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**A Manuscript about Sufi Sheikh Miracles  
from R. Fakhretdinov's Archive  
in the Collection of the IOM, RAS**

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*Abstract:* Rizaeddin Fakhretdinov (1859–1936) is one of the most prominent figures among Muslim scholars at the turn of the 19–20th cc. whose sphere of scientific interests was biographies. Among the materials of R. Fakhretdinov on the preparation of his famous work “Asar” there are texts related to Sufism, and of particular interest are descriptions of the miracles performed by Muslim righteous men. One of the documents about the miraculous deeds of a righteous man named Abd al-Latif b. Subhankul b. Ramkul under the title (Fī bayān manāqib ‘al-‘imām ‘al-shaiḥ ‘al-kāmil) “Explanation of the virtues of al-Imam al-Sheikh al-Kamil” (the Imam, the Sheikh who should be followed) is stored in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in the archive of R. Fakhretdinov (Fund 131, Inventory 1). The stories in many ways resemble or even coincide with similar Sufi texts from other Muslim countries. This is a sign of cultural and ideological interaction between brotherhoods, as well as transmission of the perfect image of Sufi righteous men. In addition, miracles and their number enhanced the importance of a sheikh — mentor in the eyes of his followers and made his authority undeniable. It is worth mentioning that the text is written in a good Arabic literary language, which testifies to a high education level of the author. The present article contains a short biography of Rizaeddin Fakhretdinov, facsimile publication of the text and its translation into English.

*Key words:* miracles, Sufism, Islam, biographies, Tatar-Bashkir, Rizaeddin Fakhretdinov, Asar

In Sufi circles, the ability to perform miracles was one of the qualities of a preceptor and righteous man. Information about miracles was collected in biographies of the most influential sheikhs. People followed such men, whose deeds were recorded by scholarly authors.

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One of the brightest figures among Muslim scholars who worked at the turn of the 19th–20th is Rizaeddin Fakhretdinov (1859–1936). He is the author of the well-known voluminous work “Asar” (“Traces”), in which he managed to collect biographies of the most famous people, mostly Muslims of the Russian Empire. The biography of this outstanding man explains the reasons for his early interest in Islamic teachings and his desire to bring to his contemporaries and new generations information about the people famous for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

R. Fakhretdinov was born in the village Kichuchatovo, Bugulma district, Samara region on January 4, 1859, in a family of pious people, as his grandfather and father were local imam-khatibs. The boy was sent to school early, where he had the opportunity to study the Quran and the Arabic language, as well as to gain knowledge of Islamic sciences.

Then Rizaeddin Fakhretdinov continued his studies at the madrasa of Chistopol, and in the period of 1869–1889 he himself tried to combine study and teaching. At the same time, the young man got acquainted with newspapers addressed to a Muslim audience, in particular with publications of Ismail Gasprinsky (1851–1914) in “Terjiman” (“Translator”).<sup>1</sup> In the last years of his studies and later, the future scientist and publicist was fascinated by the heritage of the Tatar thinkers A. Kursavi (1776–1812),<sup>2</sup> Sh. Marjani (1818–1889).<sup>3</sup> The ideas of such major theologian reformers as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897) and Muhammad Abdo (1849–1905) also aroused great interest in him.<sup>4</sup>

In 1887 he published his first book, which was devoted to the Arabic language. In 1891 R. Fakhretdinov moved to Ufa, where he worked as a judge-qadi and in the same year he received the title of akhun. During the last decade of the 19th c. he was fortunate to meet the poet Miftakhaddin Akmulla (1831–1885), teacher and public figure Zainulla Rasulev (1833–1917), who also, like R. Fakhretdinov, came from a religious family. Later, R. Fakhretdinov in his works warmly spoke of this scientist, teacher, and Sufi. Fate also brought him together with Armin Vamberi (1832–1913), a famous Hungarian traveler and a major specialist in Turkic languages, who traveled to the Bashkir region in 1895.

<sup>1</sup> The newspaper “Terjiman” (The Translator) was published from 1883 to 1918 in Bakhchisaray.

<sup>2</sup> Abunnasyr Kursavi was a Tatar theologian and educator.

<sup>3</sup> Shigabutdin Marjani was a Tatar Muslim educator and scholar.

<sup>4</sup> Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdo were Muslim scholar-reformers.

In 1905–1906. Fakhretdinov moved to Orenburg, where he became assistant editor of the newspaper “Vakit” (“Time” 1906–1918), published in the Tatar language, and in 1908–1917, he himself edited the magazine “Shuro” (“Council” 1908–1917), owned by Zakir Rameyev (1859–1921). In this magazine, he published 179 articles about representatives of Tatar culture and religion. In 1917 he was actively involved in social life of the Bashkir region.

In 1922 he was elected Mufti of the Central Religious Administration of Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia.

In 1926 he participated in the First World Muslim Congress as the head of the Soviet Muslim delegation. In the same year, he made the Hajj. He finished his scholarly and life journey as Mufti of Russia and Siberia in Ufa in 1936. He rests in the Muslim cemetery in Ufa.

The main published work by R. Fakhretdinov is “Asar”<sup>5</sup>, and its several volumes were printed in 1900–1909. In terms of genre, it can be classified as a biographical dictionary.

In addition to his individual work on collecting necessary materials for the preparation of this huge work, he asked all his colleagues, friends, acquaintances, parishioners of mosques in those settlements that he visited, to provide him with written testimonies, memoirs, and other texts from their private archives that contained biographies of Muslim scholar-theologians, imams, teachers, and judges. Many people responded and sent him genealogical trees of their prominent relatives, information about their Hajj and public activities. Some of these materials were letters of correspondence between imams, theologians and Sufis. There were also texts related to Sufism.

The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences contains a significant number of documents related to R. Fakhretdinov's activities in preparing his famous work “Asar”. They are kept in the Archive of Orientalists (Fund 131).

Among the documents found in the collection, along with texts in Russian and Tatar, there are documents written only in Arabic, or in Arabic and Tatar. Altogether there are 30 texts in Arabic, and 22 texts mixing Arabic and Tatar.

The subject matter of the texts varies. The most interesting Sufi text that combines biographical information about a sheikh-mentor and the miracles (karamat) performed by him is the “Explanation of the virtues of al-Imam

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<sup>5</sup> “Asar” in Arabic means “traces, monuments”.

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al-sheikh al-kamil” (the Imam, the Sheikh who should be followed) (Fī bayān manāqib ‘al-‘imām ‘al- shaiḥ ‘al-kāmil). It reports on the life and miraculous deeds of ‘Abd al-Latif b. Subhankul b. Ramkūl. The second volume of R. Fakhretdinov’s biographical dictionary contains information about him, but there is practically no information about his Sufi activities in the text.<sup>6</sup>

The manuscript is written in good literary Arabic on three sheets of paper and is dated 1895. The author of the text was the son of Hajji Mullah Isa al-Kama. The descriptions of miracles are very colorful and resemble those found in other texts similar in spirit and style, for example, in the Sudanese material in Ibn Daifallah’s “*Tabaqat*”, in which they are included in the main text of the biographies of righteous people.<sup>7</sup>

In many respects the plots with miraculous deeds resemble or even coincide with those in similar Sufi texts in other Muslim countries. This fact proves the existence of a cultural and ideological interaction between brotherhoods, which includes transmission of ideas about righteous Sufis from one brotherhood to another. Rizaeddin Fakhretdin was certainly familiar with this text, but it was not included by him in the main body of his work “*Asar*”.

This text expands our understanding of Sufi life at that time, clarifies the relations of Sufi sheikhs with their followers, the transmission of knowledge, and the qualities that a true righteous man should possess, even if some of them were attributed to him and were of a supernatural nature.

## Translation from Arabic into English

### **Explanation of the virtues of al-Imam ash-sheikh al-kamil (the Imam, the Sheikh who should be followed)**

[f. 1] Abd al-Latif b. Subhankul b. Ramkul. Al-Kasaka is his birthplace and al-Karj is his ancestral nest. The village of Kasaka Yalgi arose there. It is a small village in the *nahiya*<sup>8</sup> Shaharbekbai. He studied sciences in the village of Adai on the way to Arachi, while he was brought up by Mullah Amirkhan b. Kauchak, may the Almighty have mercy on him.

<sup>6</sup> FAKHRUDDIN 1901–1909: vol. 2, no. 265.

<sup>7</sup> GERASIMOV 2018: 294–296, 331, 349, 351, 366.

<sup>8</sup> *Nahiya* is a territorial and administrative unit corresponding to a parish.



I was informed by his son, and he learned it from his notes, may Allah have mercy on him, from a commentary on his book. And I was informed by his son Muhammad as-Sadiq of the words of his mother, and she [learned] from her husband — the mentioned Sheikh, that during his days of study he used to visit the grave of Sheikh Baba, who was buried in the cemetery of this village of Adai. He received a *baraka* from him with the joy and love of the Almighty for him. And he was a man of reading and he had a beautiful voice when he read. A passion to reach the Kaaba filled his heart, and he set out there. He reached Cairo in Egypt. There he met the sheikhs of al-Azhar and before the scholars who practiced the art of reading in that country, he showed his mastery of reading the surahs and ayats, which he knew by heart. He recited in chant and was given an *ijazah*<sup>9</sup> for what he demonstrated before them.

Then he reached the goal of his journey and made *tawaf* around the Kaaba, kissed the Black Stone and returned unharmed without succumbing to vice. Then he went to pious Bukhara, intending to follow the Way [of the Righteous]. He accompanied a sheikh known as Turkoman, may Allah be pleased with them both. “As was befitting”, said sheikh Abd al-Latif, “I saw sheikh Turkoman, may Allah be pleased with them both, and he was with a radiant and fresh face. Whenever he met me he would say: ايشانم ايشانم and I was confused by his words and I did not know what he meant by them”.

One day I accompanied him, and it was just the two of us. I perceived from him the *viridas*<sup>10</sup> and the acts which I could not perform in the time allotted for performing these acts. I was so absorbed in it, that the thoughts of the deeds almost completely overwhelmed my mind. Then I went to sheikh Daulatshah, and he became sheikh in the *nahiya* of Urabnur in the village of al-Manikal, and at that time [he] was in Bukhara.

He was getting *ijazah* from the same sheikh [meaning sheikh Turkoman — *I.G.*] and his teaching. He went with me and said: “I learned from him and performed all the deeds in the time in which he ordered me to perform them”. Then I realized that it was possible to perform [what had been assigned] myself.

I escorted the sheikh a second time, staying alone and he gave me an *ijazah* to teach and signed a letter of instruction. I found out that what had happened to me had happened in Sheikh Baba's tomb, but I did not know

<sup>9</sup> Ijazah — recognition of scientific achievements and permission to teach relevant aspects.

<sup>10</sup> Vird — a short prayer.

that. And the mystery of the beginning of the Sheikh's speech became clear. And he, may Allah have mercy on him, informed me.

And when he returned to the village where he grew up, which is Kasaka Yalgi, he preached to people and watched that they did not do anything sinful. But they did not accept him. He departed from them, comforted by the words: "Messenger of the Most Gracious, may Allah bless [f. 2] him and his kin, and welcome!" "He who flees with faith in Allah from one land to another by even one span..." [And this is the text from] *hadith*. And he came to the village of Karaj and its people received him with love and obedience. He became a sheikh in it.

He achieved heights of honor shown by many men and many women who, thanks to him, achieved excellence. He gave *baraka* to those who followed him in mastering the science.

And he, may Allah have mercy on him, performed miraculous deeds *karamat*. And for that he was treated with respect. If he sat down with knowledgeable scholars, no one dared to speak except him. Whenever he wanted to make a speech, he made himself admired, thanks, among other things, to his beautiful extraordinary voice.

And even if someone was hungry, in need and burdened by worldly affairs in this near life, but sat down with him in the *majlis* during his recitation, he forgot what was happening to him and longed for recitation and felt no heaviness and fatigue in his soul, even when the sheikh recited a long surah. One day he, may Allah have mercy on him, making sure that no sinful thing is done and showing pity to the one in distress, [he] said to those present: "I have ordered you to do good and forbidden you to do evil, but you have not complied, so all my teeth have fallen out". And when he opened his mouth the people did not see a single tooth in it.

One of his miraculous deeds is that one day he was sitting in the shadow of a mosque, looking at a mountain in the vicinity of the village, and said: "If you dig a hole in the mountain at this place, it is possible that a spring will come up there". And at that time there was no water there. When a small hole was dug in the place pointed out by him, a mighty stream poured out of the middle of the mountain. Since then, the spring existed and the villagers of al-Karaj have been drinking from it. Thanks to this water, the ailments are cured. Since that time, it has been known as Yachshim Hazrat Ishan.

Of his miraculous deeds and what he once told his followers: "I dreamed that my horse, of white color, had fallen dead," and he asked: "How is sheikh al-Turkoman doing in Bukhara, is he not dead?" According to my

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information [it followed that] he was dead. And suddenly sheikh Turkoman appeared before his followers on his own feet. Then he and his companions performed the prayer of fear after the sunset prayer.

And of his miraculous deeds is that he had a *murid*<sup>11</sup> who was very eager to become perfect by the look with which the sheikh would look at him. And one day the Sheikh looked at him, and [the murid — *I.G.*] became frightened and fell down. The *murid* said: “My mind is sound, but I have no strength to move and I [find myself] in the middle of the road in a place where men walk. And whenever a man passed by me, he would utter: “And this one is a drunkard, [f. 3] who has reached an extreme degree of intoxication”. Very soon the sheikh came and said: “Get up!” I got up safe. The sheikh said: “I look at you with the gaze of beauty, and if I look with the gaze of grandeur, you will not be able to cope with it”.

And also of his wonders is that he had a murid whose name was Sulaiman in the *nahiya* of Ufa in the village of Tirmakalmash. And he nicknamed Sulaiman *khalifa* so that he would someday make a visit (*ziyara*). And that [*murid*] said: “I wanted to spend the night in a valley with abundant water and plenty of trees and pasture. I let my horse loose and prayed the evening prayer [salat al-maghrib] and, behold, I heard a sound accompanying the revelry and sounds similar to those of men: someone reciting poetry, someone beating a drum, someone playing a lute, someone shouting in a loud voice. And when I looked at the highest point of the valley, I saw many men approaching me. Some were over the mountain, some over the trees, and I guessed they were jinns. I set off [away] from the place, but they did not follow me and stayed behind. On the way I reflected that when I reached [the sheikh] I would tell him what had happened to me. When I arrived, I greeted him by the hand and he smiled and asked: “How are you doing?” I replied, “I saw such things...!” When I started to speak, he told me, “If you did not have someone watching [you — *I.G.*] ready to save you, they would have killed you by tying you to the branches of the trees”.

This is all I have heard from my father, may Allah have mercy on him.

Miraculous deeds and virtues abound. I will refrain from continuing and peace... Peace to our brother in the faith, suppressing heresy in favor of trustworthy knowledge, the most faithful of judges, the pillar of the suffering Mullah Rida al-Din.

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<sup>11</sup> Murid — a student, follower of sheikh.

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And I almost stopped writing to you, and was about to censure you, and would have deserved to be said of me, “He is slower than Fanad”.<sup>12</sup> And I have no support and would have been right in saying, but I have not found a faithful host, and I am sad. And I have apologized, and your forgiveness is desired, and your prayer for good is filled with goodness, and for you are my prayer, gratitude and peace.

From a servant who cries out for the help of the Lord All-preserving. Given by the son of Hajji Mullah Isa al-Kamal at the beginning of the month of Zu al-Hijja in 1312 of the Islamic Qur’anic year according to Hijra [corresponds to the summer of 1895 — *I.G.*].

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<sup>12</sup> Fanad is Aisha’s servant, the daughter of Sa’ad b. Abi Uakkas, who was sent to fetch fire and did not return with it until a year later. It is a symbol of slowness and unhurriedness.

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