
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

S. E. Grigoryev

AFGHAN HISTORICAL SOURCES ON THE *KHIRQA* OF THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD

The halting, gradual spread of Islam in Afghanistan, spaced over nearly a thousand years, led to an abundance of popular Islamic forms of worship there. Because of Afghanistan's distance from the Islamic centres of Arabia, Syria, Iraq and other regions of the Near East, it was not visited by any of the four so-called Rightly-guided caliphs or other great saints of Islam. Yet the country is bursting with graves, *mazārs*, the *ziyārats* of caliphs and Muslim saints who, however, never saw those places, local saints, *shahīds*, *hadrats*, *mūllās*, *hājīs*, etc. The population venerates various passes, mountain summits, valleys, rivers, cliffs and rocks, groups of trees and simply spots on the map. Today they are linked with the activities of local or pan-Islamic saints; in fact, they are usually throwbacks to past beliefs held by the inhabitants of this poly-confessional and poly-ethnic country.

Afghanistan contains an enormous number of sacred objects linked by the local population with one of the four Rightly-guided caliphs — ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, traditionally called there Shāh-i mardān (Lord of Mankind). Among the holy places considered by the Afghan population to have a sacred tie with the Prophet Muḥammad, two stand out. These are the Friday mosque in the southern Afghan city of Jalalabad, with its hair from the beard of Muḥammad, and the *mazār* of *khirqā-yi sharif* in the city of Qandahar (see *fig. 1*), which holds one of the greatest holy relics in Islam, the *khirqā* (cloak, hair-shirt) of the Prophet (see *fig. 2*). Aḥmad-shāh Durrānī — founder of the Durrānī empire and one of Afghanistan's most brilliant rulers — was buried in the *mazār* in 1773.

Here is how the well-known Afghan historian ‘Azīz al-Dīn Wakīl Pupālzayī describes the *khirqā* of the Prophet: “The *khirqā* is of thick wool, with two short sleeves that are shorter than the flaps. It is made of fine, shining bluish camel's wool. It fits a short man. It has no lining. The two front panels are moth-eaten and hemmed” [1]. According to Afghan legend, the *khirqā* was made by the Prophet himself with the help of his family. The Prophet wore the *khirqā* during his fatal illness. Before his death Muḥammad bequeathed it to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab al-Farūq, the future sec-

ond caliph, as well as to his father-in-law, the future fourth caliph, ‘Alī b. ‘Abī Ṭālib. After the latter's death in 661, the *khirqā* was given to *sayyid* ‘Umar b. al-‘Amr al-Quranī. The *khirqā* was later taken to Yemen, then to Baghdad, and then to Central Asia. Wherever it was taken, the *khirqā* was usually kept in a specially constructed house that almost immediately became a place of worship.

A number of motifs connected with the appearance of the *khirqā* of the Prophet Muḥammad in Afghanistan are, in my view, of special interest. Local Afghan historical sources contains a wealth of information about the complex fate of this relic, which the Afghans so revere. The most important among them is considered the *Sirāj al-Tawārīkh* (“Lantern of History”), which contains the main explanations for the appearance of the *khirqā* of the Prophet in Afghanistan. It is the official historical chronicle of Afghanistan, written by Fayḍ Muḥammad-Khān Kātib, court historiographer to the *amīr* Khabīballāh-khān, who reigned in the early twentieth century. This three-volume work describes the history of Afghanistan from 1747 to 1896; it was published in Kabul in 1913–1915. The second — most significant and valuable materials on the odyssey of the *khirqā* in Afghanistan — are found in the historical manuscript *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* (“History of Badakhshān”), written by the Badakhshān authors Sang Muḥammad Badakhshī and Mīrzā Faḍl ‘Alī-Bek Surkhafsar at the turn of the nineteenth — twentieth century. It is held at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (call number B 2311). A facsimile edition of the manuscript text, a work of regional Afghan history that narrates the history of Badakhshan, an inaccessible mountainous region in north-eastern Afghanistan, was published in 1959 by Professor A. N. Boldyrev (Leningrad State University). In 1997, a facsimile of this manuscript with a translation from the Persian, introduction, notes and appendices was published by Professor Boldyrev and by the author of the present article.

We read the following about the appearance of the *khirqā* in Afghanistan in the first volume of *Sirāj al-tawārīkh*:

“In 1172 (1758) Aḥmad-shāh sent the *wazīr* Shāh Walī-khān with a force of six thousand to Balkh and Badakhshan, where the local populace had revolted. Murād-Bek, the ruler of Bukhara, went to help the inhabitants of Balkh and Badakhshan. The Afghan forces moved from Herat to Bukhara through Meyman, Balkh, Andkhoy and Shiberghan (cities in northern Afghanistan — S. G.).