

---

---

# TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

A. Alekseev

## MAḤMŪD B. AMĪR WALĪ AND HIS *BAḤR AL-ASRĀR*

### I. The data about the biography and the works of Maḥmūd b. Amīr Walī

Most part of Muslim writings has been authorised, and *Baḥr al-asrār fī manāqib al-akhyār* is no exception. The author of this voluminous work on the world history and geography is Maḥmūd b. Amīr Walī. The information about the author that we possess is fragmentary and is obtained from his work in which the material is scattered confusedly. Most of the data on Maḥmūd b. Walī's biography is contained in the chapter dedicated to his travel to India [1].

In the first volume of his work he calls the Farghānā valley the motherland of his ancestors. His father Amīr Walī originated from the Farghānā Kāsān (at present the Kāsān region of the Namanghān oblast' of the Republic of Uzbekistān) and came from the family of Sa'īd Aḥmad Kh<sup>w</sup>āja b. Sa'īd Jalāl al-Dīn Kāsānī (d. btw. 949—56 / 1542—9), a prominent theologian of the 10th/16th century. Amīr Walī himself was considered a very educated man. He is the author of a number of poetic works which he wrote under a literary pseudonym (*takhalluṣ*) "Mīr Khislat". The title *amīr* proves to his noble origin [2]. According to Maḥmūd b. Walī, his father had moved to Balkh — the home town of the author — during the reign of Shīrbānīd Pīr-Muḥammad-khān I (953—74 / 1546—67) [3].

The exact year of birth of Maḥmūd b. Walī is not mentioned, but it can be calculated according to the following data: Maḥmūd b. Walī mentions that at the age of 19 he became a pupil (*murīd*) of a famous *shaykh* theologian Mīrak-shāh al-Ḥusaynī [4] and remained with him for 9 years, i. e. until the death of Mīrak-shāh, which was in the last day of the month of jumādā II 1033 / April, 18th, 1624. Thus, he became *shaykh*'s student in 1023/1614, and so Maḥmūd b. Walī was born in 1004/1595–6. We must also mention the fact that Mīrak-shāh and Maḥmūd b. Walī were relatives, as the future historian and writer's sister was his teacher's wife.

Mīrak-shāh obviously possessed a large library, as Maḥmūd b. Walī wrote that while serving his teacher he had managed to get familiar with numerous works on history, literary theory, historical geography, among which he distinguished the works by Ibn al-Faḥḥ, Muqaddasī,

al-Iṣṭakhrī, Zakariyyā' b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, Banākātī, Waṣṣāf, Rashīd al-Dīn, Juwaynī and Mīrkh<sup>w</sup>ānd, who we will refer to later in connection with the sources of *Baḥr al-asrār* [5].

Maḥmūd b. Walī began his literary activity when he was still a *murīd*. By Mīrak-shāh al-Ḥusaynī's order he wrote a Ṣūfī tractate *Rawā'ih-i ṭayyiba* ("Delicate Aroma") which, as well as all his other works except *Baḥr al-asrār* has not preserved until our days [6].

After his teacher's death Maḥmūd b. Walī left the abode and went travelling to enrich and deepen his education. With a caravan of merchants going to India he arrived to Delhī in the month of shawwāl 1034 / June—July 1625 through Kābul, Peshāwar and Lāhawr (Lahore). Having visited Delhī, he set off to Ḥilālābād, then to Āgrā, Allāhābād and Banāras (Benares). After the visit to the city of Ṭayyib, the centre of the Bīkhār province, Maḥmūd b. Walī went to Ceylon on aboard a Portuguese ship. The ship got into a storm and together with the crew and the passengers it was cast ashore in the mouth of Ganges. Maḥmūd b. Walī was captured by the Great Mughals, and his fate could have been a sad one if he hadn't found a patron among one of the local feudal lords — Bāqī-khān b. Muṣṭafā-bek. Bāqī-khān detained our author during two years. It was to him that Maḥmūd gave his work called *Risālat-i Bīkhāriyya* ("The Bīkhār Tractate") which he had completed in Golkondā. In captivity Maḥmūd b. Walī led quite a well-to-do life, was engaged in literary activity and participated in poetic contests (*munāzara*). Such treatment of a noble and educated captive was quite natural. Many rulers eagerly attracted scholars and writers to their courts, thus raising the prestige of their lands. Besides, scholars, and especially writers and historians were carriers of a powerful ideological weapon — the artistic word — which they could turn for as well as against this or that ruler.

In the beginning of 1037/1628 he was set free and in the same year moved to Āgrā, where he was warmly welcomed by the Great Mughal Shāh Jahān. In the following year Maḥmūd b. Walī went home through Panjāb. On his