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Abu Tahir as-Silafi on Islamic culture and adab in Bab al-Abwab Shirwan and Arran

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Abstract: the biographical dictionary by Abu Tahir as-Silafi under the title “Mu`jam as-safar”¹ (Dictionary of the travels) has been introduced by the Ukrainian Arabic scholar of Daghestani origin Ziya Saidov. The rich and hitherto underexplored data on the history of the Northern Caucasus was used in his PhD Thesis, however not extensively. Then only the first volume of the biographical work of As-Silafi was available to him [2; 3]. Some information used by Dr Saidov originate from the works of later Muslim authors, in the first instance al-’Askalani, Ibn al-Sabuni, Ibn al-Fuvati and al-Zahabi. The present article mostly provides additional information to the broad picture of the Islamic religious life in the Eastern Caucasus in the 11th-12th centuries, to which mostly contributed Professor Amri R. Shikhsaidov, Dr Z. Saidov and the present writer [4].

Keywords: Islam, classical; Eastern Caucasus; Shafi`ites; Sufism; As-Silafi, Abu Tahir (d. 1180); ad-Darbandi, Abu Bakr Muhammad (d. 1145)

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Абу Тахир ас-Силафи об исламской культуре и адабе в Баб-ал-Абвабе, Ширване и Арране

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Аннотация: одним из первых на сочинение Абу Тахира ас-Силафи «Му`джам ас-сафар» («Словарь путешествий») как ценного источника по Восточному Кав-

¹ The work is written in the biographical dictionary “genre” Mu`jam al-masha`ih (“the dictionary [biographies] of the shaykhs”). This fact as well as grammatical rules of invite a researcher to vocalize the title as “Mu`jam as-safar” (“Dictionary [biographies] of travelers”). However, the publisher de;iberately put on the cover of the book the vocalization [as-safar], i.e. “journey”. He claimed here that in the 11th–12th cent. AD the form of singular was applied also to the plural. Here is used the Egyptian edition under the title [1].



казу² обратил внимание украинский арабист дагестанского происхождения З. А. Саидов (Луганский педагогический университет), ученик В. М. Бейлиса. Сведения источника были использованы в его диссертационной работе далеко не полностью: по собственному признанию диссертанта, ему был доступен только первый том биографического труда ас-Силафи [2]. Часть информации, которую З. А. Саидов ввёл в научный оборот, заимствована из биографических сочинений более поздних мусульманских авторов, прежде всего ал-'Аскалани, Ибн ас-Сабунни, Ибн ал-Фувати и аз-Захаби. Данная публикация – лишь дополнительный штрих к картине духовной жизни мусульман Восточного Кавказа в XI–XII вв., воссозданной А. Р. Шихсаидовым, З. А. Саидовым, а также исследованием автора настоящей статьи, посвящённым эпохе классического ислама на Кавказе.

Ключевые слова: классический ислам; Восточный Кавказ; шафииты; суфизм; Абу Тахир ас-Силафи (1180–?); Абу Бакр ад-Дарбанди (1145–?)

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Abu Tahir as-Silafi and his work “Mu`jam as-safar”

The personality of Sadr ad-din Abu Tahir Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Sylafi al-Isfahani al-Jarwani (died 576/1180) and his works are well known to the scholars. Many Arabic and Persian biographical dictionaries comprise the entries about him. No wonder, he was actively participating in the Muslim spiritual life. A keen traveler and polemist he was personally acquainted with many theologians, lawyers and muhaddisin of his time. It is worth mentioning here that during his lifetime as-Silafi did manage to visit not only various cities in Iran, but also other countries of the Islamic world, such as Iraq, Syria, Khorasan, Hijaz, Egypt and even remote Andalusia. By visiting these places he effectively visited the three caliphates in three parts of the world: the Abbasid caliphate in the Near and Middle East, the Fatimid in North Africa and the Umayyad in Muslim Spain. He also twice traveled in the Caucasus.

As-Silafi's travels did not prevent him from being a prolific writer: he authored many works, among them voluminous biographical dictionaries. We know about four: the “Mu`jam masha'ikh al-Isbahan”, the “Mu`jam masha'ikh Baghdad” and the “Mu`jam as-safar”. The first two have not survived. From their titles we can assume that they comprised data about the religious authorities from Isfahan and Baghdad. The only surviving dictionary the “Mu`jam as-safar” deals with the Islamic scholars from other parts of Dar al-Islam whom the author met during his travels or who trav-

² Сочинение написано в жанре биографического словаря му`джам ал-маша'их («словарь [биографий] шайхов»), что делает предпочтительным (по аналогии и грамматическим правилам) чтение его названия как «Му`джам ас-сафр» («Словарь [биографий] путешественников»). Однако издатель текста огласовал на обложке книги второе слово в этом названии как ас-сафар («путешествие»), основываясь на том, что в XI–XII вв. форма единственного числа указанного слова употреблялась и в значении множественного числа. Нами использовано египетское издание [1].



elled themselves in pursuit of knowledge. There is also the fourth one authored by him the “Mu`jam ash-Shuara” [5, p. 38; 6, p. 624]. It is known to be incorporated into Yaqut al-Hamawi’s *Irshad*.

Abu Tahir al-Silafi was born in Isfahan, however, the exact year of his birth is not known. His pupil al-Safrawi (d. 636 / 1238-39) mentioned 478 AH. He writes: “My teacher al-Silafi was born in 478, therefore he lived 98 years.” The same al-Safrawi gives the contradicting date of 475/1082 by quoting as-Silafi “I remember how Nizam al-Mulk (485/1092) was murdered. I was then ten years of age”. Finally the reference work by C. Brockelmann provides the third date: 472/1079 [6, p. 624]. It can be only said that as-Silafi had been transmitting an enormous number of hadith for a very long time. We also know that among his teachers are listed the authorities who died when he was very young. According to as-Subki, as-Silafi studied the hadith with Abu ‘l-Mahasin ar-Ru’yani; the latter known to be assassinated in 502/1108 [7, p. 32]. His first long study travel to the large cities of Hamadan, Amul, Qazwin and Rayy as-Silafi undertook at the end of the eleventh century when he was around 20 years of age. In 511/1117 we find as-Silafi already moved to Alexandria in Egypt where he soon became one of the most influential scholars. In 546/1151 the mighty Fatimid Vazir Ibn as-Sallar even built for him a *madrassa*, which later became known as the “*Silafiyyah*”. According to Ibn Hallikan when as-Silafi approached the end of his life nobody in the whole Egypt could be compared to him [8, pp. 86–87] in the knowledge of hadith. The same Ibn Hallikan following as-Silafi’s pupils [ibid.] also reports the date of his death: Friday evening 5 Rabi II 576/30 August 1180.

In the 11th century AD the scholars in Islamic tradition, the *muhaddithin*, have gradually shifted their attention from the pure collecting and classification of hadith to the biographies of the hadith transmitters. The ‘ilm al-hadith became focused on the authenticity of the information preserved in the hadith and the isnad (i.e the chain of transmitters) started to play the key role. However, the goal, which in this way was considered to have been achieved for the traditionalists, still remained to achieve with regard to the mystical Islamic tradition. This is because for the Sufis who needed more the *sunna* related information neither as-Sahih by al-Bukhari, nor other “reliable” writings of that caliber did completely suffice. As-Silafi was at the same time a traditionalist, i.e. the collector of the tradition regarding the life and sayings of the prophet Muhammad³ [1, p. 34], and a practicing Sufi according to his epistemological methods. He recognized both the legitimacy and necessity of mystical experience as an instrument for deeper knowledge of God. He is known to compile mystical collections of *hadith* and participate in Sufi ceremonies, e.g. visiting the sessions (*majlis*) of Ahmad al-Ghazali [7, p. 54] brother of the famous Abu Hamid al-Ghazali.

In this context it is important to mention that as-Silafi personally knew the author of the work “*Raihan al-haqa’iq wa-bustan ad-daqa’iq*”, the famous Sufi *shaykh* from Bab al-Abwab (Persian Darband, modern Derbent) Abu Bakr Muhammad ad-Darbandi (died 539/1145). This ad-Darbandi was his close friend and a travel

³ About him see: [9, p. 366; 10, p. 8].



companion. Both scholars studied together in Baghdad, Mecca and Hamadan as well as other sites of Islamic learning. Ad-Darbandi considered as-Silafi to be a reliable hadith transmitter as he refers to him in the “Raihan al-haqa’iq”: *ahbarani ash-shaykh Abu Tahir as-Silafi ... ahbaru lana marrat al-ukra*. Further information on ad-Darbandi is expected to be found in as-Silafi’s lost work, the “Mu`jam masha’ikh Baghdad”, since the *Shaykh* of Bab al-Abwab had by that time moved to Baghdad where he taught in the Baghdad *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya.

Ad-Darbandi and as-Silafi share many teachers whose names are well-known in Islam. Among them: Ibn al-Zahra ‘at-Turaisisi (died 497/1103), who received his education in the *ribat* of Abu Sa’d al-Sufi along with *Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri* [4, p. 388]. As-Silafi refers to Ibn al-Zahra as ‘one of the most famous Sufi *shaykhs* from Azerbaijan’. There was also Abu ‘Abdallah al-Husayn al-Bakri (died 498/1105), the famous Ash’arite preacher and one of the main culprits of the religious and political turmoil in Baghdad in the reign of Malik Shah (*fitna* Ibn al-Qushayri)⁴. Among them were Abu’l-Mahasin ar-Ru’yani (assassinated in 502/1108), the supreme *qadi* of Tabaristan and the leader of the an-Nizamiyyah *madrasa* in Amul; Shiravaikh b. Shahridar ad-Dailami (died 509/1115), author of the multi-volume history of Hamadan and the famous “*Kitab al-firdaus*” [11, p. 303]; Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Zanjawayh az-Zanjani, the imam at the Zanzan mosque [1, p. 31] who was a pupil of the famous Shafi’ite polemicist from Amul Abu-t-Tayyib at-Tabari (died 450/1058) [4, p. 497]. Perhaps as-Silafi met az-Zanjani at Abu Bakr al-Darbandi’s following the suggestion of his mentor Ibn at-Tuyuri (d. 500/1107), a pupil of Abu-l-Qasim al-Qushayri. Both ad-Darbandi and as-Silafi travelled together at least in the parts of Caliphate where people spoke Persian. It is known that ad-Darbandi was fluent in this language. This invites the suggestion that the information missing at ad-Darbandi may well be completed by those from as-Silafi.

As-Silafi and the “Country of the Mountains”

In the preface to the Egyptian edition of the “Mu`jam as-safar”, the editor Abdullah al-Barudi points out that as-Silafi spent much time in the “Country of the Mountains” (*balad al-Jabal*). In the modern scholarship the inhabitants of *balad al-Jabal* are called Daghestanis. After the Sassanian annexation of the Caucasian Albania the name Albania began to be applied to Arran⁵, although the actual area of settlement of the Dagestani tribes was much wider. The name Albania in the medieval Arab tradition was also applied to Shirwan, Bab al-Abwab and the mountain regions of modern Dagestan. The local people were usually called *Ahl al-Jabal* (i.e. “people of the mountains”). This appellative is by no means accidental. It directly points to the ethnic, or more precisely tribal affinity of the indigenous peoples of these lands, who

⁴ About him see: [11; 29].

⁵ Modern scholars, in particular V. A. Livshits consider Arran to be a Parthian (middle Persian) word for Caucasian Albania. In the Greek sources is used *Ἀλβανία*, (lat. Albania), in the Syriac Arran, in Armenian Agwa’nk/Alwan’k/Aluan’k, in Old Georgian Rani, in Arabic ar-Ran, Arran, al-Arran.



formerly constitute part of the Caucasian Albania. At the same time it is not entirely clear whether in the 11th–12th cent. it bore any ethnic semantics or was just a geographical term. Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi, like many other scholars, for example, called himself “an inhabitant of the mountains”. Although this points to his origin it does not mean necessarily that ethnically they belonged to the indigenous population.

The term “Mountains” was applied to a number of independent counties, which did not have any established contacts with each other. Among these counties Arran, Shirwan and Bab al-Abwab were most ethnically diverse, albeit with a high degree of Islamization. Among their settlements were so-called “colonies” of Persians, Arabs, and later Turks. The Arab-Muslim authors often referred to them as *ath-thaghr*, or *ath-thughur*, i.e. the “border region”, although as-Silafi used in this instance terms in combination with local toponyms, with the simple meaning “neighborhood”.

Historically significant cultural shift in the area, which began in the period between the Sassanian annexation of the Caucasian Albania and the Arab conquests, did not remain unnoticed and was reflected in the Medieval sources. The Hunno-Savir residents of the Caucasia were first not to apply the name “Country of Mountains” to the Muslim possessions in Arran and Shirwan. Subsequently the local Islamic tradition began to use Turkic toponym Tawyak (from *tav* “mountain” and *yak* “side”, “country”) although the equivalent Arabic name *Balad al-Jabal* continued to be used in a broader sense. The later author Jamal ad-din al-Karabudagi (died 1947), referring to al-Mas’udi says, that *Shirwanshah* Muhammad b. Yazid when captured Darband got the title *Shah of Tawyak* [12, pp. 95, 196; 13, pp. 119–121].

We can, therefore, assume that if al-Karabudagi’s source was reliable enough, al-Mas’udi considered the Bab al-Abwab to be within the borders of the “Country of the Mountains.” The local sources, however, contradict this tradition. A historian Mammus al-Lakzi (d. around 504/1110) reported in his “Ta’rih al-Bab wa-Shirwan” that when *Shirwanshah* Muhammad b. Yazid invaded the Bab al-Abwab, the “people of the Country of the Mountains” (in Arabic the *ahl at-Tawyak*) came to rescue the city.

In the “Darband-nama” the toponym Tawyak is also used with regard to the country of *Filan*, which the recent research locates in the Daghestan. After the Mongol invasion in the 1th–12th cent., the Hunno-Savir name of the toponym started to be applied to the whole area where the peoples of Daghestan did settle. One has only to add that this time the name was re-written in the Persian-Oguz way as Dag-i-stan, which also means the “Mountain Country”.

The text of the “Mu`jam as-safar” by Abu Tahir as-Silafi reveals that its author possessed a fairly good knowledge of the geography of the Mountain Country as well as the bordering lands. Describing the “region of Arran” the “Arraniyah” he mentioned not only the southern territories of the former Caucasian Albania, along with Janza (modern Ganja) and al-Barda’a, but also the Georgian lands adjacent to Arran. The capital of Shirwan is also described there sufficiently well (see below). The Azerbaijan is identified as the lands stretching from Urmiyya to Maragha and Ardebil, which reveals the fact that the toponym here is applied to what is now the



Iranian or South Azerbaijan. Armenia (“Arminia”) is mentioned twice: once in a general context as *thughur* (borderland) *Arminya*. The toponym al-Jurzan (Georgia) itself can not be found in the “Mu`jam as-safar”. However as-Silafi says that the city of Tiflis is the “most distant Muslim city of Arran” [1, pp. 361–362]. He also distinguishes the city of Tiflis from its “borderland” (*thaghr* Tiflis), which he identifies as a part of Arran. The whole context invites a suggestion that the expression “*thaghr Tiflis*” could be applied to the eastern parts of Kartli, which historically was the “principality” of Hirsan⁶. From the South this principality of Hirsan adjoined Lakz, whose population was ethnically close to the inhabitants of Arran: the village of Hirs of the Kakh district in modern Georgia is populated by the ethnic group of tzakhurs (Compare here the passage from al-Baladhuri who says that the ruler of Lakz [14, p. 199] had a title “Hirsan Shah” to the information provided by Zakariya al-Qazwini. The latter applied to the capital of Lakz the name “Zahur”, i.e. Tsakhur [15, p. 405]). Probably, as-Silafi described the caucasian *Dar al-Islam* without visiting it himself but staying in the territory of Arran, Shirwan and Bab al-Abwab following only the local written historical tradition.

The chronology of Abu Tahir as-Silafi’s travel to the Caucasus can be reconstructed on the basis of his works, as well as other sources. The first time he travelled to the Bab al-Abwab at the end of the eleventh century, when he visited Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi, the second time it happened much later. As-Silafi himself reports that in the month of Shawwal 530 AH (i.e. between June 3 and July 1, 1135 AD) he attended the class of Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Ghada’iri in Darband. Abu Bakr al-Darbandi was then not there, however, as-Silafi’s trip to the Bab al-Abwab was again largely due to the fact that he was well acquainted with the author of the “Rayhan al-haqa’iq”.

Bab al-Abwab

Among those who came from Bab al-’wab, as-Silafi in his “Mu`jam as-safar” pays most attention to the Darband dynasties of scholars. Their names are also known from other contemporary writings, first of all the “Rayhan al-haqa’iq” by Abu Bakr al-Darbandi and the “Kitab al-ansab” by Abu Sa’d al-Sam’ani (died 562/1166) [16]. A historical event is considered to be most authentic when it is independently mentioned in one or several contemporary sources, especially if these texts are not dependent on each other. At the time of as-Silafi the most influential scholars dynasty in the Bab al-Abwab was the al-Gada’iri family. Its founder was the supreme judge (*qadi al-qudat*) of the “frontier region” called Abu al-Husayn Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Gada’iri (died in the middle of the 11th century), known also as Ibn al-Gada’iri. According to the sources, Ibn al-Ghada’iri, or al-Gada’iri, along with *Shaykh* al-Mufid (died 413/1022), the spiritual leader of the Shi’a (see: [17]), was one of the main teachers of the *Shaykh at-ta’ifa*, the founder of the Imamite law [18, p. 744] Abu Ja’far at-Tusi (d. 460/1067) [19]. The latter studied with Ibn al-Gadh’iri for three years [20, p. 238].

⁶ This is not the Georgian principality of Shakki (georg. Ereti), which was adjacent to Lakz from the South West and the West.



However, the sources admit another interpretation. The name of Ibn al-Ghada'iri can be applied both to Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri as well as to his father Abu 'Ubaidallah al-Husayn ash-Shi'i (d. 411/1020), the head of the famous Shi'a centre the Dar al-Ghada'iri in Baghdad. Judging by the dates of life and the revealed historical facts, *qadi al-kutat* of the "border area" Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri was a peer and friend of Abu Ja'far at-Tusi, Ahmad's father his mentor, and the sons of Ibrahim and Yahya considered him their teacher. Perhaps that is why Abu Ja'far at-Tusi, as reported by Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi, personally visited the Bab al-Abwab. The dates of life of Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri, the *qadi al-qu-dat*, as well as the historical events mentioned in the context of his life well indicate that the *qadi al-qu-dat* was contemporary and the close friend of Abu Ja'far at-Tusi. Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri's father was Abu Ja'far at-Tusi's mentor and Abu Ja'far's two sons Ibrahim and Yahya considered him to be their teacher. Probably this is why Abu Ja'far at-Tusi according to Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi had personally visited the Bab al-Abwab.

As-Silafi knew both sons of Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri. The first of them, Abu Iskhak Ibrahim b. Ahmad al-Gadh'iri, who held an office of the *qadi* in Bab al-Abwab, is also mentioned in the "Fihrist kutub ash-Shi'a" by Abu Ja'far at-Tusi [21]. Ibn al-Ghada'iri's second son, Abu Zakariyah Yahya b. Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri had with as-Silafi more frequent contacts than his brother. In the city of Bab al-Abwab as-Silafi heard a lot about these scholars, later he learned and borrowed much from their books, as well as from the books by their father, Ibn al-Gadh'iri, whom he naturally never met because this scholar died much earlier. As-Silafi confirms the information found in the writings by Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi that Ibrahim and Yahya studied with *Shaykh* Muhammad b. Tahir at-Tusi, who is known to have been a student of the famous author of "Tabakat as-Sufiyah" Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (died 412/1021). At the same time, he supplies new information about the sons of Ibn al-Ghad'iri, which is missing from ad-Darbandi's books. This applies to their teachers, especially *qadi* Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qada'i from Egypt and *shaykh* Abu Mansur al-Isfahani from Amud [1, pp. 441–442].

The intellectual and spiritual ties, which linked the scholars from the "border area" in the 11th century can be illustrated by the information, which as-Silafi provides with regard to the personality of Abu 'Amr Usman b. Shazi⁷ al-Fuqqa'i. He was one of the Darband *faqih*s, with whom our author studied certain sections of Islamic law regarding the property and possession (al-fawa'id). As-Silafi puts him among the disciples or associates (*al-askhab*) of Ibrahim b. Faris al-Hafiz al-Darbandi. The information, which as-Silafi provides about Ibrahim b. Faris echoes the information, which Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi provides about the poet and scholar Ishaq Ibrahim b. Faris al-Babi who was the mentor of Abu-l-Qasim al-Warraq. It should be mentioned that some specimens of his mystical poetry have been already published [4, p. 303].

'Usman al-Fuqqa'i himself is mentioned in the "Raihan al-haqa'iq" by Abu Bakr al-Darbandi as a secretary in the court council of *qadi* Abu Mu'ammara b. al-Hasan,

⁷ Sic! The MS reading is probably Shazl.



known as Ibn al-Maslama. The Darband *khatib* Ibn al-Zanjani provides an account of Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri who asked 'Usman al-Fuqqa'i to tell *qadi* Abu Mu'ammara that "yesterday his son Ibrahim entered the house as a true Muslim"⁸.

The established close ties between the four men Ibn Faris al-Babi, 'Usman al-Fuqqa'i, Ibrahim al-Ghada'iri and Abu Mu'ammara invite a suggestion that Abu Mu'ammara was in fact Abu Mu'ammara al-Mufaddal al-Isma'ili, who once awarded to Ibn Faris an *ijazah* [4, p. 257]. With regard to this fact one has to stress that the Imamite and Ismaili traditions, which became very strong in Bab al-Abwab at the time of the Buyyid dynasty after the advent of Saljuk Empire gradually become weak. According to the "Raihan al-haqa'iq", when *qadi* Abu Mu'ammara died, Ahmad's son Ibrahim "took his.

Abu Tahir as-Silafi mentions Usman b. Shazi al-Fuqqa'i as a prolific writer. This is surprising because Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi does not say anything about him directly. However, he mentions a certain *hajji* Shazi as-Saya [4, p. 268], who could have been the father of Usman. The date of Usman al-Fuqqa'i's death as it given by as-Silafi, makes this rather suggestion rather groundless because the Bab al-Abwab court council secretary died in his hometown in 455/1063. Therefore the question about whether Usman b. Shazi al-Fuqqa'i did belong to Ahmad al-Fuqqa'i's dynasty remains open. The name "al-Fuqqa'i" is not a proper name, but rather a *laqab*, i.e. a sobriquet. We know that 'Usman b. Shazi traveled a lot: in the Caucasus as-Silafi met him not only in Bab al-Abwab, but also in the vicinity of Salamas [1, p. 247], a city in Azerbaijan.

According to Abu Tahir al-Silafi who had a long stay in the city of Salamas, some of its numerous *shaykhs* were also well known in Bab al-Abwab, Shirwan and Arran. Among them is a prolific writer Abu-l-Qasim Mahmud b. Sa'ada b. Ahmad b. Yusuf b. Imran b. Musa b. Hilal al-Hilali, who belonged to the clan of local rulers. According to Abu Bakr al-Huwaiyi who transmitted this information to al-Silafi when the latter stayed in Damascus, Abu-l-Qasim Mahmud al-Hilali died at 510 / 1116-7 [1, p. 361]. The example of how scholars from Bab al-Abwab did contact with their colleagues in Salamas, sheds light upon the structure of the cultural contacts of this small emirate with many other Muslim cities. As-Silafi reports about one of the great *faqih*s from Bab al-Abwab [1, p. 375], Abu-l-Qasim Maimoun b. 'Amr b. Muhammad al-Faqih al-Babi. He is known to collect and transmit the information, which he initially got from many "*shaykhs* of his country" [1, p. 375], such as al-Lariji, Ibn Iqbal, al-Ja'dawi and many others. As-Silafi studied with him the science of *hadith* as well as the way how this information was transmitted from one authority to another. It has to be mentioned here that *Abu al-Qasim* al-Babi trained his student as-Silafi in 503/1109-10, however, not in Bab al-Abwab but in the same city of Salamas.

Biography of Abu-l-Qasim Maymun al-Babi also contains the full name of another Bab al-Abwab *shaykh* Abu Khafs 'Amra b. al-Hasan al-Lariji. As-Silafi men-

⁸ Raihan al-haqa'iq wa-bustan ad-daqa'iq li Abi Bakr Muhammad b. Musa b. al-Faraj ad-Darbandi. MS 2191 from the MSS depot of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Daghestani Centre of the Russian Academy, Fol. 198a. See also: [4, p. 244].



tions that he transmitted the *hadith* from Abu Hamid Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Isfara'ini (died in 406/1016) [1, p. 375]. This means that Abu Hafs al-Lariji in his turn was trained in the *madrassa* at the mosque of Abdullah b. al-Mubarak, in the Baghdad neighbourhood of Karkh known for its religious conflicts between Sunni and Shi'a. Abu Hamid al-Isfara'ini taught there the Shafi'ite jurisprudence [10, pp. 195–200; 22, pp. 367–368].

Bab al-Abwab used to be chosen as a place to settle by many of those who Had travelled a lot and did manage to stay in other cities of the Muslim world. The reason for that was not just an intellectual activity but also the very benign climate of that place. Islamic authors left frequent eulogies about its location as well as abundance in grain and fruit. One of such authors was a Bab al-Abwab *shaykh* who studied at the city of Fustat in Egypt, Abu-l-Fath Ahmad b. Sa'id b. Khumaydan al-Fariki at-Tadjir. He was born in Mayyafarikin. His *laqab* at-Tajir indicates that he was a merchant. As such he traveled a lot until he settled in Darband. As-Silafi mentions that he met him in Egypt where al-Fariki attended his lectures and wrote down *hadith* after him [1, p. 35]. He also With great eulogies he also referred to Abu Tahir as-Silafi his teacher Abu-n-Nami Sadak b. Ibrahim at-Tanuhi al-Ma'ari from Shirwan. Here it has to be pointed out to the fact that in this short account about Abu'l-Fatah al-Fariki, the author of "Mu`jam as-safar" mentions both names of the city of his choice: Bab al-Abwab and Darband.

Shirwan

The Abu-l-Fatah al-Fariki at-Tajir's biography comprises some poems of the mystic poet from Shirwan Abu-n-Nami Sadaki b. Ibrahim at-Tanukhi al -Ma'ari. This poem deals with the death of the wazir Nizam al-Mulk assassinated in 485/1092. His murder at the time attracted some significant attention, especially in the areas where did function *madrassas* founded by Nizam al-Mulk. In the city of Fustat Abu'l-Fatah al-Fariki recited Sadaki's at the time when he met as-Silafi⁹. In the poem he calls him a "stronghold for people and imam for the creed". When he was assassinated the "light faded": this mischievous act was not just killing of the *shaykh* but, moreover, it was killing of everybody as well as the Islam.

صدرا وللدین القویم اماما کان النظام ابو علی للوری
عاد الضیاء علی الانام ظلما حتی اذا قتلوه ظلما منهم
قتلوا جمیع الخلق والاسلاما لم یقتلوا الشیخ الکبیر وانما

Later, the disciples and followers of Nizam al-Mulk were also subjected to terror. According to Abd al-Rashid al-Bakuwi [23, p. 42], the first to condemn the ideology of the Isma'ilites was qadi al-qudat Abu-l-Mahasin ar-Ru'yani. Being at the same time the leader of the *madrassa* al-Nizamiyyah in Tabaristan, he trained many scholars who

⁹ Here and below translations generally the main meaning, which precedes the actual verses in Arabic is given. The complexity of the translation is normally dependent on meter and rhyme as well as the polysemy of almost each Arabic word. The present author is preparing a special study regarding the Medieval poetry of the Eastern Caucasus.



later became active in Bab al-Abwab and Shirwan, among whom was also Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi. For condemning the Isma'ilites he was also killed on 10 September 1108 when he held the Friday sermon in the cathedral mosque of Amul.

Being supported by the authorities, actually by Nizam al-Mulk himself, the Sufis, Shafi'ites and Ash'arites were very hostile not only to the Isma'ilis, but also to the majority of conservative Muslim traditionalists, especially the Hanbalites. Judging by the evidences found in as-Silafi's "Mu`jam al-Safar" the position and influence of the Sufis in Shirwan as well as in Bab al-Abwab were particularly strong. Otherwise how a follower of al-Khallaj, who was not always welcomed even by the Sufis himself, could manage to become one of the most influential Shirwan *shaykhs* in the first half of the 12th century? I mean here Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Ahmad b. al-Mufaddad al-Lujini ash-Shirwani¹⁰, the ardent supporter of extreme trends in Muslim mysticism. Talking about his instructions and teaching as-Silafi uses the "akhbarana" (we were told by NN) formula, which usually implied collective instruction. Abu-l-Hasan was originally from Shirwan, as it comes from his *nisba* (i.e. indication on the provenance) al-Lujini (the letter *lams* bears the vocalization [u]). One does not still have enough grounds to link the *nisba* "al-Lujini" with the well known toponym Lahij (or Laizan), which were situated in the territory of Shirwan. Anyway according to V. F. Minorsky modern Lahij corresponds to the ancient Laizan [12, p. 212]. The question about more precise identification of the local toponym, which gave the *nisba* al-Lujini when taking into consideration all the possible ways of its vocalization, nevertheless, still requires a further study.

According to as-Silafi, Abu'l-Hasan al-Shirwani "was a brilliant *shaykh* famous throughout the cities of Shirwan and in the adjacent lands. By saying this he refers not only to Arran, situated to the South-West of Shirwan and Lakz, which laid to the North but also possibly to Bab al-Abwab. This suggestion is based upon the historically close ties between Bab al-Abwab and Shirwan, especially during this period when the latter was governed by Yazidids (183/799 – 418/1027). "He was impressive when he delivered a sermon (wa'z)" writes as-Silafi. Further down he continues: "He collected information about al-Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj. This information has been transmitted to us in Baghdad by one of the scholars who himself listened to Abu'l-Hasan al-Shirwani in Shirwan. Later I personally heard this information transmitted by himself at my personal meeting with him in Shirwan". In this passage is mentioned the very al-Hallaj (d. 309/922), who became famous for his ecstatic saying "I am the Only God" (*ana-l-haqq*). By saying this he meant that after the mysticist unites with the Almighty who is The Highest Truth, his human hypostasis ceases to exist and becomes dissolved in the Divine Substance the cognizant gnosticist himself becomes the bearer, receptacle and the repository of the Highest Truth.

The biography of Abu al-Hasan ash-Shirwani comprises remarkable information, which allows us to more accurately place the ancestral estate of the Shirwanshahs, the Yazdiyya. In the "Ta'rih al-Bab" by Mammus al-Lakzi this name is applied to the

¹⁰ Sic. Probably the name should be read as "al-Mufaddal" or "al-Musaddad".



city built in 306/918 on the land of Shirwan by Yazid b. Muhammad [12, p. 48]. As-Silafi points out that special respect for Abu al-Hasan ash-Shirwani was paid in al-Yazidiyah, the “residence of the rulers of Shirwan” (*dar mamlakat bi-Shirwan*). Another remark of his adds that this place was also known as *Shamakhi*, i.e. the city of Shemakha. This confirms the V. F. Minorsky’s suggestion that al-Yazidiyah was the capital of Shirwan, however, it was of course “possible that the Yazidids did only rebuilt the old Arabian city of Shammahiyya”. It might be added here that the “old Arabian” is actually the “old Albanian”.

The information provided by Abu Tahir as-Silafi regarding the religious views and opinions of Abu al-Hasan ash-Shirwani as well as his close relationship with the rulers of the Yazdidid dynasty shed enough light on the religious education of the Shirwanshahs. Of course, the fact that at that time the Sufi culture and mystical teachings were at their heyday invites the suggestion that the ruling elite of Shirwan to some extent could have also been influenced by Muslim mysticism. The reality, however, can often be more radical than any expectation. So this reality in a short time produced such famous poets as Khaqani and Falaki in Shirwan, and Nizami in Arran.

Along with Abu al-Hasan al-Shirwani as-Silafi mentions another Shirwani *shaykh*, Abu Nasr Mansur b. Abi as-Sakr ash-Shirwani. He was one of his close mentors. He was known for transmitting the information from Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Sahl b. as-Sari al-Hamadani, which that scholar in his turn had received from Makhul [1, p. 288].

Among the Shirwan Sufis, there were also many descendants from al-Abhar. One of them is Kasul b. Abi Bakr b. al-Hajj al-Abhari al-Sufi was a servant (*khadim*) in one of the Sufi fraternities (*ribat*). He met as-Silafi in Qazwin, where he told him a story about a certain *fakih* from Shirwan, who spoke with al-Faradj al-Duni and ‘Ali al-Bukhari [1, p. 343]. Unfortunately, there is no further indication on the *ribat* where Kasul al-Abhari served. It could be one of the most famous Sufi *khanaka* in Shirwan on the river Pirsagat. This *khanaka* was closely associated with the descendant from the Baghdad house of al-Ghada’iri who moved to Bab al-Abwab and Shirwan. This is al-Husayn al-Ghada’iri (later – Pir-Husayn), the disciple of Abu Sa’id Fadl of Allah b. Abi-l-Khair al-Mayhani (died 440/1049) [4, p. 240].

Another famous *shaykh* of al-Abhar, whose *ijazas* reflect the intellectual activity in Shirwan was *qadi* Abu Tahir Nasr al-Sarawi. As-Silafi mentions that he saw by him an *ijaza* issued by Abu Tayyib at-Tabari (died 450/1058) who was at a time the most influential theoretician in the Shafi’i jurisprudence. Nowadays scholars are sufficiently well informed about his activity and in the Caucasus [4, pp. 496–497]. As-Silafi was trained by Nasr al-Sarawi with regard to the teaching of *ijaza* (*fava’id bi-l-ijaza*). “His nisba and kunya are identical to mine”, pointed out our author, apparently wishing to stress how close he was to his teacher. Nasr al-Sarawi was also well connected to the city of Salamas in Azerbaijan, or, more precisely with the area, the *thaghr*, where as-Silafi also spent much time. Nasr al-Sarawi quotes the poems of his compatriot Abu Sa’d Bidar b. al-Khadr al-Sarawi who suggested that his addressee should “forget



the tricky grammar¹¹ and do instead mathematics and study Persian”. Further he should make efforts in order to gain benefits later, because the “state of Arabs” [1, pp. 390–391] has already perished.

فراغ القلب عن المسائل نحو واشتغل بالحساب والفارسية
وتشترط على الوري تتشرف ذهب اليوم دولة العربية

Arran

The most important “Islamic centres” in Arran, where Abu Tahir as-Silafi lived for a long time, is Janza, the capital of Arran, as well as the mysterious nameless place in this “border area” (*thaghr Janza*). According to the “Ta’rih al-Bab”, Muhammad b. Khalid built the city of Janza in the Arran in 245/859. Judging by the way to describe such an event in the local tradition one should not think about building up a totally new city but rather about a reconstructing an old one. Additionally, there took place a construction of the new system of fortification on the territory of the already existing settlement of Gandzak as well as building up a citadel (*qal’a*), which would become the most protected place. This fact is singled out by the following passage: “Muhammad b. Khalid’s castle is located in a fortified quarter of the city, called *mahallat al-qasr* (“fortress quarter”), near the city gates of al-Hass”. As for the “border area” of Janza, it is not entirely clear whether this toponym can be applied to the “famous estates, which are still called Khalidiyat”, named after Muhammad’s father b. Khalid. This estate was granted to Muhammad b. Khalid by Caliph al-Mutawakkil about 245/895 [12, p. 46], when he retired from an office of the governor of Arminiyyah. “Ta’rih al-Bab” makes it clear that Muhammad b. Khalid voluntarily gave up his high office [12, pp. 47, 158] in exchange for hereditary rights to Janza its estates.

The most influential of the Arran *shaykhs*, Tahir al-Janzi, personally knew many powerful people of his time, including the Seljuk *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk. His nisba, al-Janzi, indicates that he belonged to the upper class and was a Muslim judge (*qadi*) from Janza. Apparently, Tahir al-Janzi possessed an excellent knowledge about some important sections of Islamic law. As-Silafi reports that he consulted all the city’s *adibs* and *faqih*s on matters of bounty (*al-fadl*). He was one of the teachers of al-Silafi, who wrote down after him. He transmitted to as-Silafi the knowledge he gained from his teachers who also originated from Arran. Tahir al-Janzi read the law (*fiqh*) in Barda`a, the ancient capital of the Caucasian Albania with Abu al-Fadl Sha`ban b. ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Barda`i. Among his teachers was also Abu-l-Qasim ‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Ilayq an-Naysaburi.

As-Silafi met with Tahir al-Janzi on other occasions in many different places. First time such a meeting took place in Isfahan – in the homeland of as-Silafi. Al-Janzi himself said that at that time “he visited the *majlises* of Nizam Abu ‘Ali al-Hasan b. ‘Ali b. Ishak al-Wazir and read in his presence (*bayna yadihi*) *hadith*”. The second time, as-Silafi went himself to see Tahir al-Janzi. He received from him a training, however, not in Janza himself but in the “border area” the *thaghr* of Janza. The reason why this

¹¹ I.e. the Arabic Grammar as opposed to the Persian language.



particular area was so important is obvious. This was the only place in Arran where in South Caucasus was the school the *madrassa* an-Nizamiyyah. The information regarding its foundation could be found in the biography of *qadi* Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. Muhammad at-Tabari. As-Silafi says that his father called ‘Ali b. Muhammad was a teacher (*mudarris*) in the *madrassa*, which was built by an-Nizam in the vicinity of Janza. Then he became the head of teaching (*wali at-tadris*) with further specialization in *fiqh* and *adab*. As-Silafi personally visited this *madrassa*, moreover, the son of Abu ‘Abdallah, Muhammad b. ‘Ali at-Tabari, who also lived in Janza at that time, personally entertained him to an elegant poem: “I saw how the black colour of hair is praised and the grey colour is despised. As if the night of unity would be compared to the darkness and the day when one has to part from the beloved one with the approaching age”.

رايت سواد الشعر يمدح فى الورى ويهجو بياض الشيب كل ويجتنب
كان شبهوا ليل الوصال بلونه ويوم فراق الحب بالشيب اذ قرب

[1, p. 349]

The poem quoted by Muhammad b. ‘Ali says that people see in the dark hair youth and in the grey hair an old age. With youth one associates the night of love, whereas with the old age the time when the sexual pleasure is no longer possible. Along with the open meaning the poem also contains a hidden Sufi meaning, which could be understood only by those who were made privy. The first meaning of the word *al-wisal* is a coitus, the Sufi meaning, however, the “union with Almighty”, which is the goal of the mystical path. Similarly *firaq* means separation from God. Such separation can be temporary as a result of accidental faux-pas and negligence in thinking of the Almighty or eternal, if a person is destined to go to the hell for the sins he committed in his earthly life. The Sufi concept of seeing the Almighty the *ar-ru’ya* implies that in the eternal life only the righteous would be able to see Him. The carnal, or passionate love (*al-ishq*) was rejected by the Sufis because it did impede the cognition and comprehension of God. The possibility of the two-fold interpretation of the poem is indicated by the usage of the word *al-hibb*. This word does not have an indicator to its grammatical gender. Therefore, it is possible to interpret it as beloved person (in the ordinary sense) and the Beloved, i.e. the God. Other Arabic derivatives from the same root are used only as nomina masculini generis (*al-habib*, *al-mahbub*), or feminine generis (*al-habiba al-mahbuba*).

It is probably quite possible that the establishing in Arran the teaching centre of an-Nizamiyya is connected with the personal relationship between Tahir al-Janzi and Nizam al-Mulk. The indication to the reason why the *madrassa* was built not in Janza but in its *thaghr* could be found in Tahir al-Janzi’s biography. There is a reference to a certain “memorable place”, which is associated with the stay of Alp Arslan, the Saljuk Sultan and/or Malik Shah (depending on the chronology of the event). In the first instance there was built up a Friday Mosque, which attracted famous people. Another passage of the “Mu`jam as-safar” says that Arran was visited by the famous Ibn Makula: “Amir Abu Nasr Ibn Makula al-Hafiz al-Baghdadi visited the Friday



mosque of the “border area” due to the fact that Sultan and his *wazir* have reached Arraniyah» [1, p. 131].

Thus, on the territory of the former Caucasian Albania, were founded even two educational centres (*madrasas*) one of them in Lakz (Zakhur / Tsakhur) and also in Arran (near Janza). Arab authors mentioned in this territory to exist two languages: that one of Arran (*lughat arranyiya*) and another one of Lakzan (*lughat lakzaniyya*). After the Arab conquest the capital of Lakz for a while became Zahur (Tsakhur). According to Zakariya al-Qazwini, “there was a *madrasa* built by Nizam al-Mulk”. In this *madrasa*, Arabic books were even translated into the Lakzan (Lezghian) language, a fact, which has been for a number of times mentioned in the special literature. The recent linguistic research says that the language of Arran be compared with the Albanian (ancient Uda). This is the language of the ancient Albanian palimpsests, recently discovered by Z. N. Aleksidze in the St Catherine monastery in Sinai [24–26].

The very fact that in Arran was opened a teaching centre, the *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya, is highly significant. Not only does it show how deeply the official Seljuk ideology became rooted in the Caucasus, but also how well thought-through was the policy of Nizam al-Mulk with regard to the Islamic population on the outskirts of the *Dar al-Islam*. The teaching institutes/centres were opened in important cities with the majority of the homogenous and predominantly Islamic population. It is not exactly known, which role in establishing and funding of the *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya played the influential *qadi* Tahir al-Janzi, however, it is known that he personally knew Amir Ibn Makula and also visited the *majlises* of Nizam al-Mulk. This fact gives enough reasons to assume that he was instrumental in establishing this teaching centre.

Educational institutions similar to *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya opened also in various areas adjacent to Arran. For example, Abu ar-Rukh al-Faraj b. ‘Ubaidallah b. Khalaf al-Juvayi a Shafi`ite from central Azerbaijan who was trained in the Islamic law (*fiqh*) in Baghdad by a prominent Shafi`i juristconsult and a teacher Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi (died 476/1083) then returned to South Azerbaijan and founded in it a *madrasa* where he taught himself [1, p. 332]. It is known that Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi was the rector of the first *Madrasa* an-Nizamiyya, which was solemnly opened in Baghdad 1 dhu-hijjah 459/12 October 1067. It is not exactly known where al-Juwayyi studied before he joined the newly opened an-Nizamiyya. Probably it was a *madrasa* of the mosque in the Baghdad quarter of *Bab al-Maratib* [10, p. 204] where Abu Ishaq ash-Shirazi taught before he became the rector of an-Nizamiyyah.

However, not all educational centres could bear the name of an-Nizamiyya. This name if born by an institution indicated that the *madrasa* would have an official status and would be funded from the imperial money, i.e. from the treasury of Seljuk Sultan. The name “an-Nizamiyya” also suggested that the subjects taught in the *madrasa* would be specially approved and the teaching process itself would ensure a student who sticks to it to receive an excellent education. It was also rather prestigious to be employed by “an-Nizamiyya” *madrasa*. Best teachers were invited to teach in the newly opened *madrasas*. They received a high pay and their posts were permanent.



‘Ali b. Muhammad at-Tabari was one of the central figures in the *madrassa* an-Nizamiyyah. As-Silafi mentions him first to occupy a position of a teacher (*mudarris*) and subsequently as a director of teaching (*wali at-tadris*). There is no more information about him in the “Mu`jam as-safar”. However, in the “Raihan al-haqa’iq” by ad-Darbandi we find that *qadi* Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. Muhammad at-Tabari personally knew Abu al-Qasim al-Warraq al-Babi, the mentor of Abu Bakr ad-Darbandi himself. It is known that ‘Ali b. Muhammad recited a poem of his to Abu al-Qasim al-Warraq, where he praised quietness and silence, which keep people safe.

سكوتي فرار من عوائل مقولي
وما مثل صمت المرء قيد الأوابر
فكم فارس الأعراب ظل فريسة
بمعسول نطق ذاق سم الأساور

Subsequently ‘Ali b. Muhammad has completed it by quoting another poet (Abu al-`Atahiya): “Keeping silence is better than talking without being clear. Do not speak much and you will be safe, however if you speak be temperate”.

كوتي فرار من عوائل مقولي
والصمت خير من كلام عاتم
فكن صامتاً تسلم
وإن قلت فاعدل

A student of the cultural contacts between the Muslim communities of the Eastern Caucasus in 11th–12th Centuries AD will find most striking not so much the existence of close ties between the scholars who came from Bab al-Abwab, Shirwan and Arran but the continuity of scholarly and spiritual traditions that have been carefully preserved and maintained for centuries. This becomes apparent on the example of Abu Sa’id Fadl Allah b. Abi-l-Khair al-Mayhani (about him see [27, p. 145]), a Sufi mystic from Horasan. His name is closely associated with the *khanaka* (a building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood) on the river Pirsagat in Shirwan, where served his follower, Pir-Husayn al-Ghada’iri. Pir Husayn’s nephew, Abu Zakariyah Yahya al-Gada’iri from Bab al-Abwab, was also interested in Sufi practices. At the same time in Arran was active Abu al-Qasim ‘Abd-al-Rahman b. Tahir b. Sa’id b. Fadl Allah b. Abi al-Khair al-Mayhani the direct descendant of Abu Sa’id b. Abi-l-Khair. As-Silafi on one occasion calls him “a grandson” (*hafid*), on another “a descendant” (*min hafda*). Later he even specifies that Abu Sa’id was the grandfather of Abd ar-Rahman al-Mayhani’s father. As-Silafi was instructed by Abd ar-Rahman al-Mayhani in reading the Surah “Sin” and commented that both had the coinciding views with regard to this chapter of the Holy Qur’an by saying “between us is unity.” Both men met in Baghdad, together they went on hajj. As-Silafi learned from his friend in Mecca, Kufa, Baghdad, in various regions of Azerbaijan, as well as in the areas adjacent to Janza. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani was an expert on Sufi practices and beliefs. He spoke well and was a good companion. His authority in transmitting the *hadith* was Zahid b. Ahmad al-Sarahsi. “And we both have reached maturity together” writes as-Silafi writes. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani and al-Silafi visited



Medina together, then met again in Janza and Dabil, as well as somewhere in this *thughur*. Then ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani returned to Baghdad, where he stayed until his death [1, p. 316].

The “Mu`jam Al Safar” provides information from Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani, which as-Silafi recorded in his book somewhere in the vicinity of Janza. These are records about Sufi scholars and their sayings. Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani learned them from his father, however, they date back to his great-grandfather. They feature the famous scholars of Islam, such as ‘Ali b. ‘Isa al-Naysaburi al-‘Ayyar, Isma’il as-Sabuni, Abu Muhammad al-Juvaini and Abu-l-Qasim al-Kushayri.

The biography of Abd al-Rahman al-Mayhani shows how two theological traditions shaped the spiritual culture of the Eastern Caucasus. These traditions belong to the two Shafi’ite scholars who both were the pupils of Abu Sa’id b. Abi al-Khayr and close friends. Together they made a Hajj to Mecca. The first was Abu al-Qasim al-Kushayri (died 465/1072), author of the practical guide for the Sufis, “Risala fi ‘ilm at-tasawwuf”¹², the second was Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni (died in 438/1047). According to the “Raihan al-haqa’iq”, ad-Darbandi made al-Kushayri’s teaching known through his six pupils. The “Mu`jam as-safar”, however, shows that ad-Darbandi was not the only scholar from the Eastern Caucasus who was interested in al-Kushayri’s teachings. The *shaykh* Abu al-Mahasin ‘Amr b. ‘Ubaid at-Tusi from Janza was taught by Abu al-Qasim al-Kushayri himself. Abu al-Mahasin came from a large family of Tus, whose members included famous *fakihs* and *qadis*. The father of Abu al-Mahasin, ‘Ubaid at-Tusi, who was also a Sufi, knew personally Abu al-Qasim al-Kushayri and Abu al-Qasim al-Gurgani. As-Silafi reports that at one time ‘Ubaid at-Tusi was in active contacts with Sufis from Kukhistan, Azerbaijan and Arran [1, p. 316]. As-Silafi himself met Abu al-Mahasin in Dinawar.

As for the Sufi tradition of Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni in the Caucasus it was adapted to local conditions by the Arran *Shaykh* Mas’ud b. As’ad al-Hiladi al-Marwazi. As-Silafi calls him a Sufi who belonged to the “al-Juwwalayn” (lit.: “of two Juwayni”) school. This school was called after Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni and his son Abu al-Ma’ali al-Juwayni, the famous “Imam al-Haramain” (“imam of two shrines”), the author of “Risala Nizamiyya” [10, pp. 211, 350]. Abu’l-Ma’ali al-Juwayni was in close contacts with Abu Nasr, the son of Abu al-Qasim al-Kushayri. Together they were connected to the *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya in Baghdad [10, p. 352]. The Shafi’i traditions of the al-Juvallain school Mas’ud al-Marwazi adopted directly from the son of the “Imam al-Haramain”, Abu al-Qasim b. Abi al-Ma’ali al-Juwayni. Mas’ud al-Marwazi traveled a lot, collected *hadith*, studied Islamic law and hagiographic literature. Among the people whom he studied with was Abu Isma’il al-Ansari, the author of “Hilyat al-Awliya”, and Abu al-Muzaffar al-Sam’ani, the grandfather of the author of the “Kitab al-ansab”, the famous Abu Sa’d al-Sam’ani

¹² About Abu Qasim al-Kushayri see: [28, p. 526]. Cf. Also the recent translation by A. Knysh: Al-Kushayri’s Epistle on Sufism [29].



[1, p. 368]. He dictated to as-Silafi *hadith* and other tradition; this took place somewhere in the vicinity of Janza¹³.

The continuity of the spiritual culture can be traced from one generation of scholars to another. Abu al-Qasim Zahid b. ‘Umar b. Abi-l-Husayn ar-Ravvasi ad-Dihistani somewhere near Janza dictated to as-Silafi *hadith*, which he learned from his father ‘Umar of Khorasan. Further as-Silafi reports that Abu al-Qasim Zahid was in constant letter correspondence with his father, who lived away in Dihistan. Many Khorasani *shaykhs* praised ‘Umar of Khorasan’s “reliable and detailed isnad”. In mentioning the Janza as-Silafi uses the expression *thaghr Janza*. Probably this does not mean the outskirts of the city but actually the whole surrounding area, judging from the non-standard use of this word by as-Silafi, which puzzled even the modern editor of his text [1, p. 99].

The problem of the correct interpretation of the term *ath-thaghr* arises with regard to the biography of the influential and well-known layer Qadi Abu al-Qasim Mahmud b. Yusuf al-Barzandi ash-Shafi’i. He originated from the “borderland” (*ath-thaghr*) of Tiflis, which according to as-Silafi was a part of Arran. It has already been mentioned above that the adjacent to Arran lands of Eastern Georgia were at one time were part of the Caucasian Albania. Abu al-Qasim al-Barzandi was a disciple and one of the “prominent followers” of Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi (d. 476/1083), the rector of the Baghdad *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya and an outstanding Shafi’ite lawyer. This information can be interpreted as that Abu al-Qasim al-Barzandi had to be a student at the Baghdad *madrasa* an-Nizamiyya. After finishing his studies he returned to his homeland in capacity of a Muslim judge. As-Silafi mentions that he enjoyed a great reputation and was a specialist in *adab* and *fawa’id*. From as-Silafi we also learn that al-Barzandi was in contact with Abu Ya’la al-Farrah (died 526/1133) who wrote the “Tabakat al-Khanabila”.

Finally, among the most notable scholars from Arran who actively traveled in pursuit of knowledge the author of “Mu`jam as-safar” mentions Abu ‘Abdallah al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Ahmad al-Janzi al-Mukri, the Sufi and ascet (*zahid*) of Janza, and the supreme *shaykh* (*shaykh ash-shuyuh*) of Arran. His title meant not only that he had a higher rank in the Sufi hierarchy, but was also very influential in the whole country. He not only controlled the day-to-day life of the Sufi communities and preserved the tradition but had to meet various influential people and to deal with many problems of diverse character. This made his position in fact to be more of diplomatic and political character rather than of purely spiritual. *Shaykh ash-shuyuh* Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Janzi told Abu Tahir as-Silafi about Ibn at-Tarjuman (died 448/1056), the famous Sufi *shaykh* from Syria, who was also well known in Egypt. Ibn Tardjuman was transmitting the *hadith* following the collection “Kitab fi -f-fada’il Askalan”. However,

¹³ The biography, which precedes that by Mas`ud b. Asad al-Marwazi was authored by Mas`ud b. ‘Ali al-Marwazi, whom as-Silafi met in Azerbaijan. The striking here is not the obvious coincidence of the names of these two authors but the fact that Mas`ud b. ‘Ali was also a pupil of ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari and Abu al-Muzaffar al-Sam`ani [1, p. 367].



according to al-Janzi, when ‘Abd al-’Aziz al-Nahshabi read the entire collection he is reported to say: “There is no reliable *hadith* in this collection apart from one or two [1, p. 73]”. As-Silafi reports that he met Abu ‘Abdallah al-Janzi in Hamadan and the latter read to him the poems he wrote following the manner of Abu al-Ala’ al-Ma’ari about the frailness and instability of the perishable world, the and the divine predestination of everything, which exists.

Below is a specimen from the poems by Husayn b. ‘Ali al-Janzi, the supreme sheikh (*shaykh ash-shuyuh*) of Ganja then the administrative centre of Arran. The author advise the reader to abandon the earthy values and get prepared for the inevitable death.

دع الدنيا اطالها وقدام لنفسك قبل يوم الارتحال
ولا تأسف على ما فات منها ولا تفرح بمنزلة وحال
متاع مضمحل عن قريب وحب المضمحل من المجال

The circle of the people from Bab al-Abwab, Shirwan and Arran whom as-Silafi personally knew and with whom he had spiritual and intellectual contacts was undoubtedly much wider than a couple of dozens of *shaykhs*, whose biographies are mentioned in his biographical dictionary. The colleague and companion of Abu Bakr al-Darbandi mentioned the best religious scholars from the “Country of the Mountains”. Out of them he had chosen those who traveled the world and endured the hardships of wandering striving to collect piece for piece the precious God-inspired knowledge.

The “Mu`jam as-safar” by as-Silafi is an important source, which provides valuable data about Islamic scholars who lived and taught in the Caucasus region during the 11th–12th cent., the time when Medieval Islamic culture was at its heyday. The information collected by the author as well as that found in the “Raihan al-haqa’iq” by ad-Darbandi shows that our knowledge about that period still remains limited.

A modern scholar must look forward to the critical analysis of the data collected by these historians and equally the definitive editions of many works of Islamic theological literature in the Caucasus, which originated long before the Mongol conquests.

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