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FROM WAYFARING ELITES TO LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS:
SUFIS IN MEDIEVAL PALESTINE *

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This article is part of a comprehensive study of the Sufis of medieval Palestine. At its heart resides the birth of locally embedded Sufi-inspired associations in this historical framework in the course of the Earlier Middle Period (late tenth to mid-thirteenth centuries). Drawing on the profiles of renowned Sufi traditionalists and legalists living in the Palestine of the time, the article highlights the assimilation of Sufis into the scholarly circles of the religiously learned, the *'ulamā'*, and the social order. It outlines how they perceived their role and place in society and disseminated the truth of Islam, and how, parallel with their integration into the world of the *'ulamā'* of the established legal schools (the *madhhabs*), they developed their own inner life and organizational forms and devised their own ways of integrating into the fabric of social and communal life. The early development of a coherent local Sufi congregation around the Sufi guide out of the loosely knit and dispersed circle of disciples is closely tied to the change in the concept of guidance for advancement along the Path and the change in the relationship between master and disciple.

Keywords: Sufism; Palestine; tenth-thirteenth centuries

Este artículo es parte de un estudio de conjunto sobre los sufíes de la Palestina medieval. Se centra en el surgimiento de asociaciones de inspiración sufí en contextos locales de ese ámbito geográfico durante el primer período medieval (desde finales del s. X hasta la mitad del s. XIII). A partir de las biografías de tradicionalistas y juristas sufíes famosos que vivieron en la Palestina de la época, se pone de relieve la integración de los sufíes en los círculos de los especialistas del saber religioso (los ulemas), así como en el orden social. Se analiza también cómo percibían su lugar en la sociedad y el papel que en ella debían jugar, cómo difundían la verdad del Islam y cómo, paralelamente a su integración en el mundo de los ulemas de las escuelas legales establecidas (los *madhhabs*), desarrollaron formas de vida interna y organizativas específicas, y perfilaron modos de integrarse en la vida social y comunal. El temprano desarrollo de una congregación sufí local coherente en torno a un guía sufí —más allá del círculo disperso y fragmentado de sus discípulos— está estrechamente vinculado al concepto de guía para avanzar a lo largo del Camino y a cambios en la relación entre maestro y discípulo.

Palabras clave: Sufismo; Palestina; Siglos X-XIII

Islamicists have long noted the transformation of Sufism from a marginal elitist stream of mystical wayfarers into the most prominent

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religiously based and led-association in the Islamic public sphere by the end of the Earlier Middle Period (broadly defined by Marshall Hodgson as the mid-fourth/tenth-mid-seventh/thirteenth century)¹. However, the study of the dynamic of this transformation and its concrete manifestations in particular historical times and geographical settings needs to be carried on further. In particular, further attempts should be made to defining the link between the Sufi shaykh's teaching and the emergence of a community of followers around him, or between *ṭarīqa* as a spiritual path and *ṭarīqa* as a religious and social association. In this paper, I propose to highlight this affinity through an examination of the lives and teachings of prominent representatives of mainstream Sufism who lived in Palestine in the late fourth/tenth-sixth/twelfth century. This was a seminal period in the history of Sufism both as a doctrine and as a practice.² With regard to medieval Palestine, while scholarship on the official sphere is vast, modern historians of the field have generally neglected the process by which pious and charismatic figures in this spatial and temporal frame disseminated their traditions, formed communities and helped shape an Islamic society and space.

Commonly perceived as a universal Islamic phenomenon, the intensification of communal and social life surrounding Sufi shaykhs of recognized virtue and their tombs must also have been the product of the concrete historical framework. In the case of Palestine, it was influenced primarily by its cities' sanctity and long established position as centers of pilgrimage to universal and distinctive Muslim holy sites, and by the foundation of endowed Sufi lodges, introduced by the Ayyubids and intensifying under the Mamluk regime. Greater Syria as a whole, it is also noteworthy, did not constitute the cradle of the major Sufi brotherhoods that evolved in the course of the

¹ For a panoramic review of the prominence of Sufism in the entire Muslim world of the Earlier Middle Period, see Hourani, A., *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, 153-157. See Lapidus, I. M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, 168-171, for the development of Sufism into a social movement from the late fourth/tenth to the eighth/fourteenth century. Bulliet, Richard W., *Islam: the View from the Edge*, New York, 1994, 174, notices the sixth/twelfth century as a milestone in this development.

² Margaret Malamud, while focusing on medieval Khurasan, has offered a valuable interpretation of the importance of this period in the universal history of Sufism: Malamud, M., "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Khurasan", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26 (1994), 427-442.

sixth/twelfth-seventh/thirteenth centuries. The *ṭarīqas* that appeared on its soil during this period were branches of major mystical paths and spiritual chains (*silsilas*) that originated in other parts of the Muslim world, notably Iraq, eastern Iran and Central Asia.³ Sufi shaykhs whose biographies are studied here often assumed leadership over smaller, much more modest associations, slowly extending beyond the innermost circles of ascetics and mystics.

Drawing largely on Sufi and non-Sufi biographical literature, the analysis here revolves around the universal and peculiar features of the Sufi shaykh, the formation of a religious and social association around him and the early phase in the extension of his following beyond the nucleus of seekers of the Path. Statements of the doctrines and tenets of Sufism by renowned Sufi thinkers of the Earlier Middle Period serve to locate these representatives in the broader perspective of the evolution of Sufism. Such an inquiry may advance an understanding of Sufism in the period covered where research has focused either on the lives and legacies of the great mystics of the East or on the doctrinal dimensions of Islamic mysticism, while tending to overlook the interrelated dynamic of religious and social evolution.

Composed in later periods, the accounts and narratives contained in the biographies studied in this paper convey the image of an ideal type of Sufi shaykh that was shaped after his death. In their endeavor to present a uniform model of guidance in righteous Islamic belief and conduct, the authors of these texts constructed the figure of the Sufi guide in terms and expressions accepted by universal Islamic standards. Still, this construction must also have been concordant with the beliefs and expectations of the local community of believers. Moreover, only by locating the ideal type of a shaykh within a specific community could the norms he represented become effective and his figure be commemorated. Accounts of renowned Sufi shaykhs that had been related and transmitted by reliable reporters were carefully recorded, providing details about their lives and activities and creating a reservoir of role models for later generations of local believers. Hence, notwithstanding the seemingly idealized and imaginary dimension of these accounts, their critical examination

³ On the origins and spread of the major Sufi brotherhoods in Greater Syria, see Geoffroy, E., *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturelles*, Damas, 1995, 216-239.

may uncover the concrete and distinctive manifestations of universal phenomena.⁴

The Learned Sufi

Several Sufi shaykhs lived in Tyre in the late fourth/tenth century. Among them was Aḥmad b. al-‘Aṭā’ al-Rūdhbārī (of Rūdhbār, a village near Baghdad). Arriving from Baghdad, he lived at first in the neighbourhood of Acre, dying in Tyre in 369/980.⁵ One of the eminent Sufis of his time, whose fame both as a spiritual leader and as a traditionalist scholar spread far beyond his final residing place, his biography is included in al-Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, where he is classified as a member of the fifth and final “generation”:

Among them is Shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī, and his name is Aḥmad b. ‘Aṭā’ [b. Aḥmad al-Rūdhbārī] the nephew of Abī ‘Alī al-Rūdhbārī, and the shaykh of al-Shām in his lifetime. He gained distinction due to his mystical states (*aḥwāl*) and the mastery of various fields of the Islamic traditional sciences (*al-‘ulūm*) he had attained. These included knowledge of the variant readings of the Qur’ān (*‘ilm al-qirā’āt*), knowledge of the Divine law (*‘ilm al-sharī‘a*) and knowledge of the True Reality (*‘ilm al-ḥaqīqa*). He is [also] distinguished for his moral traits (*akhlāq*), good qualities (*shamā’il*) and glorification of poverty. His honor was upheld and his rules of decorum (*ādāb*) were adhered to. He was beloved by the Sufis (*al-fuqarā’*), favored them and was courteous toward them.⁶

In common with the majority of biographies in al-Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt*, the brief introduction part to this biography is followed immediately by an expounding of *ḥadīth* transmission. Stretching back

⁴ An important implementation of this approach in the study of medieval Sufism is represented by Denis Gril in his extensive introduction to a biographical dictionary dedicated to seventh/thirteenth-century Sufi masters: Gril, D., *La Risāla de Ṣaḥī al-Dīn ibn al-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir: Biographies de maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du VII^e/XIII^e siècle*, Le Caire, 1986, 1-79.

⁵ Sezgin, I: 663, for a full bibliography and references and details there on several of his treatises that have been preserved in manuscript.

⁶ Al-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Raḥmān, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, Shurība, N. (ed.), 2nd edition, Aleppo, 1986, 497.

from the time of the author to the time of the Prophet through the generations of the “pious predecessors”, the *salaf*, and including the subject of the biography, the chain of authority (*isnād*) linked the Sufis and Sufism to the prophetic Sunna.⁷ The chain of this particular *ḥadīth* links it up with the Prophet through the line of the first Shi‘i *imāms*. Like many other *ḥadīths* presented in al-Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt* and other compilations, this particular tradition is not related specifically to the Sufi tradition but represents a recurrent topic in *ḥadīth* literature; its text provides information on the simple, basic nutrition of the prophets: “Meat in wheat is the broth of the prophets”. The message encoded is one of moderate self-discipline in dietary matters, modeled on the last of the prophets and his predecessors.

The inclusion of *ḥadīths* that were outside the Sufi tradition served the function of legitimization; it implied that prophetic traditions were a vital source of Sufism and asserted that exemplary Sufis shared with religious scholars an interest in collecting and transmitting them. Indeed, *ḥadīth*, accepted as sound by all, became a part of Sufi literature composed by al-Sulamī and the other great formulators of the Sufi tradition of his epoch, who sought to demonstrate the resemblance between their doctrine and the Sunna.⁸ Furthermore, given the highly edifying function of *ḥadīth*, the presentation of the Sufi as a *muḥaddith* was proof of his inner-worldly outlook, showing him to be aware of the society around him and dedicated to the dissemination of the norms and values of the prophetic Sunna within the community of his fellow believers.

Utterances quoted by al-Sulamī in the main body of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī’s biography, and attributed to him in a number of later biographical dictionaries and chronicles, afford insights about the interplay of Sunni traditionalism and Sufism in his teaching. The following sayings illustrate his attempt to promote Sufism in the form of the moderate ethical tradition that was gaining dominance during his lifetime by bringing together major Sufi concepts, traditional knowledge and normative practice, *al-‘ilm wa’l-‘amal*:

⁷ Mojaddedi, Jawid A., *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, Richmond, 2001, 20-21, for the structure of the biographical unit in Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt* and its functions.

⁸ *Id.* See also the remarks of Kister, M. J. in his introduction to *Kitāb ādāb aṣ-ṣuḥba by Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Sulamī*, Jerusalem, 1954, 6-8.

And he [Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd] also told us that he had heard him [Aḥmad b. ‘Aṭā’ al-Rūdhbārī] saying: “The most repulsive person is the avaricious Sufi”.⁹

I heard Abū Naṣr saying that he heard Abū ‘Abd Allāh saying, “*al-taṣawwuf* removes avarice (*bukhl*) from the adherent, while the writing down of the *ḥadīth* removes ignorance from him. Hence, once brought together in one person, it is sufficient for [the attainment of the rank of] the exalted (*nubalā’*)”.¹⁰

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī’ was quoted by al-Khaṭīb [al-Baghdādī] as saying, “The traditional knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) is based on the outward act (*al-‘amal*), and the *‘amal* is based on sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and sincerity in His worship bequeaths comprehension of Almighty God (i.e., the meaning of His decrees).¹¹

By the sixth/twelfth century, due to the efforts of such great mystics as al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Ghazzālī, the tradition of the main Sufi stream had been systematized, its science matured and its path accepted as a legitimate version of *sunnat al-nabī*. By then, the Sufi shaykh’s role as a disseminator of righteous Islamic belief and conduct had become established. Sufi shaykhs participated actively alongside legal scholars of the established *madhhabs* in the process of forming the Sunna, which began in the Muslim East and penetrated into Greater Syria during the sixth/twelfth century. They appear in our texts as arbiters of religious knowledge and practice (*al-‘ilm wa’l-‘amal*), and of the central moral tenet of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (*al-amr bi’l-ma’rūf wa’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*). Accordingly, many became intertwined with the activities, practices and institutions of the *‘ulamā’*.

To be sure, during the Sunni revival and just after, the diversity and fluidity of the Sufi tradition were revealed in their brightest light: sober Sufism existed alongside gnosis and the various old traditions of moderate and extreme asceticism,¹² while new forms of popular and der-

⁹ Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 498.

¹⁰ *Id.*, 500.

¹¹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Thiqat al-Dīn, Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, M. Abū Sa‘īd and ‘U. al-‘Amrawī (eds.), in 40 vols. new edition, Beirut, 1995/1415, 5: 18.

¹² The meaning of *zuhd* and the moderate and extreme forms of early Islamic asceticism have received considerable attention by Islamicists. Recent contributions include Kinberg, Leah, “What is meant by *Zuhd*?”, *Studia Islamica*, 61 (1985), 27-44; Hurwitz, Nimrod, “Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination”,

vish piety penetrated everywhere.¹³ Nevertheless, for all the diversity within the Sufi tradition as a whole and the vast differences among the various groupings and shaykhs within each stream, a class of Sufis consolidated that may be classifiable as “learned” or “institutional”. Though difficult to typify, it would be fair to suggest that their characteristics included meticulous obedience to the sacred law, moderate asceticism, and interaction and intermingling with both the legal scholars of the established Sunni legal schools and the political rulers.¹⁴

A considerable number of these learned Sufis came to be generally recognized as *ḥadīth* scholars, and their names are included in the pages of biographical compendiums devoted to the most celebrated *muḥaddiths*. A well-known example in early sixth/twelfth-century Palestine is Abū'l-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Maqdisī al-Qaysarānī (son of a man of Caesarea, d. 507/1113), one of the most renowned Sufis of his generation, who earned fame and recognition in the fields of Arabic language and poetry and, especially, *ḥadīth*. He was the author of numerous works, some of them substantial, concerned mostly with the technicalities of the transmission of traditions. Born in Jerusalem in 448/1056, from 486/1075 he studied in Baghdad and spent many years in the East, finally settling in Hamadhan (in western Iran), continuing the long-standing connection between Jerusalem and the great intellectual and spiritual centers of Iran. On what proved to be his last pilgrimage, he went to Jerusalem to perform the sanctification (*iḥrām*) and died on his return journey, in Baghdad.¹⁵

Studia Islamica, 85 (1997), 41-65. Manuela Marín's study of the *zuhd* that was practiced in al-Andalus in the fourth/tenth century is probably the most important contribution toward an understanding of the characteristic features and various nuances of medieval Islamic asceticism: Marín, M., “*Zuhād* of al-Andalus (300/912-429/1029)”, *The Formation of al-Andalus. Part 2: Language, Religion, Culture and the Sciences*, M. Fierro and J. Samsó (eds.), Aldershot, 1998, 103-131.

¹³ Karamustafa, Ahmet, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1500*, Salt Lake City, 1944, represents a model study of the characteristics and spread of groups of extreme, antinomian Sufis, the so-called dervishes.

¹⁴ See, for example, the comments by Karamustafa, *Id.*, 88-89. See also their definition as “savant Sufis” by Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 149-150.

¹⁵ Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī and his treatises, see *EP*, “Ibn al-Qaysarānī” (by J. Schacht); 'Umar Ridā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin*, Damascus, 1960, 10: 98-99; Brockelmann, *GAL*, I, 355-56, *Suppl.*, I: 306. See also there for full bibliographies. On the frequent performance of *iḥrām* of the *ḥajj* from the Ḥaram of Jerusalem, see Elad, A., *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, Leiden, 1995, 64.

Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī's biographers depict him as an extremely zealous Sufi and ardent *ḥadīth* collector. Like other men of his generation, eager to hear as large a number of prophetic traditions handed down directly from as many as qualified transmitters as possible, he keenly pursued the custom of journeying in search for knowledge, the *riḥla*. Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī is said to have generally gone on his extensive travels on foot, carrying his books on his back—a description frequently encountered in the biographies of the keen seekers of *ḥadīth*, connoting their humility before God. He himself testified that he never ceased traveling in search of prophetic traditions, notwithstanding the hardships he experienced while en route:

I bled twice in my search for *ḥadīth*, once in Baghdad and the other time in Mecca. I was walking barefoot enduring the heat, and was suffering much from this. Yet never have I ridden an animal while in search for *ḥadīth*... nor have I asked anyone for anything while seeking; I have lived on whatever [God] has provided me.¹⁶

So sincere was Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī's quest for accuracy and proficiency in recording prophetic traditions, he is quoted as saying that he copied the canonical six *ḥadīth* compilations several times.¹⁷

Authors of standard biographies of religious scholars known for their role as collectors and recorders of prophetic traditions seem to be unanimous in their high regard of Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī's diligence and authenticity. The eighth/fourteenth-century historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, who included him in his biographical dictionary of the celebrated *ḥadīth* transmitters (*Kitāb tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*) and in several of his other compilations, quotes a number of great *ḥadīth* authorities praising him for his trustworthiness as well as his personal integrity.¹⁸

Moreover, there were Sufis living in Muḥammad al-Qaysarānī's epoch who gained recognition and fame as legal experts (*fuqahā'*)—the elite of the '*ulamā'*' class—as attested in the recurrent com-

¹⁶ Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, al-Arna'ūt, S. *et al.* (eds.), in 25 vols., Beirut, 1985, 19: 363.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.* See also *idem*, *Kitāb tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 4 vols., Hyderabad, 1968, 4: 1242-1245.

pound label “Sufi, jurist (*faqīh*)” in biographical compendiums. Some are characterized as learned mystics (*al-‘ulama’ al-‘arīfīn*); they were those who combined knowledge of the Divine Law with knowledge of the True Reality. Others apparently did not gain importance as mystics; they are designated in their biographies as pious and virtuous worshipers (*‘ubbād, ṣāliḥūn*), models of proper conduct to be followed, rather than gnostics. These designations are often used by Mujīr al-Dīn al-‘Ulaymī al-Muqaddasī (d. 928/1521) in his narration of the lives of the virtuous Sufis and “friends of God”, the *awliyā’ Allāh*, of Jerusalem and Hebron (in *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta’rīkh al-Quds wa’l-Khalīl*).

Conversely, biographical compendiums are replete with descriptions of legal scholars bearing the appellations *zāhid* and *‘ābid*, which are often associated with the Sufis. These were men known for their self-control and self-discipline, who shared with the Sufis their opposition to materialism and worldliness. The kind of Sufism they ventured confined itself to moderate asceticism. Significantly, biographers speak as much about the piety and virtue of these figures as about their scholarly achievements.¹⁹ A noteworthy example of an ascetic jurist in late fifth/eleventh-century Jerusalem is Abū’l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Rāzī, who moved to the city from Baghdad and was killed in a massacre carried out by the Crusaders during their conquest. An outstanding figure among the Muslim intellectuals of his generation, he is praised by his biographers as much for his ascetic mode of life as for his profound legal learning (he adhered to the Shāfi‘ī school of legal interpretation).²⁰ Another telling example is Abū Muḥammad Hiyāj al-Ḥusayn of Hittin, who moved to Mecca and was killed there during a confrontation between the Sunnis and Shi‘is in 472/1080. He heard prophetic traditions from many authorities and devoted himself to the study of jurisprudence in accordance with the Shāfi‘ī rite until he became the *faqīh* of the Ḥaram and its mufti. He was a *zāhid*, a god-fearing man (*wari’*) totally immersed in

¹⁹ For the many examples in fifth/eleventh-century Baghdad, see Ephrat, D., *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘Ulama’ of Eleventh-Century Baghdad*, Albany (NY), 2000, esp. 89-90, 144, and figures 2.4-2.7 in chapter 2 there on legal scholars bearing the appellations associated with Sufism.

²⁰ Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*, al-Ḥilw, ‘A.F.M. and al-Tanāhī, M. M. (eds.), in 10 vols., Cairo, 1964-76, 5: 98. See also Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta’rīkh al-Quds wa’l-Khalīl*, new edition, Baghdad, 1995, 1 (pt. I): 299.

worshiping (*'ibāda*), praying and fasting. He used to perform the “minor *ḥajj*”, the *'umra*, three times daily on foot and the pilgrimage to the Prophet’s tomb barefoot. When traveling, he would take the opportunity to impart lessons to his accompanying disciples (*aṣḥāb*). He never accumulated belongings, possessing only a single garment.²¹

The occurrence of overlapping designations and characterizations in the biographical literature is not surprising once the supposedly unbridgeable barriers between strict legalism and Sufism are reasserted. Indeed, this supposed dichotomy conceals an ongoing rapprochement so characteristic of Islamic religiosity, beginning in the late fourth Muslim century and during the so-called “Sunni revival”. Moderate asceticism and pietism — both as a perception of proper conduct and in practice — transcended the lines between legalists and Sufis. As best illustrative in the teaching careers of al-Sulamī, al-Ghazzālī and his disciple Abū 'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, prominent legal experts and Sufis studied together in the same scholarly circles, grouping themselves around a common shaykh who combined the role of jurist with that of a Sufi guide.

Sufis searching for a middle ground between legalism and Sufism were generally attracted to the more traditionalist versions of the Sunnization movement. In particular, they were inclined to the schools of law and thought that rigorously relied on the prophetic traditions as guidelines of righteous belief and conduct and as a source of the law. Some therefore assimilated into the Shāfi'ī school of legal interpretation and cultivated Ash'arī theological tendencies, while others found their home in anti-rationalist Ḥanbalism.²² The “orthodox”-moderate form of asceticism and pietism practiced by these Sufis must have been most closely in harmony with that of the followers of Ibn Ḥanbal.

²¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad, *al-Muntazam fī ta'rīkh al-mulūk wa 'l-umam*, vols. 5-10, Hyderabad, 1358/59, 8: 326.

²² On the close association between Sufism and Shāfi'ism in Nīshāpūr, see R. W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, 41-43. See also Margaret Malamud's argument that the spread of Sufism in Nishapur from the late fourth/tenth century was linked to its connection with the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* as Sufis in Nīshāpūr were exclusively Shāfi'is: Malamud, «Sufi Organizations», 429. On Hanbalism and Sufism, see especially Makdisi, G., “The Hanbalite school and Sufism”, *Humaniora Islamica*, 2 (1974), 61-72; *idem*, “Hanbalite Islam”, *Studies on Islam*, Swartz, M. L. (ed.), New York, 1981, 247-250.

The Sufis' contribution to the consolidation of the legal schools led to their being included in the biographical dictionaries devoted to the celebrated scholars of the *madhhabs*, primarily the Shāfi'ī —the many examples in al-Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā* come to mind. Indeed, it was al-Sulamī who launched the particular strain of Shāfi'ī-oriented works in his *Ṭabaqāt al-sūfiyya* that was followed by the likes of al-Subkī and Yafi'ī, the latter himself a Sufi master.²³ Since many biographies are claimed by both the Sufis and the Shāfi'īs or Ḥanbalīs, who selected the material and accommodated it to their school traditions, it is sometimes difficult to pin down whether it was the legal school of a particular Sufi that was the principal element in the personality, or an earlier element in his upbringing. Were the biographees above all Sufis rather than Shāfi'īs or Ḥanbalīs? Nevertheless, the scholarly activities and web of connections of Sufi legalists do testify to their association with the legal schools, primarily the Shāfi'ī.

The close association of Sufism with Shāfi'ism, clearly revealed in the figures of such leading Sufis from the East as al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Ghazzālī, is confirmed by biographical accounts of contemporary Sufi-Shāfi'īs of Palestine. Prominent among the latter was Abū l-Faḍl 'Aṭā' al-Maqdisī of late fifth/eleventh-century Jerusalem (exact date of death unknown). By his time, Palestinian cities, above all Jerusalem, had become important centers of the Shāfi'ī school. Here, the mainstream of Shāfi'ī scholarship was continuously augmented by the worldwide ties between native-born and those who had moved to Palestinian cities from elsewhere, primarily from the East.²⁴ In Jerusalem, the Shāfi'ī study circles (*ḥalaqāt*), as with those of other legal communities, often gathered in the teachers' private homes and in teaching mosques, notably al-Aqṣā. In the late sixth/twelfth century, a new framework of legal learning appeared in the city. This was al-Madrasa al-Ṣalāḥiyya —the most prestigious educational institution of its kind in Ayyubid and Mamluk Jerusalem.²⁵

²³ See Terry Graham book review of Mojaddedi *The Biographical Tradition, Journal of Islamic Studies*, 13: 3 (2002), 339.

²⁴ For examples, see Gil, M., *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, trans. Ethel Broido, Cambridge, 1992, 425-428.

²⁵ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 2 (pt. 2): 41. For the dedication inscription, see Berchem, M. van, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, deuxième partie. Syrie du sud, Jérusalem, ville*, Le Caire, 1922, 35.

‘Aṭā’ al-Maqdisī, a native-born, having acquired renown, established his position in both Sufi and Shāfi‘ī circles. Abū Bakr b. al-Arabī, the Andalusian writer who stayed in the city from 1093 until 1095, described him in his travel journal as “the eldest shaykh of the Shāfi‘īs and the Sufi wayfarers (*shaykh al-ṣūfiyya bi’l-ṭarīqa*) of Jerusalem”, and in another compilation, as “the learned shaykh of Jerusalem and its most devout Sufi”, and “the eldest shaykh of the *fuqahā’* and the Sufis (*fuqarā’*) in al-Aqṣā mosque”.²⁶ Neither Ibn al-‘Arabī nor any later authors specify the content of ‘Aṭā’ al-Maqdisī’s teachings. Did he concentrate his efforts on transmitting his spiritual method? Or, if the education he imparted to his disciples and other followers focused on the essentials of the law common to all legal schools, or was it confined to the legal doctrine of the Shāfi‘ī school with which he was affiliated? Yet his designation as the teaching shaykh of both the Shāfi‘īs and the Sufis in al-Aqṣā mosque indicates the integration of Sufis and Sufism into the city’s scholarly life, dominated by the established legal schools. Thus began in medieval Palestine the phenomenon of spiritual wayfarers and seekers of legal learning studying under the same roof, and of Sufi shaykhs combining the role of the shaykh of the *fuqarā’* with that of shaykh of the *fuqahā’*.

‘Aṭā’ al-Maqdisī seems to have been the disciple of another Jerusalemite, Abū ‘l-Faṭḥ Naṣr al-Maqdisī al-Nābulusī (d. 490/1096), who more than any other contemporary Shāfi‘ī-Sufi connected with the history of legal learning in Palestinian intellectual and spiritual centers embodied the combination of legal scholarship with the attributes and mode of life associated with the Sufis, particularly *zuhd*. Like other scholars of religion and mainstream Sufis of his time, he was a sharp opponent of Ibn Karrām, of whom there were evidently still many disciples during this period in Jerusalem. Naṣr al-Maqdisī was born in Nablus, studied in Tyre and from there moved to Jerusalem. He later returned to Tyre, where he taught for some ten years. From Tyre, he moved to Damascus, where he spent the latter part of his life. It was during his days in Damascus that his position as a mufti and as one of the leading masters of his legal school was established. There he also met al-Ghazzālī, who sought his instruction in legal matters. He was the author of many books on the law, among

²⁶ Drory, J., *Ibn al-‘Arabī of Seville*, Ramat Gan, 1993, 81-82 (in Hebrew).

them *al-Ishāra*, a commentary on the legal compendium of his master in Tyre, the great Shāfi‘ī Sulaymān b. Ayyūb al-Rāzī, and had many disciples, one of the most celebrated being Idrīs b. Ḥamza of Ramla. Sufi and non-Sufi biographers described him as an outstanding legal and *ḥadīth* scholar, and unequaled among his generation in his asceticism and praiseworthy conduct (*al-sīra al-ḥamīda*).²⁷

Yet, despite the blurring of the lines between legalism and mainstream Sufism, there were important differences. Under the Seljuks and their Ayyubid successors, who offered abundant career opportunities to the ‘*ulamā*’ of the established *madhhabs*, the career of an ‘*ālim*’—a member of one or other of the legal schools—and hence his place and role in the official and public sphere, came to be distinguishable from that of his counterpart learned Sufi. The term ‘*ālim*’ is used in the biographical literature pertaining to this period to designate a man fully occupied in the instruction and application of the law. As opposed to the learned Sufi of his generation, the typical, full-time scholar of religion would often be a religious or civil official (or both) and, as such, incorporated into the state bureaucracy and closely associated with the official sphere.²⁸ This distinction is well attested in Mujīr al-Dīn’s collection of biographies of Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī *fuqahā*’ and the Sufi shaykhs of late Ayyubid and Mamluk Jerusalem and Hebron.²⁹

Moreover, to define the learned Sufi whose name is included in biographical collections written by ‘*ulamā*’ about other ‘*ulamā*’ as “orthodox”—ascetic or *shar‘ī*-mystic would be to play down another seminally important dimension of his persona, that of an authoritative spiritual and moral guide, the focus of veneration by the disciples and followers who orbited round him. Similarly, overemphasis on such a

²⁷ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 1: 297-298; al-Yafi‘ī, ‘Abd Allāh, *Mir‘āt al-Jinān wa-‘ibrat al-yaqzān fī ma‘rifat ḥawādith al-zamān*, 2nd edition in 4 vols., Beirut, 1970, 3: 152; al-Ṣafadī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *al-Wāfi bi’l-wafayāt*, Ritter, H. (ed.), in 29 vols., Istanbul, 1931, 4: 376-77; al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar fī khabar man ghabar*, al-Dīn Munājīd, Ṣ. and Sayyid, F. (eds.), in 4 vols., Kuwait, 1961-66, 3: 329; Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, in 8 vols, Beirut, n.d., 3: 395-396. See also Brockelmann, *GAL, SI*, 609, and the references in Drory, *Ibn al-‘Arabī*, 66-67.

²⁸ See Gilbert, J. E., “Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the ‘Ulamā’ in Medieval Damascus”, *Studia Islamica*, 52 (1980), 105-134. For examples in fifth/eleventh-century Baghdad, see Ephrat, *A Learned Society*, 126-136.

²⁹ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 2: 143ff.

person's operation within the large camp of mainstream Sunnism might eclipse his peculiar modes of operation within society. From the late fourth/tenth century onward, alongside the integration of Sufism into the mainstream of Islam and the scholarly world of the legal schools, the Sufi shaykh and his grouping constructed their own inner life and organizational forms and devised their own ways of integrating into the fabric of social and communal life.

The Moral Guide and the Early Local Congregation

Learned Sufis, disseminators of "true" knowledge and proper Islamic conduct, are praised primarily for their mild ascetic habits and moral posture, rather than for the spiritual stations and mastery of gnosis they attained. Moreover, as noted above, their biographies show them to be virtuous ascetic worshipers, rather than mystics. The stories about Naṣr al-Maḡdisī serve as a good example. Settling finally in Damascus, he pursued his ascetic mode of life, refusing to eat anything beyond what was necessary for his mere subsistence. A small loaf of bread was baked from the harvest of a plot he had in Nablus and sent to him in Damascus every night. His *fatwās* decreed the pursuit of one way (*ṭarīqa*) only: asceticism in this world and purity from base qualities or habits.³⁰

Sufi and non-Sufi Muslim authors have long distinguished between the mystical and ethical dimensions of Sufism —*al-ṭaṣawwuf alladhī li'l-takhalluq* as opposed to *al-ṭaṣawwuf alladhī li'l-taḥaqquq*. Some even defined Sufism as etiquette, thus stressing the importance of the ethical over the mystical dimension. Abū 'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī in his famous manual, *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (composed in the late sixth/twelfth century), quotes earlier Sufis of great renown: "The noblest characteristics of the Sufis are their moral qualities... A saying of Abū Bakr al-Kattānī: 'Sufism is ethical disposition, so whoever is better than you in his ethics is greater than you in Sufism'. When Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh was asked about good ethical behavior, he said that its minimal requirements were to suffer evil with forbearance, to abstain from retribution and to have compassion for him who wrongs you. It is these qualities which are characteristic of

³⁰ See note 27, above.

the Sufis...”.³¹ Elsewhere in his compilation, al-Suhrawardī makes a clear distinction between the ethical and mystical dimensions, which corresponds to the division between its visible-outward and hidden-inward dimensions: “This school [Sufism] has external and internal aspects (*zāhir wa-bāṭin*). The external aspect is to observe the rule of ethical behavior in relation to mankind, and the inner aspect is to launch into states and stations (*aḥwāl wa-maqāmāt*) in relation to the Real One (*al-ḥaqq*)”.³² About two hundred years later, the eighth/fourteenth-century Andalusian scholar Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb designates classical Sufism as “mysticism of ethical behavior” (*al-taṣawwuf al-khuluqī*).³³

The emphasis placed on Sufism as etiquette comes out clearly in Sufi manuals composed from the late fourth/tenth century onward, all subsumed under the term *adab* or *ādāb* (ethics and manners). Al-Sulamī in his *Jawāmi‘ ādāb al-ṣūfiyya*, apparently the first single work entirely devoted to describing many disparate *ādāb*, placed unprecedented emphasis on correct behavior. The acquisition of *adab* is described as more important and praiseworthy than the accumulation of knowledge (*‘ilm*) or prolonged engagement in ascetic practices; any disrespect for *adab* might lead to the loss of faith in God.³⁴ In his *Manāhij al-‘arīfīn*, al-Sulamī traces the various stages through which the novice has to pass. First, one learns *adab* from his shaykh, which leads to the second station, morals (*akhlāq*). It is on this basis that he advances to the final station, mystical states (*aḥwāl*).³⁵ The perception that acquiring ethics and manners is the first and foremost objective of training in Sufism and a precondition for advancement along the spiritual path is nowhere more clearly expressed than in al-Suhrawardī’s manual; Sufism in its entirety is viewed here from

³¹ *A Sufi Rule for Novices. Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn of Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī*, an abridged translation by Menahem Milson, Cambridge, Mass., 1975, 37.

³² *Id.*, 36 (additions of Arabic terms in parentheses are mine).

³³ See Meier, F., “The Mystic Path”, *The World of Islam: Faith, People, Culture*, Lewis, B. (ed.), London, 1992, 118. On the distinction between the mystical and moral dimensions of Sufism, see also Brenner, L., “Separate Realities: A Review of Literature on Sufism”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 5 (1972), 645.

³⁴ *Jawāmi‘ ādāb al-ṣūfiyya* and *‘Uyūb al-naḥs wa-mudāwāthuhā* by Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 412 H), edited with an introduction by E. Kohlberg, Jerusalem, 1976, 11 (summary of paragraph 7).

³⁵ Sulamī, *Manāhij al-‘arīfīn*, (ed.) Kohlberg, Jerusalem, 1, 1979, 31, 38.

the standpoint of *adab*. For, “each moment [of mystical experience (*waqt*)], each state (*hāl*) and each station (*maqām*) has its *adab*”.³⁶

The great importance authors of Sufi manuals ascribed to training in Sufism as a moral code of conduct was manifested in practice. An early testimony concerns Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī, the great mystic of Tyre. Al-Qushayrī depicted him as closely monitoring the behavior of his disciples. Concerned with safeguarding the reputation of members of his grouping as righteous people among the community of their fellow believers, the shaykh disseminated his norms and values *within* society:

It is related that one day Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī was following the *fuqarā’*. It was his habit to follow them. They directed their steps to a private house for the performance of the supplication prayer (*da‘wa*). Someone was heard to remark: “These people take things unlawfully”, and added, “One of them did not pay me back one hundred silver coins (*dirham*) he had borrowed from me, and I know not where I should find him”. The house where they gathered belonged to a “lover” (*muḥibb*) of this grouping (*tā’ifa*), and when they entered it, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī said to the house owner, “If you care about my peace of mind, give me one hundred *dirham*”. The request was immediately granted. He then ordered one of his close companions (*aṣḥāb*): “Take the money to the greengrocer with the following explanation: Here is the money that one from among our group borrowed from you. He now returns the loan in the hope of your forgiveness for the belated repayment”. And the disciple did so. On their way back from the *da‘wa*, they all stopped at the shop of the grocer, who, upon seeing them, started to praise them, exclaiming: “These are righteous and trustworthy worshipers, may God bless them”.³⁷

Al-Rūdhbārī concluded the episode with the words: “The most repulsive [man] is the stingy Sufi”. This last statement is also attributed to him in *Bāb al-taṣawwuf* of al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*.³⁸

Later authors cast further light on the shaykh’s role and reputation as a moral guide. Thus, for example, Ibn ‘Asākir tells of Abū ‘Abd

³⁶ Milson, *A Sufi Rule*, 36 (additions of Arabic terms in parentheses are mine).

³⁷ Al-Qushayrī, Abū ‘l-Qāsim, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, Zuriq M. and al-Balṭajī, ‘A. (eds.), Damascus and Beirut, 1988, 415-416.

³⁸ *Id.*, 281.

Allāh al-Rūdhbārī's habit to invite his disciples to follow him to the houses of the common people (*sūqa*), who were not Sufis, where they would assemble for the supplication prayer. Before entering the houses, however, he would supply them with a meal so that they would not help themselves to the host's food, thereby marring their reputation as people of virtue. As his moral virtues were publicly manifested, the belief in the divine grace with which he was endowed spread among the people. At the same time, he gained renown in scholarly circles due to his mastery of all Islamic sciences.³⁹

By the turn of the fifth/eleventh century, it had become common for the aspirant to call upon a shaykh rather than tread the spiritual path alone. Scarce is the information provided by the sources studied here about the content of the Sufi master's guidance, the practices he applied in training his few select disciples and intimates or the ways he interacted with them. Nevertheless, a few, rare testimonies infer that the shaykh would equip those who called upon him not merely with knowledge of the essentials of Sufism and the sacred law, or with generalized instructions on spiritual etiquette. He would also act as a master of training (*shaykh al-tarbiya*), involved in the private, inner life of his disciple (*ṣāhib, murīd*), and intervening directly in his behavior by means of definitive instructions, the carrying out of which he supervised.⁴⁰ What is more, while acting as *shaykh al-tarbiya*, he would induce in his disciples sentiments of fraternity based on the Sufi maxims of service to others and altruism (*īthār*), thereby constituting them as a spiritual family. This is how Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī imparted to his disciples the Sufi rule of bountifulness and generosity (*al-jūd wa'l-sakhā'*) towards one's brethren:

³⁹ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, 5: 20.

⁴⁰ The eighth/fourteenth-century Moroccan Sufi Ibn 'Abbād al-Rundī was the first to point out a universal transformation of the teaching shaykh (*shaykh al-ta'līm*) into the directing shaykh (*shaykh al-tarbiya*), beginning in the fifth/eleventh century. Following his lead, Fritz Meier has traced the early phase in this transformation in Khurasan at the end of classical Sufism. See esp. Meier, "Hurasan und das Ende der klassischen Sufik", *Atti del Convengo internazionale sul Tema: La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome, 1970, 546-547; "Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism", *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane with editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke, Leiden, 1999, 190-192. See also, Malamud, "Sufi Organizations", 432; Buehler, A. F., *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykhs*, Columbia, 1998, 29-44 (following Meier, "Hurasan").

I [al-Qushayrī] heard shaykh Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (may God grant him mercy) relate, “Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rūdhbārī went to the home of one of his companions. No one was at home and the door of the house was locked. He stated, ‘This man is a Sufi, and he locks his door? Break open the lock’. They complied with the order. He then ordered them to take all the goods found on the grounds and in the house, carry them to the market, sell them, and take wages from the work for the money received. Then he and his companions waited in the house. When the owner came in, he was speechless. His wife came in afterwards, wearing an outer garment. She threw off her cloak, declaring, ‘O companions, this is also part of our worldly property, so sell it, too’. Her husband asked her, ‘Why do you choose to suffer like this?’ She replied, ‘Keep quiet! How can you grudge anything from one such as this shaykh, who honors us with such familiarity and disposes of our affairs?’”⁴¹

The accomplished Sufi master embodies the behavior patterns and ethical postures of the Prophet that were imparted to him through successive generations of outstanding pious and virtuous figures. Hence, it is through him that the prophetic Sunna is revived. This perception, which was first manifested in the writings of al-Sulamī, was elaborated by later Sufi authors of *adab* literature; it was lucidly expressed by Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 635/1234): “The characters (*akhlāq*) of the masters have been polished through their perfection in molding themselves after the Messenger of God, peace and blessing be upon him. They are the most successful of people in revivifying the Sunna, in all that he commanded and commissioned, censured and enjoined”.⁴²

The shaykh’s central role, indeed the very essence of his guidance, is to serve those who call upon him, and the prime goal of this service is to pass on to them his virtues (*manāqib*) and morals (*akhlāq*), even the divine blessing (*baraka*) with which he was endowed—all these attributes that make him indispensable. This ultimate goal of transmission of religious lore was not peculiar to the Sufis but was shared by the religious elite generally. Still, education under the Sufi guide acquired a special significance; molding behavior is often described

⁴¹ Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 250; trans. B. R. von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism by al-Qushayri*, Berkeley, 1990, 252 (transliteration is mine).

⁴² Cited by Malamud, «Sufi Organizations», 440, n. 37.

in terms of a total transformation of a disciple's entire mode of life, even a transformation of his self. Al-Ghazzālī presented the authoritative guide as a healer of souls. In his words, addressed to the seeker of the spiritual path, "Know that whoever treads this path (*ṭarīqa*), should attach himself to a shaykh, a guide and educator, through whose guidance his bad qualities will be rooted out".⁴³ Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, following this line, stated, "The shaykh's purpose is to cleanse the *murīd*'s heart from the rust and lust and of nature, so that in it, by attraction and inclination, may be reflected the rays of the beauty of unity and the glory of eternity".⁴⁴ Accordingly, the disciple must enter a life dominated by his shaykh's guidance or, to use the language of the great Sufi thinkers, of constant service (*khidma*), which dictates that he owes total obedience to his shaykh, just as every man owes obedience to God. Abū 'l-Najīb put it this way: "The novice should not leave his shaykh before the eye of his heart opens. Rather, during the period of service (*khidma*), he should forbear whatever his educator commands and forbids. One of the shaykhs said: 'He who was not educated by the shaykhs' words and ordinances, would not be educated by the Qur'ān and the Sunna'".⁴⁵ The shaykh is thus presented as the living heir of the Prophet, and the relationship between a shaykh and his disciples is parallel to that between the Companions and the Prophet.⁴⁶ In the words of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī: "The shaykh in the midst of his *murīds* is as Muḥammad in the midst of his *aṣḥāb*".⁴⁷

Sayings by Sufi authors living in the Earlier Middle Period are a clear indication of the change from the fluidity of the mystical wayfarer's environment to new and deeper bonds uniting masters and disciples. Previously members of the Sufi circles sought instruction and guidance from as many shaykhs as possible, now from about the late fourth/tenth century, they associated themselves with a particular

⁴³ Al-Ghazzālī, Muḥammad Abū Hāmid, *Ayyuhā al-walad*, Beirut, 1959, 37.

⁴⁴ Al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn, *The 'Awārifu-l-ma'ārif*, trans. Wilberforce Clarke, New York, 1970, 14.

⁴⁵ Al-Suhrawardī, Abū al-Najīb, *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, edited with an introduction by Milson, Jerusalem, 1978, 31.

⁴⁶ See the comments by Kohlberg in his introduction to al-Sulamī, *Jawāmi'*, 11 and n. 28 there. For examples of the change in the relationship between shaykh and his disciples in fifth/eleventh-century Khurasan, see Malamud, «Sufi Organizations», 432-435; Buehler, *Sufi Heirs.*, 29-44 (following Meier, "Hurasan").

⁴⁷ Al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn, *The 'Awārifu-l-ma'ārif*, 19.

shaykh, and were prepared to follow his spiritual route (*ṭarīqa*) and transmit it themselves to future generations.⁴⁸ The shaykh, for his part, was fully committed to the service of his disciples; imparting to them his norms and values and closely monitoring their conduct, he combined the roles of educator, psychologist and caring spiritual father. Thus, the stage was set for the evolution from loose and mobile groupings into coherent local congregations. In the course of the Earlier Middle Period, amidst the fluidity of the cosmopolitan world of the Sufis still evident, the phenomenon of a guide living among his disciples, followers of his *ṭarīqa* came to be increasingly common. Around Sufi shaykhs who settled in Palestinian spiritual centers and their environs, a locally embedded congregation began clustering forming the nucleus of the “people of the way”.

The stories about al-Rūdhbārī, related above, reflect the early phase in this formation. The shaykh and members of his *ṭā'ifa* clung to each other, performed their rituals together and interacted as a coherent group with other members of the local community. The term *ṭā'ifa* (literally, “faction”), which in a later period denoted a Sufi fraternity or suborder, is used here to cover a specific category of people with shared identity and leadership.⁴⁹ Another example is a group (*jamā'a*) orbiting around Naṣr al-Maqdisī during his days in Jerusalem, called Naṣriyya, after him.⁵⁰

Little is known about the formation and forms of operation of the early local *ṭā'ifa* or *jamā'a*. Apparently, the most significant of these Sufi associations had their origins in earliest times as small circles of ascetics, mystics and their disciples (*aṣḥāb*), who settled in the sacred cities of Jerusalem and Hebron, as well as in Nablus and Ramla. The coastal border cities, such as Ascalon, Arsūf and Tyre, were also cradles of Sufi communities of ascetics and mystics who combined there warfare against the Byzantine enemy with spectacular supererogatory acts of worship.⁵¹ From the earliest days of Muslim rule, ascetics and

⁴⁸ Probably the most significant discussions of this evolution are Trimmingham, S. J., *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1971, esp. 13-16, and see Lapidus, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁴⁹ On the term “*ṭā'ifa*” and its applications in early Islamic societies, see Mottahedeh, R. P., *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, Princeton, 107, 149, 159. See also Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 241, for the use of the term in the period of institutionalization of Sufism into the major fraternities.

⁵⁰ Drory, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 67.

⁵¹ On the earliest Muslim ascetics on the Arab-Byzantine frontier, see Bonner, M.,

mystics were drawn to the cities and towns of Palestine from regions of the Muslim world as far apart as Spain and India. Many were transients, wandering from one spiritual center to another, while others settled in them. Although politically marginalized and economically deteriorating under the Fatimids and Seljuks before the Crusaders and the Ayyubids after them, the Holy Land—in particular Jerusalem—continued to attract ascetics and mystics.⁵²

Disciples and intimates who constructed their loyalties and identities around a certain shaykh, clinging to him for a long period and complying with his devotional and ethical requirements, formed the nucleus of the local Sufi association. Around them, another circle of lay believers began to emerge. This universal development is clearly attested in Abū 'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī's famous manual. A careful distinction is made here between two categories of membership of a Sufi congregation: the “fully committed members”, who are obliged to undertake the rigors and self-imposed deprivations implicit in its rules of conduct, and those who wish to partake of its spiritual life without forsaking their material possessions and social connections.⁵³ By sophisticatedly applying the traditional concept of *rukḥṣa*—a dispensation from some of the severer Sufi requirements for those believers unable to observe them to the maximum—⁵⁴ Abū 'l-Najīb responded to the phenomenon of attachment to Sufism of lay members of the public, called *muḥibbūn*—“lovers” and supporters of the Sufis.⁵⁵

In return for sharing in the spirituality of the local Sufi congregation and the charisma of the fully committed members, the *muḥibbūn* were expected to render services to that congregation—in particular, to support its local members through charitable donations and provide hospitality for itinerant fellow Sufis. The *muḥibb* of al-Rūdhbārī's *tā'ifa* hosted the local brethren and lent them money.⁵⁶ Abū Turāb

Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab Byzantine Frontier, New Haven, CT, 1996, esp. 107-134.

⁵² For some of the most famous examples, see Goitein, S. D., “The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam”, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966, 142-146.

⁵³ Milson, *A Sufi Rule*, 19, 53, 66.

⁵⁴ Netton, I., “The Breath of Felicity: *Adab*, *Aḥwāl*, *Maqāmāt* and Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī”, *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, Lewisohn, L. (ed.), London, 1993, 461.

⁵⁵ Baldick, J., *Mystical Islam: Introduction to Sufism*, London, 1989, 72.

⁵⁶ See note 37, above.

al-Ramlī (d. unknown), while making his way back from the *ḥajj*, directed the disciples who accompanied him to an easier route in order to save them the hardship of traversing the desert. When they arrive in his hometown of Ramla, he instructed, they should dwell in the house of a certain *muḥibb*. And so they did. The “lover” of this *ṭā’ifa* provided them with shelter and food aplenty (pot roast and chicken) throughout their stay, until their shaykh’s return.⁵⁷

Rather than isolating themselves in the hope for spiritual perfection, the shaykh and his *ṭā’ifa* participated in the social and religious life of the local community, and interacted with its members. This interaction most probably took place in a private home or in a mosque, the *masjid* or the *jāmi’* (congregational mosque). The Persian traveler Nāṣir-ī-Khusraw provides us with a most telling example of Sufis participating in the devotional life of the local community of Jerusalem in the city’s great mosques and holy sites. In his account of his visit to the Ḥaram al-Sharīf (written in 1047), he noted that a group of Sufis would enter it as a matter of routine for the attendance of the Friday public prayer. At the same time, he observed that the group had developed its own communal center: there were two cloisters by the northern wall exclusively belonging to this group, where they lodged and performed their daily prayers and rituals.⁵⁸

The Advent of the Sufi Establishment

Several historians ascribe an important role to the development of the Sufi lodge —*ribāt*, *tekke*, *khānqāh*, *zāwiya* or *khalwa*— in the transition of Sufism from loose, mobile groups of spiritual wanderers to coherent associations. In particular, the foundation of a vast network of endowed *khānqāhs* (beginning with the Seljuks in Khurasan in the early fifth/eleventh century) for Sufi devotees, where they were lodged, and fed and performed their rituals, is believed to be a major phase in the evolution of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* as an organization (as op-

⁵⁷ Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, in 10 vols. Beirut, n.d., 10: 164; Al-Jāmī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *Nafahat al-uns min ḥadarāt al-Quds*, al-Jādūr, M. A. (ed.), new edition in 2 vols. Beirut, 2003, 1: 78.

⁵⁸ Peters, F. E., *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*, Princeton, 1985, 246.

posed to a mystical path). Thus, parallel to the foundation of *khānqāhs*, the loose Sufi associations yielded their place to organized systems of affiliation, instruction and ritual, each developing a hierarchy of spiritual guides who derived their authority from a kind of apostolic succession bestowed upon them by the founder.⁵⁹

But this interpretation of the effects of founding endowed centers for Sufi devotees plays down the internal dynamic of religious and social evolution. Given the highly personal character of training in Sufism and transmitting of spiritual knowledge, it was around persons—the Sufi shaykhs—rather than places, that aspirants and companions forged their social relationships and constructed their identities. Spencer Trimingham persuasively argues: “It was not through such an establishment [the *khānqāh*] that the next development of Sufi institutionalization took place but through a single master, sometimes settled in a retreat far from the distractions of *khānqāh* life, sometimes in his *zāwiya* home in the big city, frequently a wanderer traveling around with his circle of disciples”.⁶⁰ Indeed, biographical accounts of the Sufi shaykhs under consideration here, demonstrate that training in Sufism, prayer, and *dhikr* or spiritual retreat took place wherever a shaykh happened to sit, just as sessions for legal instruction continued to be held in a variety of forums other than the endowed *madrasa*.

The flexible terms used to describe particular cultural establishments and changes over time in their designation are themselves reflective of the flexible, personal character of the dissemination of Islamic learning and devotion. Historians and chroniclers accorded much more importance to accurately recording with whom a person had studied than to specifying and defining the building or institution where he acquired his education or training.⁶¹ What is more, the general model suggested by historians for understanding the character of the Sufi lodge and its social significance overshadows its particular characteristics in the various regions of the medieval Muslim world,

⁵⁹ See esp. Holt, P. M., *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*, London, 1986, 80.

⁶⁰ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 10.

⁶¹ This is in line with Jonathan Berkey who, while focusing on medieval Cairo, has made an invaluable contribution to the study of educational institutions and the world of religious learning in medieval Islam as a whole: Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, Princeton, 1992, esp. 49.

as well as differences among various types of establishments as delineated in the sources. The main source for the development of Sufi establishments in medieval Palestine is Mujīr al-Dīn's history of Jerusalem and Hebron, which includes an extensive list of the establishments founded in the two cities during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, on the basis of the great number of deeds of endowment (*waqfiyyas*) he had before him. Added to this valuable primary source, are the few endowment charters in the name of the founder and the dedication inscriptions posted on the buildings themselves that have survived to this day.

It was not until the Ayyubid period that the first *khānqāh* made its appearance in Palestine (in 585/1189) —the prestigious Ṣalāḥiyya of Jerusalem, named after its famous founder. The first director of the establishment and the trustee (*nāzir*) of its pious endowments was Shaykh Ghānim al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī, inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time (he was born in a village in the Nablus region and died in Damascus in 632/1234), known for his excellent qualities and virtuous deeds.⁶² The founder, who created the office of the shaykh of the establishment and made the appointment, entitled him to pass it on, either to his descendants or to anyone else of his choice. Nevertheless, the deed of the endowment does not indicate that the Ṣalāḥiyya *khānqāh* was founded and bountifully endowed for the benefit of a particular shaykh and his group of close disciples and followers. Rather, the best available information suggests that the establishment was granted to the virtuous, “true” Sufis in general, whether indigenous or, more probably, foreign.⁶³ The *khānqāh*, in other words, was an official establishment that did not center on the shaykh and his circle.

The foundation of the Ṣalāḥiyya and the other great *khānqāhs* that fall into the same category is a clear indication of the process by which Sufism moved from the margins of intellectual and social life to become part of the social order and the fabric of Muslim devotion. These magnificent buildings are physical evidence of the growing recognition of Sufis as one among the groups disseminating the truth

⁶² Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 2: 146.

⁶³ The deed of the *waqf*, preserved in the archives of the *shar'ī* court of Jerusalem, have been published by al-'Asalī, Kamāl al-Dīn, *Wathā'iq maqdisiyya tā'rikiyya*, Amman, 1983, 91ff.

of Islam and shaping the communities' spiritual and social life accordingly. However, the formal institutional structure of the *khānqāh* could hardly contain the activities and energy of the growing numbers of medieval Muslim men and women who identified themselves in some way as Sufis.⁶⁴ No less important, it seems, was the wish of Sufis pursuing an ascetic mode of life to avoid the patronage of the ruling elite and distance themselves from an establishment founded by the powerful and closely associated with the official sphere. It is no wonder, then, that informal groups of Sufis with their shaykhs continued to gather in mosques and private homes. Alternatively, they would gather in the much less institutionalized and more informal Sufi establishment known as *zāwiya*. Apparently, this was the case in medieval Palestine.

A glance at Mujīr al-Dīn's description of the Sufi establishments founded in Ayyubid and Mamluk Jerusalem indicates the flexibility in the use of the term "*zāwiya*" and exposes a number of patterns. The different terms he himself uses to describe particular Sufi establishments are in themselves an indication that at least during the early phase of its development the *zāwiya* did not conform to a single pattern.⁶⁵ Among the *zāwiyas* included in Mujīr al-Dīn's list is the Nāṣriyya. This seemingly very small Sufi lodge was named after the above-mentioned famous learned Sufi of Jerusalem, Shaykh Naṣr al-Maqdisī. Its description yields a complex picture; over time, changes took place in the character of the establishment and the functions it was designed to serve. According to Mujīr al-Dīn, Naṣr lived in Jerusalem in his *zāwiya* located atop the Gate (Gates) of Mercy (*Bāb [Abwāb] al-rahma*). Shortly afterward, however, the *zāwiya* was renamed al-Ghazzāliyya in honor of al-Ghazzālī, who had taken up residence there during his sojourn in the city (1095-96). But when Ibn al-ʿArabī, who visited Jerusalem at the time, speaks in his travel journal of the Shāfiʿī *madrasa* near the Gate (Gates) of the Tribes (*Bāb [Abwāb] al-aṣbāt*), he may be referring to the same institution. Later, according to Mujīr al-Dīn, the Ayyubid prince al-Malik al-Muʿazzam ʿIsāʾ refurbished the establishment (labeled a *madrasa* in this ac-

⁶⁴ Jonathan Berkey makes this point in *The Transmission*, 58.

⁶⁵ Based on the al-Maqrīzī's description of the *zāwiyas* of Cairo in the early ninth/fifteenth century, Jonathan Berkey shows that even in the Mamluk period the *zāwiya* did not conform to a single pattern: Berkey, *Id.*, 58.

count) for use as a *zāwiya*. He designed it for the study of the Qur'ān and the syntax, and donated many books as *waqf* for this purpose. Mujīr al-Dīn adds that in his day the *zāwiya* has fallen into ruin: it is no longer occupied and has been abandoned.⁶⁶

Another establishment Mujīr al-Dīn lists and describes is al-Naḥwiyya. This establishment —sometimes called a *zāwiya*, other times a *madrasa*— was the first to officially combine Sufism and the law on the institutional level; in accordance with its endowment charter, it housed under the same roof the *fuqarā'* and the *fuqahā'*, and offered lessons in jurisprudence and related sciences. Also founded by al-Malik al-Mu'azzam 'Īsā' (in 604/1207), it provided for a supervisor of prayer (*imām*) and twenty-five students and their shaykh, with the stipulation that they receive instruction in grammar and affiliate with the Ḥanafī school of law.⁶⁷

Whatever the various types and changing functions of the *zāwiya*, a fundamental distinction existed from the outset between this and other establishments of learning and devotion. In contrast with the royal establishments —the *madrasa* and the *khānqāh*— the *zāwiya*, as delineated by later historians and chronicles, was the home and realm of its first shaykh and his successors. Usually, although not invariably, it was founded on the private initiative by a shaykh who presided over it. Moreover, even when members of the ruling elite built *zāwiyas* and endowed them liberally, their financing came from private sources for the benefit of a *particular* shaykh, his followers and his successors.⁶⁸

The individual pattern for establishing and endowing of the *zāwiya*, which became increasingly apparent in Mamluk times, is revealed as early as the foundation of al-Khanthaniyya (in 587/1191), the first Sufi establishment in Ayyubid Jerusalem that is specifically and consistently called a *zāwiya*. Mujīr al-Dīn relates:

⁶⁶ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 1: 34.

⁶⁷ *Id.*, 2: 64. See also al-'Asalī, *Ma'āhid al-'ilm fī Bayt al-Maqdis*, Amman, 1981, 104.

⁶⁸ Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 168 makes this observation with regard to the *zāwiyas* founded in Syria and Egypt in the late Mamluk period. See also Fernandes, L. E., *The Evolution of the Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: the khānqāh*, Berlin, 1988, 16-32, for the fundamental difference between the *zāwiya* and *khānqāh* as developed in Mamluk Egypt.

As for the *madrasas* and *zāwiyas* around the mosque [al-Aqṣā]: the earliest is *al-zāwiya* al-Khanthaniyya, adjacent to the mosque behind its pulpit. Al-Malik Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, may God protect him with His grace, bequeathed it as *waqf* for one of the people of virtue. And he is the most honorable, ascetic and pious man, al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Shāshī, inhabitant of Bayt al-Muqqadas, and, after him, for whoever would follow him. Indeed, a group of the distinguished shaykhs has presided over it ever since...⁶⁹

Symbolizing the presence and authority of its first shaykh and his successors, the *zāwiya* developed into the prime establishment for the dissemination of his knowledge and guidance and as the center for followers of his spiritual path. As such, the proliferation of *zāwiyas* in Palestinian cities, towns and villages under the Mamluk regime made a significant contribution to the growth of locally embedded Sufi-inspired communities around pious and charismatic leaders living in their lodges among their fellow believers.

* * *

A study of the concrete manifestations, when placed within the broader context of the theme, suggests that the heart of the transition from a marginal elite of mystical wayfarers into a prominent religiously based and led-associations resides in the dissemination of Sufism as a code of moral conduct, or ethical Sufism, as opposed to a mystical doctrine. In the case of medieval Palestine, and perhaps of other medieval Islamic settings, this transition began as early as the late fourth Muslim century. Embodying the authority of the Prophet and replicating the prophetic pattern of discipleship and companionship, the Sufi moral guide constituted his circle as a spiritual family. Still, only through his operation within society could the scope of his influence enlarge and the horizons of Sufism extended beyond the core of small circles of seekers of the Path. Certainly, the adoption of the legalist approach of incessant concern with the regularization and shaping of public norms and customs helped establish the learned Sufi shaykh's position as a moral guide within his community. More important, however, was the actual manifestation of virtues associated with the Sufis.

⁶⁹ Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl*, 1: 34, 2: 144 (in his biography of al-Shāshī).

Representatives of activist ethical Sufism in Palestine during the late fourth/tenth-sixth/twelfth century not only acted as arbiters of religious knowledge and practice alongside the scholars of the established legal schools within which they integrated. Practicing their virtues within society and interacting with its members, they disseminated Sufi norms and values throughout the local community and integrated Sufism into the fabric of social and communal life. Thus was the road paved for the transformation of Sufism into a generalized religious pattern accessible to every believer leading beyond the confines of exclusive affiliations and enforced loyalties. Under the Mamluk regime, the Sufi inspired community, the *ahl at-tariqa*, became the focus of social identity and affiliation in the public sphere of Palestinian cities and their environs. The sites and spaces that grew around the dissemination of the Sufi shaykh's knowledge and guidance and the bestowal of his divine grace helped shape and expand an Islamic space.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ On this evolution, see Ephrat, "Sufism and Sanctity: The Genesis of the Sufi *walī Allāh* in Mamluk Jerusalem and Hebron", *Mamluks and Ottomans: Studies in honour of Michael Winter*, D. J. Wasserstein and A. Ayalon (eds.), London, 2006, 4-18.