

**SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ORIGINS OF THE ROSHANI MOVEMENT: BAYAZID ANSARI
IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY AFGHANISTAN (BASED ON MASSON & ROMODIN'S
HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN)**

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Annotations: This article presents an English translation of the section devoted to Bayazid Ansari and the Roshani movement from the monumental Soviet academic work History of Afghanistan (Vol. I, edited by V. M. Masson and V. A. Romodin). The text describes the social, religious, and political background of the anti-feudal uprising led by Bayazid Ansari in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Drawing upon historical and philological analysis, the authors interpret the Roshani doctrine as both a mystical-religious reform movement and a form of popular resistance against Mughal domination and Afghan feudal elites.

Keywords: Bayazid Ansari; Roshani movement; Afghanistan; Sufism; anti-feudal uprisings; Mughal Empire; Islamic reform; Afghan tribes; social movements; 16th century; Masson; Romodin; Soviet historiography

During the development of feudal relations among the Afghans (this process proceeded unevenly among different tribes), property inequality increased, and class contradictions intensified. This situation led to a mass popular movement directed both against the Mughal authorities and against the Afghan nobility. From the 1560s to the 1630s, armed uprisings took place involving many Afghan tribes. The Afghan popular movement was led by a religious sect called the Roshani, whose founder was Bayazid Ansari. Bayazid Ansari was born in 1525 in Jalandhar (Punjab). He came from a small people called Ormurs (Baraks), some groups of whom still live in Waziristan (Kaniguram) and in the Logar valley. His father, Sheikh Abdullah Ansari, was from Kaniguram and was considered a descendant of Sheikh Siraj ad-Din Ansari, who traced his lineage to one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and therefore was regarded as a respected man. In 1529, Bayazid Ansari's father was forced to leave India and move to Kaniguram.

While still a boy, Bayazid became acquainted with Sufism, and he chose as his sheikh (spiritual mentor) one of his poor relatives — Khwaja Ismail. Bayazid's father opposed this choice, insisting that his son should become a murid of one of the sheikhs descended from the famous Baha ad-Din Zakariya. However, Bayazid acted in his own way; according to the author of "Dabistan al-Mazahib," even then he condemned the principle of transferring the position of sheikh by inheritance. In his youth, Bayazid went on trading journeys with merchant caravans to earn a living, tried to trade horses, visited Samarkand, and lived for some time in Punjab. During this period, Bayazid met the famous Ismaili scholar Mulla Suleiman, who apparently had a strong influence on the formation of the views of the future founder of the Roshani sect.

In Punjab, Bayazid married an Afghan woman from the Lodi tribe. Returning to Kaniguram with his wife and small son Umar, he entered into a religious dispute with his father and other relatives. The quarrel grew so severe that Bayazid's father inflicted a serious wound upon him, and he barely survived. Later, Bayazid was forced to hide in the Kaniguram area, and then he left his native lands. He went to the Dauris in the Tochi valley, among whom the preaching of his doctrine had already found success. Then he arrived in the Bangash region and from there continued to spread his teachings among the Tirah mountain tribes of the Orakzai and Afridi.

Afterward, Bayazid Ansari came to the Peshawar region and settled in the Hashtnagar area; here he won over many people from the Khalil, Mohmand, Daudzai, Ghagiani, Yusufzai, and other tribes. Bayazid Ansari achieved great success among the Afghan tribes inhabiting the lands adjacent to the Khyber Pass. Therefore, the main center of the movement he led became the Tirah region. Supporters of Bayazid from the Afridi, Mohmand, Orakzai, Khalil, and Bangash tribes gathered there. At that time, a fierce ideological struggle began between Bayazid Ansari and the influential ulama — orthodox Muslim theologians who considered him a heretic. Such accusations, put forward by authoritative defenders of Sunni orthodoxy, as well as reports about Afghans gathering in the Tirah region to prepare for anti-Mughal uprisings, alarmed Mirza Muhammad Hakim, son of the Mughal emperor Humayun and governor of Kabul. His uncle Faridun arrested Bayazid and brought him to Kabul.

According to written traditions, a religious disputation was held in Kabul, in which Bayazid Ansari managed to defeat his opponents with arguments and to remove from himself the accusations of heresy. After that, he was released from imprisonment. Regardless of the credibility of these stories about the debate and its results, the action of the Kabul authorities was most likely caused by their fear that punishing Bayazid might provoke a major uprising among the Afghan tribes, among whom he already enjoyed great authority and many followers. Leaving Kabul, Bayazid Ansari went to the Nangarhar region, where he already had many supporters, and then moved to Tirah and to the northern part of the Peshawar region. Continuing to preach his doctrine, Bayazid Ansari won over the Shinwari tribe and part of the Barak and Safi tribes of Kandahar. He also gained supporters among the Sindh population and the Baloch.

By the end of the 1560s, Bayazid Ansari openly rose against the Mughal authorities and against the Afghan khans and ulama, calling on the Afghans to take up arms.

The degree of ferocity of this struggle and the determination of the masses are shown by the stories of the first battles of the Roshani, led by Bayazid Ansari. Before the battle of Chora, on the way to Tirah, he armed 300 of his followers with strong reed sticks instead of spears, since he had no other weapons. Nevertheless, in this battle the Roshani defeated the detachment of Mughal troops that pursued them. A fierce opponent of Bayazid Ansari and the Roshani doctrine was Akhund Darweza of Nangarhar, a disciple of Sayyid Ali Shah Tirmizi, who was known under the name Pir Baba. Akhund Darweza came from a family originally from the Nangarhar region, which had joined the Yusufzai during their migration to the Peshawar region and had later settled in Swat.

He wrote two large polemical works filled with sharp attacks on the Roshani and Bayazid Ansari, whom he called “Pir-i Tarik” (“Father of Darkness”). One of these works, “Makhzan al-Islam,” was written mainly in Pashto, the other, “Tazkirat al-Abrar wa-l-Ashrar,” in Persian. Akhund Darweza considered the followers of Bayazid Ansari “manifest unbelievers (kafirs)” and, from the point of view of religious law, regarded it as permissible to kill them, seize their property, and enslave their wives. Focusing mainly on religious-dogmatic questions, observance of rituals, and the fate of the ulama, Akhund Darweza accused the Afghans who had accepted the Roshani doctrine of stopping the payment of zakat and the performance of prayer, neglecting fasting, showing hostility toward Muslim scholars, and even allegedly burning the Qur’an and hadiths. Attacking also some Afghan customs not directly related to the Roshani doctrine, Akhund Darweza, proceeding from his understanding of the prescriptions of Islam, demanded strict seclusion of women, and declared sinful such popular Afghan entertainments as singing, dancing, and so on. It is very significant that, along with the most venomous attacks against the Roshani and their sect’s founder, Akhund Darweza repeatedly emphasized — evidently also as a reproach — that Bayazid Ansari addressed the common people, the “rabble” (‘awam). There are sufficient grounds to connect this accusation with social motives, which generated the anger and hatred of Akhund Darweza and other Afghan spiritual and secular feudal lords toward Bayazid Ansari and his followers.

The studies of M. G. Aslanov have shown that the mass popular movement of Afghans in the second half of the 16th and early 17th centuries, headed by the Roshani sect, had a social character. By its nature, this movement was anti-feudal; its supporters waged a decisive struggle against the khans and the ulama for land and for the abolition of their privileges. In one of the manuscripts of “Muntakhab at-Tawarikh,” a work by the 17th-century Indian historian Abd al-Qadir Badayuni, the Roshani movement is directly called a peasant movement. Bayazid Ansari demanded the recognition of the personal qualities of people, opposing them to hereditary privileges and authority. The opponents of the Roshani accused the followers of this doctrine of a complete lack of respect for lineage. M. G. Aslanov attempted to link the Roshani policy regarding land directly with the Afghan custom of “vesh” (the traditional system of land redistribution). He drew attention to an important report by Afzal Khan Khattak, who, in the early 18th century, wrote the historical work “Tarikh-i Murassa.” In it, the Orakzai malik Tora, the author’s maternal grandfather, is said to have broken with Akhdad (Bayazid Ansari’s grandson), one of the leaders of the Roshani movement.

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