

## ON THE HISTORY OF 'ISHQIYYA BROTHERHOOD SACRED RELICS. I: THE *KHIRQA* OF THE PROPHET\*

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, reports from Afghanistan speak of a Muslim holy relic, the *khirqā-yi mubārak* ("blessed mantle"). Perhaps the only known images of Ṭālibān leader Mūllā 'Umar are the internationally famous pictures of him receiving the *khirqā* of the Prophet, which sanctifies his power and underscores the messianic role assigned to him and the *ṭālibhaye karam* ("merciful ṭālibs"), chosen to carry out the mission of the *farishta-yi najāt*, angels who liberate the world's Muslims from the godless West. The very appearance of the Ṭālibān was called an '*urūj* (raising) [1]. The Emirate they created was only the first step on the path to creating a world-wide caliphate, a task they stressed with their ritual "coronation" and ceremonial presentation of the blessed *khirqā* to the "renewer of the faith" (*mujaddid*), Mūllā 'Umar.

This use of holy relics was traditional for medieval Islam. According to legend, Muḥammad presented his *burda*, a piece of woollen cloth, which was worn as a cloak by day and used as a blanket by night, to Qa'b b. Zuhayr as a reward for a poem that eulogised the Prophet. Later it was bought by Mu'āwiya, and then preserved in the treasury of the 'Abbāsid caliphs, who treated it together with the warder and seal of the Umayyads as the symbols of caliph's power and dignity. The fame of the legendary relic reached nearly all outposts of the Muslim world after the appearance of *Qaṣīdat al-burda* by Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Buṣṣirī (1212—1294) [2].

According to some sources the *burda* perished during the Mongol siege of Baghdad, but in the early sixteenth century, when a new Islamic dynasty, the Ottomans, claimed power over *dār al-islām*, a very similar relic found its way to Istanbul together with the key of Mecca and other Islamic relics. *Khirqā-yi sharīf* or *khirqā-yi sa'ādat*, one of the mantles ascribed to the Prophet, was brought to the Ottoman capital by Muḥammad Abū Numayy, son of the *sharīf* of Mecca, after the conquest of Egypt in 1517 by the Ottoman ruler Selim I (r. 1512—1520). It immediately became one of the symbols of Ottoman power (sword-girding and oath of allegiance ceremonies) and the alleged

sacred source of their military successes. Today the 1.24 cm-long black mantle with wide sleeves and a cream-coloured woollen lining is preserved at the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul "wrapped in seven silk velvet cloths, embroidered with gold thread; these in turn are protected by a gold box with a double lid, which is given further protection by a gold casket... This is then placed on a silver table in the silver throne" [3].

Another *khirqā* of the Prophet appeared in Istanbul in 1617—1618. We note that this *khirqā* was believed to have been sent by the Prophet to the famous Ṣūfī Uways al-Qaranī. Now it is preserved in one of the Istanbul mosques and displayed to the public every year between 15 Ramaḍān and Laylat al-Qadr.

Two years ago I published an article on the so-called "Uthmānic Qur'ān" from Katta Langar (now in Uzbekistan) [4]. At the turn of the fifteenth—sixteenth centuries, such a copy appeared among the sacred relics of the 'Ishqiyya brotherhood. The latter also included such significant items as a *tasbīh*, a string of yellow rosary beads which allegedly belonged to Muḥammad himself (they were stored in the Katta Langar mosque and shown to those who performed the *ziyāra*, but no one was allowed to hold them); *muy-i mubārak*, sacred hairs from the beard of Muḥammad [5]; and, finally, a *khirqā* or *janda-chapan*, which was also supposed to have belonged to Muḥammad.

The *khirqā* was of light-brown camel skin. The fabric was covered in yellow, blue, and red decorations. Some felt that the *khirqā* was made from the skin of the sheep sacrificed by Ibrāhīm. According to tradition, it had no seams and was miraculously created for Muḥammad. It was also said to possess a special quality: it appeared to be of varying colours to all who succeeded in seeing it [6].

There is also an interesting legend about how the *khirqā* made its way to Māwarā'al-nahr. According to tradition, Muḥammad bequeathed it on his deathbed to the Yamanī Uways al-Qaranī, one of the first Ṣūfīs to convert to Islam in the spirit of the Prophet. The latter is said to have lived in a cave not far from "Northern Langar".

\* This is the first in the series of articles on 'Ishqiyya brotherhood sacred relics and historical sources about them. In an upcoming issue of *Manuscripta Orientalia* we plan to publish articles by our Tashkent colleagues Dr. S. Vahidov and Dr. B. Aminov. The first is devoted to a ninth-century Qur'ānic copy in Kūfī script stored in Katta Langar, the second — to an 'Ishqiyya *shajāra* recently found in Iski Langar.