Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men:
Narratives of Hero and Saint
at the Frontier of Orality and Textuality

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Most of our principles and assumptions about editing Islamic manuscripts have been worked out in the context of a relatively limited range of literary genres, encompassing works that little affected, and were little affected by, the more 'public' oral venues for the transmission and circulation of knowledge and rhetoric (or, works for which possible oral 'variants' could be, arguably, ignored); these include chronicles and geographical works, produced in the environment of court chanceries and often for royal presentation, whose contents were typically not part of ongoing popular transmission or elaboration as a living tradition, as well as juridical and credal works, produced in environments that maintained, by their very nature, a highly controlled relationship between the written text and oral modes of instruction and transmission. With many hagiographical sources, however, and with other genres filled with what we might classify as 'folkloric' material (such as popular local histories, historical dāsās or heroic and romantic epics), we are typically faced with textual recordings and adaptations of 'content' that continued to develop in oral venues, separately from the written tradition - sometimes parallel to it, sometimes divergent from it, and sometimes, it would seem, repeatedly intersecting with it. With such material, we risk not only significant errors in the editorial interpretation of manuscript versions of a given narrative, but often serious misunderstandings of the essential meaning, purpose, and 'reading' of a narrative, if we approach the text solely on the basis of a manuscript tradition.

The transmission of the narrative corpus surrounding a popular Sufi saint indeed raises a host of special issues important for religious and social history, as well as for our understanding of the interaction of oral and textual traditions and their role in yielding the extant manuscript recordings of the narrative corpus in question. These issues include the multiple venues in which a saint's legacy may be cultivated (and, hence, in which narratives may be transmitted, both orally and textually); the relations between these venues and modes of transmission; the character of the hagiographical and/or doctrinal material also circulated

1 This applies especially to hagiographical works created as part of the rhetorical self-justification of specific Sufi communities (i.e., those linked with the saint or lineage that is the subject of a given work by bonds of natural descent or initiatic transmission), and less so to the better-known 'literary' hagiographies such as Aṭṭār’s Tadhkira al-wālid yu’ud Jānim’s Naqshabī al-wāni. 
about the saint; the accretion of popular narratives focused on other types of figures – rulers, heroes, ancestors, communal founders, etc. – to the hagiographical personality of the saint; and the impact of the compilers of hagiographical works – Sufis themselves, with literary "motives" reflecting specific doctrinal, experiential, and polemical circumstances – in recasting and reinterpreting hagiographical narratives circulated originally or, at least, when the hagiographers got hold of them – for quite different purposes and in venues quite different from that of a Sufi community.

In addition, a host of more narrowly textological issues – the relationship between a particular narrative tradition and the larger hagiographical work in which it is embedded, the relationships among multiple narrative traditions, of diverse origins, included within single hagiographical works, the relationships among the same narrative traditions reflected in, and put to diverse uses within, a variety of hagiographical works, basic textual choices and interpretations made by the compiler of a hagiographical work in the course of transmitting narratives received orally and in written form, and so on – bear directly upon our understanding both of the proper object of our critical and comparative attention, and of the purpose of that critical study.

Is the object a single 'work' to be studied and edited on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of manuscript copies of the presumed single work, with the aim of yielding an 'original' text? Is it a narrative corpus focused on a single saint, extracted from multiple sources with the aim of establishing the 'earliest' narrative image of the saint, or even of tracking the development of his or her narrative image through several centuries? Or is it a single narrative motif as applied to multiple saints in a wide range of sources, with the aim of discovering shared patterns of religious, ritual, or even institutional developments through the use and adaptation of narrative structures? There are other possible permutations, of course, and each approach may hold particular value in specific instances, but underlying all these issues is a fundamental distinction between the hagiographical and 'sacred historical' genres, on the one hand, and the types of Islamic texts that hitherto have drawn the greatest attention from historians and philologists, on the other.

The narrative corpus surrounding Khwâja Ahmad Yasavi – a Sufi saint of Central Asia who most likely lived in the latter 12th century – provides an excellent vantage point from which to explore many of these issues, not only because of the long time-span covered by recorded narratives focused on him (from the 14th century through the 20th), and the relatively limited geographical arena in which he was the subject of a living narrative tradition, but also because of the distinctive character of the hagiographical material focused on him. Simply put, the extant body of narratives about Ahmad Yasavi is unusual compared to the stories circulated about other Sufi saints of roughly the same era: while the latter, both in content and in setting, reflect a focus primarily on the interests of a Sufi community (e.g., issues of daily life in a khânqâh, relations among a master’s disciples and between the master and particular followers, a shaykh’s method of instruction and training, etc.), the extant narrative repertoire focused on Ahmad Yasavi consists primarily of miracle stories, and above all of accounts of spectacular wonders such as conjuring storms, calming fires, flying through the air, and turning men into dogs. Similar stories, of course, are preserved about other saints of roughly the same period, but in the case of Ahmad Yasavi, very few stories reflect the typical interests of a functioning Sufi community; they suggest that the narratives were developed and transmitted, at some stage (if not necessarily “originally”), not in the context of a Sufi community, but in some other environment.

I have recently discussed one such complex, which links Ahmad Yasavi to narratives of Islamization and to specific evocations of ritual and devotional practice centered at his shrine in the city of Turkistan, and which suggests the centrality of ‘public’ constituencies based at Yasavi’s shrine, rather than any Sufi tradition stemming from him, in the preservation and transmission of the narrative corpus later drawn upon by Sufi communities claiming connections with Ahmad Yasavi. Here I would like to consider another complex, of even wider ramifications, comprising a set of stories focused on Ahmad Yasavi’s conflict with a particular community that dwelled near him. The causes for the conflict between Yasavi and this community are almost never explained in any detail, but the gist of the conflict itself is recounted in three ways: in some versions, the focus is on the murder of Yasavi’s son by this community; in others, it is the false accusation by the community that Yasavi stole an ox (or a cow, or a horse) from them; and in others, both elements are found, usually combined rather clumsily. The consequences of the conflict, however, are reported in much the same fashion in nearly all versions, and they are as peculiar, from the standpoint of the narrative’s own logic, as they are dramatic: Ahmad Yasavi turns his enemies into dogs, then reconciles with the community of Dog-Men, but curses them with some visible sign of their former enmity (usually the sign is the canine tails they are said to bear).

The story of Ahmad Yasavi and the men he turned into dogs was mentioned already in Mehmed Fuad Koprulu’s now quite dated study of the Yasavi Sufi tradition; Koprušu was unaware of many versions of the story found in manuscript sources, primarily from Yasavi Sufi circles, dating from the 14th–20th centuries, and in any case the story has not drawn significant critical attention since Koprušu’s time. What has gone unnoticed, in particular, is the broader narrative

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2 See De Weese 2000a.
repertoire to which the story clearly belongs. This repertoire includes two basic sets of stories: first, narratives focused on a hero’s conflict with men who have the form (or name) of dogs, associated with a wide range of Inner Asian figures, but especially with heroic ancestors and rulers known from traditions circulated about and among the Oghuz and Türkmen; and second, narratives clearly derived from the story linking Ahmad Yasavi with the Dog-Men, and preserved in the oral tradition of the Qazaqs, Qaraqpaqs, Uzbeks, and above all Türkmen, recorded by ethnographers in the late 19th and 20th centuries (these narratives usually, though not always, preserve the name of Ahmad Yasavi, as well as specific features of the stories of his dealings with the hostile community).

This broader narrative repertoire suggests that the story of Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men in all likelihood reflects the appropriation and adaptation of a narrative motif that was widespread in Inner Asia during the Mongol era (and probably earlier) in the context of multiple layerings of hagiographical traditions, focused on the saint, that were developed in quite different venues; the ethnographic recordings, in particular, confirm the continued circulation of the tales focused on Yasavi—which were, not surprisingly, put to different uses—outside the hagiographical venues of the Sufi community linked to the saint. At the same time, the narrative repertoire as a whole reminds us of the problems, of both text and meaning, posed by the extant manuscript recordings of the tale of Yasavi and the Dog-Men when considered in the context of narratives that clearly had a much wider range of both oral and written circulation.

Space constraints will not permit a thorough discussion here of either the Inner Asian hero-stories, or the broader range of more recently recorded oral versions, that parallel the story of Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men; we must at least briefly take stock of that broader narrative repertoire, however, in order to understand the likely place of the Yasavi stories, and the specific features that recur, within it. As a basis for comparison with these features, we may first summarize the central elements of the basic stories about Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men:

(I) The stolen ox: The hostile community’s leaders hide an ox in Yasavi’s khanqah (or kitchen, or barn), and then accuse him of stealing it; when they come on the pretext of investigating, Yasavi tells them to go in and look, addressing them as “You dogs,” whereupon they turn into dogs and devour the ox. In some versions, the Dog-Men turn on one another as well and kill each other; in some versions, the Dog-Men are restored to human form; in some versions, the rest of the Dog-Men’s people are spared the canine transformation, but are chased to a new abode by their erstwhile leaders. In most versions, all the members of the community bear tails ever afterward.

(II) The murdered son: The same community revives its enmity with Yasavi; its leaders find the shaykh’s son Ibrahim asleep beside a stream, beneath a tree, and cut off his head. They wrap it up and take it to Yasavi, saying it is a melon; the saint complains only that they picked it still unripe, and here too he reconciles with the community, serving as their counselor and thereby providing an example of saintly forbearance (in some versions he even gives his daughter in marriage to his son’s killer).

To these basic, synthetic summaries should be added two points. First, in some early versions of the story, the hostile community is identified by the name “Süri” (or “Suir”), a term that is nowhere explained in the extant versions. Second, many versions of the story—most of the “ethnographic” recordings, though not the earliest manuscript versions—assign names to two individuals among the hostile community who are portrayed as the most wicked of the saint’s offenders and, in some cases, the only ones among them who are transformed into dogs (or who remain in that state): Aqnam and Qaraman. These names form a contrasting pair—i.e. “black and white”—and as such are often assigned to two closely related figures (e.g., brothers) in folklore; but they also reflect ethnonymy found most commonly among the Türkmen, with the personal and ethnic name “Qaraman” particularly widespread (it was applied to the well-known Anatolian principality, rival to the early Ottoman state, whose origins were linked already by Rashid al-Din to Türkmen groups that originally dwelled along the lower Syr Darya and near the Balkhān mountains near Khwarazm, and remains today one of the chief divisions of the Salar [Sülür] tribe of the Türkmen). Although these names do not appear in any of the reliably datable textual variants until the beginning of the 19th century (and then only in a source that is now lost), they must be of some antiquity, since they appear in versions of the story preserved among the Salars of China (whose departure from the larger body of Sülürs in Central Asia is dated by their own traditions to the latter 14th century). With these basic elements in mind, we may briefly consider the broader narrative repertoire noted above. To begin with, the body of stories focused on Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men bears unmistakable connections with widespread legends about men who have the shape and manner of dogs, and about heroic figures who encounter such creatures. While these traditions go back ultimately to classical stories of the Dog-Headed Men and the Amazons, they are echoed with particular relevance for our purposes not only in contemporary oral tradition recorded among the Türkmen, but in textual sources produced in the Islamic world from the 14th to the 17th centuries, above all in the traditions focused on the history of the Oghuz preserved in Rashid al-Din’s Jami’ al-tawārīkh, in the

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4 The lost work, assigned the title “Tārikh-i masha’ib-i at-ta’lā” and written in the early 19th century, was studied by Zeki Velidi Togan (see Togan 1946, Umumd Türk Türküne Gıgı, 311 and 468, n. 27, and Togan 1953, 325), citing M S Halis Efendi No. 199, but noting already its disappearance.

5 The Salar versions, however, have lost specific mention of Ahmad Yasavi as the saint with whom their ancestors quarreled. On the Salars and their traditions, see Tenenba 1964, Salarduvans tôblo, 119-25; Ateev 1993; and Ma Jianzhong and Kevin Stuart 1996 (with further references).

6 See the wide-ranging survey of such lore in White 1991, Myths of the Dog-Man.
Book of Dede Qorqut, and in Abü'l-Ghāzī’s Şujiang-i tərəkhə. The hagiographical echoes of such stories strongly suggest that Ahmad Yasavi has been fitted into a narrative complex otherwise encountered in connection with heroes, rulers, and communal ancestors, more often than not with Yasavi himself serving in the role of the hero; in addition, the written recordings of these tales attest to the circulation of a body of oral tradition that clearly must have played a role in shaping the eventual recording of narratives about Ahmad Yasavi, but which continued to circulate in various oral venues, independent of the written tradition, for many centuries.

There are four major narrative parallels of this sort that appear to be relevant to the story of Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men:

(I) The story, recorded first by Rashid al-Din, of the campaign by the eponymous figure of Oghuz Khân against the country of Qil Baraq, ruled by It Baraq (‘It and Baraq’ are Turkic terms for “dog” and a mythical dog-like creature, respectively), where the men resembled dogs, and made themselves impervious to their enemies by immersing their bodies successively in two vats, one full of white glue, the other full of black glue, and then rolling in sand. Oghuz was eventually able to defeat the Dog-Men (thanks to the treachery of their women) and to incorporate their realm into his domains; the tale concludes with some genealogical and ‘ethnogenic’ consequences of his stay in their country.7

(II) The account, included in the Şujiang-i tərəkhə of the 17th-century Khivan khan Abü'l-Ghāzī, of the enmity between the hero of the Sālûr tribe, Sâlûr Qâzân, and another tribe, referred to as the “It Bechéne” (a name combining the word for “dog” with a tribal designation, “Bechene,” that reflects the name of the historical enemies of the Oghuz, the Pechenegs, but was included already by the 11th century among the sub-divisions of the Oghuz). According to Abü'l-Ghāzī, the It Bechéne carried off Sâlûr Qâzân’s mother, who was returned after three years upon payment of an enormous ransom; Abü'l-Ghāzī in fact gives two versions of the aftermath of these events, one of which affirms that Sâlûr Qâzân’s mother returned to the Sâlûrs pregnant, and that the son she bore, of a man from among the It Bechéne, was held by some to be the ancestor of a particular group among the Sâlûrs.8 These stories seem clearly to echo traditions of Sâlûr enmity toward a community identified, at least figuratively, as dogs, and to combine them with traditions about the descent of at least one group of Sâlûrs from one of those canine enemies; the Dog-Men are thus both enemies and ancestors (a dual role found also in many oral versions of the story of Yasavi and the Dog-Men, and a combination undoubtedly quite useful in the context of Islamization).

(III) The story of the pillaging of the home of Sâlûr Qâzân in the well-known Oghuz epic compilation, the Book of Dede Qorqut. In this story, the hero catches up with his enemies just as they are about to kill his captive son, beneath a tree; surprisingly, Sâlûr Qâzân declares that he will come to the enemy holding his son (and his wife as well) captive if only they will release his mother.9 The story clearly echoes Abü'l-Ghāzī’s account of Sâlûr Qâzân and the It Bechéne; and although this version from the Book of Dede Qorqut merely calls Sâlûr Qâzân’s enemies “infidel dogs,” with no other evocation of their canine character, the clear expression of the hero’s willingness to countenance the loss of his son marks yet another point of contact with the hagiographical stories told about the murder of Ahmad Yasavi’s son.

(IV) In a more distant echo, Rashid al-Din gives an account of a prince, descended from Oghuz Khân, who understands the speech of animals, and is aided by a holy dog in protecting his people’s livestock from a band of hungry wolves; in return for this, the dog asks only that the hero-prince give him the fatty-tail (dunhu) of one sheep (in language that vaguely echoes the story of Yasavi condemning the Dog-Men, even though reconciled with him, to bear tails). Eventually the prince fathers a son who, while playing with another boy on the bank of a stream, grows angry with his playmate and strikes him with a reed, cutting off his head.10

All of these hero-stories, recorded in manuscript sources, are linked in some way with a stock of narratives recounting the origin and legendary history of the Oghuz and Türkmen tribes; the first and second explicitly include a legend of origin for particular communities, the third focuses on an eponymous hero of the Sâlûr tribe, and the fourth involves a hero within the lineage stemming from Oghuz Khân. This ‘ethnogenic’ element appears even more strongly in the ethnographically-recorded versions of the story of Yasavi and the Dog-Men; indeed, in nearly all of these oral versions, the focus of the story shifts from the saint’s forbearance and patient endurance of the troublesome community’s offenses, to

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7 See Rashid al-Din, Die Geschichte der Oghusen des Radif ad-Din, ed. John, 68. Similar stories, recounting a campaign by the Mongols into the land of the Dog-Men, circulated already in the 13th century, and were recorded by John of Plano Carpini, leader of a papal mission to the court of the Mongol khán Gãyãk in 1245-47 (see the translation in Dawson, ed., The Mongol Mission, 23).


9 Dede Korkut Kitâb, ed. Ergin, 1, 95-115; tr. Lewis, The Book of Dede Korkut, 42-58. The women who figure in several of these stories—the hero’s wife and mother in this case, his mother in Abü'l-Ghāzī’s version, and the wives of the Dog-Men who became enannored of Öghuz Khân’s men in Rashid al-Din’s account—clearly play a central role in the ‘ethnogenic’ focus of these tales of the Dog-Men, but their functions also parallel the ‘flexible’ and, as a rule, mutually exclusive roles of the women highlighted in the lore about Ahmad Yasavi (separate traditions stress the roles of his mother, sister, or daughter; see DeWeese 1999b, 512-14).

the saint's role in forming and naming a community. The story becomes, in short, a legend of communal origin, with the saint's 'victory' over the community understood as the formative moment in the community's history.

The ethnographic recordings of these traditions from the 19th and 20th centuries significantly expand the range of variants, and of 'peoples' whose origins are linked with the story of Yasav and the Dog-Men, beyond those that figure in the earlier written versions. As an example of such tales, and of the rich array of folkloric motifs they often incorporate, we may consider a version recorded among the Ersari Turksmen in 1964; here the names of Yasavi's antagonists have been changed, though they retain their allusion to black and white, but the 'moral ambiguity' of the Dog-Men as both enemies and ancestors is accentuated through their identification as saints themselves, with the conflict between the Dog-Men and Yasavi cast as a contest of miracle-working holy men. According to this tale, the brothers Aq Ishan and Qara Ishan lived among the ancestors of the Turksmen in Mangishlak and were regarded by them as saints; but the people also revered Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi, and his son, of Turkistan, who had built a mosque with the offerings they received from the people, thus provoking the jealousy of Aq Ishan and Qara Ishan. The ruler of Mangishlak learned of these saints' rivalry and decided to test their power by asking them to move a great mountain that hid the sun; the two brothers failed, but Yasavi managed to induce the mountain to move by itself, thus releasing the sunlight and winning the admiration of the people and the ruler. The two brothers, seeking revenge, placed a dead horse in Yasavi's mosque and accused him of stealing it; to prove his innocence, Yasavi had to perform a miracle, and therefore declared that Aq Ishan should turn into a white dog and Qara Ishan into a black one. His words had their effect, as the two brothers turned into dogs with human heads and began eating the horse's carcass. Thus thwarted, the two Dog-Men went atop a hill and addressed their 'tribe,' calling those of the "Uz" people (i.e., "Oghuz") who belonged to the tribes "Aq" and "Qara" to follow them; a thousand households answered the call and set off toward the west, among them the ancestors of the Ersari.

The narrative clearly reflects specific elements known from the hagiographical lore focused on Ahmad Yasavi; the mention of Yasavi's son suggests that at one point the episode might also have included an account of the boy's murder, but in fact nothing more is heard of him in this version. Yet the other narrative elements, not typically found in connection with the stories of the stolen ox and the murdered son, are also of interest. One element, for instance, the saintly contest to move a mountain that was blocking the sun—recalls an altogether different story told about Yasavi in the works of Hazini (discussed below), in which Yasavi, as a child, conjures a storm to move a mountain; another, the apparent allusion to the Dog-Men's people as the Oghuz, evokes an ethnonym that would seem to root the story in a quite archaic period of Turksmen history. The oral tradition may thus have grown by accretion, 'picking up' originally unrelated elements that do not appear in written versions; or it may have retained specific elements of the story of the Dog-Men that have disappeared entirely from its hagiographical and 'ethnogenic' adaptations.

Students of the 'ethnographic' recordings of the tales have been unaware, for the most part, of the evocations of these motifs in the earlier manuscript sources from the Yasavi Sufi tradition; they have also tended to approach the narratives as evidence on the historical location and migrations of particular tribes during the 12th century (based on the presumed lifetime of Ahmad Yasavi). Some have gone so far as to see in the narratives—usually shorn of the 'miraculous' element that lies at their heart, namely the transformation of the Dog-Men—a more or less straightforward reflection of the historical Ahmad Yasavi's interaction with a community, typically understood as nomadic, dwelling in the middle Syr Darya valley in the 12th century; the prevalence of Turksmen versions among the modern, ethnographically recorded variants of the tale, has led to the story being used as historical evidence of the residence of particular Turksmen groups in the middle Syr Darya valley during that time, and of their migrations from that region to other parts of Central Asia (and beyond), and according to one Soviet-era researcher, flush with antireligious fervor, the story reflected a memory that the migrations of certain groups among the Turksmen were initiated in response to their oppression by the "Muslim clergy."14

A more fruitful approach to these oral versions of the story of Ahmad Yasavi and the Dog-Men must begin with acknowledging not only the full range of the motif of an 'ethnogenic' encounter between a hero and a community of Dog-Men, but the multiple layers and mutual intersections of the oral and written versions of the tale. The developments evident in the various versions of these stories suggest (1) interesting conclusions about religious developments and the reclassification of pre-Islamic Inner Asian traditions (possibly both ritual and narrative) as Muslim legends of origin, and (2) possible ethno-historical

14 This is the claim of Dzhikiev 1972, Etnografikleskii ocherk, 44-46 (see also Dzhikiev 1991, Ocherki poslezhizhnosti, 243-253). The view that the story reflects historical migrations in the lifetime of Yasavi is advanced also in Agadzhanyan 1969, Ocherki istorii oghuzov i turkmench, in Tolstov 1947, and more recently in Atanazian 1988, Slavoj turkmenskikh etnikomu, 17, 102-103, and Atanazian 1994, Slavoj, 37-39.
15 See my preliminary discussion of such traditions, but with a focus on tales of Kubrawi rather than Yasavi provenance, in DeWeese 2000b.
implications, in view of the persistent echoes of connections with the Türkmen, and with the Salûs in particular.

The figure of Salûr Qazân is indeed one of the chief points of contact between the ethnographic recordings and the earlier accounts from the work of Abû‘l-Ghâzâl and the Book of Dede Qâpa (though the name of Oghuz Khân also survives in some oral versions of these tales); a wide range of stories about Salûr Qazân continues to circulate among the Salûs and other Türkmen tribes, often formulating quite clearly the descent of several contemporary tribes—including the Tekê, Ersâr, Sarîq, and Yomut—directly from Salûr Qazân.16 The stories of tribal origins stressing the role of Salûr Qazân appear to alternate, however, with stories stressing the role of Ahmad Yasavi and his encounter with the Dog-Men, and the distribution thus implied suggests that Ahmad Yasavi has in effect ‘replaced‘ the epic hero Salûr Qazân, in some traditions, as the focal point of the conflict with the Dog-Men.17 The role of Salûr Qazân, moreover, may be echoed, faintly, in Yasavi lore as well, which preserves a story about the saint’s magical flight to Egypt;18 the story begins with a ruler called “Qazân Khân” summoning Yasavi, and one version ends affirming that the ruler and his troops became Yasavi’s disciples following his miraculous flight. We may be justified in seeing this narrative as evidence that Yasavi and Salûr Qazân were indeed linked in an earlier story—which may have recounted the ruler’s submission to the saint, or even the ruler’s conversion by the saint—which developed in two ways, one stressing the ruler’s role and the other the saint’s; earlier layers of Salûr (or general Türkmen) lore may have ensured the attachment of the motif of the conflict with the Dog-Men to both ‘heroic’ figures.19

16 For versions of recently recorded tales about Salûr Qazân (among the Salûs, Sarîq, and Yomuts), see Dzhikiev 1991, Osobki pradesnykhdena, 20–17; Dzhikiev 1977, 122–24; Dzhikiev 1972, Etnograficheskii ocherk, 7–37; and Baslov 1974.

17 Such a complementary distribution may also be echoed, in a different way, in a tale, recorded among the Salûs of Sarakhî, that traces the long wanderings of the Salûs, before settling in Sarakhî, to their murder of the 14-year-old son of a Muslim named “Seyit Khojam,” whom they murdered Salûr Qazân and his people; see Dzhikiev 1972, Etnograficheskii ocherk, 14, 46, 100 (the story reflects, for Dzhikiev, a time when the still-pagan Salûs “fought against Muslim missionaries”). The complexity of the relationship between the two heroes, however, is clear from another episode in the Book of Dede Qâpa, in which Salûr Qazân is captured, while out hunting with birds of prey, and lowered into a pit, from which he speaks to his captors, telling them how he torments their dead from his underground enclosure (Dede Korkut Kûlû, ed. Urgin, I, 234–43; tr. Lewis, The Book of Dede Korkut, 171–81); the motive of hunting with birds of prey is a recurrent element of Ahmad Yasavi’s saintly persona, and the narrative cycle involving his subterranean enclosure was noted above.

18 See DeWese 2000a, 362–3.

19 This, in turn, may itself be of relevance for the question of narrative transmission. As noted, our earliest recordings of the narratives identify the people who quarrel with Ahmad Yasavi as a community called “Sûrî” (this form might be interpreted, in an extinct Sufi context, as referring to the shykh’s opponents as “formalist” enemies of Sufism, but another old written version of the narrative gives the people’s name (or that of their village) as “Sûrî” with a š. Even though we can find scattered references, in sources from the 13th, 16th, 19th, and 20th centuries, to a toponym of the form “Sûyîn,” or the like, in the vicinity of the town of Türkistan, it is tempting to see in the orthographic form “sûrî” or “šûrî” a simple error, through the omission or misinterpretation of a šīm, for the etymology “šûrî” or “šûrî” (the error is perhaps more understandable if we assume an original form with sah rather than šin, but is plausible in either case); to do so, however, requires us to suppose a textual, rather than oral, transmission at a very early phase in the development of these traditions.

20 The problem of the relationship between the Yasavi and Bektişî Sufi traditions is a complicated one and cannot be explored here, but we may note that the claims of intimate connection between the two traditions, in terms of doctrine, practice, or organization (with the latter even posited as a ‘branch’ of the former), have no foundation; what is perhaps most significant about the preservation, in Bektişî lore, of old narrative traditions focused on Ahmad Yasavi is that such traditions appear in fossilized form, not as the subject of ongoing elaboration and development (since, after all, the central character for the Bektişîs was not Ahmad Yasavi, but Haji Bektişî himself, who became the focus of the tradition’s narrative devotionalism in the 16th century). The town’s name is given in the form “şûr-i,” suggesting a back-formation from the saint’s name, and in turn further suggesting the fossilized character of the traditions about him.
pretended to search for it; first they went to the place where they themselves had killed the beast and 'found' the traces of it, and then, accompanied by the townspeople, they came to Yasavi's dwelling place and asked permission to search there. The saint allowed them in, and they searched the place; at last, they entered the kitchen and saw the flesh hanging there. When they saw that flesh, Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi boughtr God, and [God] charged those persons into the form of dogs; they came up the flesh entirely, and when the flesh was gone, they tore one another to pieces and destroyed one another.

Thereupon the people of the city realized the truth, and their faith in the saint grew even stronger.22

22 Vilâyat-nâma, ed. Gölparıh, 14; ed. KerkExtra, 32-3; tr. Gross, 29; cf. the pirified version, ed. Noyan, 113-15; and Kopitulle 1918/1984, 54th edıtıyızıina 38, muhasevler, 39. Gross' German paraphrase raises an additional complication possibly rooted in a defective text: it makes Yasavi himself, and not his accusers, undergo the pivotal canine transformation. According to his rendering, when the culprits entered Yasavi's dwelling and accused him, "he changed himself into a dog and tore them to pieces." It has not been possible, unfortunately, to consult the manuscript Gross used as the basis for his study, or the other copies he consulted; Gross identified two families of manuscripts, which he says differed with respect to the order of the stories about Haji Bektaş's youth (including, implicitly, the stories about Yasavi), and although Gross says nothing about this specific element of the story as a point of difference between the two manuscript groups, it is possible that his rendering indeed reflects a manuscript variant that might signal, in turn, a significantly different tradition of the climactic moment in the story of Yasavi and the Dog-Men. However, none of the other available renderings or studies of the Vilâyat-nâma of Haji Bektaş give such a version: Gölparıh's version makes it clear that it is Yasavi's accusers who are transformed into dogs, and the manuscript he used (of which a facsimile was included in the first printing of his work) would appear to belong to the family of manuscripts that Gross adopted as the basis for his study as well (by contrast, the early 19th-century manuscript published in facsimile in the second printing of Gölparıh's work appears to represent the second group of texts identified by Gross, since its account of Yasavi's miracles follows an account of Haji Bektaş's relationship with Leqmam Patana, without the episode of Haji Bektaş rescuing Qubl ad-Din Haydar and converting Badakhshân inntervening [see Vilâyat-nâma, tr. Gross, 219, for the sequence of these sections in the manuscripts he used], but this later manuscript too leaves no question about the canine transformation of Yasavi's accusers, not of Yasavi himself); the pirified Vilâyat-nâma published by Bedi Noyan likewise affirms that the accusers were transformed into dogs, as did the pirified version utilized by Kopitulle. The text available in the 1990 printing of Gölparıh's work, to be sure, is quite unambiguous, specifying "el kemser" as the object of the canine transformation, and it is difficult to imagine how having misconstrued the text; yet it is equally troubling that he made no mention of any discrepancy (he cites Kopitulle's work, after all, which alludes to the Bekşish version of the story of the slaughtered ox in the course of recounting Hazi's version; unfortunately Gölparıh made no reference to Gross' study of the text, or of any difference on this point among manuscript versions, while other students of the Vilâyat-nâma have tended to ignore Gross' work). On balance, the weight of the various versions suggests that the text utilized by Gross was somehow ambiguous, and that, because he was unfamiliar with the gist of the story as given in other sources, he read the text as affirming that Yasavi himself turned into a dog and attacked his accuser; it is of course possible that this indeed reflects a variant tradition, but it seems more likely that Gross' rendering should remind us, again, of the potential pitfalls of approaching such a narrative in isolation.

This Bekşish version, on the one hand, is full of details—the place where the ox was slaughtered and dismembered (and the culprits' pretense of finding evidence of the ox's killing there), the fact that only its meat was carried to the saint's dwelling, the culprits' successive search of the town, Yasavi's home, and finally his kitchen, and the specific moment in their search when they were turned into dogs—that is missing altogether from other versions of the story, but on the other hand it in turn omits elements that became central in those other versions, namely the curse of bearing tails, and its hereditary and communal character; the Bekşish tradition also omits, of course, the entire 'other half' of the story, namely the murder of Yasavi's son, but many oral and written recordings omit this as well. In any event, the preservation of irrelevant details, alongside the omission of the central point of the story as developed in other versions, again seems to point to the essentially fossilized nature of the story within Bekşish tradition.

Unfortunately, in terms of textual 'control,' the story of the stolen ox is not found in the most important Yasavi hagiographical work produced in Central Asia, the Lamabat min nasabat al-şuq, by 'Ālim Shakhkhi of 'Alyabād, from the early 17th century—which does, however, include the account of the murder of Yasavi's son—but it is clearly echoed in a work from the same era, the Sayyid Aţâ'i Manaqib al-âbâr (which, in turn, omits any hint of the story of Yasavi's son).23 According to the latter work, the "chastisement of the Sûnîyân," as the hostile community is collectively called, was among the compelling miracles of Aţâ'i Yasavi, and this hostile community's effrontery entailed clear communal consequences:

... one night, out of utter villainy, the elders of that blameworthy tribe slaughtered a cow and hid it in one of the corners of his khânaqâh. In the morning they raised an outcry, saying, "He stole our cow last night and killed it in this khânaqâh!" The holy saint said, "If you find a trace of it, I will submit." Then those wretches hurried to the place where they had hidden the slaughtered cow, in order to find the evidence, heaping scorn on the saint as they went; when they came upon the cow, God gave them the appearance of dogs. And to this day, whoever has come into existence from the stock and lineage of that despicable group has borne a tail (shonîd mîrîd).24

By far the fullest hagiographical versions of the story of the stolen ox, finally, appear in two works by Hazini, an important Yasavi writer who was born in Central Asia, in Hîsar (in present-day Tajikistan), but moved to Istanbul; in both of these works, Hazini includes both the account of the stolen ox and the story of the murdered son, and stresses the spiritual lessons to be drawn from each account. The earliest version appears in Hazini's Persian Jami' al-marâşid, written

23 On these two works, respectively, see DeWeese 1999a and DeWeese 1993.
24 Muḥammad Qâsim "Râvân," Manaqib al-âbâr, MS India Office, f. 23b (described in Ethnt, Catalogue, cols. 268-270, No. 649); MS Rampur, ff. 29b-30a.
in 972/1564-65:²⁵ it identifies the culprits as “a people from the village called Şuri,” who conspired together and one night killed a cow, which they secretly placed in Yasavi’s ḡarīqah, through a window, planning to accuse him, the next day, of theft. When morning came, they gathered and demanded that Yasavi allow them to search for their missing cow in his ḡarīqah; several men hurried in, and Yasavi said, “ارية التهير” (“Go in, dogs!”), or, as Ḥaznī translates, “Enter, you wicked and malicious dogs!” Some of those who had gathered hesitated to go in, and when they looked inside, they saw that those who had hurried into the ḡarīqah appeared in the form of dogs, tearing at the cow’s flesh and snapping at one another. The “tribe” became apologetic and sought Yasavi’s forgiveness; the shaykh blessed them, and told them that their hesitation had saved them. Nevertheless, “tails remained upon them, and their children and descendants as well are not free of tails, down to the present, so that they call those hypocrites ‘Tail-bearing’” (dashūṭi).²⁶

Ḥaznī’s Ottoman Turkish Jāvāhīr al-ʿābrār, completed in 1002/1593-94, gives much the same account, but adds a few elements worth noting.²⁷ It adds that by Yasavi’s prayers, even those who had taken on the appearance of dogs regained their previous form, but emphasizes that the tails borne by “their tribe and people and descendants” were intended to set them apart and curse them. It also adds what may be an allusion to the cause of the conflict between Yasavi and the people of the village of Şuri,” who, we are told, sought water, in the town of Yasi, for their fields, thus leading them into a quarrel with the shaykh. The precise character of the quarrel is not clarified, but the ensuing dispute, writes Ḥaznī, ultimately led the people to “destroy their fields in the next world and burn the storehouse of their posterity.” On the one hand this element serves Ḥaznī’s constant purpose of “spiritualizing” the narrative and drawing specific doctrinal lessons from it; on the other hand, a quite “external” dispute over water rights figures in oral versions of the story. A variant recorded in southern Kazakhstan, for example, retains neither the murder of Yasavi’s son nor the stolen ox, but explains the departure of Aṣman and Qarāman from Türkistan as a result of Yasavi’s refusal to give them water with which to irrigate their fields; Yasavi instead cursed them and turned them into man-eating dogs.²⁸ A final and more significant addition, however, is Ḥaznī’s affirmation in this work of a specific link between the narrative’s content and actual ritual practice at Yasavi’s shrine: those who now appeal for some blessing through Yasavi’s spirit, Ḥaznī tells us, and sacrifice an ox at his shrine (fulfilling other conditions as well), will obtain their goals. As in another case we will note below, this ritual connection noted by Ḥaznī confirms the role of Yasavi’s shrine as a focal point for narrative traditions, in oral circulation, that were drawn upon by compilers of hagiographical works.

As noted, our earliest recording of the full story of the murder of Ahmad Yasavi’s son appears only in the works of Ḥaznī from the 16th century. There is clearly an early echo, however, of a tradition about such an event already in the Türkic treatise of İshaq Khwaja b. İsmā’īl Ḍaṭtar, who belonged to an important but little-known Yasavi Sufi lineage, from the mid-14th century.²⁹ Here the account follows a discussion of the Prophet’s solicitude even for the souls of unbelievers, relating how he prayed to God not to destroy the ğafır, but to show them the right path; Yasavi, likewise, we are told, did not even sigh when the “persecutors” (maddās-i-khār) martyred his only son, but implored God to show the killers the straight path, and further used the occasion to instruct his disciples about the difference between the human retributive impulse represented in the ṣarī’s, and the higher path of the ṭarīqah, which, he explained, consists of patience and forbearance, even to those who do you harm. This brief account provides no narrative details or explanation, but affirms that Yasavi’s reaction to the death of his son was one of stoic acceptance; it is doubly instructive insofar as it records the doctrinal lessons of this event in words ascribed to Ahmad Yasavi himself, thereby reminding us that for a Sufi community linked to Yasavi, such doctrinal lessons – especially those born of bitter experience whose pain hardly needed any narrative elaboration – were of central importance, the “story” that underlay them less so.

A possible, but in several respects problematic, earlier allusion to the death of Ahmad Yasavi’s son – one that casts his death as purely hypothetical, however – may be found in the well-known Mantiq al-taṣārīf of Farid al-Din ʿAttar, where a figure called the “Pr of Türkistan” is reported to have lamented his own “idolatry” in holding dear his horse and his son; “Should I receive word of the death of this boy,” he is made to declare, “I would give up the horse in thanksgiving at the news.”³⁰ It is possible that the “Pr-i Türkistan” known to ʿAttar was indeed Ahmad Yasavi, and that this brief passage alludes to a story, perhaps in circulation quite early, about the martyrdom of Yasavi’s son; however, the hypothetical

²⁵ Ḥaznī, Jami’ al-mushribin, MS Berlin, ff. 760-77a (see the description in Eilers and Heinz, Verzeichnis, 274-5, No. 352).
²⁶ Ḥaznī’s 16th-century reference to this apparent communal designation is not reflected in other sources, but is echoed in the familial group of southern Kazakhstan known as the Qiykładıaghi khıkas; their name alludes to a small bone (qiyykładıag) associated with the fatty tail (in Persian, donb) of a sheep, and their oral tradition affirms that the killers of Yasavi’s son were among their ancestors. According to their traditions, Yasavi asked God to place a distinguishing mark on the killers and their descendant; God thus caused a small protrusion to appear on the tip of the killers’ spines, and from then on, generation by generation, members of the clan descended from the killers have been marked by this distinctive feature (Mustafina 1992, Pıdestalentia, 53, 76-77).
²⁷ Ḥaznī, Jāvāhīr al-ʿābrār, MS Istanbul, 101-103; ed. Okuyucu, 60.
²⁸ See Agažhanov 1969, Odereri siyirii ugra topkum, 228.
²⁹ İshaq Khwaja b. İsmā’īl Ḍaṭtar, Risāla, MS Kabul, f. 253b; MS Tahkhent, No. 252, f. 74a, and No. 300f, f. 172b.
character of the statement, as well as the absence of any allusion to the son's murder, suggests that the account might well have referred originally to some other figure (or to some symbolic personage), and only later came to be linked with the specific content of narratives about Ahmadi Nasi (there is in fact no echo, in 'Attar's brief account, of that specific content, involving the hostile community, the scene of the murder, or the conceit of the unripe melon). It is also possible, of course, that stories about the death of Nasr's son were developed already in response to this passage from 'Attar's work, once Ahmadi Nasi became known as the preeminent saint of Turkestan.

In any case, there is no doubt about the impact of 'Attar's verse on at least some literary formulations of hagiographical narratives about Ahmadi Nasi; both of Nasi's versions of this story unmistakably echo 'Attar's account of the Pir-i Turkestan (though only the latter one explicitly refers to it). In his earlier work, the Jami' al-murshidin, Nasi begins his account by affirming that Nasr one day noted that he still bore traces to two things, as to an idol: "one is my son Ibrahim, and the second is my piebald horse; I will give that horse to whoever brings news of my son's death." After this clear evocation of 'Attar's verse, Nasi then explains that the same malevolent people who had earlier plotted against the saint "found the prince Ibrahim, who was twelve years old, and had not yet reached the age of maturity, asleep at the place of seclusion, and martyred him." The killers then took his head, in a kherf, to Nasr, and explained that it was newly picked fruit; Nasr declared, "It would have been better if they had plucked it ripe." Nasi here adds—whether merely to continue the metaphor or to explain away what might be construed as a somewhat flippant comment—that these words were based in part upon recognition that the boy, if he had grown up, would have found "the sweet taste of servitude to God." In any event, Nasi then affirms that Nasr indeed gave his horse to the boy's killer, and gave him also "a daughter from his family" in marriage, "so that from then on no one would stir up disputes with him or claim a blood-price, and he would remain secure."

In his later Jami' al-abrar, Nasi gives essentially the same account, but comes close to implying that the renewed hostility of the "people of Sur" was in effect inspired by Nasr's "offer" to give his horse to whoever brought him word of his son's death; the episode ends with Nasr giving his horse and its gear to the murderer, and giving his daughter as well, "to serve as the blood-claim," so that enmity might not endure between them, and in this case Nasi affirms that "Shaykh 'Attar" had learned of this story and included it in his Manzil al-izhar. The latter element, of course, appears transparently tendentious, and indeed the initial explanation for Ibrahim's murder—that the people of Sur were, in effect, inspired to kill him by Nasr's announcement of a "reward" for whoever brought news of his son's death—seems a quite clumsy and superfluous narrative device through which to link the deed of a people explicitly described as hostile to Nasr with the content of 'Attar's account. We may rightly suspect, then, that both of Nasi's accounts were heavily shaped, in their presentation, by his acquaintance with the Manzil al-izhar.

However, Nasi's account also makes it clear that he had direct acquaintance with narrative tradition rooted at the shrine of Ahmadi Nasr, where, no doubt, the specific content of the story of the murder of Nasr's son was in oral circulation, quite independent of 'Attar's literary allusions: each year, Nasi tells us, "blood flows openly from the place where [Ibrahim] was killed beneath the tree," and is collected in red bottles; pilgrims (ka'atirin wa 't'allatin) take the blood and use it to cure many illnesses. As noted, Nasi also described a ritual tie-in in connection with the story of the stolen ox, but this case is more clearly of interest with regard to the construction of Nasi's version of the narrative; this echo of shrine-centered tradition suggests that Nasi has fused local orally-circulated lore from Nasr's Turkestan with elements of 'Attar's literary account, and other elements too suggest that his account has merely been shaped, and not formulated entirely, on the basis of 'Attar's verse (including the mention of Nasr's daughter, given in marriage to the murderer, an element that may well reflect narratives circulated at Nasr's shrine by claimants to descent from Nasr through his daughter, or by rival groups, but one to which 'Attar makes no allusion whatsoever).

As it stands, then, Nasi's account would seem to reflect an interweaving of elements clearly drawn from oral tradition with elements so closely paralleling 'Attar's story that we must assume either a straightforward recounting of real events by both 'Attar and Nasi, or the latter writer's heavy debt to the former. The second alternative seems preferable, since it appears likely that Nasi simply framed his understanding of the traditions he received about Nasr and the people of Sur in terms of the "classical" treatment by 'Attar; indeed, what distinguishes Nasi's two versions from other treatments is the obvious attempt to clothe the narratives in Sufi terminology and interpretation, in order to draw lessons from them suitable for Sufi adepts. Nasi has fleshed out the stories considerably, and has done so on the basis of both literary reference (which makes the story more widely resonant) and ritual performance (evidently based upon
traditions about Yasavi's shrine known to the author through his own zijvat there, as seems likely, or through second-hand reports).

A generation after Hazini wrote, and quite independently of his works, Âlim Shaykh included in the Lâmahât an account of the murder of Yasavî's son; it bears no evidence of familiarity with 'Attâr's account, but includes the specific 'folkloric' elements found in Hazini's versions and in other recordings as well. The account from the Lâmahât is quite concise: when Yasavi began urging the people of Turkistan toward the path of God,

a group of ignorant people called Sûrî, because of their wholesale hatred and internal malevolence toward that holy man, in utter contempt dispatched his beloved son, still a child, to the rank of martyrdom; they wrapped up the head of that delicate youth in a kerchief and brought it to Sulân [Khwâtja Ahmad Yasavi], saying it was a melon. Before he opened it, he said, "They have picked it before it was ripe" and for their offense, God made tails appear among that tribe.

Nevertheless, concludes the account, Âhmad Yasavi stayed there and gave advice and counsel to that community.34

The Lâmahât's account thus shares with others an emphasis upon Yasavi's forbearance, and affirms the shaykh's continued relationship with the community responsible for his loss. What is most remarkable, perhaps, and most indicative of a much broader narrative repertoire from which Âlim Shaykh may have condensed his tense account, is the absence of any explanation of why bearing tails should have been an appropriate punishment for the murder of the saint's son; the Lâmahât thus omits the entire story of the stolen ox, but transfers the consequence of the crime transformation involved in that story into the account of the murdered son. This in itself is significant, for it implies that the stories of the stolen ox and the murdered son were indeed transmitted together down to some indeterminable time prior to their partial dissociation in the Lâmahât's text. It is of course difficult to judge whether the story of the stolen ox was consciously omitted by Âlim Shaykh, as an 'editorial choice' made in the course of adapting whatever narrative source, oral or written, was available to him; the story may have been omitted already in that source. Even if the omission should be ascribed to Âlim Shaykh himself, we cannot automatically assume that this reflected his suspicion of the story, or even his doubt about its didactic worth, and, consequently, his conscious decision to suppress it; after all, the spare, telegraphic version of the story in the Lâmahât may simply suggest that the narrative was widely known and could be fleshed out, during recitations at Sûfî gatherings, for instance, on the basis of the work's narrative 'prompts.' Alternatively, it is quite possible that the version of the story received by Âlim Shaykh, whether in oral or written form, had already been garbled and simply made no sense to him. In short, even if we had a clearer understanding of the sources available to Âlim Shaykh, we would be quite limited in what we could rightly infer from his curious treatment of a narrative we know more fully from other oral and written versions.

For a reader unfamiliar with more complete versions of the story, however, the Lâmahât's account would undoubtedly make little sense, and could thus lead not merely to misunderstandings, based on the uncertainties inherent in a textual transmission, but to the willful introduction of extraneous interpretations rooted in a desire to make sense out of a story already excessively abbreviated, and hence garbled, in transmission. A 19th-century scholar of Bukhârâ, for example, who was clearly unfamiliar with the point of the stories, repeated the Lâmahât's brief account, but added his own explanation of the punishment assigned to the offending tribe; and even though the manuscripts of the Lâmahât I have been able to consult (and of another work that repeated the Lâmahât's version of the story) explicitly vow the significant word as "dami," meaning "tail," this author evidently interpreted the word as "dami" ("breath," "odor"), and explained further that the offending tribe took on a "horrendous odor" as punishment, such that "no one can stand in a room where even one member of that tribe might be," due to the intensity of the stench.35 When we see the textual development that has led to this sort of gross misunderstanding, we are justified in asking how many of our earlier written versions of these narratives -- including not only these hagiographical adaptations, but those incorporated into the 'histrigraphical' venues of Rashid al-Din or Abu'l-Ghazzâ -- reflect a similar pattern of misunderstandings, abbreviations, or conscious 'doctoral' adjustments of a story preserved more completely (though with a different complement of adaptational parameters) in some oral versions.36

Regardless of the obvious value of a datable written recording, then, the written texts have several limitations (rooted not only in the interests of their constituencies, but in specific misunderstandings within an often 'telegraphed' narrative form); more broadly, we must be cautious in assuming the greater 'reliability' or thoroughness of early written versions of such narratives, and we must recognize the dangers inherent in understanding and interpreting such narratives entirely from within a particular textual or manuscript tradition.

As a final example of a written work reflecting multiple layers of oral and written texts we may consider the account of a 20th-century shrine-guide to the region of Turkistan, compiled by a certain Şâfâ-bêk-ul-Sâdîq (1904-1982); in this case we have versions of both stories, and they seem to be based on oral tradition, etc.

34 Âlim Shaykh, Lâmahât, MS St. Petersburg, f. 14b (described in Mikkulho-Maklî, Optuvarî, 133-35, No. 187).
35 Mit Musayyab Bukhârâ, untitled hagiographical compendium, MS St. Petersburg, f. 444a (see the description of the manuscript in Tagirzhano, Oktuvarî, 362-68, No. 150).
36 Such 'doctoral' adjustments are also encountered in oral versions, of course, as in the explanation of the origin of the peculiarly Yasavi form of the verbal dekr from the saint's cry upon hearing of his son's murder; see Troitskaya 1928, 186.
or to reflect considerable development, in an oral venue, of versions perhaps drawn originally from written sources.\footnote{Sapudekuli, “Türkistan dağları tarihî ziyaret,” ed. Imanzhanov and Zhurzhueva, 126-128; the original account was written in Qazaq using the Arabic script.}

This work’s account explains that Yasavi’s enemies in Turkistan, jealous of his success in attracting followers, one day found the shykh’s son Ibrahim near an irrigation ditch (arşı) and shut him up in a “coffin” (tabihi); they took it to Yasavi and told him it was a certain kind of melon, whereupon Yasavi declared that it was not yet mature and had been picked unripe. He said nothing else, the account affirms, but one of the Sufis with him could not match his master’s restraint, and began to hurl curses at the culprits: their melons would be the size of apples, their hair would fall out, their sons would be dull-witted, their daughters would be mute, and protrusions would appear on their tail-bones (if they tried to hide this, moreover, they would die). These words could not be taken back: each had its effect, and all the curses were fulfilled; in this context we learn, moreover, that stunted melons grew in their fields along the irrigation ditch called “Süyni,” thus echoing the name of the ‘village’ or ‘tribe’ known from earlier recordings of the story. At this point, however, the account shifts its focus to two men identified as Yasavi’s first enemies in Turkistan, who are assigned the names “Akhman” and “Qaraman;” they killed an ox, hid it in Yasavi’s barn (sahatbanı), accused him of stealing people’s cattle by night, and appealed to the khan (who is not assigned a name) to investigate. The khan agreed, and Akhman and Qaraman themselves went into the barn to get the carcass they had placed there; but as they came out, Akhman turned into a white dog and Qaraman into a black one, and the two dogs began fighting over the animal’s flesh. The people acknowledged Yasavi’s sainthood and drove the dogs away; they eventually migrated westwards, harming each community they came to and then fleeing, until both dogs were at last killed by a young man named Manghêtiya.

This exceptionally rich written version not only combines both “halves” of the tale (the murdered son and the stolen ox), but includes various details attested already in Hzaini’s account — the ruse of the melon, the tails — as well; it also includes the name of Yasavi’s son, which is omitted in many versions, and clearly echoes the name “Süyn,” which in this version, however, has become merely the name of an arşı (an irrigation canal by that name is indeed mentioned in 18th- and 19th-century descriptions of the environs of Turkistan).\footnote{Bekchurin 1866, 216; cf. Dobrovol’sky 1912, Goroda Sred’Dn’iskoi oblasti, 113, citing earlier accounts.} This account is also noteworthy for distinguishing the community condemned to bear tails from the culprits who were turned into dogs, and for deferring responsibility for the curse onto one of Yasavi’s disciples; the curse itself is significantly expanded, with elements seemingly drawn from oral venues. The curse of bearing tails (or the equivalent), moreover, is linked not with the story of the stolen ox, where it makes more sense in the narrative’s moral logic, but with the story of the murdered son, echoing the misplaced handling of the tails evident in the Lamahût (which, however, unlike this version, omitted the story of the stolen ox altogether); yet it is not the tails that are highlighted as the communal consequences of the offense against the saint, but the stunted melons their fields brought forth, marking a quite different, and otherwise untested, evocation of the story’s moral symmetry, this time rooted in Yasavi’s lament about the unripe melon. The transition to the second episode, in any case, is altogether abrupt and disjointed, suggesting on the one hand some distance from the contrived transition supplied in the literary versions, and on the other hand an understanding that the two parts of the story, however unconnected they may seem, were nevertheless received together as a single narrative unit. The appearance of a ruler in the story of the stolen ox is also noteworthy; his absence from the literary versions might suggest a later insertion here, but in fact the ruler serves no evident purpose in the narrative (such as would suggest some motive for a later addition), while a ruler does figure in several oral versions of the story, and his absence from the literary versions might represent yet another example of a hagiographical author’s disregard for a part of the received oral tradition not immediately relevant to a spiritualized telling of the tale. Finally, the name “Manghêtiya,” assigned to the dogs’ killer, is otherwise unknown in this context, but the role he plays — as a hunter, in effect, who pursues the dogs — is echoed in several versions of this story preserved in Qazaq, Qaraqalpaq, and Türkmen oral tradition; yet despite retaining this and other echoes from the oral variants that serve as communal legends of origin, this version once again focuses on the saint rather than on any community formed through the encounter with him.\footnote{The retention, in the more restricted venue of hagiographical traditions about a particular saint, of narrative elements suggestive of the saint’s role, at some point, in broader legends of communal origin, is evidenced in another set of stories about Ahmad Yasavi (discussed in DeWese 2000a), to some degree in stories about Suyyid ‘Ali Hamadânî (see DeWese 1992, 149-53), and possibly in the case of Najâd-Dîn Kûbra (see DeWese 2000b); a similar pattern is evident in traditions about the Islamicizing saint Suyyid Ata. A contrary process, of the virtual disappearance of a saint’s hagiographical personality and a concomitant elaboration of his role in communal origins, is evident in the traditions I have elsewhere explored about Bûha Tûkûs, though even in this case, examples may be found of attempts to retrospectively dispute the saint’s hagiographical profile (e.g., DeWese 1994, Islamization and Native Religion, 352-41).}

This version, in short, seems to represent an almost seamless interweaving of elements drawn from, and elaborated within, oral tradition, with elements reflected quite similarly in earlier literary versions. It is unfortunately not clear whether this version’s author had access to any of the known literary accounts; he almost certainly did not know any of Hzaini’s works (each of which survives in only one manuscript, preserved outside Central Asia), but it is possible that the Lamahût or some account based upon it was available to him. It is more likely, however, that the author had access only to oral versions of the story,
which earlier had been shaped in part, perhaps, by literary versions such as the Lanahul's. In any case, this late literary version may offer the best illustration of the long development of intersecting oral and written accounts, and of the inadequacy of approaching its text without consideration of the fuller narrative repertoire, drawn both from earlier written accounts and from oral recordings.

More broadly, these few examples may suggest some of the issues we face in the written records of narrative traditions that continued to develop independently in oral venues, and continued to intersect with and reshape the written versions that have come down to us. Attempting to trace specific narrative elements in and out of oral and written venues is in itself a useful and informative task, but it also has implications for our understanding and treatment of the extant written sources in which our narratives are preserved. Even with the surviving textual records of such narratives as we have considered here—whether in hagiographical works or the broader range of 'sacred historical' sources—we are often dealing with texts that were never regarded by their authors or compilers or copyists as unique works whose proper mode of transmission lay in the correct copying, so far as could be achieved, of an original text without alteration, without modernization, and without revitalization—in short, without reflecting a living and changing tradition.

On the contrary, to speak of hagiographical sources alone, we often encounter not separate and inviolate texts focused on a particular saint, but families of texts that grew 'in contact' with one another, even when maintaining a formally separate identity, under a specific title and linked with a specific author; as examples may be noted not only the relatively sparse body of hagiographical and narrative material surrounding the figure of Ahmad Yasavi, but the several hagiographical works, and their redactions, produced by the first generation of the disciples of Baha' al-Din Naqshband, or the hagiographical corpus focused on the 16th-century Kubravi saint of Central Asia, Husayn Kiwârabzâmi (there are numerous other examples). In such cases, it may make little sense to edit a single 'work.' what is needed is a comprehensive study of the entire family of clearly related texts, and the development of an appropriate (and quite possibly ad hoc) mode of presenting both textual and narrative variants, across both redactions and mere copies, without, however, obscuring the actual structure of existing texts (and in the process, ideally, incorporating relevant variants of specific narratives preserved outside the given family of texts—since, after all, each narrative, or narrative complex, even, is itself a 'text' susceptible to an editor's analysis, and indeed needful of such analysis, if it is to reveal its secrets).

The point here is that we are still ill-equipped, in terms of theory and methodology, to deal with this material. The issues faced in dealing with such material are not wholly or even largely covered by theoretical and methodological frameworks developed for historical analysis, for which we have, readily at hand, a series of 'advantages' (though in some cases they may be thought of as limitations) that we do not possess when our task is the tracking and analysis of narrative traditions in their own right; that is, for historical analysis we have not only other types of sources (both written and 'plastic,' i.e., other products of material culture), but a presumed underlying historical reality that is reflected, approximated, or purposefully distorted in a given textual source. In the case of our hagiographical or 'sacred historical' sources, however, we have only the narrative traditions themselves, which can occasionally be construed, to be sure, as reflections or evocations of an actual life or event, but which are more often much richer semantic structures, fraught with adaptations of symbolic and prescriptive conventions that shape and inform a paradigmatic life, and construed for didactic, exemplary, and competitive purposes that are in themselves potentially revealing about social history.

To deal with such material, I would argue, it is important to understand the religious meaning underlying both oral and written representations of a given narrative as itself a 'text' constructed out of multiple sources (including, in the present case, Islamic paradigms as well as elements of pre-Islamic lore), and to understand that this meaning is 'written' not only in books, but in the memories of those to whom it is meaningful: it is then 'written,' even more broadly, beyond the explicit narrative form in oral tradition, when it shapes shrine landscapes and structures that are 'read' by pilgrims, and shapes ritual and devotional practices that are performed by still wider social circles. Each of these venues—written hagiography, oral tradition, shrine 'architecture,' and ritual performance—must be explored as, in effect, a source of 'textual' variants that must be consulted in understanding and interpreting the system of meaning conveyed or reflected at any given moment; and here, naturally, the goal cannot be simply the pursuit of an archetypal meaning, but an understanding of each 'variant,' and of each audience that brought to the 'text' its own expectations and references.

If, then, our goal is to understand the religious meaning conveyed by particular hagiographical traditions, to understand that religious meaning as an integral part of the history of its age, and to understand that religious meaning as itself an important 'text' that can illuminate the history of its age, we must develop other strategies for analyzing such traditions; those strategies must naturally include analytical frameworks for understanding religious change as a social process, but they will also inevitably include new approaches to the interplay of written and oral traditions and to the interpretation of older textual recordings of orally transmitted narratives.