.

<sup>21</sup> HASAN 1959: 8.

<sup>22</sup> KHAYDAR 1996: 632–537.

<sup>23</sup> MATU 1389: 171; DAVARPENAH 1397: 7.

Such evolution of assessments demonstrates not only the necessity of critical analysis of sources' confessional perspectives, but also the importance of considering the historical context in which these assessments were formed when studying medieval religious history.

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