

A
History of
the Shī'a People

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

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A
History of
the Shī'a People

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

Edited & annotated by
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

With a Foreword by
Professor Noel Q. King

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of
my wife Fatima Zahra
who passed away on
28th October 2001
in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania

Sample

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ا	a	ع	‘
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	و	w
ر	r	ه	h
ز	z	ي	y
س	s	ة	ah
ش	sh	-----	
ص	ṣ	أ	ā
ض	ḍ	ي	ī
ط	ṭ	و	ū
ظ	ẓ		

Note: This transliteration style has been used in this book except for the names of the people of the present era.

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Editor's Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامِ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

The current trend in the academic world is to work on regional history rather than a global history. But when one sits down to look at the history of a faith-based community spanning across centuries with a variety of ethno-cultural boundaries, religiously connected to and mutually influencing one another, the need for a wider angle that binds the communities in their common struggles and triumphs is undeniable. That is the purpose of this book.

Hence the first part of this work looks at the beginning of the Shī'a Ithnā-'Ashari community during the era of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt and the period thereafter till the collapse of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate as a single unit. Then it goes into regions: Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan is reviewed together because of multilayers of mutual influences among them on socio-religious and political levels. Then it moves on to the Arab Middle-East and Turkey; then it turns towards the east to the Indian subcontinent and then to the south to the African continent. Far-East and the West are relatively new areas of growth in Shī'ī world, and the author has used his personal contacts and his travels to the West to briefly describe the settlements of Shī'a communities in their adopted homelands.

ii A History of the Shi'a People

It is worth mentioning that the section on Shi'a community in Africa, particularly in East Africa, is a seminal work in which the author was not just a spectator observing the events and reporting them, rather he played a pivotal role in furthering the cause of Shi'i faith in that region, especially among the indigenous African people.

* * * * *

The work on this book spans just over a quarter of a century starting from mid seventies to the demise of my father in June of 2002. Interestingly, it started as a history of the regional scope covering the Khoja Shi'a Ithnā-'Ashari community of East Africa as proposed by the late Professor Noel Q. King to the author in mid 1960's.¹ While writing the history of the East African Khoja community, the author included their early history in India. This initial work was edited and abridged by Professor King, and published under joint names in two parts in *The Muslim World* and *Journal of Religion in Africa* respectively.²

Gradually the scope of research widened to include the whole African continent, and proceeded to the Indian subcontinent, leading to the history of Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. From there on it was a short leap to describe the history of the Arab Middle East and Turkey. This is when the author decided to turn it into a world history of the Shi'a peoples.

During this period, the manuscript went to different changes. In various travels of the author to India, Iran and UK, he visited many libraries (such as the famous Mar'ashi Najafi Library in Qum, Khuda Bakhs Library in Patna, Nasiriyya Library in Lucknow as

¹ Dr. Noel Q. King was then the Professor of Religious Studies at Makerere University College, Kampala (Uganda) and in 1970's moved to the USA as Professor of Comparative Religion, University of California at Santa Cruz.

² "The Khoja Shia Ithna-asheriya Communities in East Africa (1840-1967)," *The Muslims World* (Harford Seminary Foundation) vol. LXIV (1974) no. 3, p 194-204. "Some East African Ithna-Ashari Jamaats (1840-1967)," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. V, fasc. 1, p. 12-22.

well as the British Library, the India Office Library and the library at SOAS, all in London). This was done mostly in mid 1980's to 1997.

The author discarded first two drafts, finally focusing on the history of Shī'ī peoples starting with the era of Occultation (*ghaybat*) of the Twelfth Imam to the contemporary age. He worked on this book in Dar-es-salaam, Gopalpur (India), London, Vancouver and Toronto with interluding gaps whenever he got time away from his various missionary activities. In the last extended visit of my parents to Canada in 2000 when we were blessed once again to serve them for six months, my father gave me a copy of the latest manuscript, saying that he was now tired and is leaving this manuscript with me so that I would work on it to finalize the book for publication.

The final manuscript began with the fall of Baghdad (which marked the end of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate) in seventh century of the Islamic era. I looked through the earlier drafts of this work that the author had discarded and some of his writings of 1960's, and was able to put together a brief history from the early caliphate era to the beginning of the Occultation, and also the era that followed from aṣ-Ṣadūq to aṭ-Ṭūsi, connecting to the fall of Baghdad. This was reviewed and approved by the author himself.

I have added many relevant footnotes wherever required, updated references (to reflect the modern editions of the Arabic sources) and also supplemented new references in various places. Wherever the author had quoted from secondary sources, in most cases, those were compared with the original sources and referenced accordingly. Some quotations from Western sources that had been translated from their Arabic translations were replaced with the original quotations and their references. Charts showing the various dynasties who have been covered in this narration were also added. Moreover, while reviewing the current situations of the Shī'ahs in various countries, I have briefly updated them to bring them up to our era, especially areas that I

had the opportunity to visit myself for lectures (e.g., Oman, South Africa, Central America and Australia as well as various cities in North America). In the Far-East Asian scene, I was able to add more information based on the reports from private Shī'a organizations and recent studies that have emerged on Shī'as in that region. However, in cases such as Iraq, Bahrain and Afghanistan, the events are unfolding very rapidly and can only be covered, insha Allāh, in the future editions of this work.

* * * * *

In the note that my father left in the final manuscript, he wished to thank some relatives and friends without whom this work could not have been completed:

“First of all the Rev. Professor Noel Q. King (now, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religion, University of California at Santa Cruz) who initiated this project and kept me alert by constantly reminding (or, in his own words, pestering) to complete this work.

“The late John (Yahya) Cooper who typed the first draft at Oxford in early and mid 1980's.

“My son, Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (Toronto) for editing; my other son, Syed Masud Akhtar Rizvi (Dar-es-salaam) for finding some historical details in English; my youngest son, Sayyid Murtaza, for finding even more references.

“Hujjatul Islam Syed Shuja'at Hussain (Lucknow, and presently in Qum) for obtaining for me a rare copy of *Tā'rikh-e Firishta* on loan and Hussein A.M. Jaffer (Nairobi) for making its photocopy. Dr. Syed Manzoor Naqi Rizvi, M.D. (New Jersey) for sending me an important book.

“Imam Sahebuz-Zaman Trust (Chemsford, UK) and Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania (Dar-es-salaam) for supporting me in this project, and more so Bilal Muslim Mission for providing secretarial services.”

Among those friends of my father who eagerly waited to see this book in its final form were the Commander Qasim Hussain (Trustee and Managing Director of Muhammadi Trust, London) and Mulla Asgharali MM Jaffer (Founding President, the World Federation of the KSI Muslim Communities, London)—unfortunately both passed away before the completion of this work.

Finally, on my part, I would like to thank Nasreen Razvi and Rabia Bokhari for proof-reading the first one-third of the final manuscript, and my son, Mahdi, for helping me in preparing the bibliography and also charting the map of Shaykh Ṣadūq's travels in search of ḥadīth. Thanks also to Islamic Shi'a Ithna-'Ashari Jamaat of Toronto for relieving me of some routine work so that I could concentrate on this book and finalize it.

My only regret has been that I was not able to finalize this book earlier and it sees light 13 years after the passing away of my father. As the saying goes, everything is destined for its own time. May the soul of my father be pleased with the final rendering of his work.

Perfection belongs only to the Almighty. The esteem readers are requested to inform the editor of any error that they notice in the contents of this book so that it can be corrected for future editions.

August 2015
Shawwal 1436

Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi
Toronto

PART TWO

Iran, Iraq & Afghanistan

Sample

CHAPTER 5

THE FALL OF BAGHDAD

The fall of Baghdad in 656/1258 was a catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude. The 'Abbāsīd ruler was looked upon as the Caliph of the Prophet, and many virtually independent Sunni rulers acknowledged his suzerainty—at least verbally. It was the first time in the history of Islam that a non-Muslim power had trampled the heartland of Islam and left the Sunni world without a caliph.

Regrettably the Mongols were first invited into the Muslim lands by none other than the caliph, an-Nāṣir (575-622/1180-1225) himself, who is generally recognised as the ablest and most astute of the later period's caliphs. He had freed the caliphate from the grips of the Saljūqids with the help of Khwārizm-Shāh; many sultans submitted to him, and *khuṭbas* were read in his name even in Spain and China.¹ Later, his relations with Muḥammad II Khwārizm-Shāh (596-617/1200-1220) were strained, and Khwārizm-Shāh tried to put pressure on the Caliph by planning to put an 'Alid as Caliph. Worried by this development, an-Nāṣir sent a delegation to Chingīz Khān inviting him to attack Khwārizm-Shāh from the rear. Spuler says:

This had been a frequent political move by the caliphs throughout past centuries, and therefore the report seems quite credible in itself; it cannot, however, be confirmed from contemporary sources. In any case the Caliph could not have anticipated that on this occasion an old-established procedure would have dreadful consequences and even bring about the downfall of his house.²

¹ As-Suyūṭī, *Tar'ikh al-Khulafā'*, p. 450.

² *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 161-162.

However, it is clearly confirmed by the contemporary historian, Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazari (555-630/1160-1234), as he states: “The Persians rightly say that it was this Caliph who encouraged the Mongols to capture the [Muslim] lands; and corresponded with them in this regard. Thus he was the greatest calamity compared to which all great sins are trivial.”³

Chingīz Khān and his successors had their own agenda for the conquest of the world. They took advantage of temporary alliances and friendships merely to protect their one flank while they were busy on the other front. Khwārizm-Shāh gave Chingīz Khān an excuse by killing his envoys who were sent to his court for spying. Chingīz Khān, prompted by an-Nāṣir, attacked Khwārizm-Shāh *cir.* 611/1215. By 615/1219 Bukhara, Samarqand and Balkh were reduced to ruins; palaces, libraries and schools were razed to the ground, and the cultural and academic heritage of Islam in Inner Asia was obliterated, never to revive again. Then he ranged through northern Persia from Sistan to Hamadān and left Iran from the Caucasian Gate near Darband (in Daghistān). The Persian plateau including Khurāsān and Azerbaijan was now a Mongol province. For the moment, the hurricane had left Iraq untouched.⁴ However, the respite was temporary; and continued as long as Chingīz Khān’s and his successors’ attention was fixed on Russian

³ Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazari, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 12, p. 440. This harsh language may seem surprising for a historian; but we should keep in mind the fact that Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazari was opposed to anything even remotely related to Shi‘ism; and the Caliph an-Nāṣir had some manifest Shi‘ite leanings—he had received the sash of *al-futuwwah* (‘knighthood’) from a great Shī‘a scholar in the mausoleum of ‘Alī at Najaf; and had prepared a grave for himself at the towards the feet of the graves of the Seventh and the Ninth Shī‘a Imāms at Kāzīmāyn. His heirs, however, buried him elsewhere in Baghdad.

⁴ It is significant that Muẓaffaru ‘d-Dīn, the ruler of Irbīl, wrote to the Caliph an-Nāṣir that he could stop Chingīz Khān at a certain strategic point if the Caliph would send to him 10,000 soldiers. The Caliph wrote him to proceed to Daqūqa where the army would reach him; but he sent only 800 men, and Muẓaffaru ‘d-Dīn abandoned the plan. (Vide *Ibid*, pp. 337-338)

conquest. A generation later, Chingīz Khān's grandson, Mongke (Mangu Qā'ān in Arabic) was elected the Great Khān in 649/1251. He sent his brother, Qublai, to take over the northern and the southern China. Another brother, Hulāgu Khān, was sent with an army of 129,000 to finish the conquering agenda in the west. His mandate was to conquer the Ismā'ilis' Kingdom of Alamut, then subjugate Kurdistan and Luristan, and then Baghdad (if the Caliph refused to give allegiance); after which he was to conquer Syria, Egypt and Armenia, so that the Mongol empire would extend from China to the Mediterranean Sea.⁵

It will not be out of place to have a look at the Mongols' attitude towards religion. Originally, the Mongols were shamanists and also possibly animists.⁶ Some of their tribes like Karait and Merkit had been converted to the Nestorian Christianity.⁷ Qublai and his brother Hulāgu embraced Buddhism,⁸ most probably of Tibetan brand. But religion had a low priority in the Mongols' lives; and in any case it was Chingīz Khān's Yasa (Code of Conduct) that served as their paramount law. The ruling family frequently married Christian women, who had their children baptized. Mongke's mother and several of his wives were Nestorians. Hulāgu's wife, Doqūz Khātūn, was a staunch Nestorian Christian, who was first married to Hulāgu's father, Tolui, although that marriage was not consummated.⁹ Hulāgu had a very high regard for her. Mongke had particularly advised him to consult Doqūz in all matters and to listen to her advice. Rashīdu 'd-Dīn Faḍlullāh (644-717/1247-1318)

⁵ Rashīdu 'd-Dīn Faḍlullāh al-Hamadani, *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, p. 237, 234; *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 340.

⁶ *Cam. Hist. of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 540; *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 160.

⁷ *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 160.

⁸ *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 540.

⁹ *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, p. 92; like pre-Islamic Arabs, marriage with one's step-mother was prevalent in the Mongols. But what is surprising is that the seventh Il-Khān, Aḥmad Ghāzān, even after his conversion to Islam, married in 1294 Princess Bulūghān, who had been married to his father, Arghūn.

further says about her: “She was very dominant, and it was because of her influence that the Christians throughout the Il-Khānid Kingdom were happy and they built churches everywhere. They always erected a church at the entrance of Doqūz Khātūn’s camp and rang the bells.”¹⁰ The commander-in chief of Hulagu was a Christian, Kīt Būqā by name.

Āshtiyāni describes this phenomenon as follows: “There were no Buddhists in Iran, but there were many Christians in Azerbaijan and Armenia; and Hulāgu under the influence of his wife and officials gave full attention to their welfare. By his order churches were built everywhere for them. Armenians and other Iranian Christians...looked upon Hulāgu and his wife as their saviours and friends. Particularly this group was earnestly trying to use the power of the Mongols for the advancement of their own religious aspirations; and hoped that the Mongols’ support to the Crusaders (who were fighting the Muslims in Syria and Egypt) would obliterate Islam from Asia and Africa altogether.”¹¹

“[Hulāgu] had made a deal with the Byzantine King of Armenia to spare all Christians and their places of worship and to help recover Jerusalem, provided that the Christians helped him to destroy Islam. For this he was addressed as ‘Your Serenity’ by the Pope and was even invited to join the Christian faith himself together with his hordes.”¹²

This was the situation as Hulāgu crossed the Oxus river on the 30th day of Dhu ’l-Qa’da in the year 653 (1st January 1256), and took for himself the title, ‘Il-Khān’ (Lord of the Tribe). Others have translated it as ‘viceroy’ or ‘subject Khān’, a sort of homage to the Great Khān. Entering the Persian plateau he marched towards Ismā’ili forts from four directions. Ruknu ’d-Dīn Khūr Shāh, the

¹⁰ *Jāmi’u ’t-Tawārikh*, p. 92.

¹¹ ‘Abbās Iqbāl Āshtiyāni, *Ta’rikh-e Umūmi-e Irān*, p. 74 as quoted by Dawāni, *Mafākhir*, vol. 4, p. 102.

¹² Anthony Nutting, *The Arabs*, p. 195.

last ruler of Alamut, finding himself unable to resist the Mongolian onslaught, sought advice of his ministers and officials. The majority, including Khwāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī, advised surrender, which he did on the 1st day of Dhu'l-Qada in the year 654/20 November 1256. Twenty-six years earlier, in 628/1231 the then Alamut ruler had informed the Mongols of the weak position of Jalālu 'd-Dīn Khwārizm-Shāh;¹³ but that “friendship” was of no avail when the crunch came. Hulāgu demolished Alamut and other Ismā'ili forts. Al-Juwayni, a historian and an official of Hulāgu's court, was sent to check the Alamut library. Whatever he thought useful was taken away, the rest was burnt down. Meanwhile some troops had proceeded further and subjugated Luristan and Mawṣil.

Hulāgu now advanced towards Baghdad, and sent several emissaries from Qazwīn, Hamadān and Kirmānshāh, to al-Musta'ṣim (r. 640-656/1242-1258) demanding his surrender. “The bell was tolling for the 'Abbāsids. The wretched caliph had been forced to reduce his garrison from 100,000 to 20,000 to pay the Dane gold demanded by the Mongols under their treaty of alliance with an-Nāṣir, and he was in no fit state to resist. Yet he hesitated to comply with the Mongols' ultimatum.”¹⁴

The above quotation does not give an accurate perspective of the Caliph's problems. It was not scarcity of funds, but his excessive greed and confused priorities that brought about his downfall. After the Caliph's surrender, when Hulāgu accompanied him to his palace, he stopped outside looking at the huge thick iron gates. He said to the Caliph: “If you had used this iron in making arrows, your archers could have stopped my army at the other side of the Tigris.” After capturing the treasury, Hulagu placed before the Caliph at dinner time a huge golden tray heaped with diamonds, rubies, pearls and other gems, and invited him to eat it. When the Caliph hesitated, Hulāgu said, “If you cannot eat it, then

¹³ Ibn al-Athīr, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

¹⁴ Nutting, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

why did you not sell it to maintain a well-equipped army which could have defended your kingdom?"

When Hulāgu Khān, after capturing the treasury and distributing it among his officials, ordered the Caliph to show him the buried treasures, the Caliph led them to a *ḥawḍ* (reservoir); when it was dug up they found it full of gold nuggets, each piece weighing a hundred *mithqāl*.¹⁵

The historian, Ibnu 'ṭ-Ṭaqṭaqi (659-709/1261-1309) says that al-Musta'ṣim was surrounded mostly by ignorant and selfish courtiers; and spent his days in the company of singers, musicians and court-jesters; his harem contained seven hundred concubines.¹⁶ Ibnu 'ṭ-Ṭaqṭaqi further says: "His companions held him in their hold, and all of them were illiterate, from low class of the society, except his minister, Mu'ayyidu 'd-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-'Alqami who was a distinguished and intelligent person; but his hands were tied and his words unheeded; he expected to be dismissed and imprisoned any time."¹⁷

Those who want to see the details of this concise comment, should study *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh* of Rashīdu 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī who as the minister of the Il-Khāns, Ghazān and Uljaytū, had access to the Mongol records, in addition to the reports of the local people. According to him, the responsibility of all problems falls upon Mujāhidu 'd-Dīn Aybak, the Secretary (*dawātār*) of the Caliph. In 654/1256, Aybak had gathered around himself a large group of ruffians who indulged in plunder and rape throughout Baghdad. Then he began conspiracy to put someone else on the throne. When the minister, Ibn al-'Alqami, informed the Caliph of these events, the latter called Aybak, informed him of the minister's allegation and expressed his full confidence in him. Aybak took advantage of this unusual trust and poisoned the Caliph's mind

¹⁵ *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, p. 292

¹⁶ Ibn aṭ-Ṭaqṭaqī, *Ta'rikh al-Fakhri*, p. 318.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

against Ibn al-'Alqami saying that he was a sympathiser of Hulāgu. Soon after, the Secretary's name was included in the *khutbas* with that of the Caliph.¹⁸

When the second ultimatum of Hulāgu came to Baghdad in 655/1257 from Hamadan, Ibn al-'Alqami advised the Caliph that wealth's only benefit was to use it for protection of honour; that the Caliph should send attractive and valuable presents to Hulāgu to earn his friendship; gifts should also be sent for the Mongolian princes and nobles, and promise should be made to include Hulāgu's name in the *khutbas* and coins. The Caliph agreed; but Aybak sent some courtiers accompanied by his thugs to the Caliph with the warning that Ibn al-'Alqami's advice was nothing short of treason, and if gifts were sent to Hulāgu, they would attack and rob it. The Caliph changed his mind. Then a group of the courtiers, including Aybak, came to Ibn al-'Alqami and expressed the opinion that an army should be prepared to meet the enemy. On Ibn al-'Alqami's advice, the Caliph ordered him to recruit an army promising them that the Caliph would make them rich. When a large army was recruited in five months' time, the Caliph hesitated, until the soldiers went back to their homes. The Caliph was easily prevailed upon with the view that Ibn al-'Alqami was a traitor who wanted to empty the treasury on military preparations.¹⁹

Even when news came of the approaching army of Hulagu, al-Musta'ṣim remained indifferent. Ibn al-'Alqami kept protesting but the Caliph paid no heed. His trusted advisers kept telling him that there was not much danger in it; and that Ibn al-'Alqami only wanted to squander all the Caliph's wealth on the army.²⁰

Unfortunately, many Sunni writers accuse Ibn al-'Alqami of plotting against the 'Abbāsid caliph and instigating the Mongols to

¹⁸ *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, pp. 262-264

¹⁹ *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, pp. 271-274

²⁰ Ibn aṭ-Ṭaṭṭaqī, *Ta'rikh al-Fakhri*, p. 319.

attack Baghdad. The first to write this accusation was al-Waṣṣāf in his history; he was followed by adh-Dhahabi (*Shadharātu 'dh-Dhahab*, vol. 5, p. 272) and al-Yāfi'i (*Mir'atu 'l-Jinān*, vol. 4, p. 105). It is the claim which Aybak, the Secretary, had made for his own selfish motives. But keeping the above-mentioned details in view, such a claim cannot be substantiated.²¹

Baghdad fell on 4 Safar 656/10 February 1258, and was given to the pagan hordes for several days. The material and economic disaster was beyond description, but even more ruinous was the vacuum it created in the intellectual sphere and the destruction it brought upon the academic life. The city was given over to an orgy of massacre, plunder and devastation unheard of before. Nearly a million people were put to death. Hardly a building was left standing, as the Mongols set fire to palaces, libraries and academic institutes "that had given Baghdad the cultural leadership of the world." The only group left unscathed were the Christians who basked in the favour of the wife of Hulāgu and were especially protected by his Christian commander-in chief.

Khawāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsi

It seemed as if the Muslim religion, Muslim scholarship, Islamic sciences and fields of learning were doomed to extinction, like those of Bukhāra and Samarqand. In such a dark period a man appeared on the scene who skillfully managed to salvage what was humanly possible from that ruin. He was Khawāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-

²¹ Obviously, this is not the place to discuss this allegation in detail. Professor Shaykh Fidā Ḥusayn (1861-1934) of Aligarh Muslim University wrote an Arabic booklet *al-Waṣwāṣ* which was published with Urdu translation in seven issues of the Urdu monthly *Iṣlāḥ* (Kujhwa, Bihar, India) from July 1911 to April 1912 (vol. 14, no. 7 to vol. 15, 4). It analyses al-Waṣṣāf's claim and throws full light on this episode. These issues of *Iṣlāḥ* are in my personal library.

Ṭūsī, generally known as al-Muḥaqqiq aṭ-Ṭūsī. We will refer to him as “the Khwāja” in this narrative.

His name was Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan aṭ-Ṭūsī. He was born on 11 Jumāda I 597/17 February 1201 at Ṭūs (Khurāsān). ‘Abdullāh Ni’mah writes: “He was one of the greatest thinking brains of the world, a genius in erudition, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics etc. whose like is rarely produced by the mother earth.”²² The Khwāja’s unparalleled scholarship, prolific writing and above all, his serene politeness, has remained as an unforgettable memory in the Muslim consciousness. Sarton considers him the greatest Muslim scholar and mathematician, and Brockelmann describes him as the most famous scholar of the thirteenth century; while his disciple, ‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī calls him the teacher of mankind and the “eleventh intellect”.²³

If the modern world remembers him more for his contribution to mathematics, astronomy and geography than for his highly original and penetrating logical, metaphysical and theological works, this is more a reflection on the preferences of modern times than a true evaluation of his achievements. Jurji Zaydān says, “In the countries of the Mongols, scholarship shone brightly at the hands of this Persian, like a radiating light in pitch-black darkness.”²⁴

The Khwāja was in Nīshāpūr, the city of philosophy and theology, when Chingīz Khān ransacked it. Some time later he left the ruined city and went to Naṣīru ’d-Dīn Muḥtashim, the Governor of the Ismā’ili fort at Qā’in. After many years’ sojourn there, Muḥtashim took the Khwāja with him to ‘Alā’u ’d-Dīn, the ruler of Alamut (618-653/1221-1255), where the Khwāja remained until ‘Alā’u ’d-Dīn’s murder in 653/1255 by his son, Ruknu ’d-Dīn Khūr Shāh (653-654/1255-1256); thereafter, Khwāja had to go to

²² ‘Abdullāh Ni’mah, *Falāsifatu 'sh-Shī'a*, p. 531.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jurji Zaydan, *Ta'rikh Ādābi 'l-Lughati 'l-'Arabiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 250.

the latter's residence at Maymun Daz, and thence back again to Alamut. He remained in the Ismā'īlis' strongholds for about thirty years and spent his time in scholarly pursuit. Some scholars are seen puzzling over two questions:

1. What was the Khwāja's religious faith until he came to the Mongol court and openly declared that he was a Twelver (Ithnā-'ashari Shī'a)?
2. Had he willingly settled and remained with the Ismā'īlis, or was he taken there forcibly?

The first question can easily be answered if we look at his family and his teachers in religious sciences. His first teacher was his father, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, a well-known Shī'a Ithnā-'ashari religious scholar who was a disciple of Shaykh Faḍlullāh ar-Rāwandī who in his turn was a disciple of Shaykh Abu 'Alī aṭ-Ṭūsī son of the Shaykhu 'ṭ-Ṭā'ifah aṭ-Ṭūsī. Likewise, the Khwāja studied *ḥadīth*, theology, logic and philosophy from the famous Shī'a Ithnā-'ashari scholar, Naṣīru 'd-Dīn 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥamzah aṭ-Ṭūsī, who was the maternal uncle of his father. He also acquired *ḥadīth* from Shaykh Burhānu 'd-Dīn al-Hamadāni who was a disciple of famous Ithnā-'ashari scholars, Shaykh Muntajabu 'd-Dīn ar-Rāzi and Shaykh Sadīdu 'd-Dīn al-Ḥimmasi. He studied *fiqh* and *uṣūlu 'l-fiqh* from Mu'īnu 'd-Dīn Sālim ibn Badrān al-Māzini al-Miṣri who was a disciple of such famous Ithnā-'ashari scholars as Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī and Abu 'l-Makārim ibn Zuhrah. It was al-Māzini who gave the Khwāja the *ijāzah* (authority) in 619/1222 to transmit *ḥadīth*. The Khwāja at that time was 22 years old. We thus find that his father and the father's uncle as well as all his teachers of *fiqh*, *uṣūlu 'l-fiqh*, *kalām* and *ḥadīth* were well-known Shī'a Ithnā-'ashari scholars, and many of them have left valuable books on religion for posterity.²⁵ In view of these facts, the assumption of some writers that he was

²⁵ Dawāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

from an Ismā'īli family, or the claim that he was an Ismā'īli *dā'i* (missionary) has no basis at all.

While on the subject of his teachers, it should be noted here that the Khwāja had studied the famous philosophical text of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), *al-Ishārāt*, in Nīshāpūr, from Farīdu 'd-Dīn Dāmād who was a disciple —with four intermediate links— of Ibn Sīnā. Also he studied medicine from Quṭbu 'd-Dīn al-Miṣri ash-Shāfi'i, the author of the best commentary of Ibn Sīnā's *al-Qānūn*. His teacher in mathematics was Kamālu 'd-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥāsib.²⁶

As for the second question, some people claim that he was abducted by the *fidā'is* to the Ismā'īli fort and kept there under duress; while others say that he had gone there willingly and stayed willingly. This controversy may be resolved by looking at the following conclusion of his commentary on *al-Ishārāt* which he had written in Alamut in 644/1246:

I have written most of it in very difficult circumstance, worst than what cannot be imagined; when every moment of time is filled with painful suffering and in a place where every second there is a warden of hell pouring boiling water overhead. There never was a time when my eyes were not raining or my heart was not grieving...O Allah! deliver me from the onslaught of the armies of calamity and from flooding waves of hardship...²⁷

Also he writes in the preface of *Akhlāq-e Nāṣiri*, added to the book after his release from Alamut: “This book was written at a time when the vicissitudes of the time had compelled me to abandon my home, and the hand of the fate had kept me fettered in Qūhistan. When I started writing the book, I had to do as advised by a poet:

*'Behave with them politely, as long as you are in their house
And keep them happy while you are in their land.'*

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 89-90.

²⁷ *Al-Ishārāt*, published with its two commentaries of ar-Rāzi and aṭ-Ṭūsī, Egypt 1325, vol. 2, p. 146.

I had to write a Preface according to their custom which contained praises of their leaders...Now I have replaced that Preface with this one..."²⁸

In view of the above, it is not difficult to agree with ‘Abdullāh Ni‘mah that the Khwāja had indeed gone to Muḥtashim in Qūhistan on his own accord, probably because the Ismā‘ilis seemed the only power capable of resisting the Chingīz Khān’s onslaught. But once there, he could not come out; and had to spend the prime of his life as an honoured prisoner who could read, write and indulge in his academic pursuit but could not leave the fortress. It is to his credit that even in such a condition he did write many books which even today are held in high esteem, e.g. the *Sharhu ‘l-Ishārāt*; *Taḥrīr al-Majesti*, *Bîst Bâb Astrolobe*, *Akhlâq-e Nāṣiri* and *Taḥrīr Uqlaydis*.

If really it was the Khwāja who wrote the two Ismā‘ili tracts which the Ismā‘ilis attribute to him, then it must have been because of *taqyyah*. Ivanow, in the Persian preface of “*Two Early Ismaili Treatises*” (Bombay, 1933), p. 3, ascribes the second treatise, *Maṭlūbu ‘l-Mu‘minīn*, and also a book, *Rawḍatu ‘t-Taslim*, to the Khwāja. But in the English preface (p.7) he says that the Russian copy gives the author’s name as Muḥammad Ghūd. Also he says in the Persian preface: The reality is not known yet, but possibly he could have been born in an Ismā‘ili family. (p.3) The details about his father and other elders and teachers given above do not leave any room for this conjecture.

The third chapter of the Khawāja’s life begins with his arrival at the Hulāgu’s court; and it was here that his astuteness and acumen came to the fore-front. It is to the Khwāja’s credit that he subtly transformed the savage Mongol warrior into a protector of civilization, the destroyer of libraries into a patron of learning and the killer of ‘ulamā’ into their supporter. How did this

²⁸ *Akhlâq-e Nāṣiri*, pp. 3-4.

transformation take place? The Khwāja was a top-most expert on astronomy; he also knew that Hulāgu firmly believed in astrology; it was but a small step for him to advance from astronomy to astrology. He was included in Hulāgu's retinue to serve as his astrologer. Gradually he convinced Hulāgu of the necessity of building an observatory in order that the stars' movements and relative positions could be accurately mapped, as it would be helpful in arriving at more reliable astrological forecasts. The Il-Khānid capital, Maragha, in Azerbaijan was chosen as its site. Naturally one person could not do this even if he was of the calibre of the Khwāja. Hulāgu was prevailed upon to invite capable scholars from all around. Fakhru 'd-Dīn Luqmān ibn 'Abdullāh of Maragha was entrusted with this responsibility; and he gathered a galaxy of scholars there. We find among them at least twenty top-most scholars of various fields of knowledge who had gathered around the Khwāja in Maragha. There were philosophers, logicians and jurists; mathematicians, astronomers and physicians; engineers, builders and inventors. They came from Damascus, Tiflis, Mawsil, Tunisia, Baghdad and other places. Almost all of them were Sunni. Such lists usually contain only the important names; and it is reasonable to believe that the actual number must have been in three digits. They unanimously acknowledged the good nature, polite behaviour and generosity of the Khwāja towards 'ulamā' and students. As Mu'ayyidu 'd-Dīn al-'Arazi writes in his treatise a description of the instruments of the Maragha Observatory, "the Khwāja is kindlier to the scholars than a father to his son."²⁹

While speaking of Khwāja's good nature, an interesting incident comes to mind: Someone had written to him a very nasty letter in which he called the Khwāja "dog, son of dog". The Khwāja replied: "As for calling me 'dog, son of dog', it is not true. A dog

²⁹ Ms. in the Library of Āstan-e Quds, Mashhad, Iran, as quoted by Ni'mah, *op. cit.*, pp. 485-486.

walks on four legs and barks, it has long fangs; while my posture is erect, my skin is not hairy and my nails are wide; and I speak and laugh. Thus you see my characteristics are totally different from those of a dog.” The whole letter was written in the same vein, without rancor, without bitterness. This was at a time when he had influence in Hulāgu’s court!³⁰

Hulāgu had ordered that the Khwāja should be given whatever was needed for the observatory project. Besides that, the Khwāja provided an independent source of income for his project. On his own suggestion, he was given an overall charge of all the endowments (*awqāf*) in the Il-Khānid domain. He appointed supervisors in every town and ordered ten percent of the income to be sent for the Maragha project. In this way he protected the *awqāf* from being usurped by the victorious hordes or unscrupulous trustees or managers, and at the same time ensured their good management, as the contemporary writers have attested. “No Shī’a or Sunni scholar, wherever he might be, was excluded from the munificence of the Khwāja. He improved the hospitals, schools and caravanserais, and fixed stipends for students and the needy. Their management improved to a much better state than before.”³¹

The observatory’s foundation was laid in 657/1259, and it was completed in 660/1262. Astronomical observations continued upto 672/1274; and the Khwāja completed his astronomical almanac, *Zij-e Il-Khāni* the same year. It contained many new calculations and conclusions, and was used in Europe upto the Renaissance. “[It] can be called the first astronomical observatory in the full sense of the term.”³²

The Khwāja died in Baghdad on 18th Dhu ’l-hijja, 672/25th June 1274, and was buried at the footside of the graves of the Seventh

³⁰ Ibn Shākir, *Fawātu ’l-Wafayāt*, vol. 3, p. 248.

³¹ Ibn Kathîr, *al-Bidāyah wa ’n-Nihāyah*, vol. 13, p. 313.

³² *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 67.

and the Ninth Imāms at Kāẓimayn. When they started digging the grave, they unearthed a well-built empty grave, which turned out to be the one Caliph an-Nāṣir had made for himself; and the Khwāja was buried in it.

The observatory was the nucleus around which the Khwāja had built a full-fledged university with separate departments for philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and related subjects. It also contained a library with 400,000 books. Students came from far away places, including a hundred from China. They were given stipends ranging from ½ to 3 dirhams daily.³³ This university flourished upto Uljaytū Khudābanda's time, under the guidance of the sons of the Khwāja. After that, the university began its decline and finally nothing remained of it.

Before concluding this section, one more misunderstanding should be cleared. Some people claim that after the conquest of Alamut, Hulāgu intended to attack Constantinople but Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī exhorted him to conquer Baghdad. However, this claim cannot be sustained because, first of all, we have already seen that Hulāgu had his orders to conquer Baghdad after capturing Alamut, Kurdistan and Luristan. And that is exactly what he did. Secondly, the alliance between the Byzantine emperors and the Pope on the one hand and the Mongols on the other is not a secret. In fact, the Byzantine emperor, Michael VIII had sent his illegitimate daughter, Maria, known as Despoina Khatūn, to be married to Hulāgu. She reached Maragha after Hulāgu's death; so Hulāgu's son and successor Abāqā Khān married her.³⁴ With such close connections, the above claims are not worth considering.

Thirdly, the Khwāja was a newcomer to the court of Hulāgu at that time, while there were several Sunni officials who had been with him longer. Sayfu 'd-Dīn Baytakchi was Hulāgu's Minister, and Muwaffaqu 'd-Dawlah, Ra'īsu 'd-Dawlah and 'Aṭā Mālik al-

³³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa 'n-Nihāyah*, vol. 13, p. 249

³⁴ John Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1829) p. 266.

Juwayni were in various responsible posts; and all of them were present at the fall of Baghdad. Why should the Khwāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī be singled out for this blame just because he was a Shī'a? The Khwāja was never given any administrative post. He was content with his academic projects.

Moreover, the Khwāja's "influence" could not prevent the Mongols from burning down the mausoleum of the Seventh and Ninth Imāms at Kāẓimayn, nor could he save well-known Shī'a 'ulamā' and *sādāt* of Baghdad from massacre. Finally, no contemporary historian has mentioned this accusation; while Ibn Kathīr ad-Dimashqī (701-774/1302-1372) who came half a century later, has refuted this allegation.

The four Shī'a towns, Ḥilla, Karbala, Najaf and Kūfa remained safe from the Mongol hordes; but it had nothing to do with the Khwāja. As we have described in detail elsewhere, three Shī'a 'ulamā' of Ḥilla had taken the initiative of writing a letter to Hulāgu asking him to issue a *firmān* that Ḥilla, Kūfa, Karbala and Najaf be left unharmed. They were Sadīdu 'd-Dīn Yūsuf ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (the father of al-'Allāmah al-Ḥillī), Sayyid Majdu 'd-Dīn ibn aṭ-Ṭā'us and al-Faqīh bin Abi 'l-'Izz. Hulāgu sent his two officials (one of them, Nicola, most probably a Christian) requiring the correspondents to pay a visit to his court. Sadīdu 'd-Dīn went with them and Hulāgu asked him as to how could they write to him and appear at his court even before knowing the outcome of his venture? Perhaps the Caliph would make peace with him and he would go away? Sadīdu 'd-Dīn replied that their decision was based on the sermon, *az-Zawra'*, of their first Imām 'Alī (a.s.), which foretells of the Mongol's victory. Hulāgu accordingly issued a decree giving protection to the four cities.³⁵

³⁵ Al-Ḥillī, *Kashfu 'l-Yaqīn*, p. 80-82. Momen is mistaken when he attributes this "negotiation" to Majdu 'd-Dīn (*An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 94). Majdu 'd-Dīn was one of the signatories of the original letter, but only Sadīdu 'd-Dīn

When Kāẓimayn was burned, it was Hulāgu's Sunni minister, Sayfu 'd-Dīn Byatakchi who sent a hundred soldiers for protection of Najaf. No mention is made of the Khwāja.³⁶ 'Alī Dawāni writes that according to his information it was John Malcom (the British ambassador in Iran) who first claimed in his *History of Persia* that the Khwāja had any hand in diverting Hulagu's attention from Constantinople to Baghdad. The same tune was taken up by Edward Browne in *The Literary History of Persia*.³⁷

The Khwāja wrote a hundred and sixty books and treatises, most of which are preserved in various libraries in the Middle East and Europe. More than half are on astronomy, mathematics, trigonometry, philosophy and physics. About twenty are on *kalām*, *fiqh*, ethics and other religious subjects. The rest are on astrology, medicine, geography, music and other subjects.

His commentary of *al-Ishārāt*, apart from clearly explaining the theme of Ibn Sīnā, corrects the mistakes made by Fakhru 'd-Dīn ar-Rāzi in his *sharḥ* of that book. He also re-wrote more than twenty books on Greek philosophers, mathematicians and astronomers, streamlining their arrangements, removing the ambiguities and mistakes of previous translators and, occasionally, of the original writers. Such re-writing is called *tahrīr* (writing; emancipating) in Arabic, probably because it frees the original from ambiguity. Among them are his *Tahrīr* of *Almagest* of Ptolemy. Dr. Tawqān says: "The Khwāja criticized in it the book, *Almagest*, and invented a new system of the universe, much simpler than Ptolemy's. He also wrote in it the mass and dimension of some planets. Sarton says that at times criticism of Ptolemy's system shows his genius and his vast expertise in astronomy. It may be said that his criticism

Yūsuf went to Hulāgu as his other two colleagues were scared of going to his court.

³⁶ *Jāmi'u 't-Tawārikh*, p. 296.

³⁷ Dawāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

was the first step that led to the researches of Copernicus.”³⁸ Among such books are his *Tahrīrs* of two books of Archimedes, and three books of Euclid, as well as that of the *Spheres* of Menelaos.

His books on trigonometry have proved extremely important. As Dr. Tawqān says: “Trigonometry is the basic ingredient of many mathematical and astronomical subjects; and it cannot be imagined without triangles and their ratios...Aṭ-Ṭūsī was the first to use the six ratios for a spherical right-angled triangle, and he wrote about it in his *al-Shakl al-Qitā’*. This book contains all that is found in the best modern books on the subject.”³⁹ The book is on plane and spherical trigonometry and was translated into Arabic, Latin, French and English. Its original in Persian was published in 1952 in the USSR.⁴⁰

Khwāja’s books have attracted the Shī’a and Sunni scholars who have been writing commentaries and glosses on them almost continuously from his days to the present time. For example, *at-Tadhkirah* on astronomy, *Bist bāb Astrolab*, *Tahrīr Almagest*, *Tahrīr* of Euclid, and *Zij-e-Ilkhān* have several commentaries and glosses each.⁴¹

His *Tajrīdu ’l-’Itiqād* and *Qawā’idu ’l-’Aqā’id* are on scholastic theology and his disciple, al-’Allāmah al-Ḥillī wrote commentaries on both naming them *Kashfu ’l-Murād* and *Kashfu ’l-Fawā’id*

³⁸ Dr. Qadri Hāfiz Tawqān, *Turāthu ’l-’Arabi ’l-’Ilmi*, pp. 358-359 as quoted in *Falāsafatu ’sh-Shī’a*, p. 489.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “The author lists the six combinations of known sides or angles of a spherical triangle under which the triangle is determined. He then systematically indicates the solutions in each case without recourse to the Menelaos Theorem.” It is thus “the first treatment of trigonometry” as such. “It is a landmark also in a second sense...Until the work of Naṣir al-Dīn, trigonometric techniques were closely associated with problems in spherical astronomy...but his book makes no reference to astronomy, and marks the emergence of trigonometry as a branch of pure mathematics.” (*The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 667.)

⁴¹ ‘Abdullah Ni’mah, *op. cit.*, pp. 493-503.

respectively. *Tajrīdu 'l-I'tiqād* occupies a special place in the history of Shī'ī scholastic theology. Although rational arguments and proofs for matters of belief and faith were commonly given and written by the companions of the Imāms and the Shī'a scholars, it was the Khwāja who presented them in the language of the Greek philosophy. Perhaps it is for this reason that people say if al-'Allāmah al-Hillī had not explained it with his *Sharḥ*, it would have been difficult to comprehend it fully. Since then many commentaries and marginal notes have been written on it by Shī'a and Sunni theologians alike.

In 1956 (1355 AH[solar]) Tehran University held a five-day seminar to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Khwāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī. Some papers were later published as *Yadnāma-e-Khwāja Naṣīru 'd-Dīn*. Dr. Jalāl Mustafawi and other scholars spoke about original contributions of the Khwāja in trigonometry and physics. Dr. Mustafawi gave detailed references of the Khwāja's theories on light and sound which some four centuries later were attributed to Rene Descartes (d. 1650 C.E.) and Christian Huygens (d. 1695 C.E.).⁴²

⁴² Dawāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-130.