

Shrines (*Qadamgāh*) and Relics Dedicated to Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib in the Turkic and Indo-Persian Areas

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This article deals mainly with a particular role played by the shrines called the *qadamgāhs* or *qadamjāys* (stepping places) regarding saints’ veneration in Turkic and Indo-Persian regions. Although considered similar to tombs (*mazar*) and being the focus points of pilgrimages and rituals, a *qadamgāh* is not a grave but a place where a prophet, an imam, or a saint is believed to have stopped or stayed for a while. According to French archaeologist Joseph Castagné, in a seminal article on saint veneration in Central Asia, a *qadamgāh* is a site that has received the feet of holy persons (*qadam* = foot; *-gāh/-jāy* = place) and so it is a “commemorative monument.”¹ We can also characterize such a site as a *lieu de mémoire* (realm of memory),² which is a place for remembering great persons or holy events. Over time, a *qadamgāh* has turned into a sacred structure, in the shape of a mausoleum, usually surmounted by a cupola (*gumbadh*) and, in some cases, supplemented with a fictitious grave (*qabr*).

The term *qadamgāh* is very popular in Iran, Central Asia, and to some extent India but not the rest of the Muslim world. However, several places similar to a *qadamgāh* exist in these lands. Although they are depicted as tombs or mausoleums, they are without the body of a holy person inside. There is a very little literature available on *qadamgāhs* and only a few researchers, mostly Russians or Central Asians, have referred to this phenomenon.³ I am convinced, however, for many reasons, that an inquiry into this unusual kind of shrine, which is neither a mosque nor a mausoleum, will contribute to a better understanding of the saint and tomb veneration in Islam.

I. *Qadamgāh* and the Relics of Holy Men

One of the major features of a *qadamgāh* and the reason for which it becomes focus point of a pilgrimage is the presence of a relic that indicates the visit of a holy person. There are, however, *qadamgāhs* without any relics: one such example is the Takht-i Sulaymān (the Thorne of Solomon), at Osh, in Kyrgystan (Ferghana Valley), where King Solomon

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1 “Sometimes, the monuments are hollow; they were erected to commemorate some events of the holy persons’ lives or indicate the place where they set their feet, known as the ‘kadam-joi’ of their travel. Then, they are no more than simple sanctuaries, modest oratories dedicated to the men of virtue, and simple enclosures where various objects that belonged to the deceased or were touched by him are deposited,” Castagné 1951: 46–48.

2 See Nora 1998.

3 See for ex. Snezarev 2003: 209, and Abashin 2003: 23.

is supposed to have walked and stayed for a while (picture 1).⁴ A well-known sanctuary dedicated to the Companions of the Cave (Ashāb al-Kahf), at Tuyuq (Turfan, China) houses two *qadamgāhs*: one of them is linked to Naqshbandī king Afāq Khwāja Hidāyatullāh (during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries) (picture 2), who visited the cave,⁵ and the second, named Qadam-jāy Charyār is dedicated to four caliphs (*khalīfas*) who, according to hagiography, came from the Arabian Peninsula and visited the cave. All these *qadamgāhs* have no relics and will not be the subject of the present study.



1. *Qadamgāh* at Takht-i Sulaymān, 1997 (© T. Zarccone)



2. *Qadamgāh* of Afāq Khwāja at Tuyuq, 2013 (© T. Zarccone)

4 Zarccone 2013: 73–89.

5 Another *qadamgāh* of Afāq Khwāja exists at Fayzabad. See Shinmen 2003: 86–87, 92 and Papas 2005: 123, 137.

Etymologically, a *qadamgāh* is a place that preserves, in general, the print of a foot (*qadam*). The tradition of maintaining footprints of holy persons is inspired by the footprints of Prophet Muhammad. The earliest and the most famous shrine with such a relic is undoubtedly the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. It marks the place where Prophet Muhammad mounted his mule Buraq and set off on his Night Journey (*Isrā*), followed by the Ascension (*Mi‘rāj*). Before the Prophet set off that place, his foot left an imprint on a solid rock.⁶ Perween Hasan writes that no other relics, such as of the hair from the Prophet’s beard, his coat, or sandals, are regarded as important as his footprints (*qadam rasūl*).⁷ Only the Prophet of Islam, some imams, and holy persons could do miracles like leaving footprints on stones like on wax.⁸

There are many mosques and holy persons’ tombs in the Muslim world (in Cairo, Damascus, Istanbul, Delhi, and other Indian cities) with the Prophet’s footprints on stones. These sites are usually called *Qadam Sharīf* or *Qadam Rasūl Allāh*. However, importantly, all these places were never visited by Prophet Muhammad. The stones carrying the Prophet’s footprints were brought to these areas by merchants or sultans to be housed in mosques or mausoleums and to achieve sanctity (*barakat*). Christiane Grüber terms these footprints as “portable impressions.”⁹ Though these places are called *qadamgāhs*, they were never visited by Prophet Muhammad.



3. Pilgrimage to Qadamgāh of Khoja Ubbo in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 1993 (From the Newspaper *Turkiston*, Tashkent, Jan. 1993)

6 Perween 1993: 335.

7 Perween 1993: 335, 341. See also Goldziher 1971, vol. 2, 331.

8 I am highly surprised to see that André Vauchez, a French leading expert on saint veneration in medieval Christianity, imagined erroneously that there is no veneration of relics in the cult of Muslim saints! He writes: “*La grande différence entre les deux religions [Christianity and Islam] réside certes dans l’absence de reliques, puisque l’on ne vénère que des cénotaphes dans les sanctuaires musulmans...*” (Vauchez 2007: 160).

9 Grüber 2013 : 297–307.

Furthermore, a sacred object linked to the Prophet or ‘Alī may be the reason for the erection of a *qadamgāh*. It was the case in the seventeenth century, when the cloak (*khirqā*) of the Prophet, which was given to ‘Alī and then to ‘Uways al-Qaramānī, was brought by Afghan king Ahmad Shāh from Fayzabad to Kabul. At every stepping place on the way, the cloak is venerated by pilgrims, and each stepping place has come to be called “the place where the lord of men set foot” (*Qadamgāh-i Shāh-i Mardān*).¹⁰ One more example of the relic of this kind exists at Bukhara, in Uzbekistan. It is the *Qadamgāh* of Khoja Ubbo, the eighteenth son of Imam ‘Alī, who was beheaded in a battle (picture 3). According to legends, his head fell on earth, near a cemetery, and then disappeared miraculously (*ghoyib*) underground. This *qadamgāh*, located near a spring and close to the desert, is a structure topped by a cupola but is without a tomb.¹¹

Most of the *qadamgāhs* of Central Asia are linked to biblical or Quranic personalities, such as Prophet Job/Ayyūb, who are supposed to have visited the region—a fact the locals believe firmly. Among them, Shi’i imams are particularly renowned, and several mausoleums bear their names; several mausoleums are devoted to Imam ‘Alī, a few to Imam Ridā and Imam Ja‘far Sādiq, and one to Fātima.¹² This point is corroborated by Uzbek researcher Nodirbek Abdulakhatov, who has published a detailed book on pilgrimage places in the city of Marghilan (Ferghana Valley). According to Abdulakhatov, some famous *qadamgāhs* also commemorate the visit of the Companions (*ashāb*) of the Prophet Muhammad to Ferghana, such as Sa‘d Ibn Abū Waqqās, ‘Abdullāh al-Ansārī, Bilāl, and Uways Qaranī. These Arab warriors, however, had never entered Central Asia... Thus, the *qadamgāh* commemorates only a mythological idea, which, however, the local population strongly believes.¹³ The *qadamgāhs* devoted to Imam ‘Alī are the most important, first because of his high prestige and second because many believers that Imam ‘Alī had really visited these places. Hence, some of them, instead of *qadamgāh*, are called the foot of ‘Alī.

The relics found at *qadamgāhs* or mausoleums are as given here:

- the footprints, handprints, or fingerprints of Imam ‘Alī (and some other imams and spiritual persons), usually found on stones or rocks;
- the hoof prints of ‘Alī’s mule or Duldul, on stones or rocks;
- the rocks or stones cut into two either by the sword of ‘Alī (*Dhulfiqar*) or coming into contact with some part of his body when he performed his prayer.

The footprints of ‘Alī and Imam Ridā are the most famous relics, but this tradition has

10 McChesney 1991: 226.

11 “*Hazrat Ali’ning on sakkizinji oghillari Khoja Ubbo’ning boshi kilichdan otkaziladi. Shunda gavdadan ajralgan kalla yumalab-yumalab uch chaqirimcha nari (hozirgi maqbaralar atrofiga borib yerning ostiga ghoyib bolganmish)*”: the oral information collected by journalist Nusrat Sayidov, in 1993.

12 ‘Alī and the other Shi’i imams are praised in Xinjiang popular literature: see Reich 2003: 7–24.

13 Abdulakhatov and Eshonboboev 2007: 126–127.

also inspired veneration of the footprints of other holy persons and Sufis at some shrines from the Middle East to India. For example, the footprint of Hācı Bektāş Velī, the eponym of the Bektāshī Sufi order, on a rock at Hacibektaş, in Turkey, is venerated. As this footprint resembles bread dough, the name of the stone carrying it is called Hamur Kaya (Rock of the bread dough).¹⁴ Another footprint that is venerated is of famous Bektāshī saint, Sari Saltık, on a stone in the Kruja mountains in Albania.¹⁵ Moreover, some other footprints that are venerated are of the Baghdadi Sufi ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī in a mosque in Chittagong in India¹⁶ and of the saint Shāh Walī in Hunza Valley, in Northern Pakistan.¹⁷

II. ‘Alī’s Mythological Travels in Non-Arab Lands

Many shrines, *qadamgāhs*, and mausoleums commemorate historical events—though mythical—about the battles of ‘Alī against infidels from Turkey to China. These events regard the Imam and his mule Duldul, who is viewed as an exceptional animal and a precious companion of the Imam. So, legends claim that ‘Alī was one of the most active propagators of Islam in Anatolia,¹⁸ in the whole of Central Asia, and especially in the valley of Ferghana and the oasis of Xinjiang.

In Turkey, several oral and written traditions—many prevailing among the Alevi population—recount that ‘Alī traveled to Anatolia to spread Islam and left some marks of his passage (*Ali’nin izleri*), meaning the footprints on stones; it is also true regarding his mule.¹⁹ Moreover, it is believed that ‘Alī visited Central Asia, Eastern Turkistan, and even India.²⁰ The tradition attributes seven graves to the Imam in Central Asia, the most celebrated being at Khiva, and another quite famous at a place called Shāhimardān in the Ferghana Valley.²¹ At Namatgul Kishlaq, in Hindu Kush (Afghanistan), a mausoleum dedicated to ‘Alī commemorates the time when the Imam arrived there and conquered the Pyanj River valley.²² Likewise, the Imam fought against enemies in Kyrgyzstan and won over them. A mausoleum reminds this event at Qabr-qul Kishlaq, near Arslan Bab, since ‘Alī visited this place and erected there a banner.²³ We are also informed by a hagiographer that at Uch-Turfan, in East Turkestan, the Imam fought against a ruler named Barbar and defeated him, and to

14 Zarccone 1995: 318; Perween 1993: 341.

15 Şahin 2011: 143 with a photograph of the relic: 153; Koleczynska 2013: 57.

16 Perween 1993: 340–341. There is a photograph of Muhammad and ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī’s footprints in the Qadam Mubarak mosque at Anderkilla, Chittagong, in Harder 2011: 74.

17 Frembgen 2005: 90.

18 Arslan 2012: 47.

19 Arslan 2012: 47.

20 Abdulahatov 2016: 98–100; Demir 2011: 94.

21 Abdulahatov 2016: 106, 109.

22 Abdulahatov 2016: 105.

23 Abdulahatov 2016: 100.

commemorate the event, the locals built a shrine.²⁴

‘Alī and Shi’i influence were particularly strong in the Pamir area, which is an Ismaili region in Central Asia. We see a great number of shrines dedicated to the Imam, who is credited with introducing Islam in the region, particularly in the Wakhan valley. Thus, the whole region is presented as the “stepping place of the *pūr*” (Qademgāh-e pīrān) by a local historian.²⁵ According to the tradition, the Imam was accompanied by 40 warriors; this is the reason for which one shrine containing a print of ‘Alī’s foot is named Chiltan Spring (The Source of the Forty).²⁶

III. Footprints, Handprints, and Fingerprints of Imams

The footprints are, in general, the major relics conservated at *qadamgāhs*. The most famous among these *qadamgāhs* is situated in Iran near Nishapur on the Mashhad road and is dedicated to the eighth Imam Ridā. It possesses a piece of black stone on which, according to locals, two footprints of Imam Ridā have been carved.²⁷ The place called Qadamgāh is visited by a large number of pilgrims; the visit to this shrine is usually included in the program of all the believers who come to Mashhad to visit Imam Ridā’s tomb (pictures 4 and 5).²⁸ It exists wonderful miniature from the sixteenth century that depicts two footprints of Imam Ridā (pictures 6 and 7).²⁹



4. *Qadamgāh* of Imam Ridā, Nishapur, 2017
(© T. Zarccone)



5. Section with the Footprints of Imam Ridā
(© T. Zarccone)

24 Pantusov 2001: 184; Abdulahatov 2016: 106.

25 Mock 2011: 122.

26 Middleton 2017: 12, 38.

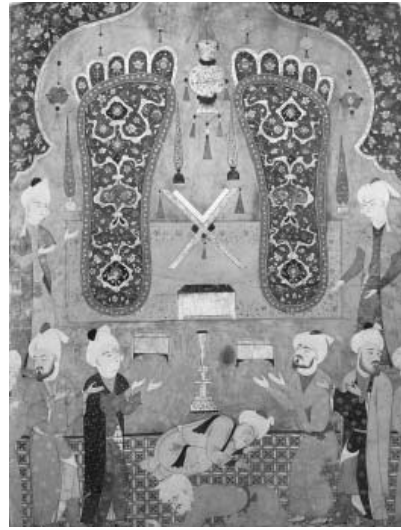
27 Donaldson 1933: 67; Daneshdoust 1993: 49.

28 Personal observations at Qadam-gāh, Nishapur, October 2017.

29 From the *Falnāma* (Iran, Qazvin, 1550–1560), published in Farhad and Bagci 2009: 30.



6. Footprints of Imam Ridā
(© T. Zarccone)



7. Miniature of the Footprints of Imam Ridā,
1550–1560 (Farhad 2009: 137)

However, such places with the footprints of Imam ‘Alī (and perhaps also of Prophet Muhammad) are also found in the Sunni world, as they are found in Northern Africa³⁰ and Turkey; both of these areas are believed to be the places of ‘Alī’s battles. In northern Anatolia, near Beşikdüzü, a commemorative shrine called Ali Taşı reminds the victory of the Imam against his enemies who entered the region through the Black Sea. According to local legends, ‘Alī, after his victory, stopped at that place to perform his prayer and hence the rock bears the imprints of his feet and fingers. There are also the marks of the hooves of the mule Duldul. The footprints are associated with the Imam’s hands, fingers, and knees as he performed there the ritual of the prayer. Ali Taşı is nowadays the focus point of a cult.³¹



8. Shi’i Pilgrimage Āli Ayagy, at Buzovna, Azerbaijan³²

30 Servier 1962: 32; Dermenghem 1954: 142.

31 Demir 2011: 100.

32 Image published at <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/eli-ayagi-ziyaretgahinda/?ref=article-related-artcles>.

Many sacred places in the Caucasus and Central Asia house the footprints of ‘Alī. For example, a major sanctuary named The foot of ‘Alī (Āli Ayagy) is located at Buzovna, near Baku, in Azerbaijan. It is one of the major Shi’i pilgrimages in this region (pictures 8 and 9).³³ Another site, Shahqadam, the “Foot of the Shāh,” is located in Turkmenistan (Turkmenbashi).³⁴ Such relics exist in a great number in the rest of Central Asia: at Aravan, Kampir Ravat, Haydarkan Qadamjāy, Yigit Ali Pirim, and Katput.³⁵ One stone named *Aulie tash*, found on the bank of the Bagsan river in Kazakhstan, is also considered a place that was visited by ‘Alī and bears a print of his foot.³⁶ Furthermore, according to locals, some pre-Islamic petroglyphs of human footsteps and horse hooves at Terekty Aulie in Central Kazakhstan could have been the impressions not only of Imam ‘Alī but also of other saints.³⁷



9. Footprint of ‘Alī at Buzovna Sanctuary³⁸

There are many *qadamgāhs* of ‘Alī in the Xinjiang province of China.³⁹ One, situated at Uch-Turfan (Northern Xinjiang), commemorates a miracle accomplished by the Imam.⁴⁰ In Tajik Pamir region, an entire mountain, the Muztagh Ata, is regarded the tomb of the Imam,⁴¹ whereas in Khotan district, there are legends and narratives about an imaginary mountain named the Mountain of the Tomb (Mazar Tagh) where ‘Alī is believed to have performed his

33 Āhādov 1991: 130; Abdulahatov 2016: 105.

34 Demir 2011: 102.

35 Abdulakhatov and Eshonboboev 2007: 20–21; Muminov 2016: 666–667.

36 Abdulahatov 2016: 105; Yasin 2016: 76–77; Muminov 2016: 669.

37 Lymer 2004: 166–167.

38 Image published at <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/eli-ayagi-ziyaretgahinda/?ref=article-related-artciles>.

39 Abashin 2003: 23.

40 Mullā Mūsā Sayrāmī 1905: 316–317.

41 Zarccone 2017: 136–137.

prayers. His mule Duldul, which was flying, brought ‘Alī at the summit of this place after both had traveled all around the world. Then the site became a pilgrimage place.⁴² Another shrine dedicated to ‘Alī’s footprint, close to Maralbashi (Xinjiang), is described by the traveler Forsyth by the end of the nineteenth century:

Nine miles to the north-east of Maralbashi is a huge black rock, apparently basaltic, with a peak rising to some 2,500 feet above the plain. It is very rugged and quite inaccessible and forms a conspicuous landmark. It is called *Pir Shereh Kuddum Moortaza Ali Tagh* or Prophet Ali’s footstep. At its foot on the north side is a mazar of great sanctity.⁴³

This site is also more or less identified as the whole mountain.

Thus, the footprints are not the only marks left by Imam ‘Alī; we must also consider his handprints and fingerprints. In Turkey, for example, near the river Ceyhan, the five fingers of ‘Alī were imprinted on a rock when he was performing his prayer.⁴⁴ Also, in Kyrgyzstan, at the eponymous district of Qadamjay, at a site called *Qadamjāy*, we find stones that bear the print of ‘Alī’s hand (his five fingers) and also the prints of his knees (probably because he was performing his prayer).⁴⁵ Another mausoleum with ‘Alī’s footprints and knee prints exists at Shahr-i Kalach Khojend in Ferghana.⁴⁶

Finally, there is an intriguing shrine at Qila-e Panja, in the Ismaili Wakhan district (Afghanistan), which is neither depicted as a mausoleum (*mazar*) nor a *qadamjāy*, but as an *oston* (from *astān*). According to locals, this shrine is dedicated to nature, trees, springs, and mountains. It contains a stone called *Panja Stone* (palm stone) on which five fingers of ‘Alī are imprinted (picture 10).⁴⁷ As discussed earlier, there is a tomb—also called *Astān*—of Shi’i saint Shāh Walī, believed to be a descendant of the Imam Ja‘far Sādiq, in the neighboring Hunza Valley. The tomb contains Shāh Walī’s footprint (*piqmār* stone), which is an imitation of Imam ‘Alī’s footprint. At this place, according to J. Frembgen, “The pilgrims drink the rainwater collected in the deepening of Shāh Walī’s footprint.”⁴⁸

42 Yasin 2008: 62–65.

43 Forsyth 1875: 227. I would like here to thank Professor Hamada Masami (Kyoto University) who drew my attention to several sources quoted in this paragraph.

44 Demir 2011: 101.

45 Abdulahatov 2016: 116.

46 Abdulahatov 2016: 100.

47 Mock 2011: 124–125.

48 Frembgen 2005: 90.



10. A Man Holding the “Panja Stone” (Palm Stone) Carrying ‘Alī’s Fingerprints
(Mock 2011: 124–125)

Another *qadamgāh* of ‘Alī, integrated with the pilgrimage of Sufi Shāh Nurānī (believed to be a descendant of ‘Alī), has become a major holy site in southern Balouchistan. Also called Lahūt-makān, this *qadamgāh* contains a cave where, according to a legend, Imam ‘Alī spent a night. Hence, nowadays the pilgrims spend a night at this place. Furthermore, ‘Alī is believed to have fought against a demon and freed the Lahut Valley from this creature. However, the Lahūt-makān site is known for housing a very big footprint of ‘Alī (50 cm long) on a stone upon which the pilgrims put their foreheads.⁴⁹ (A small dent in a nearby rock is said to be a mark left by the hoof of the Imam’s mule. See below.)

Significantly, a mausoleum in the Marwar area of Rajasthan, in India, belongs to the saint Shams Pīr who got the dual Hindu-Muslim identity. The relic venerated at this holy site (disputed by the two religions) is a footprint engraved on a big rectangular stone, which is considered the footprint of either Prophet Muhammad or ‘Alī by Muslims. However, for Hindus (mostly the followers of Nath Yogi sect), the footprint is of the Hindu god Vishnu.⁵⁰

IV. Hoofprints of ‘Alī’s mule Duldul

There are many narratives in Northern Africa, Turkey, Caucasus, and Central Asia about the coming of ‘Alī riding his mule to some places and the animal leaving there the imprints of

⁴⁹ Oral information collected by Rashid (2012). See also <https://pakistaniinformation.wordpress.com/syed-bilawal-shah-noorani/> (in Urdu).

⁵⁰ Sila Khan 1996: 40–41.

his hooves on rocks and near some of the footprints of his master (e.g., one imprint at Lahūt-makān shrine). However, these places are not particularly described as *qadamjāy*, which they are. They are generally regarded as tombs or mausoleum and have become an attraction points for pilgrims. ‘Alī’s mule Duldul (picture 11)—who is Muhammad’s gift to his son-in-law—is supposed to have got extraordinary strength.⁵¹ At Tlemcen, in Algeria, a holy place named The Foot of Serhan (popularly called Serhan), houses a footprint of ‘Alī and a very big hoofprint of his mule. Serhan is the other name of Duldul in the epics in Northern Africa.⁵² According to oral tradition, the mule made a spectacular jump of 500 m to come to this site.⁵³



11. ‘Alī’s Mule Duldul, drawing from Bombay, Twentieth Century.
(Centlivres 1997: 47)

In Turkey, the Iskilip Castle (Çorum Province, Black Sea region of Turkey), which was visited by ‘Alī, contains a print of the mule’s hoof on a stone. Not far from Iskilip, the hill Yivlik Dağ was reached by ‘Alī riding on the flying Duldul. There are also stones on this hill that bear the hoof prints of the mule.⁵⁴ In Turkey, between Nazmiye and Kadırlı, a stone that bears the hoof mark of Duldul is venerated by locals.⁵⁵ There are probably other marks of Duldul passing from the rest of Turkey. Besides, the miraculous powers of the animal are confirmed by both oral and written Turkish traditions: Duldul, like Muhammad and ‘Alī, has the capacity to imprint hooves marks on stones, but also has the ability to fly or make prodigious jumps (some of these wonders are mentioned in the *Cenknâme* of ‘Alī, a popular hagiography about the Imam based on oral and written sources and read in Turkish Sunni

51 Mahdawī Dāmghānī 2011: 477.

52 Desmarquet 1939: 192–226.

53 See <https://azititou.wordpress.com/2012/06/10/mythes-et-rites-de-nos-sanctuaires-les-marabouts-en-algerie/>.

54 Arslan 2012: 47–51.

55 Kalafat 2014: 26.

milieu in Turkey and in Central Asia).⁵⁶

In Azerbaijan (Nakhichevan province), a stone with Duldul's hoofprints (called Yazılı Qaya—the rock with a writing) is housed in the sanctuary of the Companions of the Cave (Ashāb al-Kahf). From oral legends, we realize that Duldul, by jumping over the rocks, reached the Ashāb al-Kahf sanctuary where 'Alī performed his prayer. There is no connection, however, between the legends of the Companions (see Sura 18 of the Quran) and the Imam.⁵⁷ The presence of 'Alī and Duldul at such a sanctuary is a sign of the Shi'itization of the area. Buzovna near Baku, which is another major Shi'i sanctuary in Azerbaijan, also hosts a hoofprint of the Imam's mule. This print is protected in an unusual little structure without a cupola (picture 12).



12. Hoofprint of 'Alī's Mule at Buzovna Sanctuary⁵⁸

In the neighboring Iran, about 40 km south of Persepolis, a well-known place named Qadamgāh on the mountain Kuh-e Rahmat has curious marks on rocks, which are interpreted as the footprints of 'Alī's mule.⁵⁹ The other shrines dedicated to this animal are not unknown in Central Asia and even in India. In Western Turkestan, a shrine with such a relic, called Kalla-Mazar, is situated near Chirabad.⁶⁰ Another relic exists at Gava (near Namangan).⁶¹

As mentioned earlier, Uch-Turfan in northern Xinjiang and its surroundings is a

56 Abdulakhatov and Eshonboboev 2007: 19; Arslan 2012; Ünlüsoy 2015: 244–247.

57 Personal observation in November 2014 and the oral information collected by Q. Qādirzade, a scholar at Nakhichevan University; see his webpage ashabikahf.nakhichivan.az (accessed in November 2014). See also Kadirzade 1998: 211–225 and Bağırov 2008: 214.

58 Image published at <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/eli-ayagi-ziyaretgahinda/?ref=article-related-artciles>

59 Wells 1883: 143.

60 Castagné 1951: 117. See also Castagné 1951: 82 where a mausoleum called *Duldul Ata* (Father Duldul), from the name of 'Alī mule, has a stone with a footprint of this animal.

61 Muminov 2016: 668.

conservatory of the memory of the mythological battle of ‘Alī against the pagan king Barbar. A mausoleum, named Suutkan—actually nobody is buried here, and it is not bigger than a *qadamgāh*—was erected at this site. According to the legend, ‘Alī watered his mule at this place. Another site in the neighborhood is a sacred hill where a stable for the mule of the Imam was built (Duldul Akhūr).⁶²

At Haydarabad, in Sind province of Pakistan, a shrine—Qadam-i ‘Alī—with a footprint of ‘Alī is regarded by the Muslims of India as *Najaf-e Sind*, which means the Najaf of Sind (Najaf, housing the tomb of Imam ‘Alī, is a major pilgrimage site for Shi’is in Iraq). The shrine, which is the focus point of a Shi’i pilgrimage, houses two stones with footprints. One stone holds the prints of ‘Alī’s hands, feet, knees, forehead, and nose; whereas the second stone holds the prints of the foot of a lion—a symbol of ‘Alī—and of the hooves of the mule of the Imam.⁶³ Surprisingly, this pilgrimage site is regarded a substitute for ‘Alī’s tomb at Najaf; and this is also the reason for its title *Najaf of Sind*.⁶⁴ This shrine can be compared with the sanctuary of Ashāb al-Kahf in Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan) which is considered by local Shi’is as a substitute to the shrine of Karbala (the major site of pilgrimage in Shi’ism, where Imam Husayn is buried). However, the footprints of ‘Alī in the Haydarabad shrine were brought from Iran at the end of the eighteenth century as a present from the Persian Qajar ruler to Mīr Fātih ‘Alī Khān, the Talpur king of Sindh province in Pakistan.⁶⁵ Thus, these relics are not more than “portable impressions,” and the site, known as Qadamgāh Imām ‘Alī, was not visited by the Imam.

V. Shrines Dedicated to ‘Alī’s Sword, *Dhulfiqar* and the Objects Touched by Imam

Some unusual shrines, sometimes called *qadamgāhs*, have become sacred due to a particular event linked to the miraculous power of ‘Alī’s sword, *Dhulfiqar*. This fabulous two-edged sword is credited with the capacity to kill men and jinns and cut stones. At Divriği, in Turkey, people go for a pilgrimage to a stone named *Ali Taşı* that was mythologically cut into two parts by this sword.⁶⁶ A similar legend exists in Kabul (district of Kart-e shahi) about the site named Sang-i Zulfiqar (The Stone of Dhulfiqar).⁶⁷ Not far from Sivas, in Central Anatolia, a rock named Ali Taşı is shaped like an enormous cheese cut into slices with a knife. According to the legends, Imam ‘Alī was responsible for this.⁶⁸ In Central Asia, at Gava Qishlaq, in the district of Namangan of Uzbekistan, a stone named Sang-i la’nat (The Stone of the Damned),

62 Pantusov 2001: 184, 186; Abdulhatov 2016: 106.

63 Sadique *et al.* 2015: 53.

64 Zarccone 2011: 258.

65 Kalhoro 2015: 52.

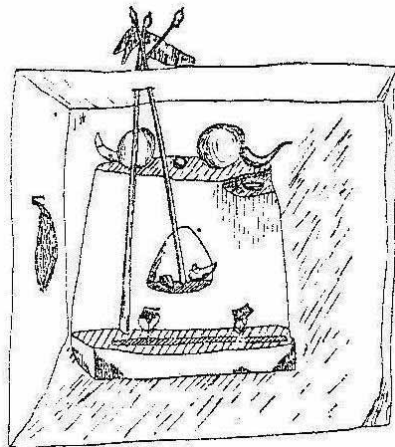
66 Kalafat 2014: 25.

67 Kalafat 2007: 49.

68 Demir 2011: 101–102.

was formed by a blow from of ‘Alī’s sword.⁶⁹ These rocks or stones have become relics and are the focus points of pilgrimages because they were cut or touched by the miraculous sword. A striking example is of the rock named Ali Kaya (the rock of ‘Alī on the road Nazmiye-Tunceli), which is a focus point of a pilgrimage in Turkey: according to the legend, the shrine got its name from the fact that ‘Alī had his back propped against it.⁷⁰ Thus, more than the passing of a saint, a *qadamgāh* brings to mind some of his gestures and actions, such as praying and spending a night in the cave.

There is another site that was visited by ‘Alī in the Vakhan, a mountainous region in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan. According to locals, the Imam used two large rounded black stones to play ball; these stones became the symbol of ‘Alī’s strength and this is the reason for building of a monument at this place. The Danish traveler O. Olufsen visited the shrine by the end of the nineteenth century and wrote a detailed description along with a drawing (picture 13). The small shrine has no grave but an altar with two rounded black stones of seventeen centimeters diameter. The other objects in the shrine are cow-horns, a lamp, candlesticks, and long staffs/banners, which pass through a hole in the roof. We must consider the black stones as relics preserved in this shrine since they were touched by ‘Alī. Olufsen learned from the locals that several religious festivals were celebrated at this shrine, which is no more than a *qadamgāh*.⁷¹



13. Drawing by Olufsen of ‘Alī’s Shrine in Vakhan District

VI. Conclusion

The relics dedicated to Prophet Muhammad and ‘Alī, his son-in-law and the first Imam of Shi’ism, constitute the model for the most venerated relics in the Muslim world. Particularly,

69 Abdulhatov 2016: 100; Muminov 2016: 668.

70 Kalafat 2014: 25.

71 Olufsen 1904: 157–161.

the two holy persons’ footprints are far more important than the Prophet’s coat, stick, sandals, and even his beard hair. Later, the tradition of venerating such relics has been followed in case of several other holy persons. The stones carrying the footprints of Prophet Muhammad are located in some places in the Middle East, which were visited by him. Many other stones with such prints, which are “portable impressions,” have been transported to places as far as Istanbul or India and venerated in mausoleums or mosques. On the other hand, a large number of footprints of ‘Alī are found in places visited by the Imam during his “military campaigns” in Turkey, Central Asia, and even in Algeria. Moreover, the hooves prints of ‘Alī’s mule are the focus points at many pilgrim places.

The origin of the footprints of Prophet Muhammad and ‘Alī is not identical: Muhammad’s footprints are, in general, the memories of his Night Journey and Ascension (*mi‘rāj*), significant events in Islam. But ‘Alī’s footprints are not linked to the memories of particular events in the Imam’s life; they remind the moments of the Imam performing his prayers. While he prayed, his feet left the marks on stones. The same applies to other parts of his body which are ritually in contact with the earth during prayers. Hence, the impressions of ‘Alī’s hands, fingers, and even knees are marked on stones. In several shrines, these relics are more respected than those of footprints as they are the relics of a “praying body” (*un corps priant*).

The sacrality of the hooves’ prints of the mule Duldul and of the rock formed by the Imam’s sword is due to the exceptional nature of the animal and the weapon. Both belong to ‘Alī and constitute his equipment with which he fought against the enemies of Islam. Hence, the prints of Duldul’s hooves and *Dhulfiqar*’s marks are generally not far from the Imam’s footprints. To conclude, we may wonder why these relics exist in such a large number in Central Asia (including Xinjiang), which is largely a Sunni region (except for the Pamir area). One explanation is that ‘Alī is more famous here as the greatest hero of the Islamisation than a caliph or the major figure of Shi’ism. On the contrary, in the Indian subcontinent, the veneration of ‘Alī’s relics and those of his sons, especially their footprints, is practiced in general in the mausoleums frequented by Shi’ites; although there are some exceptions.

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