



The Sufis in Tbilisi city under David the Builder's rule (1089–1125)

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Abstract

Georgian historiography provides exhaustive information about David the Builder, but after processing the document preserved in the National Archives of Georgia: "The [keeping] of the City of Tbilisi by King David the Builder and His Relations with Muslims," I present my analytical vision. The archive document states that David gladdened the hearts of the inhabitants of Tbilisi: he ordered the eristavs not to slaughter pigs with Muslims, to mint a coin with the inscription of God, his apostle and the caliph, and that Christians and Muslims should not go to the bath together. David, together with his son Dimitri, went to the main mosque on Fridays to listen to prayers and the reading of the Koran, gave a lot of money to help the "Katib" and "Moazin", built "Caravan Sarai" and houses for preachers, and appointed

food for Sufis and poets. If any of them wanted to leave Tbilisi, he generously helped them, giving them a large sum of money for the road. David respected Muslims more than Muslim kings themselves (found – 1438, desc – 1, doc – 394).

I will discuss the Sufis' origins in the Caucasus and their tariqa (arabic: طريقة) in Tbilisi.

Keywords: Caucasus, city of Tbilisi, David the Builder, Muslims, Sufis.

Introduction

Initially, let's consider why it was important for David the Builder to retain Tbilisi. The city of Tbilisi was an important trading place. Even during the Arab rule, Tbilisi did not lose its importance as a major trading city, and merchants from many corners of the world gathered here (Iortkipanidze, 1963:228). This was also the case after David the Builder, if we recall Jalal ad-Din's invasion of Tbilisi in 1228, Rusudan entrusted the defense of Tbilisi, Metekhi fortress, to the brothers Memnon and Botso (Found - 1462, desc - 1, Doc - 65), because by taking Tbilisi, the enemy would seize a trading city, which would then give them the opportunity to spread their influence throughout the region.

According to the transcribed text about Tbilisi in the archival document, "Agha Mohammad Khan intended to restore (renew) his autocracy and become king of all Persia and be called Shah. This is a brief history of the devastation of the city of Tbilisi with unimaginable cruelty, which he carried out with a treacherous war, who drove away the old King of Georgians, Heraclius II, in 1795." Agha Mohammad Khan called a meeting where everyone agreed to his call and pledged to obey and cooperate in everything—but only if his

intention was clearly fulfilled. At that meeting, they also decided to send an ambassador to the king in Constantinople and the emperor in Germany (or France) to get their approval. And when he got this response from Babylon, he started working. One of them promised him patronage over all of Georgia, while the other said he would call him Shah if he conquered" (Found – 763, desc- 1 doc - 336).

In the mid-17th century, Tbilisi was a populous, important trade and craft center. This is confirmed by contemporary Georgian, Eastern, and European sources. Caravan routes converged in Tbilisi, through which trade relations were carried out, on the one hand, with the cities of the Eastern Transcaucasia and Iran, and on the other hand, with Constantinople via Erzurum (gabashvili, 1966:184).

European travelers and representatives of the Russian government confirm that in the 18th century, Tbilisi had quite lively trade not only with neighboring peoples, but also with Russia, Persia, and even distant India, that it received expensive Indian and Persian shawls and brocades, as well as porcelain dishes by caravans, and itself sent copper utensils, horse decorations, weapons, cotton fabrics, and leather products abroad; the city had many workshops and several small manufacturing factories where silk, wool, and cotton fabrics were made. But Tbilisi's trade and industry were in the hands of a foreign element, especially Armenians (kikodze, 1942:122-123). According to the archival document, Kikodze's conclusion is confirmed, in particular, after David's capture of Tbilisi, Armenians entered the city, because they knew the importance of Tbilisi in terms of trade and industry, and in 1122 the Christian element was strengthened in Tbilisi (found-1438, Descr-1, doc-394).

The French explorer Peyssonnel in the 1750s and 1760s wrote: "The location of Tbilisi makes it the key to all the cities of Persia." "Caravans come to Tbilisi every day from Ganja, Shamakh, Yere-

van, Tabriz, and Erzurum," he said. Everyone is aware that Tbilisi serves as a storage for products traveling from Persia to Aleppo, Constantinople, and Smyrna, as well as back to Persia. This demonstrates that Tbilisi was, in fact, the best location to start Black Sea trade with Persia" (gelovani, 2021:140).

The city had the same function in 1889-1892 and 1899-1902. In Tbilisi, the French magazine "Le Caucase illustré" ("Illustrated Caucasus") featured an advertisement for Karapet Mut-Afov, whose company existed in Tbilisi and Baku and was engaged in the export of cotton fabrics, silk, and carpets from Persia. Also, the company of Knight and Matievich, which exported various types of goods from European cities (sanik'idze, 2025:10).

Thus, it is evident why Tbilisi's upkeep was so crucial to King David the Builder. Since the city has traditionally played a significant role in trade, a wide variety of individuals, including Sufis, have settled there. Returning to the archive document, let's talk about the role of Sufis in Tbilisi.

Discussion

The Sufis' entry into the Caucasus, their involvement in the capital city of Tbilisi, and David the Builder's specific regard for them are all fascinating and remarkable.

It is evident that Sufism expanded in the areas, nations, and cities where commercial relations were established. In the 14th century, for instance, the Qadiriya Sufi Tariqa expanded to Syria and Iraq; in the 15th century, to Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and Hijaz; and in the 16th century, to Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Members of the Qadiriya Tariqa spread over Sudan, Senegal, Guinea, Nigeria, and Mauritania in the sixteenth century. The city served as the social foundation for the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood, which had strong ties to business and industrial associations. The Volga region (city of Kazan)

was affected in the 18th century by the Naqshbandi brotherhood, which was active in Central Asia. (Islam. Encyclopedic dictionary, 1993:126-187).

According to an archive document, after David the Builder captured Tbilisi, Sufis already lived in the capital. We should also not forget that Muslims owned Tbilisi for 400 years before the city was returned. From 744 to 1122, Tbilisi was under Arab rule, and they had their own emissaries in the city, whose responsibilities included monitoring the tribute that Georgians sent annually to the Caliph in Baghdad (Fund-1438, Inventory-1, Case-394). It is known that the knightly organization of the "Futuwwa" order originated in Baghdad in 1180-1225 (Gordlevskiy, 1928:1176). It is noteworthy that the wandering dervishes and Sufis, possessed by the ideas of "Ayyars", "Futuwwa" and "Batiniyya", joined together and formed a unified, similar worldview system. As for the "Ayyars", they were the most socially active part and participated in almost all the riots and disturbances that became more frequent in the cities of the Near East at that time. They became especially active in the 12th century. The Arab historian Ibn al-Jawziyya conveys the dates of the "Ayyars" rebellions: 1097, 1100, 1104, 1119, 1121, 1122, 1136, 1138, 1140, 1141, 1158, 1169 and 1170. They often achieved great success, for example, in 1034-1044. In Baghdad, the power was entirely in the hands of the "Ayyars". The first significant characterization of "Javanmard", which was also identified with the "Fata" movement, and also of the "Ayyars", is given in the didactic work " 'Unşur al-Ma'ālī Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, a prominent representative of Persian classical literature, which was created at the end of the 11th century and is an instructive treatise dedicated to his son (javelidze, 2010:123-125). "Young people" or "youths" participated in the social movements taking place in the cities of the Near and Middle East, for the designation of which the

appropriate term "al-Fata", "Jevanmard" was used (gabashvili, 1981:70). "Futuwwa" literally means "knightly", "chivalry" (gabashvili, 1966: 147). In the Middle Ages, "Futuwwa" in the Islamic world was a generalized term and represented a unity, a connection, which was conspicuous in its characteristics and form throughout the country at all levels of culture and was initially a kind of association of men. The word "Futuwwa" (Persian: "Futuwwat", Turkish: "Fütüvvet") is of Arabic origin. After the Arabs conquered various regions, they spread the concept of the ideal of a true man - Fata - in the conquered countries, especially this ideal was established in northern Iran, in particular in Khorasan. It took deep root in the circles of Iranian nobles and merged with local, existing traditions. Generosity and bravery were always a prerequisite for recognizing the Futuwwa sequence. In battle, he would sacrifice his life for a friend. The unity of the youth of "Futuwwa" took organizational form not in the Arab reality, but in the basin of Iranian civilization. Later, their military spirit was reduced to the level of hunters, who were distinguished by their boundless boasting and audacity. Moreover, a brave man only caused anxiety and fought. Moreover, from time to time these brave men did not shy away from robbery. The public connection of "Futuwwa" gained immense influence on the masses and often represented such a force that it strongly shook the foundations and order of states (javelidze, 2010:14-19).

According to V. Gabashvili, the "Rinds" in Tbilisi ought to have used the same methods of class conflict as the "Rinds" in the Near Eastern cities that are well-known from Eastern sources. The "Rinds" performances or uprisings occurred between the end of the eleventh and the first quarter of the twelfth centuries, before to Tbilisi's annexation to Georgia, as their active participation during the height of the

power of the Georgian feudal kingdom is unclear (gabashvili, 1966: 152).

Until 1122, Tbilisi did not belong to the Georgian kings, and the government of representatives of the then population (perhaps a Muslim majority) dominated the city (meskhia, 1982:248). The city of Tbilisi was in the hands of "young people," and European researchers equate "Jovens" and "Fathas" ("fata," "futuwwa," "fitian"). In this regard, the question arises: could "young people," "fithians," "javanmards," "rinds," dervishes, meaning urban elements participating in a social movement or rebellion, seize power in the city? Ghazali's "Nasihah al-muluk" ("Advice for Kings") contains interesting information that directly states that young people seized power and oppressed the people (gabashvili, 1981:74-75). V. Gabashvili considers it possible that in 1082-1122 a situation was created in Tbilisi in which the rule of nobles and merchants existed. As proof of this, the explanation of the true meaning of "rind" and the information of David the Builder's historian, which concerns the unrest in newly annexed Tbilisi, are used. For forty years, a struggle took place in the city of Tbilisi between different social strata of the city. And according to Ibn al-Jawziyya, the rule of "rinds," "fithians," "javanmards," and, from my side, I add dervishes, who ruled Tbilisi for forty years after the extinction of the Jafarid family, is confirmed (gabashvili, 1981:79-81). Obviously, the Sufis living in Tbilisi were a considerable force to be reckoned with, and let's consider which tariqa the dervishes living in Tbilisi belonged to.

It is significant that dervishes, which had its roots in Islam, flourished throughout the Middle East and became extremely hostile toward the established state structure, feudal lords, and high-ranking clerics. (javelidze, 2010:8). Dervishes had a great influence on the people. In the eyes of Muslims, a dervish was such a sacred figure that

they almost placed him above the Koran. Therefore, they felt at ease in all Muslim countries and moved freely. They were the most dangerous and elusive political agitators, who were determined against the existing state system. Wandering and free dervishes were almost the initiators of every rebellion, whether in the countryside or in the city. Every rebellion and uprising was wrapped in the veil of dervish ideology and carried, first of all, an anti-Sunni and anti-state character (javelidze, 2010:9; Gureshize, 2024:195).

According to the archive document, Sufis and dervishes came to the Caucasus from Persia; they had no home, no families, and owned no property. A person's origin did not matter to them, whether they were Persian, Tatar, Afghan, Bukharan, or Jewish; the dervish was a friend and well-wisher to everyone, his estate was the whole world, his family was all of humanity, and his home was the universe (found - 1438, desc. - 1, doc - 441). Most of the dervishes led a wandering life; dressed in robes of various colors, with alms-bags, a staff in hand, and a begging bowl, they wandered from village to village, from city to city, from country to country (javelidze, 2010:8). Kay Kāvus gives a description of "Javanmard" and wandering dervishes. According to the writer, first of all, they are adorned with truth or spirit, they are educated in the science of religion, their word and deed are honest, they are not accustomed to flattery, they condemn stinginess, do not harbor envy in their hearts, do not show anger and rage, do not offend anyone for their own appearance, do not pass unfair verdicts and do not oppress people, they help selflessly and do not condemn the sinner for his mistake, do not lecture anyone in the presence of others, do not neglect foreign science and religious books. They do not incite the commoner to commit a crime" (javelidze, 2010:129-132). Notably, in 1854, Anna Dranse, the governess in the Georgian nobleman Chavchavadze's home, records the following:

"The Lezgins demanded a million rubles for their ransom when she was kidnapped along with the Chavchavadze family and then stayed with Imam Shamil." Shamil disliked the rumors that were going about the community since they seemed to be impeding his plans. He therefore made the decision to put an end to this rumor and immediately and decisively shift public opinion in favor of the Chavchavadze family. After going missing for a few days, the Imam returned with a dervish who was renowned for his extreme piety. The devout hermit spent all day and night teaching and praying. We were told that the dervish preached in our favor while in a state of religious ecstasy. He pleaded with Allah to guide the Lezgins out of the darkness of error and to illuminate their minds. They would be motivated by the hermit to show compassion to the poor inmates and refrain from demanding an impractical ransom. He closed his sermon by saying, Most importantly, do not ask for a million rubles to free the prisoners." As soon as the Imam receives his son from the Emperor, let these unfortunates return to their native country" (Dranse, 1978:119-133).

The Encyclopedia of Islam notes that dervishes were followers of the Bektashi Tariqa in Sufism. Let's consider the Bektashi Tariqa. The Bektashi Sufi brotherhood was formed in Asia Minor at the turn of the 13th-14th centuries, initially among the local Turkish nomadic population. The name of the brotherhood is associated with Haji Bektash Rumi. According to specialists, the real founder of Bektashia was a wandering preacher (Baba) and Haji Bektash Vali Qalandari (Nishapur Khorasan, 1208-1270), who connected his spiritual silsila (chain) to the Turkmen Sheikh Ahmad Yasawi (d. 1166). Haji Bektash quickly gained wide popularity in Asia Minor. In 1240, he took an active part in the "Turkish Freedom" uprising, led by the dervish-

qalandar Baba-Ishaq, against the Sultan of Konya (file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/M_1991.pdf 1991:40-41 21/08/2025 4:07).

The Bektashi brotherhood consisted of village communities and communities of "the initiated". Upon reaching a certain age, people from the village communities underwent an initiation ritual performed by the local hereditary leader of the community, and they became members of the brotherhood. "The initiated" were those who, after joining the brotherhood, lived in hermitages located in the village but close to the city. The members of the brotherhood were divided into six main categories: 1. Ashik - an associated but not dedicated member. 2. Muhip (Muhibb) - an Ashik who has undergone the initiation ceremony and has acquired the right to participate in some ritual gatherings of the brotherhood. 3. Dervish - a Muhip who has passed the stage of serving the elders, acquired the skills associated with passing the path, took an oath-vow, and received permission to wear a hirka, a taj, and a symbolic accessory of the brotherhood. 4. Baba. Appointed from Dede-Baba or the regional tekke by the Caliph, from the number of dervishes with a special document (ijazet-nama) as the head of the local monastery or the central (regional) tekke department. The Baba had the right to lead the ordinary members of the brotherhood (muhip, dervish). 5. Darvish Mujarrad - those who took a vow of celibacy. They underwent a special closed initiation ritual (Mujerrad Ayini), which was performed in the mother's monastery, as well as in the Bektashi tekke, Kerbela and Balim Sultan's tekke in Anatolia. They lived only in the monastery, shaved their mustaches, beards and heads, and wore a silver or copper earring in their right ear. 6. Caliph - the deputy of the Chelebi in the form of the head of the regional tekke, appointed from the number of Babas (file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop /M_1991.pdf 1991:40-41 21/08/2025 4:07).

The Bektashi religious doctrine is complex and syncretic. Officially it was Sunni, but it contained an esoteric doctrine that was very close to the doctrine of the extreme Shiites - the Hurufis. The Bektashi members believed in the Trinity - consisting of Allah, Muhammad and Ali. Ali was considered the embodiment of God (Islam, Encyclopedic Reference Book 1999:44). Today, the Bektashi followers recognize Shiite views with special reverence for Ali ibn Abu Talib, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. An important part of their religious practice is the mystical interpretation of the Koran, as well as the performance of dhikr (ritual prayers) and participation in spiritual gatherings. Studies show that "Bektashi rituals include elements of Shiite and Sufi mysticism, which makes them unique among Islamic orders" (<https://www.sarakuehn.com/the-albanian-speaking-bektashi-order-of-dervishes21/08/2025> 4:06). Notably, Bektashi Tariqat adherents supported Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the Turkish National Liberation War, but he did not spare them during the anti-Sufi campaign in 1925 (Knish, 2004:321).

The Bektashi followers first appeared in Albania during the Ottoman Empire's rule in the 15th century. According to Sarah Coen's research, "The Bektashi followers played an important role in the formation of Albanian identity and culture." During this period, they established numerous tekkes (spiritual centers) that developed into hubs of religious and cultural life. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Bektashi followers actively participated in the Albanian national movement. They contributed to the development of Albanian literature and education. In 1925, after the abolition of the Caliphate and the ban on all Sufi orders in Turkey, the Bektashi world center moved to Tirana. This helped to consolidate their positions in Albania and the development of the order in the new conditions. During Enver Hoxha's communist regime, the Bektashi order was

severely persecuted. All religious institutions were closed and practice was prohibited. A 1990 Human Rights Watch report noted that "Albania's communist government officially banned all religious practices." However, after the fall of the communist regime in 1991, religious freedom was restored and the order began to revive. Today, the tekkes are open again and the Bektashi community continues to preserve its traditions. Today, the Bektashi order in Albania is beginning to recover after decades of persecution and destruction. They continue to preserve their unique traditions and cultural heritage and play an important role in the country's religious and cultural life (<https://www.Sar akuehn.com/the-albanian-speaking-bektashi-order-of-dervishes> 21/08 /2025 4:03).

Conclusion

According to the aforementioned texts, it is probable that the Sufis residing in Tbilisi were members of the Bektashi Tariqa and contributed significantly to David the Builder's preservation of the city, or at the at least did not obstruct the king.

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