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Sufism

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Sufism

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Sufism is concerned with a broad trend within Islamicate societies towards expressing how *taṣawwuf*, as a path of spiritual refinement, has impacted religious, social, and political modes of human endeavour. If we look at *taṣawwuf* more specifically, we can identify a vibrant discourse of thought and practice that purports to address a fundamental part of the religion of Islam, namely *iḥsān* (consummate spiritual practice). Sufis themselves see *taṣawwuf* as an aspect of the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad, preserved and propagated by a community of believers from generation to generation. Others perceive *taṣawwuf* as the exploration of ethical considerations stemming from Islamic religious precepts, while yet others identify it as part of a debate within Islamicate societies around religious authority and the ideal religious leader. Regardless of which perspective on *taṣawwuf* is taken, it is a fact that *taṣawwuf* both developed early within Muslim societies and has fully integrated itself into the practice of Islam up to the present. Sufis developed complex social structures termed *ṭarīqa* (Sufi brotherhood) that, connecting the entirety of the Muslim world, often followed the path of trade routes. Sufis not only focused on spiritual concerns, but also entered into legal and theological debates within larger Islamic scholarly discourse. They fought wars of *jihād* and founded states and ruling dynasties. With the advent of modernity and the colonial conquest of Muslim majority lands, Sufis were at the forefront of defending their lands against European imperialism. In the post-colonial period, Sufis have faced challenges to their authority, both from political elites and Islamic modernists subscribing to Salafist ideology. Nevertheless, *taṣawwuf* continues to adapt and develop as a global phenomenon that has reached beyond Muslim majority lands, to serve the ethical, spiritual, and religious needs of all who seek solace in its teachings.

Keywords: Sufism, *taṣawwuf*, *tazkiya*, *ṣūfī*, Islamic mysticism, Islamic spirituality, *wilāya*, Virtue ethics, *futuwwa*, Sufi brotherhood, Salafism

Table of contents

1 What is Sufism?

1.1 Origins, trajectory, and social aspects

2 The path of Sufism

2.1 *Murīd* versus *murād*

2.2 *Wilāya*

2.3 *Futuwwa*

2.4 Love in Sufism

2.5 Virtues

2.6 States and stations

2.7 Sufi terminology

3 Sufism and theology

4 Sufi reform

5 Conclusion

1 What is Sufism?

Sufism, in its vast complexity, integrating social, religious, spiritual, and practical aspects of Islam, defies a single definition (Knysh 2017: 3). The term itself is contested, being a construction of the study of that tradition which encompasses *ṣūfī* knowledge, practices, and persons, often by those external to the religion of Islam (Ernst 2011: xviii; Green 2012: 3). For the purposes of this article, the term Sufism will refer to all those ideas, practices, and traditions that Sufis themselves adopted to reflect their understanding and approach to God and the world. The term Sufism helps those outside of the tradition to better understand this important aspect of Islam. For Muslims, the term *taṣawwuf* is more pertinent. This term first appeared in the third/ninth century to describe the experiences and practices of the *Ṣūfīya* of Baghdad, who developed a new vocabulary to articulate their spiritual encounter with God (Welle 2016: 168). The term *taṣawwuf* is a verbal noun that originally indicated someone who wears wool or seeks to become a Sufi (Green 2012: 18). However, in Nicholson's classical study of the use of this term, out of seventy-eight definitions found in early Muslim sources, only one carried the meaning of wearing wool. The vast majority instead connoted a process of spiritual purification and transformation of the heart, among other ethical and moral considerations (Green 2012: 18). Definitions of *taṣawwuf* among Sufis themselves have generally revolved around *akhlāq* (moral virtues) and *adab* (propriety).

One of the earliest discussions of the term *Ṣūfīya* is that by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), one of the earliest Sufi biographers and compilers of Sufi tradition, who argued that it described an outward attire of wool because Sufis are not particularized by any one set of characteristics, but rather are the mine of all knowledge and the source of all praiseworthy inward states. He likened this to the way in which the disciples of Jesus are described in the Qur'an (61:14) as being *ḥawārīyūn* (wearers of white; Sarrāj, Maḥmūd and Surūr 1960: 40–41). Someone who attained a high degree of self-purification and thus became aware of *ḥaqā'iq* (spiritual realities) was therefore called a Sufi, often by others who saw this person as a paragon of virtue (Al-Sulamī 1960: 3–5). The Sufi may be contrasted with the *mutaṣawwif*, that is, the person who attempts to purify his or herself with the intention of drawing nearer to God (Al-Sulamī 1993: 106). With the decline in influence of Sufi authority over the modern period, another term has come to represent the process of purification of the heart: *tazkiya* (purification). However, this term lacks the attendant connotations that *taṣawwuf* carries, of a universe of social, spiritual, and practical applications (Knysh 2017: 47). We can say that *taṣawwuf* differs from *tazkiya* in the sense that it represents a continuous tradition of social organization, practice, and debate about what it means to be a Sufi. Also, in the modern period, especially in a Western context, the terms Islamic mysticism and Islamic spirituality are used to refer to a larger category that includes Sufism under its rubric (Knysh 2000: 2–3). Islamic mysticism

came to be used by scholars of Islamic Studies to denote a larger category than Sufism per se, including other mystical movements within Islamicate societies that were not heirs to the tradition of the *Ṣūfiya* of Baghdad. These were movements such as the *Karrāmīya*, *Malāmātīya*, as well as the *Ḥakīmīya* of Khurasan and Transoxiana. Nevertheless, the term *taṣawwuf* today is used by Muslims to denote all Islamicate traditions that have contributed to the project of the purification of the human heart from the dross of the lower self and attachment of the heart to other than God (Al-Jurjānī 2004: 54).

Sufism, as a neologism, grew out of Western attempts to understand a unique spiritual tradition in Islam whose boundaries were never particularly delineated by Muslims themselves. What began primarily as a quest for the embodiment of spiritual perfections, as exemplified in the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet, slowly developed into a social reality with the advent of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* (literally 'way' as both spiritual method of training and social brotherhood) in the aftermath of the Mongol devastation of Muslim lands in the thirteenth century CE. *Ṭarīqa* came to represent a form of social organization that followed trade networks, eventually stretching across much of the Islamic world by the advent of modernity (Green 2012: 126). The period of the development of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* is also described as a period of vernacularization, when Sufi teachings spread to all parts of the Muslim world and became integrated into courtly spheres (Green 2012: 103–104).

The advent of modernity in the Muslim world is usually connected with Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, which lasted from 1798 to 1801. By this time, the Sufi *ṭarīqa* had become part of the elite establishment within Islamicate societies. The challenges of modernity initiated deep reactions in Muslim societies against those elites, leading to an attempt to purify Islam of the excesses of un-Islamic innovations (*bid'ā*), which were seen as the root of decay within the Muslim world and a cause of Muslim societies having succumbed to Western imperialism and colonization.

1.1 Origins, trajectory, and social aspects

Sufis will say that *taṣawwuf* has been an essential element of Islam since the latter's inception with the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and the revelation of the Qur'an. This is because, if we consider *taṣawwuf* to be the process of purification of the heart and the acquisition of virtues and goodly states, then for Muslims the Prophet Muḥammad possesses the purest heart and is the paragon of the greatest virtues and goodly states. The fifth/eleventh-century Sufi, 'Alī al-Hujwīrī (d. 464/1072), quoting Abū al-Ḥasan Fushanjā (d. 348/959), wrote that, '[t]oday, *taṣawwuf* is a name without a reality but was before a reality without a name' (Al-Hujwīrī 1911: 44). The attempt to define the terms *taṣawwuf* and *ṣūfī* based on textual and historical grounds alone runs into numerous challenges. The term *taṣawwuf* begins to occur in the Arabic lexicon after approximately 128/750 (Palmer 2019: 49). This year represents a watershed moment in Islamic history,

with the advent of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution. The term *ṣūfī*, however, was not used at this time to indicate a person who practices *taṣawwuf*, but was rather synonymous with asceticism, or the practice of *zuhd* (non-attachment to the things of this world; Palmer 2019: 52). Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), therefore, records both men and women Sufi exemplars from the first century after the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, but counts them as being among the *zuhhād* (renunciants) and *awliyā’* (special protected friends of God, often referred to as saints). Foremost among the eighty or so women renunciants mentioned by al-Sulamī in his addendum to the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (Generations of the Sufis) is the mystic Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīya (d. 185/801). Little is known about the historical Rābi‘a, with many of the stories related by later tradition being unverifiable. However, what can be said is that Rābi‘a was a historical figure who discoursed publicly on love of the divine and was accepted as equal to her male counterparts (Cornell 2019: 34). A Persian mystic by the name of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875), known for his ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*), also articulated a number of mystical paradoxes over this early period, and which prefigured the development of the doctrine of *fanā’* (annihilation) by Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz (d. 279/890) and al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910) (Knysh 2000: 69–72). Another early mystic, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859), a contemporary of al-Bisṭāmī, became the first to discourse on the topic of states and stations (*aḥwāl wa-al-maqāmāt*; Knysh 2000: 40).

Sometime during the third/ninth century, the term *ṣūfī* came to be associated with a particular group of spiritual elites, known as the *Ṣūfiyya* of Baghdad, a group led most famously by al-Junayd al-Baghdādī and his circle (Green 2012: 16). This group is sometimes referred to as the Baghdad School, although it was not a unified movement, but rather a loose association of scholarly mystics who shared a common discourse on how to describe their spiritual and mystical experiences. This group did not arise within a vacuum. They were preceded by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), whose spiritual and psychological program for travelling the path (*ṭarīq*) to acquiring knowledge of God introduced a paradigm shift, moving *taṣawwuf* away from asceticism and towards the interiorization of the Sufi path. It was Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz who first articulated important Sufi doctrines in this regard, and which would later be associated with his spiritual companion, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī. These were the doctrines of *fanā’* (annihilation) and *baqā’* (subsistence).

While the Sufis of Baghdad represent the most well-known and authoritative articulation of the Sufi synthesis of the fourth/tenth century, there were a number of other movements whose mystical tenets and spiritual practices would also become part of this development. Some of these movements had existed alongside the *Ṣūfiyya* in other regions of the ‘Abbāsīd empire, including the circle of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) in Basra, the Karrāmīya and Malāmatīya in Khurasan, and the Ḥakīmīya in Transoxiana (Knysh 2000: 83–99). During the fourth/tenth century, the doctrines of the *Ṣūfiyya* of Baghdad merged

with some of these movements while displacing others. This synthesis reached its fullest expression in the works of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī and his student, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). The fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries then saw a rapid expansion of Sufi teachings across the Islamic world, into regions where Islam had not yet spread, travelling along trade routes into Central Asia, Southeast Asia, North Africa, and Anatolia. By the seventh/thirteenth century, even the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (d. 622/1225) would style his caliphate after Sufi *futuwwa* (chivalric) institutions (Ohlander 2008: 276).

In the aftermath of the Mongol destruction of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate in 656/1258, Sufi institutions became entrenched in Muslim societies with the attendant rise of what came to be known as the Sufi brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*) (Ohlander 2008: 1). Sufi *ṭarīqas* played a pivotal role in the character and trajectory of the gunpowder empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals right up to the end of the premodern period. Sufi *ṭarīqas* spread Islam peacefully into the regions of Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeastern Europe (Green 2012: 138–141, 145). It was only with the rise of European imperialism and colonialism that Sufi institutions in Muslim majority societies faced a contraction. When political rulers in the Muslim world succumbed to European hegemony, some *ṭarīqas* served as a final form of resistance to colonial rule. Imām Shāmīl (d. 1871) in the Caucasus, the Mahdī (d. 1885) in Sudan, and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī (d. 1883) in what is today Algeria are examples of Sufi resistance leaders who attempted to halt European attempts to subjugate parts of the Muslim world (Ernst 2011: 5). However, when these attempts ultimately failed, Sufi elites in some Muslim majority lands became brokers between colonial administrators and the larger Muslim populations they ruled (Knysh 2017: 178). After independence from colonial rule in the twentieth century, this would ultimately tarnish the reputation of Sufi elites. This, along with colonial propaganda representing Sufis negatively, has led to the large-scale disengagement of Muslims from Sufi institutions in the post-colonial period. The decline of some Sufi movements over this period was also accompanied by an attendant rise in modernist approaches to Islam that have ironically borrowed elements of Sufi organization and practice to form Islamic political parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in much of the Arab world and the Jamaat-e-Islami party in Pakistan, among others (Elsässer 2019: 280–305). Nevertheless, despite these challenges, traditional Sufi institutions have remained a vibrant part of Muslim social and religious life in many parts of the Muslim world.

2 The path of Sufism

2.1 *Murīd* versus *murād*

The path of *taṣawwuf* was first articulated clearly by al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (Knysh 2017: 53–54). As he described it, the path of *taṣawwuf* was not unidirectional. In fact, al-Junayd described the path in terms of its beginning in the Primordial Covenant (*mīthāq*) of the

Qur'anic ethos (Al-Junayd 1988: 33). In this regard, al-Junayd synthesized a number of conceptual strands of mystical and spiritual teachings that were current in the vibrant religious discourse of third/ninth-century Baghdad. Among these was the thought of al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) and Sarī al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867; Knysh 2000: 52–53). The Qur'an (7:172) describes a covenant that occurred between God and every created soul before the temporal creation of the world, when God asked all of the souls, 'Am I not your Lord?' The souls then answered in unison, 'Yes, we bear witness'. For al-Junayd, this covenant represented the reality and potential of every human soul to experience a direct and unmediated encounter with God. Thus, the path of *taṣawwuf* is a path of realizing a reality that already exists within us. The *murīd* (the one who seeks) is no longer able to see himself when he is lost in the *murād* (the one sought), just as the souls at the time of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) adored God completely without body. This theme of *fanā* (annihilation), sometimes leading to the physical death of the lover and their dissolution in the Beloved, is famously reiterated in the works of Persian Sufi poets such as Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 586/1190), whose masterpiece, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds), became a classic among Sufis. In the *Manṭiq*, ʿAṭṭār describes the Sufi journey using the story of a group of birds who, initially led by the Hoopoe, go out in search of the beautiful Sīmurgh, a legendary bird whose feather had dropped in China, providing a clue as to its existence. After a perilous journey during which some of the birds perished, thirty arrived at their goal, having exhausted both body and soul, which had withered to nothing. They beheld the Sīmurgh in a giant mirror, finding it to be even more beautiful than they could have imagined. The word Sīmurgh in Persian means thirty (birds; Knysh 2000: 152–154).

A contemporary of al-Junayd, the aforementioned Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, had his own following of devoted seekers in Basra (Iraq), where he formalized the distinction between a *murīd* (one who seeks God) and *murād* (one who is sought by God; Böwering 1980: 232). Every seeker of God (*murīd*) is also sought by God (*murād*), however, for each person on the path one aspect may predominate over the other. This distinction between *murīd* and *murād* is important for understanding the Sufi path because advancement on that path requires knowing to what extent one of these aspects is predominant within oneself. Furthermore, the question remains for the seeker on the path as to how to bring these two aspects into balance. In fact, this is virtually impossible for a person to actualize on one's own. For this reason, travelling on the path of *taṣawwuf* requires an outside reference point to provide a corrective to the state of the traveller. This is where the shaykh (guide) of *taṣawwuf* plays a pivotal role. The guide is someone who brings balance to the state of the novice on the Sufi path by instructing that novice with *adhkār* (invocations) or by asking the disciple to leave extra spiritual practices to bring balance to his state.

2.2 Wilāya

‘Alī al-Hujwīrī made the incisive statement that there is no *taṣawwuf* without *wilāya* (special protection and closeness to God; Al-Hujwīrī 1911: 210). Some modern scholars have distinguished between *wilāya* (authority) and *walāya* (sainthood), terms which are ambiguous and whose Arabic word can accommodate both vowel readings, in order to differentiate the political/authoritative dimension of this word from its spiritual dimension (Knysh 2017: 42). Other scholars of Sufism have used both terms to discuss the way in which *wilāya* functions as a system of patronage (Cornell 1998: xxix). In the early texts of *taṣawwuf* we have no way of telling whether one of these terms was used to the exclusion of the other (Palmer 2019: 35). In fact, by distinguishing between them, we may be projecting a modern dichotomy onto an era that generally did not see any issue with conjoining authoritativeness in religion with closeness to God. *Wilāya*, when referring to the special group of people called the *awliyā’*, is a term that is not uniquely connected to Sufis. However, it was the Sufis who spoke most often about *wilāya* being the special protection and closeness granted to a person by God, as well as the sign that indicates whether someone is a *walī* of God. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 295–300/907–912) was the first to discuss this term in relation to a path of the *awliyā’* (Al-Hujwīrī 1911: 210). In the third/ninth century, al-Tirmidhī was concerned with explaining how a person should tread the path of *wilāya* and become one who is granted special closeness and protection by God. He enumerated over a 150 questions that a *walī* should be able to answer if he is in fact a true *walī* (Palmer 2019: 153). In the fifth/eleventh century, al-Sulamī wrote an important work entitled *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiya* (The Generations of the Sufis), which sought to provide real examples of those who could be considered *awliyā’*, as identified by their wisdom. Here, the terms Sufi and *walī* were used interchangeably while being connected to another important term, *khalīfa* (deputy). According to both al-Tirmidhī and al-Sulamī, the Sufi masters were not only *awliyā’*, but also *khulafā’* of the Prophet. They were the inheritors of the prophetic authority, not only in the sense of having transmitted the Sunna from the Prophet as scholars (*‘ulamā’*), but also in the sense of having the authority to speak about *ḥaqā’iq* (spiritual realities). Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) was an Andalusian Sufi who set *taṣawwuf* upon its own theosophical basis, independent of other theological schools. He advanced a monistic approach that saw in everything that exists the site of God’s unmediated self-manifestation. Probably his most important and controversial work, the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom), discusses the relationship of the *walī* (special protected friend) to the *nabī* (prophet) by detailing twenty-seven prophets as archetypes of the *walī*. The Prophet Muḥammad represents the seal and final prophet who completes these archetypes.

The Sufis were generally careful to say that their words were meant to support the Prophet’s guidance and not in any way compete with or supersede it (Palmer 2019: 183). The Sufis saw the ideal of Islamic authority as being ensconced in an individual who lives the Sunna (way) of the Prophet inwardly and outwardly, as well as being someone who

masters his lower self while leading a virtuous life. This person should also be able to instruct others in how to tread the path of self-purification. If a Muslim finds such a person, he can enter into a pact of *wilāya* with them as a guide/master to be listened to and obeyed as long as they do not command anything contrary to the Sunna of the Prophet. Therefore, *wilāya* not only describes a special closeness to and protection of God, but also a social reality that binds a disciple to his Sufi master. In other words, there is the *wilāya* of God for the *walī* (friend, protector) and then the *walāya* of a *walī* for those who see this person as an inheritor of the prophetic authority.

2.3 *Futuwwa*

The first to interiorize *futuwwa* (or *jawānmardī*) within a Sufi ethos was al-Sulamī and his followers in Nishapur. Al-Sulamī brought this ethic of manly virtue and social non-conformity from Arabo-Persian culture into his Sufi synthesis. This was a subversive moral code that resulted from a centuries long cultural and social integration that eventually melded into a Sufi ethico-spiritual code (Ridgeon 2011: 1–2). The place of *futuwwa* in this overall ethic was important because it functioned to counterbalance the social conformist tendencies inherent in the *wilāya* ideal. Ibn ‘Arabī brings this out in his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* [The Meccan Revelations], in which he describes *futuwwa* using the story of a shaykh who requests his disciple serve his guest. The disciple, however, cannot conform to the shaykh’s command because of some ants crawling on the spread that would be used to set before the guest (Zargar 2020a: 56). The tension between *futuwwa* and *wilāya* inherent in this story entails a need to maintain balance between individual accountability, which preserves the ideal of social non-conformity on the one hand, and loyalty to the authority structures that underlie Sufi community life and the master-disciple relationship on the other. This balance indicates the high level of sophistication that Sufi ethics achieved in its formative period.

2.4 Love in Sufism

Love of the divine has remained a pivotal aspect of *taṣawwuf* from the latter’s inception onwards. Al-Muḥāsibī states in his treatise *al-Qaṣd wa-al-rujū‘ ilā Allāh* (Seeking and Returning to God) that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīya would say at the coming of the night, ‘[t]he night has come, the darkness has mingled, and every lover is left alone with his beloved. Now I am alone with you, my Beloved’ (Cornell 2019: 39–40). The Sufis of Baghdad were persecuted during the *miḥna* (inquisition) of Ghulām Khalīl (d. 275/888) for discoursing on the topic of love. The issue at hand was the use of the term *‘ishq* (passion) to describe the seeker’s love for the divine. This inquisition reached as far as Transoxiana, where al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī was put on trial for the same accusation. Nevertheless, love (*maḥabba*) figures as one of the main stopping places (*manzil*) on the Sufi path. Al-Qushayrī describes love as a temporary *ḥāl* (state) that overwhelms the seeker, and as

opposed to being a more stable *maqām* (station). Among Persian Sufis after Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126), love becomes the highest principle, being almost synonymous with God. Jalāl al-Dīn Rumī (d. 672/1273) unifies the abstract principle of love with its existential worldly manifestation when he contemplates and celebrates his love for Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī (d. 645/1248), in whom he saw the perfect manifestation of divine love. Rūmī communicated his theme of love in the form of thousands of lines of rhyming poetry in Persian. His poems were inspirational to his followers, who sang them in *samāʿ* (audition) sessions in which they performed a dance that brought together outward rhythm and order with inward ecstasy. Rūmī exemplifies the power of Sufi expression, which communicates ideas such as love of the divine in accessible and artistic modes that are both performative and educational about the nature of the path to God (Knysh 2017: 156–161). For Sufis, love represents a higher form of devotion to God than fear and is the true test of a person's sincerity.

2.5 Virtues

Early Sufis were in almost unanimous agreement that *taṣawwuf* is concerned foremost with the cultivation of virtues. Originally, it was a virtue-ethics based on *ādāb* (proper ways), *akhlāq* (virtues), and *aḥwāl* (states), as outlined by al-Sulamī (Welle 2016: 82). The adoption of virtues is considered by Sufis to be intrinsically linked to following the example of the Prophet. According to them, the Sufi master is someone who represents a living manifestation of the Prophet's example (Al-Qushayrī 1989: 618). Therefore, the disciple moves from textual references about the prophetic character, as embodied in the Qur'an and Hadith, towards seeing that example practised in the character of their shaykh. After the disciple approximates these virtues by following the textual and lived testimonies of the Prophet's way, he attains a position in which God takes on the refinement of his character and heart directly (Al-Sulamī 1993: 111). The Prophet, therefore, functions as the door to all virtue and higher reality (*haqāʾiq*). Sufis also talk about virtues as an adornment (*taḥliya*) by which God beautifies a person. In order for the wayfarer to ready himself for this adornment, he must remove (*takhliya*) the negative traits of the lower self (Al-Qushayrī 1989: 156). This approach to virtue-ethics based on states (*aḥwāl*) developed out of a Qur'anic paradigm in which various types of soul (*nafs*) are described, each of which indicates a higher level of spiritual refinement (Welle 2016: 82). Ultimately the Prophet's character, having been moulded by the divine concern (*ināya*), provides an example of how a spiritual traveller should also seek to reflect the divine names of God. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) explores this mode of virtue ethics in his *al-Maqṣid al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (The Sublime Endeavour to Comment on the Meanings of God's Most Beautiful Names; Casewit 2020: 155). Ibn ʿArabī synthesized this virtue ethics through his doctrine of the perfected human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), through whom the world continues to exist as long as this person subsists in the earth (Chodkiewicz 1993: 70). Such a one is annihilated (*fān*) to everything other than the contemplation of God and,

thus, reflects in their subsistence (*bāq*) through Him the perfection of His most perfect names. There is therefore a movement in Sufi ethics from social and cultural norms, such as Arabo-Persian notions of nobility and virtue in the form of *murū'a* (manliness) and *futuwwa* (manly virtue; Zargar 2020b: 2), towards contemplation of the Prophet's life and virtues to, finally, the self-contemplation and mirroring of God's most beautiful names.

2.6 States and stations

States (*aḥwāl*) are most often contrasted in Sufi literature to stations (*maqāmāt*). States are transient, temporary modes of being sent by God. Stations, on the other hand, are acquired by a Sufi's own effort and should be inculcated until they become characteristic of the Sufi's nature. Maintaining the correct distinction between states and stations is critical to 'wayfaring', or travelling the Sufi path (Knysh 2000: 302). This is because delusionary spiritual experiences can pull a wayfarer from the path. The existence of a competent shaykh, or spiritual guide on the path, is seen as necessary to provide an external reference point for the wayfarer so that delusionary spiritual experiences can be differentiated from authentic ones. Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī was the first to clearly explicate the distinction between states and stations. The wayfarer should allow a state to come and go without actively engaging with or attempting to perpetuate it. Authentic states are those that strike one unawares and without any expectation. Stations, on the other hand, require constant work and attention (Al-Qushayrī 1989: 132–133). States are seen as gifts of divine grace that prove indicative of a Sufi being on the right path. However, it can happen that a divinely gifted state is at first authentic but then, in trying to reproduce itself, falls into delusion.

Sufis differ concerning the number and kinds of states and stations. Nevertheless, the first station is universally agreed to be *tawba* (repentance; Khalil 2018: 6). All Sufis agree that the beginning of the path of *taṣawwuf* lies in the wayfarer becoming thoroughly cognisant of the need to repent to God, such that regular repentance becomes his or her inveterate practice. States are more numerous than stations and include the following: *qurb* (nearness), *maḥabba* (love), *khawf* (fear), *rajā'* (hope), *shawq* (longing), *uns* (intimacy), *ṭama'nīna* (quiescence), *mushāhada* (witnessing), and *yaqīn* (certainty). Examples of stations, according to Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), are: *wara'* (scrupulousness), *zuhd* (non-attachment to worldly things), *faqr* (poverty), *ṣabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (reliance upon God), *riḍā* (being well pleased with God), and *murāqabat al-aḥwāl* (constant watchfulness over oneself).

2.7 Sufi terminology

The academic study of Sufism reached a major turning point with the work of Louis Massignon, who demonstrated that Sufi terminology is clearly linked to the Qur'an (Palmer 2019: 171). In other words, Massignon argued successfully that the important terms and

dichotomies resident at the heart of early Sufi thought could be traced to a contemplation of the Qur'an and the use of its terms and concepts. One such set of terms is *fanā'* (annihilation) and *baqā'* (subsistence), the already discussed dichotomy that arose out of the Sufi milieu of third/ninth-century Baghdad. Prior to Massignon, some scholars of Sufism sought to trace the origin of the term *fanā'* (annihilation) to Indian mystical doctrines, including *nirvana*. The terms *fanā'* and *baqā'*, however, find a clear referent in the Qur'an, which states, 'Everything upon it (the earth) is in annihilation (*fān*), but the countenance of your Lord ever remains (*yabqā*)' (Q. 55:26–27). The verb *yabqā* (remains) becomes the noun *baqā'* in Sufi terminology, translated as subsistence. Al-Sarrāj understands the annihilation of the self (*nafs*) as a passing away of the form of that self as it appears in the imagination. In other words, the true self, imprinted with the stamp of the encounter with the divine during the *mithāq* (divine covenant), only manifests when the image of the self and its projections disappear. What remains is the subsistence of the soul that is constantly aware and confronted with the divine reality. The doctrine of *fanā'* and *baqā'* was decisive in forcing other Islamic movements, such as the Malāmātiyya, to reevaluate the basis of their approach to *tarbiya* (spiritual tutelage). The Malāmātiyya saw the project of spiritual development as a constant focus on the soul and its deceits, such that a person is constantly watchful over it. When Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932), from the circle of the Ṣūfīya in Baghdad, went east into Khurasan, he described the Malāmātī approach as dualism because within it the lower soul became an object of spiritual focus besides God (Silvers 2010: 36). The Ṣūfīya, on the other hand, approached spiritual development as the contemplation and practise of the invocation of God that results in the erasure of the *nafs*. To demonstrate the extent to which this Sufi terminology was synthesized by normative Muslim scholarship, we can see that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī uses the *fanā'*-*baqā'* paradigm in his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) to explain how a person rids himself of spiritual diseases such as haughtiness and pride (Al-Ghazālī and Rustom 2018: 51).

3 Sufism and theology

In the modern period, Sufism has been closely tied to the Ash'arī theological school (Nafi 2002: 466). This is primarily due, it would seem, to the way in which Ash'arī precepts have become famously used to support and explain aspects of Sufi cosmology, particularly in relation to *karamāt* (miraculous occurrences gifted to the friends of God). The doctrine that is often cited in this context is occasionalism, or the idea that causes and effects are not intrinsically linked, but rather only customarily so. In effect, miraculous occurrences can happen any time God decides to suspend the customary connection between a particular cause and effect (Abrahamov 1988: 75–76). The close association of Sufism with Ash'arī theology among modern Muslim reformists, however, is more the result of modern Islamic intergroup polemics than actual historical fact. If *taṣawwuf*, as the Sufis claim, can be described as an articulation of the third major aspect of the religion (*dīn*) of

Islam in the form of *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence), then we should see *taṣawwuf* distributed along the spectrum of the various *madhāhib* (movements) that constitute normative Islam. This is precisely the case: all of the authoritative schools of Islamic jurisprudence and theology can claim large numbers of adherents who inculcated *taṣawwuf* into their Islamic practice. This is even the case for those groups who are often known for criticizing and distancing themselves from Sufism, such as certain traditionalist Ḥanbalīs who, while eschewing the terms *ṣūfī* and *taṣawwuf*, nevertheless appropriated many of the same teachings under a different name (such as *tazkiya*, purification). Nevertheless, while there have been successful attempts to reconcile and integrate *taṣawwuf* and *kalām* (Islamic theology), there have also been numerous examples of clashes between the two. This is most famously true of the theosophist and mystic, Ibn ‘Arabī. If the work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī represents a synthesis of *taṣawwuf* with Islam’s legal and theological traditions, with his *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* being a tour de force in this respect that immediately became a classic at Islamic colleges throughout the Muslim world, Ibn ‘Arabī produced a synthesis that, rather than integrate *taṣawwuf* into mainstream Islamic legal and theological schools, presented a competing framework to the classical model (Chittick 1989: 70). While al-Ghazālī sought to reorient Islamic intellectual discourse towards an otherworldly focus, in which not only actions, but even knowledge, should be weighed in relation to its value in the *ākhirah* (next world; Moosa 2005: 267), Ibn ‘Arabī emphasized the ubiquitous and continuous nature of God’s divine theophany in the present world. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the abstraction of God by theologians compromised the dynamic and ever-changing manifestation of *tawḥīd* (doctrine of unification), which is the very purpose of the existence of the world. Some of those who followed Ibn ‘Arabī while seeking to codify his approach came to adopt the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of existence) as a way of explicating this ‘doctrine’, if we can in fact say that Ibn ‘Arabī espoused one. This term came to dominate the polemics surrounding Ibn ‘Arabī and his thought, despite the fact that he never used it himself, with it actually being coined by some of his detractors (Chittick 1994: 72). The condemnation of Ibn ‘Arabī reached such a level that some theologians charged him with heresy and espousing a doctrine of *ittiḥād* (union with God). In contrast to this, those Muslim scholars who supported his approach call him *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the greatest shaykh) because of his keen insights into the subtle nature of *tawḥīd*. Despite the polemics around his thought, an honest appraisal of Ibn Arabī’s synthesis of the Islamic tradition can only surmise that it was unique, highly sophisticated, and carried important interpretive potential for the tradition as a whole. His thought still plays an important role in Sufi discourse today.

Mainstream Sufi teachings, however, aligned most closely with al-Ghazālī’s synthesis, based firmly in Ash‘arī *kalām*. The attempt to integrate Sufi forms of authority (in terms of the master-disciple relationship) into Islamic theological discourse continued after al-Ghazālī, reaching an apex in the work of Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī (d. 1860), whose life straddled

the transition of the Muslim world from pre-modernity to modernity. Al-Bājūrī's super commentary on the *Jawhara al-tawḥīd* of Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (d. 1041/1631) provides a section on *taṣawwuf*, describing it as required knowledge for every Muslim believer, stating the position that every Muslim should follow a shaykh of *taṣawwuf* (Al-Bājūrī 2002: 341). The effects of European imperialism and colonialism on the Muslim world, however, would fundamentally change the power relationship between Muslim elites, many of whom were Sufis, and the Muslim laity. The result would be a deep split between those Muslims who followed traditional, premodern authority structures and those who sought to embrace new forms of authority bequeathed by modernity and the West.

4 Sufi reform

Sufi thought and practice were so integrated into the fabric of Muslim intellectual life up to the beginning of the modern period that many reform movements seeking to correct what they saw as Sufi excesses nevertheless had their origins in various Sufi movements. This is nowhere more evident than in the genesis of Salafism, the movement dedicated to reviving the way of the pious ancestors, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to contest not only the traditional schools of Islamic law and theology, but also Sufism in its many variegated forms. Salafism, coming from the term *salaf*, meaning the early forbearers, is a movement that has sought to reevaluate Islamic authority structures in light of modernity, principally by hearkening back to an earlier period of perceived uprightness and purity of belief and practice, as found in the first three generations of Islam (that is, among the Prophet's companions and the two generations that followed them). Salafist thought first developed among the disciples of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1883) in Ottoman Damascus during the latter part of the nineteenth century (Weismann 2007: 142–143). 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, however, was a spiritual heir to the Akbarī Sufi tradition, having possessed a spiritual genealogy going directly back to Ibn 'Arabī. Preceding the followers of al-Jazā'irī were the Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815) and Ahmad b. Idrīs (d. 1837), a collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century Sufi movements that sought to correct perceived excesses in the traditional legal schools and Sufi brotherhoods. The development of Salafism, the seeming antithesis of Sufism today, should not therefore be understood in isolation from the milieu of nineteenth century Sufi thought. The decisive break between Salafism and Sufism only occurred in the early twentieth century, when Rāshid Riḍā (d. 1935) aligned his Salafī reform agenda with the anti-Sufi polemics of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), as propagated by his descendants in the Arabian Peninsula (Willis 2010: 720).

The post Second World War period heralded the political independence of many majority Muslim countries from European colonial dominance. The rejection of colonial hegemony brought with it a rejection of those elites who had been associated with colonial control, including the many Sufi elites who had acted as brokers between colonial administrations

and the Muslim populations they wished to control (Knysh 2017: 178). Thus, the twentieth century saw the widespread abandonment of Sufi forms of authority in the wake of independence, particularly among educated Muslim elites who gravitated towards more modern forms of Islamicate authority, as embodied in Salafī doctrines. This was reflected in the rise of Muslim intellectuals who sought to reinterpret Islamic sources in light of modernist agendas, such as Abu A'la Mawdudi (d. 1979) in Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) in Egypt. Despite these changes, Muslim states have retained Sufi social structures, particularly among less educated Muslims and those elites who have maintained a connection to age-old scholarly traditions.

Even in the twentieth century, Sufi movements, teachings, and practices have continued to travel along trade routes and follow migration patterns. Sufis who settled in Europe and the Americas brought with them a spiritual tradition that found fertile ground among Westerners looking for spirituality outside of their own religious frames. One such example is the spread of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* under Shaykh Nāẓim al-Ḥaqqānī (d. 2014), who, while based in Cyprus, frequently visited Europe to spread the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* among European converts to Islam. Moreover, there are some Westerners who, while not wanting to identify as Muslim, nevertheless have come to see themselves as Sufi. This is exemplified in the Sufi community of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986) in Philadelphia, USA, some followers of whom profess to being Sufi without identifying as Muslim. Some Sufi brotherhoods in West Africa have built on the social cohesion of the Sufi brotherhoods to create multi-national networks involving trade and business, connecting Dakar, Senegal, to communities as far away as New York and Los Angeles.

5 Conclusion

Taṣawwuf has been a thoroughly Muslim social and religious phenomenon since its inception. Its foundational principles are therefore rooted in the core texts of Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith. The seminal achievement of the tradition of *taṣawwuf* has been its ability to fuse Islamic religious doctrines to a spiritual and social paradigm constituted by a common set of ethical guidelines. Modernist movements that seek to replace Sufi authority structures often run into the quandary of not having sufficiently developed an ethical framework to use in place of *taṣawwuf*. Furthermore, Sufi authority structures institutionalized certain civic notions that have not been successfully replicated by modernist Islamic movements. What this has demonstrated in the modern period is that Sufi teachings, traditions, and practices remain highly relevant to how Islam as a religion interacts with the challenges of modernity and other ever-changing expressions of the human project.

Attributions

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