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THE PLACE OF SHAHABUDDIN SUHRAWARDI IN THE SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL CENTRE OF BAGHDAD

Abstract. *This article analyses, on the basis of historical sources, the development of science and enlightenment during the period in which Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardi, who lived and worked in the 12th–13th centuries, carried out his activities. The study highlights the scientific and cultural environment of the Abbasid period, the role of Baghdad as a centre of learning, the madrasas and libraries, and the processes of development of Sufism, fiqh, hadith and the other Islamic sciences. In addition, the influence of this scholarly environment on the scientific and educational activities of Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardi and on the formation of his work “Awarif al-Ma‘arif” is analysed. The results of the research demonstrate the necessity of studying Suhrawardi’s legacy in close connection with the scientific and cultural processes of the period in which he lived.*

Keywords: *Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardi, science and enlightenment, Baghdad, Abbasid period, Islamic sciences, madrasas, scholarly environment, “Awarif al-Ma‘arif”, Islamic culture.*

INTRODUCTION

The 12th–13th centuries are considered one of the highest stages in the development of science and enlightenment in the history of Islamic civilisation. During this period religious and secular sciences developed in such major centres of learning as Baghdad, Nishapur, Damascus, Bukhara and Samarkand; the activities of madrasas and libraries expanded; and a rich scholarly heritage was created by scholars and thinkers. Particularly during the Abbasid period, the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge were recognised as important factors in the development of society. It was in such an

intellectual and educational environment that Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardi (1145–1234) lived and worked, gaining recognition as one of the leading jurists, hadith scholars and thinkers of his time (Mukhamedov, 2019: 7–14).

The aim of the article is to reveal the scientific and cultural environment of Baghdad in the Abbasid period and to determine its influence on the formation of Suhrawardi's worldview and on his work "Awarif al-Ma'arif". The study is based on historical-comparative, descriptive and analytical methods and on the generalisation of the data of medieval sources and of contemporary research literature.

MAIN PART

Suhrawardi's education and his teachers in Baghdad

Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardi made a significant contribution not only to the development of Sufi theory but also to the broad dissemination of knowledge and enlightenment. His work "Awarif al-Ma'arif" is one of the important sources in the history of medieval Islamic thought, in which questions of knowledge, morality, the education of the perfect human being and spiritual perfection are discussed in depth (Saidkhanbaleva, 2026:420–429).

Suhrawardi arrived in Baghdad while still young. There he came under the care of his uncle, the Iranian Sufi and preacher Ziya al-Din Abu al-Najib Suhrawardi (d. 1168), who had a profound influence on the development of his worldview. Abu al-Najib was born in 1097 in the city of Suhraward in the Jibal province of Persia, in present-day Azerbaijan. In 1113 he moved to Baghdad, where he studied the Islamic sciences, Arabic grammar and literature.

The Sufi ribat belonging to his uncle Abu al-Najib Suhrawardi, as well as the Nizamiyya Madrasa where his uncle had once taught, became the first school for Shahabuddin Suhrawardi. According to Suhrawardi himself, he received both the exoteric and the esoteric sciences from his uncle.

Among Suhrawardi's teachers in Islamic law and hadith were Abul-Qasim ibn Fadlan, Abu al-Muzaffar Jalal al-Din Shibli, Ma'mur ibn Fakhar, Abu al-Fadl al-Tayi (475–555/1097–1177), Abu Dharr al-Muqtasidi (1097–1177) and other thinkers. His teachers in Sufism included the famous preachers and Sufis Shaykh Abu Sa'id al-Baghdadi (d. 579/1201) and Shaykh Abu Muhammad Abdullah al-Basri (d. 582/1186), who had a great influence on the development of his religious-philosophical and mystical views.

During one of his annual pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, Suhrawardi met the greatest Sufi poet of the time, Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235). He was also acquainted with the great Sufi scholar Ibn Arabi (1165–1240). According to some sources, when Shaykh Ibn Arabi and Suhrawardi met in Baghdad in 618 AH, they both bowed to each other and then parted in silence. When Ibn Arabi was asked about Suhrawardi, he replied that Suhrawardi was entirely bound by the rulings of the Prophet (peace be upon him); and when Suhrawardi was asked about Ibn Arabi, he replied that Ibn Arabi was an ocean filled with divine truth (Suhrawardi, Sh. U., n.d.: 31; Addas, 1993:140).

Suhrawardi was a great preacher. After the death of his uncle Abu al-Najib Suhrawardi in 1168, Abu Hafs Suhrawardi began delivering sermons in his ribat. The sermons of this eloquent speaker inspired his listeners with extraordinary enthusiasm and spiritual excitement. Under the influence of his preaching many listeners shaved their heads as a sign of repentance and adopted an ascetic way of life; others wept continuously while listening to his words and sometimes even lost consciousness.

The classification of the sciences in the Abbasid period

During the Abbasid period traditional Islamic culture did not remain stagnant. By the time of the Arab historian and geographer al-Mas'udi (d. 956), the four principal theological and legal schools (madhhabs) of Sunni Islam had taken shape: the Maliki, the Hanafi, the Shafi'i and the Hanbali.

Medieval historians and philosophers paid special attention to the classification of the sciences known to them. They distinguished two branches of knowledge: the Arab-Muslim sciences, which included the specifically Islamic disciplines (the study of the Qur'an, hadith and Islamic law) as well as philology; and the "foreign sciences", namely those fields of knowledge adopted by the Arabs through contact with other peoples.

A more detailed classification of the sciences is presented in the famous "Muqaddimah" of the historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), which serves as an introduction to his multi-volume historical work (Filippinsky, n.d.:304). In addition to the study of the Qur'an, hadith and Islamic law (fiqh), Ibn Khaldun included theology (kalam), Muslim mysticism (Sufism), philology (primarily the Arabic language and Arabic poetry) and even dream interpretation among the traditional Arab sciences. Under the general heading of "philosophy" he grouped the foreign or rational sciences, including logic (Aristotle's "Organon"), physics (which encompassed medicine, agriculture, magic, talismans, illusionism and alchemy), metaphysics, mathematics

(including questions of trade and inheritance), optics, the preparation of astronomical tables, astrology and music.

Medicine and the natural sciences

Medieval Arab medicine achieved remarkable successes, and scholars such as Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes; d. 925) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna; 980–1037) made invaluable contributions to its development. Abu Bakr al-Razi's work "Kitab al-Tibb al-Mansuri" ("The Book of Medicine Dedicated to Mansur") provided descriptions of all the diseases known in his time. Ibn Sina's "Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb" ("The Canon of Medicine") served for many centuries as one of the principal medical textbooks not only in the countries of the East but also in medieval Europe.

During that period medical knowledge and skills were transmitted from teacher to student both practically and theoretically: students acquired information through written manuals as well as through oral instruction (Filippinsky, n.d.: 305). The physicians of the Abbasid era were able to distinguish various diseases and pathologies with great precision. They also possessed an excellent knowledge of human anatomy and of the structure and arrangement of the organs and muscles. Herbal remedies and infusions were primarily used in the treatment of patients; stomach pains and intestinal disorders, for example, were treated with decoctions of ginger and hawthorn. At the same time Arab physicians were well acquainted with the history of world medicine.

Baghdad as a centre of learning

In Baghdad the Bayt al-Hikma Academy – the "House of Wisdom" – was established by Caliph al-Ma'mun (786–833) in the 820s. It included an observatory and a library where ancient Greek and Roman treatises were preserved and translated into Arabic. Paper production began, and the first pharmacies and hospitals in the East were established. The following figures lived and worked in Baghdad: the physician Abu Bakr al-Razi (865–925), the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi (d. 1229), the historian al-Mas'udi (d. 956), the traveller Ahmad ibn Fadlan (10th century), and the philosophers al-Kindi (d. 873) and al-Farabi (873–950).

Arab mathematicians and astronomers inherited the traditions of the Greek scholars. During the Middle Ages Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi of Balkh (d. 886) and Muhammad al-Khwarizmi of Khwarazm (d. in the mid-9th century) became famous astronomers in Baghdad. It should be emphasised that Persian thinkers made especially important contributions to the development of medieval Arab-Muslim science and culture. Arabic astronomy gave us such words as "zenith" and "nadir". Processes such as distillation,

sublimation, calcination and filtration emerged from the world of chemistry, and modern chemists still use Arabic systems of weights and measures.

Industries such as perfumery flourished during the Abbasid era: dozens of types of oil were produced from violet, lotus, saffron, dwarf palm and other plants. Labour processes were also improved during the Abbasid period. Watermills and floating mills, for example, were developed, freeing people from the difficulty of grinding grain by hand. The largest mill in Baghdad, the Patricia Mill, contained one hundred millstones and generated an annual income of one hundred million dirhams.

The humanities: historiography, genealogy, poetry and prose

The humanities also developed significantly (Filippinsky, n.d.:306–307). One of the most important fields of intellectual activity during the Abbasid era was historiography. Thus the principal surviving work of the 10th-century Arab thinker al-Mas‘udi, “Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Stones”, is a historical work. Its prose passages contain biographical information about poets, describing, for example, their meetings with notable individuals and explaining the circumstances under which particular poems were composed. Often this information was presented in the form of legends enriched with motifs from folk tales.

The Qur’an played a major role in shaping the historical consciousness of the Arabs and of all the peoples who later embraced Islam, by presenting human history as a sequence of prophetic missions. This chain culminates with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the “Seal of the Prophets”. Influenced by both Islamic and biblical ideas of history, Arab-Muslim genealogists connected the genealogies of the Arab tribes with biblical history. The science of genealogy (shajara) received additional impetus during the reign of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab. He introduced a special system known as the “diwan” for paying the participants in Muslim military campaigns. An important component of this system was the maintenance of registers in which warriors and their relatives were recorded according to tribal affiliation. Tribal identity thus became closely linked with social prestige and material well-being. The first Arab-Muslim author to systematise genealogical information and tribal customs was Muhammad al-Kalbi (d. 763). His son Hisham (d. 819) supplemented and recorded his works. Similar genealogies were compiled by other authors, such as Abu Yaqzan al-Nassaba (d. 805). Later, specialists such as Haysam ibn Adi (d. 821) and Mus‘ab al-Zubayri (d. 847 or 850) emerged in the field of genealogy.

Medieval Arabic poetry was also highly diverse in terms of genre. Medieval Arabs were renowned as tellers of tales, anecdotes, fables, short stories and entertaining narratives from urban life. Such stories were extremely popular and became a permanent part of the repertoire of street storytellers.

The compilers of anthologies of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry also showed great interest in medieval Arabic prose, whose formation coincided with the Abbasid era. A new genre of prose literature emerged – “adab” (proper conduct and etiquette) – dealing with the normative behaviour of a Sufi towards his shaykh and his fellow disciples, with the rules regulating these relationships, and with the observance of religious customs. Adab literature instructs individuals on how to attain contentment through proper conduct. The emergence and development of this genre are associated with such figures as Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 779), al-Jahiz (775–868) and Ibn Qutaybah (828–889).

Sufism and Sufi literature

Muslim mysticism (Sufism), which emerged in the eighth century, became widespread in the tenth and eleventh centuries and developed various forms and directions within Islam. In the subsequent centuries the centre of the Sufi movement shifted from Iran to Khurasan and Mawarannahr. Important Sufi works include Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi's (d. 384/994) “Ta'arruf li-Madhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf” (“Book of Introduction to the Doctrine of the People of Sufism”), Abu Talib al-Makki's “Qut al-Qulub” (“Nourishment of Hearts”), Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami's (d. 412/1021) “Tabaqat al-Sufiyya” (“Classes of the Sufis”), Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri's (d. 465/1074) “Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi ‘Ilm al-Tasawwuf”, Muhammad al-Ghazali's (d. 555/1111) “Ihya' ‘Ulum al-Din” (“Revival of the Religious Sciences”), Abu al-Najib Suhrawardi's (d. 546/1168) “Adab al-Muridin” (“Rules of Conduct for Novice Sufis”) and others (Filippinsky, n.d.:305–315; History of the East, 2000: 263; Suhrawardi, Abu Najib, 1993).

Sufi poetry gained widespread popularity throughout the Islamic world beginning in the tenth century. Among the prominent Sufi poets were Ibn al-Farid (1181–1235), Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Fakhr al-Din Iraqi (1211–1289) and others (The History of Iran, 1958: 331; Zakhoder, 1944; Ernst, 2002).

The influence of Muslim scholarship on European civilisation

The scientific and cultural flourishing that took place in the Muslim East between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, together with the intellectual potential of the Arab-Muslim world, constituted one of the fundamental factors that brought about a

decisive transformation in the development of European civilisation. Indeed, historical records from this period indicate that some of Europe's most prominent scholars either studied directly at Arab educational institutions or became closely acquainted with the Arab intellectual tradition through scholarly works. As a result, the writings of thinkers such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina became classical sources for European science during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In particular, fundamental studies in military science, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, geometry and sociology, as well as cultural and technological innovations such as Arab military technology, numerals, mechanical clocks, the compass, the astrolabe, pharmacology, soap and perfumery, profoundly transformed the daily and technological life of Western society.

CONCLUSION

The global scientific and cultural flourishing and the broad social and educational processes of the Muslim world outlined above served as the initial conceptual factor in shaping the religious-mystical worldview and the philosophical conceptions of Shahabuddin Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi, the founder of the Suhrawardiyya order.

Consequently, the system of the thinker's ideas and his distinctive mystical doctrine appear as the dialectical and natural product of the socio-political realities, the economic stability and the spiritual and ideological development of his era. This socio-intellectual environment, together with the author's conceptual views, was brought into a complete and systematic form in his fundamental work "Awarif al-Ma'arif", which exerted a direct influence not only on the intellectual life of his own age but also on the subsequent development of Sufi thought.

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