

Martin van Bruinessen,

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## The Qâdiriyya

and the lineages of Qâdirî shaykhs

in Kurdistan

The observer of the Qadiriyya in Kurdistan is struck by two traits that clearly distinguish it from the only other order that presently has numerous Kurdish adherents, the Naqshbandiyya, as well as from the branches of the Qadiriyya elsewhere that have been studied thus far. The first is the fact that the order is, at least in southern and eastern Kurdistan, virtually monopolised by two (formerly by four) large families of hereditary shaykhs, who also control considerable economic resources, the Barzinjis and the Talabanis. Whereas the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya rapidly spread across all of Kurdistan in the 19th century due to the practice of appointing locally influential `ulama as *khalifa*, the networks of the Qadiri shaykhs (especially the Barzinjis) remained family networks, with branches of the family established in different places acting as the chief spiritual authorities and with few or no outsiders in positions of importance. The second striking aspect of Kurdish Qadiri practices is the use of percussion instruments accompanying the recitation of mystical poetry as well as the *dhikr*, the ecstatic nature of the *dhikr*, and (especially with the Barzinji branches) the practice of cutting oneself with sharp objects (*tîghbâzî*), licking red-hot iron, eating glass and poison, in which some of the participants in the Qadiri *majlis* engage. The latter practices are commonly associated with the Rifa`iyya, not with the Qadiriyya.<sup>1</sup> The Kurdish Qadiriyya *majlis* appears to represent a local synthesis of devotional and mystical exercises.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These practices are not entirely unknown in other branches of the Qadiriyya, however. In the Maghrib, where the order is known as Jilaliyya, it is especially renowned for them. According to During (1989: 639) they are also found with the Qadiriyya of Turkey, Baluchistan and South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> A description and analysis of the rituals of the Kurdish Qadiriyya is beyond the scope of this article. The most elaborate description of a number of Qadiri *majlis* in Kurdistan is probably still that in Bruinessen 1992: 234-40, but there is much interesting and detailed information on Qadiri ritual in Tawakkuli (s.d.: 169-95). The musicologist and religious scholar Jean During provides an interesting description and analysis of a Kurdish Qadiri *dhikr* (1989: 241-51, 288-90) and of some of the religious poetry sung in the *majlis* (ibid. 252-78).

## The Barzinji shaykhs

The two families of shaykhs that have dominated the Qadiriyya in southern and eastern Kurdistan for the past century and a half are the Barzinji, with their major centres in the the city of Sulaymaniyya and a number of villages in the districts around it, and the Talabani, with their central *takiya* in Kirkuk. Previously, two large and influential families of sayyids in central Kurdistan, based in Nehri in Shemdinan and in Arvas near Moks respectively, were also affiliated with the Qadiriyya but the leading shaykhs of both adopted the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya in the 19th century and appear to have completely given up their Qadiri affiliations.<sup>3</sup>

The Barzinji are the most influential and powerful family of `ulama and shaykhs in Kurdistan. They trace their origins to a certain Sayyid `Isa who in the mid-15th century came, together with his brother Musa, from Hamadan and settled in Kurdistan at a spot named Barzinja, where they established a mosque. Family chronicles make `Isa and Musa the sons of `Ali Hamadani and brothers of Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh, who, according to the same chronicles, personally spread the Nurbakhshiyya in Kurdistan; Sayyid `Isa himself is also sometimes named `Isa Nurbakhsh.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that at least at one stage the family was affiliated with the Nurbakhshiyya order. `Ali Hamadani (d. 786/1385) was a well-known mystic affiliated with the Kubrawiyya, who established himself in Kashmir; Muhammad Nurbakhsh (d. 869/1465) was a second-generation disciple of `Ali Hamadani, who declared himself the *mahdi* and for whom the Nurbakhshiyya, a distinct branch of the Kubrawiyya, is named. The presence of the Nurbakhshiyya in 15th-century Kurdistan is also attested by other sources.<sup>5</sup>

The same two brothers Sayyid `Isa and Sayyid Musa also occur in the founding myth of the syncretistic Ahl-i Haqq religion. Sultan Sahak, the divine incarnation who established the first Ahl-i Haqq community at Pirdiwar, was the son of Sayyid `Isa. Several of the sayyid families (*khânadân*) who constitute the hereditary religious leaders of the Ahl-i Haqq claim to be the

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<sup>3</sup> On the seyyids of Nehri, see my "The Sadatê Nehrî or Gilanizade of Central Kurdistan", in this volume. The seyyids of Arvas, who are not related to them, are briefly discussed below. Extensive biographies of prominent members of the latter family are to be found in Uyan 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Summaries of Barzinji family chronicles are given by Edmonds (1957: 68-72) and by Tawakkuli (s.d.: 133, citing Muhammad Amin Zaki's *Ta'rikh Sulaymaniyya*, which unfortunately was not available to me). Edmonds gives the date of 656/1258 for the arrival of the two brothers, Tawakkuli the more likely one of 860/1456.

<sup>5</sup> On Muhammad Nurbakhsh and the Nurbakhshiyya, see Hamid Algar's article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which does not mention any indication that the order spread west from its origins in Kashmir. Some Kurdish sources claim that the 15th-century sufi, Shaykh Husamuddin Bitlisi, the father of the famous historian and diplomat Idris Bitlisi, was a *khalifa* of the Nurbakhshiyya (e.g., Zeki 1998[1945]: 121; Çaglayan 1996: 161). The source that is closest in time to him, however, the *Sharafname* (late 16th century) does not mention the Nurbakhshiyya but only speaks of a *silsila* to the earlier great sufi of Bitlis, `Ammar b. Yasir, who was Kubra's teacher (and thus Nurbakhsh' spiritual ancestor).

descendants of Sultan Sahak's sons (and therefore distant relatives of the Barzinji).<sup>6</sup>

The sources contradict each other as to the date since when the Barzinji family has been affiliated with the Qadiriyya; some sources tend to project this further back into the past than is warranted. The present branches of the Barzinji family all descend from a certain Baba Rasul (d. 1056/1646), who is in the ninth generation after Sayyid `Isa.<sup>7</sup> As the family tradition (in Tawakkuli's summary) has it, Baba Rasul received an *ijâza* to teach besides the Nurbakhshiiyya a second *tariqa*, the `Alawiyya branch of the Khalwatiyya, which he also handed down to his descendants. Baba Rasul had numerous sons, who settled in different villages in the Shahrazur region, establishing their own lodges.

One of Baba Rasul's sons, Muhammad (1040-1103/1630-1691), travelled widely, studying in Baghdad, Mardin, Aleppo, Cairo and finally settling in Medina, where he became the Shafi`i *mufti*. He acquired a certain fame for the vehement critique of Ahmad Sirhindi that he wrote in 1682, in response to an *istifta* from Indian `ulama and at the request of his teacher Ibrahim al-Kurani. His descendants remained an influential family in Medina, that frequently occupied the position of *mufti*.<sup>8</sup>

One of Baba Rasul's grandsons, Muhammad Nodehî (named after the village of Nodê in the Qalacholan district where he established himself), acquired such a reputation as a mystic that came to be known as "[al-] *kibrît al-ahmar*", Red Sulphur — after the elixir to which Ibn al-`Arabi's metaphysical mysticism refers as a symbol for the transformation of the human soul.<sup>9</sup> One source (Mudarris' biographical dictionary) claims that Muhammad already taught the Qadiriyya; according to another (Tawakkuli), it was his son Isma`il who made this into the family's distinctive *tariqa*.

The first member of the Barzinji family who adopted the order with which the family was later primarily associated, the Qadiriyya, was Muhammad Nodehi's son, Isma`il Wulyani (also known as Isma`il Qazanqaya). Isma`il had first been initiated by his father into the Nurbakhshiiyya and the Khalwatiyya-`Alawiyya and then travelled to Baghdad for further study. It was there that he

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Edmonds 1957: 182-190, Edmonds 1969, Tawakkuli s.d.: 134.

<sup>7</sup> The major branches of the family are shown in the diagrams in Edmonds 1957: 69, Bruinessen 1978: 342 and Bruinessen 1992: 320; an elaborate list of Baba Rasul's descendants is also given in Mudarris 1983: 107-111. The latter author gives the year of Baba Rasul's birth as 970/1562-3, Tawakkuli that of his death as 1056/1646.

<sup>8</sup> On Muhammad b. `Abd al-Rasul see Mudarris 1983: 493-5; on his polemic with Sirhindi: Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971, pp. 97-99.

<sup>9</sup> Tawakkuli s.d.: 133, Mudarris 1983: 497-8.

received his initiation into the Qadiriyya, at the hands of a certain Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î.<sup>10</sup> The available sources give no date for this event, but since Isma`il is said to have died in 1158/1745,<sup>11</sup> his adoption of the Qadiriyya probably took place in the early 18th century.

The *silsila* of present-day Kurdish Qadiris are of little help in elucidating the Barzinji's first Qadiri affiliation. Those that I have come across are curiously incomplete, or rather, consist of three distinct parts, the lowest part a proper spiritual genealogy of the present head of one of the branches, with Isma`il Wulyani at its apex, the middle part a clearly non-genealogical listing of recognised spiritual ancestors including `Abd al-Qadir, and the top part some (often abbreviated) variant of the standard *silsila* connecting `Abd al-Qadir with the Prophet. As an example, here is one *silsila* that I copied in the Qadiri *takya* of Hajj Sayyid Wafâ Salâmî in Sanandaj:

Muhammad SAW — `Ali b. Abi Talib — Hasan Basri — Habib `Ajami — Da'ud Ta'i — Ma`ruf Karkhi — Junayd Baghdadi — Abu Bakr Shibli — `Ali Hakkari — Abu Yusuf Tarsusi — Abu Sa`id Makhzumi al-Mubarak — `Abd al-Qadir Gilani — `Abd al-Jabbar [b. `Abd al-Qadir Gilani] — Ahmad Rifa`i — Ahmad Badawi — Ibrahim Dasuqi — `Isa Barzinji & Musa Barzinji — Isma`il Wulyani — `Ali Qosa Dolpamû — Husayn [b. `Ali Qosa] — Hajj Sulh `Abd al-Salam [b. Husayn] — Hajj Sayyid Wafa Salami

Compare this with the *silsila* of the Kasnazan (or Kripchina) branch, as read out in the invocations following the *dhikr* in the *takya* of that branch in Mahabad:

Muhammad al-Mustafa — [*al-Jhulafâ al-rashîdîn*] — Hasan wa Husayn — Hamza wa `Abbâs — Muhyiddin Sultan `Abd al-Qadir Hasan Husayn al-Gilani — Muhammad al-Bukhari al-Naqshbandi — Ahmad al-Ahsa'i — Isma`il Wulyani — Mas`ud-i Kirkuk — `Abd al-Samad-i Gilazarda — Husayn-i Qazanqaya'i — Khalid Sayyid `Abd al-Qadir-i Qazanqaya'i — `Abd al-Karim Shah-i Kasnazan — `Abd al-Qadir-i Kripchina — Husayn-i Tajdani — Muhammad Husayn-i Kasnazan — `Abd al-Karim-i thani

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<sup>10</sup> Tawakkuli s.d.: 133. This can obviously not be the famous scholar of that name, the founder of the Shî`i *Shaykhi* sect (who died in 1828, which is a little late). Mudarris (1983: 95-6) also names al-Ahsâ'î (without explicitly mentioning his *tarîqa*) and adds that this was the shaykh of the then well-known *takya Ahsâ'iyya*, presently the *takya Khâlidiyya*, located on the banks of the Tigris in the neighbourhood of Ra's al-Qarya. Two generations later, the young Khalid al-Kurdi (the future Mawlana Khalid) is reported to have studied in Baghdad with Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ahsâ'î, presumably at the same *takya*, which was later under his influence converted to the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya.

<sup>11</sup> Mudarris 1983: 96.

In the latter *silsila* there is not even the pretense of a lineal connection between the persons preceding Ahmad al-Ahsa'i. The names of Hasan, Husayn, Hamza and `Abbas suggest pro-Shi'i sympathies, that of Muhammad al-Bukhari (who can not be identified unambiguously but by whom probably Muhammad Baha'uddin Naqshband is meant) a reconciliation with the Naqshbandiyya. `Abd al-Karim "the Second", with whom the *silsila* ends, was in the late 1960s and early 1970s perhaps the most influential of the Qadiri shaykhs in Iraqi Kurdistan, at least among the peasant masses.

One wonders whether the Barzinji of Kurdistan maintained contact with their relatives in Medina. (A son of Muhammad b. Baba Rasul, Ibrahim, is reported to have returned to Kurdistan and settled in the village of Bardazard.)<sup>12</sup> Muhammad b. Baba Rasul, the founder of that branch, had initiations in a number of orders, among which — though not prominently — the Qadiriyya.<sup>13</sup> His great-grandson, Ja`far b. Hasan b. `Abd al-Karim b. Muhammad (1690-1764), who was a contemporary of Isma`il Wulyani, appears to have had a more exclusive affiliation with the Qadiriyya. He achieved fame as the author of one of the most popular hagiographies of Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir, *Lujjayn al-dânî fî manâqib `Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî*.<sup>14</sup> Thus far, however, I have not found any indication that the Medina branch of the family exercised an influence on their relatives in Kurdistan, and in spite of its poor documentation, we must take the family tradition of Isma`il Wulyani's initiation into the Qadiriyya as the most authoritative one.

Upon his return to Kurdistan, Isma`il settled in the village of Qazanqaya, which then gained renown as a centre of learning and attracted numerous visitors from all over Kurdistan. Isma`il appointed four *khalîfa*, including his own brother `Ali Qosa of Dolpamû and his son Riza of Dêlîzhî.<sup>15</sup> Soon the other branches of the family, centred around *takiya* in the villages of Sargelû, Gilazarda, Nodê, Dolpamû, Kasnazan, Kripchîna, Qadir Karam and others, also were affiliated with the Qadiriyya.

The next member of the family to acquire great renown as a scholar and mystic as well as political influence was Ma`ruf of Nodê (1166-1252/1753-1836), the chief *khalîfa* of his grand uncle `Ali Qosa. He had great influence at the court of the (Kurdish) Baban dynasty in

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<sup>12</sup> Mudarris 1983: 110, 495.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad was, like his mentor Ibrahim al-Kurani, initiated into the whole package of *turuq* taught by Ahmad al-Qushashi, in which the Shattariyya and Naqshbandiyya dominated but which included also the Qadiriyya (see Qushashi's *Al-simt al-majîd*). Cf. Bruinessen 1998b.

<sup>14</sup> Biographical notices in Muradi, *Silk al-durar*, vol. II, p. 9; Mudarris 1983, p. 136; Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Band II, p. (2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1949), 384 and Supplementsband II, pp. 517-8. This *manâqib* is very popular in Indonesia, see Bruinessen 1998b.

<sup>15</sup> The other two were a brother's son, Muhammad Qûleyî, and a non-relative, Mulla `Ali Sosîyî (Tawakkuli s.d.: 133).

Sulaymaniyya and was the author of numerous books on doctrine and devotions. He also made a contribution to Kurdish philology in the form of a versified Arabic-Kurdish dictionary written for his son Ahmad.<sup>16</sup> It was in Shaykh Ma`ruf's days that Mawlana Khalid returned from India and began teaching the Naqshbandiyya in Sulaymaniyya, to which the Baban ruler initially responded very favourably. A fierce rivalry between the two shaykhs ensued, in which Shaykh Ma`ruf gained the upper hand, forcing Khalid to leave the town for Baghdad. In his days the relations with the other major family of Qadiri shaykhs in southern Kurdistan, the Talabanis, were cordial. `Abd al-Rahman Khalis, who was to become the greatest of the Talabani shaykhs, studied with Shaykh Ma`ruf and was close friends with the latter's son, Kak Ahmad.<sup>17</sup>

Ma`ruf's chief *khalîfa* was his son, Kak Ahmad (d. 1305/1887-8), who gained a great reputation as a miracle-worker and reputedly won the favours of the Ottoman sultan `Abd al-Hamid II.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the rivalry between his father and Mawlana Khalid, Kak Ahmad established good relations with Khalid's chief *khalîfa* in the region, Shaykh `Uthman Sirajuddin of Tawêla, and exchanged *tarîqa* with him. Shaykh `Uthman's descendants have since then taught a combination of both orders but have not allowed the ecstatic *dhikr* and the *tîghbâzî* of the other Qadiris.<sup>19</sup> A more distant relative, Ahmad-i Sardar of the Sargelû branch, had in fact become a *khalîfa* of Mawlana Khalid himself. His descendants, while formally remaining Naqshbandis, became known for the extremely heterodox practices in which their followers, presently known as the Haqqa sect, engaged.

Kak Ahmad was succeeded at Sulaymaniyya by his son Muhammad Pichkol, "the Small". Muhammad's son and successor, Sa`id (not to be confused with Baba Sa`id Barzinji, mentioned below) was also the *naqîb al-ashrâf* of Sulaymaniyya. He was killed in Mosul in 1906 under circumstances not yet fully elucidated. The mantle of *naqîb* passed to his brother Ma`ruf; as leader of the order he was succeeded by his sons Qadir and Mahmud.<sup>20</sup>

Another *khalîfa* of Kak Ahmad was Baba Sa`id Barzinji, of whom I have not found out whether he also was a son or a more distant relative. Baba Sa`id settled in the village near Sawuj

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<sup>16</sup> See his biography in Mudarris 1983: 572-587; a long list of his writings is given in Tawakkuli s.d.: 141-4.

<sup>17</sup> Edmonds 1957: 77; Dr. Nouri Talabany, personal communication.

<sup>18</sup> On some of Kak Ahmad's miracles, cited from the traditional-style booklet *Manâqibî Kak Ahmadî Shêkh* that was printed in Sulaymaniyya in 1936, see Edmonds 1957: 74-7. Cf. Mudarris 1983: 74-76, Tawakkuli s.d.: 146-150. Kak Ahmad also wrote books on various branches of the Islamic sciences, titles of which are listed by Bursali Mehmed Tahir Efendi (OM I: 146). One of them has the titillating title of *Fath al-jawâd fi bayân fazâ'il al-jihâd*.

<sup>19</sup> Bruinessen 1978: 305-7, 319-324, 1992: 240-2.

<sup>20</sup> Nikitine 1956: 215. Family sources claim Sa`id was executed by the Ottoman authorities; according to others, he was killed by Mosul citizens as a result of a quarrel caused by his servant.

Bulaq (Mahabad, Iran) that is presently called Ghawthabad. He gained a large personal following there (Lehmann-Haupt, who met him in 1898, speaks of 8,000 *murîd*, missionary sources mention his large armed retinue) as well as a reputation for saintliness that gave his village its name. The shaykh entertained friendly relations with the American missionaries in nearby Urmia, whom he gave free access to all the Muslim villages that he controlled, and he even had himself baptised a Christian though he remained outwardly a Muslim and went on teaching and leading the *tarîqa*.<sup>21</sup> When during the World War Ottoman troops briefly occupied the region (in the winter of 1915-16), they hanged the shaykh as a renegade.<sup>22</sup> These events have neither diminished his reputation as a saint nor the influence of his family; his descendants have continued leading the *tarîqa* from Ghawthabad.<sup>23</sup>

The most famous member of the Barzinji family in recent times was Kak Ahmad's great-grandson Shaykh Mahmud, who in the wake of the First World War led a number of uprisings and in 1922 declared himself "King of Kurdistan".<sup>24</sup> With him, we have definitely entered the realm of Kurdish politics and left that of mysticism. Contemporaries and posterity either praise him as a Kurdish patriot or condemn him as a feudal oppressor. His son and successor Latif has the distinction of being the target of a communist uprising in 1947-8.<sup>25</sup> Shaykh Latif later allegedly prevented the loss of his large estates by joining the Iraqi Communist Party before it got the power to carry out land reforms after 1958. Another Barzinji shaykh in the Sulaymaniyya district, `Abd al-Karim of Kasnazan, had in the early 1950s a large following precisely among the poor peasants, and as the anthropologist Barth observed during his fieldwork there, there were suspicions that the *tarîqa* was being used as a vehicle of socio-economic disaffection.<sup>26</sup>

The various branches of the family have their own central *takya* that continue the *tarîqa* independently of each other, and most of the branches have a number of dependent *takya* at other places, constituting overlapping networks. Thus we find in Mahabad one Qadiriyya *takya*

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<sup>21</sup> The conversion, at the hands of the American Missionary Samuel G. Wilson, is reported in Coan 1939 and Lehmann-Haupt 1910: 232, 272.

<sup>22</sup> According to Nikitine (1951: 232-3, cf. 1956: 218), the reason of Shaykh Baba Sa`id's execution was his pro-Christian (i.e., by implication, pro-Entente) attitude and his opposition to the pro-*jihâd* propaganda in which the other shaykhs readily took part.

<sup>23</sup> Baba Sa`id was succeeded at Ghawthabad by his son, Husayn, and the latter by a younger brother, Najmuddin, who was the shaykh of Ghawthabad in the mid-1970s.

<sup>24</sup> See Edmonds 1957, *passim*, McDowall 1996: 151-183, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Batatu 1978: 611-3.

<sup>26</sup> Barth 1953: 85. This is the shaykh whose silsila was given above. He later became known as `Abd al-Karîm Kripchîna, after another village of the family to which he had moved. In the 1960s and 1970s, he cultivated good relations with the government, which helped him to further increase the number of his followers.



affiliated with the Kripchîna branch and another that depends on Ghawthabad. Sanandaj has many *takya*, most of them affiliated with different branches of the Barzinji family, but others affiliated with the other major Qadiri family, the Talabanis.

### **The Talabani shaykhs**

As in the case of the Barzinjis, the origin of the Talabanis' affiliation with the Qadiriyya remains somewhat obscure because the Indian shaykh to whom they owe it cannot be identified. Unlike the Barzinjis, the Talabanis make no claim to descent from the Prophet. The first shaykh of this family was a certain Mulla Mahmud (d. 1215/1800-1), who hailed from Bukan in Iranian Kurdistan and had come to present Iraqi Kurdistan to study. He married a daughter of the chieftain of the powerful Zangana tribe (which probably added to the prestige he had already gained through his studies) and settled in the village of Qerkh, in the Chamchamal district of Kirkuk.<sup>27</sup> Mulla Mahmud was initiated into the Qadiriyya by an Indian shaykh, Ahmad al-Hindi al-Lahuri, who was a long-time resident of Surdash in southern Kurdistan. On one of his annual visits to the shrine of Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir in Baghdad, Shaykh Ahmad Lahuri spent some time in Qerkh as Mulla Mahmud's guest. On the return journey, Shaykh Ahmad spent another period at Qerkh and made Mulla Mahmud his *khalîfa*.<sup>28</sup>

This Indian shaykh, Ahmad Lahuri, to whom the family owes its first affiliation with the Qadiriyya, is not a well-known person, but the family's *silsila*, although abbreviated, gives at least an indication of the branch of the Qadiriyya with which he was affiliated. The relevant section of the *silsila*, from `Abd al-Qadir to Mahmud Zangana, is as follows:

`Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani — `Abd al-Razzaq [b. `Abd al-Qadir] — `Uthman al-Jili — Yahya al-Basri — Nuruddin al-Shami — `Abd al-Rahman al-Hasani — Burhanuddin al-Zanjari — Muhammad Ma`sum al-Madani — `Abd al-Razzaq al-Hamawi — Ahmad al-Hindi al-Lahori — Mahmud al-Zangana'i al-Talabani<sup>29</sup>

Mulla Mahmud established a daughter *takya* in the city of Kirkuk but continued to reside in Qerkh and to lead the rituals in his *takya* there. His son and successor, Shaykh Ahmad,

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<sup>27</sup> He is commonly known as Mulla Mahmud Zangana, which suggests that he was a Zangana himself. His descendant, Dr. Nouri Talabany, informed me, however, that Mulla Mahmud (son of Rustam son of Yusuf) belonged to the Kaka-Suri family of Bukan (letter dated January 22, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Mudarris 1983: 555-8. Cf. Edmonds 1957: 270, where also a family tree of the Talabanis is reproduced. Whereas these authors suggest Shaykh Ahmad was an itinerant sufi, Nouri Talabany writes (in a letter dated January 22, 1999) that he was a permanent resident of Surdash, who annually visited the shrine of `Abd al-Qadir in Baghdad.

<sup>29</sup> *Silsila* of `Abd al-Rahman Talabani cited in Vicdani 1995, p. 135.

established a new *takya* and built a village at a spot opposite Qerkh named Talaban. It is from this village that the family has taken its name. Shaykh Ahmad and his seven sons are considered as the founders of the Talabani family.

The most famous of the Talabani shaykhs was Ahmad's son, `Abd al-Rahman Khalis (d. 1275/1858-9). Though he presumably received his first instruction in the Qadiriyya from his father, he studied for a considerable time with Shaykh Ma`ruf-i Nodê in Sulaymaniyya, who took such a liking to him that he wanted to adopt him as his son. It was `Abd al-Rahman who later took up residence in Kirkuk and made of the *takya* there the centre of this branch of the Qadiriyya, which it has since remained. Branch *takya* were established in several other towns by his brothers.

Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman introduced some innovations in the recitations of the Qadiriyya, including the use of percussion instruments accompanying *dhikr* and poetry, and he is for that reason considered as the founder of a distinct branch of the Qadiriyya, the Khalisiyya. The *takya* at Kirkuk has a reputation for the beauty of the vocal and instrumental music performed there. Unlike the Barzinji branch of the Qadiriyya, however, the Talabani branch does not allow *tîghbâzî* and similar practices. Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman appears to have been considered as the leading Qadiri shaykh of his day, as is indicated by the respect that was shown him during his annual visits to the shrine of `Abd al-Qadir by the *sajjâda-nishîn*, who was the nominal head of the order.<sup>30</sup>

Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman gained a reputation as a poet, who composed poems in Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Gorani.<sup>31</sup> After his death, a collection of his poetry was published in Istanbul.<sup>32</sup> He also made a Turkish translation of Shattanawfi's biography of `Abd al-Qadir, *Bahjat al-asrâr*.<sup>33</sup>

His fame spread to Anatolia and Istanbul, and the Khalisiyya branch of the order followed. One *khalîfa*, Mor `Ali Baba, was despatched to Sivas at the special request of the governor and

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<sup>30</sup> `Abd al-Rahman each year led *majlis* at the shrine, at which he had, against prevailing custom, drums (*kudîm*) and other musical instruments played. To other devotee who protested against this innovation, the *sajjâda-nishîn*, Sayyid `Ali Jilani, answered that he had no wish to "intervene between the sultan and his vizir." This and other interesting anecdotes on Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman are interpolated into Vicdani's book by the editor, Irfan Gündüz, at pp. 136-143.

<sup>31</sup> Gorani, which differed from the Sorani Kurdish of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyya, was the language spoken by the Zangana tribe. It had been the favourite language for literary expression in southern Kurdistan but was in the 19th century gradually replaced by Sorani.

<sup>32</sup> *Kitâb jadhba-i `ishq*, Istanbul 1880, reprinted in Iran in 1951 and again in 1993. Dr. Nouri Talabany kindly sent me photocopies of this work. Cf. Şapolyo 1964: 163 and Vicdani 1995: 137-143, where a few poems are quoted.

<sup>33</sup> Bursalı Mehmed Tahir, OM I: 37 (where the author of the *Bahjat al-asrâr* is called `Ali Nurbakhshi).

notables of that province. Mor `Ali, later renamed Nur `Ali, lies buried in the Khalisiyya *takya* that he had built in the city.<sup>34</sup> Other *khalifa* of Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman settled in Istanbul and elsewhere in Anatolia.<sup>35</sup> According to one of his descendants, the shaykh had literally dozens of *khalifa*, each with his own *takya*: in various parts of Kurdistan (Arbil, the Badinan and Khoshnaw districts, Zahaw, Juwanru, Hawraman, Mariwan, Sanandaj, Bukan, Sa'uj Bulaq [Mahabad], and Urfa) and as far as Samarkand, Medina, Tanta in Egypt and Syria.<sup>36</sup> Sultan `Abd al-Majid, having heard many favourable reports about Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman, showed his appreciation by building a mosque for him.<sup>37</sup>

In Kirkuk, Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman was succeeded by his son `Ali (d. 1330/1912), and in the next generations too, succession was from father to son: through Muhammad `Ali (d. 1352/1933-4), Muhammad Jamil (d. 1381/1961-2) and `Ali (d. 1990) to the present incumbent, Yusuf.<sup>38</sup> As the number of *murid* kept growing — Shaykh `Ali is said to have had 50,000 disciples<sup>39</sup> — the *takya* in Kirkuk was rebuilt several times. Other branches of the family remained in charge of secondary *takya* (such as that at Koy Sanjaq).

The best known of Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman's *khalifa* was a Kurd from Arbil who settled in Tanta' in Egypt and who wrote a book that is read as far away as in Indonesia. `Abd al-Qadir b. Muhyiddin al-Arbili (d. 1315/1897) is the author (or rather, the translator from Persian into Arabic) of the widely read hagiography *Tafrîh al-khâtir fî manâqib shaykh `Abd al-Qâdir*. He was a Naqshbandi and a Khalwati as well as a Qadiri.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Vicdani 1995: 138-9 (interpolation by İrfan Gündüz).

<sup>35</sup> Vicdani 1995: 117. Vicdani speaks of *khalifa* in the plural coming to Istanbul but gives no names. Gündüz mentions another *khalifa* of `Abd al-Rahman in Urfa, `Abd al-Qadir Siddiqi Efendi, whose son Shaykh Safwat Efendi in turn was a *khalifa* of Mor `Ali Baba (Vicdani 1995: 139). Tâlabânî 1999 mentions another *khalifa* in Urfa.

<sup>36</sup> Tâlabânî 1999, note 10.

<sup>37</sup> Mudarris 1983: 558.

<sup>38</sup> Biographical notices on Shaykh `Ali, his son and grandson in: Mudarris 1983: 398-400, 552-3, 553-4. Nouri Talabany, who provided me with much additional information on the family, is a son of the late Shaykh Muhammad Jamil.

<sup>39</sup> Mudarris 1983: 398-400; Tawakkuli s.d.: 165.

<sup>40</sup> Mudarris 1983: 305; Bursalı Mehmed Tahir, OM I: 36. Tâlabânî 1999 is the only source indicating that this author was a *khalifa* of `Abd al-Rahman Talabani. He mentions yet another book by al-Arbili: *Hujjat al-dhâkirîn wa radd al-nâkirîn*.

Shaykh `Abd al-Rahman's second son, Shaykh Riza Talabani, acquired great fame as a poet in Sorani Kurdish. A part of his poetry was devotional, with a few references to the Qadiriyya, but he also wrote in other registers, and some of his poetry was hardly of the kind one would expect from a mystic. He used his art as a weapon against his family's enemies and is the author of probably the most scurrilous poems ever written in Kurdish.<sup>41</sup> There was no shortage of targets for his attacks; with its rapidly expanding control of land and people, the family had acquired quite a few enemies in his time.

In the late 19th century, the Talabanis' relations with the Barzinjis (especially the branch of that family settled at Qadir Qaram in Kirkuk province) became strained and developed into a rivalry that gradually assumed a violent character. The available sources do not explain the reasons of this growing antagonism but one assumes that some of the increase in the Talabanis' political and economic fortunes was at the expense of the Barzinjis. In 1886, government authorities made several unsuccessful efforts to intervene in the conflicts then setting the Talabanis and the Barzinjis of the Kirkuk district against each other. In 1887, a member of the Talabani family, `Abd al-Samad, was killed by Shaykh Husayn Barzinji of Qadir Karam. Some months later, a brother of the victim, Shaykh Hamid, killed Shaykh Husayn in revenge.<sup>42</sup> Peace between the feuding families was finally restored through the intervention of Shaykh `Ali Talabani (the head of the Talabani family and cousin of the killed `Abd al-Samad) and two leading Barzinji shaykhs, Sa`id Hafid of Sulaymaniyya and Hasan of Qara Chwar (the elder brother of Husayn of Qadir Karam).

Both the Barzinji and the Talabani family originally owed their influence to the religious charisma of their leading members (which in the case of the Barzinjis was further enhanced by their status as sayyids), but as they acquired their own armed retinues and dependent peasantries — both families brought considerable areas of land under their direct control — they developed into a sort of tribal-feudal formations, that took part in tribal conflicts. Late Ottoman and British sources often list them among the tribes.<sup>43</sup> In the 20th century, members of both families became

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<sup>41</sup> Edmonds 1935; Edmonds 1957: 270, 290-5. Edmonds comments that most of Shaykh Riza's poetic attacks on enemies are "far too vitriolic and obscene to be translated into English." Nonetheless Edmonds observed that he was in the 1920s by far the most popular southern Kurdish poet, with the possible exception of Haj Qadr-i Koyî.

<sup>42</sup> See the official documents concerning this case in Binark (ed) 1993: 162, 164-5, 172-3. `Abd al-Samad was a cousin of Shaykh `Ali. He and Shaykh Husayn Barzinji had fought together at the front in the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-78, and it was apparently there that a rivalry had developed between them.

<sup>43</sup> A British report lists the strength of three branches of the Talabanis (including the peasants attached to the family) in 1919 as follows:

Shaykh Hamid:	700 houses, 300 horse, 400 foot
Shaykh M. Ra'uf:	200 houses, 500 horse

influential in Iraqi politics. Hasan Talabani, a grandson of the poet Riza, was a minister in the cabinet of Qasim (1959-1963). Mukarram Talabani was a prominent member of the Iraqi Communist Party and at one time a cabinet minister; Jalal Talabani (whose father Husamuddin was a shaykh of the Koy Sanjaq branch of the family) became one of the leading Kurdish nationalist leaders.

### **The sayyid lineages of Nehri and Arvas and the Qadiriyya**

Central Kurdistan was home to two other great families of sayyids that have produced numerous `ulama and sufi shaykhs, and whose influence equalled that of the Barzinjis. The sayyids of Nehri claim descent from `Abd al-Qadir Jilani through his son `Abd al-`Aziz and were until the early 19th century affiliated with the Qadiriyya. Briefly after Mawlana Khalid's return from India to Sulaymaniyya, the head of the Nehri family, Sayyid Taha, joined him there and became his *khalîfa*; since then the leading members of the family have only taught the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya.<sup>44</sup>

The other family of sayyids was established at Arvas, a village in the vicinity of Moks (new name: Bahçesaray, in the mountains south of Lake Van). They claim descent from a certain Sayyid Qasim al-Baghdadi, who fled Baghdad when it was sacked by Hulagu (1258) and settled with his family and dependants in the mountains of Kurdistan. His father, as the family tradition has it, was the *qutb* of the Qadiriyya and was known by the name of Qutb Muhammad. The present Arvasi sayyids all descend from `Abd al-Rahman Arvasi, who flourished in the first half of the 19th century. Sultan Mahmud II is said to have highly respected and honoured him, and his contemporaries called him "the *qutb* of Arvas"; even Sayyid Taha of Nehri reportedly referred to him by this title. He led two *medrese* and two (Qadiri) *khânaqâh*, in Arvas itself and in Khoshab. Of his sons, `Abd al-Hamid acquired a great reputation as a master of the Qadiriyya.

Two of `Abd al-Rahman's grandsons, Sibghatullah b. Lutfullah and Fahim b. `Abd al-Hamid, took the Naqshbandiyya from Sayyid Taha and became highly influential teachers in their own right. Both collected *ijâza* from numerous teachers. Fahim (d. 1333/1895) was a *khalîfa* of no less than five orders: Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya, Chishtiyya, Kubrawiyya and Suhrawardiyya. In practice, however, he mostly taught the Naqshbandiyya. The same is true of his cousin Sibghatullah (d. 1287/1870), who settled further west in Khizan and became known as "the *ghawth*". His spiritual descendants constitute one of the most influential Naqshbandi networks in present Turkey and Syria. Since Fahim and Sibghatullah, the family's affiliation with the Qadiriyya

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Shaykh Tahir: 150 houses, 60 horse  
("Notes on the tribes of Southern Kurdistan", Baghdad, government press, 1919.)

<sup>44</sup> See my article on the Sadatê Nehrî elsewhere in this issue.

has been nominal at best.<sup>45</sup>

## Other Qadiris in Kurdistan

### *a. present Iraq*

Shaykh Nuruddin Brifkani (1205-1268/1791-1851) and his descendants, based in the `Amadiyya district (Badinan, in present Iraqi Kurdistan). Shaykh Nuruddin is presently primarily remembered as a poet (writing in the Badinani Kurdish dialect) but he was also a learned `âlim and a sufi. He acquired an *ijâza* to teach the Qadiriyya from Shaykh Mahmud b. `Abd al-Jalil al-Khufri in Mosul. Returning to Kurdistan, he spread the Qadiriyya especially among the nomads of Badinan and Arbil. He appointed numerous *khalîfa* in central and northern Kurdistan, among others Muhammad Nuri al-Mawsili, `Ali Gelî Rûmanî, `Abd al-Hamid Khan Atrushi, `Abd al-Rahman Ansarî al-Jaziri (of Cizre), `Abd al-Bari Çarçaxî Wanî (of Van) and Shaykh Abdurrahman Takhi (of Takh near Hizan in Bitlis).<sup>46</sup> Shaykh Nuruddin was succeeded by his brother `Abdullah (d. 1305/1887-8), who established a *takya* in Duhok, and who in turn was succeeded by his son Nur Muhammad.<sup>47</sup>

### *b. present Turkey*

Both Bitlis and the village of Tillo (presently Aydınlar, near Siirt) were long known as centres of the Qadiriyya. Tillo has long had a unique reputation as a major centre of religious and secular learning, where sufism flourished side by side with astronomy and the natural sciences. The most famous of the shaykhs of Tillo was Isma`il Faqirullah, who died in 1147/1735 at the age of over eighty. He reputedly was the greatest scholar to have flourished in this part of the Ottoman Empire, although none of his writings ever was as widely read as his student Ibrahim Haqqi's encyclopaedic *Ma`rifetname*. Faqirullah is said to have been a Qadiri as well as a Naqshbandi.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Uyan 1983 has extensive biographies of members of this family: `Abd al-Rahman (I: 194-7), Fahim (II: 771-814), Sibghatullah (III: 1812-22), Muh. Siddiq, Fahim's son (III: 1538-9) and `Abd al-Hakim (I: 34-73). The last-named, the grandson of another cousin and also a *khalîfa* of Fahim, became the most famous of the Arvasi in Turkey and the progenitor of the *Işıkçı* branch of the Naqshbandiyya.

<sup>46</sup> Amêdî 1980: 413-5. The last-named *khalîfa* later converted to the Naqshbandiyya under the influence of the charismatic Sibghatullah Arvasi (Yüksel 1993: 148-9).

<sup>47</sup> Amêdî 1980: 446.

<sup>48</sup> The one important primary source on Faqirullah is the *Ma`rifetnâme* by his disciple Erzurumlu Ibrahim Haqqi, in which the author does not explicitly say with which order Faqirullah was affiliated. (The notes on Faqirullah

According to his disciple Ibrahim Haqqi, Faqirullah was of Arab descent; the first of his ancestors to settle in Tillo was a certain Molla `Ali, who had been the *re'is* of the `ulama of Cizre before leaving that city in 910/1504-5.<sup>49</sup>

The `ulama of Bitlis, which had even longer been a centre of learning and mysticism, maintained close relations with the shaykhs of Tillo (whom they appear to have considered as superior). Şems-i Bitlisi (Mahmud b. `Abd al-Ghafur), born into a Bitlis family that claimed descent from (`Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's spiritual ancestor) `Ali Hakkari in 1127/1715, studied first with a local *khalîfa* of the then *murshid* in Tillo, `Abd al-Wahhab al-Hamzawi, then with `Abd al-Wahhab himself and finally in Baghdad with Shaykh Ahmad-i Sharif, `Abd al-Wahhab's own master, from whom he received an *ijâza* to teach the Qadiriyya and, on a second visit to Baghdad, a Naqshbandi *ijâza* as well. Returning to Bitlis he taught both *туруq* and appointed *khalîfa* for both. He died in 1202/1787, leaving his chief *khalîfa* Mahmud `Uryani or `Uryan Baba (no relative) as his *postnishîn*. `Uryan Baba was succeeded, upon his death in 1822, by Şems-i Bitlisi's only grandson, `Abd al-Hamid, and since then the position has been held within the family.<sup>50</sup>

### c. present Syria

Following the ban of Sufi orders in Turkey in 1925, many Kurdish shaykhs moved across the border into Syria, resulting in a relatively high density of sufis in the Kurdish-inhabited northeast corner of that country. In the 1930s and 1940s, Qadiri shaykhs were especially influential in the town of `Amuda, where allegedly some 90 percent of the population were affiliated with one or another of the numerous shaykhs living there, most of the Qadiris.<sup>51</sup> In the following decades, the Qadiri shaykhs lost some influence to the Naqshbandiyya (notably to Shaykh Ahmad Khiznawi, who had then recently arrived from Turkey, and who soon became the leading religious authority in all of north-eastern Syria<sup>52</sup>) and more to secular community leaders, when the first French-educated professionals and intellectuals replaced the last Ottoman-educated generation. When I visited `Amuda in 1976, there were only one Naqshbandi and two Qadiri shaykhs actually

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follow, however, an exposé of the Naqshbandiyya, and there is no reference to the Qadiriyya in the book at all). In a biographical notice on Ibrahim Haqqi, Muharrem Hilmî Efendi asserts that Faqirullah was a *khalîfa* of the Veysiyye and Qadiriyye orders (n.d.: 86-7).

<sup>49</sup> Ibrahim Haqqi 1330: 304-5 (corresponding with vol 2, p. 116 in the Latinised adaptation).

<sup>50</sup> Gündoğdu & Gündoğdu 1992, *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with former residents, Qamishli and `Amuda, April-May 1976.

<sup>52</sup> On Shaykh Ahmad Khiznawi and the Naqshbandi network to which he belonged, see Bruinessen 1992: 337-9 and the literature quoted there.

teaching, and they had relatively small numbers of *murîd*. I interviewed one of the latter, Shaykh Sayyid `Ubayd, who told me that he was affiliated with the Kasnazan branch of the Barzinjis. His father, from whom he had received the *tariqa*, had come to `Amuda from present Turkey. Although affiliated with a Kurdish branch of the Qadiriyya, Shaykh `Ubayd did not consider himself as a Kurd but as an Arab (because of his *sayyid* status), and his *murîd* included Arabs as well as Kurds, most of them urban lower middle class (shopkeepers, civil servants, etc.). Besides this Kurdish branch of the Qadiriyya, I was told of another branch, led by Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir `Isa in Aleppo, that had some followers in the region.

## Conclusion

The Qadiriyya is still present throughout Kurdistan, but its influence has considerably decreased, not only as a result of gradual secularisation (and an official ban in Turkey) but also due to the spectacular successes of Mawlana Khalid and his successors in drawing numerous former Qadiri adepts into the orbit of the Naqshbandiyya. Mawlana Khalid, the great reformer and revitaliser of the Naqshbandiyya, was born in southern Kurdistan around 1780 and grew up in his native Qaradagh and in Sulaymaniyya. Among his early teachers were two members of the Barzinji family, and his first sufi affiliation was also with the Qadiriyya, into which he received initiations from the Damascene Shaykh Mustafa al-Kurdi and Shaykh `Abdullah of Nehri. He found his real mission in India, where Shaykh `Abdullah Dihlawi initiated him into the Naqshbandiyya, made him his *khalîfa* and sent him back to Iraq to spread this order in the Ottoman Empire. Upon his return to Kurdistan in 1811, he initiated some of his own teachers into the Naqshbandiyya and appointed all in all dozens of *khalîfa*. These included the Qadiri shaykhs `Abdullah of Nehri and Ahmad-i Serdar Barzinji, whose descendants were to maintain their affiliation with the Naqshbandiyya. The expansion of the Naqshbandiyya, at least in part at the expense of the Qadiriyya, continued under Mawlana Khalid's *khalîfa*, who drew more disciples away from the older order — and even shaykhs, such as the Arvasi sayyids.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> On Mawlana Khalid and the expansion of the Naqshbandiyya, see: Hourani 1972; Bruinessen 1992: 222-34.



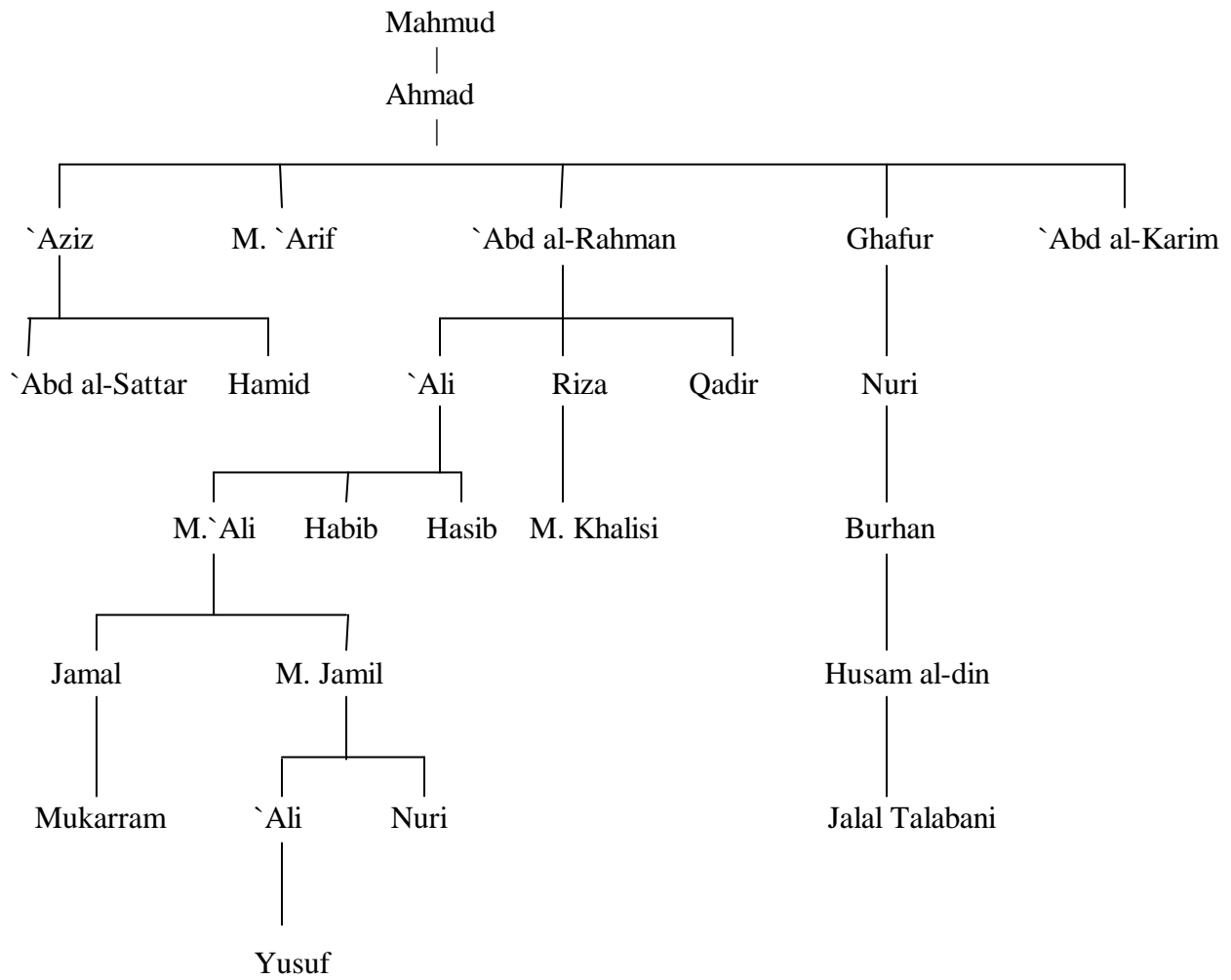
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**Appendix: Family trees of the Talabani and Arvasi shaykhs**

**The Talabani shaykhs** (cf the diagram in Edmonds 1957: 270)



## The Arvasi shaykhs

