PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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PRAYER AGAINST FEVER, CONNECTED WITH THE NAME OF KHwÄJA AHMAD YASAWÎ

A lot is connected with the name and personality of a mystic Ahmad Yasawi (d. 886/1166) from Central Asia: he founded tarîqat Yasawîyya, an extensive literature exists on Ahmad Yasawi and on the tarîqat founded by him [1]. To him a collection of mystical poems — hikmat (intricacies) in Jaghatâ'î language called Dîwân-i hikmat is ascribed [2]. Ahmad Yasawi is mentioned in some sources of mystical character as an author of such texts. In this respect of special interest is a small text du‘ã — a prayer connected with the name of Ahmad Yasawi. In it his spirit is mentioned as a means which helps to remove fever (bizgak).

In the list of works in Persian Murâd al-‘ârîfîn [3], by a Jaghatâ'î poet Śûfi Allâhârî (1644—1724) [4] we have found an enclosure on a separate sheet — a du‘ã text (fig. 1) addressed to a certain person — Allah qâl bîk. Reasoning from its contents, the text can conditionally be called Du‘ã-yi Khadrât Khwâ‘ija Ahmad Yasawi (Khadrât Khwâ‘ija Ahmad Yasawi’s Prayer).

Muslim Turks from Central Asia consider Ahmad Yasawi [5] the second in the spiritual hierarchy after Prophet Muhammâd [6]. In different sources Ahmad Yasawi was usually mentioned as a Śûfi shaykh [7], and folk beliefs turned him into a “spirit” resisting disease [8]. This was a widely used practice. Bakshî, a folk healer, in his ritual dances in the process of healing of an ill person usually turned to help of saints [9]. He could be engaged in healing of an ill person with the help of a special dance or other methods. Accordingly, texts resisting certain diseases appeared.

Du‘ã—prayers played an important role in the spiritual life of Central Asia. There were special du‘ã to cure from any disease. There were particular prayers for creating favourable conditions for advancement of a certain business; for solution of various personal problems; for development of trade [10]; against rivals [11]; they can be found in epigraphical monuments [12] etc. Special books were written where texts of prayers and fortune-telling were collected [13].

Belief and the need for mystical texts also existed after colonization of Central Asia by Russia (from 1867). These texts were also popular among Russian population of Turkistan. For example, in the beginning of the 20th century “in Tasjkent they told fortune by handwritten books. In the Russian part of Tasjkent there was a sort female fortune-teller to whose house often came Russian intelligent ladies who were quite satisfied with the old woman’s fortune-telling by the book” [14]. At the same time the tumârs were widely spread — talismans against the evil eye inside which prayer—du‘ã was put. N. Lykoshin wrote that he had seen a “fortune-teller giving his clients talismans written on scraps of paper” [15]. Tumâr (tûmâr) — talismans as a means of resistance of different kinds of diseases, ailment and the evil eye still play an important role in the region.

The concerned text of du‘ã—prayer against fever is written on a rectangular sheet of paper, sizes 14,5 × 13. The size of the text is 11 × 8,5. Nasta‘î script, black ink. We have no exact date of this prayer’s creation; the language can approximately be dated to the 18th—19th centuries. According to its poetic style, the text, to some extent, reminds of the hikmat from Dîwân-i hikmat ascribed to A. Yasawi [16]. Partly the text is written in rhyming prose (sajî). The choice of rhyme was often in detriment of sense. That is why in several cases a translation is very difficult to make, it can only be approximate.

By composition the text of the prayer consists of two parts: an introductory part — the destination of the prayer [17]; and the text of the prayer itself (du‘ã) [18].

The introductory part is written in Persian with elements of the Tajik language which is typical of Persian texts of Central Asia beginning from, approximately, 18th century. The text of the prayer itself is in Jaghatâ'î. This must have been done to emphasize the sacral character of the text. Apart from the basmala in the beginning of the prayer, after the introductory part, there is nothing in the text which accentuates its Islamic character.

The most important part of the text is driving out the disease with the help of A. Yasawi’s spirit. In Central Asia there was a rite kûchûriq (“eviction”, “removal”, “driving out”) [19]. In shamanism the rite in which the shaman healed an ill person was considered a rite of a spirit’s removal — kûchûriq [20]. In our case the text of the prayer in its essence is close to the abovementioned rite of driving out of spirits.

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