

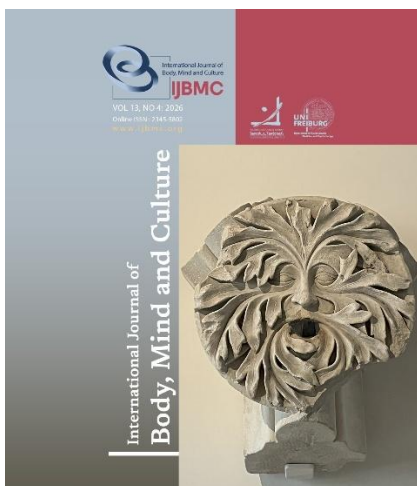
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# The Spread of the Naqshbandi Tariqa from Central Asia to India and Asia Minor: Trade Routes, Political Conditions, and Religious Networks

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## ABSTRACT

During the fourteenth century, the Silk Road experienced a significant phase of revitalization, functioning not only as a major corridor for commercial exchange but also as a dynamic conduit for the transmission of religious ideas, cultural practices, and intellectual traditions. Within this context, the Naqshbandi order, which emerged in the fourteenth century in Bukhara, rapidly expanded its influence across Central Asia, India, and Asia Minor. The dissemination of Naqshbandi teachings was closely linked to the infrastructural and political stability provided by the Silk Road, particularly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This period was marked by the support of major political entities, including the Golden Horde, the empire of Amir Timur, and the Ottoman Empire, all of which had a vested interest in maintaining secure and efficient transcontinental networks. The article analyzes the key socio-political, economic, and cultural factors that facilitated the transregional spread of the Naqshbandi tariqa and examines the distinctive features of its adaptation within different local contexts. Particular attention is given to the role of the Silk Road as a structural and symbolic framework that enabled the diffusion of Sufi practices and networks. The study offers a critical reassessment of the interaction between trade routes and religious movements, contributing to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the historical expansion of Sufism.

**Keywords:** Culture, history of Naqshbandi, Sufism, religion, Central Asia, mysticism.

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## Introduction

The term Silk Road was introduced in 1877 by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen to describe a network of transcontinental exchange routes linking East Asia with the Mediterranean world. Modern scholarship, however, emphasizes that this was not a single, unified road but a dynamic, shifting system of routes whose intensity and direction varied across historical periods. While early contacts between China and Central Asia are often associated with the diplomatic missions of Zhang Qian in the second century BCE, such accounts must be treated with historiographical caution, as they reflect later imperial narratives as much as they document concrete economic realities.

Rather than attributing the emergence of interregional exchange to a single event, it is more accurate to view the Silk Road as a gradually evolving network shaped by multiple factors, including trade interests, political consolidation, and ecological constraints. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this network functioned not only as a conduit for commodities but also as a structured space for the circulation of people, texts, and ideas. Importantly, different forms of mobility—merchant caravans, itinerant scholars, diplomatic envoys, and religious figures—operated according to distinct logics, which complicates any simple assumption that trade routes automatically facilitated religious diffusion.

Within this broader framework, the transmission of religious traditions must be analyzed through specific mechanisms, such as the movement of Sufi masters, the establishment of institutional networks (khanqahs and lodges), the circulation of manuscripts, and the role of political patronage. The case of the Naqshbandi order provides a particularly instructive example. Emerging in the fourteenth century in Bukhara, the Naqshbandi tariqa developed into one of the most influential Sufi movements across Central Asia, Iran, the Indian subcontinent, and parts of the Ottoman world.

The expansion of the Naqshbandi order coincided with a period of renewed political stabilization across much of Eurasia following the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire. Successor states such as the Golden Horde, the Chagatai Khanate, and the empire of Amir Timur actively supported trade and communication networks for fiscal and administrative reasons. While

improved security along key routes likely facilitated mobility, the relationship between infrastructural stability and the spread of Sufi orders should not be reduced to a simple causal link. Instead, it is necessary to examine how political patronage, urban religious centers, and scholarly networks interacted with existing routes of exchange.

Despite a substantial body of scholarship on the doctrinal and spiritual dimensions of Naqshbandi Sufism, relatively limited attention has been paid to the spatial dynamics of its expansion—specifically, the mechanisms through which it entered different regions, the forms it adopted in diverse socio-political contexts, and the factors that shaped its patterns of diffusion. Existing studies often acknowledge the importance of transregional connectivity but rarely differentiate between the movement of individuals, the transmission of texts, and the institutionalization of religious authority.

This study addresses this gap by asking the following research question: how did the infrastructural, political, and cultural conditions associated with the Silk Road contribute to the transregional expansion of the Naqshbandi tariqa, and through which specific mechanisms did this process occur? To answer this question, the article analyzes the interaction between mobility networks and religious organizations, with particular attention to (1) the role of political patronage, (2) the circulation of Sufi actors and texts, and (3) the adaptation of Naqshbandi practices in different regional contexts.

By moving beyond generalized assumptions about “exchange” and “diffusion,” this study seeks to provide a more precise and analytically grounded account of how Sufi networks expanded across Eurasia during the late medieval period.

## Methods and Materials

### *Study Design*

This study adopts a qualitative, source-based historical approach to examine the transregional expansion of the Naqshbandi order within the broader Silk Road context. The methodological design integrates historiographical analysis with the interpretation of primary sources to systematically move from evidence to historical claims.

### *Research Design and Case Selection*

The analysis is structured comparatively across key regions associated with Naqshbandi expansion, including Central Asia (with a focus on Bukhara and Samarkand), Iran, the Indian subcontinent, and parts of the Ottoman sphere. These regions were selected based on two criteria: (1) their documented integration into transregional exchange networks, and (2) the presence of identifiable Naqshbandi communities and lineages. Rather than assuming uniform diffusion, the study treats each region as a distinct case in which the tariqa was adapted to local political, social, and intellectual contexts.

### *Source Base and Data Selection*

The primary source base includes Sufi hagiographical texts (tazkirāt), biographical dictionaries, correspondence attributed to Naqshbandi figures, and selected historical chronicles from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Secondary historiographical studies in English, Russian, and Turkic-language scholarship complement these. Sources were selected based on their relevance to (a) the mobility of Sufi actors, (b) institutional development (e.g., lodges and teaching circles), and (c) references to political patronage.

To distinguish between narrative convention and historical evidence, hagiographical materials were read critically, with particular attention to recurring motifs, authorial intent, and the temporal distance between events and their recording.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations affect the analysis. First, reliance on hagiographical literature introduces genre bias, including a tendency to emphasize spiritual authority over historical detail. Second, uneven preservation of sources across regions constrains direct comparison. Third, the transregional scope of the study raises the risk of retrospective overgeneralization; to mitigate this, the analysis remains grounded in specific cases and avoids assuming uniform patterns of diffusion. Finally, the concept of the Silk Road itself is treated as an analytical construct rather than a fixed historical entity, requiring careful differentiation between routes, networks, and historical actors.

## **Findings and Results**

### *The emergence and formation of tariqa in Central Asia*

At the end of the 14th century, a new Sufi order (history) appeared in the city of Bukhara, the religious center of Central Asia. The tag called Nakshbandi is named after its founder, Muhammad Bahauddin Naqshbandi. Naqshbandi, in its General sense, was one branch of Sufism. In particular, Yassawi, which previously existed, became a current that changed some of the principles of history. Thus, it has become a Sufi movement with new principles and values that are offered to society. However, Bahauddin Naqshbandi considered himself a follower of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, the founder of Sufism in Central Asia. In our opinion, Bahauddin Naqshbandi may not have intended to create a flow that differs from the history of Yassawi. He can only assume that certain principles and approaches to the history of Yassawi were perceived as complementary or as updates in accordance with the requirements of the time. His followers recognized Naqshbandi as a completely new Sufi path and elevated it to a higher level (Sultonmurod, 1996).

In General, both external and internal factors influence the emergence of any spiritual and cultural phenomenon. For a comprehensive explanation of these factors, we need to consider the political, economic, and socio-spiritual developments of that period. During the existence of the Central Asian Naqshbandi Bahauddin land called Maverannahr, it was ruled by the descendants of Sagata, the second son of Genghis Khan. The Great Silk Road increased trade and economic significance and restored the spiritual and cultural appearance of the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara before the Mongol invasion. However, in the 1360s, a domestic political conflict in Mawerannahr led to societal weakening. As in neighboring Moghulistan, an aggressive state policy is developing.

There is reason to believe that the descendants of Genghis Khan have lost their true reputation in society. According to him, in 1365, during the Mughal attack on Mauerennahr in Samarkand, the reign of the serbed power (popular movement) is a manifestation of this Yazdi & Mozafari (2018). Its head is the appointment of a student of a simple madrasa, Maulanezade, which has already become an unshakable title for the descendants of Genghis Khan, belonging to the aristocracy. That is, the Mongol aristocrats did not meet the population's spiritual and material requirements. At the same time, in his opinion, this phenomenon is attributed to the power

of Amir Timur, who is not a descendant of Genghis Khan. We assume that along with these historical processes, the Mongol codes of Yas laws began to decrease. Of course, by virtue of their legal code, the Yas-nomadic people survived until the 19th century in the Kazakh khanate. However, in countries such as Iran, settled, Mauroner, ISA could not long preserve their political and spiritual phenomenon. For example, in Iran in 1353, the power of the Khulagids was abolished by the local population (Petrushevsky, 1960). During such a spiritual-political crisis, the Sufi groups began to organize the Marinara population.

Unlike other doctrines in the Sufi stories of al-Gudduwani and Ahmad Yassawi, proposed by Baha'uaddin Naqshbandi, they were manifested in the issue of relations with the authorities. According to Naqshbandi, representatives of religion should enter into relations with the authorities and exercise their influence on the public. In other Sufi stories, this principle is inapplicable. In other words, the history of Naqshbandi was highly political. All these factors have led to a widespread history of Naqshbandi. However, it should be noted that the history of Naqshbandi was treated with respect alongside other Sufi stories and did not figure in the conflict. Amir Temir brought together leading Sufi figures under his authority. Of course, there is no real evidence that Bahauddin Naqshbandi was among them. Naqshbandi died in 1389. The main spiritual teacher of Amir Timur, a representative of the Yassawi Sufi movement, was Mir Said Baraka. It was considered the mainstay of the iron power's spiritual ideology (Uljaeva et al., 2020). In all his campaigns, they supported him with their prayers. Amir Temir contributed to the construction of the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yassawi. Subsequently, all the descendants of Amir Timur maintained close ties, relying on the help of Sufi representatives. This was the first phenomenon in the political and spiritual history of Central Asia. Previously, the Islamic and Mongol rulers sought to keep Sufi representatives away from power. Thus, the processes of spiritual dissemination of Naqshbandi history are strengthened.

A great contribution to the widespread dissemination of the history of Naqshbandi in Central Asia was made by students such as Muhammad Parsa and Alauaddin, who, first of all, continued the tradition of Bahauddin Naqshbandi. In General, the Sufi principle of

"complementarity of teaching or teaching others" in the Mauerennahra region and beyond has played a major role in the history of Naqshbandi. Bahauddin Naqshbandi and his followers widely use this principle. For example, when one of the outstanding students of Baha'uaddin Naqshbandi, Yaqub Chahi, came from Ghazni (Afghanistan) to become a Mursi (disciple), the Sheik sent him to the Sufi teacher Maulan Tajuddin in Balkh (Afghanistan) to supplement his knowledge (Buehler, 1996). Such practical methods were constantly applied during the Naqshbandi period. Sheiks sent their students to other regions to learn or spread knowledge. Another major representative of Sufism in Central Asia, Khoja Ahmet Yassawi, sent his disciple Suleiman Bakirganid to Khorezm to spread Sufism (Zhandarbek, 2006).

In addition, at the stages of formation and development of the history of Naqshbandi, Central Asia was completely under the control of the iron power. Travel from one city to another was safe and not difficult to survive. From the perspective of many authors, the interregional spread of religious movements was influenced by trade caravans (Pachkalov). With their support, Sufi representatives were able to reach a distant region and spread their mystical teachings. Safe movement of trade caravans in the XV century is guaranteed not only in Central Asia, but also in Iran and Afghanistan. In particular, under the rule of Abu Seyid (1424-1469), the trade caravans of the great Silk Road maintained peaceful trade and economic relations between India, Asia Minor, and the Middle East (Foltz, 1996). Ubaydullah Khoja Ahrarar's great work in building the history of Naqshbandi from the perspective of trust in Central Asia. In 1420-1430, Khoja Ahrar spent a long time visiting the sheiks of Khorasan and Central Asia in search of knowledge that led to the heights of spiritual power. In Herat, she studied for four years with Sheik al-Tabrizi, who is famous for the history of Naqshbandi. Then, I searched for Sheik Yaqub Charhid, who lived in the mountains of Hissar, and was convinced that he had achieved his spiritual goal (Malikov, 2010). From him came to the city of Shash (Tashkent). It forms its own madrasah. In the 1450s, amid power struggles among Timur's descendants, he supported Abu-Seid, Timur's successor, and offered moral support when Abu-Seid came to power. Abu-Seid Khoja, who rose to power,

recognized Ahrar as his mentor and turned to the entire spiritual Sheik Mauerennahr (Buehler, 1996).

In the Palace, his influence reigns over the government. Khoja Ahrar, with the support of the political authorities, carried out several reforms in the religious, cultural, and social strata of Mauerennahr. Tried to finally abolish the code of laws of Genghis Khan (Zhandarbek, 2006). Naqshbandi historians promoted the rejection of the dervish rite and invited them to seek God outside ordinary life. Thus, some members of the Sufi community began to interfere in Handicrafts, trade, economic, and social Affairs. His " main goal of the Sufis is not to save his soul, but to save this world. It needs power and wealth". Thus, representatives of the history of Naqshbandi increased their influence not only in the religious sphere, but also in politics and the trade and economic sphere. Khoja Ahrar sought to weaken the medicinal foundation, a common principle in the history of Yassawi and Naqshbandi. In General, medicinal existence is a phenomenon inherent in all Sufism movements. Khoja Ahrar's religious reforms had a significant impact on the lives of the people between Turkestan and Khorasan. The history of Naqshbandi is deeply embedded in the traditions of the settled people of this region. It continues to this day. Moreover, in the time of Khoja Ahrar, the teachings of the Naqshbandi history began to spread to India and lesser Asia (Le Gall, 2003). In India, through the trade caravans of the Silk Road in the form of books, and in lesser Asia through their representatives, the teachings of the Naqshbandi history reached the Ottoman Empire.

#### *The arrival of Sufism in India and the role of Naqshbandi tariqa*

Islam entered Indian society at the beginning of the 11th century through Afghanistan, coinciding with Mahmud Ghaznavi's campaigns. In 1004-1025, Mahmud Ghaznavi repeatedly conducted successful campaigns in India as part of Islamic Jihad (Chaliand, 2017). After that, it became a tradition to conduct campaigns against Muslim rulers in India under the name of Jihad. Then the Iron and Babyr campaigns continued. Moreover, Nichtraucher, the doors were opened in India to Islam. Closer to Indian religion, Islam, in the form of Sufism, in the context of a patriarchal society, mystics take an interest. As proof of this, we can cite the Sufi schools that arose and developed in India. Even the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was influenced by Sufism.

Moreover, the word "Sikh" means "seeker" (Weismann, 2007). The hadith says that Allah is one of us, one of us, one of us, and one of us, one of us, one of us. Therefore, the achievement of Sufism's principles in Indian society was unsurprising.

The first Sufi movement in the 12th century was recorded in the teachings of Muhyiddin ibn Arabi. It was called the Chishti stream (Foley, 2008). During the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin, Iltutmysh (1211-1236) brought Sufism closer to power. In Indian society, it is known that Islamic values come from Central Asia and Iran. In particular, the campaigns of the Turkish rulers of Central Asia and their spiritual scientists. The Delhi Sultanate was founded (Nuri, 1992). This means that Central Asia is the cradle of Sufism. Therefore, Islam developed primarily as Sufism in India. In 1258, the Mongols captured Baghdad, the Abbasid Caliphate's capital, and severed India's ties to the Islamic world (Chaliand, 2017). However, this change did not prevent the Indian society to the spread of Islam through Sufism in Indian society. Moreover, in this case, we should not forget that in Islam, as in other countries, we should not forget this. Subsequently, the revival of the great Silk Road in the early 14th century increased the influx of religious missionaries to India from Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (Wormser, 2014). According to some sources, the Sultan of Delhi and the Golden Horde, along with trade and economic relations through the Great Silk Road, were established within a religious and cultural context (Pachkalov).

In India, the focus of Sufism was considered the Kashmir zone (Jackson, 2003). Here, the Indians settled in small numbers and were located close to the territories of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. It was in Kashmir that the Naqshbandi movement began to function. In the middle of the 16th century, the history of Kashmir was established in the teachings of Sheik Baba Wali. After this, Ahmad Sirhindi (Imam Rabbani) made an invaluable contribution to the development of the Naqshbandi movement not only in India, but throughout the Islamic world (Algar, 1976). He criticized Ibn Arabi's concept of "unity of being" (Wahdat al-wujud), which is very popular among followers of this story. The concept of "loneliness as a witness" (Wahdat al-shuhud) was put against it and supported among Sufis throughout the Islamic world (Hasballah Thaib, 2025).

At the time, Ahmad of Sirhind boldly spoke out against religious delusions. Moreover, even the glorious ruler of the Mughal Empire, Akbar I (1556-1605), sharply criticized the Shiite views of the policy of religious syncretism and his successor, Jahangir (1605-1627) (FAROOQI, 1986). He, analyzing the books of the history of Naqshbandi that came down the Great Silk Road, founded his small Naqshbandi-Mujaddidiya. Stream is India-Pakistan, great support among Muslims, its spiritual life is now deepening.

Sirhindi particularly misled the Shiite beliefs of Iran, which is an ally of the great Mughal Empire (FAROOQI, 1986). In the 16th century, the Safavid dynasty interrupted not only trade routes from Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire to India but also spiritual ties. This change has become a major obstacle to the free movement of Sufi representatives from one country to another and to the dissemination of their knowledge. However, their labors and teachings did not stop. This process triggered an internal spiritual explosion within Indian society and contributed to the emergence of its Sufi leaders.

In General, the Islamic religion has expanded its influence not by force of arms in India, but through peaceful propaganda.

*The origins of Sufism in Asia Minor and the tariqa of Naqshbandi*

Sufism, known in the West as Muslim mysticism, is widely practiced in Asia Minor. There are several reasons for it. The first of them: the Turkic tribes from Central Asia; the families of the rulers and inhabitants of the Seljuk and Ottoman States who lived in Asia Minor. Moreover, the Turkic tribes were close to Sufism and thus were able to accept Islam deeply. The second is the passage of the Silk Road through Asia Minor into Europe. In these places, the exchange and acceptance of religions and cultures were rapid. However, the Turks did not lose a single point of similarity with their culture and religious beliefs (identity) (Kozintsev Alexander, 2016). Therefore, there is reason to believe that their spiritual ties with the Central Asian Turks were never interrupted. Several Sufi stories appeared in the Seljuk and Ottoman states. The most common of these are the histories of the Mevlevi and Bektashi.

In the 13th century, under the influence of two Sufi movements, the capital of the Seljuk state was moved to Konya (O'Dell, 2011). The founder of the Bektashi order

is considered to be the Persian Haji Bektash Veli. This stream became popular among the peasants of Anatolia and representatives of the troops. The powerful weapons of the Ottoman Empire were considered spiritual educators of the janissary corps (Lewis, 1963). There are various legends that Haji Bektash came to Anatolia for a reason. According to one legend, he was a disciple of Khoja Ahmed Yassau in the Turkestan region and of his mentor, Anatoly, to promote the history of Yassau (Mamraimov, 2009). However, given that Bektashi was born in 1209, some researchers doubt becoming a disciple of Ahmet Yassawi. Because Khoja Ahmet Yassawi did not live in the XII century. According to the most reliable data, Haji Bektashi arrived in Anatolia, Naif, or Mecca (Averyanov, 2011; Lewis, 1963).

The second Sufi movement, Mevlevi, is still considered meaningful in Turkish society. Its founder is the famous Sufi poet Mawlana Jalal al-DIN Muhammad Rumi, who was born in the Balkh region (now Tajikistan) of Central Asia (Türkan, 2024). In 1220, due to Genghis Khan's conquest of Central Asia, his family was forced to move to Asia Minor. In General, the influence of Rumi's spiritual heritage goes beyond national borders and ethnic characteristics. His works have been translated into many languages. Even in the US, it was named the "Best-selling poet" (Ciabattari, 2014).

The third story is our object of research, Naqshbandi. This story appeared in Central Asia and reached the steppes of Asia Minor through the trade and cultural relations of the Silk Road. There is no doubt that the history of the Naqshbandi order reached the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. Because history itself in the 15th century had a huge impact on Central Asia. According to some researchers, the history of Naqshbandi suggests it was founded under Sultan Osman II Mehmet (1444-1446, 1451-1481) (Le Gall, 2005). In any case, this is the moment when a major representative of the flow of Nakshbandi Hodge of Ahraar holds power in Mawarannahr. Given that these stages were in the lower reaches of the Iron state across most of Central Asia and Iran, it is not surprising that along the Silk Road in these regions, the phenomenon of members of history moving to Anatolia does not inspire admiration. These periods indicate that the opponent of Sunnism has not yet formed Safavid Iran. According to Cemal Zehacic's research on the prevalence of Naqshbandi history in the Balkan Peninsula, the history

of Naqshbandi originated in the second half of the 16th century in the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Mehmet II. The founder of history in Asia Minor is Mullah Abdullah Illahi of Central Asia (one of the trusted representatives of Ubaydullah Ahrarar) (died 1487). It is known that Mullah Abdullahu Illahi, on the part of the leader of the history of Naqshbandi, in the Iron state, Ubaydullah Ahrararar, on the part of the mission to spread the history to the Ottoman state. In the 1470s, he came to Asia Minor (Algar, 1976) via the Silk Road in Iran. Thus, the process of historical development in Asia Minor has begun. It subsequently changed its form. In 1501, the rise to power of the Safavid dynasty of Shiite textiles in Iran seriously hindered the spiritual exchange of history in the lands of Central Asia and Asia Minor. This is the famous orientalist A. Muminov, noted in his work (Muminov, 2015). However, this situation caused the leaders of the Ottoman Empire. In 1492, the discovery of America weakened the great Silk Road. Thus, the continuous process of spiritual and cultural exchange in the Eurasian space was forced to stop. Now, spiritual and cultural outbursts have become a pattern due to the influence of internal sets, not from outside.

During the 16th century, diplomatic exchanges between the Bukhara khanate and the Ottoman sultans continued. According to the ambassadors, the Bukhara khans and Ottoman sultans constantly reminded each other of their origins and common religious views.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The history of the Great Silk Road is widely discussed in world literature. Of course, research on the development of some regions has not reached full mutual agreement. Moreover, regarding the history of Naqshbandi and related stories, the historiographical literature is rich, especially in Russian and post-Soviet (Uzbek) studies. However, research on the spread and forms of historical penetration along the Great Silk Road has not yet been fully developed. In the Middle Ages, several Sufi movements emerged in Central Asia. Of these, only the history of Naqshbandi influenced long distances in the South, to India, and in the West, to Turkey. The rest of the story continued to develop at the regional level. One of the reasons for this was the emergence of history and the complementarity of the period of development of the Great Silk Road.

Our research has examined this conclusion. Moreover, scientific works that have studied the history of the great Silk Road and the history of Naqshbandi, unfortunately, do not collide. Therefore, the question should be divided into two parts. First of all, it is possible to approach our topic and reveal the study's meaning by considering the role of the Great Silk Road in the transfer of religion in General. To systematize the discussion of research papers on the problem, we organized it into several stages.

**Studies of the period of tsarist Russia.** At the beginning of research on the topic is the name of a prominent Russian scientist, V. V. Barthold. He is the first researcher to study in depth the religious and cultural structure of Central Asia, where the history of Naqshbandi is widely spread. His works "Report on a trip to Central Asia in 1893-94" (Barthold, 1956) and "History of cultural life of Turkestan" (Barthold, 1977) provide a broad assessment of the emergence and role of religious movements in Turkestan society. In addition, he expressed his opinion on the Great Silk Road's influence on the region's culture. According to Barthold, the history of the Nakhshbandi order was used for political purposes in the XVII-XVIII centuries.

**Uzbek studies.** Fundamental research on the history of Naqshbandi is conducted in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Support for researchers on this issue is being created. The history of the Nakhshbandi order is part of the religious ideology of modern Uzbekistan. However, the Uzbek authorities treat religion with great danger.

In Uzbekistan, much attention was paid to the history of Naqshbandi during the years of independence. His first name was A. Kayumov and Sultanmurat Alim (Sultonmurod, 1996). These researchers paid special attention to the reasons for the spread of Naqshbandi history in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as to the forms of acceptance within society. A. Kayumov, in the work "Naqshbandi as the support of this world" (Kayumov, 1993), focused on the personal appearance of Baha'uaddin Naqshbandi and gave an individual assessment of the activities of his students. According to the author, the path of Naqshbandi Sufism is a current that meets the spiritual needs of the settled inhabitants of Central Asia.

**The Kazakhstan studies.** Among the studies on the religious aspects of the Great Silk Road in Kazakhstan, the works of A. Mamraimov is interesting. His work"

Sacred places on the great Silk road " Mamraimov (2009) highlights the main religious sites laid along the Great Silk Road. According to the author, the largest gathering of temples from various religions in regions with developed trade demonstrates the religious tolerance of the peoples of that period.

A special place is occupied by research on the history of Naqshbandi according to the criteria of distribution and perception of nomadic Turks (Kazakhs). His attitude to the history of Naqshbandi is a critical critique. In his opinion, the histories of Yasavi and Naqshbandi were engaged in a mutual struggle for political power in Central Asia. In the Golden Horde, as a religious ideology in the Kazakh khanates, there is an exchange of stories of Yassawi and Naqshbandi. When Yassawi became a religious ideology in society, these States grew stronger, and representatives of Naqshbandi history say that these States are weakened as they approach power (Zhandarbek, 2006). That is, according to the author, the principles of Yassawi history are effective in a nomadic society. However, many researchers will not agree with this idea. Some researchers say that in this question, Z. Jandarbek holds a more rigid position.

The name of A. Muminov, who conducted a fundamental historiographical study on the penetration and consolidation of the Hanafi madhhab in Central Asia, has a special character. In his work " Hanafi madhhab in the history of Central Asia, " Muminov (2015) analyzed the geographical distribution of the history of Naqshbandi and the factors that became religious and political forces. The author also assesses the role of the Great Silk Road in the spread of religious trends. For example, according to the author, the expansion of trade routes in the 14th century contributed to the strengthening of intellectual life. The formation of the Islamic religion in the state of the Golden Horde led to an increase in the cultural level. However, in the 16th century in Iran, the rise of the Shia Safavid dynasty forced the shortening of the great Silk Road.

**Modern Russian research.** The process of disseminating Naqshbandi history in the Caucasus and Turkey is actively discussed among modern Russian researchers. In particular, the religious situation in the countries of Chechnya and Dagestan in the Russian Federation, where Sufism is widespread, is of particular interest to Russia. In this direction, a large financial support for scientific projects is being provided. Among

them are Algar (1976), Kozintsev Alexander (2016), Weismann (2007), and Yarlykapov (2024. Among the above-mentioned in A. A. Hismatullin's work "Sufi ritual practice: (on the example of the Naqshbandiya brotherhood)" are the forms of Naqshbandiya's arrival and acceptance within Caucasian society, which are analyzed in detail. According to the author, Sufism became the main ideology of the peoples of the Caucasus' struggle against Russian aggression in the 19th century.

The following important work is "Tariqa Naqshbandi in the social and political life of Turkey" (Kozintsev Alexander, 2016). The works cover information about the arrival of history in Asia Minor and its impact on society. According to the author, with the advent of the Ottoman Empire, the Naqshbandi order became the most common in the Islamic world. Because it has spread to the Hejaz and to the updated teachings in Middle Eastern countries, it has led to the Ottoman Empire's possession. Thus, history has become the largest Sufi order between the Middle East and India (Kozintsev Alexander, 2016).

In our view, Russian authors fear that the history of Naqshbandi, which is widespread throughout the Caucasus, is being influenced by societal efforts. To him, as a source of religious extremism, this position is considered.

**Turkish researchers.** In Turkey, there is a small research school on the history of Naqshbandi. In particular, the issue of history's entry into the Great Silk Road will be considered. At the beginning, H. Cetinkaya Çetinkaya (1986), H. Kaya Kaya (2011), and others are referred to as researchers. Among the aforementioned works, "Tarikatta Rabıta ve Nakşibendilik" is particularly important to us. The work is based on medieval sources in Arabic and Persian. The author paid special attention to the life and work of major representatives of Sufism in the Islamic world. Among them are the major figures in the history of the Nakshbandiyya: Alauddin, Ubaidullah Ahrar, Yakub Charkhi, and Ahmad Sirhindi, who helped promote its history in India. In addition, the author paid close attention to the factors in the arrival and absorption of Naqshbandi history in the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the process of interaction between members of the historical community and the language was analyzed. The work is particularly valuable on its subject.

Other Turkish researchers have conducted little analytical research on the reasons for the arrival of

Naqshbandi history in the Ottoman Empire and its impact on society. Research on the role of the Great Silk Road in religious contexts is under-covered. However, given the current religious situation in Turkey, the zhamagattarga of religious researchers is of great importance, including the history of the Naqshbandi order.

**European and American researchers.** The richest is the historiographical Fund for research into the dissemination of Naqshbandi history in Europe and the United States. Among them is H. Algar, a well-known expert on the historical literature of Iran, Afghanistan, and Asia Minor. In his research, H. Algar conducts an in-depth analysis of the prerequisites for the emergence and spread of Naqshbandi history (Algar, 1976). In his opinion, the emergence of Safavid Iran halted the exchange of religious ties along the Great Silk Road. This factor is supported by several researchers, who argue that the history of Naqshbandi can lead to the renewal and development of its form in each geographical territory (Algar, 1976). The next Western author considering the history of Naqshbandi is I. Weismann. It conducts a broad analysis of the penetration of history in other countries. Of particular interest are the facts and arguments presented about how to reach and spread to distant countries. I. In his research, Weismann paid close attention to the peculiarities and advantages of the history of Naqshbandi compared with other Sufi movements (Weismann, 2007).

Recent scholarship has approached the development of the Naqshbandi order through more differentiated and comparative frameworks. For example, S. Foley examines the evolution of the Khalidiyya branch as a later reformulation of Naqshbandi traditions, situating its emergence within broader processes of institutional and doctrinal transformation (Foley, 2008). Rather than presenting a linear narrative, this approach highlights internal diversification within the tariqa and underscores the importance of regional reinterpretations.

The role of the Silk Road in facilitating intellectual and religious exchange has also been reassessed in recent studies. Michael A. Peters, for instance, offers a comparative analysis of transregional knowledge circulation, arguing that the Silk Road served as a key infrastructure for the movement of not only goods but also ideas, texts, and belief systems (Peters, 2021). His

work emphasizes that such exchanges contributed to early forms of economic and intellectual integration and enabled the broader dissemination of religious traditions beyond their original local contexts.

At the same time, contemporary European and American scholarship increasingly prioritizes critical and comparative methodologies, moving beyond descriptive accounts to analyze underlying mechanisms. This includes examining both the enabling conditions and the limitations of transregional exchange, as well as the potential asymmetries in the circulation of knowledge and religious authority. Such approaches provide a more nuanced understanding of how Sufi networks, including the Naqshbandi tariqa, expanded across diverse socio-political environments.

### *Conclusion*

This study has demonstrated that the Silk Road functioned as an important enabling environment for the transregional expansion of the Naqshbandi order during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, the findings suggest that its role should be understood not as a direct causal force, but as a facilitating infrastructure that supported multiple, distinct mechanisms of religious transmission.

A key analytical distinction emerging from this research is between enabling conditions and driving mechanisms. Political stabilization under major Eurasian powers—such as the Golden Horde, the Timurid state of Amir Timur, and the Ottoman Empire—contributed to safer routes, urban development, and intensified interregional connectivity. These conditions facilitated mobility, but they did not in themselves generate religious expansion. Instead, the spread of the Naqshbandi tariqa depended on specific mechanisms, including the movement of Sufi masters, the establishment of institutional networks (lodges and teaching circles), the circulation of texts, and the cultivation of patronage relationships.

The analysis also highlights features that distinguished the Naqshbandi order from other Sufi currents in its capacity for wide geographic diffusion. In particular, its emphasis on disciplined spiritual practice combined with active engagement in social and political life enabled closer interaction with ruling elites and urban populations. This relative openness to political authority—while varying across contexts—enhanced its

institutional durability and facilitated its integration into diverse socio-political environments.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that patterns of reception were not uniform across regions. In the Indian subcontinent, the expansion of Naqshbandi networks relied heavily on the circulation of texts and scholarly lineages originating in Central Asia and Khorasan, thereby fostering intellectual and doctrinal consolidation. By contrast, in Asia Minor and the Ottoman domains, the spread of the tariqa was more closely associated with itinerant Sufi representatives and localized institutional embedding, resulting in different modes of adaptation. These variations underscore the importance of regional context in shaping the trajectories of Sufi expansion.

In sum, the transregional spread of the Naqshbandi tariqa cannot be explained solely by the Silk Road. Rather, it emerged from the interaction between infrastructural connectivity, political frameworks, and internally generated religious networks. By distinguishing between these dimensions, the study provides a more precise account of how Sufi movements expanded across Eurasia and contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between mobility, power, and religious change in the late medieval period.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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