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SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY OF AL-SAYYID AL-SHARĪF AL-JURJĀNĪ

Abstract: The main factor behind the cultural and scientific renaissance during the Timurid period was the rulers' patronage of scholars and the environment of free debate among the intellectual elite. The scientific activity of al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (740-816/1339-1413) was a product of this highly productive era, elevating the development of Islamic philosophy, logic, and linguistics to a new level. However, there is a current tendency to evaluate the scholar's heritage solely within the framework of traditional commentary, which hinders an objective illumination of his unique scientific perspectives. Furthermore, re-evaluating the scientific discourse between the schools of al-Jurjānī and Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī using modern criteria is an essential resource for shaping the independent scientific thinking of today's students. Systematizing the terminological system and ideological peculiarities in the scholar's works, using accessible scientific language, helps study Eastern philosophy through a new prism and highlights the harmony between Islamic doctrine and the exact and natural sciences in the Middle Ages.

Key words: al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, Samarkand madrasahs, Amir Timur, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, Sharh al-Mawāqif, science of Kalām, eloquence, balāghah, muta'akhhirūn scholars, late, chief mudarris, professor.

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Introduction

The cultural and intellectual revival that took place in Central Asia during the 14th and 15th centuries – the Timurid Renaissance gave rise to the most advanced scientific centers of its time. The primary factor behind this monumental development was the state's support for the scientific community, the concentration of leading scholars from various regions within a single intellectual space, and the creation of an environment for free scholarly debates and discussions among them. In this environment, scholars not only developed their respective fields but also elevated the thought of Islamic civilization to a new level.

One such polymath was al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, whose scientific activity took shape at the

intersection of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), exegesis (*tafsīr*), speculative theology (*kalām*), philosophy, astronomy, and linguistics. However, in contemporary scholarship, the wide-ranging landscape of that era's intellectual environment and the role of al-Jurjānī's oeuvre within it are often studied one-sidedly. In particular, the free scientific discourses, the ideological disputes between scholars, which served as the main driving factors of the era's development, and their impact on the worldview of the youth of that period have not been researched as an integrated system. Consequently, analyzing the scientific activity of al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī in close connection with the socio-cultural factors of the Timurid period, as well as studying his scholarly relations with other thinkers and the conceptual

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significance of his works based on modern methodology, constitutes an urgent scientific problem.

Main part

The full name of al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī was ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥanafī al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī [5:196], and he was widely known by the honorific title “*al-Sayyid al-Sharīf*”. The reason for this was his lineage as a descendant of the Prophet. Specifically, he was a descendant of Muḥammad ibn Zayd al-Dā‘ī, with thirteen generations separating them [7:488]. Indeed, the scholar's lineage was explicitly recognized and honored by Amīr Tīmūr upon his arrival in Samarkand. In some accounts, his name is also recorded as ‘Alī ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn. This is reported by Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1496), who heard these words in Mecca in 886/1481 from al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī's great-grandson while teaching him [9:328-330]. However, the first name, namely ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, is more widespread and widely recognized. He was born in 740/1340 in a locality called Tākū (or Tāghū) near Astarābād (which was later called Jurjān) [11:7].

There are various perspectives regarding why Jurjān, the city where the scholar was born and raised, was named so; according to the work *Tārīkh Jurjān* (*The History of Jurjān*), this city was founded by Jurjān ibn Lāwudh ibn Sām, who was considered a descendant of the Prophet Noah [3:5]. According to another view, Jurjān is the Arabized form of the Persian word “*gūrgān*”, meaning “*wolves*”.

Numerous well-known writers, historians, philosophers, traditionists (*muḥaddith*), and jurisprudents (*faqīh*) emerged from the city of Jurjān, which was a flourishing center of science in the Middle Ages. Among the most famous of them, one can list such scholars as the traditionist Muḥammad ibn ‘Umayrah al-Jurjānī (d. 267/881), the Ḥanafī jurisprudent Ja‘far al-Jurjānī (d. 336/947), the renowned traditionists ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd al-Jurjānī (d. 346/957), Abū Aḥmad ibn ‘Adī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/976), and Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ismā‘īlī al-Jurjānī (d. 371/982), the celebrated physician Abū Sahl al-Masīḥī al-Jurjānī (d. 401/1010), the author of *Tārīkhī Jurjān*, Ḥamzah ibn Yūsuf al-Sahmī al-Jurjānī (d. 427/1036), the great imām and leader in the sciences of jurisprudence, grammar (*nahw*), speculative theology (*kalām*), and eloquence (*balāghah*), ‘Abd al-Qāhīr al-Jurjānī (d. 474/1082), as well as the traditionist and man of letters Abū ‘Āmir Faḍl ibn Ismā‘īl al-Jurjānī (d. c. 493/1100). From his youth until the end of his life, al-Jurjānī remained continuously engaged in scholarship. Throughout his life, the scholar resided in the territories of Samarkand, Jurjān, Shīrāz, Mecca, and the land of

Rūm (Anatolia). Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī noted that he studied al-Sakkākī's work *Miftāḥ al-‘ulūm* under its commentator, Nūr al-Tāwūsī, and also studied the exegesis of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* and *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* from al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* under the same master [9:329].

Having received his primary and intermediate education from the scholars of his homeland, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī set out for the city of Herat (before 763/1362), intending to study the works on logic *Sharḥ al-Shamsiyyah* and *Sharḥ al-Maṭālī* directly from Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Taḥṭānī, the commentator of these very works. After teaching al-Jurjānī for a short period, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī stated that he had grown weak due to old age and could no longer teach extensively; moreover, recognizing al-Jurjānī's mastery in logic and philosophy, he advised him to go to his student and manumitted slave, Mubārakshāh, who was living in Egypt at that time. He wrote a letter to Mubārakshāh and sent it with al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī. In Egypt, he studied the rational sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-‘aqliyyah*) under Mubārakshāh al-Bukhārī (d. after 784/1382) and the transmitted sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-naqliyyah*) under Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384) [1:127]. al-Jurjānī journeyed to the land of Egypt in 766/1365. Upon his arrival in Eastern Anatolia, he read the commentary written by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Āqsarā‘ī on al-Qazwīnī's *al-Īdāh*, and was astonished, expressing his dissatisfaction with the book by saying, “*This book resembles a cowhide torn by wolves*” [1:127]. Some men of letters who were in al-Jurjānī's presence at that time praised al-Āqsarā‘ī, stating that his oral exposition of knowledge was superior to his written expression. Following this, al-Jurjānī decided to acquire knowledge from him. However, he soon learned that al-Āqsarā‘ī had passed away during that period. Subsequently, he became acquainted with al-Āqsarā‘ī's student, Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 834/1430), and they traveled to Egypt together. Meanwhile, al-Jurjānī wrote a gloss (*ḥāshiyah*) on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's work *Sharḥ maṭālī ‘al-anwār*.

Shaykh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār served as al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī's master in Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and invested him with the Naqshbandiyyah cloak (*khirqah*) [10:297]. After ten years of study in Egypt, he set out for the cities of Anatolia in 776/1374. Having stayed there for a short period, he then returned to his homeland [4:246]. He met Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (722-792/1322-1390), and upon his recommendation, the ruler of that time, Shāh Shujā‘, appointed him as the director (*mudīr*) of the Dār al-Shifā’ madrasah in Shīrāz [6:426]. Throughout his life, the scholar trained numerous ulema. Parts of the *ijāzah* (academic license) chains of transmission (*silsilah*) in the Ottoman State, Iran, Turkestan, and

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India linked back to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) partly through al-Taftāzānī and partly through al-Jurjānī. Among his most famous students, one can count such renowned scholars as the mathematician Qāḍīzādah al-Rūmī (d. 833/1430), Faṭḥullāh al-Shirwānī (d. 857/1453), Sayyid ‘Alī al-‘Ajāmī (d. 865/1460), and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Samarqandī (d. 880/1475) [2:208].

When Amīr Tīmūr conquered Shīrāz in 789/1387, he showed great respect to al-Jurjānī and granted clemency even to those who sought refuge in the scholar's house. Subsequently, he invited the polymath to Samarkand. al-Jurjānī accepted the invitation and served as the chief *mudarris* (professor) in the capital for eighteen years, penning many of his works during this very period. Having active scholarly pursuits in Samarkand until the death of Amīr Tīmūr, the scholar spent the final years of his life in Shīrāz, remaining engaged in writing and teaching.

Despite his close ties with the family and students of al-Taftāzānī, the Timurid-era historian Ghiyāth al-Dīn Khwāndamīr (d. 941/1534) expresses highly favorable and sincere opinions about al-Jurjānī in his Persian-language work *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār aḫrād al-bashar*. The author particularly emphasizes that al-Jurjānī prevailed over al-Taftāzānī in most debates and points out that not a single lesson in the madrasahs of that period was conducted without al-Jurjānī's works.

Although the polymath taught classes using his own works on eloquence (*balāghah*), logic, and the Arabic language in the madrasahs of Samarkand, he maintained his own critical views regarding the contemporary educational system and its intellectual methodologies in Transoxiana. Specifically, in the introductory part of *al-Miṣbāḥ* (written in 804/1402 in Samarkand), his gloss (*ḥāshiyah*) on al-Sakkākī's famous work *Miftāḥ al-‘ulūm*, he analyzes the local intellectual environment and states:

“...until, at the end of my life, I was tested by moving to Transoxiana (*Mā warā’ al-nahr*). There, I found a people whose hearts were thirsty, circling the book (*al-Miftāḥ*), yet unable to find a path to its sources... In uncovering the structure of the work and revealing the subtle nuances of its methods, they were relying on commentaries, most of which were deficient (full of wounds). Even the best among those commentaries was corrupt and flawed, containing neither a cure for the sick nor a remedy for the thirsty...” [2:33].

From a historical standpoint, during the period when al-Jurjānī arrived in Samarkand, highly sophisticated commentaries by Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, such as *al-Mutawwal* and *al-Mukhtaṣar*, which were considered unparalleled foundations in the science of eloquence, were already widely utilized

as standard textbooks in Transoxiana. Taking this historical reality into account, one can infer from al-Jurjānī's sharp remarks that his criticism was directed not at a total absence of authoritative manuals in contemporary education, but rather at the excessive complexity and over-elaboration found in the existing commentaries, specifically those of the al-Taftāzānī school. In other words, al-Jurjānī likely considered al-Taftāzānī's extensive philosophical and rhetorical analyses as overly burdensome for the students' minds, potentially obscuring the core linguistic essence of the text. Consequently, this excerpt highlights a fundamental methodological divergence between the schools of al-Taftāzānī and al-Jurjānī. Through his gloss *al-Miṣbāḥ*, al-Jurjānī aimed to offer an alternative system that was linguistically precise, devoid of superfluous philosophical encumbrances, and more accessible for madrasah students.

Al-Jurjānī authored prestigious works on speculative theology (*kalām*), such as *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-‘Aḥudiyyah*, *Risālah fī al-firqah al-nājiyyah fī al-madhāhib*, *Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Sharḥ al-Tajrīd li-l-Isfahānī* (dedicated to the work of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī), *Sharḥ al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*, *Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Maṭāli’ al-anzār* (about the heritage of Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī), and *Risālah dar uṣūl-i dīn*, which was penned in Persian. The polymath's views on human free will and destiny are reflected in his treatise *Risālah fī tahqīq af’āl al-‘ibād* (also referred to in some sources as *Risālat al-qadar* or *Risālah fī khalq al-a (māl)*).

al-Jurjānī's work *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* is a commentary on *al-Mawāqif*, a treatise on *kalām* by ‘Aḥud al-Dīn al-Ījī. While this commentary stands as one of al-Jurjānī's most prominent works, it is also recognized as the most famous and widely circulated commentary written on *al-Mawāqif*. This work, which was taught throughout the Islamic world, particularly in the madrasahs of the Ottoman State alongside al-Taftāzānī's work *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, received nearly thirty glosses (*ḥāshiyah*) [8:144]. *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* served as a primary source in madrasahs within its academic discipline for nearly six centuries and has not lost its significance to this day.

The scholar passed away in Shīrāz on Wednesday, the 6th of Rabī’ al-Ākhir in the Hijri year 816, corresponding to July 7, 1413 CE. He was buried in the Wāqib cemetery near the ‘Atīq Friday Mosque (*Jāmi’ al-‘Atīq*) [9:120-124]. Today, the scholar's mausoleum has been turned into a place of pilgrimage (*ziyāratgāh*).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī is considered one of the few scholars who left behind a monumental scientific heritage. He

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authored numerous works about both religious and rational sciences. Foremost among these disciplines, one can list speculative theology (*kalām*), the Arabic language, philosophy, logic, astronomy, mathematics, history, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Hadith, exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). According to historical sources, al-Jurjānī was regarded as an exceptionally brilliant, investigative scholar (*muḥaqqiq*) who examined the subtlest nuances of every matter, possessed eloquence and clarity of speech, and excelled in conducting scholarly debates. His works

on the Arabic language, the laws of inheritance (*farā'id*), and *kalām* continue to be taught as primary sources in educational institutions, spanning across multiple generations. Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī lived and operated at a turning point in Islamic history. Indeed, within the Islamic world, while al-Taftāzānī has been recognized as the last of the *mutaqaddimūn* (early) scholars, al-Jurjānī is acknowledged as the first of the *muta'akhhirūn* (later) scholars.

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