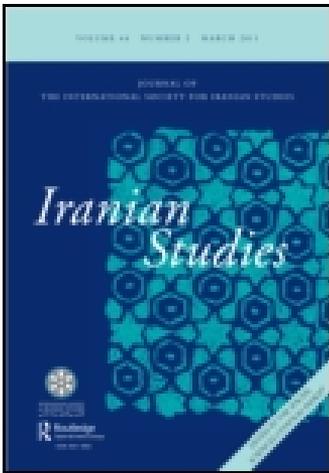


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Sayyed Mohammad Hossein Manzoor al-Adjdad

The Naqīb of Ray Alids and His Support of Scientists

The contributions of Shīʿa scholars and noblemen to the advancement of knowledge is well documented. These contributions culminated in the institution of dār al-ʿilm during the Buyids (334–447/945–1055). While the advent of the Saljūqs signaled the disappearance of the dār al-ʿilm, the Shīʿa minority continued to serve in the production of both religious and secular knowledge, despite the increasingly strict social policies under the Saljūqs. This article examines the remarkable role of Abu al-Ḥassan Muṭabbar, the naqīb of Ray Alids, who provided protection as well as immense support for scholars of his time. It further elucidates the sectarian tensions that affected the institutionalization of the sciences, hence a greater need for the opportune support afforded by the naqīb Muṭabbar.

Introduction

In the Islamic era, the term *naqīb* was used generically as a title for the head of a social group. The term underwent changes during the Abbasid period, when it came to apply specifically to an individual who was put in charge of the affairs of the Alids and the Abbasids in a particular locale. According to al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), the rationale behind installing a naqīb was to remove individuals of noble progeny (*ansāb sharīfa*) from the tutelage of those who were not of the same nobility.¹ The ordinance bestowing the title of naqīb was issued either by a caliph or by a vizier or by a ruler/governor or by the *naqīb al-nuqabā* who could appoint a naqīb on his behalf. In any case, the naqīb of an area was held in high regard by the populace and the court alike, and therefore was in a position to exert influence.

This article studies the life of the prominent naqīb of the Ray Alids under the Saljūqs—that is, Sayyed Murtaḍā dhu al-Fakhrayn, also known as the naqīb Abu al-Ḥassan Muṭabbar (d. 492/1098). More specifically, the article demonstrates that the naqīb Muṭabbar's unique relationship with the Saljūq court, especially with the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), allowed him to promote the production of knowledge and to provide support to scholars. This study argues that

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¹Abu al-Ḥassan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya wa al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya* (Qum, 1406/1985), 96–97.

the naqīb's remarkable performance in leading the Shī'a minority and in supporting scholars bolstered a local network that, in hindsight, proved instrumental for the production of knowledge. Thus, the intensification of sectarian conflicts during the Saljūq period posed a serious threat to the operation of this local network much needed for the success and continuation of scientific activities.

The Naqīb of Ray Alids

Abu al-Ḥassan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Nassawī, a preeminent mathematician of the fifth/eleventh century, dedicated three of his seven books and treatises on mathematics and geometry to the naqīb Abu al-Ḥassan Muṭahhar, the prominent naqīb of the Ray Alids. During the Saljūq era in Iran, it was customary for scientists to compose books in honor of, or at the request of Shī'a naqībs. For example, the heresiographer Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Shahrīstānī (d. 548/1153) dedicated his book, *al-Muṣārī'a al-Falāsīfa*, to the Tirmidh naqīb, Majd al-Dīn Abu al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn Ja'far Mūsawī.² 'Abd al-Jalīl Qazvīnī has related that his rejoinder to *Ba'd al-Faḍā'ih al-Rawāfiḍ* was composed at the behest of the Ray naqīb, Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 566/1170).³ Likewise, Muntajab al-Dīn of the Bābiwayh family wrote two books, *al-Fibrīst* and *al-Arba'īn 'an al-Arba'īn min al-Arba'īn fi Faḍā'il Amīr al-Mu'mīnīn*, in order to earn the favor of 'Izz al-Dīn Yaḥyā, son of Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad.⁴ Despite this long-standing tradition of composing books and treatises for a naqīb, the prominent character of Nassawī and the topics of his books dedicated to the naqīb Muṭahhar call for special attention.

An expert in astronomy, mathematics, and geometry, Nassawī was born in 393/1002 in Ray; his name suggests that his family was from Nasā in Khurāsān. When he was eight, he became interested in hawks and learned falconry. For the next sixty years of his life, Nassawī busied himself with falconry while working in the army and serving kings. Having been trained by the masters of this art, Nassawī studied books on falconry in Persian and foreign languages, and reached the rank of an expert falconer, such that at any given time sixteen people worked under his supervision. In his late sixties, Nassawī retired from this job and ten years later, when he was about 79, wrote *Bāḡ-Nāmah* (The Book of Falconry).⁵ We do not know the exact date of Nassawī's death, however, according to Beyhaqqī, he lived a healthy life for about one hundred years.⁶

²See Zabih'ollah Safa, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyyat dar Iran* (Tehran, 1339/1960), 2: 270, 286.

³'Abd al-Jalīl Rāzī Qazvīnī, *Naqḍ ma'rūf bi Ba'd Mathālib al-Nawāshib fi Naqḍ ba'd Faḍā'ih al-Rawāfiḍ*, ed. by Mir Jalal al-Dīn Muhaddith (Tehran, 1358/1979), 5–6.

⁴Muntajab al-Dīn ibn Bābewayh, *Fibrīst Asmā' 'Ulamā al-Shī'a*, ed. by Sayyed Abd al-Aziz Tabataba'i (Qum, 1404/1983), 3–6.

⁵See Abolqassim Qurbani, *Nassawī-Nāmah* (Tehran, 1370/1991), 7.

⁶'Alī ibn Zayd Beyhaqqī, *Tatimma al-Ṣiwān al-Ḥikma*, ed. by Muhammad Shafī' (Lahore, 1935), 1: 109.

Thanks to his expertise in mathematics, Nassawī was called *Ustād Mukhtaṣ* (the competent master); he was also well-versed in philosophy and medicine. He was admired for his good nature as well as for his interest in the sciences and arts. Nassawī was described as generous, hospitable, a supporter of scientists, and a promoter of knowledge.⁷ He had several students, including Shahmardān ibn Abi al-Khayr Rāzī, who recognized Nassawī's special place as his teacher.⁸

Nassawī wrote his book *al-Isbbā' fi Sharḥ al-Shikl al-Qiṭā'* as a commentary on the topic of *qiṭā'* in Ptolemy's *Almagest* to be dedicated to "*mawḷānā al-sayyid al-ajal al-Imām al-Murtaḍā dhi al-Fakhrayn naqīb al-nuqabā'* al-Islām sayyidanā al-Imām Abi al-Ḥassan al-Muṭahhar ibn al-sayyid al-Zakī dhi al-Ḥasbayn Abi al-Qāsim 'Alī adām Allāh dawlatab."⁹ In addition, he dedicated to this same naqīb his book on basic geometry, entitled *al-Tajrīd fī Uṣūl al-Hindisa*. According to Shahmardān Rāzī, Nassawī "made an utmost abridgement, for Sayyid ajal Murtaḍā, of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Umar Ṣūfī's *Ṣūwar al-Kawākib* and called it *Murtaḍawī*."¹⁰ Just who was this naqīb to evoke the respect of such a distinguished scientist as Nassawī?

Referred to by Muntajab al-Dīn Bābewayh as "*al-sayyid al-ajal al-Imām al-Murtaḍā al-kabīr al-a'alam al-aḥbad dhi al-Fakhrayn naqīb al-nuqabā'*, sayyid al-sādāt Abi al-Ḥassan Muṭahhar,"¹¹ the naqīb Muṭahhar was related to the family of Qum and Ray naqībs who were descendants of 'Abd Aallāh, son of the fourth Shī'a Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn (d. 94/712). Called Bāhir, thanks to his glowing face, 'Abd Aallāh was the brother of the fifth Shī'a Imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735). During the third/ninth century, 'Abd Aallāh's descendants migrated from Ṭabaristān to Qum and earned an eminent status in that city. Muḥammad, one of 'Abd Aallāh's descendants, was subsequently appointed as the naqīb of Ray by 'Alā al-Dawla Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Rostam ibn Marzbān, who was the ruler of Jibāl from 398/1007 to 433/1041. Later, when Muḥammad died in Ray, his body was taken to Qum where he was buried and a shrine was erected there in his honor. This shrine, called Imām-zādah Muḥammad Sharīf, remains in existence to this day.¹² Muḥammad's son 'Alī, otherwise referred to by his agnomen as Zakī, succeeded his father as the naqīb of Qum. The naqīb Muṭahhar was the son of 'Alī who, according to Abu al-Rajā' Qumī, settled in Ray and established himself there as naqīb after

⁷Gholam Hossein Sadiqi, "Ḥakīm Nassawī," *The Journal of the Faculty of Literature*, 1 (Tehran, 1337/1958): 13.

⁸Shahmardān ibn Abi al-Khayr Rāzī, *Rawḍa al-Munajjimīn*, ed. by Jalil Akhavan Zanjanī (Tehran, 1382/2003), 587; also Shahmardān Rāzī, *Nuḣbat Nāmab 'Alā'i*, ed. by Farhang Jahanpour (Tehran, 1362/1983), 439.

⁹Qurbani, *Nassawī-Nāmab*, 22.

¹⁰Rāzī, *Rawḍa al-Munajjimīn*, 529.

¹¹Bābewayh, *Fibrīst Asmā'*, 4.

¹²Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *al-Shajara al-Mubāraka fī Ansāb al-Ṭālibīyya*, ed. by Sayyid Mahdi Raja'i (Qum, 1409/1988), 117; cf. Shaykh Abbāss Qumī, *Muntabā al-Āmāl* (Tehran, ?), 2: 46.

removing Sayyid Qāsim ibn ‘Ibād Ḥassanī from that position.¹³ In Ray he lived a life of grandeur, admired for his extraordinary interest in the sciences as well as for his benevolence and integrity. Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1209) refers to the naqīb as a theologian, debater, writer, and a poet, while adding that he was generous and charitable (*lahū mā’ida al-manṣūba al-mabdhūla*).¹⁴

Abu al-Ḥassan Bākharzī briefly met Muṭahhar in Ray in 434/1042 and spoke highly of him, adding “despite the shortness of our meeting, I would regularly hear about the naqīb and his kind remarks about me would increase my respect for him.”¹⁵ This brief meeting took place when the naqīb was relatively young, so his status must have risen to higher prominence as time passed. The naqīb’s eminent status becomes clear when we learn that his son married the daughter of the Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk. Interestingly, according to ‘Abd al-Jalīl Rāzī, Niẓām al-Mulk proposed the marriage and employed intercessors to obtain the naqīb’s consent.¹⁶ Family relations and wealth had earned the naqīb unique prestige. In addition to the relationship with Niẓām al-Mulk, according to Abu al-Rajā Qumī, the naqīb himself had married the daughter of Kīyā Abu al-Faṭḥ who was a vizier to ‘Alā al-Dawla, son of Kākūyah. Further, his grandson, ‘Alī, married the daughter of ‘Āyishah Khātūn, who was the daughter of Sulṭān Ālp Arsalān (r. 455–65/1063–72).¹⁷ The naqīb accumulated such wealth that 400 *mans* (about 1200 kg) of pearl was only one item of his estate.¹⁸ Apparently his wealth secured him high esteem among the Shī‘as and Sunnis alike. ‘Abd al-Jalīl Rāzī reports that, “every Friday, scholars of the *farīqayn* [Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī] paid him a visit and received gifts; the Sulṭān [Malikshāh] met the naqīb in private at the latter’s place; and the magnificent Niẓām al-Mulk visited him several times a year.”¹⁹

Needless to say, the naqīb’s prominence would evoke jealousy. Drawing on a eulogy composed by Amir Mu‘ezzī, Malikshāh’s court poet, we can infer the following points. First, one of the naqīb’s agnomens was Abū Ṭāhir. Second, Burhānī, Amīr Mu‘ezzī’s father, who was also Malikshāh’s court poet, had praised the naqīb. And third, one of the naqīb’s enemies had disparaged him in the presence of the Sulṭān, which in turn had vitiated, albeit for a brief period, the relationship between the naqīb and the Sulṭān; but according to Amīr Mu‘ezzī, the relationship eventually improved “thanks to the Muslims’ prayers.”²⁰

¹³Najm al-Dīn Abu al-Rajā’ Qumī, *Tārīkh al-Wuẓarā’*, ed. by M. T. Danish-Pazhuh (Tehran, 1363/1984), 106.

¹⁴Rāzī, *al-Shajara al-Mubāraka fī Ansāb al-Ṭālibīyya*, 117.

¹⁵Abu al-Ḥassan Bākharzī, *Dumya al-Qaṣr wa ‘Uṣra Abl al-‘Aṣr*, facsimile copy of the library of Mojtaba Mīnavi, No. 129, 1: 109.

¹⁶Qazvīnī, *Naqd ma’rūf bi Ba’d Mathālib al-Nawāṣīb*, 261.

¹⁷Qumī, *Tārīkh al-Wuẓarā’*, 107.

¹⁸Qazvīnī, *Naqd ma’rūf bi Ba’d Mathālib al-Nawāṣīb*, 224.

¹⁹Qazvīnī, *Naqd ma’rūf bi Ba’d Mathālib al-Nawāṣīb*, 399.

²⁰*Dīwān Amīr Mu‘ezzī*, ed. by Abbass Iqbal Ashtiyani (Tehran, 1318/1939), 36–40.

The naqīb Muṭahhar was well versed in writing as well as in religious sciences. He is said to have attended, during his Hajj pilgrimage, the ḥadīth lectures of Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–67).²¹ It has been reported that, in 457/1064, the naqīb embarked on Hajj and, accompanied by his large entourage, went to Baghdad. However, due to the unsafe roads and treacherous guides, they never arrived in Mecca and therefore returned to Ray.²² Muṭahhar's meeting with Shaykh Ṭūsī is likely to have taken place in the same year. He could have met Shaykh Ṭūsī during his pilgrimage to the shrine of the first Shī'a Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Najaf although there is no direct report to support this speculation.

The naqīb Muṭahhar died on the day of 'Īd Qurbān in 492/1098.²³ Half a century later, 'Alī ibn Zayd Beyhaqqī recalls that he had seen in the naqīb's library in Ray so many books and treatises penned by Abū Naṣr Fārābī (d. 870–950), and the latter's pupil Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 893–974), that he had not heard of before.²⁴ This is likely to have been a family library. The existence of books penned personally by Fārābī who had died in 339/950 leads us to believe that the naqīb Muṭahhar collected these books and founded the library when he settled in Ray.

The Naqīb and the Promotion of Knowledge

Following the conquest in 447/1055 of Baghdad by Ṭuqrul's troops, Shaykh Ṭūsī migrated to Najaf. Three years later, the Sunnīs of Baghdad demolished the *dār al-'ilm* of the Buyid vizier Shāpūr ibn Ardashīr (d. 415/1024) in the Karkh quarter.²⁵ We can envision that Shaykh Ṭūsī confided in the naqīb, sharing his views about recent events such that Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa's advice enabled the naqīb to perform more effectively as leader for the Shī'as of Ray. As a consequence, not only were the Shī'as protected from the strict policies of Malikshāh and Niẓām al-Mulk, but the naqīb himself was placed on a higher footing vis-à-vis the leaders of other Muslim sects, thereby improving the social conditions of the Shī'a populace in his times. Moreover, the naqīb seems to have undertaken single-handedly the task of supporting the scientists—a task that was formerly performed by institutions such as the *dār al-'ilm*. While our sources reveal very little about the specifics of his support, the

²¹Bābiwayh, *Fibrīst Asmā'*, 153.

²²Shams al-Dīn Abu al-Muzaffar Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān fī Tārīkh al-A'ayān* (Ankara, 1968) 122–123.

²³Qumī, *Tārīkh al-Wuẓarā'*, 107–108.

²⁴Beyhaqqī, *Tatīmma al-Ṣiwān al-Hikma*, 17–18; cf. Naṣīr al-Dīn ibn 'Umda al-Mulk Muntajab al-Dīn Munshī Yazdī, *Durra al-Akbbār wa Lom'a al-Anwār*, addendum to *Mibr*, 5 (Tehran, 1318/1939): 18. For an in-depth analysis of Fārābī's circle, see Ian Richard Netton, *Al-Farabi and His School* (London and New York, 1992).

²⁵Abd al-Raḥmān Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam*, ed. by Mohammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut, 1992), 16: 48–49.

dedication of Nassawī's three books appears as a token of appreciation for the naqīb's support. Nassawī's expression of gratitude suggests that the naqīb was interested not only in religious sciences, but also in other branches of knowledge, including the philosophical sciences.

The role of the naqīb Muṭahhar seems even more significant when we consider that, beyond the *Zij Malikshāhī*, there is little evidence for the support of scientific projects by the powerful Saljūq Sultāns and the great Khwāja Nizām al-Mulk. Nizām al-Mulk was expected to offer this kind of support, but he, according to Amīr Mu'ezzī, not only showed no interest in poetry, but "did not mingle with anyone save the religious leaders and the Sufis [*va aẓ a'immah va mutesavvifah beh hichkas nemīpardākeh*]."²⁶ After the death of Malikshāh and Nizām al-Mulk, the sons of Malikshāh became bogged down among themselves. One son, Muḥammad, became increasingly preoccupied with suppressing the Ismā'īlīs. As a result, little time and resources were left to support scientists, not to mention that a distinguished astronomer, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ma'mūrī, was murdered in the ensuing turmoil.²⁷ It is worth noting that Nassawī's pupil, Shahmardān ibn Abi al-Khayr Rāzī, dedicated his encyclopedia in natural and mathematical sciences, entitled *Noẓbat Nāmab 'Alā'ī*, not to the Saljūq Sultāns, but rather to 'Alā al-Dawla Abū Kālījār Garshāsb ibn 'Alī ibn Farāmarz (r. 488–513/1095–1119), the Shī'a ruler of Yazd from the Kākūyah family.²⁸

Nassawī was a prominent figure. He probably did not need the financial support of the naqīb as his service to the kings must have earned him enough wealth to allow for a comfortable life. Rulers of his age depended on his expertise in falconry. Thanks to his social status, then, Nassawī would probably rather not be regarded as depending on the naqīb. Dedicating his books to the naqīb, however, might have brought him the protection that scientists and philosophers so desperately needed under the Saljūqs during the fifth/eleventh century. The Iranians remembered a more prosperous period of the state support of scholarship, as exemplified in Sultān Maḥmūd's love of poetry,²⁹ and his search for scientists to serve at his court,³⁰ as well as his son Sultān Mas'ūd's passion for the arts and sciences.³¹ Scientists were now at the mercy of the Saljūq Sultāns, who imposed strict religious policies on their subjects,³² fueling sectarian

²⁶Nizāmī 'Arūḍī Samarqandī, *Chabār Maqālab*, ed. by Mohammad Mo'in (Tehran, 1334/1955), 83.

²⁷Beyhaqqī, *Tatimma al-Šiwān al-Ḥikma*, 109–10; cf. Yazdī, *Durra al-Akbbār wa Lom'a al-Anwār*, 95–96.

²⁸Rāzī, *Noẓbat Nāmab 'Alā'ī*, 14–15.

²⁹According to Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, there were always 400 poets in Maḥmūd's entourage; see *Tadbkara al-Shu'arā* (Tehran, 1366/1987), 36.

³⁰This is reflected in Sultān Maḥmūd's letter to Ma'mūn Khwārazmshāh; see 'Arūḍī Samarqandī, *Chabār Maqālab*, 151.

³¹See Abu al-Faḍl Beyhaqqī, *Tārīkh Beybaqqī*, ed. by Ali Akbar Fayyaz (Mashhad, 1356/1977), 845.

³²Ālp Arsalān had such a zeal in his Ḥanafī faith that he was not pleased with Nizām al-Mulk's Shāfi'i faith; see Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyāsat Nāmab*, ed. by Ja'far Shu'ar (Tehran, 1370/1991), 115–117. This passage from *Siyāsat Nāmab* also reflects Nizām al-Mulk's zeal for his faith.

conflicts while heartening those with a passionate antipathy toward the rational sciences.³³ Moreover, the Saljūqs' intensifying hostilities with the Ismā'īlīs, who promoted the rational sciences, further exacerbated social problems that confronted scientists of the day. One unfortunate consequence, as mentioned earlier, was the murder of the mathematician and astronomer Ma'mūrī, who was active in the *Zīj Malikshāhī* project and was sent by Malikshāh (r. 465–85/1072–92) on a mission to Iṣfahān. It is reported that Ma'mūrī was killed during a public riot against the Ismā'īlīs in Iṣfahān after he left Sulṭān Muḥammad's palace anonymously.³⁴ Nonetheless, it can be envisaged that the loss of social and political support in such a troubled time must have exposed the scientists to all sorts of risks.

Conclusion

The naqīb Muṭahhar's public activities were instrumental in creating space for intellectual activities, especially those associated with rational sciences, in the face of intensifying sectarian conflicts. His exemplary performance was particularly crucial in light of the underdeveloped state of institutions inclusive of the foreign sciences. The naqīb Muṭahhar's support must have protected the social status of scientists, such as Nassawī, if not their lives. One could probably relegate the naqīb's enthusiasm to his personal interest in the sciences or attribute it to what had hitherto remained from the Shī'a tradition of support for the sciences—a tradition epitomized in the institution of the *dār al-'ilm*. More importantly, there is little evidence for continuity during the sixth/twelfth century of efforts similar to those of the naqīb Muṭahhar. Was there a change in the policy of the naqīb Muṭahhar's successors? Or did they rely on newly-established Shī'a *madrasas*, which held authority over the expenditure of the *waqf* proceeds? Is it that the efforts of the adversaries of natural and mathematical sciences resulted in discouraging patronage, hence diminishing the production of knowledge? Any attempt to answer these questions will require further inquiry into the changing terrain of social relations that shaped the production of knowledge during the Saljūq period.

³³An exemplar may be found in Imām Muḥammad Ghazzālī's rejection of Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's philosophy and equating them in some instances with infidelity (*kofr*); see *Tabāfut al-Falāsifa* (Bombay, ?), 94; also see *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Cairo, 1955), 105; cf. Safa, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyyat dar Iran*, 271–288.

³⁴Yazdī, *Durra al-Akbbār wa Lom'a al-Anwār*, 95–96.