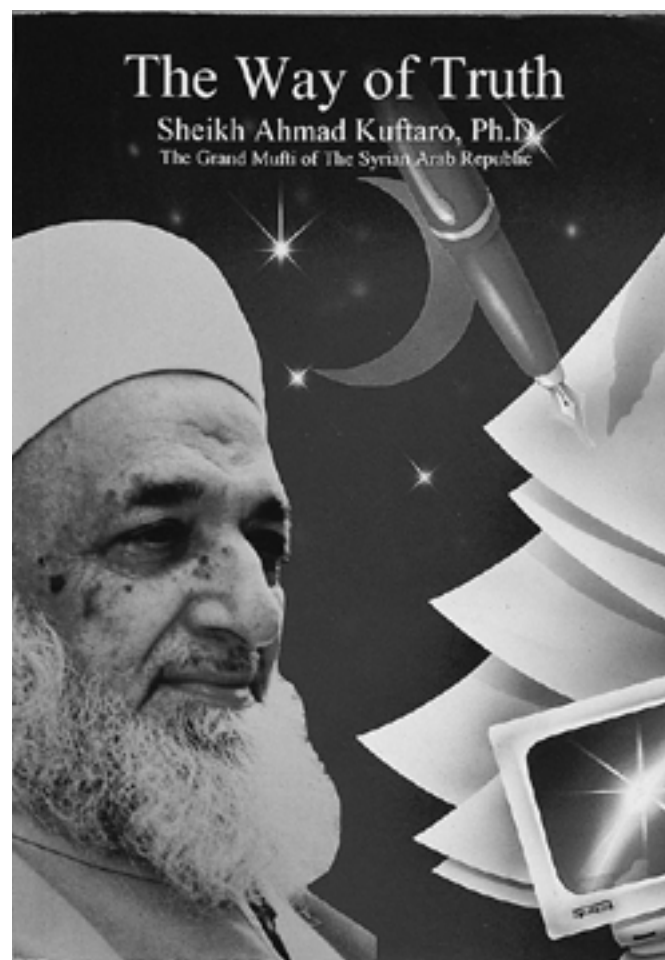


Book Presentation
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The Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia

The Naqshbandi order constitutes one of the leading Sufi orders (*tariqa*) in the Muslim world. Baha'al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), the order's eponym, originated from Bukhara in Khorasan. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the order developed into a world-wide organization, spreading to areas as culturally and geographically distant as Central Asia, Eastern Turkestan, India, China, Afghanistan, and the then Ottoman Empire (including the Balkans).



Cover of Sheikh Ahmad Kufaro's bestseller from 1997.

Of great importance for the diffusion of the Naqshbandi order was Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) from India, who, at the turn of the first millennium (Hijra) became one of its great innovators, thence gaining the epithet *mujaddid* (re-newer). He is, as so many other leading Naqshbandi figures, well-known both for his great wisdom and his powerful involvement in social and political affairs. Ahmad Sirhindi had an influential predecessor in Khoja 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar (d. 1490) from Samarqand, who is also remembered as a great religious personality and powerful community leader.

Another prominent Naqshbandi sheikh and re-newer was Mawlana Khalid (d. 1827), who belonged to a Kurdish tribe in what is today northern Iraq. Since he spent his most influential years in Baghdad, he has been endowed with the epithet 'Baghdadi'. Like Ahmad Sirhindi, he was influential enough to initiate a new Naqshbandi sub-branch, the Khalidiyya. It was to a great extent under the influence of the Khalidi branch that the Naqshbandi order markedly increased its influence over 19th century Ottoman society. Its legacy is still strong in both present-day Turkey and Syria.

Preserving tradition

In today's world, where social relationships are highly fluid, it is remarkable to notice the existence of a viable religious movement with roots several hundred years back in history. It is only by reflecting over the immense transformations taking place within economic relationships, political structures, settlement patterns, communications, science, technology and even family relationships over the last 100 to 150 years, that one can truly appreciate the extraordinary fact

that a Sufi order like the Naqshbandiyya has been able to preserve its traditions since the 15th century. This highlights the fact, so easily overlooked in times of powerful secularization, that religion represents a strong force in the formation of social and cultural identity – even in modern society.

Outsiders trying to understand the role of the Naqshbandi order in today's society often mistake its members' involvement in worldly affairs (as economic entrepreneurs, state officials, or political activists) for simple worldliness; as if religious involvement was nothing but a pretext or cover for their economic or political power interests. However, this picture is over-simplified. A characteristic feature of the Naqshbandi is indeed the emphasis of a double responsibility: towards this world *and* the other world. This position seems to be as valid now as it was hundreds of years ago and constitutes an important key to the remarkable perseverance and integrity of the movement.

The Naqshbandi order could not have preserved its core identity so persistently, had it not been for a good share of flexibility. Its capacity to adjust to changing social conditions is just as remarkable as its endurance. The openness towards change has been especially observable during the last century, and especially the last couple of decades, when representatives for the Naqshbandi *tarikat* have been involved in a range of high technology enterprises, advanced institutions of higher education and the latest innovations in media technology. Studying the Naqshbandi raises intriguing questions not only about how change and continuity are balanced against each other, but also how concerns for this world and the next are combined against the challenges from an increasingly secularized society.

Background and content

The articles on which the book, *The Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity*, is based are papers read at a conference entitled 'Patterns of Transformation among the Naqshbandi in Middle East and Central Asia' held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul from 9-11 June 1997. The conference was part of a two-year programme of activities at the Institute focusing on 'Islamic culture'. The aim of the conference was to address problems of recent change among the Naqshbandi in the Near East and Central Asia. Keeping in mind the long history of this institution, the aim was to encourage analyses in a *longue durée* perspective. In light of that objective, studies focusing on Central Asia gained special significance, since these areas are the original homeland of the Naqshbandi. But it was crucial to focus on Central Asia for yet another reason, which concerns the fact that its peoples have only very recently come out from a 70-year-long communist dictatorship, in which religion was severely suppressed. Stemming from this fact are many questions related to what will happen to Islam in general, and the Naqshbandi in particular, as conditions in this part of the world have the opportunity to normalize.

The book opens with a chapter by Hamid

Algar, where attention is drawn to how 'global' people, living many generations before us, in fact were. Hamid Algar presents an analysis of how Sheikh Nidai of Kashgar (d. 1760), in the capacity of a wandering mendicant, for more than 40 years travelled to a large number of holy sites in Turkestan, later on turned to Kirkuk, Mosul, Aleppo, Jerusalem and the Hijaz, and how he finally settled in Istanbul, where he was appointed the first sheikh for a newly opened *tekke* (lodge) in Eyüp. This example illustrates how the Naqshbandi order, for many centuries, bound together the three main regions of the Sunni Muslim world: the Ottoman Empire, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

Dhikr (zikr) – the repetitive invocation of the name of Allah – is widely practiced among Sufis. The *zikr* ritual is most often practiced collectively, with intensive and emotion-laden expressions, where the participants move their bodies rhythmically as they loudly pronounce the names of Allah. In contrast to such expressions, members of the Naqshbandi order have generally been regarded as being more sober and orderly, practicing the so-called 'silent' rather than the 'loud' *zikr*. However, even if silent *zikr* generally has been referred to as one of the most characteristic marks distinguishing the Naqshbandis from other Sufi orders, such as the Qadiriyya ('whispering' as opposed to 'jumping' dervishes) historical records show that both forms of *zikr* in fact have been practiced by Naqshbandi dervishes themselves. This intriguing question is addressed by Isenbike Togan, who, by referring to developments in Eastern Turkestan and China of the 17th and 18th centuries, draws attention to the fact that the question of 'silent' versus 'loud' *zikr* could even stir up controversy between various Naqshbandi groups.

Jo-Ann Gross discusses the well-known *waqf* (foundation) of Khoja Ahrar (d. 1490) in Samarqand, and its reorganization after the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s. Khoja Ahrar was an influential and venerated Naqshbandi sheikh, whose *khanaqah*, or tomb complex, has been a place of pilgrimage for over 500 years. The fact that the Russian colonial administration, for the sake of control, initiated a special investigation of the *waqf*, bears witness to the social and economic importance of the *waqf* holdings. The effect of Russian colonialism was, however, that the Naqshbandi communities, for the first time in their long history, were seriously threatened. Following is a chapter by Butros Abu-Manneh, which approaches this *waqf* leader from a different point of view, namely through a widely read hagiography, *Rashahat Ain al-Hayat* (Trickles from the Fountain of Life), written by Kahshiifi, one of Khoja Ahrar's disciples.

Questions related to what happens to Naqshbandi networks in Central Asia after the collapse of the former Soviet Union are discussed by Vernon Schubel. Based on his own recent research, Schubel discusses how written sources in the form of popularized hagiographies play an important role in the

process of reconstructing the Naqshbandi tradition in Uzbekistan. He also discusses the dilemmas facing today's Uzbek authorities, who in their newly begun nation-building projects, are anxious to support the new interest in Islam, without leaving the fields open to religious radicalism and fanaticism.

Outside Central Asia

This volume also contains chapters on the Naqshbandis in three areas outside of Central Asia, namely the Kurdish areas of Iraq and southeast Turkey, Syria, and Afghanistan. Ferhad Shakely gives a detailed description of the relation between the sheikhs of Hawraman and other Sufi orders like the Qadiriyya and their cultural and political influence in the Kurdish areas until today. Leif Stenberg analyses the Syrian branch of the Naqshbandi order, centred at the Abu an-Nur Foundation in Damascus, led by Sheikh Ahmad Kufaro, and the Grand Mufti of Syria. Bo Utas' account of the Naqshbandi order in Afghanistan is unique. Having spent time in Afghanistan in 1977 and 1978, he happened to be in the country on the very day of the coup d'état, 27 April 1978. For a couple of months, he travelled around and visited 12 *khanaqahs*, 7 of which are Naqshbandi. Bo Utas' observations took place at a very critical point in time and contain information about groups and social networks that are now lost forever.

The book also contains three chapters on modern Turkey. Hakan Yavuz problematizes the role of different Naqshbandi groups in terms of economic, political and intellectual life in post-war Turkey, placing this against the background of an historical exposé of the Naqshbandi order. Fulya Atacan presents a portrait of a contemporary Naqshbandi sheikh, Osman Hulusi Ate_ (1914-1990), who was born in a small town in the province Malatya.

Korkut Özal, former MP for the National Salvation Party and Minister of Internal Affairs in one of the coalition governments of the 1970s, focuses on yet another leader, namely the well-known Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897-1980). Professor Özal offers more than just a portrait of a prominent Sufi leader. He also gives an account of his own experience of being Kotku's *murid* (disciple) for a period of 20 years.

This book was intended as a modest follow-up of the impressive work, *The Naqshbandis* (Gaborieau, Marc, Alexandre Popović and Riery Zarcone (1990) It is hoped that as such it will help in carrying the scholarly discussion of this powerful branch of Islamic mysticism a bit further. ◀

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