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'Urafa' of the Fifth/Eleventh Century

1. Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Khurqani

One of the most famous *'urafa'*, the *'urafa'* relate amazing stories about him. Amongst these is one according to which he would go to the grave of Bayazid and converse with his spirit, taking his advice in solving his difficulties. Rumi says:

After many years had passed since the death of Bayazid Bu'l-Hasan appeared. Now and then he would go and sit By the side of his grave in his presence, Until came the spirit of his shaykh, And as soon as he uttered his problem, it was solved

Rumi has remembered Shaykh Abu al-Hasan a lot in his Mathnawi, which shows his devotion and attachment to him. It is said that he met with Abu 'Ali Sina, the philosopher, and with Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al- Khayr, the famous *'arif.* He died in 425/1033-34.

2. Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr

One of the most famous of all mystics, Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr is also one of those most noted for their spiritual states (*halat*). When once asked the definition of *tasawwuf,* he replied: "*Tasawwuf* is that you give up whatever is on your mind, give away whatever is in your hand, and to give over yourself to whatever you are capable of."

He met with Abu 'Ali Sina. One day Abu 'Ali participated in a meeting at which Abu Sa'id was preaching. Abu Sa'id was speaking about the necessity of deeds, and about obedience and disobedience to God. Abu 'Ali recited these verses (*ruba'i*):

We are those who have befriended your forgiveness,

And seek riddance from obedience and disobedience.

Wherever your favour and grace is to be found,

Let the not-done be like the done, the done like the not-done.

Abu Sa'id immediately replied:

O you who have done no good, and done much bad,

And then aspire after your own salvation,

Do not rely on forgiveness, for never

Was the not-done like the done, the done like the not-done.

The following ruba'i is also of Abu Sa'id:

Tomorrow when the six directions fade away,

Your worth will be the worth of your awareness.

Strive for virtue, for on the Day of Retribution,

You shall rise in the form of your qualities.

Abu Sa'id passed away in the year 440/1048.

3. Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq al-Nishaburi

He is considered one of those who combined in himself the expertise of the Shari'ah and the Tariqah. He was a preacher and an exegete (*mufassir*) of the Quran. To such an extent did he use to weep while reciting supplications (*munajat*) that he was given the title 'the lamenting shaykh' (*shaykh-e nawhahgar*). He passed away in 405/1014 or 412/1021.

4. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri

He is the author of *Kashf al-Mahjub*, one of the famous sufi books and one which has recently been published. He died in 470/1077.

5. Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari

A descendant of the great Companion of the Prophet, Abu Ayyub al-'Ansari, Khwajah 'Abd Allah is himself one of the most famous and pious of all *'urafa'*. His fame rests largely on his elegant aphorisms, *munajat*, and *ruba'iyyat*.

Amongst his sayings is this:

When a child you are low, when a youth you are intoxicated, when old you are decrepit; so when will you worship God?

He has also said:

Returning evil for evil is the trait of a dog; returning good for good is the trait of a donkey; returning good for evil is the work of Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari.

The following ruba'i is also his:

It is a great fault for a man to remain aloof,

Setting oneself above all the creation.

Learn thy lesson from the pupil of the eye,

That sees everyone but not itself.

Khwajah 'Abd Allah was born in Herat where he died and was buried in 481/1088. For this reason he is known as 'the Sage of Herat' (*Pir-e Herat*).

Khwajah 'Abd Allah authored many books, the best-known of which, *Manazil al-sa'irin*, is a didactic manual on *sayr wa suluk*. It is one of the most well-written works of *'irfan*, and many commentaries have been written on it.

6. Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali

One of the best-known scholars of Islam whose fame has penetrated the East and the West, he combined in his person the knowledge of the rational and traditional sciences (*ma'qul wa manqul*). He became head of the Nizamiyyah Academy in Baghdad and held the highest position of his age accessible to any scholar. However, feeling that neither his knowledge nor his position could satisfy his soul, he withdrew from public life and engaged in disciplining and purifying his soul.

He spent ten years in Palestine, far from all who knew him, and it was during this period that he became inclined towards *'irfan* and sufism. He never again accepted any post or position. Following his period of solitary asceticism, he wrote his famous *Ihya' 'ulum al-Din* ('Reviving the Sciences of Religion'). He died in his home city of Tus in the year 505/1111.

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