



ARTICLE

## The Sufi shrine at Dhār in central India: documents for an economic and institutional history

Saarthak Singh<sup>1,2</sup> , Muntazir Ali<sup>3</sup>, Vishwa Mohan Jha<sup>4</sup> and Michael Willis<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium, <sup>2</sup>EFEU, Paris, France, <sup>3</sup>Archaeological Survey of India, Nagpur, India, <sup>4</sup>ARSD College, University of Delhi, India and <sup>5</sup>The Royal Asiatic Society, London, UK

**Corresponding author:** Michael Willis; Email: [mwroyalasiaticsociety@protonmail.com](mailto:mwroyalasiaticsociety@protonmail.com)

### Abstract

During the course of our exploration of the history and architecture of central India, Mukhtar Ahmad Khān, a school teacher and local historian, directed our attention towards a collection of unpublished legal documents pertaining to the shrine of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn Chishtī in Dhār, Madhya Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> As a corpus, these documents are concerned with grants of land, revenue, and legal issues regarding the management of the shrine, but they give, nonetheless, incidental information about the Chishtīs and the religious activities for which they were responsible. The shrine at Dhār—more correctly a dargāh—has enjoyed a continuous history from the fourteenth century to the present and is preeminent among the many Sufi places of pilgrimage in central India. Despite its manifest importance, the institutional, religious, and social histories of this dargāh await scholarly attention. The present article takes a first step in this direction by focusing on one crucial document that dates to the late seventeenth century.

**Keywords:** Chishtīyah; Dhār; land grant; Mughal empire; Sufi saints

### Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn and Dhār

As the history of Dhār's leading Sufi shrine is virtually uncharted, we begin with a digest of known events. Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn was born in the year 636 (1238–1239 CE), a grandson of the celebrated Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar, popularly known as Bābā Farīd (d. 1266 CE).<sup>2</sup> Kamāl al-Dīn studied in Delhi, where he was among the close disciples of the celebrated Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Chishtī (1238–1325 CE).<sup>3</sup> Initially entrusted with washing utensils in the kitchen of his master, Kamāl al-Dīn acquired a reputation for his generosity in distributing bread (*nān*) to the poor and abstaining from delicacies wherever he went.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In addition to pointing us to these documents, we were also provided with Mukhtar Ahmad Khān, *Purāne charāg: Bujurgānādīn-ē Mālāvā* [The Old Lamps: Men of Religion in Mālāvā] (Dhār, 1994) and other invaluable material in his library. The authors are deeply grateful for his interest in and support of the current research.

<sup>2</sup> An early hagiographical account is given in the mid-fourteenth-century biographical compendium of Mīr Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, (ed.) Chiranjī Lāl (Delhi, 1885), pp. 197–198, (Urdu trans.) Ghulām Ahmad Baryān, *Siyar-ul-Auliya': Khvājgān-i Cisht kā mustanad va qadīm tarīn tazkirah* (Lahore, 1978), pp. 296–297, discussed by Khān, *Purāne Charāg*, pp. 23–4. S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols (New Delhi, 1978), vol. i, p. 149, further cites *Ma'arīj al-Wilāyat* of 'Abdī Khwīshagī Qasūrī (d. 1695), fol. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Abū al-Faḍl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, (trans.) H. S. Jarrett (Calcutta, 1894), vol. 3, p. 365.

<sup>4</sup> In one anecdote, Mīr Khurd recounts how Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn arrived from Dhār to Delhi in the reign of Sultan Muḥammad ibn Tughluq and made the hagiographer a soft dish (*harīṣah*) with some halwa in return for all

Mīr Khurd recounts that, when Kamāl al-Dīn and his brother ‘Azīz al-Dīn approached their master with the wish to travel somewhere, Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn handed them one *jalālī* coin each, despatching Kamāl al-Dīn to Mālwa and ‘Azīz al-Dīn to the territory (*vilāyat*) of Deogīr.<sup>5</sup> Further details of the saint’s life are supplied by Muḥammad Ghawthī’s *Gulzār-i Abrār* (circa 1613 CE)—a voluminous compilation of biographical notices of learned men and mystics that was completed in the early seventeenth century and dedicated to Jahāngīr.<sup>6</sup> According to this account, Kamāl al-Dīn was sent by Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn for the spiritual guidance of the people of Mālwa and arrived in the town of Dhār in around the year 690 (1291 CE), when Rāi Pūranmal was the governor of the Mālwa region. These details highlight the fact that the pious activities of the Chishtī lineage preceded the political annexation of the region. It was only in 704 (1304–1305 CE) that Sultan ‘Ala’ al-Dīn Khaljī (reg. 1296–1316 CE) sought to extend the territories of the Delhi Sultanate southward and ordered Malik ‘Ayn al-Mulk Mūltānī to proceed to Mālwa with the task of securing the region as a staging post to the Deccan.<sup>7</sup> ‘Ayn al-Mulk successfully dismantled the crumbling Paramāra kingdom and served as the regional governor until he was eventually transferred to the Deccan, taking command of Deogīr-Daulatābād in 716 (1316–1317 CE).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Kamāl al-Dīn remained at Dhār, with his passing (*visāl*) reportedly taking place on 4 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 731 (16 September 1331 CE).<sup>9</sup>

As noted earlier in the pages of this Journal, the tomb of Kamāl al-Dīn stands at a key location in the centre of the circular city of Dhār, which had served as an important seat of the Paramāra kingdom (circa 972–1305 CE) and the Sultanates of Delhi and Mandu (1305–1565 CE) (Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> The building was renovated in the latter part of the twentieth century but an old photograph that was taken in 1912 at the time of Viceroy Lord Hardinge’s visit to Dhār preserves its earlier appearance (Figure 2). As can be seen

his grandmother’s handmade bread that the Shaykh had savoured; see Mīr Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā’*, (ed.) Lāl, p. 198, (trans.) Baryān, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> The source of the story is *ibid.*, (ed.) Lāl, p. 198, (trans.) Baryān, p. 297, discussed by C. W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany, NY, 1992), p. 114, who feels that ‘[a]lthough these two brothers may have successfully extended the influence of the Chishtī order by their activities, their migration occurred partly due to their own initiative, and cannot be considered evidence for a Chishtī missionary movement’. This is in contrast to the direct involvement of Nizām al-Dīn’s disciples with Khaljī and Tughluq imperial expansion into Mālwa and Deccan.

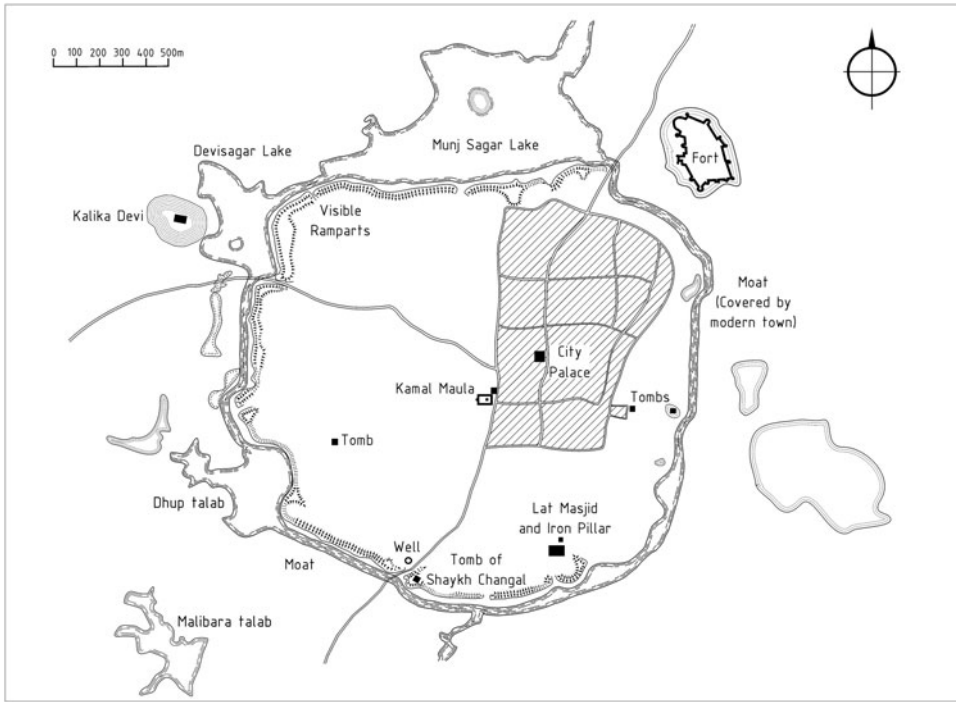
<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad Ghawthī Shattārī Māndavī, *Gulzār-i abrār*, (ed.) Muḥammad Zaki (Patna, 1994), p. 511, (Urdu trans.) Faḥl Aḥmad Jiyūrī, *Azkār al-abrār* (Agra, 1908; reprint edn, Lahore, 1975), pp. 581–582, (English trans.) Ishrat Husain Ansari, *Ghausi’s Persian Gulzar-i-Abrar Biographies of Mystics & Learned Men* (Delhi, 2017), pp. 552–553. The work consists of hagiographies of over 500 Chishtī and Shattārī saints in five parts compiled by a disciple of the Shattārī Sufi Shaykh Muḥammad Ghawth of Gwalior (d. 1563); see also Syed Bashir Hasan, ‘Chishti and Shattari saints of Malwa: relations with the state’, *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research* 3.3 (2014), pp. 51–54. It is outside the scope of the present article to chart the manuscript copies, as some are still in Mālwa and not generally known.

<sup>7</sup> Amir Khusrau, *Khazā’in al-Futūḥ* (circa 1312), (trans.) Mohammad Habib (Bombay, 1931), pp. 44–46. The date 704 is given in Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, ‘Ayn al-Mulk Multānī’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, (eds.) P. Bearman et al. (Leiden), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8372](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8372) (accessed December 2023).

<sup>8</sup> For the date of his transfer to Daulatābād, see Siddiqui, ‘Ayn al-Mulk Multānī’. The wider context is explored by P. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political History* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 198–199, 202. The territory of Mālwa centred on Dhār and was governed separately from that of Chanderi, as noted by Z. A. Desai, ‘The Chanderi inscription of ‘Ala’u-din Khalji’, *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement* (1968), pp. 4–10; M. Willis, *Inscriptions of Gopaksetra* (London, 1996), p. 84, with further context provided by S. Digby, ‘Before Timur came: provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate through the fourteenth century’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47.3 (2004), pp. 308–314.

<sup>9</sup> Khān, *Bujurgānādīn-ē Mālavī*, p. 27, with careful reservations, from which the date has hardened into a stated fact in Hasan Kashani, *Dargah Sharif in India* (n.p., 2022), p. 161, with the latter available online at [archive.org](https://archive.org) (accessed December 2023).

<sup>10</sup> M. Willis, ‘Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī: from Indology to political mythology and back’, *JRAS* 22.1 (2012), p. 133.



**Figure 1.** Dhār (Madhya Pradesh). Schematic plan of the old city showing key historical features.  
Source: M. Willis.

from this illustration, the shrine consists of two domed structures attached to each other, with that on the right (i.e. east) containing Kamāl al-Dīn's grave. This unusual architectural configuration is discussed below. The complex is surrounded by a wall with an elegant domed gatehouse (Figure 3). This was built in the fifteenth century, when the shrine was enlarged by the order of Sultan Maḥmūd Khaljī to accommodate poor and needy pilgrims and pious men, as recorded in a Persian inscription over the door dated AH 861 (1456–1457 CE).<sup>11</sup> After the 1400s, there is a considerable hiatus in historical records that pertain to the dargāh, with the earliest ones—on paper rather than stone—dating to the seventeenth century. The shift in medium puts the documents in a different class in terms of content and purpose: no longer public and poetic declarations of royal and spiritual achievement, they are concerned with land and revenue. The earliest complete document in this series, dating to 1695 CE, is the focus of the present article. It merits special attention because it sheds light on the history of the dargāh's custodians and the tax-free properties granted to them to support their religious and charitable activities.

## Document

The document, illustrated in Figure 4, is the certification (*taṣdīq*) of a Mughal princely order (*nishān*) conferring financial aid upon the shrine custodian, who was a direct descendant of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn Mālwi at Dhār.<sup>12</sup> It is dated in the 39th regnal year of

<sup>11</sup> Z. Hasan, 'The inscriptions of Dhār and Māṇḍū', *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1910–1911), (ed.) J. Horowitz (Calcutta, 1912), pp. 14–15.

<sup>12</sup> EAP1416-24 recto. Document pertaining to the Chishtī shrine at Dhār. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7016846>.



**Figure 2.** Dhār (Madhya Pradesh). Dargāh of Kamāl al-Dīn Chishtī, as photographed in 1912 by Vernon & Company (Bombay) at the time of Viceroy Lord Hardinge's visit to Dhār. Source: Wikimedia.



**Figure 3.** Dhār (Madhya Pradesh). Gatehouse to the dargāh precinct, built in 1456–1457, as documented in 2010. Source: M. Willis.





**Figure 4.** Confirmation (*taṣḍīq*) of a grant-in-aid (*madad-i ma'āsh*) to Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn Chishtī, dated in the 39th regnal year of Aurangzeb, 1106 *hijrī* (1695 CE). Source: Nizamuddin Chishti, Dhār.

Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, 1106 *hijrī* equivalent to 1695 CE. Written on paper in a vertical format that measures approximately 63 × 18 centimetres, it has 12 lines of Persian text in Nasta'liq script authenticated by seals of eight officials and witnesses on the recto. The verso carries an inspection notice dated 1904 in the current calendar. As per usual practice, the document was kept folded, the horizontal seams of which are visible across the paper.

The certificate is held by descent by the current incumbent of the dargāh, Nizamuddin Chishti, who graciously gave permission for it to be digitised along with other material in his possession. The starting point of our work on this collection can be pinpointed to the time of the 'Urs celebration in 2018, when Dr Saarthak Singh first noticed the document and transcribed and translated it, sharing images with the other authors of the present article. Our awareness of the documents led us to apply for a grant from the Endangered Archives Programme at the British Library to digitise and catalogue the

collection, which is now available via open access.<sup>13</sup> A number of these Mughal- and Maratha-era documents survive in the Qazi family collection in Bhopāl and as old facsimiles in the library of Mukhtar Ahmad Khān in Indore, which are essential to the history of the dargāh. The Principal Investigators in India were Dr Muntazir Ali and Dr Saarthak Singh, while the project as a whole was administered by Dr Michael Willis at the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS) in collaboration with the Institut français de Pondichéry (IFP).<sup>14</sup> As part of the capacity building, K. Rameshkumar from the IFP led training sessions in digitisation at Nagpur, hosted there by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).<sup>15</sup> In addition to technical staff at the ASI, Muzaffar Ansari and Ismail Ansari took part in the training, with the digitisation across the project carried out by the latter.

The document is described at the outset as a ‘certificate’ (*taṣḍīq*) that was issued in the name of Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, the hereditary shrine custodian (*khādim*) who was serving at the tomb (*maqbarah*) of Begum Šāhab that was located within the shrine complex (*rawzah*) of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn Mālwi in the town of Dhār, in the Mandū district of the Mālwa province. Reference is then made to a ‘princely order’ (*nishān-i ālīshān*) that was issued earlier in the name of the previous incumbent Shaykh Kāley, upon whom the imperial court bestowed 300 *bighā* land as financial aid for the dependants of the original grantee and 200 rupees for expenses of the attendants. This grant, though hereditary, was conditional upon service at the shrine during the incumbent’s lifetime, and required the landlords and officials of the county to demarcate the boundaries of the land that was endowed (*chakbandi*). The narrative then refers to the death of Shaykh Kāley and the assumption of office by his son and successor Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, who continued services at the tomb (lighting, sweeping, and providing water), maintaining everything physically and spiritually as was first intended. Being bound by his duties and without the expenses to appear before the imperial court, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn appealed for confirmation of the previous princely order in his name that authorised him to receive the revenues, either as a salary (*tankhwāh*) or in daily allowances (*wajh-i-yawmiyah*), from the land at Mālīwārah that was situated in the same town (*qaṣbah*) and connected with the tomb (*maqbarah*). The document confirms this request and has seals and endorsements of the officials who witnessed the statements made therein. On the lower left is a notation that records the date of writing as being in the 39th regnal year of Aurangzeb (AH 1106)—the day corresponding to 27 July 1695 CE.<sup>16</sup>

The wording of the document and the individuals named in the seals provide some insights into the state procedures for confirming grants-in-aid (*madad-i ma’āsh*) to religious institutions.<sup>17</sup> As can be seen from the text below, the new shrine attendant was

<sup>13</sup> *Documents in the Sufi Shrine at Dhar* (EAP1416), archived by the British Library under the digital identifier <http://dx.doi.org/10.15130/EAP1416> and by the IFP in the Zenodo repository under <https://zenodo.org/communities/documents/>.

<sup>14</sup> We are grateful to Dr Blandine Ripert at the IFP and Dr Alison Ohta at the RAS for their unwavering support. It is also our pleasant duty to thank the team at the Endangered Archive Programme at the British Library for their patience and support in the management of the project, and for the publication of the project’s digital assets on the Programme’s website.

<sup>15</sup> The authors wish to thank the ASI, especially Dr Praveen Kumar Mishra (Director Epigraphy in charge), who kindly approved the proposal for the training and Dr Muntazir Ali for arranging the facilities.

<sup>16</sup> For the year, we have used this table: Regnal years of Aurangzeb with Hijrī and Gregorian equivalents [data set], Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6627242>.

<sup>17</sup> The literature on the institution of financial aid (*madad-i ma’āsh*) is extensive. An early contribution and useful point of departure is S. A. Rashid, ‘Madad-i Ma’āsh grants under the Mughals’, *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 9.2 (1961), pp. 90–108, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7762693>. A recent and authoritative survey is available in I. Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556 – 1707*, 3rd edn (New Delhi, 2014), all of chapter VIII is relevant.

required to make an official representation for the grant that was held by his predecessor to be conferred in his name. For this purpose, the incumbent Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn was unable to attend the 'royal camp' (*urdū-yi mu'allā*) and to present himself to the 'lord of the overflowing bounty' (*ḥuẓūr-i faiz ganjūr*)—a formula that was used for His Majesty, the emperor himself, or an imperial prince.<sup>18</sup> As one might reasonably expect, the emperor or prince was constantly on tour during the course of his duties and following the royal camp in anticipation of an appointment was a costly undertaking in terms of the travel, tribute (*nazrāna*), and offerings (*peshkash*) that were required. Previously, Shaykh Kāley had received a *nishān*—the order of a prince from the imperial household.<sup>19</sup> The prince's name is not given but the seals show that a *taṣdīq* of this *nishān* was validated by several of the emperor's devoted servants, two of whom can be identified as high-ranking revenue officials who were appointed by Aurangzeb.<sup>20</sup> At the top is 'Abd al-Rahmān, who held the *dīwānī* of Mālwa province, while Ināyatullāh, whose seal appears lower down, held the imperial office of *dīwān-i tan* (salaries) and *dīwān-i ṣarf-i khāṣṣ* (crown lands).<sup>21</sup>

## Text

۱

تصدیق

باسم شیخ نورالدین خادم بمقبره مغفوره بیگم صاحب علیها الرحمه آنکه چون در قصبه دهار سرکار مندو مضاف بصوبه مالوا میان روضه منوره قنوه الواصلین زبده المتحققین بندگی شیخ کمال الدین مالوی که از فرزندان قطب الاقطاب حضرت بندگی شیخ فرید گنج شکر اند قدس سره العزیز بمقبره مرحومه بیگم صاحب علیها المغفوره واقع شده و خدمات مقبره مسطور بنام شیخ کالی نبیره حضرت بندگی شیخ کمال الدین مذکور تفویض یافته چنانچه درینباب نشان عالیشان سه صد بیگه زمین در وجه مدد معاش با فرزندان و دو صد روپیه نقد بجهت خرج خدمه از سرکار دولتمدار عالی متعالی مرحمت گشته و مشار الیه تا مده حیات خدمات آنجا تقدیم رسانیده و زمینی که عطا شده متصدیان و زمینداران پرگنه در چک بندی تن بدادند در این اثناء شیخ مشارالیه بقضای الهی فوت شد و شیخ نورالدین پسر خلف الصندق رافع حسب المامور در تقدیم خدمات مقبره مفید و سرگرم است چنانچه روشنایی و جاروبکشی وسقایی مدام مینماید و درینمدت بعدم استطاعت خرج اردوی معلی نتوانست بحضور فیض گنجور رسید اکنون مطابق مرادات صوری و معنوی و استجابات دعوات لشکر دعا امیدوار است که از تاریخ تحریر نشان والا بحق خود ممتاز گشته زمینی که مرحمت شده است در موضع مالیواره که عین قصبه و متصل مقبره واقع است نتخواه باید یا عوض آن وجه یومیه مرحمت گردد.

<sup>18</sup> P. Saran, *Persian Documents: Being Letters, Newsletters, and Kindred Documents Pertaining to the Several States Existing in India in the Last Quarter of the 18th Century, from the Oriental Collection of the National Archives of India*, Part 1 (Bombay, 1966), pp. 55, 246–247. A somewhat comparable case is found in the Pindori documents where the grant came from Mahārāja Ranjit Singh, who was referred to with the same honorific title, the usage indicative of how regional princes in the declining days of the Mughals 'assumed royal airs', to borrow a phrase from P. Saran, *The Provincial Government of the Mughals, 1526-1658* (Allahabad, 1941), p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> For different classes of official documents in the Mughal empire, see Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, 3rd edn (Calcutta, 1935), pp. 233–234. A comprehensive survey is given by M. Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, From Bābur to Shāh Jahān (1526-1658): A Study on Inshā', Dār al-Inshā' and Munshī's, based on Original Documents* (Calcutta, 1971), pp. 45–145, esp. 60–61 on subsistence grants such as the *madad-i ma'āsh* mentioned here.

<sup>20</sup> See Mohiuddin, *Chancellery and Persian Epistolography*, p. 101 on the process and officials involved in issuing a *taṣdīq*.

<sup>21</sup> On the office of *dīwān*, see Saran, *Provincial Government of the Mughals*, pp. 189–197; and Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, pp. 32–34; see also first and sixth seals in the listing below.

## Translation

### Confirmation

In the name of Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, who is a servant (*khādim*) at the grave of the deceased Begum Ṣāhab—mercy be upon her—located in the centre of Dhār in district Mandū in the province of Mālwa—in the midst of the radiant tomb of God’s Bondsman (*bandagī*) Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn Mālwi—the master of the scholars and descendant of the Pole of Poles (*quṭb al-aqtāb*), the Venerable Bondsman Shaykh Farīd Ganj-i Shakar—may his beloved grave be blessed and the grave (also) of the deceased Begum Ṣāhab—mercy be upon her.

The services of the mentioned grave were conferred on Shaykh Kāley, descendant of the mentioned Ḥaẓrat Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn. Accordingly in this regard, a grand order (*nishān-i ālishān*) of 300 *bīghā* land as financial aid (*madad-i ma’āsh*) for the sons and dependents (*ba-farzandān*) and 200 rupees cash as expenses for pious services (*kharch-i khidmat*) was mercifully renewed by the high and exalted court of the sovereign (*sarkār-i dawlatmadār*). The aforementioned [i.e. Shaykh Kāley] provided services there for the duration of his life (*tā muddat-i hayāt*). The record-keepers (*mutasaddiyān*) and landlords (*zamīndārān*) of the county (*parganah*) acceded to carry out the delineation of boundaries (*chak bandī*) of the granted land.

In the meantime, the aforementioned Shaykh died by divine will and Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, the son and rightful successor (*khalaf al-ṣidq*) and the bearer of the hereditary office (*rāfi’ ḥasab al-māmūr*), is busy and bound with offering services. Catering continuously in providing lights, sweeping, and watering services, he has been rendered without means to attend the royal camp (*urdū-yi mu’allā*) and to present himself to His Gracious Lordship (*ḥuẓūr-i faiz ganjūr*). As everything is physically and spiritually as it is meant to be—and praying for the army’s success—he hopes that from the date of the writing of the exalted princely order (*nishān-i wālā*) he is authorised to receive the revenues, either as a salary (*tankhwāh*) or as daily allowance (*wajh-i yawmiyah*) from the land in the village (*mawḥa*) of Mālīwārah which is situated in the same town (*qaṣbah*) and is attached to the tomb.

## Seals and notations

The readings of the seals and notations that validate the document are given below, with further comments in those cases in which information is available. The seals appear online in our seals database, obviating the need for illustration here; the relevant links in each case are given in the notes.

### Seal in the top right corner

عبدالرحمن عالمگیر شاہی سنہ ۲۳

‘Abd al-Raḥmān, 23rd regnal year of ‘Ālamgīr

‘Abd al-Raḥmān is identifiable as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Wazārat Khān, the third son of Amānat Khān and a favourite of Aurangzeb.<sup>22</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān served as the chief revenue office (*dīwānī*) of Mālwa and of Bījāpūr. He excelled at poetry and composed works under the

<sup>22</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] عبدالرحمن , Zenodo (2022), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7396102>.



pen name of Girāmī.<sup>23</sup> The seal is dated in the regnal year 23, which ran from 1 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1090 to 29 Shawwāl 1091, the corresponding dates being 4 December 1679 to 22 November 1680 CE.<sup>24</sup>

### Second seal from the top

بندۂ کمترین سید گلریز؟ پرمراد حضرت اورنگ عالم گیر شاه ۶

The lowly servant (*bande-ye kamtarīn*) Sayyid Gulrez (?), who obtains all ends through Ḥazrat Awrang Ālamgīr Shāh, 6th regnal year.

Sayyid Gulrez (?), a dependant of Aurangzeb, cannot be identified at present.<sup>25</sup> The seal is dated in the 6<sup>th</sup> regnal year which ran from 1 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1073 to 29 Shawwāl 1074. The corresponding date thus fell between 7 June 1663 and 25 May 1664 CE. The notation reads:

شهدت علی تصدیق المضمون

I witnessed the confirmation of the contents.

### Third seal, placed away from the edge of the document

مهدی مرید عالم گیر شاه ۱۱۰۴ سنه ۳۷

Mahdī a disciple (*murīd*) of 'Ālamgīr Shāh, 1104 Hijrī, regnal year 37.

The name Mahdī, normally referring to the twelfth Shī'i Imām expected at the end of time, can here be identified with Mīr Muḥammad Mahdī Ardistānī, who came with Aurangzeb from the Deccan in 1068 (1658 CE) and was given the office of Hakīm al-Mulk. In the 37th regnal year, the doctor attended to Aurangzeb's third son, Muḥammad A'ẓam Shāh, curing him of dropsy.<sup>26</sup> Aurangzeb's 37th regnal year ran from 1 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1104 to 29 Shawwāl 1105. Because the Hijrī year 1104 is given, the seal can be dated to between 4 July 1693 and 1 September 1693 CE.

### Fourth seal from the top

جعفر بیگ فدوی عالم گیر بادشاه ۱۱۰۰/۳۳

Ja'far Beg devoted servant (*fidwī*) of padishah 'Ālamgīr, 1100 Hijrī, 33rd regnal year.

<sup>23</sup> T. Beale and H. G. Keene, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary: Founded on Materials Collected by the Late Thomas William Beale* (London, 1894), p. 108, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3342520>; and *Ma'āthir-ul-Umarā*, (trans.) H. Beveridge and Baini Prashad, 2 vols (Calcutta, 1941), vol. i, p. 13, which gives the pen name correctly as Girāmī. For manuscripts of the *Dīwān-i Girāmī*, see H. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the India Office Library* (Oxford, 1903), p. 889, cat. no. 1625; and W. Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1924), p. 365, no. 804.

<sup>24</sup> As noted above, we have used this table: Regnal years of Aurangzeb with Hijrī and Gregorian equivalents (data set), Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6627242>.

<sup>25</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] Servant of عالم گیر بادشاه, Zenodo (2022), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7401564>.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ma'āthir-ul-Umarā*, i, pp. 607–08.

The name on this seal is Ja‘far Beg but he cannot be identified with certainty.<sup>27</sup> Possible candidates either have no documented link to Mālwa or do not have the right dates; for example, Ja‘far Ilāhwardī Khān was governor of Allahābād at the time of his death in 1079 (1668–1669 CE) and Ja‘far Khān ‘Umdat al-Mulk, who served as governor of Mālwa before being appointed grand vizier in Aurangzeb’s 6th regnal year, died in 1082 (1670 CE).

The year is given as 1100, with the corresponding year being 1688–1689 CE. Aurangzeb’s 33rd regnal year ran from 1 Dhū al-Qa‘dah 1100 to 29 Shawwāl 1101. Because the Hijrī year is given, the seal can be dated to between 8 August 1689 CE and 15 October 1689 CE.

The notation reads:

انى شاهد عليه

I am witness to this.

### *Fifth seal from the top*

عز من قنع دلا من طمع ١١٠١

One who is moderate is mighty, one who is greedy is weak. 1101

This seal is dated 1101 (1689–90 CE) and is inscribed with a well-known aphorism against greed—in this case, for more than what is accorded as financial aid.<sup>28</sup> A cornelian seal with this inscription—one of several examples that could be cited—is in the Ashmolean collections at Oxford.<sup>29</sup>

The notation reads:

بتصديق هذا بيان فقط

Only with the attestation (*taṣḍīq*) of this statement.

This appears to refer to the validity of the aphorism.

### *Sixth seal from the top*

The seal proper is indecipherable.<sup>30</sup> However, it must be ‘Ināyatullah whose name appears in the notation directly above. He can be identified as ‘Ināyatullah Khān, son of Ḥāfiẓa Maryam, appointed to teach Aurangzeb’s daughter Zīb al-Nisā’, on account of which he was given office and grew from being an accountant (*ashraf*) to a leading revenue officer (*dīwān-i tan and dīwān-i ṣarf-i khāṣṣ*) in the 36th regnal year.<sup>31</sup> He is the author of *Aḥkām-i ‘Ālamgiri* and *Kalīmāt-i Tayyibāt*; he is not to be confused with ‘Ināyat Khān, who served as a librarian to Shāh Jahān and whose seal appears in a fragment of an early Qur’ān in the India Office Collections.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] جعفر بیگ, Zenodo (2022), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7401621>.

<sup>28</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] Aphorism, Zenodo (2022), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7402295>.

<sup>29</sup> L. Kalus, *A Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Talismans* (Oxford, 1986), p. 89, no. 1. 82.

<sup>30</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] عنایت اللہ, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7402322>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ma‘āthir-ul-Umarā*, vol. i, pp. 680–682.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Ināyatullah Khān is mentioned in N. Chatterjee, *Negotiating Mughal Law: A Family of Landlords across Three Indian Empires* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 98, n. 85; for Ināyat Khān and the Qur’ān, see Muntazir Ali *et al.*, ‘The oldest manuscripts from India and their histories: a re-assessment of IO Loth 4 in the British Library’, *Cracow Indological Studies* 24.2 (2022), pp. 59–89, <https://doi.org/10.12797/CIS.24.2022.02.03>. His seal appears separately online: Muntazir Ali, Seal [IO Loth 4] ‘Ināyat Khān عنایت خان, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6106319>.

The notation reads:

احقر العباد عنايت الله بر مضمون مسطور مطلع است

The despicable servant (*aḥqar al-‘ibād*) ‘Ināyatullah is aware of the subject written.

### *Seventh seal from the top*

عبد الصمد خاك (محمد) مصطفى

The seal is not completely decipherable, but it gives the name ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, which also appears in the notation directly above.<sup>33</sup> There are many individuals of this name in the annals of Aurangzeb, making it difficult to ascertain the identity of this seal-bearer.<sup>34</sup>

The notation reads:

احقر الافتقار عبد الصمد حسب المسطور شاهدة فقط

The despicable poor soul ‘Abd al-Ṣamad according to the aforementioned (*ḥasb almaṣṭūr*) is just the witness.

### *Eighth seal from the top, and lowest on the right-hand side of the document*

مير جعفر فدوى عالم گير بادشاه ۱۱۰۵ سنه ۳۷

Mīr Ja‘far, devoted servant (*fidwī*) of *padshāh* ‘Ālamgīr, 1105 regnal year 37.<sup>35</sup>

As with the fourth seal of Ja‘far Beg, the name on this seal cannot be identified with certainty because the name was borne by several individuals. Aurangzeb’s 37th regnal year ran between 1 Dhū al-Qa‘dah 1104 and 25 Shawwāl 1105. The Hijrī year 1105 that is given on the seal shows that the corresponding date falls between 24 June and 22 August 1694 CE.

اطلعت عليه

I am aware of that.

### *Notation on the left-hand side of the document*

تحریر فی التاريخ پانزدهم شهر ذی حجه سنه ۳۹ جلوس مقدس معلى فقط

Written on the date fifteenth of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, in the 39th regnal year [i.e. AH 1106] of the glorious exalted reign.

<sup>33</sup> Muntazir Ali, Seal [EAP1416-24] عبد الصمد خاك مصطفى, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7404601>.

<sup>34</sup> See *Ma‘āthir-ul-Umarā*, vol. i, pp. 71–73 for Saif al-Daula ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Khān Bahādur Diler Jung (d. 1737), who served as governor of Lahore, and for another ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Khān, Sāqī Musta‘id Khān, *Ma‘āthir-i Ālamgīrī* (Calcutta, 1871), p. 384, (trans.) Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta, 1947), p. 234.

<sup>35</sup> Muntazir Ali, [EAP1416-24] مير جعفر, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7404660>.

The ‘exalted reign’ is that of ‘Ālamgīr, the corresponding day being 27 July 1695 CE. This is the most recent date given, showing that the document passed to different hands and was certified finally in 1695.

Given this date, we should like to know whether mention of the grant can be found elsewhere. For the period of Aurangzeb and his successors, a key source for day-to-day activities are the news bulletins, or *Akhbārāt*. These are not newsletters in the modern sense, but daily reports of the public proceedings at the imperial court and those of princes and of provincial governors, compiled by teams of secretaries based on a diary of events reported by agents of nobles and high officials.<sup>36</sup> Their importance was first recognised by Sir Jadunath Sarkar—one of the foremost scholars of Mughal history—who collected and used the *Akhbārāt* in his pioneering studies of Aurangzeb and the Maratha empire.<sup>37</sup> A useful bibliographic essay in Audrey Truschke’s recent biography of Aurangzeb concedes that the *Akhbārāt* were ‘only accessed [...] through the reports of other scholars’.<sup>38</sup> Since that was written, the RAS has digitised and made available online their *Akhbār-i Darbār-i Mu’alla* (‘News bulletins of the exalted court’), which consists of 2,777 folios in nine volumes, spanning AH 1070 to AH 1119 (1659–1708 CE).<sup>39</sup> As the RAS *Akhbārāt* cover the year 39 (the date of the document under study), we examined the relevant pages.<sup>40</sup> The grant is not, however, mentioned. This negative finding does not mean that the grant will not be found in other *Akhbārāt*, which is a research task that could be pursued at a later date, pending access to the relevant archives. What the absence tends to suggest is that the news writers of the RAS *Akhbārāt* did not feel compelled to record events that were relevant to Mālwa—a hypothesis to be tested through a comparative study of other available copies.<sup>41</sup>

### Notation on the verso

از سرشته ... (لشکری) محکمه منتخب افسر  
ملاحظه شده سید بشیر حسن ... ۳ ستمبر سنه ۱۹۰۴

<sup>36</sup> See Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, ‘Newswriters of Mughal India’, in *The Indian Press*, (ed.) S. P. Sen (Calcutta, 1967), pp. 110–145; and M. H. Fisher, ‘The office of *Akhbār Nawis*: the transition from Mughal to British forms’, *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 45–82. Among other studies, mention can be made of A. Shafqat, ‘Conduct of provincial government under imperial Mughals: a study of *Akhbarat* of Prince Azam’s headquarters in Gujarat, 1702–04’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004), pp. 402–407; and Y. H. Khan, *Akhbārāt: 1181–1213 Hijri/1767–1799* (Hyderabad, 1955).

<sup>37</sup> J. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, 5 vols (Calcutta, 1912–1924), and his *Persian Records of Maratha History*, vol. I: *Delhi Affairs (1761–1788)* (*Newsletters from Parasnis Collection*) (Bombay, 1953). The *Akhbārāt* have subsequently been harnessed by several historians, including B. P. Ambasthya, ‘Some letters from *Akhbārāt-i Darbār-i Mu’alla* on the rebellion of Zain-ul-Abidin, the son of Prince Shuja, in Bihar’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 29.1 (1967), pp. 158–162; and M. D. Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire 1504–1719* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 22–23.

<sup>38</sup> A. Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India’s Most Controversial King* (Stanford, CA, 2017), p. 168. The rivalry among researchers’ access to official documents is discussed by D. Chakrabarty, ‘Hunters and gatherers of historical documents’, in *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago, 2015), pp. 103–132.

<sup>39</sup> The project was completed with support from the Bharat Itihas Sansodhak Mandal (Pune) and Professor Rajeev Kinra (Northwestern University). For an account, see the online report at <https://royalasiaticsociety.org/digitization-of-akhbarat/>.

<sup>40</sup> The volume can be found by following this link: [https://royalasiaticcollections.org/aurangzib\\_39-40\\_42-43/](https://royalasiaticcollections.org/aurangzib_39-40_42-43/).

<sup>41</sup> To date, we know only that the Society’s *Akhbārāt* may have come from James Tod. Henry Beveridge noted that Tod left no account of how or where he acquired the *Akhbārāt*, but ‘from the Nagari endorsements on them it would appear that they had belonged to a Hindu Serishta [i.e. a court record keeper], and presumably to one in Rajputana. Apparently, they are notes by the court agent of some Rajputana prince of the daily occurrences of the Moghul Court’; H. Beveridge, ‘Colonel Tod’s newsletters of the Delhi court’, *JRAS* (October, 1908), pp. 1121–1124.



From the records-office (*sirishṭa*) [...] the elected officer (*muntakhab afsar*) of the law court (*maḥkamah*). It was noticed (*mulāḥaẓa*) by Sayyid Bashir Ḥasan on 3rd September 1904.

Below this inspection note in Urdu is a signature in English bearing the date 10.9.04—that is, a week later than the notation.

## Commentary

The document presented here is important for a number of reasons—institutional, architectural, and social. In the first place, due to the want of documents or inscriptions, we have but few names for the incumbents of the shrine after Kamāl al-Dīn, except for those recorded in genealogical charts that were prepared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>42</sup> From the *Gulzār-i Abrār*, we only learn that, by 1613, some of the Shaykh's descendants were deceased while others were engaged in service at the shrines of their forefathers, supported by grants of property (*maḥal*), offerings (*nuzūrat*), and living expenses (*naḥqāt*).<sup>43</sup> The first directly documented individual is Shaykh Kāley, otherwise known as Shaykh Daulat,<sup>44</sup> whose presence is attested by a land deed of 1664 CE that mentions a change in the properties that were assigned to him as financial aid.<sup>45</sup> If his grant was being changed in 1664 CE, then it is obvious that he was already the incumbent and had been assigned land before that date. The earlier documents either have not been traced or have not survived. After 1664 CE, the wording of the document under study shows that Shaykh Kāley had died some time before the princely order was issued to him, which was validated in 1695 CE after his son Nūr al-Dīn was unable to approach the royal court. The dates on the seals proper do not indicate the date of validation, as the seals of individuals were not necessarily recut and redated year-on-year, but only when there was a change in the owner's honorific (*laqab*), rank (*manṣab*), or office (*daftar*). In any event, Shaykh Kāley was followed by his son Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, who lived to *circa* 1703 CE, at which time a part of the property passed to his two daughters, Nūrullāh and Jūhī.<sup>46</sup>

The second point of historical interest is the granted land in the village (*mawẓa*) of Mālīwārah. The toponym is represented by Mālībārā on the western side of Dhār (see Figure 1) where today there is a large tank known as Mālībārā tālāb (located at 22° 34'51"N 75°16'52"E). A number of records from the eighteenth century that were documented during the course of our project show that the 300 *bighā* in the village of Mālīwārah attached to the shrine of Kamāl al-Dīn were an important asset for the livelihood and religious activities of Chishtīs.<sup>47</sup> It is not possible, however, to have a precise idea of the scale of the financial aid that was offered in the present case, much as we would have liked. This is because the document under review lacks vital details, as

<sup>42</sup> E. B. Eastwick (ed.), *Autobiography of Lutfullah, a Mohamedan Gentleman and His Transactions with His Fellow-Creatures* (London, 1858), p. viii; and Anon., *Kursīnāmah Hazrat Maulānā Shāh Kamāluddīn Mālvi, tārikh 6 māh-i sitambar 1902 īsvī* (Dhār, 1942).

<sup>43</sup> *Gulzār-i Abrār*, (ed.) Zaki, p. 511, (trans.) Jiyūrī, pp. 581–582.

<sup>44</sup> See the genealogical chart given in *Autobiography of Lutfullah*, p. viii.

<sup>45</sup> See EAP1416-44, a *Chaknāmah* record of a change in the boundaries of the land granted as financial aid to Shaykh Kāley, dated 15 Jumādā II 1074 (14 January 1664 CE), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7589379>.

<sup>46</sup> As shown by EAP1416-43, a *Qismatnāmah* or a deed of partition recording the division of the land inherited by Nūrullāh and Jūhī between Shaykh 'Abd al Qādir, Shaykh Faṭḥullāh, Shaykh Muḥammad Raushan, and Shaykh Fayẓullāh (datable to between 1708 and 1712 CE), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7585163>.

<sup>47</sup> As noted above, these are visible online at *Documents from the Sufi shrines at Dhār*, <https://zenodo.org/communities/documents/about>. Mālīwārah also features in a grant of five *bighā* of land to the important Chaudhārī family of Dhār, according to a *parvānā* of 1669 CE, noted by Chatterjee, *Negotiating Mughal Law*, p. 52, no. 94.

it is a certification (*taşdiq*) of a Mughal princely order (*nishān*) and not the original order itself. Moreover, the *bighā* is known to vary across regions and significantly different *bighā* measures are known to have existed side by side.<sup>48</sup> Often, it was purely a matter of administrative fiat. In a part of Mālwa during the early seventeenth century in the Mughal period (in a *pargana* in the former princely state of Indore), the local chief decided upon the height of the gate of his fort at the basic measure:<sup>49</sup>

As most of this *pargana* formerly belonged to the Ramgarh *pargana* in the time of Labhāna chiefs, a curious local unit of measurement obtains here, the height of the gate of Ramgarh fort, formerly the chief town, being taken by the Labhāna chief as their standard of land measurement. The gate which is seven *hāth* high was taken as a *biswa*, 20 such *biswas* forming a local *bigha*. This system of measurement of land was followed up to the year 1871 A.D. and is entered in the old *sanads*.

This notwithstanding, we can be reasonably sure that the area of the *bighā* in our case was based on the Akbarī *bighā*, following the work of Irfan Habib: 'From the time of its introduction during Akbar's reign, the *gaz-i ilāhī* seems to have been uniformly used to measure the *bighas* of the [*madad-i ma'āsh*] grants.'<sup>50</sup> Based on that, the *bighā* was about '0.60 acre (or 0.24 hectare)',<sup>51</sup> so that 300 *bighā* should have equalled about 72 hectares.

The uncertainty about the precise scale of the financial aid arises not out of the size of the *bighā*, but on account of many other variables in Mughal grants-in-aid. First, the land could have been held under the grantee's direct cultivation (*khud kāshtah*) and/or could have comprised peasant holdings (*ra'iyatī* land).<sup>52</sup> We are told that 'generally one-half of the grant consisted of waste or uncultivated land and the other half of land was already under cultivation', but also that it was not an invariable practice;<sup>53</sup> on account of this important factor that the grant included self-cultivated land, it is probably better to render *madad-i ma'āsh* as 'grant-in-aid' rather than as 'revenue grant'. There was also a tendency for the grantees to increase the land under their direct cultivation at the cost of the peasant—a tendency that is repeatedly disapproved of in the Mughal records.<sup>54</sup> An eighteenth-century record that was studied by us states that the 300 *bighā* first granted to Shaykh Kāley was divided subsequently and that only 150 *bighā* remained in Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī's hands.<sup>55</sup> We also know, from a collective attestation of 19 farm-tenants as given in another eighteenth-century document, that they were then paying rents to Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī for the use of land at Māliwārah.<sup>56</sup> It is not clear, however, whether they accounted for the entirety of the 150 *bighā* and whether a part of it was being farmed directly by the grantee. The system that prevailed with the other half of the original grant

<sup>48</sup> For a useful account and further references, see J. Gyllenbok, *Encyclopaedia of Historical Metrology, Weights, and Measures* (Birkhäuser, 2018), 2, pp. 802ff. (Bangladesh), 838 (Bhutan), 1074 (Fiji), 1356–1425 (India); 3: 1795 (Nepal), 1920 (Pakistan), [www.birkhauser-science.com](http://www.birkhauser-science.com).

<sup>49</sup> C. E. Luard and Ram Prasad Dube, *Indore State Gazetteer*, vol. 2, *Text and Tables* (Calcutta, 1908), p. 189; on p. 321, the end of this system is dated 1867.

<sup>50</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 345, repeated on pp. 416, 419.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>53</sup> Rashid, 'Madad-i Ma'āsh grants under the Mughals', p. 102, n. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, pp. 127–128, n. 27, 344.

<sup>55</sup> See EAP1416-23, Deed in favour of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī, dated 11 Rabī' I in the 10th regnal year of Muḥammad Shāh (17 October 1727 CE), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7215250>.

<sup>56</sup> See EAP1416-42, Collective attestation of tenant farmers agreeing to pay rents to Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī, son of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, dated 2 Rajab 1151 in the Fasli calendar (September 1741 CE), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7584550>.

remains entirely unknown of course, and there is no way of knowing whether the peasant share of the granted land had been greater earlier.

Next, we need to take into account the multiple corrupt practices of the age. The abuse of the system prevailed even during the strong rule of Akbar. It could work either way: 'The grantees could sometimes fraudulently obtain lands in two or more places on the strength of the same grant; on the other hand, the holder of a petty grant in an ordinary village was liable to oppression from officials of the *jagirdars* and the *khalisa*.'<sup>57</sup> A *qāzī* was able to convert his original grant-in-aid of 750 *bīghā* into 5,375 *bīghā*.<sup>58</sup> In our case, the two eighteenth-century documents assure that the grantee had been able to preserve the grant at the original size. We may also perhaps assume that the grant of the 300 *bīghā* came, as per general practice, without any obligation, unlike the type of grants-in-aid that came with certain obligations, such as when Badā'ūnī was granted one on the condition of maintaining a small cavalry contingent.<sup>59</sup> But the income depended on the produce, productivity, and location of the land that was granted as much as on the size of it. As Abū al-Faḥl explained: 'The income [...] from each *bīgha* [under *suyūrghāl*] is different in each locality (*qaṣba*); but does not fall below one rupee.'<sup>60</sup> The grant of 300 *bīghā* would have thus fetched an income of at least 300 rupees, but the question about the share that reached the grantee remains.

Last but not least is the important factor of the toll on the grantee's income by the exactions and perquisites of the various authorities on the spot. If the revenues in the area were realised through the agency of the village notable or headman (*muqaddam* or *paṭel*), then there would have been deductions on account of their customary perquisites, such as *khurāk*, or 'board'.<sup>61</sup> In general, the extortions of the officials (*mutaṣaddī*) from the hapless subjects were notorious and the state was careful not to entrust them with more responsibility than was absolutely necessary—'for it is unwise to set up the thief as the watchman', to quote a mid-eighteenth-century source.<sup>62</sup> Then there was the zamindar with his own claims to the produce, which the grantees had to pay, unless they themselves happened to be zamindars of the territory.<sup>63</sup> In our case, the great discretionary powers of the authorities on the spot—the *zamīndārs* and the *mutaṣaddīs*—and the corresponding helplessness of the grantee seem evident from the provision in our document about the frequency of payment to him. Instead of invoking anything from the original grant or customary practice, the grantee leaves it to the sweet will of the authorities in question as to whether he receives his income as 'salary' (*tankhwāh*) or as 'daily allowances' (*wajh-i-yawmīyah*).

Moving away from matters of property and its management, we come to the final issues that we wish to address in this article, namely the charitable and religious activities at the dargāh. The most important of these centres on the identification of Begum Ṣāhab—the individual at the heart of our document, as noted above. Further information about this notable woman is not forthcoming from the Dhār corpus—indeed, Begum Ṣāhab is mentioned anywhere in the extant documents of the shrine's collection as it

<sup>57</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 346.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 357, n. 68. Officially, the largest grant comprised 4,000 *bīghā*; Rashid, 'Madad-i Ma'āsh grants under the Mughals', p. 102.

<sup>59</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 358.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 360, n. 80. By consulting more accurate manuscripts, Habib has improved upon the following earlier rendering: 'The revenue derived from each *bīgha* varies in the several districts, but is never less than one rupee.' H. Blochmann and D. C. Phillott, *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (Calcutta, 1927), p. 280.

<sup>61</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, pp. 160ff.; see also p. 344, n. 14 for the great authority of the *muqaddam* over the grantees.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 330, n. 82.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 179; cf. p. 196, n. 115.

survives today and was available to us for study. However, given that our attestation states that her tomb is ‘in the midst’ (*dar miyān*) of the tomb complex of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn, and that its main concern was the long-held grant of 300 *bighā*, there is little doubt that we are concerned here with activities that took place in and around the tomb of Kamāl-al Dīn. What is surprising is that Begum Ṣāhab had overtaken Kamāl al-Dīn in the late seventeenth century, and that the attention on sweeping, providing water and lights, as well as providing for needy children was being conducted in her name.

The spatial configuration of the shrine complex is striking in the history of Indian Islamic architecture, as it comprises two mausolea that are attached to each other and linked by an arched doorway. Both have a square plan, measuring about 3 by 3 metres, with the thick ashlar walls of each carrying a dome on squinches. The eastern dome was restored by the ‘Urs Committee in the latter part of the twentieth century, based on the model of the Pawar Dynasty memorials (*chattrīs*) on the banks of Munj Sāgar at Dhār. The original structure, as seen in the old photograph given in Figure 2, shows an octagonal zone of transition punctuated by a band of merlons and a circular dome crowned by a pot-finial—iconic features of Sultanate architecture as exemplified by the tomb of Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (reg. 1351–1388) in Delhi.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the eastern dome is distinguished by a glazed tile medallion with square Kufic calligraphy, which is placed over the main door of the dargāh and is said to be the saint’s seal (*muhr*).<sup>65</sup>

Within the eastern dome are two graves lying side by side; the one closer to the north gate, outside of which women gather to pay homage, is attributed to the wife (*bībī*) of Kamāl al-Dīn. She can be identified as the Begum Ṣāhab mentioned in our document.<sup>66</sup> The western dome is simpler in design and has a large, 12-line *naskh* inscription with Qur’ānic prayers built into an arch in the north wall, before which are six low graves that are identified as those of the Shaykh’s family and disciples.<sup>67</sup> The original core of the conjoined domes was embellished in 1456–1457 during the reign of Sultān Maḥmūd Shāh Khaljī, as recorded in a dedicatory inscription in the main entrance porch.<sup>68</sup> This royal inscription is remarkable for several reasons, not least for the exquisite quality of its calligraphy, rendered in *muhaqqaq* by an Iranian master and Sufi disciple named Ḥabīb al-Ḥāfiz al-Shirāzī al-Murshidī.<sup>69</sup> The Persian verses that were composed by Maḥmūd b. Rukn extol the architectural features of the shrine of Shaykh Kamāl, describing it as a sanctuary of paradise (*rawṣah-i riṣwān*) and a dome full of the saint’s light (*qubba-yi pur-nūr*). Being overcrowded by the footfall of poor and homeless pilgrims, the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*), the porch (*riwāq*), and the dome (*gunbad*) were furnished with stone slabs (*parde-ye sang*), with chambers (*khāne*), a well (*āb-i zulāl*), a raised platform (*suffa*), a hospice (*khānaqāh*), a vestibule (*dahlīz*) with a hall (*kushk*), and merlons (*kangūre*) for the benefit of pilgrims, devotees, and Sufis. These components can still be observed in the shrine complex today, from the domed entrance porch and the battlemented boundary wall to the paved platform and storied ‘well of wisdom’ (*aql kā kūān*) that is

<sup>64</sup> A. Welch and H. Crane, ‘The Tughluqs: master builders of the Delhi Sultanate’, *Muqarnas* 1 (1983), p. 146, pl. 13.

<sup>65</sup> See E. Barnes, ‘Dhar and Mandu’, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21 (1904), illustration facing p. 349, identifying its contents with a Persian verse pertaining to the shrine of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn in *Gulzār-i Abrār*, (ed.) Zaki, p. 511: *dar riwāq-i zabarjad niwishta and bazr/ ke juz nikū’i ahl-i karam nakhwāhad mānd*, translated as: ‘On this tomb upon a green stone with golden letters it is written, that in this world nothing remains of good men except their goodness.’

<sup>66</sup> Personal communication, Smita Jassal, September 2023, who will publish a article based on her work at the shrine in the near future.

<sup>67</sup> See R. Garg, *Hazrat Maulānā Kamāluddīn Cīstī Rah. aur unkā Yug* (Bhopal, 2005), pp. 144–147 for an account of the tomb complex.

<sup>68</sup> Hasan, ‘Inscriptions of Dhar and Mandu’, pp. 14–5, plate. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Noticed in the *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy for 1971-72* (1981), 81, Appendix D, no. 76.



visible in Figure 2.<sup>70</sup> The *khānaqāh* mentioned here is a dark, vaulted hall that was built abutting the double-domed shrine along the northern side, appropriately withdrawn from the rest of the complex as a space of seclusion and spiritual exercises. While the architectural history of the shrine complex and its facilities merits detailed analysis, the walled enclosure as it stands today is largely a product of fifteenth-century renovation to accommodate a growing clientele and its diverse requirements, from charity, devotion, and dwelling to burial, healing, and spiritual guidance. The subsequent accumulation of graves within and beyond the shrine complex, as well as the local traditions that are attributed to them, further emphasise the primacy of the cenotaphs of Shaykh Kamāl and his wife under the main dome and their early followers in the adjoining dome.

The presence of the Shaykh and Begum Šāhab under a single dome as the focus of veneration is strikingly unusual considering the strict celibacy that was practised by leading Chishtī Shaykhs, Nizām al-Dīn, and his successors Našīr al-Dīn Chirāgh-i Dihlī and Burhān al-Dīn Gharīb, who held wives and families to be obstacles to spiritual progress. Yet, despite the persistent male prejudice of this discourse, biographies of women as Sufis, disciples, miracle workers, and managers of shrines have been brought to light in recent scholarship.<sup>71</sup> Expanding this corpus of Sufi women, the presence of Begum Šāhab at Dhār, documented here for the first time, is only the most prominent among the graves of other women mystics that are still venerated in the city. That women were also involved in managing shrine property is revealed by a document, mentioned above—a *Qismatnāmah* of the early eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup> This deed of partition records how the grants-in-aid that were held by ladies (*musammāt*) Nūrullāh and Jūhī were passed on to Shaykh ‘Abd al Qādir, Shaykh Faṭḥullāh, Shaykh Muḥammad Raushan, and Shaykh Fayẓullāh. What is notable in this transaction is that, after the land was divided four ways, it was agreed that this was done on the condition that Shaykh Faṭḥullāh, Shaykh Muḥammad Raushan, and Shaykh Fayẓullāh would bear all the expenses of the ‘Urs of the dargāh under the supervision of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir.

In addition to maintaining the dargāh and its charitable work, the financial aid that is recorded in the Dhār documents also supported the annual ‘Urs celebration. A leading event in the religious calendar of Dhār, the festival falls on the day that Kamāl al-Dīn is said to have passed way: 4 Dhū al-Ḥijjah. This is a moment of celebration rather than sadness and mourning. Following a variety of statements in the Qur’ān—but most especially Qur’ān 2: 156, ‘We belong to God, and to Him we return’—death is not feared, but welcomed as the moment at which the departed goes to a state of felicity. Accordingly, the ‘Urs is a wedding—the literal meaning of the word—the point being that the union of the individual soul with God is akin to a marriage. While ‘Urs of Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn is not mentioned regularly in the Dhār documents, the reference found in the *Qismatnāmah* shows that the organisation of this annual festivity required substantial expenditure and supervision. Following the Chishtī tradition of death anniversary observances, the ‘Urs of Kamāl al-Dīn is marked by five-time prayers (*namāz*) in the adjacent mosque, the distribution of blessed food (*tabarruq*) from the free kitchens (*lan-gar*), the performance of devotional songs (*qawwālī*), as well as the offering of sandalwood

<sup>70</sup> For stories of the Aql kā kūān, see W. Kincaid, *History of Mandu, the Capital of Malwa, by a Bombay Subaltern*, 2nd edn (Bombay, 1879), p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> See K. Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India* (Columbia, 2010); T. Aftab, *Sufi Women of South Asia: Veiled Friends of God* (Leiden, 2022); and M. Dallh, *Sufi Women and Mystics Models of Sanctity, Erudition, and Political Leadership* (London, 2024).

<sup>72</sup> EAP1416-43, Partition of Inheritance recording the division of the land of Nūrullāh and Jūhī between between Shaykh ‘Abd al Qādir, Shaykh Faṭḥullāh, Shaykh Muḥammad Raushan and Shaykh Fayẓullāh (datable between 1708 and 1712 CE), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7585163>.

and roses.<sup>73</sup> How exactly the annual ‘Urs celebrations were organised on an institutional and urban scale—the infrastructure required and industry drawn to cater for a diverse clientele—awaits scholarly attention. The more famous Chishtī shrines in Delhi and Ajmer provide a point of departure for any such work.<sup>74</sup> Khuldābād in the Deccan provides a closer comparison in historical terms through the dargāh of Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn Gharīb (d. 1337)—a disciple of Nizām al-Dīn, who, like Kamāl al-Dīn, was deputed to the ‘frontier’ to serve in the vanguard of Delhi’s expansion in the fourteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Aside from early documentation and the epigraphic corpus—which is richer than in Dhār—useful insights and a frame of reference for future research have been provided by Nile Green.<sup>76</sup>

While documents from Dhār and practices at comparable shrines indicate that the celebration of the death anniversary of Kamāl al-Dīn Chishtī is a centuries-old tradition, its present form, spanning three days, dates only to 1935 CE.<sup>77</sup> This coincided with rising sectarian tensions following claims that the Jāmi‘ Masjid adjoining the dargāh was in fact a Hindu building—something that was bolstered by the setting-up of a signboard to the ‘Bhojaśālā’ outside the mosque in 1935 by the *diwān* of Dhār State and the opening of a local branch of the Hindu Mahāsabha in 1939.<sup>78</sup> Further, in the 1960s, the festival period was extended to four days and the dates were shifted from the saint’s passing in the lunar month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah and fixed in the Gregorian month of December, which coincides with the annual cattle fair that is held at this time.<sup>79</sup> In addition to the impetus for trade, the ‘Urs is also an occasion for building solidarity among Muslims and non-Muslims and, with the simmering tensions at Dhār over the past century, a number of booklets have been published in rebuttal of Hindutva narratives and for the awareness of the Muslim community.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>73</sup> As observed during the ‘Urs in December 2018; for the broader tradition documented by the hagiographies of other Chishtī saints, see Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, p. 132.

<sup>74</sup> See Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, ‘The early Chishti Dargahs’, pp. 1–23; S. A. I. Tirmizi, ‘Mughal documents relating to the Dargah of Khwaja Mu‘inuddin Chishtī’, pp. 48–59; Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moini, ‘Rituals and customary practices at the Dargah of Ajmer’, pp. 60–75, all three in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, (ed.) C. W. Troll, new hardback edn with an introduction by M. Gaborieau (New Delhi, 2003); P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu‘in Al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmer* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 117–140; Qamar-ul Huda, ‘Khwāja Mu‘in ud-Dīn Chishtī’s death festival: competing authorities over sacred space’, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17.1 (2003), pp. 61–78; and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya* (Delhi, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> See Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, pp. 118–154.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92, citing an eighteenth-century chronicle of Aurangābād’s shrine festivals by Sabzwārī, Sawāne, MS 285 Persian, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, fol. 23b; N. Green, ‘Stories of saints and sultans: re-membering history at the Sufi shrines of Aurangabad’, *Modern Asian Studies* 38.2 (2004), pp. 419–446; N. Green, ‘Auspicious foundations: the patronage of Sufi institutions in the late Mughal and early Asaf Jah Deccan’, *South Asian Studies* 20.1 (2004), pp. 71–98; and N. Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 33–64 reconstructs the history of the ‘Urs.

<sup>77</sup> See N. Ahmad, ‘Dhār Urs shurū se āj tak’, in *Yādgār-i Kamāl* (Dhār, 2000), pp. 9–12 for a full account of the recent changes, arrangements, and individuals involved.

<sup>78</sup> The earliest known documentation of this term is by K. K. Lele, *Summary of the Dramatic Inscription found at the Bhoja Shala (Kamal Maula Mosque), Dhar, C. I., in November 1903*, discussed in detail by Willis, ‘Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī’, p. 141.

<sup>79</sup> Ahmad, ‘Dhār Urs’, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> On one side are histories highlighting the glories of the Paramāras by Nandkishore Dvivedī, *Dhār rājya kā itihās* (Bombay, 1916); and B. N. Luṇiyā, *Yugayugīn Dhār* (Dhār, 1964). On the other side are historical surveys of the Muslim history of Dhār by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, *Dhār kī Masjid ka Fitnā: Jāmi Masjid Dhār ko Pāthshālā banāne kī Maṁsūbī* (Delhi, 1935), 24 pp.; Muhammad Ismā‘il Khān Badnawarī, *Maulānā Kamāl al-Dīn Chishtī* (Dhār, 1945); M. W. Khān Dhārwi, *Jamāl wa Kamāl: ‘Allāma Hazrat Maulānā Kamāluddīn Chishtī rahmatullāh ‘alaih kī 611we ‘urs mubārak ke muqa’ par* (Dhār, 1952); and M. W. Khān Dhārwi, *Hazrat Maulānā Kamāl al-Dīn Chishtī Dhāravi, Astāna-ye Pāk: zamīmā silsila no. 1* (Dhār, 1964).

Against the backdrop of legal and political wrangles that were playing out at historic places of worship, our analysis of a previously unnoticed document from the Sufi shrine at Dhār highlights the importance of local archives in reconstructing the social, economic, and institutional fabric through which such monuments acquired enduring public appeal. The new primary source put forth here is a confirmation of financial aid to the hereditary custodian of the dargāh that was granted by a princely order during the reign of Aurangzeb in 1695 CE. The scale of the grant—300 *bīghā* or 72 hectares of fertile land and 200 rupees in cash—that was approved for the custodian brought substantial power and prestige to the establishment. At an institutional level, the attestation, with its seals and notations, showcases the workings of the Mughal state apparatus in the central Indian province of Mālwa, as the periodic approval of a hereditary grant-in-aid to the Sufi shrine required the new incumbent to petition the provincial governor as well as the involvement of local landlords and revenue officials. The portrayal of the custodian as being engaged in providing charitable services and praying for the empire points to an intertwining of public and political piety at the heart of the endowment. Finally, at a sociological level, the document attests to the rising reputation of Begum Šāhab alongside Shaykh Kamāl, as well as the prominence of women in the shrine complex, as revealed by the involvement of female descendants in legal transactions over the inheritance. The examination of such documentary sources from a variety of historical perspectives can thus yield new insights while opening fresh avenues for approaching the social complexity of religious institutions.

**Conflicts of interest.** None.

---

**Cite this article:** Singh S, Ali M, Jha VM, Willis M (2025). The Sufi shrine at Dhār in central India: documents for an economic and institutional history. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000312>