

**“A FOREIGN MULLA IS GREAT, A LOCAL MULLA IS FAKE”: THE
TRANS-IMPERIAL MOBILITY AND ISLAMIC AUTHORITY OF
SHAMI DAMULLA (1870 - ~1932)**

By

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Charles D. Shaw
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Abstract

The nineteenth century was an era of unprecedented mobility for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, but the rate of movement across Eurasia was particularly intense for Muslims. A slice of the history of the trans-imperial mobility of Islamic scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century lies in the life trajectory of Sa‘id Muḥammad al-‘Asali al-Ṭarabulsi al-Shami (1870-1932?), who is better known as Shami Damulla in Central Asia.

This study is a social biography delineating Islamic authority, trans-imperial mobility, and textual practice. While this thesis focuses on a single individual—Shami Damulla, it also analyzes the insights that the life of this one scholar reveal about Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire and Qing China in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In doing so, this study explores broader themes related to Islamic knowledge practices, writing practices, and the process of a Muslim scholar claiming authority through his words and action within the specific time he lived. In the broadest sense, this is a story about the relationship between Islamic learning, mobility, and Islamic authority.

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To My Family

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Introduction

It is not common for Islamic scholars to debate publicly, and it is even rare for a foreign ulama to challenge a local ulama openly in a mosque. In 1919, in the main mosque of Tashkent, an Arab Islamic scholar from the Ottoman Empire known as Shami Damulla (The Great Master from Ottoman Syria) challenged the local Imam Shah-Maksud-Qari about a Hadith question, and the local Imam failed to answer it. Then, Shami-Damulla publicly ridiculed him, knocking the turban—a symbol of erudition—off his head with a stick. From this day onward, all of the scholars attending Shami Damulla’s courses left their turbans at home and went to class in their skullcaps. This dramatic moment demonstrates the central concern of this study.¹

The book *Global Muslims in the age of steam and print* demonstrated that geographic mobility was not only the opportunity and right of Europeans.² In the late nineteenth century, the first era of globalization had an equivalent in the Muslim world as well. Nineteenth century was an era of unprecedented mobility in the region for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, but for Muslims the rate of movement between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was particularly intense.³ A slice of the history of the mobility of Islamic scholars in the age of print and steam in Central Asia lies in the life trajectory of Sa‘id Muḥammad al-‘Asali al-Ṭarabulsi al-Shami (1870-1932?), who is better known as Shami Damulla in Central Asia, an Ottoman subject who established authority in Central Asia. In this study, I mostly refer to him by his family name: Asali.

¹ Ashirbek, Muminov, ‘Shami-damulla i ego rol’ v formirovanii “sovetskogo islama” [‘Shami-damullah and His Role in the Formation of “Soviet Islam”’], *Kazanskii federalist*, no. 1, 2005.

² Gelvin, James L., and Nile Green. *Global Muslims in the age of steam and print* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2014).

³ James H. Meyer. *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2014).

This study is a social biography delineating the connection between Islamic authority, trans-imperial mobility, and textual practice.⁴ At the very least, this is a microhistory, an attempt to see the global history as a micro-historian.⁵ While this thesis focuses on this single individual: Shami Damulla, it also analyze the insights that the life of this one scholar, and the multiple transformations he underwent, reveal about the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Qing China. In this regard, I explore broader themes related to Islamic knowledge practices, writing practices, and the process of a Muslim scholar claiming authority through his words and actions, within the specific time he lived. In its broadest, this is a story about the relationship between Islamic learning, mobility and Islamic authority.

A Twentieth Century Muslim Intellectual

Before elaborating on the details on this study, and how it differs from previous scholarship, it is necessary to situate Shami Damulla by outlining some of the crucial aspects of his life. Shami Damulla's full name was Said ibn Muhammed al-Asali al-Tarabulusi al-Shami(1870-1932?). In the early twentieth century, he became an important Muslim intellectual in Central Asia. Central Asian Muslims gave him a nickname: Shami Damulla (The Great Master from Ottoman Syria).⁶

Asali was born in Aazqey, Tripoli, in a village of what is present-day Lebanon, in 1870.⁷ He was born in the family of Asali,⁸ which used to be a famous family name in these areas, but

⁴ Eickelman, Dale F. *Knowledge and power in morocco: the education of a twentieth-century notable* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.1992.)

⁵ John-Paul A Ghobrial, Introduction: Seeing the World like a Microhistorian, *Past & Present*, Volume 242, Issue Supplement_14, November 2019, pp. 1–22.

⁶ Mulla, means master, Da has two interpretations, it either was a loan word from Chinese, 大 Da, which means big, or it was from the Persian word د, which means ten. Thus, Damulla means “a big master” or “a master who had learned ten types of religious sciences”. The word Sham شام refers to the Ottoman Syria or the Levant.

⁷ His birth year is contested.

⁸ The name Asali was shared by three well-known families, they are respectively of the Syrian (Shami) and Lebanese Shiites in Shihabiye, the Sunnis in Tripoli, and the Christians in Beirut. Generally, more Sunnis used this name. see abū s'ad, aḥmad, . m'aḡm asmā' al-'asr wāl'aṣḥās ūlmḥāt min tāriḥ al-'ā'ilāt. būrūt: dār al-'lm llmlāyin. 1997.pp.683-684.

this family cannot be traced in Aazqey anymore.⁹ Tripoli by then was part of the Ottoman Empire, it was a multiethnic region, and in 1860s the whole region was dominated by the conflicts between Christian and Muslims. In 19th century, a movement of religious reformation overthrew the Ottoman Syria (Sham). The middle class ulama sought to gain more authority in the state bureaucracy.¹⁰

Within this context, Asali started his education as a kid. Despite his humble and low-income family background, al-Asali still gained thorough Islamic training. He traveled from the Ottoman empire all the way down to China, covered territories including, in today's account, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, India, China, and Uzbekistan. Since 1889, Asali studied and worked in India for about ten years. He went to Istanbul around 1900, but he drew the ire of the Sultan Abdulhamid II because of his political views, and he had to live in exile. From 1901 to 1919, he mostly stayed in Xinjiang, the western borderland of China, on three separate sojourns. From 1919 to 1932, Asali stayed in Soviet Tashkent. His trans-imperial mobility enabled him to build an impressive network of social relationships over a wide geographic area across Eurasia. He became an influential Islamic scholar in both Xinjiang and the Soviet Turkistan in the early twentieth century.

This brief biography highlighted the numerous transformations that Asali underwent, along with the significant shift in his authority, over the course of his life. In this study, I attempt to highlight and investigate these different layers and aspects of Asali's life, through a careful engagement with his own writings, archival sources and articles from journals and newspapers.

I now turn to an overview of the scholarly literature on Asali in order to discuss the normative frameworks that scholars have used to understand his life.

Literature Review

⁹ Ṭūnī Mufarrij. *Mawsū'at qurá wa-mudun Lubnān*(*Encyclopedia of Villages and Cities of Lebanon* (Nulis Beirut. volume 16, 2002), p.123.

¹⁰ Commins, David Dean. *Islamic reform politics and social change in late Ottoman Syria* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990).

In the late nineteenth century, there were not yet any diplomatic connections between the Qing and Ottoman empires. Given the fact that both empires had significant geopolitical influences, there were informal activities to fill the gap of this diplomatic vacuum. At that point, the Sultan Abdulhamid II sought a more significant influence in the Islamic world, and China, demographically, was considered as one of the nations with the largest Muslim population. At the same time, Muslims lived in China who were eager to communicate with the center of the Islamic world had to overcome the difficulties created by the lack of diplomatic connections. Specifically, after the collapse of Yaqub Beg regime in Xinjiang, the whole region was annexed by the Qing empire again.¹¹ Although Yaqub Beg's regime once gained nominal support from the Ottoman Empire towards Kashgar, the downfall of his short-lived emirate increased the number of exiles in Istanbul, and the networks linked Kashgar with Istanbul produced a platform for people with mobility advantage to carve a representative character.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the development of transportation also accelerated the spread of modernist and reformist ideas in the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the Qing empire showed little interest in the Islamic world, and the Muslims communities around the world also had limited knowledge of the Qing empire. This fact makes one curious about whether the Ottoman pan-Islamism had reached China or not, though recent studies problematized Pan-Islamism as defining ideologies to reshape political boundaries. However, Pan-Islamism may not serve as a subversive trans-imperial instrument, but it did inspire new political practices. At the first era of globalization, the Muslim world also enjoyed the increase of mobility. Thus, this study would examine the mobility of freelance intellectual who contributed to bridge the centers of the Muslim world with the Western borderland of Qing China.

Shami Damulla's rise as a freelance Islamic scholar in Central Asia can be interpreted within the framework of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which Bourdieu applied to shift

¹¹ Schluessel, Eric. *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (NEW YORK: Columbia University Press, 2020),p.2.

the scholarly attention from structures to practices. This shift is not a denial of the existence of structural constraints within which individuals and groups act, instead it allowed scholars to treat the individual as an agent, which is continuously re-connecting the social world, instead of seeing the individual as a passive actor performing an invisible script prepared by structures. In this study, Shami Damulla's interaction with people from the great mass to social elites in both Central Asia and the Ottoman empire will be scrutinized. I would argue that Shami Damulla's cross-border mobility and his trans-imperial background equipped him with the cultural capital to claim Islamic authority in Central Asia, and his well-practiced gaining and utilization of cultural capital functioned effectively in regions including China, Soviet Central Asia, and Ottoman Empire.

Contested national historiographies pictured Shami Damulla as a controversial figure. Because most research did not move beyond generalizing descriptions of him simply as "fundamentalist," or "Salafist," and more accurately grasp the nature of the intellectual and political mission that they set for themselves. Although not enough scholarly attention is given to Shami Damulla yet, most current studies on him had been carried by post-soviet Central Asian scholars. Generally, they followed a line to depict him as a vehicle of the Soviet government's initially hidden agenda to oppress folk Islam or just "conservative" Islam in Central Asia. Another layer of these studies positions Shami Damulla as the centric personal for the origin of radical Islam in Central Asia. The first generation of Salafist who placed the seed of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia.¹² There is no doubt that these scholars brought out groundbreaking researches benefiting from the re-accessibility of Central Asian archives

¹² Muminov, Ashirbek, 'Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia', in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, Tomohiko, Uyama (ed.), (Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, 2007), pp. 254–5. And Babajanov, Bakhtiyar M., "'Ulama"-Orientalists: Madrasa Graduates at the Soviet Institute of Oriental Studies', in *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War*, Kemper, Michael and Kalinovsky, Artemy M. (eds), (Routledge, Abingdon, 2015), pp. 84–119.

after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, their framework is oversimplified by the local narrative of the combat against radical Islam, which puts too much emphasis on foreign influence and ignored other local social elements. Assuming the existence of the root of radical Islam is simplifying the development of radical Islam as a linear developing process and evading other social factors that had nurtured the radicalization process. On the other hand, it's contradictory primarily to argue that Shami Damulla was speaking for soviet authority's political interest when they persecuted him.

Related Chinese literature on Shami Damulla followed a similar framework but provided a different argumentation. In available sparse Chinese works, Shami Damulla was described as a representative of the British hidden agenda in Xinjiang to destabilize the whole Central Asia ideologically.¹³ There is a natural tendency to label any foreign actors with suspected pan-Islamism ideology as a security threat in the late 19th century Xinjiang. However, it is unconvincing for Chinese scholars to integrate Shami Damulla into the Chinese nation-building narrative, i.e., to relate him with the short-lived First Republic of Eastern Turkistan in Xinjiang and depict him as an assigned spy by the British empire. This narrative not only exaggerates the threat of a constructed version of pan-Islamism, which is supported by British and Ottoman empires, as an ideological enemy of the Chinese state but also anachronistically assumed Shami Damulla to be active in Xinjiang during the 1930s when he was persecuted in the Soviet Union and very likely shot dead there. There is no evidence that Shami Damulla's unstinting travels were in the service of anyone's interests but his own.

Scholars from other regions also give a different voice on Shami Damulla. For Arabic speaking scholars, Shami Damulla was a great cultural envoy between China and the Arab world, a symbolic presence of Arab influence in Turkistan.¹⁴ Among western scholars

¹³ Bao'erhan (Burhandin Shahidi). *Bao'erhan xuan ji* [An anthology of Burhandin] ([Beijing]: Min zu chu ban she, 1989), p.128.

¹⁴ Tadmuri, 'Umar. Mawsū'at al-'Ulamā' wa-al-A'lām fī Tārīkh Lubnān al-Islāmī [Encyclopedia of Islamic Scholars and Luminaries in the History of Islamic Lebanon], al-Markaz al-Islami li-l-I'lam wa-l-Inma', Beirut,

interested in Shami Damulla, few of them showed suspicion to the historiography, as mentioned above. David Brophy's recent work filled up the gap of Shami Damulla's almost two-decades stay in Xinjiang, Brophy convincingly analyzed the "freelance go-between role" of Shami Damulla in a territory covered Ottoman empire and Xinjiang, he suggested post-soviet scholars over estimated Shami Damulla's influence in this region.¹⁵ In his earlier works, Brophy shed light on Shami Damulla's translation of Li Kitabi and praised it as a unique interaction between the kindred intellectuals at the opposite ends of Eurasia.¹⁶ In a way, this study confirms David Brophy's work on Shami Damulla. Furthermore, I try to reinterpret Shami Damulla's life trajectory, through the life of one individual to look through all of these historiographical lenses and national historiography and use it as a case study to shed light on the distortions of various national agendas.

Shami Damulla's activities were related to broader political currents: the Jadid movement in Xinjiang, the Young Turks revolution in the Ottoman Empire, and finally, the Soviet crackdown on Islam in Central Asia. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, official diplomatic connections between Qing China and the Ottoman Empire were near non-existent. The lack of diplomatic ties created a vacuum situation that equipped people who had access to mobility across these regions with a unique type of cultural capital. The mobility of Islamic scholars in Central Asia was active in the early 20th century. Given that Xinjiang and Soviet Central Asia were at the borderlands of different Empires, and culturally, both of these regions were considered the periphery of Turkic and Islamic world. Shami Damulla's move from Ottoman territory to Central Asia not only showed us the

part 3, vol. 3, 1984, p. 261. And Al-Qāsimī, Jamāl al-Dīn and 'Ajamī, Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir. *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi]*. Bayrūt : Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009.p.319.

¹⁵ Brophy D. "He Causes a Ruckus Wherever He Goes": Said Muhammad al-Asali as a missionary of modernism in north-west China". *Modern Asian Studies*. 54 (4): 1192-1224. 2020.

¹⁶ Brophy, David. *Uyghur Nation Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Harvard University Press. 2016).

connection between the periphery and the center but also demonstrated how Islamic knowledge as cultural capital had traveled and functioned in largely marginalized Islamic societies.

The Intellectual Entrepreneur: A New Approach to Asali

Previous studies of Asali indeed have deepened our understanding of him, but these studies also have left us a gap to fill. For conducting new research and explore other dimensions of Asali's life, it is necessary to exceed the scope of simply labeling him as a Salafist *ulama* and a political tool for different governments. Indeed, these approaches functioned well to explore the life of the twentieth-century figure, but these categorizations of Asali could not explain his life trajectory's multi-layered complexity and activities in the specific historical context. Therefore, I claim, with good reasons, that it is necessary to study Asali as an intellectual and an entrepreneur and explore his scholarly production, which remains underutilized in previous scholarship.

Intellectuals are defined by their place in the unfolding social process: they engage in socially recognized organizational, directive, educative, or expressive activities. Teachers, artists, political leaders, healers, and bureaucrats are all intellectuals within this definition of the term. The definition is derived, of course, from Gramsci, who explained that it is not possible to define intellectuals simply by the fact that they engage in intellectual activities, because these activities proceed within every social group. "In any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists . . . a minimum of creative intellectual activity".¹⁷ All people are therefore intellectuals, but not all people have the social function of intellectuals, a function that is directive, organizational, or educative. Intellectuals are not defined by the quality and content of their discourse (although these are of fundamental interest to us); they are defined by their place within the ensemble of social relations. Many anthropological researchers have come across nonliterate people who possess a brilliant, self-conscious,

¹⁷ Gramsci, Antonio. "The Intellectuals", in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers 1971), p.8.

discursive understanding of knowledge within their own culture, and yet earn their livings doing what most people around them do and are not recognized as engaging in directive or educative activities. These people are not defined as intellectuals in the sense adopted here.

According to sociologist Alvin Gouldner, the interests of intellectuals are primarily critical, emancipatory, hermeneutic and hence often political.¹⁸ Although giving a universal definition of intellectual is beyond the scope of this article, these definitions provide the core features of intellectuals, but they suggest an “intellectual” is always defined by an *occupation* which is related to academic research; they refer to the small and exclusive world of intellectual elites. Concerning the “masses” of thinking people, some scholars propose a definition of intellectual that is broader: in principle, everyone is an intellectual; but not all people do the social function of intellectuals, which is to be organizers.¹⁹ Certain people are distinguishable as intellectuals by virtue of their directive, organizational, or educative function in society.²⁰ In other words, intellectuals are not defined by the quality and content of their discourse; they are defined by their place within the ensemble of social relations.²¹

In this sense, besides the possession of profound knowledge, intellectuals should reflect on themselves and their community. The idea of “intellectual” implies an individual claiming or supposed to possess an especially intense awareness of the sacred center of social and spiritual values and the ability to reflect and explain valued categories of knowledge.²² Similarly, Edward Said and Elie Kedourie emphasized the marginalization that intellectuals might face. For them, intellectuals are someone able to speak the truth, a courageous and angry

¹⁸ Gouldner, A. W. *The future of intellectuals and the rise of the new class: A frame of reference, theses, conjectures, arguments, and an historical perspective on the role of intellectuals and intelligentsia in the international class contest of the modern era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.48.

¹⁹ Gramsci, Antonio. “*The Intellectuals*”, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 3-23.

²⁰ Ramos, G., & Yannakakis, Y. *Indigenous intellectuals: Knowledge, power, and colonial culture in Mexico and the Andes*, 2014, p.2.

²¹ Feierman, Steven. *Peasant intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania* (Ann Arbor (Mich.): UMI, 1997), p.18.

²² Shils, Edward. *The intellectuals and the powers, and other essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.3.

individual for whom no worldly power is too big and imposing to be criticized and pointedly taken to task. The real or true intellectual is therefore always an outsider, living in self-imposed exile, and on the margins of society.²³

Among many definitions of “Intellectual”, I choose to follow Steve Feierman’s conceptualization where he defines it as someone who “engage[s] in socially recognized, directive, educative, or expressive activities.” Intellectuals, in this definition, play an important role as educators, and crucially their positions are socially mediated. In other words, while their intellectual practice and production matter, it is essential also to recognize that “they are defined by their place within an ensemble of social relations.” In this regard, Muslim scholars, as I have discussed, are socially recognized, as scholars, because of their training and their ability to mediate Islamic knowledge to others. Their mastery over the Islamic religious sciences, their baraka, and their roles as healers set them apart from ordinary believers. Nevertheless, their production and intellectual activities speak to the broader context within which ordinary believers live. It is ultimately from this socially constituted position and dialogical relationship with other believers that defines how scholars’ knowledge translates into power.

Framing Asali as an intellectual does not foreclose the possibility to engage with his spiritual authority. Instead, my conceptualization ties these different dimensions of his life to his religious authority. Following John Hunwick’s definition, in this study religious authority is seen as “an assumed authority to guide and order people’s social life -and to varying extents economic and political -lives under an interpretation of what the holders of such authority claim to be the divine authority, which overrides authority established by ‘secular’ powers.”²⁴ This

²³ Belsey, A. Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch, eds., *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie*. *Philosophy in Review*, 18, 6, 408-411. (January 01, 1998), pp.1-2.

²⁴ Hunwick, John Owen. “Secular power and religious authority in Muslim society: the case of Songhay”. *Journal of African History*. 37 (2): 175-194. 1996.

authority was rooted in Asali's mastery over the Islamic religious sciences and was partly demonstrated through his scholarship.

With the new and emerging methodological approaches, some important studies had been conducted on the trans-imperial mobility and the Islamic authority in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Central Asia, only a few scholars have utilized multilingual sources including Arabic, Chinese, Chagatai, Ottoman Turkish and Uzbek. Unlike previous works, this study constructs a narrative on Asali through a careful engagement with his trans-imperial activities and his scholarly production. In the following I introduce some of the main sources in different languages.

Arabic

Kitab Qanuni al-Sin (The book of the law of China) is Asali's translation into Arabic of a Turkic version of the Qing dynasty's Sacred Edict, published in Cairo in 1906. It's a significant contribution to the Islamic world's knowledge of Qing China and its laws. It also contains a valuable and most reliable biography of Asali's early life, penned by Ibrahim al-Dabbagh (1880-1946), the Palestinian editor of the Cairene journal *al-Insaniyya*, Dabbagh was a longtime resident of Cairo.²⁵ In an attempt to introduce the "translator", Dabbagh penned this short biography, and placed in the beginning of Asali's translation work as an introduction both for the book and the author. Dabbagh's biography describes Asali's lengthy intellectual formation journey, starting from his teens, through the Middle East Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to centers of Islamic learning in India. I will examine Asali's motivation for translating this work *The book of the law of China*, and elaborate on his translating process to construct a narrative related to the gaining of cultural capital.

Another piece of his writing, *Al-Jumal al-mufida fi sharh al-Jawhara al-farida* [A Useful Statement in the Commentary to "The Only Treasure"] (manuscript). This manuscript

²⁵ Mil, Yaquub. *Muejam al-shueara' mundh bad' easr al-nahdati. Al-mujalad al'awal* [Dictionary of poets since the beginning of the Renaissance]. Volume I (1st ed.). 9Beirut: Dar Sader, 2009), p20.

was translated by Asal Abbasova and published in B. M. Babadzhanov, A. K. Muminov, and A. fon Kiugel' gen [von Kügelgen], eds., *Disputy musul' manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral' noi Azii v XX veke: kriticheskie izdaniia i issledovaniia istochnikov*. Previous studies used Asali's writings to prove that he was a fundamentalist, I will re-examine this work and argue against previous studies which anachronistically labeled Asali as Salafist or even Wahabist.

Other Arabic sources contain works of his contemporary critics and his disciples. According to *Imam al-Sham fi 'Asrihi Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi* [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi], in March 1907, he spent a week at the Abdullah Pahsa madrasa in Damascus, where he obtained a diploma (ijaza) from the reformist scholar Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (1866-1914). According to an entry in "Umar Tadmuri's biographical dictionary, *Mawsu'at 'Ulama' al-Muslimin fi Tarikh Lubnan al-Islami* [Encyclopaedia of Muslim Scholars in the Islamic History of Lebanon], al-Asali also studied with the Damascene Shaykh Abd al-Razzaq al-Bitar (1837-1937). These contemporaries spoke very highly of him. One of his pupils named Muhemmed Ibrahim al-Khutani, who originated from Xinjiang, became an influential Hadith scholar in Hijaz. I will examine these contemporaries' related works to reevaluate Shami Damulla's scholarly capacity and shed light on how a middle-status ulama used his cultural capital to climb the social ladder in Central Asia.

There is another Arabic book written by the Saudi scholar Muhammed Qasim Imin Turkistani, *al-ialam libadi rijal Turkistan* (Information on Some Figures in Turkistan), published in 2008. This book mentioned a Shami Damulla with a different name but similar life history, I will examine if it is the same Shami Damulla we are discussing, if so, why would he change his name, if not, Shami Damulla as a well-known nickname for a certain Arab scholar in 20th century Central Asia would become a contested title. It would add another layer of cultural capital to the figure in this study.

Ottoman Turkish

There are enough documents in ottoman archives indicating Shami Damulla's return to Istanbul and his meeting with the Sultan. There are ten Ottoman court documents related to his activities in Istanbul. He received gifts from the Sultan, and he got expelled for deceiving the court. Based on these sources, I would elaborate on how he had used his cultural capital, which he gained from mobility and his stay in the far edge of the Islamic world, in the Ottoman court, though he failed in the court; this experience further added on his cultural capital in Central Asia.

Uzbek

In the newspaper of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan Qizil O'zbekiston written in 1925 to discredit Shami-Damulla hinted at cooperation between him and the Soviet authority. "Shami-domullaning oq salla tashviqotchilari," (Shami Damull's White Turban Propaganda) Qizil O'zbekiston, April 16, 1925; Bobir, "Qay yerga borsalar tinch turmaydilar," (He Causes a Ruckus Wherever He Goes) Qizil O'zbekiston, May 17, 1925, p.4.; I will examine these critical articles of Shami Damulla, and find out how was his involvement in local ulama politics conceived differently by the soviet government and local elite, further shed light on how his participation in wider political currents give him the cultural capital to rise.

Uyghur

Shami Damulla was once a guest of Mulla Musa Sayrami, the author of *Tārīkh-i ḥamīdī* (History of Ḥamid) is a history of Qing Xinjiang, which was written in Chagatai language in 1908. A modern Uyghur translation by Enver Baytur was published in Beijing in 1986. Sayrami incorporated into this work a tract penned by al-‘Asali, in which he criticized the widespread reverence for the 'Seven Sleepers shrine' in Tuyuq, in the Turfan oasis. I would decipher the symbolic meaning of the interaction between Shami and Sayrami. The former positioned himself as the representative of the Ottoman Sultan, and the latter dedicated his book, *Tarihi*

Hamidi, to Sultan Abdul Hamid. I would use this source to explain how Shami Damulla's attitude towards Sufi practices changed and how his criticism earned him cultural capital.

Chinese

The Chinese text of the *Li-Kitabi* consisted of the Sixteen Sacred Maxims with Simple Explanations of the Code (Sheng yu shi liu tiao fu lü yi jie 圣谕十六条附律易), by Xia Xin 夏忻 (1789 – 1871). This is an 1868 redaction of the Kangxi emperor's Sacred Edict, various editions that were recited publicly throughout the empire every fortnight. As well as homilies on the Sacred Edict's original sixteen maxims, Xia Xin's work also contains a selection of articles from the Qing code (Daqing lüli 大清律例). Alongside this Chinese text, the *Li-Kitabi* provides a loose Turkic paraphrase of its text's injunctions and sanctions, which at times diverges sharply from Xia Xin's composition. The translators came up with this Turkic text themselves or were working from a highly simplified Chinese or Manchu version of the Sacred Edict.

Outline and Chapter Summary

This study consists of three chapters and a short conclusion. I have structured each chapter around one or more pieces of Asali's own writing and archival sources related to him. I have arranged the narrative chronologically. It follows Asali through key moments of his life, from his birth in 1870, to his death in 1932. I have also arranged the source material chronologically, except for chapter one. In this chapter, I use a later work in order to provide insights into an earlier period of Asali's life. In addition, throughout this study, I comment on Islamic knowledge practices, the relationship of writing and various forms of Asali's authority and document the multiple roles of a scholar living in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

In chapter one, I focus on the connection between mobility and Islamic knowledge transmission. I posit that he was able to master numerous Islamic religious sciences when Ottoman Syria (Sham) was undergoing social and political transformation through travel. By rooting the discussion on Dabbagh's biography of Asali, chapter one explains the importance of mobility in his scholarly endeavors. It argues that Asali claimed authority through the *Ijaza* (*permission, diploma*) and *isnad* (*transmitter*) system of Islamic learning. By exploring his intellectual training in India, this chapter argues his training in India shaped him as a polymath, which contributed to his thorough integration with Central Asian Islamic communities, rather than the Ottoman ones.

Chapter two pieces together a narrative on Asali's go-between activities between the Ottoman empire and Xinjiang. Through this, this chapter examines aspects of what constitutes Asali's Islamic authority. First, it seeks to explain Asali's attempts to insert himself into the elite circles of Xinjiang through his high profile as a *Hadith* scholar and an erudite historian. This chapter then explores his intermediary role in the relationship between the Muslim communities in the western borderland of China and the Ottoman empire in two ways. Firstly, it describes his continuous travels across these regions. These travels functioned as the cultural capital for him. This type of trans-imperial mobility served him well in front of the Ottoman court and the Muslim communities in Xinjiang since both sides sought a bridge for communication. Secondly, what makes Asali's case unique is that he acted only on his own will as an intellectual entrepreneur who sought to establish authority in both Istanbul and Xinjiang.

Chapter three deals with Asali's life from 1911 to 1932. This chapter uses Max Weber's tripartite classification of authority as the conceptual framework. By rooting the analyses on Asali's writings, official documents from the Ottoman and Chinese governments, and the Soviet newspaper articles penned by Asali, this chapter piece together a narrative on Asali's relationship with the government authorities the non-governmental social elites. It argues that

the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was on the lowest level of the hierarchy shaped by the three Weberian types of authorities. The case of Asali demonstrated that the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was not sustainable without the support of the traditional and legal authorities.

Chapter One

Mobility and Embodied Knowledge: the early life of Sai'd al-Asali

“Seek knowledge, even though [it be] in China.” ²⁶
---The prophet Muhammed

Introduction

This chapter explores the early life of Sa'id ibn Muhammed al-A'sali al-Tarabulusi al-Shami(1870-1932?). His later works on Islamic jurisprudence and poems and his interest in Chinese law and Central Asian history emphasize Asali's profound erudition and proficiency in various Islamic religious sciences.

Prior to his career to claim authority in central Asia, his early life trajectories of learning can be understood through the norm of the specific knowledge transmission tradition in Islam, which underscores the importance of face-to-face personalized pedagogy modes: the *isnad* paradigm and *ijaza* system. More specifically, in the Islamic learning process, instead of the text, teachers' presence counted as the primary sites of knowledge transmission. Simultaneously, the mobility of both the teachers and the students created multiple spots for knowledge dissemination which would further produce transferable authority across different Islamic societies. For the case of Asali, his later career to claim Islamic authority in both Chinese and Soviet Central Asia highlights the crucial role of mobility in producing erudite scholars that would actively engage with different political and religious authorities.

Because Asali left us no direct ego documents about his early life, my discussion in this chapter is mainly based on the 1906 short biography penned by Ibrahim al-Dabbagh (1880-1946), the Palestinian editor of the Cairene journal *al-Insaniyya*, Dabbagh was a longtime

²⁶ A famous, if likely spurious hadith.

resident of Cairo.²⁷ He was the publisher of Asali's translation work *Kitab Qanun al-Sin* (the book of the law of China). This work was Asali's translation into Arabic of a Turkic version of the Qing dynasty's Sacred Edict. In an attempt to introduce the "translator", Dabbagh penned this short biography, and placed in the beginning of Asali's translation work as an introduction both for the book and the author. Dabbagh's biography describes Asali's lengthy intellectual formation journey, starting from his teens, through the Middle East Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to centers of Islamic learning in India. Since Asali was the only source for his writing, we have to recognize that above all else we are dealing with Asali's own narrative. With such limited number of sources, it is impossible to examine all claims of Asali in this biography. However, it reveals, at least at the early age, how Asali wanted readers to think about him.

By rooting the discussion on this source, this chapter focuses on the connection between mobility and Islamic knowledge transmission. This chapter explains the importance of mobility in his scholarly endeavors. It argues that Asali claimed authority through the *Ijaza* and *isnad* system of Islamic learning. By exploring his intellectual training in India, this chapter argues his training in India shaped him as a polymath, which contributed to his thorough integration with Central Asian Islamic communities, rather than the Ottoman ones.

Though we know very little about Asali's early life, I posit that he was able to master numerous Islamic religious sciences when Ottoman Syria (Sham) was undergoing social and political transformation through travel. Mobility, the ability to travel freely in search of knowledge (*talab al-ilm*), was important because Islamic knowledge was considered authentic only when it was orally transmitted through personalized chains of transmission in the nineteenth century. In this type of epistemology for knowledge transmission, texts mattered,

²⁷ Mil, Yaqub. *Muejam al-shueara' mundh bad' easr al-nahdati. Al-mujalad al'awal* [Dictionary of poets since the beginning of the Renaissance]. Volume I (1st ed.) (Beirut: Dar Sader. 2009), p20.

but only within the logic of the broader verbal and non-verbal relationships between teachers and students.

Mobility and Knowledge Embodiment

Said al-Asali started to pursue Islamic education within the context of the grassroots ulamas' contest for authority with the established religious institution in late Ottoman empire. One decade after the 1860 civil conflict in Mount Lebanon and Damascus, in 1870, al-Asali came to the world in the village Aazqey²⁸ which was under administration of the town Danniye, Levant Tripoli.²⁹ He claimed that his grandfather was a *sheikh*--an honorific title for religious scholar, but his father did not become a religious scholar. Because the title of *Sheikh* bore a sense of Islamic authority, Asali emphasized his grandfather's religious position since the beginning of his career.³⁰

Analyzing the details of how al-Asali experienced his early intellectual formative period, I argue that Asali's gaining of a thorough Islamic religious education was made possible under the paradigm of the embodied and personalized cognitive nature of Islamic knowledge, also the mobility of teachers and students played the central role in the transmission of ideas and knowledge through the ulama networks which Asali inserted himself in. Though we have sparse information about Asali's early life, we know that he benefited from his mobility to gain Islamic knowledge and authority.

The role of mobility in the Islamic learning is crucial because of the *isnad* paradigm and *ijazat* system. *Isnad* means "support, chain of narrators", the system of transmission of *Hadith* is based on *isnad*, which coexists with the gist (*matn*) of every single *Hadith*. The *Isnad* takes the form of a list or "chain" (*silsilah*) of individual transmitters who span the generations from

²⁸ The village had developed into a little town, it's sixteen miles away from the Lebanese city Tripoli.

²⁹ 'Asalī, Sa'īd ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid. *Kitāb qānūn al-Ṣīn* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at Madrasat Wālidat 'Abbās al-Awwal. 1906), p.1.

³⁰ Ibid.

the most recent reporter back to the Prophet or Companions.³¹ In other word, there are two major aspects of a *hadith*, the text of the report (the *matn*), which contains the actual narrative, and the chain of narrators (the *isnad*), which documents the route by which the report has been transmitted.³² Concerning the study of *hadith*, the *isnad* is crucial because it was an effort to document that a *hadith* had actually come from Muhammad.³³

For example, an authentic *hadith* would go, “Obaidullah bin Saeed narrated, and Abdo bin Humid, they said: Abu Amer Alaqdy narrated, Suleiman bin Bilal narrated, from Abdullah Ibn Dinar, from Abu Salih, from Abu Huraira that the Prophet peace be upon him said: “*Iman* (faith) has over seventy branches, and modesty is a branch of *Iman*”.³⁴ The *isnad* paradigm emphasize that truth does not reside in documents, but in the authentic transmitters of the knowledge and their personal connectedness with one another, thus with the Prophet himself.³⁵ The concern for connectedness with past authority along with the personalized nature of knowledge transmission put mobility into the center of the peripatetic quest for knowledge. The *isnad* paradigm functioned as the authoritative mechanism of transmission of all learning and scholarship in Islamic tradition, thus travelling severed as the practical means for *isnad*. “The journey, or *rihlah*, tradition of personal study with outstanding teachers, wherever they might be”,³⁶ severed Muslim learners to gain knowledge and authority for centuries.

The *ijaza* system is the most important extension of the *isnad* paradigm. “The journey in search of knowledge” that rooted in the early Hadith scholarship eventually evolved into the *ijaza* system. The *ijaza*, “permission” or “license”, mostly a written document which the

³¹ Graham, William A. "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 23 (3): 495-522. 1993.p.502.

³² Brown, Jonathan A.C. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Foundations of Islam, 2009), p.4

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ M. M. A. Najeeb, "A Novel Hadith Processing Approach Based on Genetic Algorithms," in *IEEE Access*, vol. 8, pp. 20233-20244, 2020.

³⁵ Ibid., p.507.

³⁶ Ibid., p.512.

student received from specific religious authorities (*shaykhs*), authorized the student to transmit the knowledge in their names. “This *ijaza* system of personal rather than institutional certification has served not only for Hadith, but also for transmission of texts of any kind, from history, law, or philology to literature, mysticism, or theology.”³⁷ As Asali had traveled great distances in search of prestigious *ulamas*, many other students would do the same to gain an *ijaza* to be part of a particular *ulama*’s intellectual genealogies, in some extreme cases, they would learn the same thing with different teachers at different places. The *ijaza* proves the oral, face-to-face, teacher-to-student transmission of knowledge³⁸, through a written *ijaza*, the teacher transmitted religious authority by the certificate which highlights an *isnad* containing the intellectual genealogies of teachers back to the Prophet through Companions, a later venerable shaykh, or the author of a specific book.

Al-asali’s intellectual genealogy can be analyzed through the framework of the *isnad* model and the *ijaza* system. Born in the territory of the late Ottoman Syria, Asali’s early education was influenced by the rise of Arab nationalism and the religious reformism.³⁹ Instead of going to a secular school, Asali followed a traditional Islamic curriculum. In search of Islamic scholars who can provide proper religious training, he seems to have begun travelling at a very young age. According to the biography, started from his village, he travelled to Jerusalem then to Damascus and then to Tiberias and then to Nabulus, all on foot (*ajilan*).⁴⁰ Asali emphasized that these travels were carried out on foot (*ajilan*), although it was common to travel on foot at that time, it still indicated Asali’s determined mindset in search of knowledge. In today’s calculation, he had walked for at least 900km to cover these distances.

³⁷ Ibid., p.511.

³⁸ Kadi, Wadad. "Education in Islam—Myths and Truths." *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 311-24.

³⁹ More on the religious reforms in this region see Commins, David. "Religious Reformers and Arabists in Damascus, 1885-1914." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 4 (1986): 405-25.

⁴⁰ ‘Asalī, Sa‘īd ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid. *Kitāb qānūn al-ṣīn* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba‘at Madrasat Wālidat ‘Abbās al-Awwal, 1906) p.1.

Asali told Dabbagh, in the Qur'anic school *Madrasa Hayriyya*, he memorized the whole book of Qur'an in six months.⁴¹ In 1870s, there were only eight schools of this type in the whole region of Beirut,⁴² Asali had to travel long distances on foot to study in one of those schools. In late nineteenth century, this type of Qur'anic schools played the core role for the socialization of young Muslim students to the doctrine of Islam, and young Muslim students would also obtain the basic skills in Arabic literacy there. Even the basic Arabic literacy was a challenge to most students, since most of them would leave before they acquired literacy, for those few who remained would spend the six to eight years that were generally required to memorize the entire Qur'an.⁴³ In this sense, Asali's claim that he memorized the entire Qur'an within six months may sound exaggerating, but it indicated his clear understanding of the mechanism of the Islamic authority: it is not just the text studied that create authority, but also the space and time along with the masters who transmitted these knowledges, which I would conceptualize as a type of embodied knowledge.

To be more specific, the peculiarity of Islamic pedagogy as embodied cognition emphasizes the combination of memorization, the onsite teachers, and the bodily comportment. This combination reveals profound epistemological implications of *knowing*. Before the Islamic reformists contested the traditional method of Islamic learning, "to know" in the Islamic context was dramatically different from the western cognitive traditions. In Islamic learning, knowing was produced by limbs as it is by mind, imitation of teacher's gestures, memorization of texts made the Word a private possession in the body⁴⁴, memorizers became the books, as

⁴¹ Ibid., p.1.

⁴² Tibawi, Abdul Latif. *American interests in Syria, 1800-1901: a study of educational, literary and religious work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.181.

⁴³ Eickelman, Dale F. "The art of memory: Islamic education and its social reproduction". *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly*. 20:(1978), 485-516, p.493.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the Prophet Muhammed was known as the walking Qur'an. In this sense, Islamic knowledge was embodied knowledge.⁴⁵

Within this context, Asali's narration about his study in *Madrassa Hayriyya* is significant. Asali told Dabbagh that he had finished the memorization of Qur'an within six months, and he recited it to the "respected reciters Sheikh Hussein Al-Sarkhi and Sheikh Ismail Al-Masry, and also other distinguished reciters", by then he was sixteen years old.⁴⁶ We do not know what other schools Asali had studied in during his trip from the village of Aazqey to Jerusalem, Damascus, Tiberias and Nabulus, and no information about the above-mentioned teachers had been found yet, but it revealed the fact that teachers of their level could get overlooked in the records of history. That is to say, these reciters and teachers were among hundreds of their types in the region, who could teach the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an. With these teachers, Asali immersed himself into a system of embodied epistemology, which required teachers' onsite teaching, and the students' imitation and memorization. After he passed certain types of evaluations, he would get an *Ijaza* (permission), mostly written, to transmit (*isnad*) these knowledges to someone else. The sixteen-year-old Asali had been authorized to teach the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an to others. The memorization of Qur'an bestowed students like Asali with social capital within the Muslim community. Furthermore, knowing Quranic verses by heart provided students like Asali with social skills to follow and participate in social conversations about the usage of Quranic verses.⁴⁷ Under some circumstances, it allows them to serve as performers of ritual to monetize their knowledge. In this way, Asali started to accumulate authority through the *isnad* paradigm and *ijaza* system.

⁴⁵ Rudolph T. Ware. *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p.49.

⁴⁶ 'Asali, 1906, p.1.

⁴⁷ Eickelman, Dale F. *Knowledge and power in Morocco: the education of a twentieth-century notable* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp.64-66.

Asali's journey to accumulate Islamic knowledge did not end with the memorization of the Qur'an. As the traditional Islamic curriculum required, he needed to receive further education in the religious science of Islam, and again, mobility became the essential base for his further enhancement of authority. In 1887/6, he traveled to Al-Azhar.⁴⁸ Having already memorized the Qur'an, Asali began to study the rudimentary texts of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Arabic linguistics (*lughah*). He studied *Sharh al-Ta'i* and *Manla Miskeen* and *Al-ayni a'la matn al-kunz* with Sheikh Mustafa al-Qutub al-Hanafi and the historian Sheikh Masoud al-Nabulsi.⁴⁹ Not much information is available about these two teachers of him, but by 1906, these teachers had already passed away⁵⁰. Asali told Dabagh that he also memorized the entire books of *Matn al-tanwir fi al-fiqh* (*Enlightenment body in jurisprudence*) and *Al'alfiat wa al-shshafiat fi alnahw wa al-sirf* (*Millennium and healing in grammar and morphology*).⁵¹ Memorizations of such large volume works paved the base for him to become an erudite *fiqh* scholar, who was, after all, a graduate of al-Azhar. Regarding the authenticity of this, I think Asali's Azharite background is trustworthy. Because Dabbagh was also a al-Azhar graduate,⁵² he knew the system and he had connections there. That is to say, a fabricated Azharite background could not deceive Dabbagh.

During the Ottoman rule, Al-Azhar had grown into the most influential and preeminent institution for Islamic learning in the Sunni Muslim world.⁵³ However, it was not yet an institution of academic degrees, instead it still functioned under the *ijaza* system. The *sheikh* determined if the student was sufficiently trained to enter a professor, thus, to gain an *ijaza*, mostly a written document. For most students, the average duration of study was six years.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ 'Asali, 1906, p.1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.1. Dabbagh used "al-marhum", "deceased" before their names.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.1.

⁵² Mil, Yaqub. Muejam al-shueara' mundh bad' easr al-nahdati. Al-mujalad al'awal [Dictionary of poets since the beginning of the Renaissance]. Volume I (1st ed.) (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2009), p.20.

⁵³ Curta, Florin, and Andrew Holt. *Great events in religion: an encyclopedia of pivotal events in religious history*. 2017, p.561.

⁵⁴ Devine, Mary Elizabeth. *International Dictionary of University Histories* (Routledge, 2013), p.10.

Moreover, Al-Azhar was not a specific campus-based institution, it oversaw a national network of schools all across the territory of Egypt.⁵⁵ In this sense, Asali could have studied with those Azharite teachers in a small village *madrassa* but still recognized as an institutional part of Al-Azhar. However humble the facilities be, the title of “Al-Azhar alumni” would be enough to serve Asali to trigger admiration among most Muslims he encountered.

Taking a closer look at Asali’s curriculum in al-Azhar, he studied books that followed a curriculum includes Arabic grammar, *haith*, jurisprudence and other religious sciences. Among many schools of Islamic jurisprudence, Asali studied the *Hanafi* school. *Hanafi* was the chief legal school of the Ottoman Empire,⁵⁶ young Asali could have started to plan his career for the following decades. He did not follow less influential Islamic schools, such as *Maliki* and others, which were also taught in Al-azhar. *Hanifi* had and still has the largest number of adherents throughout the Muslim world, it is prevalent in Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan, in addition to parts of Russia, and Iran.⁵⁷ Asali’s latter interest in these regions was partially related to his thorough training in *Hanifi* school of Islamic jurisprudence, and his initial motivation to travel through these regions could be to seek available prestigious *ulama* in *Hanafi* school and gain their *ijazas* to increase his own authority. As he wrote in 1920s in Soviet Central Asia:

The chain of transmission of the *Sahih Jami* (the *Collection of the Hadith*) by Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870),⁵⁸ may God be pleased with him, has reached us, on the authority of a group of scholars from India, Iraq, Sham (Ottoman Syrian or Levant), Hijaz and Yemen, with a narration of multiple paths. Some of them contradict each other in context, length and shortness. Because of the large number of transmitters and many of them lived a short life, only a small number of them lived a long life.⁵⁹ Nothing comes to me at this time from those blessed chains other than the chain of transmission of the Hijazis and

⁵⁵ Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: the search for a new Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp.92-93.

⁵⁶ Hallaq, Wael B. *An introduction to Islamic law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.37.

⁵⁷ See “Hanafism” in Uhlig, Siegbert. *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 2, Volume 2* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 2005). Also, in Ahmad, Abu Umar Faruq. *Theory and practice of modern Islamic finance: the case analysis from Australia* (Boca Raton, Fla: Brown Walker Press. 2010), pp. 77-78.

⁵⁸ Imam Bukhari (810-870), who was from Central Asia and penned the most important *Hadith* collection.

⁵⁹ It matters because the reliability of their transmissions was examined through studying their biographies, longer life would provide more data for evolution, thus make the chain potentially more authentic.

the Shamis (Levantines), which is the highest chain of transmission had been found, and it is called the chain of the long-lived.⁶⁰

From this text, we saw a slice of his intentions to travel through all these regions. In addition to this, for a long time, at least before he settled down in the Soviet Central Asia, his career interest remained within the religious institutions of the Ottoman Empire. He gained authority through traveling, and then come back to the Ottoman Empire to carve a religious career. I discuss more about his engagement with Ottoman court in chapter two.

Travel, Embodied Knowledge and Authority Network

After studying in Al-Azhar for about two years,⁶¹ Asali headed east and started his journey across Eurasia to further cultivate Islamic education through travel. During Asali's time in Al-Azhar, students were not required to study for specific years, but to study specific books. If the student had finished these books and mastered them well, then an *ijaza* would be issued. By the time of leaving Al-azhar, Asali had already been authorized to transmit the knowledge of *Hanifi* school of jurisprudence, and issue *fatwa* (*legal opinion, judgment*).⁶² After earning such a remarkable achievement under the age of nineteen, he left for Iraq. He stayed in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, for some time, and studied Sufi orders including *Khatuniya*, *Marjaniya* and *Qadariya*.⁶³

In Baghdad, Asali's strategy to accumulate authority was not limited to collecting *ijazas* from famous *ulama*, he also actively networked with state bureaucracies. As he told Dabbagh, he made the acquaintance of Sheikh Nu'man Effendi al-Alusi (1836-1899)⁶⁴, the leading

⁶⁰ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v T'Sentral'noi Azii v XX veke [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]* (Almaty: Daik-Press. 2007), p.67.

⁶¹ As Dabbagh recorded that Asali came to Al-azhar in 1887/6, but by the time he traveled through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and finally settled in India, he was only 19 years old, that was 1889. So, his stay in Al-azhar couldn't be more than two years. Given such a short period of time, his claimed accomplishment there sounds a bit exaggerated.

⁶² *Fatwa* is a nonbinding legal opinion on a point of Islamic law (sharia) given by a qualified jurist in response to a question posed by a private individual, judge or government.

⁶³ 'Asali, 1906, p.1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.1.

Islamic modernist and Salafist in Iraq.⁶⁵ Nu'man was referred as *Sheikh ul-islam*,⁶⁶ which was a high-level position in state bureaucracies. Alusi was a prestigious family that produced many religious scholars in Iraq, some of them are Shia minded Sufi leaders. Asali probably also had connections with them, given his later interest in Iran. Asali told Dabbagh that he studied with *Sheikh* Abd al-Wahhab Effendi, who was the Deputy Chief Justice (*Qazi*), and his brother *Sheikh* Sai'd al-Naqshbandi, who was a Naqshbandi Sufi master. We learn from Dabbagh that Asali also studied with the famous jurists *Sheikh* Sai'd al-Douri and *Sheikh* Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, who was the teacher in the *Hadara al-Qadiriya* (Mausoleum of Abdul-Qadir Gilani).⁶⁷ Besides these famous scholars, Asali claimed to have studied together with the "honorable sons of the captain of the nobles of Baghdad".⁶⁸ Dabbagh recorded Asali's association with above mentioned personals as "*zamil fī*" (become colleagues with) , through this, Asali emphasized that his connectedness with those religious and political authorities in Baghdad was not a hierarchical relationship, instead, he befriended with them and conducted intellectual activities with them, and thus, shared their authority.

At this point, young Asali's profile was more than a *Hanafi* school jurist, he was more of an intellectual entrepreneur, who had interest in Islamic knowledge in general and eagerly sought to build an authoritative religious career. It is not clear how long Asali stayed in Baghdad, probably he had obtained *ijazas* from those Iraqi famous scholars. Because he openly referred to those names in his book that is going to be distributed through the Arabic speaking world, where acquaintances of these famous people would also have access to read it. With this

⁶⁵ For more study on Nu'man al-Alusi's intellectual activities see Weismann, Itzhak. "Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafi Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad". *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. 36 (2): 267-280. 2009.; Nafi, Basheer M. "Salafism Revived: Nu'mān Al-Alūsī and the Trial of Two Aḥmads." *Die Welt Des Islams*, New Series, 49, no. 1 (2009): 49-97.; Lauzière, Henri. *The making of Salafism: Islamic reform in the twentieth century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp.32-39.

⁶⁶ 'Asalī, 1906, p.1.

⁶⁷ It is an Islamic religious complex dedicated to Abdul Qadir Gilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, located in Baghdad, Iraq. Its surrounding square is named Kilani Square. The complex consists of the mosque, mausoleum, and the library known as Qadiriyya Library, which houses rare old works related to Islamic Studies.

⁶⁸ 'Asalī, 1906, p.1.

in mind, Asali would hardly run the risk to fabricate stories that would damage his career. In the worst case, at least, he had knowledge of those scholars from different Islamic theological backgrounds, and he managed to adapt himself into the ongoing mainstream Islamic culture in Baghdad. Moreover, his engagement with Sufi orders there added another layer of intellectual capacity to his later encounters with the Sufi brotherhood in Central Asia, where his attitude shifted from tolerance to harsh criticism, I discuss this issue in chapter three.

After a short sojourn in Iraq, he moved eastward to Iran. Asai's interest in Iran could be the results of his connections with some *Shia* minded Sufi scholars in Baghdad. We learn from Adil Hikmet Bey, a harsh critic of Asali, that they met in each other in Chinese Turkistan, Asali told him, "He gained followers in madrasahs in Iran and even recited sermons on Friday prayers there."⁶⁹ This is not totally groundless, given Asali's connections with the *Qadiriya* Sufis, and other sources indicate that he had connections with *Rifa'i* Sufis as well.⁷⁰ In both of these Sufi orders, especially *Rifa'i*, the dividing line between *Sunnis* and *Shiites* was blurred.⁷¹ However, it was quite a challenge for a *Hanafi* jurist such as Asali to remain in Iran for too long, the theologian differences were too big of a gap to cover. As he told Dabbgh, he "did not seek his place there because of the spread of the *Shiites* and the weakness of the *Sunnis*", he described Iran as "a nest of Shiites sectarians, and is the heartland of strife and disputation with those who oppose them from the people of the Sunnah."⁷² Clearly, Asali's comments on *Shiism* were not as polemic as most of his contemporary *Suni ulamas*. By then, Asali's understanding of the Islamic world exceeded a common *ulama*, he was seeing the theological differences as an intellectual, and as a young scholar, he was acting within the scope of political correctness.

⁶⁹ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. *Asya'da beş Türks [Five Turks in Asia]* (İstanbul Ötüken, 2019), p.210.

⁷⁰ Al-Qāsimī, Jamāl al-Dīn and 'Ajamī, Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir. *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi]* (Bayrūt : Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009), p.319.

⁷¹ Eich, Thomas. "Patterns of the 1920 Rising in Iraq: The Rifā'iyya ṭarīqa and Shiism." *Arabica* 56, no. 1 (2009): 112-19.

⁷² Ibid., p.1-2.

In other words, without creating enemies from both Sunnis and Shias, he attempted to further secure his religious authority.

At the early stage of his career to establish authority, Asali not only presented himself as a great well-traveled knowledge seeker, but also implied his connections with political authorities in different regions. We learn from Dabbagh that Asali pressed on to Baluchistan from Iran, but “the late Prince Abdul Rahman Khan (r.1880-1901) prevented him from entering Kabul, the capital of his country, and escorted him to India”.⁷³ It is true that Abul Rahman Khan’s “interest lay in keeping powerful neighbors, whether friends or foes, outside his kingdom”.⁷⁴ When Asali arrived in Baluchistan, it was during the “1888-1893 Uprisings of Hazaras”,⁷⁵ and policies of the “Iron Emir” Abul Rahman Khan would not allow an Arab from the Ottoman empire who had spent some time in the war-torn Baluchistan, a place where Abul Rahman Khan’s army committed ethnic genocide, to enter the capital city Kabul. However, Asali depicted it as if he had incurred the wrath of Abdul Rahman Khan personally, and implied he had met Abdul Rahman Khan, therefore raised his own profile. Although it was a common practice for *ulamas* to exaggerate their experiences, for the case of Asali, it is significant that he emphasized not only his mobility, but also his potential connectedness with political authorities. In this sense, by the time he met with Dabbagh in 1906, Asali had grown into, not just an *ulama*, but an intellectual, who had exposed himself to different Islamic knowledge and authorities through extraordinary mobility, and an intellectual who strategically utilized the political authority to claim religious authority.

⁷³ Ibid., p.2.

⁷⁴ Alikuzai, Hamid Wahed. *Concise History of Afghanistan In 25 Volumes: Volume 1* (Trafford Publishing. 2013), p.415.

⁷⁵ See the thorough discussion of these events in Kakar, M. Hasan. 1979. *Government and society in Afghanistan: the reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan* (Austin: University of Texas Press).; Tomsen, Peter. *The wars of Afghanistan: messianic terrorism, tribal conflicts, and the failures of great powers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), pp.42-43.

The Polymath

Most scholars depicted⁷⁶ Asali as a predominantly Al-Azhar trained *ulama*, this was not accurate. The title of the famous Islamic institute was used by both Asali himself and the scholars who wrote about him to raise the importance of his case. In fact, Asali's major intellectual training was gained in India. It is true that he studied Islamic Jurisprudence and Arabic grammar in Al-Azhar and he study shifted a bit to Sufism in Baghdad, but his major training in *Hadith*, which became the specialty for his later career, was received in India. I argue that Asali's training in India shaped him as a polymath in the tradition of the elite *ululmas* in Central Asia. As a young student, he explored different sets of Islamic knowledge in order to sharpen his skills and build a career in the Muslim society. His grasp of religious authority changed accordingly with his advancement in different societies under different political cultures.

In 1889, at the age of 19, after getting forced out from Afghanistan, Asali relocated to India, and started his decade long studying and working life in India. Asali told Dabbagh that his study initiated in the *Ahmadiyya Madrasa* in Saharnpur.⁷⁷ Northern India was then famous for its various centers of revivalist *Hadith* scholarship,⁷⁸ Asali claimed to have studied the *Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim*⁷⁹ (Authentic *Hadith*) and other four books with Mawlawi Ahmad Ali al-Saharanfori, Mawlawi Habib al-Rehman⁸⁰ and Mawlawi Allah Diya, and the Mawlawi

⁷⁶ Muminov, Ashirbek. 2007. "Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia," in Uyama, Tomohiko. *Empire, Islam, and politics in Central Eurasia* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), p 253. Peyrouse, S. 'The Rise of Political Islam in Soviet Central Asia'. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 5, 2007. pp. 131-148.

⁷⁷ 'Asali, 1906, p.2.

⁷⁸ Dallal, Ahmad. "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 341-59. See more on the 20th century discussion in Moin Ahmad Nizami. *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam: The Chishti-Sabris in 18th—19th Century North India*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁹ Full name of it would be translated as *The Authentic, Abridged, Chain-Supported Collection Regarding Matters Pertaining to the Messenger of Allah, His Traditions, and His Times*.

⁸⁰ Habib al-Rahman translated Musnad Abu Hanifa into Urdu. See Alhasani, Abd Alhayi, *Al-thaqafat alaslamiyat fi alhind :maearif aleawarifi 'anwae aleulum walmaearif* (Damascus:Arabic Language Academy Publications,1958), p.134.

Fakhruddin.⁸¹ However, this claim is very likely untrue, because Ahmad Ali al-Saharanpuri died in 1880.⁸² Again, Asali intentionally, possibly deceptively, added some famous names in his networks with religious authorities. There is no doubt that Asali had mastered *the Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim*, because Sunni Muslims view them as the two most trusted collections of hadith,⁸³ and these two compendiums became his speciality in his later career. However, in the *isnad* paradigm and *ijaza* system, the student had studied the text with whom and where matters much more than the text itself. In other words, because of the embodied nature of Islamic knowledge, Asali's demonstration of his affiliations with different religious authorities, which he had built through his extradentary mobility, helped him to claim religious authority.

Analyzing Dabbagh's biography of Asali, we learn that in India, Asali received a high quality of religious training which also produced many erudite ulama with Central Asian origins. While presenting this background, Asali emphasized on the details of the chains of transmission of knowledge (*isnad* and *wasta*). Here the *hadith* jargon *wasta* means *medium*, it also refers to personal connection used to gain something.⁸⁴ *Wasta* is part of the *isnad* paradigm, in an written *ijaza* (*permission*), *wasta* refers to the persons in the chain of transmitters. In Saharanpur, Asali "studied day and night with diligence and scored the first world class in the exam",⁸⁵ then he moved to *Madrasa Aliya* in Rampur. He studied *Tawhid* (*Monotheism*) with Mawlawi Irshad Hussein and Shah Muhammad Masum, one of the sons of Mujaddid al-Alf al-Thani, and Sheikh Ahmad al-Sarhandi, Sheikh Muhammad al-Tayyib al-

⁸¹ 'Asali, 1906, p.2.

⁸² Ghulam Muhammad Jaffar. "Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah Movement and the Propagation of its Ideas". *ISLAMIC QUARTERLY*. 43 (2): 1999.132-140.

⁸³ Harold G. Koenig. *Health and Well-Being in Islamic Societies: Background* (Springer International Publishing. 2014), p.30.

⁸⁴ This term contains many layers of implication, the translation of social connection/networking was more consistent with our intended meaning in the Arabic-speaking country (by using the term *Wasta*). In this context *Wasta* or *wasata* translates loosely to "nepotism" or "who one knows." See Mansoor Moaddel, and Michele J. Gelfand. *Values, Political Action, and Change in the Middle East and the Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.328.

⁸⁵ 'Asali, 1906, p.2.

Maliki, and finally Sheikh Hafeez Allah, the eldest teacher in *Madrassa Aliya*.⁸⁶ Then he traveled to Panipat, where he obtained an *ijaza* for the Six Books of the Honorable Mawlawi Abd al-Rahman al-Panipati. Between this *Hadith* Scholar and al-Bukhari there are sixteen *wasta* (*medium or transmission*), which was the fewest *wasta* (*mediums or transmitters*) to the prophet Muhammed.⁸⁷ Here Asali's narration shifted to emphasize the *wasta* to demonstrate the authenticity of his knowledge. Asali pointed out the specific number of transmissions of his Islamic knowledge from the Prophet Muhammed and demonstrated that he received it from the most authentic source among his contemporary *ulamas*. Within the framework of *isnad* paradigm and *ijaza* system, this kind of training background would bring him extraordinary religious authority.

Asali's decade long training and working experiences in India also shaped him as a "polymath" which James Pickett defines as those ulama in Central Asia with an "authoritative command over many different forms of knowledge – from medicine to law to epistolography and beyond – allowed to accumulate substantial power."⁸⁸ *Madrassa Aliya* attracted some of the best scholars of Islam in the 20th century,⁸⁹ and *Madrassa* of this type in 19th and early 20th centuries were seminaries of complete learning where pupils of all faiths gathered. "Their syllabus went beyond religion to the realm of languages, sciences, mathematics, philosophy and poetry. Very much similar to their counterparts in Samarkand, they were, in some ways, the precursors of the modern-day missionary schools".⁹⁰ This is confirmed by Asali's mastery of four eastern languages, Urdu, Persian, Turki, and his native Arabic. In a later account, he mentioned his ambitious missionary plans to convert infidels in Tibet.⁹¹ He also enrolled in the

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.2.

⁸⁸ Pickett, James. *Polymaths of Islam: power and networks of knowledge in Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2020), p.2.

⁸⁹ Ziya Us Salam, and M. Aslam Parvaiz. *Madrasas in the Age of Islamophobia* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2020), p.42.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.45.

⁹¹ Hartmann, Martin. *Chinesisch-Turkestan: Geschichte, Verwaltung, Geistesleben, und Wirtschaft* (Halle a. S.: Gebauer-Schwetschke Druckerei und Verlag. 1908), pp.101-102.

Majidiyya medical school, studied books of *Ibn Sina* and received *ijaza* for medical science from the Honorable *al-Hakim Muhammad Ajmal Khan*.⁹²

With his training in Inida, Asali's knowledge background resembled the elite *ulamas* in Central Asia. The history of Rampur's *Madrassa Aliya* as an institution was conceived of as "the Bukhara of India," however, after local *ulama* had established themselves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, alternatively, the *Madrassa Aliya* became "the envy of Bukhara" (*rashk-i Bukhara*).⁹³ Consequently, Central Asian scholars were traveling to India for educational purposes, rather than Indian students seeking training in Bukhara. Within this context, Asali's training in India formed the base for his later thorough integration with Central Asian Islamic communities, rather than the Ottoman ones.

Conclusion

Asali's early life remains the least studied aspect of his life, primarily because of the lack of sources. Besides the biographical sketch penned by Dabbagh, we knew nothing about what he had studied and with whom. Despite the scarcity of sources, this chapter depicted the available information of Asali's early life. It argued that Asali claimed authority through the *Ijaza* and *isnad* system of Islamic learning. It also argued that Asali's training in India shaped him as a polymath, which contributed to his thorough integration with Central Asian Islamic communities, rather than the Ottoman ones.

⁹² 'Asalī, 1906, p.2.

⁹³ Pickett, James. 2020. p.95. and Mawlānā Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Khān, *Madrassa-i 'Āliya-i Rāmpūr: Ek Tārīkhī Dars'gāh* (Rampur: Rāmpūr Reṣā Library. 2002), p.9.

Chapter Two

The Islamic authority between Xinjiang and the Ottoman Empire

Introduction

As an Ottoman subject who had travelled across Eurasia and as a developing Islamic scholar with an ambitious career plan to establish religious authority, Asali searched for opportunities in unattractive Muslim societies in the Far East. He chose to move to Xinjiang, the western borderland of China. At the very least, it was a place far enough to gain him a name as the great traveler. By his first visit to Xinjiang in 1901, he had finished some of the most critical phases of his intellectual formation. He had become an extremely well-travelled scholar, and he was pretty well connected with the ulama and merchant networks in northern India. In addition, he had worked as an editor in Istanbul for a short period before he travelled to Xinjiang.

When Asali reached Xinjiang, there were no diplomatic connections between the Qing China and Ottoman empires. However, given that both empires had significant geopolitical influences, there were informal activities to fill the gap of this diplomatic vacuum. At that point, Sultan Adulhamid (r. 1876-1909) sought a more significant influence in the Islamic world. Accordingly, China was considered demographically as one of the nations with the largest Muslim population. At the same time, Muslims who lived in China who were eager to communicate with the center of the Islamic world had to overcome the difficulties created by the lack of diplomatic connections.⁹⁴ Specifically, after the collapse of the Yaqub Beg (1820-

⁹⁴ Kane, Eileen. *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 113-114. And Can, Lâle. "The Protection Question: Central Asians and Extraterritoriality in the Late Ottoman Empire." In *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, edited by Can Lâle, Low Michael Christopher, Schull Kent F., and Zens Robert, (Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2020), pp.99-123.

1877)⁹⁵ regime in Xinjiang, the whole region was annexed by the Qing empire again in 1877.⁹⁶ Although Yaqub Beg's government once gained nominal support from the Ottoman Empire towards Kashgar.⁹⁷ The downfall of his short-lived emirate increased the number of exiles in Istanbul, and the networks that linked Kashgar with Istanbul produced a platform for personals with transborder mobility advantage to carve a representative character.

This chapter piece together a narrative on Asali's go-between activities between the Ottoman empire and Xinjiang. Through this, this chapter examines aspects of what constitutes Asali's Islamic authority. First, I seek to explain Asali's attempts to insert himself into the elite circles of Xinjiang through his high profile as a *Hadith* scholar and an erudite historian. This chapter then explores his intermediary role in the relationship between the Muslim communities in the western borderland of China and the Ottoman empire in two ways. Firstly, through his continuous travels across these regions. These travels functioned as the cultural capital for him. This type of trans-imperial mobility served him well in front of the Ottoman court and the Muslim communities in Xinjiang since both sides sought a bridge for communication. Secondly, what makes Asali's case unique is that he acted only on his own will as an intellectual entrepreneur who sought to establish authority in both Istanbul and Xinjiang.

By rooting the analysis on the German Orientalist Hartmann Martin (1851-1918) interview with Asali, I explore Asali's first sojourn in Xinjiang and explain how he integrated into the local society as a Sufi shrine keeper. It was the start point of his long journey to claim religious authority. Analyzing his affiliation with the journal *Al-Malumat* and his relationship

⁹⁵ Yaqub Beg was a Khoqandi military official, he ruled most tertiary of Xinjiang from 1865 to 1877. See Millward, James A. *Eurasian crossroads: a history of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press. 2007), pp, 118-123.

⁹⁶ Schluessel, Eric. *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (NEW YORK: Columbia University Press, 20200, p.2.

⁹⁷ Can, Lâle. "The Protection Question: Central Asians and Extraterritoriality in the Late Ottoman Empire." In *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, edited by Can Lâle, Low Michael Christopher, Schull Kent F., and Zens Robert, 99-123. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2020; Brophy, David John. *Uyghur nation reform and revolution on the Russia-China frontier* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 87-88.

with the Young Turks, this chapter argues that Asali was a dissident of Sultan Abdul Hamid III. Then this chapter examines his translation work in *the book of Law of China (Kitab Qanuni al-Sin)*. It demonstrated that his concerns were not limited to Islamic piety in China. Instead, he praised the system of the Qing empire and boldly constructed a narrative on the harmonious relationship between the Qing Chinese institutions and Islam. Next, this chapter compares Asali's translation to its original Chaghatai Turki version *Li-Kitabi (The book of Li)* and the Chinese version of *the Sixteen Sacred Edict with Simple Explanations of the Code* (圣谕十六条附律易解 *Shengyu shiliutiao fu lü yijie*). In doing so, I first explain how Asali's translation was different from the original Turki and Chinese versions and how this book increased his Islamic authority. Then I analyze the *Ijazas (permissions)* he received from famous *Hadith* scholars. In addition, this chapter also explores his own and his student's writings about his *Hadith* speciality. I argue that Asali positioned himself as a *Muhaddith* (Hadith scholar) to claim Islamic authority. By scrutinizing his intellectual activities in Xinjiang, this chapter argues that Asali obtained intellectual authority through learning and writing local history. Regarding Asali's activities in Istanbul, this chapter analyzes the Ottoman court documents and Ottoman journal articles related to him. It then argues that his career interest remained in the institutions of the Ottoman empire.

“Sayyid Arab”: The Shrine keeper

The earliest reference we have on Asali's activities in Xinjiang is from Hartmann Martin (1851-1918), the remarkable German orientalist in the late 19th-early 20th centuries. Since Hartmann's works remain one of the most reliable sources for the study of early 20th century Xinjiang history,⁹⁸ this study trusts his accounts as other researcher did. Hartmann travelled extensively across the Muslim world. He conducted long time research in the Middle East and

⁹⁸ For example, Rian Thum, David Brophy, Ildiko Beller-Hann, Eric Schluessel and many other scholars cited Hartmann extensively.

wrote about Islamic culture. Within this context, he spent six months travelling in Xinjiang in 1902.⁹⁹ Hartmann recorded both the residents' description and his interview of Asali. These two perspectives showed us how Asali blended himself quickly into the local society and gradually created the impression of religious authority to associate with the local elite circles.

Asali's background as an Ottoman Arab and his decade long experience in India prepared him the cultural capital to step into the elite circles of Xinjiang society. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Asali's decade long training and working experiences in India shaped him as a "polymath", which James Pickett defines as those ulama in Central Asia with an "authoritative command over many different forms of knowledge – from medicine to law to epistolography and beyond – allowed to accumulate substantial power."¹⁰⁰ This type of knowledge background paved the way for his interaction with the local religious authority. As Hartmann recorded, he owed the acquaintance of Asali to the Chief Justice (*Qadi*) of Kashgar, whom he met in 1902. The Chief Justice spoke of Asali with great respect, "he is only 33 years old, but extremely learned; he wants to go to Lhasa in Tibet to preach the true faith there". According to the Chief Justice description, Asali had arrived in Kashgar in the fall of 1901, and he spoke Turki quite well. He was usually called "*Sayyid Arab*" (*Sir Arab*) and was a descendant of Khalifa Osman.¹⁰¹ Though during Hartmann's stay in Xinjiang, Asali was poor and lived near the Paqalchaq Mazar, the tomb of Saint Paqalchaq,¹⁰² he was already recognized by the Chinese government as the guardian of this tomb.¹⁰³

Secondly, Asali's established networks in India (Hindustan) connected him with powerful Hindu merchants settled in southern Xinjiang because a considerably big community

⁹⁹ See Beller-Hann, I. Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur of Xinjiang in the 19th and 20th Centuries. in JA Millward, Y Shinmen & J Sugawara (eds), *Studies on Xinjiang Historical Sources in 17-20th Centuries*. vol. 12, The Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, Toyo Bunko Research Library, vol. 12, 2010, pp. 239-256.

¹⁰⁰ Pickett, James. 2020. p.2.

¹⁰¹ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

¹⁰² Paqalchaq باقالچاق literally means "the lower leg, the calf" in Eastern Turki. I have been unable to find any information about this "Saint Paqalchaq" and the location of the tomb.

¹⁰³ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

of Hindu merchants spoke passable Turki and blended into the local society of south Xinjiang. They settled in Kashgaria and maintained families locally or on either side of the Pamir Mountains. Most importantly, these Hindu merchants enjoyed the protection of British subjecthood and the commercial advantages of the mobility of imperial border crossing. Given these advantages, some Hindu merchants became so exploitative, even to the point of taking slaves.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, Hartmann observed Asali's association with Hindus in Kashgar. He wrote, "...Finally, on October 26th, 1902, I went to see the interesting stranger: a not-insignificant phenomenon, clearly surmounting the entire 'learned' corps of Kashgar. Sa'id Al-Asali, who called himself Sherif (descendant of the Prophet), was sitting with another Muslim (Indian) in a spacious room; in the background, several unclassified people, of very dark skin colour."¹⁰⁵ At this point, Asali had maintained a close relation with Hindus both in Xinjiang and India. We learn from Hartmann, Asali lived for six years in Hyderabad Deccan¹⁰⁶, where he taught the sons of the great; and he read many good works in the Asafia library¹⁰⁷. Then Asali lived in Khotan¹⁰⁸ for a year, and by the time he met Hartmann in October 1902, Asali had lived in Kashgar for four months. Asali told Hartmann, "In India, I learned the language of the people, and here too, I want to learn the vernacular. The main part of my book collection is still in Hyderabad."¹⁰⁹

Thirdly, the admiration of Arabs and the Ottoman Empire among the Turkic locals in Xinjiang grant Asali with additional cultural capital to claim authority. Asali as an Ottoman

¹⁰⁴ Schluessel, Eric T. *The Muslim Emperor of China: Everyday Politics in Colonial Xinjiang, 1877-1933*. (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 2016), p.207.

¹⁰⁵ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

¹⁰⁶ Hyderabad State, also known as Hyderabad Deccan, located in the south-central region of India.

¹⁰⁷ The State Central Library Hyderabad, earlier known as Asafia Library, is a public library in Hyderabad. The building was constructed in 1891. It has a collection of around five hundred thousand books published since the early 19th century.

¹⁰⁸ Khotan is a major oasis city in southwestern Xinjiang which is bordered with India. The oasis of Khotan is strategically located at the junction of the southern (and most ancient) branch of the Silk Road joining China and the West with one of the main routes from ancient India and Tibet to Central Asia and distant China. It provided a convenient meeting place where not only goods, but technologies, philosophies, and religions were transmitted from one culture to another.

¹⁰⁹ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

Arab shared these double Identities, which Turkic locals in Xinjiang admired highly. As Hartmann recorded in his interview of Asali, “Several times it emerged from his statements that as an Arab he felt himself to be elevated above all the rabble of Indians and Turkis (Turki refers to the Turkic people in Xinjiang).”¹¹⁰ Part of the picture is that Father Hendriks (1846-1906)¹¹¹ was a Dutch Roman Catholic missionary. Hendricks arrived in Kashgar in 1885 and remained there until his death. During his stay in Kashgar, he found an Arab in Khotan in 1894 who was respected and wealthy, “the stupid peasants of the neighbourhood brought the pious man money and bread and their wives and daughters; it was common practice for the Sayyids¹¹² to bring women to impregnate.”¹¹³ As for the case of Asali, when Hartmann met him in 1902, he had already married a local Turki woman.¹¹⁴ Asali’s privileged status of getting easy access to marrying new local women was also confirmed by another contemporary critic of him--Adil Hikmet Bey (1887-1933).

Along with the other four Ottoman Turks, he was famous agents sent by the Ottoman government to the Far East, and Adil Hikmet was a fervent Pan-Turkist who was highly eager to prevent Great Power interventions into the Ottoman Empire by establishing a solid alliance among the Turkic people.¹¹⁵ In his travelogue, Adil Hikmet lashed out against Asali’s lecherous and prurient character. He recorded that Asali was known as “the Arab who had married 420

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hopkirk, Peter. *Foreign devils on the Silk Road: the search for the lost cities and treasures of Chinese Central Asia* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹¹² It is an honorific title denoting people accepted as descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. See more in Ho, Engseng. *The graves of Tarim: genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, Calif: Univ. of California Press, 2010).

¹¹³ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101. For more detailed discussions on the local Turki’s admiration of Arabs and Turks, and local Turki women’s marriage with foreigner in: Eset Sulayman, *Tarim Qowuqi Chékilgende [Tarim When the Tarim Gate is Knocked: The Selected papers of Eset Sulayman]* (Shinjang Xelq Neshiriyati, Urumchi, 2001), pp.95-102. Bellér-Hann, Ildikó. *Community matters in Xinjiang, 1880-1949: towards a historical anthropology of the Uyghur*. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp 82-90.

¹¹⁴ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.37.

¹¹⁵ Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık. Yirminci Yüzyıl Başlarında Osmanlı Seyyahlarının Uzakdoğu’ya İlişkin Algılamaları [The Ottoman Travellers’ Perceptions of the Far East in the Early Twentieth Century], Bilig : Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi. Sayı 65, 2013, pp. 285-310. And Benjamin C. Fortna. *The Circassian: A Life of Eşref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.135.

women” among some locals in 1915.¹¹⁶ In early 20th century Xinjiang, high ranking government officials, wealthy merchants, and high-profile religious scholars practice “temporary marriage” (*waqitliq toy*) and polygamy.¹¹⁷ The number certainly sounds exaggerated, but this reputation demonstrated Asali’s privileged position and his authoritative practices during his scattered two-decades-long stay in Xinjiang.

Asali had a humble beginning in Xinjiang, and he started as a Sufi Shrine keeper. However, since his first presence in Xinjiang, his life was full of opportunism and self-creation. He lied about his family background to win admiration; he saw Xinjiang as a backward society where he could easily trick the local people. However, this type of understanding brought him troubles in his last years in Xinjiang, which I discuss in Chapter three. Next, to understand his political stance, we need to examine Asali’s activities in Istanbul before he moves to Xinjiang.

The Exile: A Dissident

Asali’s first sojourn in Xinjiang lasted for around five years. He arrived in the fall of 1901 and left in 1905. During his first visit, Xinjiang was still one of the main frontiers for the Great Game confrontations. Naturally, the influence of political tension made foreign actors in Xinjiang suspicious of carrying respectively a hidden espionage agenda. However, available sources suggest that Asali’s activities in Xinjiang severed no specific government but his own will. Burhandin Shahidi (1894-1989), the Tatar who became Xinjiang Provincial Chairman during the transition period between Chinese Nationalist (Guomindang) and Chinese Communist Party rule,¹¹⁸ labelled Asali as an agent for both the Ottoman and British Empires, and his mission was to spread the poison of Pan-Islamism in Xinjiang.¹¹⁹ This remains the

¹¹⁶ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. 2019. *Asya'da beş Türks [Five Turks in Asia]*. İstanbul Ötüken. p.283.

¹¹⁷ Schluessel, Eric T. 2016. *The Muslim Emperor of China: Everyday Politics in Colonial Xinjiang, 1877-1933*. (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences), pp.159-161.

¹¹⁸ Burhan Shahidi (Shahidullah), known in Chinese as 包尔汉·沙希迪. Millward, James A. 2007. *Eurasian crossroads: a history of Xinjiang*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.174.

¹¹⁹ Bao'erhan (Burhandin Shahidi). *Bao'erhan xuan ji [An anthology of Burhandin]*. ([Beijing]: Min zu chu ban she, 1989), p.128.

official interpretation of Asali in China. However, it was largely baseless. As the Chief Justice of Kashgar told Hartmann, Asali was an exile from the Ottoman Empire.

With his scholarly scepticism, Hartmann tried to detect Asali's political stance through their interview, but Asali "spoke neither of his relations with the Turkish government nor of his plans to visit Tibet and Beijing."¹²⁰ When Asali noticed that Hartmann had already been informed about his banishment from the Ottoman court, he immediately gave Hartmann a copy of the *Tabai' al-istibdad* (*The Nature of Tyranny*), a manifesto against the Ottoman tyranny written by Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855–1902), a pan-Islamist reformer who were critical at the Sultan Abdulhamid II's regime.¹²¹ However, Asali told Hartmann that it was his writing,¹²² and clearly, Hartmann was not familiar with this manifesto, and he believed Asali was the author. However, this misunderstanding did not affect Hartmann's judgement of grasp of Asali's political stance. Later, Hartmann detected Asali's connection with the Young Turks.¹²³ As Hartmann recorded, *The Nature of Tyranny* given to him was published by a particular "secret society",¹²⁴ which suggests it was a publication of the Young Turks. From this, Asali's affiliation with Young Turks reveals his dissident political stance. In conventional narratives, pan-Islamism is usually associated with the Sultan Abdülhamid II regime. Young Turks were commonly considered ideologically secularist and Pan-Turkist and Pan-Turanist, but this is not accurate.¹²⁵ In a political sense, Young Turks actively campaigned for pan-Islam

¹²⁰ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

¹²¹ *The Nature of Tyranny and the Injuries of Enslavement* (*Taba'i al-istibdad wa-masari al-isti'bad*), which is the foremost exposition of Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi's political teaching, reflects his disappointment at Sultan Abdulhamid II's regime, which came to the fore following his visit to Istanbul. Kawakibi's passionate defense of the merits of the Arabs in the appendix of this work earned him fame as an early precursor of Arab nationalism. See Weismann, Itzhak. *Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi Islamic reform and Arab revival*. (London Oneworld publication, 2015). And Ronen Raz. "Interpretations of Kawakibi's Thought, 1950-1980s." *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (1996): 179-90.

¹²² Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

¹²³ Young Turks was a political reform movement in the early 20th century that favored the replacement of the Ottoman Empire's absolute monarchy with a constitutional government. They led a rebellion against the absolute rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. See Hanioglu, M. Sukru. 1995. *Young Turks in Opposition, The Studies in Middle Eastern History*. Oxford University Press, USA.

¹²⁴ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

¹²⁵ Zürcher, Erik Jan: Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish nationalists. Identity politics, 1908-1938, in: Karpat, Kemal H. (ed.): *Ottoman past and today's Turkey*, (Leiden 2000), pp. 151-179; Eissenstat, Howard:

as a significant feature of the Ottoman Empire's policies.¹²⁶ When Young Turks forced Sultan Abdülhamid II to resign, Asali moved back to Istanbul and actively engaged with the new regime.

Based on Asali's activities in Istanbul, it is not groundless to argue that Asali was a dissident of Sultan Abdülhamid II. As a young man, Asali shared the reformism of other pan-Islamists, but his career interest remained in finding a position within the Ottoman institutions. Before his settlement in Xinjiang in 1901, Asali spent several years in the seat of the caliphate.¹²⁷ During his stay in Istanbul, he worked as an editor for the pan-Islamist journal *Al-Malumat (Information)*¹²⁸ for four months.¹²⁹ This claim is hardly untrue because other contemporary records also confirmed Asali's earlier affiliation with Baba Tahir (1864-1912)¹³⁰ --founder of the Journal *Al-Malumat*.¹³¹ When Asali told Hartmann his experience in the journal *Al-malumat*, Hartmann interjected: "So you worked under Baba Tahir Effendi, who is an ignorant patron?" - "He belongs to the palace and is a pure businessman."¹³² Asali replied in support of Baba Tahir, who was mocked by Hartmann and a discredited figure among the Ottoman learned circles. The Pan-Islamist journal *Al-malumat* faced troubles from Sultan Abdul Hamid's censorship, and finally, Baba Tahir got expelled to North Africa for fraud¹³³,

Modernization, imperial nationalism, and the ethnicization of confessional identity in the late Ottoman Empire, in: Berger, Stefan / Miller, Alexei (eds.): *Nationalizing empires*, Budapest 2015, pp. 429-459.

¹²⁶ McCollum, Jonathan: *The anti-colonial empire. Ottoman mobilization and resistance in the Italo-Turkish War, 1911-1912*, Thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2018. And Shukla, Ram Lakhan. "The Pan-Islamic Policy of the Young Turks and India." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 32 (1970): 302-07.

¹²⁷ 'Asalî, 1906, p.2.

¹²⁸ Landau, Jacob M. *The politics of Pan-Islam: ideology and organization* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.59-60.

¹²⁹ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.101.

¹³⁰ There is very little information about the early years of his life. It is only known that his mother was the nurse of Recâizâde Mahmud Ekrem's son Emced and he had a sister. He became famous as a Mâlûmatçı because he published the Ma'lûmât magazine. His recognition as Baba Tâhir is due to the title of Babanzâde, which he added to his signature. Although it was constantly emphasized by his opponents that he was uneducated and ignorant, what he did as a journalist and printing house owner gives the impression that he was educated at a certain level. Aynur, Hatice. "*Malumatçı Baba Tahir*." *Toplumsal Tarih* 128: 2004, pp.62-65.

¹³¹ "*Kaşgar Şeyhülislamı, Baba Tahir'in Refik-i Sabıkı mı?*" [*The Shaykh ul-Islam of Kashgar, or the old colleague of Baba Tahir?*], *Teârûf-i Müslimîn*, Voloum. 1. No.8. July 22, 1910. p.136.

¹³² Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

¹³³ Aynur, Hatice. "*Malumatçı Baba Tahir*." *Toplumsal Tarih* 128: 2004, pp.62-65.

and one of the journal's prominent editors, Abdu al-Hamid al-Zahrawi, was exiled to Damascus.¹³⁴ Asali's banishment by Sultan Abdülhamid II is very likely related to his relationship with the Pan-Islamist journal *Al-Malumat*.

Asali's Arab nationalist leaned dissidence can be detected from his admiration of the Arab nationalist and reformist writers. Asali told Hartmann that his primary studies are the Arabic poets, from whom he had collected a great deal in handwriting and printing; in Cairo, he copied several good old works in the library. Most importantly, he also wrote a divan of Arabic poetry. With these words, he showed Hartmann a handsome volume of handwritten poems, the first of which was a song of praise to the famous reformist and pan-Islamist --- Abū l-Hudā al-Ṣayyādī (1850–1909),¹³⁵ Abū l-Hudā built a highly successful career as the advisor of Sultan Abdulhamid II.¹³⁶ Moreover, Asali had kept copies of *The Nature of Tyranny* even in exile and when most of his books were left in India. He admired and applauded ideas from *The Nature of Tyranny* significantly. Although Hartmann did not know who the real author of this book was, Asali himself knew it crystal clear that it is the influential Pan-Islamist Kawakibi's work. However, he was living in exile in the western borderland of China, where great Imperial powers, including the British Empire, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Imperial Japan, were competing for the sphere of influence. Therefore, Asali had to hide his actual political stance. When Hartmann was leaving Asali after the interview, Asali quietly asked Hartmann not to talk about the book to anyone else.¹³⁷

Within this kind of political dilemma, Asali sought new possibilities in Xinjiang, and the path to claiming religious authority seemed promising. Not long after Hartmann's interview,

¹³⁴ Ahmed Tarabein, "Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi : the career and thought of an Arab nationalist ", in Khalidi, Rashid. *The origins of Arab nationalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.97-119.

¹³⁵ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

¹³⁶ Abū l-Hudā al-Ṣayyādī (1850–1909), the eponym by which Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Wādī al-Ṣayyādī is more commonly known, was born in Khān Shaykhūn, a small village in northern Syria. See more in Eich, Thomas. 2003. "The Forgotten Salafī-Abū l-Hudā As-Sayyādī". *Die Welt Des Islams*. 43 (1): 61-87. Abu-Manneh*, B. 1979. "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadi". *Middle Eastern Studies*. 15 (2): 131-153.

¹³⁷ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

he heard that Asali's role had expanded from a humble Shrine keeper to a *Hadith* teacher for a group of 25 to 30 students in his house.¹³⁸ For the rest of Hartmann's six months sojourn in Xinjiang, he did not meet Asali again, but he talked to another Arab named Hasan who criticized Asali bitterly, this Hasan writes everywhere that Asali was a follower of Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad (1839-1908), and Asali was a *Qadiani*¹³⁹ or *Ahmadi*.¹⁴⁰ In many Islamic countries, the *Ahmadis* have been defined as heretics and non-Muslim and subjected to attacks and systematic oppression.¹⁴¹ However, this type of attacks did not stop Asali from claiming religious authority. From 1901 to 1905, he would travel thoroughly in Xinjiang, made acquaintance with elite merchants and religious scholars. Most importantly, he would translate *Kitabi Li* into Arabic, which was the first introduction of Chinese law in the Arabic speaking world. I will discuss this translating process in detail in the next section.

From *Li-Kitabi* to *Kitab Qanun al-Sin*

As mentioned above, Asali arrived in Xinjiang in 1901. After staying in Khotan for one year, he moved to Kashgar in 1902. He lived in Kashgar as a Sufi shrine keeper for several months. After that, he became a *Hadith* teacher. In Kashgar, he received a copy of *Li-Kitabi* (*The book of Li*) from an educated young man.¹⁴² However, he did not stay in Kashgar for too long. Instead, he travelled northward in Xinjiang. As he recalled in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, between 1903-1904, he taught *Hadith* in Urumchi (the capital city of Xinjiang) for eleven months.¹⁴³ Most of the translation work of the *Li-Kitabi* was carried out in Urumchi with

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Qadiani or Qadiyani is a religious slur used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims, primarily in today's Pakistan. The term originates from Qadian, a small town in northern India, the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement.

¹⁴⁰ Hartmann, Martin. 1908, p.102.

¹⁴¹ Balzani, M. 'Localising Diaspora: the Ahmadi Muslims and the problem of multi-sited ethnography.', Paper presented at ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists), 3/1/04. 2004.

¹⁴² 'Asali, 1906. p.2.

¹⁴³ Asali used the phrase “عاصمة ديار الايغور والطغز غز” which means “the capital of the homes of the Uyghurs and Toquz oguz”, it very likely referred to the city of Urumchi, which by then was known as Dihua (迪化). Because in the book *Qanun al-Sin*, he said that he went to Hongmiaozi (Red temple 红庙子) to translate the book *Li-Kitabi*. Hongmiaozi is in Urumchi. See Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy*

the help of a local Turki-Chinese bilingual translator.¹⁴⁴ In 1905, he moved further north to *Tarbaghatay* (*Tacheng*), where he met the local Kazakh Imam Kūrbanghali Khalid (1846-1913), who was also an important Central Asian historian.¹⁴⁵ Asali's first sojourn in Xinjiang at least lasted till 1905. In 1906, he had already reached Egypt and successfully published his translation of *Li-Kitabi: Kitab Qanun al-Sin* (*The book of the law of China*).¹⁴⁶ To better explain Asali's translation of the *Li-Kitabi*, it is necessary to provide background information about the book.

In the title of *Li-Kitabi*, the word *Li* (لى) was a loan word from Chinese, and it had an ambiguous definition among local Turkis. Since the late 1870s, the Qing authority attempted to rule Xinjiang through the Confucius concept *lǐ* (礼),¹⁴⁷ which is usually translated as “rites” or “ritual”. However, the concept of *Li* did not merely reflect “ritual” in a sociological sense.¹⁴⁸ In a comprehensive way, *Li* can be interpreted as ways of being human that are considered necessary to the workings of the cosmos and its embedded social order, including everything from how to dress to how to venerate ancestors.¹⁴⁹ The complexity and ambiguity of the concept *li* made it hard to find an accurate Turki (Chagatai) word. Thus, the word *li* remained unchanged in the *Li-Kitabi*.

musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]. (Almaty: Daik-Press. 2007), p.63.

¹⁴⁴ 'Asali, 1906. p.2.

¹⁴⁵ Khalid, Kūrbanghali, and M. Qazbekov. *Tauarikh khamsa: bes tarikh : Tauarikh-i khamsa-ī sharqi : Shyghystyng bes elining tarikhy* [Essays on the History of Five Eastern Peoples]. Almaty; Алматы ::

"Qazaqstan"; "Қазақстан", 1992, p.277. “Осы жылдың рамазан айында Сағид ибн Мухаммед әл-Ғасали, әл-Шами хазірет келіп Қашғарға жақын Тулешуқ деген жерден кирандылар арасынан табылған қағаз берді. Бұл 1303 жылы деп жазылған.” “During the month of Ramadan this year (1905), Sa'id ibn Muhammad al-asali al-Shami came over and handed over a piece of paper found among the Kirands in Tuleshuk, near Kashgar. It was written in 1303.”

¹⁴⁶ 'Asali, 1906. p.II.

¹⁴⁷ Schluessel, Eric. *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (NEW YORK: Columbia University Press, 2020), pp.25-28.

¹⁴⁸ Schluessel, Eric T. *The Muslim Emperor of China: Everyday Politics in Colonial Xinjiang, 1877-1933*. (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences. 2016), p.162.

¹⁴⁹ Zito, Angela, and Tani E. Barlow. *Body, subject and power in China*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.59.

The concept of *Li* introduced into the Turki society in Xinjiang through the book *Li-Kitabi* (*The book of Li*). *Li-Kitabi* was a loose Turki translation of the Chinese book *the Sixteen Sacred Edict with Simple Explanations of the Code* (圣谕十六条附律易解 *Shengyu shiliutiao fu lü yijie*), by Xia Xin 夏炘 (1789–1871).¹⁵⁰ The Chinese text was an 1868 simple explanation of the Kangxi emperor's (1654-1722) *Sacred Edict*. Various versions of this *Sacred Edict* were publicly recited throughout the Qing empire every fortnight.¹⁵¹ Since the late 1870s, as the Qing general Zuo zongtang (1812-1885) reported to the Guang Xu Emperor (Reign 1875-1908), the Turki version of *the Sixteen Sacred Edict: Li-Kitabi* was distributed to local *Begs*¹⁵² and recited publicly.¹⁵³

Within this context, the book *Li-Kitabi* attracted Asali's interest, as it attracted a number of his contemporary foreign scholars. For example, the Khakas linguist Nikolai F. Katanov (1862-1922) from Russia published a transcription and commentary translation of the *Li-Kitabi* in 1902.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, the Prussian archaeologist Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930) received a copy of the *Li-Kitabi* in 1905 in Turfan and eventually published his study in 1925.¹⁵⁵ Since no original copy of the *Li-Kitabi* has been found survived to our day,¹⁵⁶ the transcriptions of

¹⁵⁰ Brophy David. *The Sacred Edict in Arabic Translation: Sa'id Muḥammad al-'Asali's «Qanun al-Ṣin»* (1906). Мир Большого Алтая. No.2 (2.2). 2016.

¹⁵¹ Deng hongbo, Zhou wenyan. *Huà mǐn chéng sù: Míng qīng shūyuàn yǔ shèng yù xuānjiǎng* [Transforming the People into the Common: The Academies of the Ming and Qing Dynasties and the Oracles Preaching]. Journal of Hunan University (Social Sciences). Vol.34, No.5. 2020. See also Mair, Victor H.. "ELEVEN. Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict" In *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski, 325-359. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

¹⁵² *Beg* is a Uyghur word which meant 'noble', and had applied to the landed aristocrats descended from the Moghuls, a class whom the Qing wished to co-opt. See Hodong Kim. *Holy War in China, The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp.10-11.

¹⁵³ Zuo, Zongtang (1812-1885). *Zuo Zongtang quan ji* [The Collected Works of Zuo zongtang]. Zougao 7, Memorandum No.7. Changsha: Yuelu shu she, 1994. p.466.

¹⁵⁴ Katanov N. "Man'chzhursko-Kitaiskii 'Li' na Narechii Tiurkov Kitaiskago Turkestana [Manchu-Chinese 'Li' among the Turkic Dialects of Chinese Turkestan]", Записки Восточного Отделения Императорского Русского Археологического Общества. Том четырнадцатый [Notes of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society]. Volume fourteenth. St. Petersburg: Printing House of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. 1902. pp.31-75.

¹⁵⁵ Le Coq, Albert von. *Das Li-Kitābī. Kōrōsi Csoma-Archiv : Zeitschrift Für Türkische Philologie Und Verwandte Gebiete* ; 1.1925,6, S. 440-488. Hannover: Lafaire. 1925.

¹⁵⁶ It is said that from 1905-1906, the Kokandi poet Zokirjon Furqat (1858-1909) published a revised Chagatai version of *Li-kitabi* under the title «The Laws of China and its Political Affairs» (Qava'id-i Chin va amurat-i siyasi) in the Turkistan Provincial News (Türkistan vilayatining gazeti), but I couldn't get access to it. See

Katanov and Le Coq remain the main sources for me to compare with Asali's translation. As Asali wrote, he obtained his copy of the *Li-Kitabi* in Kashgar from an educated local young man.¹⁵⁷ However, unlike other contemporary scholars' linguistic or turkological studies of the *Li-Kitabi*, Asali attempted to provide an Islamic interpretation.

Firstly, Asali translated *Li* as *Qanun* (*law*), which plainly confirmed the legalistic status of the book but in an Islamic way. Because during the Ottoman Empire, Islamic law underwent significant changes, which led to the creation of enacted laws—*Qanun*, and as an Islamic concept, *Qanun* was meant to be supplements to the *Shari'a* (Islamic law).¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Asali's perception of *Li* was also influenced by the local Turki interpretation of it as a system of rules akin to a Chinese *Shari'a*.¹⁵⁹ For example, the prolific Islamic scholar Kūrbanghali Khalid (1846-1913) explained to Katanov that the concept of *Li* divided people into different classes and punish various infractions through violence.¹⁶⁰ For Khalid, *li* was a system of scripture-based regulations. Similarly, another prominent contemporary scholar, Mulla Musa Sayrami (1836-1917), provided a more direct comparison between *Li* and *Shari'a*. In his text, he treated *Li* as a set of rules that resembles the *Shari'a*.¹⁶¹ This perception of *Li* also became the general Turki public's understanding. Since Asali had met both of these scholars in Xinjiang, and his translation of the *Li-Kitabi* (*The book of Li*) into *Kitab Qanun al-Sin* (*A book of the law of China*) was conducted with the assistance of a local bilingual Turki official,¹⁶² it is reasonable

Brophy David. *The Sacred Edict in Arabic Translation: Sa'id Muḥammad al-'Asali's «Qanun al-Şin»* (1906). Мир Большого Алтая. No.2 (2.2). 2016.

¹⁵⁷ 'Asali, 1906, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ Peters, Rudolph. *Crime and punishment in Islamic law: theory and practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.70.

¹⁵⁹ The Swedish Turkologist collected many documents from Xinjiang in the early 20th century. One document with the title “*Gunahkar Uchun Hakimning Jaza Barganinig Bayani*” “The narrations on the governor's punishment of the criminals” listed *Li-Kitabi* as one of the religious book (Dini Kitab). See Gunnar Jarring. *Prov. 207 I.48*. The Jarring Collection. Lund University Library.

¹⁶⁰ Katanov N. 1902. p.33.

¹⁶¹ Sayrami, Musa. *Tarixi hāmidī [A Hamidian History]*. (Beyjin: Millātlār Nāşriyati. 1988), pp.135,194,622. Sayrami translated *Li* as قانده *Qa'ida* (*rules, tradition*), and he treated *Li* as a set of legal traditions for the begs. For example, “لى فايا” *Li fayā* “لئواين” *Li wayan*, these two terms seems like transliteration from Chinese, but due to the unclear accent, I couldn't decipher it. At the very least, we know that Sayrami treated *Li* as a set of rules embedded in the local Muslim society.

¹⁶² 'Asali. 1906, p.2.

to say that Asali merged the local Turkis' explanation of *Li* into his Islamic interpretation of the *Li-Kitabi*.

Secondly, Asali framed a mutually compatible structure between the Qing law and the *Shari'a* in his translation. At the first look, Asali's *Kitab Qanun al-Sin* (*The book of the law of China*) is visibly more extended than the *Li-Kitabi*. After comparing his translation to the original Chinese text (written by Xia Xin), I ruled out that he was working with both the Turki version *Li-Kitabi* and the original Chinese text written by Xia Xin.¹⁶³ His translation followed the *Li-Kitabi* transcribed by Katanov approximately till the first quarter of its content.¹⁶⁴ On a closer reading, it is clear that Asali had inserted his personal views about the Qing law into his translation, though he managed to make it sounds as authentic as the Qing narrations. He depicted Confucius (551-479 BCE) as a Prophet to bridge the Chinese law with the *Shari'a*.¹⁶⁵ Confucius was indeed known as a *Sage* (*sheng ren*, 圣人) among Chinese, and he was recorded as so in the *Li-Kitabi*, too. However, Asali boldly interpreted *sheng ren* (*Sage*) in an Islamic way. Perhaps Asali was influenced by some Sino-phone Muslims, the Tungans. Because among some Tungans, Confucius was seen as an Islamic Prophet.¹⁶⁶ In his translation, Asali even went so far as to say that Confucius was illiterate, and he had a book called *Junk*, a revelation from heaven.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ I benefitted from David Brophy's paper on Asali's translation work, where he also compared the length of these two texts.

¹⁶⁴ Katanov N. 1902. p.39. and 'Asali.1906. p.17.

¹⁶⁵ 'Asali. 1906. p.36.

¹⁶⁶ Their theory is based on the famous 17th century Chinese Muslim scholar Liu zhi(1660-1739), his theory can be explained as that "The sage of or prophet , in the Chinese and Islamic traditions respectively, represents an ideal figure, a human being endowed with special qualifications that make him a suitable mediator between the divine and mundane realms." See Frankel, James D. *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2011),p.83.

¹⁶⁷ Asali, 1906, p.26. *Junk* is the Arabic transliteration of the Chinese word *Zhong* 忠, which means loyalty. As a Confucian concept, it is the fidelity of an individual to the nation. Calling *Zhong* a divine book, Asali clearly had fabricated this story to make it sounds Islamic.

For example: “He (*Confucius*) is the greatest man they (*Chinese*) have. Fawzi (*Fuzi*) is his name, and his surname is Wonk Konk Shank Rin (*Wen Kong Sheng Ren*).¹⁶⁸ He had a book full of wisdom, advice and philosophy. It is the aforementioned *Junk*, and some claimed that he was the Adam or Noah, and God knows best. The people of China all profess him, and they call him the Messenger of God; may God bless him and grant him peace. With this title (*Sheng ren, Sage*), they also say *Majn Shankarin*,¹⁶⁹ meaning Muhammad”¹⁷⁰ Asali further fabricated a story to hint at the resemblance between Confucius and the Prophet Muhammad, who was also illiterate. At the end of *Kitab Qanun al-Sin*, Asali emphasized again that “it has become clear to you that the majority of it (the *Li-Kitabi*) is not outside the provisions of our purified *Shari’a*”.¹⁷¹

The above-mentioned Islamic interpretations successfully set the role for Asali as an erudite *ulama* and an adventurous traveler among his Ottoman readers. For example, on the cover of the *Kitab Qanun al-Sin*, Asali’s name bore a glorious title “the respectful master, the famous traveller, the great linguist, the Sheikh”¹⁷². For his early 20th century Arabic speaking readers, Chinese culture was still a mysterious one. Asali’s book somehow filled the gap in their understandings. The connections between Islam and Chinese law introduced by Asali were also applauded by some of his contemporary Islamic scholars. The notable Syrian scholar, historian and literary critic Muhammad Kurd Ali (1876–1953) endorsed Asali’s work and praised Chinese law as a civilized *Qanun* (enacted law).¹⁷³ Muhammad Kurd Ali even got the

¹⁶⁸ “*Wonk Konk Shank Rin*” is probably the transliteration of *Wen kong sheng ren* 文孔圣人. But this term doesn’t exist in Chinese, the closest term for it is 文圣孔子 *wen sheng kong zi*, which is a respectful name for Confucius, it means “the literary sage Confucius”.

¹⁶⁹ *Majn Shankarin* is probably the transliteration of *Mo Jing Sheng Ren* (末经圣人), which means the prophet with the last holy book. Or it could be the transliteration *Mu Jing Sheng Ren* (穆经圣人), which means the prophet with the holy book for Muslims.

¹⁷⁰ Asali.1906. p.37.

¹⁷¹ Asali, 1906. p.58.

¹⁷² حضرة الاستاذ الرحالة الشهير المحدث اللغوي الكبير الشيخ see the cover of *Kitab Qanun al-Sin*.

¹⁷³ Kurd ‘Alī, Muḥammad. *Qanun al-Sin [The law of China]*. *al-Muqtabas* = *Al-Muktabass*. al-Qāhirah: al-Muqtabas. vol.1, no.12. 1907, pp.663-664.

impression that Asali was translating directly from Chinese,¹⁷⁴ which was not the case. Asali's work also caught the attention of the prominent Islamic reformer and revivalist—Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who was known as one of the most influential and controversial scholars of his generation.¹⁷⁵ Muhammad Rashid Rida praised Asali's work as “this *Law (of China)* is something that rulers wish to see, especially judges and lovers of history, science and literature. It is something that we hope to be popular without being discouraged. Praise to the translator for bringing it into Arabic.”¹⁷⁶

More practically, after Asali published *Kitab Qanun al-Sin* in 1906, this work became a symbol of his Islamic authority throughout his association with the Ottoman empire. During his visit to Istanbul in 1910, as the self-claimed *Sheikh ul-Islam* of Chinese Turkistan, he made a speech in a meeting with the Ulama Association. In his speech, he emphasized the significance of his work *the law of China* and repeated his so-called findings of the harmonious relationship between Qing law and the *Shari'a*.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, when he was travelling together with Adil Hikmet Bey and the other four Ottoman agents in China, Asali also talked about his translation to impress these five harsh critics of him.¹⁷⁸

From the analysis above, we can see that Asali's mobility advantage provided him access to the book *Li-Kitabi*, and he expected that the Arabic readers would applaud his introduction of Chinese culture. To further enhance his authority as an Islamic scholar, Asali skillfully interpreted *Li-Kitabi* in an Islamic way. He presented some of the ambiguous Confucian concepts in an Islamic leaned way, and he reinterpreted the concept of sage with the emphasis on Confucius' heavenly power in China. Though it also included his fabrications of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Martin, Richard C. 2004. *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.p.597.

¹⁷⁶ Muhammad Rashid Rida. 1907. *Qanun al-Sin [The law of China]*. Majallat al-Manar, vol.9, no.12. p.948.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Asalī, Sa‘īd ibn Muḥammad, 1910. “إنما المؤمنون اخوة” [The believers are brothers]. Beyânülhak. volume. 3. Issue 72. p.1414. and Hüseyin Hazım (Trans).1910. ‘Müsafir-i Fazlımız’ [(Speech of) Our Erudite Guest].Beyânülhak.. volume 3. Issue 71. p.1393.

¹⁷⁸ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. 2019. *Asya'da beş Türks [Five Turks in Asia]*. İstanbul Ötüken.p.295.

Chinese law. From a reader's perspective, Asali's translation was targeted at Arabic speaking Muslim audiences. He tactically used his work to promote his profile and claim Islamic authority in the Arabic speaking parts of the Ottoman empire. As a result, it temporally secured him the status of a great traveller and earned him the cultural capital as an erudite ulama. However, in his later intermediary role between Xinjiang and the Ottoman empire, this Islamic authority reached its peak and collapsed dramatically.

Shami Damulla: The *Muhaddith*, the *Muarrikh* and the *Sheikh ul-Islam*

It was between 1907-1910 that Asali started to be known as Shami Damulla, “the great master from Ottoman Syria”, among Muslims in Xinjiang and Russian Turkistan ¹⁷⁹ Because during this period, he claimed Islamic authority through positions like al-*Muhaddith*, the scholar of *Hadith*, al-*Marrikh*, the Historian, and the *Sheikh ul-Islam*, master of Islam. In the following, I will explain them separately.

The *Muhaddith*¹⁸⁰: the scholar of Hadith

After the publication of *Kitab Qanun al-Sin (The book of the law of China)* in Cairo at the beginning of 1906, Asali departed for the *Hajj* (pilgrimage).¹⁸¹ Before his relocation to Xinjiang in the Autumn of 1907,¹⁸² he met several famous Islamic scholars scattered from North Africa to Saudi Arabia. In March¹⁸³ of 1906, on his returning trip from *Hajj*, Asali visited Sayyid Shaykh Faliḥ ibn Muḥammad al-Zahiri al-Madani al-Badawi (1839-1910)¹⁸⁴ in Medina,

¹⁷⁹ Tikhonov D.I. *Uygurskiye istoricheskiye rukopisi kontsa XIX i nachala XX v. // Uchenyye zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniya [Uyghur historical manuscripts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries]. // Scientific notes of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Volume IX. Moscow-Leningrad: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1954, p.166.*

¹⁸⁰ Arabic المحدث, it means an expert of *Hadith*, the transmitter of *Hadith*.

¹⁸¹ Asali, 1906, p.2

¹⁸² Архив внешней политики Российской империи [The Archive of the Foreign Policy of Imperial Russia], f. 188, op. 761, d. 768, ll. 56–57ob.

¹⁸³ The pilgrimage month (*Dhu al-Hijjah*, 1323) in 1906 was February. See <https://habibur.com/hijri/ce-1906/>.

¹⁸⁴ He was also a well-traveled Islamic scholar, in 1895, he went to Bukhara and Samarkand and visited the tomb of Bukhari. See Barmāwī, Ilyās ibn Aḥmad Ḥusayn ibn Sulaymān, and Muḥammad Tamīm Zu‘bī. 2000. *Imtā’ al-fuḍalā’ bi-tarājim al-qurrā’ fīmā ba’d al-qarn al-thāmin al-Hijrī [Biographies of Reciters after the eighth century AH]*. al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: al-Nadwah al-‘Ālamīyah lil-Shabāb al-Islāmī.p.233.

who was the prominent Sanusi *shaykh* and *mufti* of the *Shafi'i* school. After a short study period,¹⁸⁵ Asali received an *ijaza* (permission, diploma) from him.¹⁸⁶

On the 6th of the month of *Safar* (March) in 1907, Asali arrived in the *Abdullah Pasha Al-Azm Madrasa* in Damascus,¹⁸⁷ where he met Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (1866-1914), the leading proponent of Islamic modernism in the early twentieth century.¹⁸⁸ Qasimi recorded that Asali visited him with another scholar named Sheikh Saeed Naasan Al-Hamawi (1867-1967), who later became the *Mufti* of Hama (Syrian city).¹⁸⁹ This Al-Hamawi was affiliated to the *Rifa'i* Sufi order,¹⁹⁰ in which the dividing line between *Sunnis* and *Shiites* was blurred.¹⁹¹ From this, we can tell that Asali's attitude towards Sufism and sectarian differences was, by then, far from hostile. For Asali's short visit, Qasimi also emphasized that among these two guests, only Asali requested an *Ijaza* for *Hadith* from him.¹⁹² Again, within less than one week of stay with Qasimi, at the night of March 11th in 1907, Asali received an *Ijaza* from Qasimi, which praised Asali highly and contained a detailed chain (*Isnad*) of the transmitters for *Hadith* as a way to

¹⁸⁵ By the time of his visit, as Asali wrote, "He (Shaykh Faliḥ) was already paralyzed, had poor vision, and therefore remained at home." See Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke* [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century] (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2007), p.67.

¹⁸⁶ As Asali wrote, "He gave me permission for everything he transmitted (*marwiyat min al mankul*) and gave me his confirmation (of their reliability)." See Ibid., p.67.

¹⁸⁷ "Al-Qasimi wrote in his daily memoirs: "The 6th of Safar Sunna (1325 AH). In the afternoon, two venerable scholars: Sheikh Saeed Naasan Al-Hamawi and Sheikh Saeed Al-Asali, the famous traveler, came to the *Madrasa* - meaning Abdullah Pasha Al-Azm School, and the second one asked me for an *ijaza* for *Hadith*." See Al-Qasimī, Jamāl al-Dīn and 'Ajamī, Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir. *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī* [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi]. (Bayrūt : Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009), p.319.

¹⁸⁸ Commins, David. "Social Criticism and Reformist Ulama of Damascus." *Studia Islamica*, no. 78 (1993): 169-80.

¹⁸⁹ Abdul Majeed Al-Shaqaqi. *Al-Nawaeer Magazine*, Issue 263. 1957.

¹⁹⁰ Darnīqah, Muḥammad. *Mu'jam a'lām shu'arā' al-madḥ al-Nabawī* [Dictionary of the famous poets of the Prophet's praise] (Bayrūt : Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 2003), p.414.

¹⁹¹ Eich, Thomas. "Patterns of the 1920 Rising in Iraq: The Rifā'iyya ṭarīqa and Shiism." *Arabica* 56, no. 1 (2009): 112-19.

¹⁹² Al-Qasimī, Jamāl al-Dīn and 'Ajamī, Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir. *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī* [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi]. Bayrūt : Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī'. 2009, p.319.

authenticate Qasimi's intellectual connection with the Prophet Muhammad,¹⁹³ thereby served Asali's goal to increase his Islamic authority.

Similarly, we know that Asali obtained *ijazas* for *Hadith* from other prominent scholars as well. For example, Sheikh Abd al-Razzaq bin Hassan al-Bitar (1837-1916)¹⁹⁴ was also a famous *Hadith* scholar in Damascus.¹⁹⁵ Besides him, we learn from Asali's student Zia al-Din Baba Khanov (1908-1982), the first mufti of SADUM, that Asali once studied *Hadith* with the Moroccan scholar Abu Shuaib al-Dukali (1878-1937), and he obtained an *ijaza* from al-Dukali.¹⁹⁶

Based on the information mentioned above, we see that Asali intentionally gathered *ijazas* for the science of *Hadith*, which provided him with the extra cultural capital, in addition to his real mastery of the knowledge of *Hadith* and his extensive trans-imperial mobility, to claim Islamic authority in the Muslim societies of both Xinjiang and Soviet Central Asia. In his 1920s writing, he also highlighted the superiority of these *ijazas*.

He wrote, "The chain of transmission of the Sahih Jami' by Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, may God be pleased with him, has reached us, on the authority of a group of scholars from India, Iraq, Sham (Ottoman Syrian or the Levant), Hijaz and Yemen, with a narration of multiple paths. Some of them contradict each other in context, length and shortness.

¹⁹³ Al-Qāsimī, Jamāl al-Dīn and 'Ajamī, Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir. *Imām al-Shām fī 'aṣrihi Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī* [The Imam of Syria in His Age: Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi]. (Bayrūt : Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2009), pp.317-321.

¹⁹⁴ For more information on al-Bitar, see Muḥammad Muṭī' al-Hāfiz, Nizār Abāzah ; qaddama la-hu Shukrī Fayṣal. *Tārīkh 'ulamā' Dimashq fī al-qarn al-rābi' 'ashar al-Hijrī* [The History of the Scholars of Damascus]. (Dimashq, Sūrīyah : Dār al-Fikr, 1986), p.340.

¹⁹⁵ Tadmūrī, 'Umar. Mawsū'at al-'Ulamā' wa-al-'Alām fī Tārīkh Lubnān al-Islāmī [Encyclopedia of Islamic Scholars and Luminaries in the History of Islamic Lebanon], al-Markaz al-Islāmī li-l-'Ilam wa-l-Inma', Beirut, part 3, vol. 3, 1984, p. 261.

¹⁹⁶ Baba Khanov recalled in a short essay about Abu Shuaib al-Dukali, that one day he heard a conversation about Morocco between his father and Asali, when his father mentioned Abu Shuaib al-Dukali, suddenly, Asali replied in great delight, "Sheikh Abu Shuaib al-Maghribi was my teacher in *Hadith*, and I have a chain of transmission (*Ijaza and isnad*) from him". See Riyād, Muḥammad . *Shaykh al-Islām Abū Shu'ayb al-Dukkālī al-Ṣiddīqī wa-juhūduhu fī al-'ilm wa-al-islāh wa-al-waṭanīyah ma'a dhikr thullah min talāmidhatihi wa-āthārih* [Shaykh al-Islam Abu Shu'ayb al-Dukkali al-Siddiqi and His Efforts in Knowledge, Reformism, and Nationalism, with mentioning a few of his students and his works]. (al-Dār al-Bayḍā' : Maṭba'at al-Najāh al-Jadīdah, 2009), pp.219-220.

Because of the large number of transmitters and many of them lived a short life, only a small number of them lived a long life.¹⁹⁷ Nothing comes to me at this time from those blessed chains other than the chain of transmission of the Hijazis and the Shamis (Levantines), which is the highest chain of transmission had been found, and it is called the chain of the long-lived.”¹⁹⁸

As I have explained, by the time of 1907, Asali had gained enough cultural capital to claim Islamic authority in the field of Central Asian Islamic learning. He had travelled to all places mentioned above searching for famous scholars and secured *ijazas* from them. When presenting himself to his new audiences in Central Asia, he prioritized the reliability of the chain of transmission for *Hadith* in his profile. For instance, with those *ijazas* in hand, he emphasized that he belongs to Hadith's most reliable chain of transmission, which created admiration among the pious Central Asian Sunni Muslims. In addition, Asali's religious connection, represented by the fewer number of transmitters in his *ijaza*, with Imam Bukhari (810-870), who was from Central Asia and penned the most essential *Hadith* collection, resonated with most Central Asian Muslims. In a religious sense, for his Central Asian audiences, to study with Asali bore a resemblance to studying with Imam Bukhari himself. In this way, Asali's career as a *Hadith* teacher soared. It was around 1907, Asali began to be known as Shami Damulla. Concerning the scope of Asali's influence, the inaugurate chairman of Xinjiang recalled that during his two-decades-long religious activities in Xinjiang, Asali had more than 3000 students.¹⁹⁹ However, Asali's ambition was not limited to be a *Muhaddith*. He was not satisfied with his position as a polymath, an erudite 'alim, or member of the ulama, in

¹⁹⁷ It matters because the reliability of their transmissions was examined through studying their biographies, longer life would provide more data for evolution, thus make the chain potentially more authentic.

¹⁹⁸ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]*. (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2007), p.67.

¹⁹⁹ Bao'erhan (Burhandin Shahidi). *Bao'erhan xuan ji [An anthology of Burhandin]*. ([Beijing]: Min zu chu ban she, 1989), p.128.

Xinjiang. Besides his high profile as a *Hadith* scholar, he would profoundly increase his knowledge of Xinjiang history. In the following section, I will discuss this matter in detail.

The *Muarrikh*²⁰⁰: The Historian

In the Autumn of 1907, Asali visited Xinjiang for the second time. His motivation for this trip was not clear, but based on his success in claiming Islamic authority in Xinjiang, this trip might be in search of potential career opportunities. This time he remained in Xinjiang until early 1910. By now, he had become a *Hajji*, which is highly respected among Muslims. He had also polished his profile as a prominent *Hadith* teacher through gathering several *ijazas* from famous scholars. In addition to this, he demonstrated particular interest in the history of Xinjiang, where he referred to as Eastern Turkistan.

At the beginning of his second sojourn, Asali stayed in southern Xinjiang for a short period. By this time, his confidence in his religious authority boosted significantly because of his achievement as an influential *Hadith* teacher in Xinjiang. As a result, he started to engage in the local debates on school reforms. Because of his Ottoman background, he chose the side of the Ottoman influence *Jadidist* in Kashgar. He actively took part in the *Jadidist* school reform in the Kashgar region, during which he teamed up with reformist merchants and argued against the local *ulama*.²⁰¹ However, instead of convincing those powerful and rather conservative *ulama* in southern Xinjiang, he ended up the same as other *Jadidists* who were seen as the enemies of traditional Islamic and Sufi practices in Xinjiang. As a result, Asali had to leave Kashgar, and from there, he headed north again.

During the trip to northern Xinjiang, he actively collected historical materials, which would become the base for his monograph “*The History of Eastern Turkistan*”. Unfortunately,

²⁰⁰ Arabic المؤرخ, means historian. Asali’s was listed as a historian in most of his biographies.

²⁰¹ See a more detailed discussion in Brophy, David *Uyghur Nation Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 105-109.

this work is still not available for researchers outside China, but its existence is without any doubt, since many Chinese scholars have cited this work as a manuscript.²⁰² To the best of my knowledge, at least one copy of it is kept in the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences.²⁰³ Meanwhile, there is enough evidence to prove that Asali was interested in Xinjiang history and was a careful historian. For example, we learn from the Russian historian Dmitry Ivanovich Tikhonov (1906-1987) that a historian in Kashgar known as Haji Yusuf (a 20th-century figure) gave Asali a copy of his work *Jam Al-Tavarih (Collections of Histories)*.²⁰⁴ Moreover, we knew that Asali had also obtained a much more valuable manuscript from the same Haji Yusuf from other sources in Uyghur. It was a copy of the 11th-century work *Kutadgu Bilig (Blessed Knowledge)*.²⁰⁵

In the middle of his trip to northern Xinjiang, Asali met the historian Mulla Musa Sayrami (1836-1917), who would emblazon Asali's name by incorporating a piece of his writing into the famous chronicle *Tarikh-i Hamidi (A Hamidian History)*. This chronicle written by Sayrami remains one of the most important sources for the study of 19th century Xinjiang history.²⁰⁶ As Sayrami recorded, their encounter took place during Asali's second visit to Xinjiang, and they travelled together for five months.²⁰⁷ Because Sayrami finished the writing

²⁰² For example, Zhongguo ren min daxue. *Song Liao Jin Yuan shi [History of Song, Liao, Jin and Yuan Dynasties, Issues 1-4]*. Beijing: Zhongguo ren min da xue shu bao zi liao zhong xin [Book and Newspaper Information Center of Renmin University of China], 1997, p.56.

²⁰³ See the citations of this manuscript in Li Jinxin. *Xinjiang yisilan hanchao shilüe [A History of Xinjiang's Islamic Khaganates]*, Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, Beijing, 1999, pp.120,129.

²⁰⁴ "Haji Yusuf, the son of Mulla Ashur Khalifa, wrote his essay in the period from June 20, 1907 to March 3, 1908, when he was in Kashgar in the Kescent quarter. He was 70 at the time. When writing the essay, he used the advice of other people. As the author writes, he made three copies of his work, which he distributed in the following way: he gave one to a certain Damulla Shami, the other to one Khotan Bey, and sent the third to the homeland of Yakub Beg, to the village of Pskent." See Tikhonov D.I. 1954. *Uygurskiye istoricheskiye rukopisi kontsa XIX i nachala XX v. // Uchenyye zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniya [Uyghur historical manuscripts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries]*. // Scientific notes of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Volume IX. Moscow-Leningrad: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. p.166.

²⁰⁵ Yüsiip Igemberdi. *Qedimki eser, qol yazmilarni retlesh, tetqiq qilishda saqliniwatqan mesililer [Existing Problems in Collecting and Reserching Ancient Works and Manuscripts]*. Shinjang ijtimai'iy penler munbiri [Xinjiang Social Sciences Forum]. No.6, 2012, p.36.

²⁰⁶ Tursun, Nabijan. 2008. "The Formation of Modern Uyghur Historiography and Competing Perspectives toward Uyghur History." *China and Eurasia Quarterly* 6(3): 87–100.

²⁰⁷ Sayrami, Musa. *Tarixi hämidi [A Hamidian History]*. (Beyjin: Millätlär Näşriyati. 1988), pp.669-670.

of *Tarikhi Hamidi* on November 5th of 1908,²⁰⁸ their journey must have happened before this date. During their travels, Sayrami consulted with Asali about the location of the shrine of *Ashabu al-kahf*²⁰⁹ (*the Islamic version of the Seven Sleepers*). They both were against the popular belief that *Ashabu al-kahf* is the *Tuyuq Khoja Mazar* (*The shrine of Tuyuq Khoja*) located close to the oasis town of Turfan in eastern Xinjiang.²¹⁰ Some locals believed that one pilgrimage performed at *Tuyuq Khoja Mazar* could be equated with a half-pilgrimage [to Mecca], and two pilgrimages to this place are equivalent to a complete pilgrimage (*Haji*).²¹¹

To debunk the myths that shroud *Tuyuq Khoja Mazar*, Asali gave Sayrami an Arabic *risala* (a small booklet) written by himself. As Sayrami recorded, Asali had visited this *Mazar* in Turfan twice and researched to argue against the widespread local belief. In this booklet, Asali raised ten arguments (*dalil*) to prove that the *Ashabu al-kahf* is not in Turfan.²¹² On a closer reading, it is a polyphonous and transcultural text, and it demonstrated his mastery of historical materials regarding the history of Turkistan and Islamic history in general. It contained sources written in Persian, Arabic, and also Turki.²¹³ From a religious perspective, it is rich in Islamic theological sources as well. Consequently, this work fascinated Sayrami, and he translated it into Turki. With the permission of Asali, he incorporated the booklet to the end of *Tarikhi Hamidi*. With this in mind, one would not be surprised to read Sayrami's glorification of Asali as "our *Sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), *Mawlana* (a title of respect), the competitive and truth searching scholar, the selected scholar for *fiqh* (*Islamic*

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p.709.

²⁰⁹ Literally it means "People of the Cavern".

²¹⁰ Hällzon, P. Stepping onto sacred ground: the mazar in Uyghur day-to-day life. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 22, 87–121. (2010). p.91.

²¹¹ Zarcone, Thierry. "Pilgrimage to the "Second Meccas" and "Ka'bas" of Central Asia" In *Central Asian Pilgrims*. edited by Alexandre Papas, Thierry Zarcone and Thomas Welsford, 251-277. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020.p.257. For more on the worshiping of *Tuyuq Khoja Mazar* see Rachel Harris & Rahilä Dawut (2002) *Mazar festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam and the Chinese State*, British Journal of Ethnomusicology, 11:1, 101-118. at pp.103-104. And Formichi, Chiara. *Islam and Asia: a history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p.52.

²¹² Sayrami.1988, pp.670-701.

²¹³ For example, it covered books like *Tarikhi Rashidi*, *Tarikhi Zefernama* and many other sources.

jurisprudence), the experienced polymath (*bilim igisi*, the owner of knowledge), the one who enacts the instructions of *Sharia* in a correct way, and the offspring of *Sheikhs*.”²¹⁴

Reaching the end of his second sojourn in Xinjiang, Asali travelled further north to the border region between Xinjiang and Russian Turkistan. In 1909, in the town of *Tarbaghatay* (*Tacheng* or *Chöchak*),²¹⁵ Asali visited the local Kazakh Imam Kūrbanghali Khalid (1846-1913) for the second time.²¹⁶ During Asali’s first visit in 1905, he had already shown Khalid a unique piece of the document found among the Kirands in Tuleshuk, near Kashgar, it was written in 1303.²¹⁷ Similarly, in his second visit, Asali showed some other documents he had collected in Kashgar, including a fourteenth-century Qadi’s *Fatwa* (*judgment*) in Arabic and a decree in 1605 from the Chaghatayid Muhammad Khan.²¹⁸ As a result, Khalid recorded in his biographical dictionary that Asali “is an erudite scholar (*Alim*) and a great man of virtue.”²¹⁹

To this point, Asali had fully established himself as an authoritative scholar. His profound erudition demonstrates that his understanding of Xinjiang society had become more profound and changed significantly in his second visit. During his first visit, he saw Xinjiang as part of the Chinese realm, both culturally and politically. His intellectual interest remained in the Chinese layer of the local society, and he attempted to bridge Chinese law with Islamic law through the lens of Xinjiang society. However, during his second visit, with the significant increase of his knowledge of local history, he treated Xinjiang as a part of the Turkic and Persianate cultural zone. His intellectual interest shifted to local Turkic history, and he

²¹⁴ Sayrami.1988, p.669.

²¹⁵ Chöchak is the Uyghur name of *Tarbaghatay* which is in Mongolian.

²¹⁶ Khālīdī, Qurban‘ali, Allen J. Frank, and M. G. Gosmanov. 2005. *An Islamic biographical dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe, 1770-1912*. Leiden: Brill.p.148. Khalid recorded that Muhammad Said of Syrian origin came to Chöchak twice in 1327 AH (1909-1910).

²¹⁷ Khalid, Kūrbanghali, and M. Qazbekov. *Tauarikh khamsa: bes tarikh : Tauarikh-i khamsa-ī sharqi : Shyghystyng bes elīnīng tarikhy [Essays on the History of Five Eastern Peoples]*. Almaty; Алматы :: "Qazaqstan"; "Қазақстан". 1992.p.277.

²¹⁸ Kūrbanghali Khalid. *Tavarikh-i Khamsa-i Sharqi [A Quintet of Oriental Chronicles]*, Ürnäk Matba‘asī, Kazan. 1910, p.759-770.

²¹⁹ “عالم وفاضل بيوك ذاتر”, see Khālīdī, Qurban‘ali, Allen J. Frank, and M. G. Gosmanov. *An Islamic biographical dictionary of the Eastern Kazakh Steppe, 1770-1912*. (Leiden: Brill, 2005).p.148.

interacted closely with local Turkic historians. In this way, Asali inserted himself into to local elite circle with another high profile, an erudite historian.

However, for Asali, a society without the institutionalization of Islam could not provide him with the platform to fully demonstrate his capacity. In Xinjiang, Islamic scholars did not have the chance to build a religious career within the government. Therefore, his longing for Istanbul was never decreased by the comfortable life in Xinjiang. For Asali, Istanbul was a place where Islamic authority could produce even more benefit for an ulama who sought to carve an institution based religious career. From 1907 to early 1909, his experiences in Xinjiang had natured him to gradually shift from a prominent *Hadith* teacher and an erudite historian to something more authoritative. To achieve this, he followed the customary pattern of striving for higher prestige and influence by setting his sights on posts in the Ottoman religious administration.²²⁰ He would skillfully transfer his Islamic authority from Xinjiang to Istanbul, that is, to move back to Istanbul as the self-claimed *Sheikh ul-Islam* of Chinese Turkistan.

The *Sheikh ul-Islam*²²¹: The Master of Islam

In 1908, the Young Turks revolution forced Sultan Abdulhamid II to resign.²²² On April 27th 1909, Sultan Mehmed V (1844-1918), at the age of 64, became the penultimate Ottoman Sultan (r. 1909-1918), but he was largely a figurehead with no real political power.²²³ By then, Asali was still in Xinjiang, but he was aware of the political changes. Soon he started the journey back to Istanbul. On May 31st 1910, Asali stopped by Bukhara, the birthplace of Imam

²²⁰ For the study of ulama newcomers and middle status ulama in late Ottoman Damascus see Commins, David Dean. *Islamic reform politics and social change in late Ottoman Syria*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990. and Roded, Ruth. *Tradition and change in Syria during the last decades of Ottoman rule: the Urban elite of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama, 1876-1918*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1988).

²²¹ A religious administrative position in the Ottoman empire. With the hierarchy of *ulamas* in the Ottoman Empire, it ranks the top.

²²² Ahmad, Feroz *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.14.

²²³ Palabıyık M.S. Contextualising the Ottoman Dynasty: Sultan Mehmed V Reşad and the Ottoman Princes in the Great War. In: Glencross M., Rowbotham J. (eds) *Monarchies and the Great War*. Palgrave Studies in Modern Monarchy. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018).

Al-Bukhari.²²⁴ As he wrote, “I visited his blessed grave (*marqad*) in the village of Khartank together with several dear brothers, we spent the night next to the tomb, prayed until the morning, then we left.”²²⁵ Finally, at the beginning of July 1910, Asali arrived in Istanbul as the representative of the Muslims in Chinese Turkistan to felicitate Sultan Mehmed V’s enthronement.²²⁶

Asali’s arrival quickly made headlines in Istanbul. It was reported that Asali, on behalf of Muslims in Chinese Turkistan, handed in gifts to the court. Including a precious piece of Quran copied around 500 years ago and a sword used by the Chagatayid Khan Muhammad, who ruled Yarkand in the late 16th century.²²⁷ For the Sultan, a visitor representing Muslims in the borderland of China certainly had caught his attention. Since the Sultan was looking for ways to consolidate his ruling, such as making royal visits to different Ottoman territories.²²⁸ Eventually, Asali made the guest of Sultan Mehmed V.

In their meeting, it is said that Asali presented himself as the *Sheikh ul-Islam* of Chinese Turkistan, and they hold a conversation on situations of Islam in the Far East.²²⁹ Asali’s Turkish skills could not serve him on such a complicated topic. He communicated with the Sultan in Persian.²³⁰ Asali reported the difficulties for Muslims in China to practice *Hajj* due to the far distance and political barriers in their conversation. Perhaps it was under Asali’s request, Sultan granted the beard of the Prophet Muhammad as a gift to the Muslims in Chinese Turkistan.²³¹

²²⁴ Tadmurī, ‘Umar. Mawsū‘at al-‘Ulamā’ wa-al-A‘lām fī Tārīkh Lubnān al-Islāmī [*Encyclopedia of Islamic Scholars and Luminaries in the History of Islamic Lebanon*], al-Markaz al-Islami li-l-I‘lam wa-l-Inma’, Beirut, part 3, vol. 3, 1984, p. 261.

²²⁵ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke* [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]. (Almaty: Daik-Press. 2007), p.62.

²²⁶ ‘‘Aseli-zade Şeyh Sa‘id Efendinin Der-Sa‘adete Mevasileti Vesilesiyle’ [‘On the Occasion of Shaykh Sa‘id Effendi’s Arrival in the Capital’], *Yeni Gazete*, 11 Receb 1328/19 July, 1910, p.1.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Özger, Yunus. *Sultan V. Mehmed Reşad’ın Edirne Seyahati* [Sultan Mehmed V Reşad’s Visit to Edirne]. Çanakkale Araştırmaları Türk Yılı. (2017).135-135.

²²⁹ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. *Asya’da beş Türks* [Five Turks in Asia]. (İstanbul Ötüken. 2019), p.211

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Presidential Ottoman Archives, (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, hereafter to be cited as BOA) TS.MA.e / 1327 – 123.

Besides this, a set of religious books were also among the gifts, and Asali requested them to be delivered by the government.²³² For Asali himself, the Sultan ordered for him a jeweled watch with silk strap and a silk prayer rug made in Hereke (the famous imperial carpet manufacture).²³³

Within one month of Asali's arrival, he had made a name in the ulama circles of Istanbul and became a distinguished guest for them. In a meeting with the Ulama Association, Asali delivered a speech in Arabic, which was published in the *Beyânülhak*, a journal for this association.²³⁴ One week later, the Turkish translation of his speech was also published in the same journal.²³⁵ In his speech, Asali talked about the situation of Muslims in India, especially about the conditions of Islamic learning there. Then he introduced the history of Islam in Chinese Turkistan and praised the success of *Jadidism* there. For example, he wrote, "last year (1909), more than 900 *Jadid* (new method) schools were built in Kashgar and areas around it."²³⁶ His erudition had clearly impressed the audiences, and the journal paid him great compliments.

Asali's activities in Istanbul also drew the attention of the Russian embassy in Istanbul. In a political sense, for the imperial rivalries of the Ottoman empire, especially for the Russian Empire, the fact that Asali representing Xinjiang Muslims in Istanbul was quite a sensitive matter. Because back in the borderland of China, in 1910, the reformist currents precipitating the Xinhai Revolution had already reached Xinjiang.²³⁷ Affected by the Xinhai Revolution, the Qing empire stumbled and ultimately collapsed in 1911. Due to the rivalry for the sphere of

²³² BOA, BEO / 3812 – 285876. and MF.MKT. / 1162 – 67.

²³³ BOA. İMBH. / 3 – 23.

²³⁴ Asali. 'Misafir-i Fazlîmızın Nutku ['Our Learned Guest's Speech'], *Beyan'ül-Hak*, volume. 2, no. 71, 1910, pp.1393–1396;

²³⁵ Hüseyin Hazım (Trans). 'Müşafir-i Fazlîmız' [(Speech of) Our Erudite Guest]. *Beyânülhak*.. volume 3. no. 71. 1910, pp.1409-1412.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Freeman, Joshua. "Uyghur Newspapers in Republican China: The Emergence of Mass Media in Xinjiang." In *Xinjiang in the Context of Central Asian Transformations*, edited by Onuma Takahiro, David Brophy, and Yasushi Shinmen, 221–250. Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2018.p.222.

influence, from the early 1910s, Xinjiang would get caught in the middle of a decades-long competition between Russian and China.²³⁸ Accordingly, Asali's activities were closely monitored by the Russian embassy in Istanbul. As the Russian ambassador reported that Asali also delivered a speech in The Committee of Union and Progress, the political party of Young Turks. He also obtained a letter of recommendation from that organization addressed to the people of Kashgar.²³⁹ To this point, Asali's affiliation with the Young Turks is very likely due to his Pan-Islamist background, since Young Turks actively campaigned for pan-Islam as a significant feature of the Ottoman Empire's foreign policies.²⁴⁰ If this was true, it certainly had triggered the alarm among Russian officials.

During his short stay in Istanbul in 1910, Asali also published his second translation work, the *Nasihah al-Khaqan: al-kalimat al-Daruriyat al-Murawijah Liaemaal al-khayr* (*Advice of the Emperor: Necessary words for good deeds*). By the time of writing this thesis, I only had access to the cover of this book. The details of it are yet to be studied, but it is believed that Asali translated it from Chinese.²⁴¹ From the cover, we learn the author of this book is Tongji Khanekdi, The Qing Emperor Tong Zhi (r.1856-1875), who he also listed as the author of *Kitab al-Qanun al-Sin* (*The book of the law of China*). Without knowing the context, the book was probably an augmented translation of the *Li-Kitabi*, but with a new title. Still from the cover we read, this was published by Muhammad Safa Bey, the editor of the newspaper *Al-Adl* (*the Justice*) in Istanbul.²⁴² Again, Asali's name bore a glorious long title, "The honourable master,

²³⁸ Millward, James A. *Eurasian crossroads: a history of Xinjiang*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p.179.

²³⁹ Reynolds, Michael A. *Shattering empires the clash and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, 1908-1918*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), p.93.

²⁴⁰ McCollum, Jonathan: The anti-colonial empire. Ottoman mobilization and resistance in the Italo-Turkish War, 1911-1912, Thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2018. And Shukla, Ram Lakhan. "The Pan-Islamic Policy of the Young Turks and India." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 32 (1970): 302-07.

²⁴¹ See the introduction of the book on this website: https://www.dig-doc.org/index.php?page=Ym9vaw==&op=ZGlzcGxheV9ib29rX2RldGFpbHNfdQ==&book_id=Njkz&lan=YXI

²⁴² Asali, Said. *Nasihah al-Khaqan : al-kalimat al-Daruriyat al-Murawijah Liaemaal al-khayr* [*Advice of the Emperor: Necessary words for good deeds*]. Istanbul: Harbet Press. 1910.

the courageous traveler, the famous scholar, the great linguist, Sheikh Saeed Al-Asali Effendi, may his grace last and may God benefit us with his knowledge”.²⁴³ Such kind words were related to Asali’s status as the *Sheikh ul-Islam* of Chinese Turkistan, and his meeting with the Sultan also granted him a shortcut to claim authority in Istanbul.

Quite dramatically, the glory of the *Sheikh ul-Islam* of Chinese Turkistan did not last long. Some Kashgarian students in Istanbul noticed the news about Asali. They reported that there was no such position called *Sheikh ul-Islam* in their homeland.²⁴⁴ Soon after this report, quite hostile articles on Asali start to be published. For example, an article titled “*The Shaykh ul-Islam of Kashgar, or the old colleague of Baba Tahir?*” (*Kaşgar Şeyhü’l-İslam Mı, Baba Tahir'in Refik-i Sabıkı Mı?*) debunked the myth shrouded around Asali’s identity. It even dug out Asali’s earlier affiliation with the journal *al-Malumat* and its sponsor Baba Tahir living in exile by then.²⁴⁵ Luckily for Asali, he had already left Istanbul when this investigation took place. Before April 1911, he reached Xinjiang with all those gifts from the Sultan, but his damaged reputation in Istanbul never saw a chance to revive.

Conclusion

This chapter pieced together Asali’s go-between activities between the Ottoman Empire and Xinjiang. It argued that Asali played the bridge role between the ottoman empire and Xinjiang. He filled the information gap between these two regions through his mobility. For himself, he used different strategies to claim authority. He utilized his Arab identity, the knowledge of *Hadith*, and his scholarly interest in local history to claim authority. Most importantly, his opportunistic character led him to claim as the Sheikh ul-Islam of Chinese Turkistan in Istanbul. This bold move brought him temporary glory, but it would become the

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Reynolds, Michael A. *Shattering empires the clash and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, 1908-1918*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), p.93.

²⁴⁵ “*Kaşgar Şeyhülislamı, Baba Tahir'in Refik-i Sabıkı mı?*” [*The Shaykh ul-Islam of Kashgar, or the old colleague of Baba Tahir?*], *Teârûf-i Müslimîn*, Voloum. 1. No.8. July 22, 1910. p.136.

base for his further troubles in Xinjiang. In general, his activities between Xinjiang and the Ottoman Empire created a pattern for him to claim authority, and in this pattern, he acted only of his own will, intending to live an authoritative and comfortable life.

Chapter Three

The Islamic authority within a hierarchy

Introduction

This chapter deals with Asali's life from 1911 to 1932. He stayed in China until early 1919. During this period, he got into serious troubles twice. From 1919 to 1932, he lived in Soviet Central Asia, mainly in Tashkent. During this time, he continued to be a prominent hadith teacher and remained close connections with the Soviet authority. However, this did not last long, and he became one of the victims of Soviet persecution of Muslim scholars in 1932. This chapter uses Max Weber's tripartite classification of authority as the conceptual framework. In this framework, Asali's well established Islamic authority was a type of charismatic authority. The non-governmental social elites, including the groups of local ulama, and merchants represented the traditional authority, and the Chinese and Soviet government possessed a type of legal authority. By rooting the analyses on Asali's writings, official documents from the Ottoman and Chinese governments, and the Soviet newspaper articles penned by Asali, this chapter piece together a narrative about Asali's relationship with the government authorities and the non-governmental social elites. This chapter argues that the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was on the lowest level of the hierarchy shaped by the three Weberian types of authorities. The case of Asali demonstrated that the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was not sustainable without the support of the traditional and legal authorities.

The Three Types of Authorities

Weber's tripartite classification of authority includes legal authority, and traditional authority and charismatic authority.²⁴⁶ Legal authority is based on a system of rules applied administratively and judicially according to known principles.²⁴⁷ In legal authority, obedience is not owed to the individual but the established impersonal order.²⁴⁸ As such, the governments of the Ottoman empire and China and the Soviet Union in this study possess legal authority.

According to Weber, traditional authority is a form of leadership primarily tied to tradition or custom. Thus, the main reason for their justification of superiority is that it "has always been that way".²⁴⁹ In this sense, the ulama groups and merchants in both Xinjiang and Tashkent in this study maintain their status as the non-governmental social elites through traditional authority.

Charismatic authority is most often owned by one who achieved qualifications that establish authority over "followers" or "disciples".²⁵⁰ The followers recognize the superiority of someone's charismatic authority because of his/her unique qualities (his charisma), not because of any tradition or legal rules.²⁵¹ As such, this study sees Asali's Islamic authority as a type of charismatic authority.

Last Years in China

In 1911, the tense atmosphere of the Xinhai Revolution spread all over China. The revolution successfully overthrew the Qing empire in late 1911,²⁵² and before the regime change in China, the local government of Xinjiang was susceptible to foreigners' activities in

²⁴⁶ Weber, Max. *Economy and society. an outline of interpretive sociology: Bind 1 1 1*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978),p.217

²⁴⁷ Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: an intellectual portrait*, University of California Press, 1977, p.294

²⁴⁸ Weber, Max. 1978,.p.216.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p.227.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p.242.

²⁵¹ Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: an intellectual portrait*, University of California Press, 1977, p.295

²⁵² Li, Xiaobing. *A history of the modern Chinese Army*. (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky. 2009),pp.13, 26–27.

Xinjiang. Within this context, in early 1911, Asali had returned to Kashgar from Istanbul. Unfortunately, the news of him as a fraud in Istanbul also reached Kashgar. In an attempt to clarify his name, in April 1911, he attempted to send a joint letter to Sultan Mehmed V, which ended with 165 signatures of his supporters in Kashgar.²⁵³ Whether this letter had reached Istanbul is not clear,²⁵⁴ but the Xinjiang government sent a six-page translation of it to the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of China in Beijing,²⁵⁵ and one month later, Beijing approved its deliverance to Istanbul.²⁵⁶

In this letter, Asali's Kashgarian supporters, under the leading of a person named Inayatullah, stated that in 1910 they sent the Mawlana Sayyid Shami Damulla to the Holy Kindom as their representative, and they had significantly benefited from his teachings. Asali's supporters also emphasized that those rumours against him were baseless, and they sincerely hoped that the Sultan would ignore those lies.²⁵⁷

In this way, Asali tried to secure his charismatic authority in Kashgar by winning the trust of the legal authority in Istanbul. However, his damaged reputation in Istanbul also brought him challenges from the traditional authority in Kashgar. The local ulama groups and the influential merchants cast doubt on Asali's authenticity. In this type of situation, Asali perceived that a collective letter from Kashgar to Istanbul would clarify his name in both regions. However, he neglected the presence of legal authority in Xinjiang, the Chinese government. He was very likely not aware that his letters would pass the scrutiny of the Chinese government. Although the Chinese government approved the letter could be sent, but this discission came by at least one month later. Most importantly, in 1911, China, including its western borderland, went through significant political turmoil. As a result, his collective letter

²⁵³ Archive of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica (IMH below), 03-32-103-02-001.

²⁵⁴ There is no information about this letter in the Ottoman Archives.

²⁵⁵ IMH, 03-32-103-02-001.

²⁵⁶ IMH, 03-32-103-02-002

²⁵⁷ IMH, 03-32-103-02-001

probably got ignored and never made its way to Istanbul. In this sense, Asali failed to protect his charismatic authority because he misjudged the essentiality of local legal authority.

Later, Asali also faced severe challenges from the traditional authority in the Kashgar region. With no response from the Ottoman court, Asali had to live on with his damaged reputation. At the same time, local ulama groups and merchants continued to be suspicious of him because Asali's presence with the beard of Prophet Muhammad and many other gifts from the Ottoman Sultan demonstrated a direct challenge to their traditional authority. Within this context, Asali tried to utilize these gifts to fix his reputation and show his loyalty to the new regime in the Ottoman Empire. His activities remained mainly among the Ottoman leaned people in southern Xinjiang. When the Balkan Wars took place between 1912 to 1913, Asali exhibited the beard of the Prophet Muhammad and raised money for the Ottoman navy.²⁵⁸ As Adil Hikmet Bey recorded, "people were pleased, they were visiting a holy heirloom and helping the Turkish navy ... Said al-Asali had thus earned thirty thousand liras in a month."²⁵⁹ However, it soon brought him into significant troubles.

During this period, in the gesture to tame Asali's charismatic authority in the Kashgar region, a group of Kashgarian ulama and merchants sent a letter to the Ottoman court and reported Asali's fundraising activities.²⁶⁰ Then, the Ottoman officials decided to investigate Asali's case together with many similar fundraising cases.²⁶¹ However, an even bigger problem caught Asali in 1913. A group of Arabs reported his fundraising activities to the Chinese government.²⁶² As a result, the local government confiscated all his wealth and gifts from the Ottoman Sultan, including the beard of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. *Asya'da beş Türks [Five Turks in Asia]*. (İstanbul Ötüken. 2019), p.211. and BOA, DH. KMS, 2/1-19.

²⁵⁹ Adil Hikmet, and Yusuf Gedikli. *Asya'da beş Türks [Five Turks in Asia]*. (İstanbul Ötüken, 2019), p.211.

²⁶⁰ Cem Çetin and Kenan Göçer, 'Türk Havacılığının Kuruluşunda İane Kampanyaları' ['Donation Campaigns in the Establishment of the Turkish Airforce'], in *Proceedings of International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress Series-Kırklareli*, Dimitar Kirilov Dimitrov et al. (eds), 2017, pp. 199–207.

²⁶¹ BOA, DH. KMS, 2/1-19.

²⁶² BOA, BEO, 4204 - 315286. p.11.

²⁶³ Ibid.

In this desperate situation, Asali still believed the legal authority in Istanbul would restore his loss of wealth and protect his charismatic authority. This time, he sent another two letters to the Ottoman Sultan. One was his letter written in Arabic on 16 June 1913;²⁶⁴ another was a joint letter written in Chaghatai Turki with 80 people signed on 23 June 1913.²⁶⁵ Perhaps he had been warned by his previous failed attempt to send letters. This time he managed to evade the scrutiny of the Chinese government, and these letters reached the Ottoman court successfully.

In the joint letter, Asali's 80 Kashagarian supporters praised him as an honest man. It also confirmed that some Ottoman subjects presented themselves as *duaguy* (fundraiser, prayer gatherer), and people gave them money within their capacity. However, some of these *duaguys* were not satisfied with it. They went to mosques city by city and village by village. In the mosques, they baselessly insulted (*haqarati bihuda*) the Imams and elders (*aqsaqalar*), and they collected lots of wealth by threatening people. However, the honourable (*janabi*) Mawlana Sheikh Saeed al-Asali Efendi was not one of them. Furthermore, the letter accused the Chinese government (*Khitay hokumiti*) of confiscating the beard of the Prophet Muhammad. Lastly, it appealed to the Sultan to send a letter to the Russian consul in Kashgar and ask them to help Shami Damulla restore his loss.²⁶⁶

From the signatures of this letter, we learn that Asali's supporters in Kashgar were a diverse group of people with Ottoman leaned character. Firstly, from the style of their names, we knew they were intentionally presenting themselves with resemblance to the Ottoman subjects. Their names all followed a structure "someone son of (*oghli*) someone", and this style of the name was not popular among local people in Xinjiang, most people would simply use

²⁶⁴ BOA, BEO, 4204 - 315286. p.11. Asali wrote in his letter a group of Arabs named Omer Issa, and Abdu Salam Taji al-Din, and Abudul Qadir, and Muhamad Saim al-Makki, Abudul Qadir, Abudulllah, attacked him with the weapons, and he Chinese government intervened, but the Chinese government confiscated his wealth and the beard of the Prophet.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.9-10.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

the structure “someone someone”, without the Turkish translation (*oğlu or oghli*) of the Arabic naming style (*bin*, son of). Therefore, the signatures at the end of the joint letter were an imitation of the Ottoman names. Secondly, from their handwritings, we knew that these groups of people had diverse backgrounds. Some of them can barely write their names, and some of them wrote in pretty skilled calligraphy, and some signed with their stamps. The identities of these people are yet to be studied, but at least we knew they were from different education and financial backgrounds. Thirdly, this letter ends with “*Ahali Ajiz Qullari*” (the poor slaves of yours); this was in the tune of the Ottoman subjects and a demonstration of their loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan.

As a result of this letter, the ottoman officials decided to prioritize the investigation of Asali’s fundraising case.²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, there were no further actions taken.²⁶⁸ Thus, again, Asali remained helpless in Kashgar, and he could not restore his loss. There was no doubt that his fundraising was also benefiting himself financially, but it was also structured as part of his charismatic authority. Those people who paid him in exchange for some kind of a written receipt were hoping to prove their supportive status to the Ottoman Empire because this would grant them a quasi-subjecthood of the Ottoman Empire, and it was easier to present themselves as the Ottoman subjects while travelling for Hajj or doing trans-imperial business. As for Asali, the miscalculation of his position in the local hierarchy of authorities led to his failure to protect his charismatic authority. Instead, he betted on the legal authority afar to fight against the local traditional and legal authorities. As a result, the traditional authority in Kashgar teamed with the legal authority in Xinjiang tamed Asali’s charismatic authority.

For the rest of his years in Xinjiang, he remained a *hadith* teacher in a village of Kucha, a town in the north of Kashgar.²⁶⁹ In 1917, because of the First World War, Yang zengxin

²⁶⁷ BOA, BEO, 4200 – 314963,

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ von Hentig, Werner Otto (ed.), *Von Kabul nach Shanghai: Bericht über die Afghanistan-Mission 1915/16 und die Rückkehr über das Dach des Welt und durch die Wüsten Chinas* [From Kabul to Shanghai: Report on the

(1864-1928), the head of the Xinjiang government, under the pressure of Russian and British power, expelled all German and Ottoman subjects from Xinjiang.²⁷⁰ On his way out of Xinjiang, Asali met Adil Hikmet again.²⁷¹ Adil Hikmet Bey and four other Ottoman agents went to Shanghai, and Asali headed to Beijing. From there, he moved to Tashkent on 13 February 1919.²⁷²

In Tashkent

Regarding his motivation for moving to Tashkent, some scholars suggested that the Imperial Russian Consul in Kashgar invited him,²⁷³ but there are not enough sources to support this claim. However, it was clear that Asali had already had good connections with the Islamic learning circles in Tashkent. On 13 February 1919, he reached Tashkent, and it was his fifth visits.²⁷⁴ There is not much information on these five visits, but we know he visited Imam Bukhari's shrine in 1910.²⁷⁵ In 1919, he began to teach *Hadith* in a secondary mosque in the Uzbek quarter of Tashkent.²⁷⁶ By then, he was already known as Shami Damulla among locals.

During his stay in Tashkent, Asali changed his strategy to maintain his charismatic authority; he tried to keep good relationships with local legal authorities. In early 1919, Asali challenged the leading local ulama Shah-Maqsud-Qari in a public dispute on a *Hadith* topic; Asali won the debate, he publicly ridiculed Shah-Maqsud-Qari, knocked his turban—a symbol

Afghanistan Mission of 1915/16 and the Return over the Roof of the World and through the Deserts of China], second ed., Libelle Verlag, Konstanz, 2009, pp.180-181.

²⁷⁰ IMH, 03-36-044-03-043.

²⁷¹ Adil Hikmet. 2019, p.294.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ashirbek, Muminov, 'Shami-damulla i ego rol' v formirovanii "sovetskogo islama" ['Shami-damullah and His Role in the Formation of "Soviet Islam"'], *Kazanskii federalist*, no. 1, 2005. and Babajanov, Bakhtiyar M., "'Ulama"-Orientalists: Madrasa Graduates at the Soviet Institute of Oriental Studies', in *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientologies during the Cold War*, Kemper, Michael and Kalinovsky, Artemy M. (eds), Routledge, Abingdon, 2015, pp. 84-119

²⁷⁴ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. 2007. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke* [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]. Almaty: Daik-Press.p.62

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.62.

²⁷⁶ Ashirbek, Muminov, 'Shami-damulla i ego rol' v formirovanii "sovetskogo islama" ['Shami-damullah and His Role in the Formation of "Soviet Islam"'], *Kazanskii federalist*, no. 1, 2005...

of erudition—off his head with a stick.²⁷⁷ The Muslim Communists favoured this kind of challenge he presented to the traditional authority represented by the local ulama in Tashkent. Soon, he got a chance to move to a more important place to teach *Hadith*. He moved to the madrasa al-Dasturhaniyya, located in the quarter (*mahalla*) of Digriz of Tashkent city.²⁷⁸ Thus, Asali (Shami Damulla) became known as the leading theologian and religious authority in Tashkent in 1919.²⁷⁹

On 25 October 1919, Asali representing Qizil Tashkent, published a speech together with a group of Communist leaned ulama.²⁸⁰ The speech was title *Khitab liahli al-Iman* (A speech to the people of faith). It lashed against the Muslim Arab collaborators who worked for the English, the French, and the Italians and helped them to abolish independent Islamic governments and remove them from the world altogether. Furthermore, it criticized the cooperation between Arab states and those western enemies created difficulties for Hajj.²⁸¹ In 1919, Asali was already regarded as a representative of “Islamic socialism”.²⁸² Asali continued to teach Hadith in Tashkent, and in 1922 from 3 to 10 July, he represented Tashkent again in the first congress of Turkestani Muslim jurists to discuss the Statute on Sharia Court.²⁸³ His speech on “Islamic socialism” in this congress was published on 22 July in the Soviet newspaper *Qizil Bayraq* (*The Red Flag*).²⁸⁴

²⁷⁷ Muminov, Ashirbek, ‘Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia’, in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, Tomohiko, Uyama (ed.), Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, 2007.

²⁷⁸ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. 2007. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke* [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century]. Almaty: Daik-Press.p.62.

²⁷⁹ Ashirbek, Muminov, ‘Shami-damulla i ego rol’ v formirovanii “sovetskogo islama” [‘Shami-damullah and His Role in the Formation of “Soviet Islam”’], *Kazanskii federalist*, no. 1, 2005.

²⁸⁰ Al-Asali (Qizil Tashkent), Muhammad Barkatullah al-bihughali al-hindi (Qizil Asker) and Qazi abudulhida ahim(Tatar), *Khitab liahli al-Iman* [A speech to the people of faith], *Ishtirakiyun* (newspaper), oct. 25.1919.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Sartori, Paolo. "What Went Wrong? The Failure of Soviet Policy on sharī'a Courts in Turkestan, 1917-1923". *Die Welt Des Islams*. 50 (3-4): 2010,397-434.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Al-Shami, ‘Abu Zarr Ghifari (*radiya llahu ‘anhu*) va Sotsiyalizm’ [‘Abu Dharr Ghifari and Socialism’], *Qizil Bayraq*, 20 July 1922.

His strategy to work closely with the local legal authority paid off well. He continued to be a *hadith* teacher in Tashkent. There were thousands of people in the opening and finishing ceremonies for his teaching of the book *al-sahih (the authentic Hadith)*. Among these people, there were the social elites, including local ulama and merchants, and important persons like the ambassador of Afghanistan in Tashkent and the Qazi al-Asker of Afghanistan.²⁸⁵ In this way, Asali secured his charismatic authority by working together with the legal authority, and in this process, his charismatic authority climbed above the traditional authority represented by local ulama and merchants.

However, when the legal authority, the top of the authority hierarchy, changed its attitudes, Asali's charismatic authority represented by his Islamic erudition was destroyed quickly. Remarkably few Muslim scholars in the Soviet Union survived the fearful persecution in the Muslim territories during the period 1932-1938 when Muslim clerics were hunted down as "counter-revolutionaries", "saboteurs", and "agents" of German, Japanese or British intelligence.²⁸⁶ In 1932, the pressure on Asali (Shami Damulla) started to increase. He was accused of spying for Great Britain.²⁸⁷ To escape the arrest of Soviet soldiers, he ran for Kashgar but was caught in Özgen.²⁸⁸

There were different versions of stories on how his life ended. Some people said Asali (Shami Damulla) did not fall into the hands of the government, and he starved to death in the mountains. According to these legends, Asali's body was found in a cave on the Sino-Soviet border and has not decomposed due to its sanctity. Another version of the story sounds more optimistic. After his arrest, Asali was sent to Turtkul (Khorezm, Karakalpakstan according to

²⁸⁵ Bobozhonov, B., A. K. Muminov, and Anke von Kügelgen. *Disputy musul'manskikh religioznykh avtoritetov v Tsentral'noi Azii v XX veke* [Disputes on Muslim Authority in Central Asia in 20th century] (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2007), p.63.

²⁸⁶ Bennigsen, Alexandre, and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay. "'Official' Islam in the Soviet Union". *Religion in Communist Lands*. 7 (3): 1979, pp.148-159.

²⁸⁷ Ashirbek, Muminov, 'Shami-damulla i ego rol' v formirovanii "sovetskogo islama"' [Shami-damullah and His Role in the Formation of "Soviet Islam"], *Kazanskii federalist*, no. 1, 2005.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

other rumours). While being sent to the prison in Termez, he encountered his student Osman Turkistani, a porter on the board, and Asali managed to escape with his help.²⁸⁹ An East Turkistani Islamic scholar in Saudi Arabia recorded in his biographical work that Asali escaped Soviet territory to the Balkan peninsular, then he moved to Istanbul and passed away in Istanbul in 1949.²⁹⁰

Conclusion

Asali's last years in Xinjiang were amidst the political turmoil in China. After he returned from the Ottoman Empire, his confidence in the new regime of the Ottoman Empire boosted. Thus, he neglected the power of the unstable government of Xinjiang. However, be it a weak government, the Xinjiang government was a type of legal authority. When the traditional authority represented by the local ulama and merchants, who were loyal to the Xinjiang government, recognized the challenges from Asali's charismatic authority, they teamed up with the legal authority and successfully restricted and finally ended Asali's charismatic authority in Xinjiang.

Asali learned his lessons in Xinjiang. In the new Soviet regime, he maintained a good relationship with the legal authority when it needed him. Similar confrontation from the traditional authority in Tashkent also happened, but because Asali's charismatic authority was back by the legal authority, the traditional authority could not take down Asali. However, when the legal authority also perceived Asali's charismatic authority as a threat, the legal authority extinguished it quickly.

Here we see a hierarchical development order among these three authorities. Legal authority consistently ranked the highest, and the traditional and charismatic authorities rely on the support from legal authority to keep their sustainability. As for the relationship between

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Muhammed Qasim Imin Turkistani, *al-i 'alām li-b 'aḍ rġālāt turkstān* [Information on Some Figures in Turkistan], (Mecca Al-Makruma. 2009), p.452.

traditional and charismatic authorities, primarily the competition took place between these two when one of them gained more power from the related legal authority, it ranked higher in the hierarchy system.

Conclusion

This study approached Asali primarily as an Islamic Scholar. It investigated Asali intellectual formation, and how he claimed Islamic authority through mobility and how his charismatic authority faced challenges from traditional and legal authorities.

The first chapter of this study focused on the connection between mobility and Islamic knowledge transmission. By rooting the discussion on Dabbagh's biography of Asali, chapter one explained the importance of mobility in his scholarly endeavours. It argued that Asali claimed authority through the Ijaza (permission, diploma) and isnad (transmitter) system of Islamic learning. By exploring his intellectual training in India, chapter one also argued that Asali's training in India shaped him as a polymath, which contributed to his thorough integration with Central Asian Islamic communities, rather than the Ottoman ones.

Chapter two pieced together a narrative on Asali's go-between activities between the Ottoman empire and Xinjiang. Through this, this chapter examined aspects of what constitutes Asali's Islamic authority. First, it seeks to explain Asali's attempts to insert himself into the elite circles of Xinjiang through his high profile as a Hadith scholar and an erudite historian. It then explored his intermediary role in the relationship between the Muslim communities in the western borderland of China and the Ottoman empire in two ways. Firstly, through his continuous travels across these regions. These travels functioned as the cultural capital for him. This type of trans-imperial mobility served him well in front of the Ottoman court and the Muslim communities in Xinjiang since both sides sought a bridge for communication. Secondly, what makes Asali's case unique is that he acted only on his own will as an intellectual entrepreneur who sought to establish authority in Istanbul and Xinjiang. The last chapter focused on Asali's life from 1911 to 1932. In this period, Asali's Islamic authority developed into a type of charismatic authority. This chapter used Max Weber's

tripartite classification of authority as the conceptual framework. By rooting the analyses on Asali's writings, official documents from the Ottoman and Chinese governments, and the Soviet newspaper articles penned by Asali, this chapter pieced together a narrative on Asali's relationship with the government authorities the non-governmental social elites. It argued that the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was on the lowest level of the hierarchy shaped by the three Weberian types of authorities. The case of Asali demonstrated that the charismatic authority of Islamic scholars was not sustainable without the support of the traditional and legal authorities.

Generally, with gradual development, the Islamic authority represented by charismatic figures like Asali would somehow clash with the legal authority. Because the core of any type of authority is a state of superiority, this superiority remains the justification for any state powers. For an actor like Asali, there is always a limit to his or her charismatic authority. In other words, the power achieved through knowledge, in this context, Islamic knowledge, is functioning within the structure of legal authority. At some point, it imitates the legal authority. If the legal authority tolerates this type of resemblance, then the charismatic authority will become a traditional authority.

For the case of Asali, his career remained mainly in Muslim societies that atheist or non-Islamic governments ruled. We cannot see through his real intentions for such a career choice. Besides cliché speculations such as *talab ilm* (seeking knowledge), we cannot understand his motivation for such a ceaseless travelling lifestyle. However, we do see challenges and opportunities presented by foreign societies for such a trans-imperial figure. As this study demonstrated, the *Ijaza* and *Isnad* system in Islamic learning indeed produce authority, but it is an essential and non-threatening authority in front of the legal and traditional authorities. What ultimately decides the development of authority remains in the networks of authority. To fulfil the development of a potential Islamic authority, one must

rely on the institutional power granted by the traditional and legal authority, which this study reckons as the networks of authority.

This study also demonstrated the limit of national historiographies at the age of steam and print, conceived as the first era of globalization. The development of technology boomed the spread of information, and it also significantly enhanced human being's mobility. However, the late-nineteenth century was the peak of western imperial powers, which presented themselves as the developing drive of human societies. Accordingly, trans-imperial travelling was seen as a western fashion. In this sense, while analyzing the trans-imperial mobilities within the dichotomy of West and East or any specific national historiography, historians tend to neglect the potential connectedness of human societies. Thus, this study presents a challenge to the historiography of trans-imperial history. Following conceptualization John-Paul A. Ghobrial, this study also advocates the study of global or transnational history through the lenses of microhistories.

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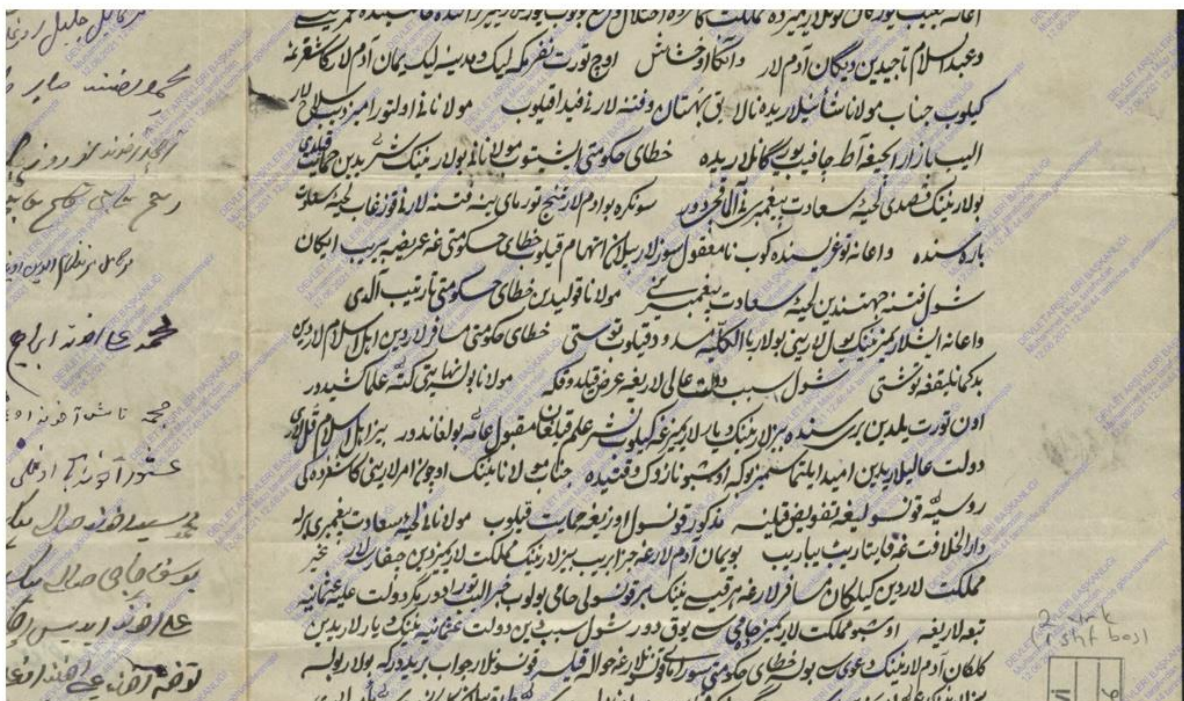
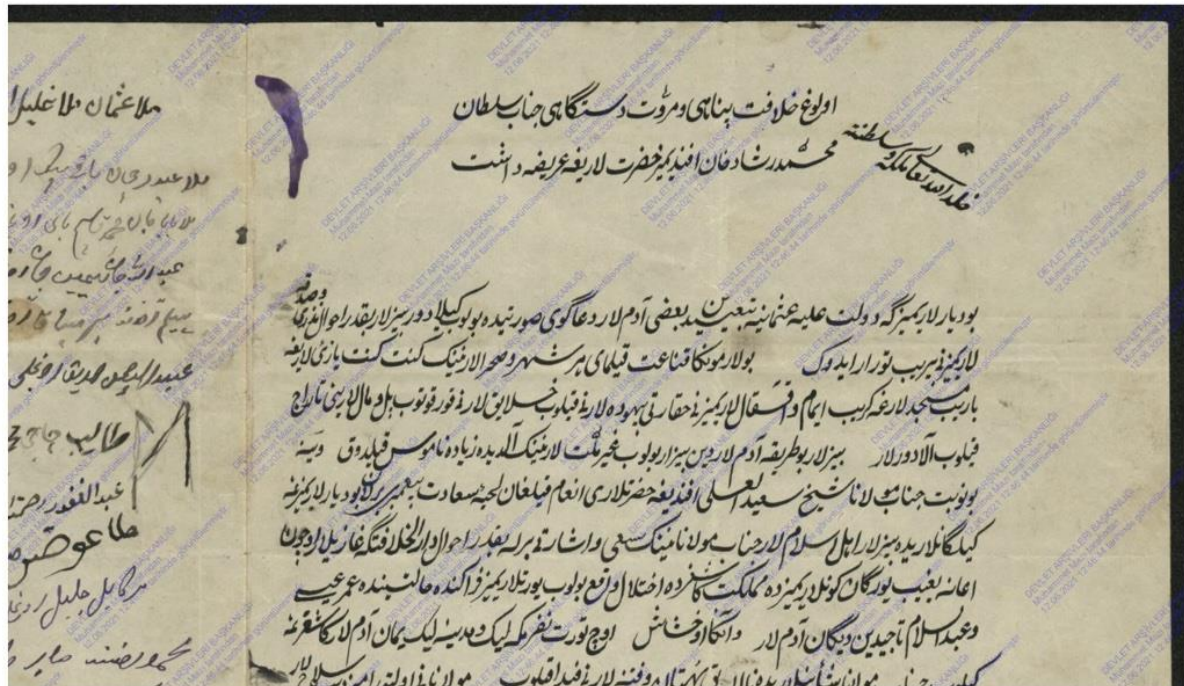
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Appendix

Sample of sources

The collective letter of Asali's Kasharian supporters



بارکسند و اعانه و عربسند و لب نامعقول سوزلار سول اهرام قیام و حبس سوزی هر صیبه برب ارجان
 شول فتنه چهنسندین لینه سعادت بفرستین مولانا قلیزین خطای حکمتی آرتیب الی
 واعانه ایشلا کیمیزنیکین لارینی بولار بالکلیه سوز و قیوت سستی خطای حکمتی سوزلار دین ایشلا لارین
 بکیمین قیوت سستی شول سبب دولت عالی لاریغی عرض قلمد و کله مولانا بولار سبب کله عکاسیدور
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بایست بچای اسحاق علی اوغلی
 سیدخان سید محمد آغا اوغلی
 غلام الفیروز ولد عبدالغفور خیرالدین عیاضا روهی
 عبدالرحیم آقاوند ولد علی اوغلی
 محمد امین انکونه اسیر و الا علی اوغلی
 من الیه یک شویشتا رشتا قورلوق قورلوق
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عريضة الى ملك العثمانيه اعظمي
 قدم نفر من عرب البحرين في يوم عيسى وعبد السلام تاج الدين وعبد القادر ومحمد صالح الدهر المكي وعبد القادر وعبد
 الى بنا وجموعا على حكم بالسلام ولولا ان رجال الحكومة الهنوية تداركوني ودافعوا عن نفسي وما لي القتل في هذا
 واللام الى ان الحكومة الهنوية انتزعت الشجرة النبوية من يدي سبقتي هؤلاء واخوانهم وقد احترمتي تلك الحكومة بالانكسار
 الكينية ومتى وردوا احرمت العاليية بوسيلة قنصل الدولة الروسية الموجود في ستر جاع الاثر الشريف الى
 عبدكم وتاديب المذكورين اجرت الحكومة ذلك
 فارجوس الدولة الهنوية الحيا فظة على نفسي وتفرقت
 ان كينة الهنوية قد دفعت الى بارادة سنية بوسيلة القنصلية وهذا عمالا لا يخفى ولا سبيل الى دعوى انما مكرهه ونفذه
 على صاحب الشجرة صلى الله عليه وسلم او على الدولة جاشا وكلا فبعدكم يفتش ويطلب برائته فان لم يجد من التزوير وهرس
 في هذا الباب والاسلام عماد عام المذكورين من انهم مفتشون من طرزالع الهنوية وانهم اعدوا بالتحقيق على احوالهم
 والشجرة النبوية التي يدي وضبطها واجراء الجرا على وغير ذلك مما يقولونه بافواههم فارجوا الى اللبس والابهام على
 هذا وان قنصل الدولة الروسية لم يقصر من ابتداء وقوع الاشكال في هذه الديار الى وقتنا هذا في الحيا فظة على ما والمسلمين
 ههنا واموالهم واعراضهم والمدارسة عنهم بالقول والافعال بما يخص ما اجراه في حق هذا الامر والارث الشريف مما يجب على ان
 خصوا وكل مسلم عموما والافقة فان لم يغير لم يصادف في مروه ما بين استناده وكما شرف من البلاد الروسية والارث
 والاحترام فلاجل هذا اكرر رجائي بان توسطوا بطرس برج والدولة الروسية في ان يكتب الى قنصلها في كافر
 في ستر جاع الاثر الشريف الى يدي واسترادي الى الاستانة الهنوية واجراء الجرا على اولئك الشجر الذين خروا شرف الاسلام
 وناسو القتل على حيا يقتضيه الفزع والعدل والحق والون
 وهذا ما اكرهه الاستر جاع والار جاع بصدقه ورجح
 اكر الى الدولة وافراد الملكة والاطهاره واصدق الحق ويطلب الباطل
 رافع عريضة الى سديكم وانا
 اسير بخصور قلعة كاشغرا فاسي الزوارع الذال والهوان والامر على الامر افنديم
 الله ولي ولا اله
 سعي على
 ١٢ جيب ٣١٤

الكينية ومتى وردوا احرمت العاليية بوسيلة قنصل الدولة الروسية الموجود في ستر جاع الاثر الشريف الى
 عبدكم وتاديب المذكورين اجرت الحكومة ذلك
 فارجوس الدولة الهنوية الحيا فظة على نفسي وتفرقت
 ان كينة الهنوية قد دفعت الى بارادة سنية بوسيلة القنصلية وهذا عمالا لا يخفى ولا سبيل الى دعوى انما مكرهه ونفذه
 على صاحب الشجرة صلى الله عليه وسلم او على الدولة جاشا وكلا فبعدكم يفتش ويطلب برائته فان لم يجد من التزوير وهرس
 في هذا الباب والاسلام عماد عام المذكورين من انهم مفتشون من طرزالع الهنوية وانهم اعدوا بالتحقيق على احوالهم
 والشجرة النبوية التي يدي وضبطها واجراء الجرا على وغير ذلك مما يقولونه بافواههم فارجوا الى اللبس والابهام على
 هذا وان قنصل الدولة الروسية لم يقصر من ابتداء وقوع الاشكال في هذه الديار الى وقتنا هذا في الحيا فظة على ما والمسلمين
 ههنا واموالهم واعراضهم والمدارسة عنهم بالقول والافعال بما يخص ما اجراه في حق هذا الامر والارث الشريف مما يجب على ان
 خصوا وكل مسلم عموما والافقة فان لم يغير لم يصادف في مروه ما بين استناده وكما شرف من البلاد الروسية والارث
 والاحترام فلاجل هذا اكرر رجائي بان توسطوا بطرس برج والدولة الروسية في ان يكتب الى قنصلها في كافر
 في ستر جاع الاثر الشريف الى يدي واسترادي الى الاستانة الهنوية واجراء الجرا على اولئك الشجر الذين خروا شرف الاسلام
 وناسو القتل على حيا يقتضيه الفزع والعدل والحق والون
 وهذا ما اكرهه الاستر جاع والار جاع بصدقه ورجح
 اكر الى الدولة وافراد الملكة والاطهاره واصدق الحق ويطلب الباطل
 رافع عريضة الى سديكم وانا
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 الله ولي ولا اله
 سعي على
 ١٢ جيب ٣١٤



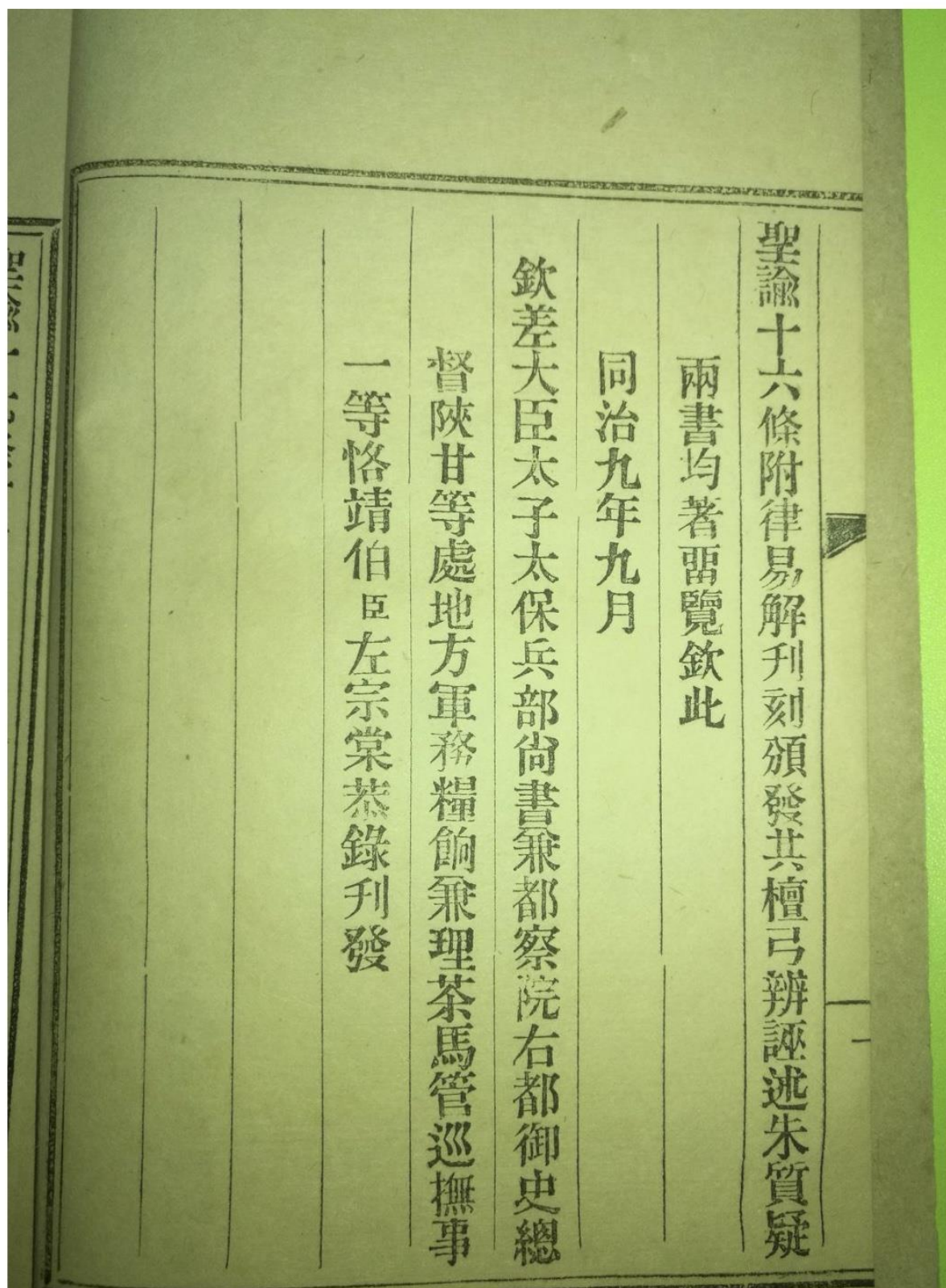
ترجمة حياة مترجم الكتاب

لقيت المرة الثانية الاستاذ اللغوي المحدث الكبير الشيخ سعيد بن محمد بن الشيخ عبد الواحد العسلي الشهير بفضلته وأدبه في الاقطار الاسلامية وغيرها ولما كان في ترجمة أعظم الرجال ضمان لذكر ما تركهم وأخبارهم وبخيلتها في السطور افادة لمن يقرأها وارشاد الى مشوبة حسنة فقد وطدت النفس على تدوين ترجمة الشيخ وأثبتها بقلم نزهة عن محاباة ومجاملة * ورفع عن خداع ومخاتلة ولو لم يكن للمذكور فضل الا رحلاته المفيدة في الاقطار الشاسعة والممالك القاصية مع استمساكه بالعروة الوثقى التي لا انفصام لها لكفى وما حفظ جامعة العربي وصان شمله من الشتات عتاد كعنايته بحياة نوابغ الرجال من امته وغيرها فلا غرو اذا اتدبت لترجمة حياة الفاضل العسلي وهو من الفضل بمحل الانسان من العين

(الشيخ سعيد) ولد سنة سبع وثمانين ومائتين والف ونشأ في عائلته (بيت العسلي) في قرية عزقي من ملحقات الضنية والضنية مديرية تابعة لطرابلس الشام الفيحاء خرج من بلده قاصداً بيت المقدس فدمشق فطبرية فنبلس راجلاً حفظ كتاب الله المجيد في المدرسة الحيرية هناك في ستة أشهر وقرأ على المقرئ المفضل الشيخ حسين السرخي والشيخ اسماعيل المصري وغيرهما من أفاضل القراء وهو ابن ست عشرة ثم قدم الازهر سنة الف وثلاث مائة وخمس فقرأ شرح الطائ ومنزل مسكين والعيني على متن الكنز في الفقه على استاذنا المرحوم الشيخ مصطفى النظم الحنفي واستاذنا المرحوم الفقيه المؤرخ العلامة الشيخ مسعود النابلسي وحفظ متن التنوير في الفقه أيضاً والالفية والشافية في النحو والصرف ثم رحل الى العراق والتي عصا تسياره في بغداد فقرأ على فضلائها في اخاتونية والمرجانية والقادرية ومن خيرة من تلقى عنه العلم فيها الشيخ عبد الوهاب أفندي نائب قاضي القضاة وأخوه الشيخ سعيد النقشبندی ومن الفقهاء الشيخ سعيد الدوري والشيخ عبد اللطيف البغدادي مدرس الحضرة القادرية والعلامة الشيخ نعمان أفندي الآلوسي شيخ علماء دار السلام وزامل في التلقي عن ذكر من هؤلاء الأفاضل أنجال نقيب أشراف بغداد ثم أطلع منها شراعه الى فارس فلم يطب له انقام فيها لانتشار الشيعة وضعف أهل السنة وهي كما تعلم

I

اوغلى نبرسى اوغرىلاب سانسە انا بابانينك حقيدا اناب قويغان الليك مو
 برنى¹⁷⁵ اوزاق برکه فارلايدور فارلاب ايباركان برده قاتيق خيزمت که سالادور باباسى
 آناسى نينك راسلاب قويغان زو تانك⁴³ جايى دين ياشونوقچه⁴⁴ بر اوى نينك
 مقدارچه سانسودك بولسه كيجيك فلاقدا يتميشنى سوقادور اوج اوى نينك مقدارچه
 5 برنى سانسە بر حصه كناه چونك فلاقدا بوزنى سوقوب اوج بلليق قرار بيلان بش
 بوزنينك بريکه فارلايدو بر آنا بابادىن توغولغان اوروق توققان نينك بال لارىنى
 بر بريکه اليب برماك يوق مبادا اليب برکان بولسه چونك فلاقدا ايكي لا طرفى
 اتميش دين سوقوب ايريب آنادو
 غيرى كيشى نينك بلاسىنى ينه برو بقيب السه اوروغى البشيب قالادور الفوجىنى
 10 چونك فلاقدا اتميشنى سوقادور بلا برکوجىنى هم اتميشنى سوقوب بلاى توققان
 آناسى غه ياندوروب برىدور
 بر كيشى نينك برى سوبى فل اموالى تولا بولسه مونينك اوروق توققانلارىدىن
 نامراتى بولسه برىدىن بر فارجه بر چقاريب تريب چقان⁴⁵ اشليغىنى برسه مونداق
 كشىنى اوز برىداكى منصب دار [بيلادو]
 16 اولوغ خاندىن التفات تىلاب ايلاتقاسا⁴⁶ نويغا⁴⁷ قىليب التفات نكورادو اناب
 قويغان بى تن⁴⁸ برنى اوغرىلاب ساتقان كيشى خنيه⁴⁹ برنى اوغرىلاب ساتقان
 كشيکه اوخشاش لوى لوى⁵⁰ بيلان بىلادور
 اوى توتوب اولتورغان همه آدم نينك خوشنىسى بار ارته اخشام كوروشكان ده
 اتفاق ليق بيلان كوروشوب اوروش تلاش قىليب دعوا قىلشاسون مبارك باد ايشى
 20 بولسه مبارك باد قىلش سون كشى اولسه من ما باراي ديب باريب كلغذ كويدورسون
 كيشى نينك اوبىنى سو باسسا انشيب⁵¹ برسون اوت كتمسه همهسى اوجوروشوب برسون
 فراچى يا اوغرى كلسه همه قبلاشسون⁵² بولك كيشى نينك آبروسى بار ايكان من
 آرزان ايكان من ديب رستهسى⁵³ كلماسون من زور كشى ديب بولش كشىنى آنای
 نافماسون⁵⁴ فلى يوق خوشنىسى غه من بانكلاشاي⁵⁵ دبسون خوشنىسى نينك فلى
 25 بولماسا انينك اوجون كوچ چقارامن دبسون مونداق بولغاندا اتفاق بولوشماغانى قابداق
 اتفاق بولماسا غيب⁵⁶ قىلاشيب تىلاشيب داد خواهلاب همهسى فلىنى نوكتايب اتادور
 همهسى فلىنى خرلاب نوكتايب بولوب همه اورنى بار ايشلارىدىن ينىكى لىب⁵⁷ كيتادور
 بو قىلغان كناهلار نينك طريقىسى كين
 كيشىنى بى عذرى تىلاسا كيجيك فلاقدا اونى سوقادور برى برىنى تىلاشسا
 30 تنك هر ايكي لاسىنى كيجيك فلاقدا اوندىن سوقادور



同治七年十一月二十三日奉

上諭前據侍郎胡肇智呈進前任安徽穎州府教授夏

炘恭繹

聖諭十六條附律易解一卷暨所撰檀弓辨誣三卷述朱
質疑十六卷當交南書房翰林閱看據稱該員所
輯附律易解尙得周官與民讀法遺意用於講約
甚有裨益其檀弓辨誣述朱質疑二書亦均能有
所發明該員年屆耄耋篤學不倦甚屬可嘉卽著
武英殿將該員所繹