

The Historical and Contemporary Significance Of Research On “Saloti Mas’udiy”

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Abstract: The work “Saloti Mas’udiy” by Mas’ud ibn Mahmud ibn Yusuf Samarkandi (late 13th century – early 14th century) is a voluminous text in the genre of “Fatwa”, addressing practical legal and religious issues of Muslims following the Hanafi school in Transoxiana. This article provides a historical and contemporary study of the work, discussing the author’s biography, the historical significance of “Saloti Mas’udiy”, its structural analysis, and the extant manuscripts, lithographs, and translations preserved in global collections. Some contemporary jurisprudential issues are addressed based on the principles outlined in “Saloti Mas’udiy”.

Keywords: Mas’ud Samarkandi, “Saloti Mas’udiy”, fiqh, Hanafi school, fatwa, legal question, “Manaqib”, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah, global collections, manuscript, lithograph, Persian language, Turkic language, Islamic history, source studies.

Introduction: Identifying and studying the intellectual heritage of scholars who contributed to the development of world science is of great contemporary significance. As stated, “We take rightful pride in the bright pages of the great history of the Turkic world created collectively by our esteemed ancestors. Preserving this invaluable heritage, studying it deeply, and passing it on to future generations is our foremost duty” [1].

A significant portion of our ancestors’ scholarly heritage is constituted by jurisprudential works within the Hanafi school. Among them, Mas’ud ibn Mahmud ibn Yusuf Samarkandi’s “مسعودي صلوة” (“The Ṣalāt of Mas’ud”) (late 13th – early 14th century) is recognized as a comprehensive fatwa work addressing all aspects of Shariah in the Hanafi legal tradition.

In the contemporary context, adherence to a particular jurisprudential school remains particularly relevant, as it prevents conflicts and disputes. In this regard, “Saloti Mas’udiy” has retained unique scholarly significance for Persian and Turkic-speaking communities of its time and subsequent centuries.

Main Body

“Saloti Mas’udiy” gained wide popularity due to its importance in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and its coverage of diverse legal questions, attracting

significant interest from scholars and students. However, the work had not been systematically studied or incorporated into modern scholarship. Research providing systematic information about Mas’ud ibn Mahmud Samarkandi’s life, personality, and scholarly legacy is scarce.

Analysis of manuscripts and lithographs of “Saloti Mas’udiy” preserved in the main fonds of the Institute of Oriental Studies named after Abu Rayhan Beruni of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, the Hamid Sulaymonov collection, the library of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, and the Resources Treasury of the Uzbekistan International Islamic Academy has provided the following information about the author:

The first Turkic translation of “Saloti Mas’udiy” was made in 1284/1867 in Khorezm by Mullah Habibullah ibn Qazi Muhammad Tayyib Khorezmi (late 19th – early 20th century), who emphasized in his introduction that Mas’ud Samarkandi was a great imam and mujtahid [2]. From his statement that “he could translate it into Turkic”, it can be inferred that Mas’ud Samarkandi was proficient not only in Persian and Arabic but also in Turkic languages.

Additional insights into the author are provided in the 1904 Turkic translation by Rahimkhoja Alikhoja Eshon oghli:

“Know that the distinguished, meticulous scholar, jurist, and unique fiqh authority Mas’ud Samarkandi, son of Mahmud (may Allah forgive him and his ancestors), authored the book “Saloti Mas’udiy”, the likes of which the world has never seen. He translated complex legal issues from Arabic into Persian, producing a beloved and revered book for Persian readers, leaving a precious legacy” [3].

The work, which was widely read by the peoples of Central Asia, belongs to the pen of the Samarkand-based faqih Mas’ud ibn Mahmud ibn Yusuf Samarkandi. Anke von Kügelgen, however, speculated that it might have been written by the famous Khorasan scholar Sa’duddin Mas’ud Taftazani (722/1322–792/1390). “I could not find evidence confirming the existence of this manuscript. Perhaps it refers to a passage taken from the work of the scholar Sa’duddin Mas’ud Taftazani (d. 1390), who was highly respected in Central Asia” [4]. According to Ghanijon Makhmudov, a German language specialist, the first sentence in this note, “Diese Schrift konnte ich nicht nachweisen”, can be translated as “I could not verify this manuscript”, which would be appropriate in this context.

One Iranian researcher, Ali Safari, in his article titled “Persian Text of the 6th Hijri Century” notes that he had difficulty determining the period in which Mas’ud Samarkandi lived [5]. He confuses him with another faqih, Mas’udi, who lived in the 12th-13th centuries CE. The same information is cited by Zubayda Shadkam and Ikhtiyar Paltore in their article “A Chagatai Manuscript: Şalāt-i Mas’udī in Turkic” [6]. However, subsequent research concluded that Mas’ud ibn Mahmud ibn Yusuf Samarkandi lived at the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century. The exact date of the writing of his work is unknown. Nevertheless, based on similar historical sources and the fact that the oldest surviving manuscript [7] dates back to 1333 CE, it can be considered a work of the 14th century.

Discussion

During the late 13th and early 14th centuries, in the period following the Mongol invasions, the branches of literature, science, culture, and art – which had suffered decline – began to revive as a result of the reactivation of economic life in both urban and rural areas. A distinctive feature of this period was, firstly, the gradual replacement of Arabic with Persian as the primary scholarly and literary language, and secondly, an increasing demand for practical works rather than purely theoretical treatises. A prime example of this trend is “Saloti Mas’udiy”, a Hanafi fatwa work focused on “furu’ al-fiqh” (practical jurisprudence), composed in three volumes.

Mas’ud Samarkandi distinguishes his work by including

the “Manaqib” (biographical virtues) of Abu Hanifa at the outset, setting it apart from other jurisprudential sources. Typically, works in the “Manaqib” genre were written as separate texts and encompassed a wide array of rich information. Based on these details, it can be inferred that in Transoxiana, the portrayal of Abu Hanifa’s personality adapted over time, reflecting the ideological challenges faced by Hanafi scholars. His character was presented as an exemplary model for artisans, merchants, and members of the urban middle class in their daily lives [8].

Thus, Mas’ud Samarkandi’s “Manaqib” was contextually written for its time, not only highlighting Abu Hanifa’s intellectual achievements as a leading scholar, jurist, and hadith expert, but also emphasizing his qualities as an ascetic, pious, devout, generous, and virtuous individual. In doing so, the work served as a moral exemplar for the wider public and encouraged adherence to the Hanafi school.

In the introduction of “Saloti Mas’udiy”, Mas’ud Samarkandi devotes particular attention to the doctrinal content of the work by outlining the fundamental principles of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah creed. This emphasis demonstrates that the work is a significant source not only for jurisprudential (fiqh) studies but also for theological (aqidah) discourse.

To address the prevailing deficiencies in the public’s understanding of Hanafi fiqh and the teachings of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah, the author allocated approximately two-thirds (67%) of the text to issues of worship, ethics, and creed, 12.6% to social and daily-life jurisprudential matters, 13.6% to economic and financial questions, and 6.8% to criminal law. Thanks to the scholarly efforts of Mas’ud Samarkandi and other ulama active in Transoxiana, the Hanafi school maintained its status as the official jurisprudential tradition in the region.

Research indicates that the author drew upon a total of 88 works for the “Saloti Mas’udiy”, transmitted hadiths from 125 prominent companions, and cited narratives from 149 imams and jurists [10]. Subsequent generations of scholars extensively referenced “Saloti Mas’udiy” in their own works. Notable examples include Alauddin Bukhari (13th-14th centuries) in “Hayratu-l-Fuqaha”, Muhammad ibn Ahmad Zahid (d. 632/1234) in “Targib as-Salat wa Taysir al-Ahkam”, Sufi Allohyor (1644-1724) in “Maslak al-Muttaqin”, and Afzali (17th-18th centuries) in “Majma’ al-Masa’il”, all of whom incorporated quotations from Mas’ud Samarkandi’s text in their fatwa collections.

Mas’ud Samarkandi’s “Saloti Mas’udiy” was widely studied in mosques, madrasas, and among the general

public. Consequently, between the 14th and 20th centuries, numerous manuscript copies of the work were transcribed by scribes in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Khokand, Shash, Taraz, and other urban centers.

With the advent of print, from the 18th to the 20th centuries, the text was repeatedly published in Tashkent, Samarkand, as well as in Bombay and Delhi in India, Lahore in Pakistan, and other cities.

Today, multiple manuscript and printed copies of “Saloti Mas’udiy” are preserved in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the library of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, the State Literature Museum named after Alisher Navoi, the Center for Islamic Civilization, the Literature Museum of Kokand, and the online Mamun Library.

Additionally, a total of 227 copies – comprising 116 manuscripts and 111 printed editions – are held in various international collections, including Harvard and Stanford Universities in the United States, Umm al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia, Kazan Federal University in Russia, the Institute of Asian Peoples, the library of the Islamic Consultative Assembly in Tehran, the Bangladesh Online Digital Library, the King Ghazi Library in Jordan, the Noor International Microfilm Center in India and Tehran, the Ayatollah Marashi Najafi Library in Iran, the Konya Museum in Turkey, and the National Library of Kazakhstan.

The oldest manuscript of “Saloti Mas’udiy” is preserved in the “Fundmental” collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan under registration number R:4041. Dated to 1333 CE (14th century), this manuscript is not divided into volumes and consists of 83 chapters. Another manuscript, preserved under registration number R:2639 and dated 1650 CE (17th century), is divided into three volumes, with the first volume containing 18 chapters and the second volume 25 chapters.

Over time, the number of chapters in the manuscripts has varied; however, the topics and overall content of the work have remained unchanged. An increase in chapter count is attributable to the detailed commentary on certain sections of the earlier manuscripts, as well as the addition of chapter numbering in subsequent copies and printed editions. Conversely, a decrease in chapters indicates the condensation of the text.

Among printed editions, the oldest is preserved under registration number 7664 in the same collection, published in Lahore in 1885 by Shaykh Oliy Bakhsh.

Due to demand, a second edition was issued in 1892. Two copies held in the Hamid Sulaimon collection were printed in 1886 in Nulkeshwar and Lahore, representing some of the earliest examples of printed editions [9].

Thus, the preservation of numerous manuscript and printed copies of “Saloti Mas’udiy”, its widespread dissemination across different regions, and its repeated publication attest to the high demand for the work and underscore its scholarly, spiritual, and legal significance.

In the 19th century, “Saloti Mas’udiy” was translated from Persian into Turkic. This translation process was carried out by translators in Khorezm, Kokand, and Samarkand. Of the five existing Turkic translations, three survive as manuscripts and two as printed editions. Subsequently, these translations were repeatedly published.

Comparative analysis indicates that all translations produced by Mulla Habibullah ibn Qazi Muhammad Tayyib Khoremi (second half of the 19th century), Muhayir (late 19th century), and Rahimkhoja Alikhoja Eshonoglu (early 20th century) were successful. This is evidenced by the fact that Khan Muhammad Rahimkhan II of Khiva (1845-1910) specifically tasked Mulla Habibullah with translating all volumes of the work, and Rahimkhoja Eshon’s translation was republished seven times over a period of thirteen years. Muhayir also noted in his preface that his translation was accepted without objection by the scholarly community.

Results

Many social issues, including contemporary matters related to rental agreements (the use of property or services for a specified fee), can be addressed using the “Saloti Mas’udiy”, a work of the “Fatwa” genre. Today, rental relationships are implemented not only in traditional forms but also in modern contexts. One such example is the rental of items for decorative purposes, where the rented object does not provide direct material benefit but serves an aesthetic function. In such cases, the lessor derives material benefit, while the lessee does not utilize the item for profit but rather for beautifying the surroundings and pleasing observers.

Although “Saloti Mas’udiy” emphasizes that the rental of useless items is generally impermissible, it is noted that if such rental practices have become customary, they may be deemed permissible based on specific fatwas. When consulted, the “Fatwa” department of the Uzbekistan Muslim Board stated:

“Rental of decorations and related work for weddings

is permissible. This permissibility is recognized because the practice has become customary and fits the definition of a legitimate rental”.

If a broker (Simsar – سمسار, samsar or simsara) provides services to both parties, they may receive fees from both. In such cases, the contract must be clear and transparent. Charging service fees without any agreement is not permissible. Establishing a formal agreement with the broker ensures proper organization and sets defined terms for cooperation. “Saloti Mas’udiy” emphasizes that formalizing agreements in rental matters is a necessary element.

Regarding this contemporary issue, the Fatwa Center provides the following guidance:

“A broker refers to a person who mediates buying and selling transactions. Currently, the term ‘broker’ encompasses roles such as broker, agent, intermediary, or mediator. The broker may act on behalf of the seller, the buyer, or both parties. If the goods being sold are lawful, and the broker operates honestly without deception, fraud, or falsehood, receiving a fee is permissible. Several fiqh sources consider this practice legitimate due to the necessity of brokerage in commerce. The entitlement and source of the broker’s fee are determined according to local custom, which governs the conduct of their professional activity”.

Conclusion

Mas’ud Samarkandi’s “Saloti Mas’udiy” remains a significant source not only for addressing issues that arose in the 13th-14th centuries but also for providing guidance on contemporary matters and preventing disputes and innovations (bid’ah).

“Saloti Mas’udiy” presents a comprehensive exposition of the main branches of Islamic law and their related detailed issues, which gives it considerable scholarly and practical importance. The rulings on social and legal matters contained in the work can serve as an important reference for contemporary social relations.

Scientific analysis of this work from the perspectives of Islamic history and source studies contributes to a systematic continuation of research aimed at demonstrating its role in the historical, religious, and social life of our region.

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