



SUFI MASTERS AND THE CREATION OF SAINTLY SPHERES IN MEDIEVAL SYRIA

by
DAPHNA EPHRAT

ARCHUMANITIES PRESS



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THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMICATE WORLD

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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ISBN (HB): 9781641892087

ISBN (PB): 9781641894647

ISBN (PDF): 9781641892094

Printed and bound in the UK (by CPI Group [UK] Ltd), USA (by Bookmasters), and elsewhere using print-on-demand technology.

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
A Note on Transliteration, Names, and Dates	xi
Introduction	1

PART ONE: CHARISMATIC MASTERS IN THEIR LOCAL SETTINGS

Chapter 1. Putting Down Roots	19
Chapter 2. Sources and Displays of Spiritual and Charismatic Authority	33
Chapter 3. Sustainment of Spiritual Leadership and Loyalty: The Shaykh in the Company of his Disciples	49
Chapter 4. Expansion of Operation: The Shaykh, the Public Sphere, and the Local Community	63

PART TWO: EMPLACEMENTS OF AUTHORITY AND HOLINESS

Chapter 5. The Development and Spatial Layout of Physical Settings	83
Chapter 6. From Dwelling Places into Sainly Dominions and Local Spaces	101

Chapter 7. The Gravesite and the New Sacred Landscape 115

Conclusion..... 135

Bibliography..... 141

Index..... 147

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

Figure 1.	Syria (Bilād al-Shām) in the mid-thirteenth century.	2
Figure 2.	The Valley of the Christians west of Homs.....	65
Figure 3.	Late-twelfth–early-thirteenth-century frescoes in the historic Roman Orthodox Church of St. Elian in Homs.....	66
Figure 4.	The spatial layout of Sufi establishments in mid-fourteenth-century Damascus.	93
Figure 5.	Thirteenth-century Aleppo.....	97
Figure 6.	Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery, early twentieth century.....	119
Figure 7.	Jami‘ al-Maqāmāt, Aleppo, Syria, early twentieth century.	121
Figure 8.	Carved decorated sarcophagus in the cemetery of al-Ṣāliḥīn, early twentieth century.	122
Figure 9.	The tomb of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī in the agricultural hinterland of Manbij.....	123
Figure 10.	The mosque and shrine of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī. (a) The entrance to the complex; (b) a view of the interior and the sarcophagus at its centre.....	129
Figure 11.	The mausoleum of Ibn ‘Arabī in the Ṣāliḥiyya. (a) The mosque minaret; (b) the sarcophagus in a glass burial chamber on the underground level.	131
Figure 12.	The Qalandariyya mausoleum in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr.	132
Figure 13.	The mosque of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī in Cambridge, Ontario and in Manbij.....	134

Table

Table 1. *Khānqāhs*, *zāwiyas*, and *ribāṭs* founded in Damascus up to the
mid-fourteenth century.....89

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK REPRESENTS the end product of my research on the spatiality of Islamic sainthood and the commemoration of saintly figures in medieval Syria. I would like to take the opportunity here to thank at least some of my colleagues and friends for their generosity in sharing their work and insights and long-lasting friendship: Daniella Talmon-Heller, Chaim Nissim, Hatim Mahamid, Meir Hatina, my colleagues in the Department of History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies at the Open University of Israel, and especially Sara Wolper and Paulo Pinto, who joined me as co-editors in a collective volume on saintly spheres and Islamic landscapes across time and place.

Portions of this book were presented at conferences, workshops, and seminars over the years. For these opportunities to share ideas and advance my research, I thank the hosts, organizers, and participants at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg in Bonn, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Edinburgh University, Harvard University, the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies, and Waseda University in Tokyo.

This is also an opportunity to thank the lectors of Arc Humanities Press who gave me wise advice, and the editorial and production staff at the Press for their professional help and well-meaning attitude: the editors Danna Messer and Simon Forde, and Ruth Kennedy and Ed Robinson who worked tirelessly and expertly to prepare the book for print.

The Israel Science Foundation (ISF) generously supported my work with a research grant (no. 46/11) for the study of “In the footsteps of the Prophet: spiritual leadership in a medieval Islamic setting.” This endowment enabled me to benefit from the help of a devoted research assistant, Shaykh Khalid, to acquire copyright permissions to translate and cite large portions from the saintly *vitas* tapped for this book and reproduce figures. I am particularly indebted to Daniel Demeter for granting me permission to include several photos from his *Syria Photo Guide* as well as for the cover image.

Last but certainly not least, I thank my family: my husband Oved, my children, Noa, Daniel, and Omri, and my entire family for their ongoing support and belief in my goals.

A NOTE ON transliteration, NAMES, AND DATES

IN GENERAL, I have adopted the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used by the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (EI3). For certain Arabic words and names that are commonly found in English texts or dictionaries and atlases, I have preferred the less technical form: for example, Sufi, not *Ṣūfī*; Ayyubids, not *Ayyūbids*; Baalbek, not *Ba'albek*. I have also frequently indicated the plural Arabic nouns simply by adding an "s" rather than giving the correct Arabic form (e.g. *ṭarīqas* rather than *ṭuruq*; *zāwīyas* rather than *zāwāyā*).

For the sake of convenience and the accessibility of the book to a wide readership in the field of medieval history, dates are generally given according to the Western calendar, except for dates of birth and death for which I have used both the Islamic (AH) and Western systems of dating.

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK EXPLORES the lives of Sufi masters who functioned as embodiments of Islamic sainthood and left a lasting mark on the land. These figures lived in the ancient cities of Syria and their surrounding towns and villages during a formative period in the social history of Syrian Sufism and the spiritual tradition of Islam.¹ In the course of the twelfth century, the free-floating world of earlier spiritual wayfarers in the central Islamic lands was yielding to local groups that came together around particular Sufi masters, called *shuyūkh al-ṣūfiyya* in Arabic sources, and congregated in specifically Sufi structures, known mostly by the terms *khānqāh* (Per.), *zāwiya* (Arab.), *ribāt* (Arab.), and *tekke* (Tur.). Sufi masters diffused their spiritual methods (*ṭarīqas*), put down local roots, gained leadership over small congregations of committed disciples and companions, and set forth to spread their teachings and diffuse their authority more broadly among the population. Gradually, the geographical and social horizons of their operation expanded. Their lodges proliferated, anchoring their presence in urban and rural environments, and eventually evolved into spiritual dominions.²

In this very period, an activist, community-oriented Sufi tradition in the form of piety that centred on Prophet Muḥammad was moving to the centre of the public religious and social life in the great cities and the small provincial towns of the eastern and near-eastern Islamic lands. While joining hands with traditionalists and legalists of the established Sunni rites (the *madhhabs*) in a Sunnization movement that set forth to shape Islamic religious and social life in light of the prophetic legacy, prominent representatives of this tradition claimed to be the most qualified to recast the tradition of God's Messenger.³ Similarly, alongside their adaptation to the traditional modes of authorization in transmitting and disseminating the prophetic legacy, Sufi shaykhs

1 In this book, I focus on the geographical area of Bilād al-Shām that stretches from Damascus in the south to the Euphrates to the north and east (see Fig. 1).

2 For general overviews, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1–30; Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 80–86. See also Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 127–54, for the beginning of the spread of Sufism at the end of its formative period.

3 Historians have proposed that the terms Sunni “recasting” or “re-centering” more accurately describe what has been referred to as the “Sunni Revival.” For example, see Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: A View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 101, 126–27, 146–48; and Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189–202. For an in-depth discussion of the distinctiveness and superiority of Sufism in the writings of the formulators of the main Sufi tradition, see Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), especially 140–48.

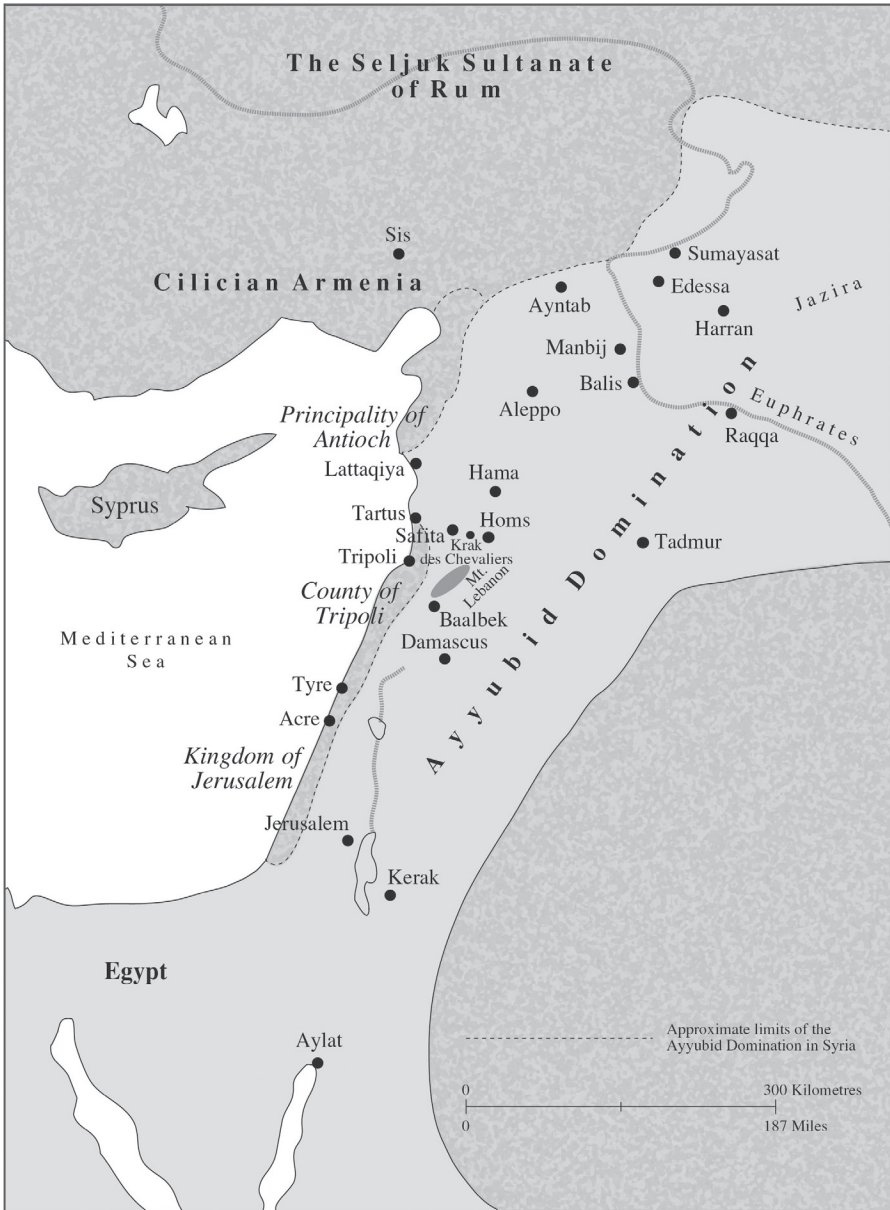


Figure 1. Syria (Bilād al-Shām) in the mid-thirteenth century. (Drawn by the author.)

devised their own ways of connecting to the prophetic *sunna* and cultivated their own forms and frameworks of constructing and diffusing authority. Operating outside the institutional and social channels through which jurists attempted to control religious knowledge and praxis, they extended their reach far beyond their inner circles.

In Bourdieusian terms, what came to be known as Sufism developed into a sub-field of cultural production within which those who monopolize the specific cultural capital devise strategies of sustaining and perpetuating their command.⁴

The elevation of the Sufi shaykh's authority to new heights and the expansion of his sphere of domination went hand in hand with the spread of the so-called cult of saints that, from the twelfth century onward, became central to the religious experience of all Muslims. Various individuals with Sufi affiliations were celebrated by their contemporaries as holy men or "Friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*), recognized as such during their lifetime or after their death. Not all of those considered God's Friends and channels to Him in Sufi circles were necessarily accorded saintly status by the public, and the widespread veneration of saintly figures had little to do with Sufi theories of closeness to God. Indeed, a glance at the standard biographical compilations that cover the cultural and historical context at hand reveals a category of ascetic saints with no sign of the mystical quest and no evidence of Sufi doctrine in their biographies. In this regard, Megan Reid, studying the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods (from roughly 1170 to 1500 CE), provides abundant evidence of revered men and women from all social strata who emulated a distinct ascetic tradition that was modelled after early Islam's devotees and owed no particular allegiance to Sufism.⁵ Anne-Marie Eddé, for her part, argues that ascetic saints and Sufis in Ayyubid Aleppo were two distinct categories of holy people.⁶ At the same time, antinomian ascetics whose names are normally excluded from compilations composed by religious scholars and devoted to models of piety and virtue were venerated as God's Friends in their groups and beyond them.⁷ Yet, by the close of the thirteenth century, the number of Sufi shaykhs revered as holy by their disciples and companions and by the broader community of devotees was clearly on the rise. This merging of the Sufi and popular spheres of sainthood, or between sainthood as metaphysical "closeness" to God (*walāya*) and sainthood as the manifestation of spiritual power on the mundane plane (*wilāya*), found its most salient expression in pious visitation (*ziyāra*) to the lodge of the shaykh, and later to his gravesite.⁸ Ordinary

⁴ See especially Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984).

⁵ Megan Reid, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6–35.

⁶ Anne-Marie Eddé, *La Principauté ayyubide d'Alep (579/1183–658/1260)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 412–22.

⁷ The most comprehensive study of these groups in medieval Islam is Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1500* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

⁸ Vincent Cornell was the first to distinguish between the two spheres of sainthood. See Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 272–73. Throughout, I follow Cornell and other historians of Islamic societies in retaining the most commonly used "non-Islamic" rendering of *walī* and *walāya*—namely, "saint" and "sainthood," as well as the cognate of "saintly." Although Cornell relates to an explicitly Moroccan context, his use of the terms may be well applied to other contexts, too. Here the cognate "saintly"

believers flocked to the homes and the graves of holy men to seek their divine and mundane intercession, to be near them, and to partake in the rituals of the Sufis.⁹ Some of the spaces and sites around the revered Sufi shaykhs developed as part of built environments, such as complexes of lodges, tombs, and shrines, whereas others were grounded in natural environments, such as caves and mountains. While some of these sites were permanent, others were fluid and shifting in nature, formed and revitalized wherever a saintly figure was (or was believed to be) present or buried, and left his mark on the land. Projecting the holy man's religious authority and believed to be suffused with spiritual power and capable of producing blessings (*baraka*), the concrete places acquired enduring functional and symbolic meaning.

Such developments were never monolithic. Instead, they were shaped in a concrete spatial frame in accommodation with local religious and social life and specific political order.¹⁰ In the context of the Syrian broader milieu, the rise of the Sufi shaykh holy man and the development of spaces that gave materiality to his presence and served as arenas of his *baraka* occurred in a historical setting marked by an overall religious vigour and a desire to re-sacralize the landscape for Islam, and in an environment rich in ancient holy places, Christian churches and monasteries.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, under the reign of the Zangids, the Ayyubids, and the early Mamluks, who set forth to restore and solidify the presence of Sunni Islam and its control over the land after a long period of crusader dominance, hundreds of new religious buildings were constructed to teach the Islamic religious and legal sciences and to harness Sufism, and long-forgotten holy sites were "rediscovered" and renovated, revitalizing the Islamic identity and sacrality of the landscape. An

is used to denote the sphere of religious charismatic authority and sanctity that surrounded the Sufi shaykh and Friend of God.

9 The most comprehensive work on the growth of the cult of Muslim saints in the Islamic medieval world is Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Josef W. Meri, "The Etiquette of Devotion in the Islamic Cult of Saints," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul A. Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 263–86, for the development of visits to the graves of venerated holy persons into a fundamental aspect of Muslim spirituality. For a comprehensive study of the visitations of the tombs of the dead during the Mamluk period, see Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). While focusing on Egypt (1200–1500), Taylor provides insightful observations on the evolution of the phenomenon of *ziyāra* and saint worship as a whole. See also his extensive bibliography on this field.

10 On the emergence of regional and local patterns in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt and Syria, see Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 1; Richard J. A. McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabi* (Albany: SUNY, 2004), chap. 3; Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: The Dissemination of Sufism in Medieval Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pt. 3; and Nathan Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pt. 3.

increasing number of mystics, ascetics, and holy men, collectively called “Sufis,” were drawn to the region during this period of excitement and renewal. Native-born and newcomers diffused their authority beyond small local congregations and were granted unprecedented moral and material support by the political rulers, in return for their ideological support, prayers, and blessings.

On the more popular level, the growing prominence of Sufi masters and holy men followed on the heels of a general quest for charismatic religious leaders who would stimulate religious fervour in their devotees and perform the role of patron saints. Such abilities, which emerged from the demonstration of the virtues of these figures and the enactment of their spiritual powers, were pivotal in a period marked by continuous threats from external and internal enemies (Crusaders, Mongols, and extreme Shi‘i sects). Equally significant was the quest for figures capable of exerting their influence on the rulers who recognized their local power and prestige and believed in their spiritual potency and miracles.

Unlike their contemporaries in Upper Egypt studied by Nathan Hofer, who valorized and embodied an utterly miraculous authority rooted almost entirely in prophetically inherited access to the world of the unseen (*ghayb*), the charismatic Sufi shaykhs in the Syrian milieu did not conform to a single mode of authority.¹¹ Rather, they employed and enacted a variety of resources that were brought together on their road to sainthood. Nor was the scope of their activities confined to a specific environment. Some gained prominence in cities and mid-sized towns and villages, while others operated in both urban centres and rural areas. With the hinterlands of Syrian cities — particularly those surrounding Damascus, Aleppo, and Baalbek — connected to nearby towns and cities, and in the absence of a clear demarcation between urban and rural communities, Sufi shaykhs and God’s Friends diffused their authority across the entire social canvas of local societies.¹² A wave of their lodges swept up the entire region from the late twelfth century onwards and became centres of spiritual guidance and objects of visitation of men and women, seeking the saintly figures’ intersection with both the divine and mundane powers and partaking in the rituals of the Sufi community. Their graves, sanctified immediately after burial, expanded the horizons of a sacred landscape, ennobled with the tombs and memorials of biblical prophets, descendants, and companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the martyrs of the Counter-Crusade.

What were the resources and mechanisms the revered shaykhs living in the medieval Syrian milieu employed to construct and maintain their spiritual and charismatic authority in Sufi congregations, and the ways by which they diffused their authority more broadly among the population and served as patron saints and leaders of local communities? How were they embedded within their localities and associated with the glorious history of the ancient Syrian cities and their holiness inscribed in a landscape of sacred sites? These questions lie at the heart this study, which places the local and

¹¹ On which, see Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism*, 236–43.

¹² For more on these characteristics, see Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Muslim Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 55–68.

regional context of the social history of Sufism and the embedment and emplacement of Islamic sainthood at the centre of its inquiry.

The book draws primarily on biographical and hagiographical accounts in Arabic that narrate the lives of Sufi masters and holy men.¹³ In particular, I scrutinize narratives preserved in hitherto-unexplored saintly *vitas* (*manāqib*, “virtues and feats”) of three Sufi shaykhs which are still in manuscript form (listed here in accordance with the dates of their composition). The first is *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī* (who died in the first half of the twelfth century) of the town of Manbij, northeast of Aleppo. The second is the *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām al-Bālīsī* (d. 658/1258) of the town of Bālīs on the western bank of the Euphrates river. The third is *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī* (d. 617/1221), known as the “Lion of Syria” (*asad al-Sham*), of the village of Yūnīn near Baalbek in the Lebanon Valley.

The first and earliest saintly *vita* was composed by Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, the grandson of Ibn Qawām al-Bālīsī and one of the most famous Damascene Sufi shaykhs of his epoch (d. 718/1318), who collated accounts related by his father as well as by disciples and companions who orbited around the shaykh, first in his hometown of Bālīs and later at the site of his burial place in the Damascene Šālihiyya neighbourhood on the slope of Mt. Qāsyūn. While the composition of the *vita* attests to the author’s dedication to the commemoration of his beloved grandfather, it could also have served to assert his family-based claim to spiritual authority in Sufi and scholarly circles in Damascus. Reflected in the *vita*, the significance accorded to family pedigree as a source of authority became increasingly apparent in Sufi writings, in particular hagiographies composed or reproduced in the early Ottoman period.¹⁴

More than 200 years later, large portions of the *vita* by the grandson of the great shaykh of Bālīs were copied by Muḥammad ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 955/1548), the famous religious scholar, historian, and author of late Mamluk and early Ottoman Damascus. Here, the reproduction of the accounts in the *vita* of the Sufi saint may be seen as a reflection of the author’s general endeavour to reaffirm and perpetuate the merits of

13 These include accounts in *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā’* (“classes of saints”) by ‘Umar Sirāj al-Dīn ibn Mullaqin (804/1401), a work which is rich in biographical accounts of earlier Sufi masters and lacks hagiographical flavor; *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fi tarājim al-sāda al-šūfiyya* by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) on the collective lives of generations of Sufis and holy figures from the first Islamic century to the author’s time; and the modern work, *Jamī’ karāmāt al-awliyā’* by Yūsuf ibn Ismā’il al-Nabhānī, a comprehensive collection composed of various versions of hagiographical narratives preserved in written form. For details about works of this type composed in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, see Éric Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: Orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels* (Damascus: Institut Français d’Études Arabes de Damas, 1995), 31–32.

14 On which, see Adam Sabra, “Household Sufism in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: The Rise of the Sāda al-Bakrīya,” in *Sufism in the Ottoman Era, 16th–18th Century*, ed. Rachida Chic and Catherine-Mayeur-Jaouen (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2010), 101–18; Adam Sabra, “The Age of the Fathers: Gender and Spiritual Authority in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ša’rānī,” *Annales Islamologiques* 47 (2013): 133–49.

the Ṣālihiyya, created by its scholarly and spiritual climate and sacred aura, to which he dedicated one of his famous treatises.¹⁵

The two other saintly *vitas* were compiled in the later Ottoman period, centuries after the lifetimes of the Sufi shaykhs they celebrate. The *vita* of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī was composed by a certain al-Hājj ‘Uthmān ibn al-Hājj Muḥammad al-‘Ūrānī al-Ḥalabī (of Aleppo). It commences with praises of the shaykh, God, and the Prophet, and the colophon with the signature of the author dates its completion to Dhū al-Ḥijja 1063 (October 1653). Attributed to a certain Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ‘Uthmān, the writing of the “The Book of the Virtues of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī” was completed in 1157/1744. The hagiography itself, which has a few marginal notes leading the reader through the sixty-eight folios of the manuscript, ends on folio 67b, between which and the colophon there is a story about the vengeance of a certain Shaykh Sa‘īd against a tyrant in Tabaristan. On the five folios after the colophon, a story about the Prophet appears.

There is no information about the transmission, recording, and preservation of the accounts in the *vitas* over a long period. Nor are there any references to the lives and works of their authors in contemporary or later sources, such as biographical anthologies from the late Ottoman period, that may allow us to reconstruct the social and scholarly milieu within which they composed the *vitas*, their audience, or their reception. Still, the authors’ motivations in taking up the pen to commemorate saints of a bygone era can be gleaned from the works themselves.

The author of the *vita* of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī cannot be identified except for the reference to him by the name affix (*nisba*) that indicates Aleppo as his home city or place of origin. The first two pages of the *vita* are dedicated to the shaykh’s spiritual lineage, which leads to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph and one of Islam’s most revered figures, and the work brims with praises of the “glorious town of Manbij” (*Manbij al-mafkhara*). From this, we may surmise that its author intended to perpetuate the memory of one of its most revered Sufi saints and to convey the splendour of the town and the region of Aleppo as a whole. Sometime later, the *vita* was reproduced by a certain Aḥmad ibn Yahyā ibn al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl. He traced his noble family lineage to Sahykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī and testified in the marginalia (reading note) that he “scrutinized it [and found it correct].”

As to the *vita* of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, its author presents himself throughout the text as a disciple of a renowned Sufi legal scholar of Baalbek and notes that he assembled accounts about the virtues and feats of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, his sons, and companions. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad seems to have had a twofold goal. The first was to be linked to a lineage of celebrated shaykhs, biological and spiritual ancestors and models of virtue that extends back to ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, whereas the second was to perpetuate the historical heritage of his hometown as a centre of Islamic religious learning, piety, and spirituality, and as a locus of Islamic revivalism during

15 In this respect, Stephan Conerman notes the loyalty Ibn Ṭūlūn felt towards his hometown under its changing rulers in “Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 955/1548): Life and Works,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 8 (2004: 115–40.).

the Counter-Crusader period. Accounts that narrate the life and deeds of the revered shaykh within his historical context and bolster his image as a warrior-saint, found in works by thirteenth-century Syrian historians, were probably copied out by the author of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī’s vita. Other accounts preserved in his hagiographical work may have been transmitted either in written forms that have not survived, or orally from generation to generation of biological and spiritual descendants. It is also from the vita of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī that another significant motivation for penning a hagiographical work comes to light: composing a work commemorating the life of a saint was seen as a pious act worthy of reward. At the very beginning of the vita, its author addresses the readers as follows:

Even if I dedicated my entire life [to the composition of this work], I could never be able to assemble and record all of the accounts about the virtues, feats, and mystical states (*manāqib*, *karāmāt*, and *aḥwāl*) of the shaykh, his sons, and the shaykhs that followed him, may God bless them all. Even so, my wish is that God will reward me for my book on the Day of Judgement.¹⁶

Indeed, as noted by historians of religious and intellectual life in the Ottoman period, the composition, copying, reproduction, and transmission of hagiographical works that commemorated the lives of Sufi saints were common scholarly pursuits and therefore were likely to have been highly valued in the milieus of the authors of the vitas.¹⁷ Moreover, despite the long time gap between the era of the Sufi saints and the lifetimes of the authors, the vitas, as well as other, later works, are valuable historical sources that can carry us back to the performative contexts on the ground of which the revered figures functioned in medieval Syria. This working hypothesis is based on several interrelated preliminary observations.

First, like other biographical and hagiographical works produced in the medieval and premodern Islamic world, the vitas studied for this book consist almost solely of first-hand accounts and self-testimonies transmitted by relatives, disciples, and intimate companions of the Sufi saints. The names of this first generation of informants and transmitters are given at the beginning of each citation attributed to them, and reappear in the texts.¹⁸ Throughout, the extracts in the vitas demonstrate the authors’ diligence in recording the accounts transmitted in oral and written forms. This effort is lucidly expressed by the author of the vita of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī at the beginning of the work. Reflecting on his own reliability, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad remarked, “I trusted God while

16 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ‘Uthmān, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yunīnī*, composed AH 1157/1744. MS 259. H, No. 711 in Garrett Collection, Princeton University, Islamic Manuscripts Collection, fols. 26a–b.

17 On which, see Thierry Zarcone, “L’Hagiographie dans le monde turc,” in *Saints orientaux*, ed. Denise Aigle (Paris: De Boccard, 1995), 55–68.

18 See, for instance, the discussion of the development and structure of the first hagiographical corpora in medieval Morocco in Halima Ferhat and Hamid Triki, “Hagiographie et religion au Maroc médiéval,” *Hespéris Tamuda* 24 (1986): 17–51.

citing reliable books, and depended with full confidence on narratives trustworthy people relayed to me. May God forgive me for any mistake or inaccuracy.”¹⁹

The second observation is that the sacred biographies of Sufi saints were not written outside somehow “beyond time.” Rather, as this study seeks to demonstrate, the accounts preserved in them were anchored in their historical contexts and relate to concrete situations that lent them their meaning. Disciples and intimates elaborated on the lives of their shaykhs and the close relationships they forged with them, as well as their interaction with the surrounding society. For all their idealized descriptions and literary topoi, the accounts they relayed provide testimonies that shed light on the functions of the shaykhs as formidable masters and as embodiments of Islamic sainthood, as well as on the role of the narrators in nourishing and perpetuating their memoirs for later generations of local communities of devotees. Similarly, the memories, narratives, and histories that emplaced the holiness of the shaykhs in specific localities must have played a central role in revitalizing the sacredness of their burial places. Historical and anthropological studies that explore the relational aspects of hagiographical and historical traditions and the construction and signification of Sufi tombs and shrines are central to my approach of using the accounts in the *vitas* for the study of the sacralization of the space surrounding the medieval Sufi saints.²⁰

Building on insights gained from studying the lives of saints in medieval Latin Christendom, I read the hagiographical narratives of the Sufi Friends of God on their own terms and in their entirety rather than trying to distinguish those portions considered to be reliable from the rest.²¹ This holistic approach seems apt for Sufi biographical and bio-hagiographical literature, and especially for works devoted to individual holy lives that became common in the Near East and other parts of the Islamic world from around the thirteenth century onward. In addition to affording a wealth of information about the subject’s personal, public, and political life, they narrate the Sufi shaykh’s path to sainthood from youth to death and provide numerous examples of his saintly miracles.²²

19 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīn*, fol. 2b.

20 These include Nile Green’s pathbreaking study on the relationship between the written and oral traditions attached to Sufi masters and the spatial territories in which they lived, traveled, and lie buried: Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Devin DeWeese, “Sacred Places and Public Narratives: The Shrine of Aḥmad Yasavī in Hagiographical Traditions of the Yasavī Şūfī Order: 16th–17th Centuries,” *The Muslim World* 90 (2000): 353–76.

21 See especially Evelyn Patlagean, “Ancienne hagiographie byzantine et histoire sociale,” *Annales esc.* 23 (1968): 106–26; Stephen Wilson, ed., *Introduction to Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–2; and the annotated bibliography on this field, 309–417.

22 For an overview of the appearance and evolution of the Islamic bio-hagiographical genre, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 5–7, 242–45. For more on the subject, see the biographical references in *Friends of God*, 318n15. On stories about saints’ miracles as a prominent component of Sufi biographies composed in Egypt and Syria from the Mamluk period onward, see

The miraculous, while never as dominant as in Christian and other religious traditions, might well have represented reality for those who recorded the narratives about the astonishing deeds of God's Friends, and therefore merited inclusion in their works.²³ In this respect, Spencer Trimingham describes the miracles of the Sufi saints (*karāmāt al-awliyā'*) as part of the transformation of Sufism in this period, "a blending of the saint-cult with the emerging Sufi orders and a new reverence for the Prophet's legacy."²⁴ Sufis who acquired honour were linked to all sorts of miracles—from outstanding perspectives on others' mental states, clairvoyance, and spiritual vision, through feats of healing, to more imaginative deeds like flying from Delhi to Mecca for a nightly pilgrimage and traversing long distances. Elaborate narratives of their miracles were effectively circulated by their disciples and companions and eventually put into writing.²⁵ Just how influential stories of saints performing miracles were may be gauged from the testimonies of their opponents.²⁶

Hagiographical narratives, particularly those linking the marvels of power and the manipulation of divine grace with defending the defenceless and benefiting the needy, must have reflected the concerns and expectations of the wider public of worshippers no less than the goals, worldviews, and traditions of those who related them and put them to writing. Moreover, only by situating the hagiographical narratives within a specific community of fellow believers could the memory of the heroic virtues and deeds of the Sufi saint be commemorated. His persona required concretization, and the manifestations of his spiritual power and grace required detailed depiction.²⁷ While the significance of hagiographical material for the history of Sufism has received

Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 29–37. His study shows that such works could consist solely of stories about *karāmāt*. See also Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 18–20, on the dramatic expansion of the miracles of saints in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

23 For insightful comparative perspectives, see Denise Aigle, ed., *Miracle et karāma: hagiographies médiévales comparées* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

24 Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 26–27.

25 For taxonomies of saintly miracles in studies that focus on particular historical and cultural contexts, see Cornell, *Realm*, 116; and Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Saint*, 129. For a more extensive treatment, see Richard Garmilich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner, 1987), 139–47; and Renard, *Friends of God*, 91–117.

26 For a recent in-depth study on the discourse on *karāmāt al-awliyā'* in Sunni Islam, beginning in the tenth century, see Jonathan A. C. Brown, "Faithful Dissenters: Sufi Skepticism about Miracles of Saints," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 123–68.

27 For the notion of persona and its performative character, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Press, 1959), 17–76; and Marcel Mauss, "La Notion de personne, celle de moi," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, 6th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1995), 333–62. For charismatic performances in contemporary Sufi communities, see Paulo G. Pinto, "Performing *Baraka*: Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Syrian Sufism," in *On Archaeology of Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Islam: Past and Present Crossroads of Events and Ideas* (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam 5), ed. Georg Stauth (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004), 195–211.

ample scholarly attention, only recently have scholars started to situate the narratives about God's Friends in their particular milieus and uncover the political, social, and cultural worlds in which a gallery of figures, celebrated for their piety, moral conduct, and closeness to God operated.²⁸ This fresh avenue is advanced in the present study, which presents the Sufi saints as social actors who emerge from ever-evolving notions of sainthood that owe their meaning and normative force to their elaboration in specific cultural and historical contexts.

Complementary literary genres help to situate the hagiographical narratives in their temporal and spatial frame and to identify the burgeoning of physical places and sacred sites around the Sufi masters and God's Friends. These include historical works by contemporary and later Syrian historians, notably al-Nu'aymī (d. 951/1514) and Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 944/1548) for Damascus, and Ibn Shaddād (d. 684/1285) and Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1262) for Aleppo and its environs, travellers' itineraries (the *riḥla* literary genre), and guides to places for pilgrimage in medieval Syria.²⁹ Especially significant in this regard is the sixteenth-century and earliest known guide to pilgrimage in Damascus and Syria, written by Ibn al-Hawrānī, *al-Ishārāt ilā amākin al-ziyārāt*. This text contains an impressive body of locally grounded hagiographical lore about the saints, whose names are used to identify particular sites. Websites and tourist guides to sanctuaries in contemporary Syria and Lebanon describe the sanctuaries that still stand.

By interrogating these literary sources, the book exposes the formation of a locally embedded charismatic religious leadership and the evolution of concrete and symbolic spheres of spiritual domination and sanctity in the historical setting under consideration. Such exposition may also advance an understanding of the embodiments and emplacements of Islamic sainthood and to contribute to current research on the relationship of Islamic hagiography to history.³⁰ The book relates to the realization of submission to the master's authority, the embodiment of the spiritual power that emanated from him in practices, objects, and places, as well as the hagiographical and historical traditions and means that ensured his centrality in the lives of his fellows and granted the space and site around him shape and meaning.

28 This methodological approach was developed and implemented in Rachida Chich and Denis Gril, eds., *Le Saint et son milieu: ou comment lire les sources hagiographiques* (Cairo: FAO, 2000), and in John Renard, ed., *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), a companion volume to his *Friends of God*.

29 On the appearance and development of the Syrian pilgrimage literature, see Meri, *The Cults of Saints*, 150–52; and see Janine Sourdel-Thomine's discussion of the *riḥla* genre and its contribution to the creation of a map of pilgrimage places in medieval Damascus: Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Les Anciens Lieux de pèlerinage damascaine d'après les sources arabes," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 14 (1952–54): 65–85.

30 For insightful reevaluations of hagiographical material as a source for history, see John J. Carry and Erik S. Ohlander, eds., *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pt. 1: "Historiography."

Structure of the Book

The first part of this book centres on the performative character of spiritual power and its embodiments in symbolic practices and physical effects. Here, I adopt the approach, current in anthropological research, that reassesses the Weberian paradigm of charisma as a form of power embodied in the personality of its holder and arousing strong emotions and appeal.³¹ In this view, charisma is not only an inherent personal quality but also an interaction enacted between a particular leader and his following. In other words, charisma is a performative principle. The charismatic leader produces, displays, and enacts his extraordinary personal qualities within his community in relation to his fellowship and audience. Moreover, without a responsive audience, charisma remains an abstract idea: its existence is made possible only when a group is prepared to attribute exceptional qualities to one of its members. Charismatic figures who aspire to ensure recognition of their claims must enter into dialogue with their communities. The more such leaders display their virtues and spiritual power, the more attractive they are to the community.³² This approach may illuminate the construction and maintenance of spiritual power and grace that are condensed and signified by the Sufi concept of *baraka*. The Sufi shaykh asserted the divinely given spiritual power that set him apart from all other believers and attracted disciples and lay believers by displaying his knowledge and wisdom, outstanding virtues, and miracles. Moreover, even when “routinized” into institutional practices, organizational frameworks, and hereditary forms of succession, *baraka* retained its performative character.

Through the examination of hagiographical narratives preserved in the saintly vitas, the book engages in a microanalysis of the performances of spiritual and charismatic authority in Sufi congregations. First-hand testimonies by biological successors, disciples, and companions that circulated orally long before being recorded in literary form afford glimpses of the practices of spiritual guidance and the constitution and sustainment of a committed following. These include accounts of the investiture with the patched cloak or shawl (the *khirqā*) and the taking of the oath of fidelity (the *‘ahd*) that signified submission to the master’s authority and symbolized the personal binding relationship between master and disciple. Of special importance are narratives of masters supervising the conduct of their disciples, interpreting their visions, catering to their spiritual and mundane needs, and performing miraculous deeds to protect them in times of trouble. Such accounts reflect the practices at the heart of sustainment of their spiritual and charismatic authority and the formation of the group of committed disciples and companions. Equally meaningful are hagiographical narratives of masters

31 Presented in a number of papers and in Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:trans. Gunther Roth and Clause Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

32 Recent discussions include Victoria Kennick and Arvind Sharma, eds., *Spiritual Masters of the World’s Religions* (Albany: SUNY, 2012), 8–15, and the chapters in Charles Lindholm, ed., *The Anthropology of Religious Charisma: Ecstasies and Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6–10.

transferring to their close companions the *baraka* embedded in their cloaks and other garments and in physical effects such as prayer rugs, rosaries, and coins that would remain with them after their death and make their figure present in their absence. At the same time, the saintly *vitas* are rich with narratives of the Sufi shaykhs disseminating their authority by displaying their saintly virtues and performing miracles within society in large.

According to the celebrated fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldūn, a saintly miracle (*karāma*) is a divine power that arouses the ability to exercise influence on others: “The worker of miracles is supported in his activity by the spirit of God. That is, miracles are performed by good persons and by souls that are entirely devoted to good deeds.”³³ Naturally, hagiographical narratives that display saintly miracles and marvels arose from a variety of motives and were designed to highlight varied functions of these “good and influential persons.” While their identification as Sufi shaykhs is common in medieval Islamic hagiographic literature, the reports about their heroic and beneficial deeds must have generated meaning for society at large and addressed the needs and expectations of fellow believers.³⁴ In the hagiographical narratives preserved in the *vitas* studied for this book, emphasis is placed on the application of lofty knowledge and manipulation of *baraka* to “command right and forbid wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*) and to disseminate true religion as well as to protect fellow believers from enemies and oppressors, pursue justice, and benefit the needy. Narratives about the religious activism and moral performances of the revered shaykhs are often interwoven with attestations of their outstanding virtues and great piety, awe-inspiring appearance, arcane knowledge, and heroic marvels. Rooted in the particular historical and cultural contexts and containing considerable folkloristic images, the stories shed light on their interactions with the society around them and communal roles that might have otherwise remained hidden.

The second part of this book engages with the emplacements of spiritual power with a view to the theoretical frame of the “spatial turn” heralded by the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Particularly important for my purpose is the concept of space not simply as a container or passive stage of social processes but as a product and producer of them.³⁵ Space is thus interpreted beyond physical boundaries and

33 ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 3:167.

34 In this respect, Boaz Shoshan remarks that such reports reveal the ways by which Sufis in the medieval Islamic world solved problems, or, more precisely, were expected to solve problems: Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 20. For the tendency of saints’ miracles in medieval Christendom to address human needs, see Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Medieval Christendom, 1000–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 143–44.

35 Summing up the complex nature of space, Lefebvre writes “Space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but also producing and produced by them.” Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 286.

framed as a relational definition based on social constructs in the sense of perception, use, and appropriation. Seen from the perspective of religious and social history, this interpretation is central to the study of the interrelated dynamics with which this book is concerned: the construction and sustainment of spiritual and charismatic leadership and the rooting of holiness in the land. First, it shows how the development and proliferation of Sufi lodges furthered the concentration of authority in the hands of the masters who presided over them, and who manipulated their exclusive authority to sustain their domination. It was to the Sufi lodge, typically called *zāwiya*, which centred on a particular shaykh, that spiritual wayfarers came, to receive his guidance and be initiated into his spiritual path. There the Sufi master supervised their spiritual progress, ethics, and manners, set hierarchies, delineated the boundaries of affiliation with his congregation, and manifested his authority. As such, the lodge not only provided the shaykh and his group with a physical setting; it also came to play an essential role in the verification and regularization of his leadership status and in consolidating a committed congregation around him. With shaykhs typically buried in their lodges and with biological and spiritual descendants concentrating around their shaykhs' gravesites and buried by their sides, this dynamic continued long after their death.

Concurrently, Sufi lodges and saintly tombs were places where Sufi congregations and other social groups interacted. Their actual experience and symbolic use by wide circles of followers and admirers—visits to them, supplication and ritual activities that took place there, and architectural patronage by members of the ruling and urban elites and other wealthy patrons—heightened and revitalized their centrality in the life of local communities.³⁶ Hence, the spaces that localized and gave materiality to the presence of the saint, serving as arenas of his *baraka*, evolved as focuses of spheres of spiritual domination and sanctity, central to the expression of religious authority, piety, and the belief in the miraculous.³⁷ The expression “saintly spheres” was coined as a key research tool in analyzing this process.

36 Catherine Bell was the first to pave the way for the understanding of the role of rituals in the creation and heightening of the space in which it they take place. She formulated her theory on ritualization in two books: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. In this respect, Jonathan Z. Smith contends that a place is made meaningful due to the devotional activity that takes place there: J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 103. Drawing on Smith, Kim Knott argues “Sacred space is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary”: Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2005), 96. See also Claudia Moser and Cecelia Feldman, *Locating the Sacred: Theoretical Approaches to the Emplacement of Religion*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxbow, 2014), for a recent collective work that advances the study of the emplacement of religious devotion and the sacralization of space.

37 For a study that makes an important contribution to our understanding of the formation of a material space of religious belief and practice, see Martin Rademacher, “Space, Religion, and Bodies: Aspects of Concrete Emplacements of Religious Practice,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016): 302–24. Taking up the implications of the “spatial turn” in the wider context of a “material turn,” Rademacher highlights the significance of the material space of religious practice for shaping and facilitating discourse and embodiments of human actors in space.

Analysis of a range of the narratives serves to reconstruct the dynamic through which Sufi shaykhs and Friends of God were embedded in particular environments and their holiness imprinted on the land. Funerary and burial narratives, lodge and tombs foundation accounts, and hagiographical narratives that extolled the extraordinary traits and miraculous deeds of the Sufi saints who resided in them and who were interred (or believed to be buried) there strengthened their affinity to local communities and to the land.³⁸ Historical and geographical accounts indicated the locations of the lodges and gravesites and bound the saintly figures to the local and regional history and sacred topography. Travellers' literature and pilgrimage guides pinpointed the places steeped with divine grace and situated the gravesites of the venerated shaykhs in a kind of a regional map of sacred places in medieval Syria.³⁹ The emplacement of the models of piety and virtue within their concrete milieu and the recording of the formation and spread of spaces and sites around them could have also served to convey the splendour and sacredness of the physical environs.⁴⁰

Reflecting contemporary beliefs and practices and moulded by those who related, transmitted, and recorded them, the narratives translated and analyzed for this book shed light on the creation of concrete and symbolic saintly spheres that had an abiding impact on the religious and geographical landscapes of Syrian cities and their surroundings.

38 This is what Stephennie Mulder eloquently refers to as “a landscape of deeds” that recorded the actions of holy and saintly figures, and the rituals of those who revered them. See Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 13.

39 In this regard, Dorothea French notes the insightful contribution made by Christian travelers and topographers to mapping sacred landscapes in Roman Palestine. See Dorothea French, “Mapping Sacred Spaces: Pilgrimage and the Creation of Christian Topographies in Roman Palestine,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband* 20 (1995): 792–97. Her observations were adopted by Joseph Meri in his discussion of the mapping of sacred landscapes by Jews and Muslims in medieval Syria: Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 12ff.

40 For a study that explores narratives of locality in the field of Islamic history, see Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Entangled with topographical and geographical histories, literary anthologies, religious treatises, travel literature, and maps, the notion of “place” in the early Islamic world is perceived by the author as an inventory system that arouses a sense of belonging and an aura of sacredness.

PART ONE

**CHARISMATIC MASTERS IN THEIR
LOCAL SETTINGS**

Chapter I

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

IN HIS GUIDE to pilgrimage sites in sixteenth-century Syria, *al-Ishārat ilā amākin al-ziyārāt*, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī lists the famous funerary structures in the various parts of the ancient city of Damascus. One of these is the shrine of Shaykh Arslān, the renowned patron saint of Damascus that stands to the present:

In the cemetery of Bāb Tūmā (the Gate of Tūmā) is buried the Shaykh, the one who knows God (*al-ʿarīf*), Arslān al-Dimashqī ibn Yaʿqūb ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd al-Jaʿbarī. He was an exemplary ascetic, one of the great shaykhs and leaders of the Gnostics in Syria (al-Shām), a man of sublime [mystical] signs (*ishārāt*), truthfulness, and extraordinary miracles (*karāmāt*) [. . .].

Shaykh Arslān at first used to worship at a small mosque inside Bāb Tūmā near his house, which is known today as his “place” (*maqām*). He dug the well (*biʿr*) that is still there with his hands. The people of that neighbourhood drink from it and receive blessings from its water (*yatabarrakūna bi-māʾihā*). Whoever has a stomachache or any pain and drinks from it will be cured, with the permission of God the Exalted [. . .]

The shaykh’s house consisted of a small single story, to the side of which there was a weaving shop. That was the place where he sawed wood. And there the saw spoke to him on two occasions, and on the third, it broke into three pieces and said, “Oh Arslān, you were not made for this profession, nor were you commanded to take it up.” So he left his work and sat down (to worship God) in this place of worship (*maʿbad*).

It is mentioned that Shaykh Arslān gave Nūr al-Dīn the Martyr (*al-shahīd*) a piece of his saw. When Nūr al-Dīn the Martyr died, he stipulated in his will to his family and companions that it be placed in his shroud. Shaykh Arslān’s miraculous deeds (*karāmāt*) are many, and his glorious traits are famous. He died after 540/1145–46 and was buried in his well-known mausoleum (*turba*) outside of Bāb Tūmā that is outside Damascus, may God the Exalted have mercy upon him.¹

Although his name is seldom included in biographical compilations by medieval Muslim authors, there is no doubt that Shaykh Arslān came to be recognized as the most revered Sufi shaykh of his time in Damascus. He left behind a composition on

¹ Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *al-Ishārat ilā amākin al-ziyārāt; Ziyārāt al-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazzālī, 1981), 87–91. For a slightly different and fully translated passage, see Josef W. Meri in “A Late Medieval Syrian Pilgrimage Guide: Ibn al-Ḥawrānī’s *Al-ishārāt ilā amākin al-ziyārāt* (Guide to Pilgrimage Places),” in *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 7 (2001): 50–51.

the key Sufi theme of God's transcendent oneness (*tawhīd*), which attracted many commentaries in later eras, and he made a lasting mark on the religious and sacred topography of the city.² Such was his legacy that the Damascene historian Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn penned a work on his saintly life as part of an extensive corpus on the history of Damascus and its famous figures.³

Born in a village in the mountains of Qal'at Ja'bar (in northeastern Syria), Shaykh Arslān moved to Damascus and settled in Bāb Tūmā (i.e. the Gate of St. Thomas the Apostle) in the northeastern corner of old Damascus—a predominately Christian quarter. Adjacent to Shaykh Arslān's small house was a shop where he worked as a carpenter for more than twenty years. After receiving signs that called him to the Sufi way of life, he abandoned his work, devoted himself to worshipping God, and became a disciple of Shaykh Abū 'Amīr al-Mu'addib whose spiritual lineage reportedly reached back to Sarī al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867) of the early Baghdadi school of mysticism. Legend has it that Shaykh Arslān handed over a third of his salary to his shaykh. Other accounts present him as an extreme ascetic who would periodically starve himself.⁴

After establishing himself at the mosque of the early military commander Khālīd ibn al-Walīd where he used to worship, Shaykh Arslān began to attract his own disciples. As their number increased and the modest space became too small for their gatherings, the Zangid prince Nūr al-Dīn bought a house adjoining the mosque and had a minaret built atop it. Regular revenues ensured the upkeep of this complex of home and mosque.⁵ Perhaps partly because of his association with this mosque, which was symbolic of holy war during the continuous crusader presence in the region, a popular belief in his sacred power to protect Damascus from external danger emerged. No less important seems to be his association with Nūr al-Dīn, the leader of the jihad movement at the time (d. 1174), who believed that the Sufi shaykh's spiritual power was embedded in and transferred through his sword, a piece of which he asked to be placed in his shroud when he died.

Following Shaykh Arslān's death, between 555/1160 and 560/1164, his tomb on the outskirts of Bāb Tūmā, outside the city gates, became a site for pious visitation (*ziyāra*). Several contemporary and later Sufi shaykhs who connected themselves to Shaykh Arslān through a spiritual chain (*silsila*) settled near his tomb and asked to be buried

2 On the life and work of Shaykh Arslān, see especially Éric Geoffroy, *Jihād et contemplation: Vie et enseignement d'un soufi au temps des croisades* (Paris: Albouraq, 2003); Éric Geoffroy, "Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., BrillOnline reference books, www.brillonline.nl/ (hereafter *EI3*). See also G. W. J. Drewes, *Directions for Travellers on the Mystic Path* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 6–25; and Henri Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIe: Vie et structure religieuses d'une métropole islamique* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashraq, 1988), 207–43. For Shaykh Arslān's association with jihad warfare against the Crusades in Sufi historiographical tradition of the holy war, see Harry S. Neale, *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Traditions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 124–25.

3 Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ṭūlūn, *Ghāyat al-bayān fī tarājim Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī* (Damascus: A. Ibish, 1984).

4 Geoffroy, *Jihād et contemplation*, 25, 30.

5 Geoffroy, *Jihād et contemplation*, 25, 30.

by his side, and their gravesites are listed in the pilgrimage guide of Ibn al-Ḥawrānī. By the time Ibn al-Ḥawrānī composed his work, the tomb had developed into a shrine and a central site for veneration and worship in a cemetery of righteous figures known as the Arslāniyya *maqbara* (see Chapter 7, Figure 10).

Muḥammad ibn Maḥfūz Abū l-Bayān (d. 551/1156), known as Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, an associate of Shaykh Arslān, gained no less renown in Damascus and beyond. His biographers present him as a zealous ascetic and intensely pious person, as well as a learned mystic of far-flung fame. He composed several works on the mystical states and stations (*aḥwāl*, *maqāmāt*) and formulas of divine invocation (*adḥkār*) in rhymed prose and poems. Upon settling in a mosque in the Darb al-Ḥajar neighbourhood in the vicinity of Bāb al-Sharqī (the Eastern Gate), which he shared for some time with Shaykh Arslān, Abū l-Bayān formed a local group of adherents to his spiritual path.⁶ Four years after his death in 551/1156, Nūr al-Dīn erected a building alongside that mosque and named the *ribāṭ* al-Bayānī after him.⁷ His nephew, Muḥammad ibn Maḥfuz al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī—a writer and poet praised for his piety and asceticism—became master (*walī*) of this Sufi place at the beginning of the thirteenth century.⁸

Beyond their legendary layer and idealized descriptions, these accounts afford us testimonies of the early formation of sites and spaces around revered Sufi shaykhs. A process of local embedment and growth gained impetus from around the late twelfth century onwards. Native-born Sufi masters established family-based groups while an increasing number of mystics, ascetics, and holy men from the eastern and western parts of the Muslim world settled in Syrian cities and their surrounding towns and villages. Some natives and immigrants were disciples and lineal descendants of the alleged founders of the first major spiritual paths, the *ṭarīqas*, which originated in other parts of the Muslim world—notably Iraq, eastern Iran, and Central Asia. Others do not appear to affiliate with one particular Sufi path or another. Damascus, in particular, attracted individuals from the eastern and western Islamic world, following the re-ascendency of the city as a major centre of religious scholarship and intellectual pursuits under the Zangids (r. 1154–74) and the Ayyubids (r. 1174–1260).⁹ Among the most famous of these newcomers was the Andalusian-born mystical philosopher Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240).¹⁰

6 On Abū l-Bayān, see especially Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn al-Kathīr, n.d.), 4:160; and see Pouzet, *Damas*, 209.

7 On *ribāṭ* al-Bayānī, see ‘Abd al-Qadir ibn Muḥammad al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris fī ta’rīkh al-madāris*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1988), 2:188, based on the earliest (now lost) account by the Syrian historian and topographer ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād.

8 On him, see Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar fī khabar man ghabar*, ed. S. al-Dīn al-Munajjid and F. Sayyid, 5 vols. (Kuwait: Dār al-Matbu‘āt wa-l-Nashr, 1961–62), 3:224.

9 For the geographical origins of mystical and ascetic routes in thirteenth-century Damascus, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 217–36.

10 Other examples of renowned Sufis from the Muslim West are Shaykh Abū ‘Alī ibn Hūd al-Mursī (d. 699/1299), the son of a family of Andalusian rulers, and Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-‘Innābī

Accounts of the lives of the Banū Yūnisī show the stages in the development of local, family-based groups that became commonplace in the Syrian milieu of the late Mamluk period (from around the mid-fourteenth century). Named after its first shaykh, Yūnis ibn Saʿīd (d. 619/1222–23), who never left his village of al-Qunayya in the Syrian Jazīra, the spiritual path known as the Yūnisiyya was laid down in Damascus by his grandson Sayf al-Dīn al-Rajīhī ibn Sābiq in the early period of Mamluk rule. Ibn Saʿīd moved to the city, where he was given the residence of the vizier Amīn al-Dawla inside Bāb Tūmā as a lodge (*zāwiya*), as well as a village in the Ghūṭa Oasis around Damascus. He died in 706/1306, an affluent and highly esteemed man. His disciples (*aṣḥāb*) prayed over him in the main mosque and buried him in his lodge, which they named al-Yūnusiyya after their master.¹¹ His two sons—first Faql (d. 727/1327) and then Yūsuf—succeeded him (*waliya mashyakha*) at the family *zāwiya*, where their brother ʿIsā had been buried (in 705/1305).¹² Apparently, by their time, the family's place of residence included a space where a local group of disciples and companions would gather, with private funds set aside for its upkeep and supervised by the shaykh. As noted by Éric Geoffroy, although small in size and limited in scope, the hereditary *zāwiya* evolved into the centre of gravity of the familial Sufi tradition. The descendants supervised the activities of the *zāwiya* and were also authorized by their fathers to teach and transmit the spiritual method of their ancestors.¹³

Originating in Baghdad, the Qādiriyya was the most prominent spiritual path to spread through the entire Syrian region. Its early lineages were diffused in Syria through the efforts of disciples of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the alleged founding father of this path (d. 561/1166) in Baghdad, who moved away from the city, and of Syrian aspirants who came to study under him. A noted scholar of Ḥanbalī law, the Qurʾān, and the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), al-Jīlānī urged his disciples to acquire profound religious knowledge before all other pursuits. After a period of study of the legal and traditional sciences and training in Sufism, they received the cloak of initiation, the *khirqā*, from their master, and, in turn, were authorized to bestow the *khirqā* of the venerated master on others. It would appear that already during al-Jīlānī's lifetime his *ṭarīqa* was implanted in Mt. Hakkār (Sinjar mountain range in upper Iraq and the Syrian Jazīra) and in Syrian towns,

(d. 776/1374), who settled in the Andalusīyya lodge (*khānqāh*) inside Damascus. On al-Mursī, see Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalāʾid al-jawhariyya fī taʾrīkh al-ṣālihiyya* (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lughā al-ʿArabiyya, 1980), 2:625–27. On al-ʿInnābī, see Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī aʿyān al-mīʾa al-thāmina*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wārith Muḥammad ʿAlī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1406/1987), 1:298; al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris*, 1:466–67.

¹¹ Abū l-Fidāʾ ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣalāfiyya, 1932), 14:51; al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:216.

¹² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:39, 132.

¹³ Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 216–17, based on the example of the hereditary *zāwiya* of Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥiṣnī (d. 829/1426) in the Shaghur quarter in Damascus.

with family branches of adherents to al-Jilānī's path emerging independently of one another.¹⁴

Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Baṭā'ihī (of the village of Baṭā'ih in the marshlands of Iraq between Basra and Baghdad) studied with al-Jilānī in Baghdad and played an important role in diffusing his path in Syria.¹⁵ According to accounts preserved in his saintly vita, Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī was the first in the Beqaa Valley to don the cloak of initiation of al-Jilānī. His disciples and companions related that "while still young, Shaykh 'Abdallāh put on the cloak conferred on him by Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Baṭā'ihī, and set out to Baghdad to visit Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī and renew the cloak at his honorable hands."¹⁶ They also cited al-Baṭā'ihī saying, "Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī is the light of Iraq and al-Shām, after Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir,"¹⁷ and praised their shaykh, saying, "Our shaykh ruled his generation, just as Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir had ruled in his day, until the point that he was granted the honorific *khawaja* (Per. "master," "lord") as a token of his lofty standing."¹⁸

Indeed, as we will see below, Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī gained fame and admiration both as an active participant in jihad warfare during the Fifth Crusade (1217–21) and as a prominent Sufi master. He settled in the village of Yūnīn, on a hill overlooking the city of Baalbek and the sanctuaries of ancient Heliopolis, built a lodge there, and turned it over to the use of his disciples, where they resided, shared meals, and conducted rituals. As he approached death (in 617/1221), Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī nominated his son Muḥammad as his successor and head of the *zāwiya*. Acquiring renown as much due to his own virtues as to his ancestry, Shaykh Muḥammad attracted many disciples and companions. He died in 651/1253 and was buried by the side of his father in a cave under an almond tree next to the family *zāwiya*.¹⁹

Among Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī's companions was the renowned legal scholar, Faqih Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad (d. 658/1260), who, together with his two sons, Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī (d. 701/1301) and Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā (d. 726/1326), fostered the path of the eponym of the Qādiriyya in Baalbek.²⁰ Ibn Rajab, the author of the biographical

¹⁴ For an overview of the spread of the Qādiriyya in medieval Syria, see Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 43; Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 225–28; and Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 184–85.

¹⁵ On this figure, see al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, 5:240; and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:228.

¹⁶ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 26a–b.

¹⁷ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 27a.

¹⁸ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 29a.

¹⁹ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 42b–43a. For his biography, see especially Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-zamān*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad-Deccan: Osmania Publications Bureau, 1347/1954), 3:12.

²⁰ For the early establishment of the Qādiriyya in Baalbek around the Ḥanbalī family of Yūnīnī, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 226–27.

dictionary of the scholars of the Ḥanbalī rite to which members of the Sufi family of Baalbek affiliated, pointed to the close association between the great shaykhs of the city:

Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad, may God be pleased with him, was invested with the *khirqā* of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) by Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī the ascetic (*zāhid*)—a man of many spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) and miracles known as *asad al-Shām*. He remained in his company and benefited from him. [. . .] He was buried close to his shaykh, may God have mercy on them both.²¹

Another local branch associated with the Qādirī path coalesced around the Shaykh Abū Bakr ibn Qawām al-Bālīsī, first in the town of Bālīs, close to the upper bank of the Euphrates, and later on the outskirts of Damascus. As early as the late ninth century, Bālīs became a mercantile hub as well as a centre for the study and transmission of Islamic traditional and legal sciences, remaining so through the mid-thirteenth century. Indeed, accounts in the saintly vita of Ibn Qawām attest to the centrality of Bālīs as a destination for scholars travelling in search of traditions and legal learning, in particular the teachings of the Shāfi‘ī legal school to which Ibn Qawām affiliated. However, by the time of Ibn Qawām’s death (in 658/1260), the residents of Bālīs had fled in fear of the advancing Mongols, and the town lay in ruins from that time onwards.²² The Syrian historian Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-‘Adīm, who died in 660/1262, writes that in his time not a single scholar or prince remained in the town.²³

Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī devoted a long entry to Ibn Qawām in his *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*—a biographical collection of the celebrated legal scholars of the Shāfi‘ī rite—which he based on the earlier hagiography by Ibn Qawām’s grandson Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar.²⁴ As noted above, Ibn Ṭūlūn copied large portions of this saintly vita into the book of virtues and feats of Ibn Qawām and his descendants, thereby binding them to the religious and scholarly legacy of Damascus and, specifically, with the merits of the Damascene Ṣāliḥiyya neighbourhood at the foot of Mt. Qāsyūn. The fourteenth-century Egyptian Shāfi‘ī jurist Sirāj al-Dīn ibn al-Mulaqqin devoted an entry to Ibn Qawām in his bio-hagiographical anthology, the *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā*,²⁵ and his sacred biography is included in comprehensive dictionaries dedicated to pious and learned figures.²⁶

²¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥman ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1981), 2:269.

²² For the history of Bālīs, see J. P. Turner, “Bālīs,” *EI*3.

²³ Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fi ta’rikh al-Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Damascus: n.p., 1988–89), 119.

²⁴ Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*, ed. ‘A. F. M. al-Ḥilw and M. M. al-Ṭanāḥī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964–76), 8:401–18.

²⁵ Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar Sirāj al-Dīn ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā*, ed. N. Shariba (Cairo: Dār al-Ta’līf, 1973), 231.

²⁶ These include al-Dhahabī, *al-Ibar*, 5:250–51; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt*, 5:295–96; Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-wafayāt wa’l-dhayl ‘alayha*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1951), 1:148–50; and Muwaffaq al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh ibn al-Suqa‘ī, *Talī Kitāb wafayāt al-a’yān*, edited and translated by J. Sublet (Damascus: n.p., 1974), 210.

The shaykh of al-Bālis is portrayed as a prominent legal scholar and revered Friend of God, famous both in his homeland and far beyond. Many disciples and followers are said to have flocked to his home-*zāwiya* in the town, and he is said to have attracted Sufi shaykhs and aspirants from as far away as India. He died in Aleppo, and about twelve years after his death his coffin was carried to the foot of Mt. Qāsyūn on the bank of the Yazid river. His grandson recounts in his vita that the shaykh stipulated in his will that he be placed in a coffin so that his remains could be transferred to the holy land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*).²⁷ A *zāwiya* named in his memory, Qawāmiyya Bālisiyya, was erected at the location of his grave and became a focal point of pious visitation.²⁸ His descendants presided over the family lodge and were buried by his side. Noteworthy among them was Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, his grandson and author of his saintly vita, who gained fame in the Damascene circles of learned and pious men. His disciple Ibn Kathīr, the celebrated fourteenth-century religious scholar and historian from Damascus, sets forth his merits in his universal history, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, which combines a chronicle and an obituary:

Another eminent person who died in that year (718 AH) was the learned, pious, ascetic and God-fearing shaykh, a model for ancestors and descendants alike, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Zāhid (the ascetic). [. . .] He was a revered shaykh, well-mannered and dignified, and he possessed the marks of a virtuous and pious man [. . .] People came on pilgrimage to visit him and receive his blessing (*baraka*). He possessed complete knowledge, firm religious belief and true conviction, loved prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), and the traditions of the ancestors (*al-salaf*), recited much and was frequently immersed in spiritual retreat seclusion (*khalwa*). He also compiled a book with accounts of his grandfather, may God Almighty have mercy on him.²⁹

Aḥmad al-Rifā‘ī (d. 578/1182), the Iraqi Shafī‘ī religious scholar and eponym of the Rifā‘iyya, also drew followers from all over Syria. Stressing poverty and asceticism, his spiritual path, which soon developed a reputation of wonder-working and extreme behavior (including fire-walking and fire-swallowing, as well as its trademark “howling” during *dhikr*, the “recollection” of God’s presence), was diffused through the activities of his disciples and lineal descendants.³⁰ One group of adherents to his path was established in Damascus by Ṭalīb ibn ‘Abdān al-Rifā‘ī (d. 683/1284), a native of the city who had a *zāwiya* with his followers located in the neighbourhood of Qaṣr al-Ḥajjājī (south of the walled city on the outskirts of al-Ṣaghīr Gate), named “Ṭalibiyya,” after him.³¹ Another

²⁷ *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abū Bakr ibn Qawām al-Bālisī*, Copy 2. Attributed to M.b. ‘U.b.ABb Qawām, Islamic Manuscripts Collection, Arabic MS, 4552, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, fol. 25a.

²⁸ On this *zāwiya*, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:208–9.

²⁹ Abū al-Fidā’ ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī l-ta’rīkh*, 14 vols (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ṣalafiyya, 1932), 14:102–3. On Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar see also Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 6:49–50.

³⁰ For the early period of the spread of the Rifā‘ī path in Syria, see Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 223–24; and see Pouzet, *Damas*, 227, for its spread in thirteenth-century Damascus.

³¹ On Ṭalīb ibn ‘Abdān and his lodge, see al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir’āt al-zamān*, 4:214–15; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:272; al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:204.

group appeared in the first half of the fourteenth century in the village of Qaṭanān in the vicinity of Damascus surrounding ‘Alī al-Qaṭanānī (d. 747/1346), who came to be known as a devout and famous propagandist of the Rifā’iyya in Syria. It is related that in addition to giving lessons to his followers he provided them with meals and other assistance.³²

Muslima ibn Mukhallad al-Rūḥī and his disciple ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī established a distinctive spiritual path that spread from northern Iraq to northern Syria along the Euphrates and extended back to al-Jilānī and al-Rifā’ī. After a period of study with his shaykh, ‘Aqīl left his place of residence in a village in the wilderness of northern Iraq for Manbij, northeast of Aleppo in the city district. During the Counter-Crusader period, the ancient town of Manbij continued to play an important strategic and commercial role, being a major road junction to the west of the Euphrates and a military base against the Crusades. Situated northeast of the river, the fortress of Najm (Qal‘at Najm) protected the bridge of Manbij (Jisr al-Manbij), which permitted access to the Upper Jazira and Iraq. In his famous *Dictionary of Countries* (composed in the early thirteenth century), the geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī writes that people arrived at Jisr Manbij, where the Euphrates could be crossed through a bridge of boats.³³

This was not, however, the kind of journey made by ‘Aqīl as narrated in his saintly vita. Its author, himself a native of Aleppo, recorded the tale about ‘Aqīl’s miraculous appearance in Manbij. Eyewitnesses related that when he wished to depart from his homeland, he ascended the minaret of the village mosque and called the residents to gather to bid him farewell. When they had gathered, the shaykh soared into the sky in full sight of all those present, until he alighted inside a cave south of Manbij. Suddenly, so goes the story, he heard a voice commanding him to move to the town of Manbij and not to leave the place. There, ‘Aqīl was instructed by his beloved shaykh to teach his spiritual route, called the ‘Aqīliyya after him, by God’s decree: “You, Shaykh ‘Aqīl, shall be the pillar and the head of this *ṭarīqa* [in your lifetime and] after your death.” Again, he soared up, this time to the town’s mosque, and people began to flock to him, group by group.³⁴

Shaykh ‘Aqīl turned his lodge into a place of training and gathering for his community of disciples, as well as a “stage” for the performance of the Sufi ritual of the *samā’* (audition), which came to be an essential element of his spiritual path and was open to

32 On him, see Abū Bakr ibn Aḥmad ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ta’rīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba*, 4 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1994–97), 2:495; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:251; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar*, 3:77.

33 Yāqūt ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī, *Mu’jam al-buldān*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣadr, 1957), 5:205–7.

34 al-Ḥājj ‘Uthman ibn al-Ḥājj Muḥammad al-‘Ūrānī al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, Cairo, MS Dār al-Kutub: T’arīkh Taymūr, No. 256, fols. 93–94. The story appears also in the biographical dictionary of the Sufis by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fi tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣadr, 1999–2007), 2:260–70, and in the hagiographical anthology of Yūsuf ibn Ismā‘īl al-Nabhānī, *Jamī‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.), 2:260–70.

the participation of all members of society. Such was the reputation Shaykh ‘Aqīl gained that his adherents ascribed to him the honorific status of the Grand Shaykh (*shaykh al-shuyūkh*) of al-Shām in his days. He lived in Manbij for more than forty years and was buried in his *zāwiya*, and his grave there came to be seen by the people of Manbij as a source of blessing.

A legend that circulated after his death commemorated him as a channel through which beneficial divine grace is bestowed upon the believers. It was recounted that his master Maslama had identified him as one of the saints who would live in their graves (*ghawasīn*), retaining their ability to bestow *baraka* and perform *karāmāt* posthumously. The announcement was made after an incident in which his disciples reached the eastern bank of the Euphrates during a journey, and each of them placed his prayer rug on the water and crossed the river while sitting on it. As for ‘Aqīl, he plunged into the river and appeared on the other bank without getting wet.³⁵ Such stories about the shaykh’s outstanding traits and marvellous deeds might have served the wish of the author of his vita to convey the splendour of the town’s spiritual climate and sacredness created by its holy figures.

Numerous seekers of the Path are said to have attached themselves to Shaykh ‘Aqīl and disseminated his spiritual path. Prominent among them was Shaykh ‘Adī ibn al-Musāfir al-Ḥakkārī, founder of the ‘Adawiyya path (d. 557/1162). Shaykh ‘Adī was born in Baalbek, and, after a period of study in Baghdad with al-Jīlānī and other Sufi masters, dedicated himself to extended periods of wandering in the mountainous region of northern Iraq, where he continued his training under local shaykhs. Finally, he settled in the Kurdish mountains of Iraq, founded a monastic complex (*zāwiya*) in the valley of Lalish (north-northeast of Mosul), and became the head of a Sufi community there. He gained popularity among both the local Kurdish villagers and distant Sufis and Christian monks (local Nestorians sought to identify Shaykh ‘Adī with the legendary Christian apostle Addai, a missionary in Mesopotamia). Shaykh ‘Adī’s attachment to his master ‘Aqīl continued long after his own rise as a venerated Sufi master. He would travel to Manbij to visit his shaykh and recounted narratives that commemorated his figure.³⁶ Two shaykhs of Dayr al-Na’ish in the Beqaa Valley affiliated with the ‘Adawiyya, a certain ‘Uthmān (d. 650/1252) and his son Ibrāhīm (d. 652/1283). Both are presented in the vita as close companions of Shaykh ‘Aqīl and reliable reporters of tales of his life and virtues.³⁷

The Sa’diyya was a familial branch of the Rifā’iyya that gained popularity in Syria—despite the bizarre practices of its followers, such as body piercing and the shaykh riding horseback over a “living carpet” of men, which scandalized more sober Muslims. The hagiography of Sa’d al-Dīn al-Jibāwī, the eponymous founder of the Sa’diyya, serves a symbolic function on this path. Historical details about him are scant, as is literary

35 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 93–94.

36 On Shaykh ‘Adī ibn Musāfir, see al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib*, 4:268–99. For additional references to Arabic and Kurdish sources, see Daniella Talmon-Heller, “Shaykh Adī ibn Musāfir,” *EI3*.

37 On them see Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 5:294.

production by members of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* that came to be associated with him. His dates also remain uncertain but most probably fall in the late thirteenth century.³⁸ Sa'd's hagiographers describe his meeting with the Prophet as the climax of his repentance and eventual transformation into a Sufi shaykh. It exemplifies the early phase of his road to sanctity and the Sufi's claim of direct encounter with God's Messenger, to which we shall return.

In his youth, Sa'd left Damascus for the Hawran, where he led a life of piracy until the Prophet, either alone or with the "righteous caliphs" Abū Bakr and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, posed as victims on the road. When, in response to his demand for goods and money, the first horseman recited the Qur'anic verse: "Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allāh?" (Q 57:16), Sa'd was seized with emotion, ecstasy, weeping, and lament. He fell from his horse, mounted again, and was thrown off again. Thereupon, he begged for forgiveness for his behavior, and when he awakened from his drunkenness and his soul's agitation had subsided, the Prophet moistened some dried dates and put them in his mouth. Sa'd subsequently returned to God and then to the Hawran, where he died after establishing a spiritual path.³⁹

Several Sufi and ascetic groups that chose degradation and life on the margins of society as their preferred spiritual path—notably the Ḥārīriyya and the Qalandariyya—sprang up in Syria and had lodges erected by their shaykhs or directly attributed to them. Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥarīrī (d. 645/1248), the foremost representative of antinomian Sufism in Syria in Ayyubid times, was born in the village of Bisr in the Ḥawrān and spent part of his life in Damascus. His disciples were known in the city as *aṣḥāb al-ziyy al-munāfi li-l-sharī'a*, meaning those whose dress runs counter to the regulations of the divine law.⁴⁰ The historian Abū Shāma remarks that these individuals were even worse on the inside than on the outside (*bāṭinuhm sharrun min ḡāhirihim*).⁴¹ Ibn Kathīr, who devoted a biographical entry to al-Ḥarīrī in his famous chronicle *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, describes the large following attracted to his path, adopting his unacceptable attire, participating in assemblies of music and dancing, and gazing at beardless youths, and how he presided over all these followers.⁴² A lodge was erected by his disciples on

38 For the beginnings of the Sa'diyya, see Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 121; Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 73; Barbara von Schlegell, "Sa'diyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, BrillOnline reference works, and the references to Arabic sources there. Von Schlegell notes that although the Rifā'iyya and Sa'diyya gained popularity in the same milieu, the connection between the two spiritual paths seems to be traceable to a careful manipulation of the Banū Sa'd's spiritual lineage.

39 Several versions of the account of Sa'd's conversion are cited in al-Nabhānī, *Jamī' karāmāt al-awliyā'*, 2:95–97.

40 On the appearance of the Ḥārīriyya in Damascus, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 220–21.

41 'Abd al-Rahmān Abū Shāma, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-l-sābi'*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Malikiyya, 1947), 180.

42 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:173.

the southern height (*al-sharaf al-qibli*) of the city to serve as the gathering and ritual space for his many followers.⁴³

The Qalandariyya, a loosely organized ascetic group with a distinctive identity and leadership which had emerged during the early thirteenth century in Central Asia, was formed in Damascus and Damietta (Egypt) under the leadership of Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn al-Sāwuji (d. 630/1232).⁴⁴ This shaykh arrived in Damascus and took up residence in the *zāwiya* of Shaykh ‘Uthmān al-Rūmī on Mt. Qāsyūn. Companions related that he remained with Shaykh ‘Uthmān until he “was overcome with a desire for asceticism and seclusion.” He then left the lodge and settled down in the Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery, exemplifying the dervish who strives for total poverty (*faqr*). Sometime later, he journeyed to Damietta in Egypt and died there.⁴⁵ Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn al-Sāwuji’s disciple, Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Darkizīnī, then became the shaykh of the local Qalandars. He dwelt in the cemetery area, built a *zāwiya* there for his followers, and attracted many companions.⁴⁶ A tomb complex grew up around the Qalandariyya lodge as an extension of it.⁴⁷

Considerable numbers of Sufi shaykhs, whose biographies do not mention any specific Sufi or ascetic group, attracted disciples and lay believers, established lodges, and gained renown and veneration as Friends of God in their local settings and beyond. A noteworthy example is ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Nu‘aym (d. 675/1276) of the village of Sulaymiyya in the region of Hama. His hagiographers designate him as a renowned *walī* and performer of supernatural miracles, and note that he had many disciples who became great shaykhs themselves.⁴⁸ Consider also the house of al-Nabhānī, a family of revered shaykhs of the village of Bayt Jabrīn in the Aleppo region. Muḥammad ibn Nabhān al-Jabrīnī, the head of the family after his father, was designated as the shaykh of the region, venerated for his piety and ascetic mode of life, kindness, blessings and working of wonders. When the news came to Damascus of his death in the month of Sha‘bān in the year 744/1343, the Prayer of the Dead (*ṣalat al-ghā’ib*) was recited for him at the Umayyad mosque on Friday. It is said that he was highly regarded by high and low and that when he died Syria (*al-Shām*) became bereft of prominent people. His

⁴³ On the Ḥarīriyya and their *zāwiya*, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:197–99, and the discussion in Chapter 5 below.

⁴⁴ The term “qalandar” is used quite broadly in Central Asia, often as a generic term for wandering ascetics or dervish migrants, itinerants, or missionaries who were unattached to organized *ṭarīqa*-based Sufi orders. For a full study of dervish groups in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, see Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*.

⁴⁵ On the formation of the Qalandarī path around the activity of its master, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Sāwījī, see Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 39–52.

⁴⁶ On al-Darkizīnī, see Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 21.

⁴⁷ For the Qalandariyya al-Darkizīniyya lodge and tomb in the Damascene cemetery, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:210–12, and Chapters 5 and 6 below.

⁴⁸ On him, see especially al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*, 2:322.

son 'Alī (d. 749/1348) resided in the lodge of his father and grandfather. He was praised for receiving whoever came—the powerful and great alongside the poor and weak—with hospitality on his father's model, and for treading the clear and evident path of his forefathers and following the ways of his grandfather. His sons are said to have done the same.⁴⁹

By the mid-fourteenth century, concrete and symbolic spheres of spiritual domination and sanctity had been forged around Sufi masters and holy men who put down roots in Syrian cities and mid-sized towns and villages surrounding them and were incorporated as a vital element of local religious and communal life. Traceable to the early generation of the locally revered figures in the medieval Syrian milieu, the emergence of circles of disciples and devotees centring on a charismatic shaykh, his lodge, and his gravesite, became increasingly apparent.⁵⁰ Thus, the term *ṭarīqa*, when appearing in biographical and hagiographical accounts, normally denotes a method of spiritual guidance practised by a *particular* Sufi shaykh rather than an institutionalized Sufi "order" with a well-defined body of teachings, and practices, and a set of rules to guide aspirants and disciples. Similarly, the sources use the expression "people of the Path" (*ahl al-ṭarīqa*, or *ahl al-ṭarīqa*) to designate a set of people who centred on a certain shaykh of well-established authority and manifested virtues rather than members of a social organization. The accounts suggest the existence of at least two circles around the revered shaykh. A small inner group consisted of aspirants (*murīdūn*) and committed disciples who resided at the lodge, surrounded by companions and former close disciples (the *aṣḥāb*) who frequented his residential place and centre of activity. A wider circle consisted of occasional visitors who came to the lodge or burial place to seek the shaykh's blessing and partake of the communal and devotional life of his congregation.⁵¹

Through the routinization of their charisma in practices performed at the spaces of their lodges and the public manifestations of their exceptional virtues and marvels, the

⁴⁹ On Banū al-Nabhānī, see especially Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar*, 3:121.

⁵⁰ For examples in the late Mamluk period, see Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 216–17. Noteworthy in this regard is the local associations of the Qādirī spiritual path in Hama around Sharf al-Dīn Yahya (d. 734/1338), grandson of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (the son of al-Jilānī), and in Jerusalem around Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad known as Ibn Arslān (d. 844/1440). On the history of the house of al-Jilānī in Hama, see Zaïm Khenchelaoui et Theiry Zarcone, "La Famille Jilānī de-Hama—Syrie (Bayt al-Jilānī)," *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1–2 (2000). Special issue: *The Qādiryya Order, Dedicated to Alexandre Popovic*, ed. Thierry Zarcone, Ekren Işin, and Arthur Buehler (Istanbul: Simurgh, 2000), 53–77. On Ibn Arslān and the local association that revolved around him in Jerusalem, see Daphna Ephrat, "The Shaykh, the Physical Setting and the Holy Site: The Diffusion of the Qādirī Path in Late Medieval Palestine," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19 (January 2009): 1–20.

⁵¹ For an elaboration of this observation with regard to the Syro-Palestinian context, see Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 131–35. For an important discussion on the nature of the congregations formed in Upper Egypt around charismatic shaykhs during the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods, see Hofer, *Popularization of Sufism*, 241–51.

revered masters sustained their spiritual and charismatic authority and enlarged their following. Their charisma did not vanish. Rather, as this study seeks to demonstrate, it was routinized in the practices performed at the spaces of the shaykhs' lodges and at their graves, and perpetuated in symbolic physical effects that made the Sufi masters present in their absence, and in hagiographical narratives that tied them to local communities and the land. The road to sainthood of such figures and the modes and displays of their authority are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

SOURCES AND DISPLAYS OF SPIRITUAL AND CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

WHEN PIECING TOGETHER the personalities of the early generations of Sufi masters and Friends of God in the Syrian milieu of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods through their biographies, one must first acknowledge the richness of terms and expressions used by the authors to designate the revered figures. These include the compound labels “Sufi, jurist (*faqih*), miracle-worker (*ṣāhib al-karāmāt*), possessor of mystical states and stations (*aḥwāl* and *maqāmāt*),” and the compound qualifying adjectives “virtuous” (*ṣāliḥ*), “pious” (*‘abīd*), and “ascetic” (*zāhid*, *munqati‘*, *mutaqashshif*). The expression “he was a religious scholar and possessor of mystical knowledge” (*min al-‘ulamā’ al-‘ārifīn bi-Allāh*) also recurs in the sacred biographies. Additionally, one often finds the expressions “he was the religious leader (*imām*) of his time,” “peerless in his lifetime” (*min al-afrād fī waqtihi*), and the “upright” (*amīn al-dīn*) that indicate high religious and social status. While many biographers commemorated these figures with mere labels of identification, some others departed from the biographical introductory formula to narrate the praiseworthy virtues and feats of the Sufi shaykhs and God’s Friends. These descriptions yield multifaceted saintly figures, representing a variety of religious traditions, and pursuing several avenues, either separately, or, more often, simultaneously.

The characterization of many biographees as learned mystics or legalist Sufis nourished and reasserted the rapprochement between Sufi shaykhs, on the one hand, and jurists—the transmitters and upholders of Islamic law—on the other. By the close of the thirteenth century, the division between them, if it ever existed, had long become blurred. While Sufism in its widest definition continued to have an important antinomian, ecstatic, and even an experimental dimension, a social category of what can be labelled as “mainstream Sufis” emerged in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and became integrated into the scholarly and social world of the *‘ulamā’* of the established Sunni legal schools and the fold of mainstream Sunnism.¹ Sufi masters in the Syrian milieu of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods who belonged to this category, mingled in scholarly circles of judiciary-trained scholars as a matter of course, studying

¹ For the lives and teachings of the formulators of the mainstream Sufi tradition such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), ‘Alī ibn ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1072), Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), and Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) and their integration into the world of the established schools of law of eleventh-century Khurasan, see Margaret Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26 (1994): 427–42. See also Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘Ulama’ of Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (Albany: SUNY, 2000), 54–55, 90, for the many examples of Sufi legal scholars in eleventh-century Baghdad.

and teaching the same texts, and combined discursive and mystical knowledge, or the *ʿilm* of the jurist and the *maʿrifa* of the mystic, as complementary avenues to religious virtuosity and authority. Several among them gained fame as outstanding traditionalists as well as legal scholars (*fuqahā*)—the elite of the *ʿulamā*’ class. “Orthodox” Sufi masters adopted the legalist approach of being constantly concerned about the shaping of public norms based on the Sunna and the Shariʿa and shared with leaders of the established *madhhabs* a commitment to disseminate religious knowledge and proper Islamic practice, and revitalize the legacy of the Prophet.²

Furthermore, the coexistence of what Max Weber termed “charismatic” and “legal-rational” authority, so characteristic in the formative period of Moroccan Sufism during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was widely accepted in the Near East of the historical context under study as well.³ These complementary sources of authority are demonstrated in my study of the lives and virtues of Sufi shaykhs and Friends of God who lived in Palestinian urban centres and their hinterlands in the Mamluk period.⁴ More recently, Nathan Hofer has shown that in the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods, it was more important for a saint to possess religious knowledge than spiritual power.⁵ Conversely, as amply demonstrated by Daniella Talmon-Heller, jurists living in Syria at the time acquired the attribute of what she calls “the blessing of religious knowledge” (*barakat al-ʿilm*) that carried with it the power to intercede (*shafāʿa*) between humans and the divine and to bestow blessing through the manifestations and manipulation of *karāmāt*.⁶

Piety (*ʿibāda*) and asceticism (*zuhd*)—both as a mode of life and as a manifestation of morality—had long been important components in the ethos of both the scholarly and Sufi milieus, and continued to serve as a basis of constructing social standing and attaining authority.⁷ Of course, ascetic expressions of piety varied in type and degree. For the most part, the type of ascetic practices that Sufis and religious scholars shared and for

2 For examples of “orthodox” Sufis, disseminators of true “religion” and proper Islamic conduct, in Jerusalem, Nablus, and Damascus during these periods, see Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 90–96.

3 On which, see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 100–118. Cornell’s detailed and informative quantitative analysis of the sociological profile of sainthood shows that during the formative period of Moroccan Sufism the popular saint was normally an urban educated intellectual, often an Arab or Arabized Berber.

4 Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 139–43.

5 Hofer, *The Popularization of Sufism*, 236.

6 Daniella Talmon-Heller, “The Resources of Authority of Ayyubid and Early Mamluk ‘Ulamā’,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 13 (2009): 1–23.

7 In this regard, Megan Reid insightfully observes that asceticism may have been crucial to the Sufi Path, but it was also crucial to the culture of Islamic law and the keepers of divine law in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. See Reid, *Law and Piety*, 7. For studies on the connection between expressions of ascetic piety and social standing of scholars in an earlier period, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 147–48, and Nimrod Hurvitz, “Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination,” *Studia Islamica* 85 (1997): 57–64; Nimrod Hurvitz, “Authority within the Hanbali Madhhab: The

which they gained prestige and influence in medieval scholarly milieus were modelled after the simple, mild ascetic piety of the Prophet: a rejection of worldly benefits and frugality without self-deprivation and mortification of the flesh.⁸ The famous Baghdadi shaykh Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168) cites a famous prophetic tradition in his *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* (*Rules of Conduct for Seekers of the Path*), one of the most widely read handbooks for training in Sufism:

The Prophet said, “Three persons will enter paradise while being exempted from any judgment; the one who washes his garment without having another for change, the one who does not have two pots on his portable stove, and the one who wishes to drink without having someone around to ask him what you would like to drink.”⁹

Other Sufi shaykhs are depicted in their biographies as extreme ascetics. These figures were satisfied with unprocessed or uncooked food and even added hunger to the physical experience of their diet, had few or no possessions, dressed in simple or rough clothing, and travelled long distances on foot—practices that were patterned after the ascetic tradition of early Islam’s devotees and that were broadly shared and highly esteemed in the society and culture of the Ayyubid and Mamluk eras.¹⁰ But, while they shared zealous acts of worship and abstention from worldliness with their contemporary pious and ascetic figures, Sufis cultivated their distinctive form of ascetic piety and set themselves above all other worshippers. In other words, the righteous Sufi would pay close attention to the underlying motives of his pious habits and infuse them with trust in God and self-control as well as other virtues of the purity of the heart (*ṣafā’ al-qalb*)—humility, honesty, moral conduct, generosity, and altruism—with which he was imbued and that lent his habits a deeper spiritual meaning. His ascetic practices, moderate as they may seem, were thus perceived as a stage in a spiritual journey leading to closeness to God.¹¹ Distinctive spiritual practices, above all the spiritual retreat (*khalwa*), which

Case of Barbahari,” in *Religious Knowledge, Authority, and Charisma*, ed. Daphna Ephrat and Meir Hatina (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), 36–49.

8 Nimrod Hurvitz describes mild asceticism that was widely practiced in the ninth and tenth centuries as an ethical outlook and code of conduct: Hurvitz, “Biographies and Mild Asceticism.” Yaacov Lev, focusing on twelfth-century Egypt, defines mild asceticism as a mode of life that does not require seclusion and poverty: Lev, “Piety and Political Activism in Twelfth-Century Egypt,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): 311–13.

9 ‘Abd al-Qāhir Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, edited with an introduction by M. Milson (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 1978), 3.

10 For a thoughtful discussion of the persistence and expansion of severe asceticism from the late twelfth century forward, see Reid, *Law and Piety*, 28–35. Her observation of the awe that surrounded the extremely devout ascetics corresponds to the depiction of revered *awliyā’* in Morocco at the time. For illustrations, see Ephrat, “In Quest of an Ideal Type of Saint,” 74–75.

11 On the importance of ascetic piety to the mystic’s self-transformation and spiritual ascent, see Sara Sviri, “Self and Its Transformation in Sūfism: With Special Reference to Early Literature,” in *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197. For a different outlook suggesting a linear transition

was often combined with intense meditation and remembrance of God's name (*dhikr*), served to induce mystical states and overcome mundane temptations and constituted one of the fundamental principles of the mystic's ascetic piety. Moreover, Sufi shaykhs, who were concerned no less with inner spiritual purification and mystical ascent than with the dissemination of the truths of Islam in the light of the prophetic *sunna* and the tradition of early Islam's paragons of virtue, claimed to embody the model of the Prophet—and thus to be the most qualified to recast his message.

The self-conception of Sufi masters as the truthful followers of God's Messenger had its origins in the writings of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), the Sufi religious scholar and theorist from Nishapur best known for his biographical anthology of famous Sufis, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*. Elaborated upon by later authors of Sufi doctrinal and didactic works from the eastern lands of Iran and Iraq, this self-perception is lucidly expressed in the last classical handbook of Sufism, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* (*The Benefits of Intimate Knowledge*) by 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), the alleged founder of the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order in Baghdad.

In the following passage, al-Suhrawardī points to the merits and superiority of the Sufis as emulators of the Prophet and revivers of his legacy:

The Prophet—may God bless and greet him—is reported as saying: Oh my son, keep your heart cleansed of injustice from the time you wake up in the morning until you lie in bed in the evening. Oh, my son, this is my *sunna*; whoever revives my *sunna* revives me, and whoever revives me joins me in paradise. [...] The Sufis (*ṣūfiyya*) revitalized this *sunna* due to the purification of the hearts from hatred and injustice. This is the pillar of their faith, their nature and visible merit.¹²

The Sufis are the most successful of all other groups in following the messenger of God in all that He commanded and commissioned, censured and enjoined. [...] Their characters (*akhlāq*) have been polished through their perfection in molding themselves after the Prophet. They resemble him in shame, forgiveness and compassion, mediation, persuasion and good advice, humbleness and altruism, and endowed with many of his spiritual states (*aḥwāl*): God-fearing piety, reverence, contentment, patience and peace of mind, asceticism and absolute trust in God.¹³

As insightfully observed by Erik Ohlander, such self-reflexive views should be seen as part of the general framework of Suhrawardī's intentions. He saw himself as a representative of the "genuine" Sufis, and Sufism was for him a matter of asserting identity, authority, and superiority as much as it was about the search for mystical knowledge and spiritual perfection. According to him, the Sufis (*ṣūfiyya*) are the true "heirs of the prophets"

from the early, lesser stage of asceticism to mysticism, and the existence of a clear borderline between ascetic and mystical piety, see Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century CE," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 51–70.

¹² Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb 'Awārif al-maʿārif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1966), 45.

¹³ Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb 'Awārif al-maʿārif*, 45–47.

and not those whom he calls the worldly ‘ulamā’ due to the specific characteristics they possess, namely, perfection in coupling veridical knowledge with faultless praxis. Their sciences are the articulation of this knowledge, which is encoded in the prophetic *sunna* and the example of early Islam’s models of virtue, and which was bestowed by the Prophet to his immediate companions, and passed down from generation to generation of spiritual masters, up to his time. Emphasizing the purely gratuitous, graced nature of the truthful knowledge with which the Sufis are blessed, Suhrawardī claimed that they are the ones who possess both the key to this knowledge and the authority to revivify it.¹⁴

As we shall have the occasion to see, the superiority of the mystic over his jurist peer is obvious in the *vitas*. Yet to characterize the revered Sufi masters who lived in the religious and social milieu under study as possessors of truthful knowledge and embodiments of exemplary authority after the Prophet model would be to play down another important dimension of their multifaceted figures—that of the miracle-worker. In the scope of miracles and marvels narrated in their hagio-biographies and *vitas*, we see the perception of *karāmāt* as proof of the blessing that God bestows upon His Friends, and the essential role accorded to the miraculous in the articulation and legitimation of their authority as well as the affirmation of their superiority. The miracles and marvels the Sufi masters performed are presented by those who related them, passed them on, and put them down in writing as a by-product of their lofty knowledge and outstanding traits and virtues. Accordingly, the hagiographical accounts of the manipulation of their spiritual power and grace are entwined with narratives that extol their ascetic habits, scrupulousness, humility, graciousness, and heroism.¹⁵

The following discussion seeks to show how various sources and venues were brought together in the social construction of spiritual and charismatic authority by focusing on the Sufi shaykhs whose saintly *vitas* are studied for this book. The general thrust of the analysis of the accounts preserved in the *vitas* proposes that in order to be recognized as holy, the figure of Sufi shaykh had to be concretized, his exceptional traits and virtues displayed and embodied in the specific environment, and narrated in detail. Even if the authors of the *vitas* sought to place the Sufi Friend of God within a universally accepted normative model, the written and oral traditions they assembled would differ in the presentation of the saintly figures and the emphasis placed on the sources of their authority and the components of their personas. The figure of the Sufi saint portrayed in them is thus more than a prototype, and his presentation is no less concordant with the motivations of those who relayed them and the intents of authors than with the beliefs and expectations of the society within which the saintly figure was embedded. Accounts that narrate his outward appearance, ascetic habits, behavior, devotional and pious acts, and interaction with others are situated within concrete settings and convey the notion

¹⁴ See Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 140–48, for a comprehensive exposition of the distinctiveness and superiority of the Sufis in Suhrawardī’s writing.

¹⁵ These characteristics generally match the virtues and practices of saintly figures that were recorded in three hagio-biographical anthologies compiled in Morocco during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. On which, see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 110–11.

of the charismatic persona and its performative character. First-hand testimonies and accounts by relatives, disciples, and companions highlight specific saintly qualities and sources of prestige and influence and expose the stages on the road to sanctity that might have otherwise remained hidden. It is also in the saintly *vitas* of the revered shaykhs in the medieval Syrian milieu that we find descriptions and self-testimonies of their initiation to the Sufi Path and of connecting to the Prophet, the ultimate source of authority and the most perfect and closest link to God that human beings can attain.

Piety, Asceticism, and Marvels on the Road to Sanctity

Contemporary and later Syrian historians present Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī as the most revered Sufi saint of the Baalbek area of his time. It is related that such was his prominence and fame that residents of Damascus would leave the city and travel to visit him.¹⁶ As noted above, his extensive obituary appears in works by the thirteenth-century Damascene historians Abū Shāma and Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, as well as the universal history of Ibn Kathīr, parts of which were reproduced by al-Nabhānī, author of the hagiographical anthology, *Jamī‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*.¹⁷

The saintly *vita* of the famous shaykh, the most comprehensive work of his life, virtues, and feats, reveals the overlapping components of his persona and the various dimensions in which he acted. Companions and disciples describe him as a devout worshipper and courageous jihad warrior, a model of ascetic and upright behavior, a mystic famous for his spiritual exercises and states (*riyāḍat* and *aḥwāl*), and a religious scholar. He was noted for his keen interest in the study and transmission of the prophetic traditions and adherence to traditions of the school of Ibn Ḥanbal, to which he affiliated. It is related that he knew the laws and commandments of Imām Ibn Ḥanbal’s school by heart and that if a legal matter was complicated or unclear, he would travel to the Ḥanbalī mosque in the Ṣālihiyya neighbourhood of Damascus,¹⁸ where he would address a question to the local leaders (*imāms*) of the *madhhab*, and later return to his lodge in the village of Yūnīn.¹⁹ He guided many disciples along the spiritual path he followed and, at the same time, participated in gatherings for the study and transmission of the traditional and legal sciences convened in the mosques of Baalbek and Damascus.

Numerous stories refer to the qualities and conditions that distinguished the Friends of God from their peers from childhood.²⁰ One such story appears in the saintly

¹⁶ Abū Shāma, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn*, 126.

¹⁷ Shams al-Dīn Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-zamān fī ta’rīkh al-a’yān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1971), 4:203–7; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:93–94; al-Nabhānī, *Jamī‘ karāmāt*, 2:248–52.

¹⁸ The Ḥanbalī mosque is the oldest in al-Ṣālihiyya and the second oldest in Damascus. The mosque was built between 1202 and 1213 and was the first major building project to be undertaken during the Ayyubid period. On which, see Daniel Demeter, *Lenses on Syria: A Photographic Tour of Its Ancient and Modern Culture* (Chicago: Just World, 2016), 55.

¹⁹ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 2a–b.

²⁰ For noteworthy examples, see Renard, *Friends of God*, 35–41.

vita of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. The markers of the extraordinary pious, ascetic, and altruistic saintly figure were manifested from the beginning of his road to sainthood. Eyewitnesses and companions in the village of Yūnīn recounted that as a small child the shaykh would go out of the village to recite poetry. After that, they would take him to his mother, who was known as a righteous woman. Once grown, he left the village and went to reside on Mt. Lebanon in order to maintain prolonged worship of God, obeying everything the Prophet had ever commanded. It was also related that he dwelt in solitude on the mountain and that his sister would bring him a flatbread and two eggs each morning. One day, as she was making her way from his dwelling place on the mountain, she encountered an ascetic who was descending from the mountain holding a flatbread and two eggs in his hands. She asked him where he had got the food, and he replied that the man who dwelted on the mountain had given them to him. And so she asked about the shaykh’s condition and what he had eaten. He replied, “I do not know, but for a month, I have come up and he gives me his food.”²¹

Accounts of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī’s life as an accomplished shaykh, which passed down from close disciples and companions, extol his scrupulousness and striving for spiritual perfection in the worship of God:

Our master, the shaykh, may God be pleased with him, was a perfect man with a thick beard. [. . .] He was very valiant in the fulfillment of God’s commandments and was full of praise for God. [. . .] He would spend night vigils in prayer, was diligent at performing rituals, immersed himself in worship and contemplation, and in “memorization” and “mentioning” of God (*dhikr*). He attained high spiritual experiences (*aḥwāl*) and access to spiritual realities (*kashf*; “unveiling”).²²

In another account, the author of the vita quotes the above-mentioned grand Sufi shaykh and legal scholar of Baalbek, Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī as saying, “I would give up all my knowledge and all my possessions such as money and children for the opportunity to sit and worship God the way the shaykh would sit from the dawn prayer until sunrise.”²³ ‘Isā al-Yūnīnī, another member of the distinguished family of Baalbek, followed suit, saying, “a visit to the Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, may God be pleased with him, is better than a visit to Jerusalem (Bayt al-Muqaddas al-Sharīf).”²⁴

In what follows, reporters expand on the virtues of the revered shaykh. Time and again one reads of his self-deprivation and mortification: having no possessions, suffering from the bitter cold during winter, and eating nothing except for pure and lawfully acquired food and drink (*ḥalāl*). While being committed to hardships, dispensing with the bare necessities of life and neglecting his body, the shaykh would cater to the needy and focus on others.

21 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 6a–b.

22 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 40a–b.

23 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 40b.

24 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 40a.

Stories that circulated after Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī’s death and commemorated his figure portray how he melded the ideals of austerity and generosity:

He did not save money, nor would he touch gold or a silver coin (a *dinār* or *dirham*). He was ascetic, humble, and reverent toward God. He never kept anything for himself, and did not possess wealth or clothes, but would borrow what he wore. He would not wear more than a single tunic made of rough material, a woollen cloak, and a skullcap (*thawb min al-khām waabā’a waqalansuwa*) made of goatskin, the hair of which was on the outside.

Sometimes in winter, one of his companions would send him a fur overcoat, which he would wear for a few days, and later give it away as charity to someone at times of severe cold weather. And if he donned a new garment, he would say, “This will pass on to this person and this to another.” When his hunger became severe, he would take the leaves of the almond tree. He would rub them lightly and then eat them. He would then drink cold water on top of this.²⁵

Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī’s lofty status seems to be closely related to his extraordinary ascetic piety and awe-inspiring appearance. His disciples and companions depict him as a venerated individual who motivated might in shaykhs, ascetics, and kings. It is said that no one was able to behold him for an extended time, and his appearance, we are told, was as though a lion were standing before you.²⁶ Kings would sit humbly before him; they would offer him gold and silver coins, which he refused to accept. Refraining from rising for them, he explained that people should stand up for God alone.²⁷ The charismatic shaykh’s son, Muḥammad, is similarly presented in the tales. His disciples related that their master and leader after his father, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, was a man of tall stature and piercing gaze, a God-fearing ascetic, constantly engaged in spiritual exercises (*riyāḍāt*) and inner struggle against the passions and drives of the lower soul (*mujahādāt al-nafs*). He possessed great influence, was strong, brave, and immersed in worship.²⁸

Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām, from the town of Bālis on the upper bank of the Euphrates, gained no less prominence than did the grand shaykhs of Yūnīn and the Baalbek area. The association of prestige and influence with ascetic piety and moral uprightness is apparent in his saintly vita as well. More than for his erudition in legal scholarship of the Shafī’ī rite to which he adhered, Ibn Qawām is praised for his mode of life and ethical posture. A collection of anecdotes contained in his saintly vita by his grandson Muḥammad portray him as a mild ascetic who embodied exemplary authority after the model of the Prophet. Above all, he is presented as a figure of austerity and humbleness, attributes that were obvious both in the quality and quantity of his food and dress. He led an ascetic life, exploiting but little of what life had to offer. He wore clothes made of coarse material

²⁵ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 3a–b. The story appears also in Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:85–86.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 6b.

²⁷ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 2a–3b.

²⁸ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 42a–b.

(*khashn*), and his diet consisted mainly of barley bread (*khubz sha'ir*), which was usually coarse and dark and therefore not very appreciated and more affordable than bread made of wheat. And he used to say, "It is inappropriate for the ascetic to wear some dress and eat some food of a refined quality designed for the rich living in ease and luxury."²⁹ One of his close disciples, Abū l-Majd ibn al-Shaykh Abū l-Thana', described his last encounter with Ibn Qawām at the latter's deathbed (in 658/1268):

I was with the shaykh during the period of illness from which he died. The shaykh said to me: Oh, my son. I shall die from this illness, and at the sound of these words, I broke out weeping. He asked, "Why do you weep? You think that I am fearful of death; I swear to you by God that I have no fear. I promised God to keep my promise." I asked, "Oh master, what did you promise God?" He answered, "I promised that when I died, I would have no property or money in my possession." And that is indeed what happened. When he died, he had neither clothes nor a turban but would cover himself with a woollen cloak of which a part had remained as a blessing.³⁰

Ibn Qawām's habit of eating poor man's bread and rejecting the large turbans worn by the learned elites, or buttoned upper-coats that rulers offered as gifts, was shown as tied to a more general modesty and humbleness.³¹ It was said that "He was very modest, and rode neither a horse nor a mule. When he grew old, he began to ride a donkey, but was so humble that he did not allow people to escort him."³² Other narratives have a similar tone:

He never allowed anyone to kiss his hand, and would not interrupt while another was speaking, or embarrass anybody on account of their speech. And when he sat down to eat, he lowered his head so that no one might see he was eating and so that no one would gaze at him. [. . .] He would hurry to respond to the invitations of the poor and weak more than he would to the invitations from the rich and mighty.³³

One testimony, in particular, shows the shaykh declining the generosity of the elites and thereby avoiding accruing a spiritual debt to them. It is related that when a certain Ayyubid princess resident in the Aleppo's citadel invited Ibn Qawām to visit the court, the shaykh said to her messenger:

Tell the mistress of the citadel that she is inviting me because of the mystery (*sirr*; the inner most secret at the centre of the heart and of all spiritual experience)

²⁹ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 24b.

³⁰ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 24a.

³¹ On the typical dress of the learned classes or the so-called "men of the turbans" in the Mamluk period, see Edward W. Lane, *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, 3rd ed. (London: Dent, 1954), 19; L. A. Mayer, *Mamluk Costume: A Survey* (Geneva: A. Kunding, 1952), 49, 53.

³² Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 21a.

³³ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 21a–b.

that God has entrusted to me, and I will not budge from my place until God gives me his permission. And indeed, I asked permission from God and he commanded me, "Do not!"³⁴

Having heard about this, the Ayyubid princess sent the shaykh food, 4,000 *dirhams*, and forty gowns of raw materials (*ʿabāya khām*) which he refused to accept. When his companion Shaykh Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Katānī told him that he owed the same sum of money that the mistress of the citadel had sent, Ibn Qawām said, "Take all of this and pay your debt."³⁵

With elites of military lords deriving their wealth from the exploitation of agricultural lands, then offering Sufi shaykhs gifts of food and money and seeking in return their prayers and blessings and the right to table fellowship with them, rejection of the support of the rich and powerful gained new meanings as tropes of pious behavior. Refusal to accept any gift suspected of coming from confiscated lands or being deprived of the poor, as well as a decline of invitations to meals urged by the rulers, became essential means of protesting against acts of injustice and transgressive conduct at royal feasts such as wearing silk and drinking.

Closely associated with the highly esteemed pursuit of purity in dietary matters (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-mahad*), the refusal of food deemed ridden with misdeeds and hence prohibited (*ḥarām*) is a recurrent theme in the saintly *vitas*. As persuasively argued by Megan Reid, what mattered was the conduct of the ruler and the source of the food offered to the ascetic, not the victual itself.³⁶ Thus, for example, when Kashtafadī, the military slave (*mamlūk*) of the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Muʿazzam ʿIsā, urged ʿAbdallāh al-Yūnīnī and his group of disciples to partake of a meal in his house, the shaykh refused to eat from the dishes laid on the table, not even a dough made of bulgur and sour milk (*kishk*) cooked by a righteous woman. When she came with a pot full of *kishk* and placed it before the shaykh, he ordered his disciples to rise and leave the house. When they asked their shaykh why he had not permitted them to eat, he replied, "Woe is to the pious *faqīr* (literally, a poor person; the common term to denote a Sufi), should he eat the food of a wrongdoer." Then one of the shaykh's companions brought him potherbs and butter, and he and his disciples ate.³⁷

We might also consider the accounts that bolster the image of Shaykh Ibn Qawām as a model of ethical purity. It is related that he would never accept a gift of money or food from anyone unless he could be certain that it was legally acquired (*kash ṭayyib*).³⁸ And he used to say, "Whenever a dish is served to me, God grants me the power to discover whether the food is licit or prohibited (*ḥalāl* or *ḥarām*)."³⁹ On one occasion, he proved

34 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 23a.

35 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 23a.

36 Reid, *Law and Piety*, 14.

37 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 13a–14a.

38 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 22b.

39 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 23b.

his miraculous powers of inward vision (*basīra*) by refusing a dish containing carrots that turned out to have been earmarked for the poor. In another incident, Ibn Qawām displayed his arcane knowledge when he was invited by a companion to a feast, and among the dishes served was lamb meat. When food was served, he asked the host where he had purchased the lamb. The man went to inquire about the matter and discovered that the lamb had been stolen from the poor.⁴⁰ Likewise, Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī would examine every detail of his clothing and nutrition. His companions praised the shaykh, saying that he was extremely wary of anything offered by men of the regime; he would not eat from the food of the rulers and soldiers nor accept their gifts. Once a man came with a dish of carrots, and when he placed it before the shaykh, ‘Aqīl asked him where he had purchased them. He replied, “In the market.” Shaykh Aqīl said, “This food is *ḥarām!*” and he sent the man off to inquire how it had arrived at the market. The man went to the market and when he returned, he said, “Oh shaykh, indeed you are right.” The shaykh asked, “How so?” He said, “I saw the seller buying the cut from the tax collectors, and I bought it from him without knowing the essence of the matter.”⁴¹

Thus, through exemplary behavior and the performances of their extraordinary virtues, the Sufi masters and Friends of God implemented the ideal norms rooted in the prophetic *sunna*. As they were exhibited in practice and employed in a particular historical setting, austerity, ethical purity, and moral conduct served as central components in the construction of their spiritual and charismatic authority. It is to the chains and mediums of connection to the Prophet and the world of the unseen, from which the revered shaykhs derived their authority and legitimized their claims to be the truthful followers of God’s Messenger, that we now turn.

Connection to the Prophet: Spiritual Chains, Dreams, and Visions

From its early coalescence in the ninth century, the Sufi tradition employed the prophetic traditions, *ḥadīth*, from the Prophet to instruct those seeking the Sufi Path and to justify its teachings. As in the traditional and legal sciences, the prime anchor of the authenticity of *ḥadīth* was the unbroken chain of reliable teachers and transmitters, the *isnād*, which extends back to the Prophet. At the same time, the Sufi tradition constructed its own chains of succession and ways of connecting with the ultimate human source of authority and fountainhead of Islamic spirituality. Two principal forms were formulated. The first was known as the “chain of companionship” (*isnād al-ṣuḥba*) or “the chain of purification” (*isnād al-tazkiya*). Having its origins in earliest times, this type was based on a simple premise: just as the Prophet’s committed companions learned from him his pious and God-fearing ways, so would any committed students of the Sufi shaykhs in the subsequent generations. The second type, known as *silsila*, represented a chain for the transmission of mystical knowledge or blessings from master to master all the way back to the Prophet. The early phase in the elaboration of this formal or

40 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 23b–24a.

41 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 59–61.

mystical chain of authority can be traced back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁴² Sufi masters acknowledged as part of the *silsila*, acquired the authority necessary to transmit esoteric knowledge and guidance along a particular spiritual path. Consequently, the traditional concept of the *isnād* was extended to include the chain for the transmission of the internal (*bāṭin*) aspect of the revelation parallel and complementary to the external (*ẓāhir*) one. This could be either a chain of physical persons or spiritual entities.⁴³ The third type was a direct connection to the Prophet that occurs through dreams or visions. In such instances, the mysterious immortal saint and mystical guide al-Khiḍr (the “Green One”), believed to have received illumination directly from God, arrives from the world of the unseen to initiate the seeker of the Path and bring him closer to God and his Messenger.⁴⁴

From around the eleventh century, in parallel with the elaboration of the distinctive Sufi chains and mediums of connection to the Prophet, the patched cloak, the *khirqā*, was employed as a significant means in the establishment of spiritual and charismatic authority. Wearing a cloak worn by one’s spiritual master came to be a primary visible marker of authorization and could help the disciple advance to a high mystical level. Thus, the chain of transmission for the *khirqā* of initiation developed, based on the claim of Sufi shaykhs that it had come from the Prophet’s practice as reflected in the following *ḥadīth*: The Prophet donated his *khirqā* to his foremost companion, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who passed it on to later spiritual authorities.⁴⁵ At the same time, as insightfully observed by Jamal Elias, the *khirqā*, as portrayed in the writings of prominent medieval Sufi masters in the Muslim East, did not necessarily have to be a physical object since the term is frequently used metaphorically to connote a chain of mystical affiliation connecting the individual with the Prophet, and because investiture in the spiritual realm was widely regarded as authentic and a mark of unusual spiritual distinction.⁴⁶

⁴² For the elaboration of the various Sufi types of *isnād* to the Prophet, see Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: One World, 2009), 187–90. See also Malamud’s comments on the increasing emphasis on the *silsila* in Sufi circles in Khurasan in the beginning in the eleventh century in Malamud, “Sufi Organizations,” 433.

⁴³ For the inclusion of mysticism into the “*isnād* paradigm,” typical of traditionalism, and an extended definition of this concept, see William Graham, “Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993): 495–522; and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Introduction: Conflicting Synergy of Patterns of Religious Authority in Islam,” in *Unity and Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2–6.

⁴⁴ For visionary encounters with al-Khiḍr and his prominence in Sufi lore as a *walī Allāh* and as “spirit initiator,” see Renard, *Friends of God*, 48–49, 84–86; John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 137–38.

⁴⁵ See Brown, *Hadith*, 190–92, for the *ḥadīth* tradition of the *isnād* for the *khirqā* and the debates over its strength.

⁴⁶ Jamal J. Elias, “The Sufi Robe (Khirqah) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority,” in *Robes of Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 275–89.

These complementary designations and effects of the *khirqa* are exemplified in the hagiographical narratives found in the saintly *vitas* studied for this book, particularly in self testimonies of “spirit initiation” or spiritual ascent through dreams and visions.⁴⁷ A most telling self-testimony appears in the *vita* of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī, who traced his biological and spiritual pedigree as far back as ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph and one of Islam’s “founding fathers.” Here, the term *khirqa* is used metaphorically to connote his initiation into the *silsila* al-‘Umariyya and the authority and legitimacy acquired through this honourable lineage. Through the *khirqa*, the shaykh is linked to such a glorious figure as a righteous caliph both as his biological descendant and as inheritor of his virtues. This is how Shaykh ‘Aqīl described his visionary experience:

A wondrous event took place when I was in the presence of the Prophet Muḥammad, may God’s prayer be upon him, after al-Khiḍr appeared before me one day and asked me to accompany him to a certain place. Suddenly I found myself in the presence of the Prophet Muḥammad, may God’s prayer and pleasure be upon him, and at his side, [the righteous caliphs] Abū Bakr al-Ṣadiq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. When I greeted them, “peace be upon you,” they all responded. Then al-Khiḍr offered to shake hands with the Prophet and the rest of the company. I turned toward the Prophet, who embraced me and kissed me between the eyes. I said, “I am at your service, Oh Prophet.” The Prophet said, “God has chosen you as his friend (*walī*); therefore, choose for yourself [. . .] I said, “I choose for myself what you have chosen for yourself, Oh Prophet.” [. . .]

I thanked God for the grace he had bestowed on me and stepped forward according to the Prophet’s instruction in order to lead the prayers. [. . .] After the prayer, I began a prayer of supplication (*du‘ā*) and heard the Friends of God (*awliyā*) invoking God for my sake, thus declaring my elevated rank.⁴⁸ [. . .]

Then the Prophet Muḥammad called me, and I immediately obeyed him. He said to me, “Oh ‘Aqīl, this is your grandfather the Imam ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, step forward and accept from him the oath of loyalty.” Then al-Khiḍr, peace be on him, rose and drew my hand to him and tied it to the hand of the Imām ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him. [. . .] The Imam rose and

47 For detailed studies of the function of the “autobiographical” narrative of visionary experience, see Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muḥammad al-Zawāwī* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Jonathan G. Katz, “Visionary Experience, Sainthood and Autobiography in North African Islam,” in *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies*, ed. Charles Issawi and Bernard Lewis (Princeton: Darwin, 1992), 85–118; Jonathan G. Katz, “Shaykh Aḥmad’s Dream: A 19th-Century Eschatological Vision,” *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 158–80. Analyzing a handful of accounts written by North African saints from the fifteenth century onwards, Katz offers interesting insights on the link between prophetic visions and the *walī* soteriological abilities on the one hand, and on the self-promoting function of accounts by the dreamers themselves on the other.

48 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 11–13.

drew me to him in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad and prayed for me, and said, "You are part of my family tree (*shajara*), your lineage (*nasab*) is mine, and you are the inheritor of the honor acquired through my excellent deeds (*ḥasab*). Whosoever loves you also loves me, and whosoever hates you hates me." Thereupon, 'Umar granted to me the honorable and blessed *khirqā al-'Umariyya*.⁴⁹

Hagiographical narratives, which served to affirm the spiritual chain of authority of Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, shed further light on the transformative function of the *khirqā*. By wearing the patched cloak transmitted by the disciple of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and the cotton skullcap given to him after his death, Shaykh 'Abdallāh was able to advance to a higher mystical level, reaching an encounter with al-Khalīl (the biblical patriarch Abraham) and connection to the realm of the unseen.

As we have seen above, disciples and companions of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī related that while their venerated shaykh was still young, he put on the cloak conferred on him by Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Baṭā'ihī, setting out to Baghdad to visit Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and renew the cloak at his honourable hands. It was also recounted that on the last night of the journey when he had already arrived at the city gates, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn passed away. The shaykh, renowned for his ability to know hidden things, knew that 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī was on his way to him. He told his son 'Abd al-Razzāq to behold his corpse, prepare for his arrival the following day, and confer his skullcap and garment upon him. 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī entered the place where the body had been laid, prayed there the final prayer before burial, and then secluded himself in a cell. After forty days of intensive prayer and fasting, he emerged and asked 'Abd al-Razzāq to return his deposit. Al-Razzāq did so, and he donned his skullcap and garment and returned to Damascus. There, he visited Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Baṭā'ihī, who inquired, "Did Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, God sanctify his soul, give you this skullcap of cotton?" He replied, "Yes, my master, the shaykh appeared before me in my dream and gave it to me." He said, "If so, you are standing to the right of al-Khalīl, may God's prayer and peace be upon him." In what follows, al-Khiḍr mysteriously appeared and joined a group gathering held at Mt. Qāsyūn. They began to recall the names of renowned righteous men. And when they asked al-Khiḍr to tell them about Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, he said, "He ['Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī] is the highest ranking in mystical knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the ultimate reality (*ḥaqīqa*) in his generation."⁵⁰

An account about Muḥammad, 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī's son and successor as head of the lodge in Yunīn, shows that in the minds of Shaykh 'Abdallāh's companions, spiritual credibility and charismatic authority could not be established through hereditary forms of succession alone. According to Muḥammad's testimony, a mysterious event occurred on the night of his father's death; the Prophet appeared in his dream and comforted him.

⁴⁹ al-Halabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 16. On the use of the term *ḥasab* to denote both acquired and inherited attributes, see Mottahedh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 319.

⁵⁰ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 26a–27b.

Initially, Shaykh ‘Abdallāh’s companions contested his succession. When they learned of the dream, however, they understood that this was their master’s command. They then spread out their master’s prayer carpet, seated Muḥammad on it, and began to serve him.⁵¹ This last tale also provides an early testimony of the function of the prayer carpet (the *sajjāda*), principally a ritual object used in the daily liturgical prayer, as one of the more important symbols of authority and leadership in Sufi circles.

The revered Ibn l-Qawām al-Bālisī is a noteworthy example of a Sufi *walī Allāh* who brought together the mystical and legalist paths to religious knowledge. But while he was highly regarded in the circles of the legal scholars of the Shāfi‘ī school with which he was affiliated, he overtly ranked himself above his jurist peers. The chain of mystical knowledge and blessing that connected him to the Prophet and the mysterious feat of reading the minds of the jurists enabled him to understand esoteric knowledge and proved his privileged access to arcane wisdom. His companion and former close disciple Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khābūrī relayed the following story:

I mentioned the shaykh more than anyone among the jurists (*fuqahā’*) at the Nizāmiyya Madrasa in Aleppo, so they said, “We must visit him with you and ask him about matters of jurisprudence, exegesis, and more.” So we resolved to visit the shaykh in Bālis. As we were preparing ourselves a Sufi (*faqīr*) came and said, “The shaykh calls you.” I asked, “Where is he?” He said, “At the residence of his companion Shaykh Abī l-Faṭḥ al-Kinānī, may God be pleased with him.” So, a group of jurists and I went out to visit him there. [. . .]

A strange thing had happened when we entered into his presence. The shaykh silenced every one of the jurists with a gag. His heart was like a beast of prey as he gazed into the face of each one of them. As we sat there for a long time without any of us daring to speak, the shaykh said, “Why do you not speak? Why do you not ask?” But not one of them dared to speak. The shaykh again said, “Why do you not speak? Why do you not ask?” and still no one dared speak. Then the shaykh said to the man on his right, “Your question is so-and-so and the answer to it is so-and-so.” Then he continued so until he came to the last one. They then arose as one man, asked God for forgiveness [for doubting the shaykh’s extraordinary knowledge and wisdom], and repented.⁵²

Elsewhere in his vita, one finds Ibn Qawām’s testimony of the mystical experience that bound him to the Prophet and brought him close to God. Noteworthy is the use of the word *silsila* to signify direct contact with the Prophet and the light of God’s Messenger rather than a chain linking the mystic to the ultimate source of authority via authoritative transmitters and mediators of texts of knowledge. The *silsila* is thus perceived in this narrative as analogous to God’s rope or cord that extended directly to the believers to be held fast (Qur’an 3:102). Ibn Qawām related:

51 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 42b.

52 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 8b–9a; and Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:407–8.

I have suffered many hardships while traversing the initial mystical stations (*maqāmāt*) of the Path and shared my experience with the shaykh. The shaykh said, "If you dare tell anyone else, I shall whip you." He ordered me to absorb myself in the worship of God and pay no attention to my mystical experience.

I clung to the shaykh's company and obeyed his orders, until that night when I asked his permission to visit my blind mother. [. . .] The shaykh allowed me to go and said, "A wondrous event will occur to you tonight. Endure it, do not shy away." While on my way, I heard a voice from heaven. I raised my head, and there was light in the shape of a chain (*silsila*), blended one into the other. The chain wound itself around my back until I could feel its chilliness.

I returned to the shaykh and told him about the extraordinary experience. The shaykh extolled God and kissed me between the eyes. He said, "Oh my son, from now on, the grace of God will wind around you. Do you know what this chain is?" I said, "I do not." He said, "This is the *sunna* of the messenger of God." Thereupon, he allowed me to relate about my mystical experience.

One night al-Khiḍr appeared before me. I obeyed his order, stood up, and set out in a hurry with him until I was present before God's Messenger, the companions, and the *awliyā'*. The Prophet said, "Proceed since the secret of sanctity (*walāya*) is embedded in your advancement. It is also through your advancement that you will become a religious leader (*imām*), guardian of the believers."⁵³

This last story as well offers clear, first-hand testimony of the total dependence of the disciple on his shaykh for his mystical experience and ascent. Only through his shaykh could Ibn Qawām attain proximity to God and his messenger. The shaykh lent meaning to the vision of his disciple, who could not advance his own claim to attain direct connection with the Prophet. The interpretation of dreams and visions by the shaykh, which would become a common practice in Sufi orders,⁵⁴ was not only intended to relieve the disciple of preoccupation with his awesome experience: it also provided the shaykh with a means of access to his inner life and, as such, of supervising his spiritual experience. The practices employed by the Sufi masters to sustain their spiritual and charismatic authority and to constitute a committed local group of disciples is the subject of the discussion that follows.

⁵³ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 3a–4a; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:401–2.

⁵⁴ For examples, see Albrecht Hofheinz's discussion of what he calls "visions in practice" in "Internalizing Islam: Shaykh Muḥammad Majdhūb, Scriptural Islam and Local Context in the Early Nineteenth-Century Sudan" (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 1996), 471–77.

Chapter 3

SUSTAINMENT OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND LOYALTY: THE SHAYKH IN THE COMPANY OF HIS DISCIPLES

BY THE ELEVENTH century, individuals were no longer welcome to pursue the Sufi Path on their own. An aspirant (*murīd*) was to seek the guidance of someone, called variously elder, master, or guide (Arab. *shaykh*, *murshid*; Per. *pīr*), a wise individual who had attained the goal of mystical striving and who would instill in the seeker the concepts and practices of the Path. Sufi authors living in the late tenth and eleventh centuries insisted on the need for a guide to tread the Path. Al-Sulamī, followed by others, urged the aspirant to direct his steps to a shaykh possessing wide knowledge and experience to lead him on the right course, warn him of pitfalls along the spiritual journey, help him to distinguish sinful from virtuous deeds, and impart to him ethics and manners (*ādāb*) based on the model of the Prophet.¹ This perception was elaborated upon by later authors of Sufi manuals such as Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). For al-Qushayrī, the success of the Sufi seeker hinged on total subordination to an authoritative master.² Al-Ghazālī presented this master as a healer of souls who would mould his disciple's behavior to the point of total transformation, even of the very self. He informed the postulant, "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."³ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, following this line, stated, "The shaykh's purpose is to cleanse the heart of his disciple from the rust and lust of nature. In it, by attraction and inclination, the rays of beauty and the glory of eternity may be reflected."⁴ The disciple, then, must enter a life dominated by his shaykh's guidance or a life of service (*khidma*), owing to his shaykh the very obedience a believer owes to God. Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī put it this way: "The *murīd* should not

1 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, *Jawāmi' ādāb al-ṣūfiyya*, edited with an introduction by E. Kohlberg (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, The Hebrew University, 1976), 66–68. See also Catherine Mayeur and Luca Patrizi, "An Introduction," in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi Adab*, ed. Francesco Chiabotti, Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, and Luca Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 14–15, on the importance of *Jawāmi' ādāb al-ṣūfiyya* as one of the first treatises written by a Sufi that centered on the *adab* of the shaykh, who, amidst his disciples had taken the place of the Prophet among his companions, that of master of *adab*.

2 Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*, ed. M. Zuriq and 'A. al-Balṭajī (Damascus and Beirut: n.p.: 1988), 734.

3 Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī, *Ayyuhā al-walad*, ed. Tawfiq al-Ṣabbāgh, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Lajna al-Duwaliyya li-Tarjamat al-Rawā'i, 1959), 37.

4 al-Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-ma'ārif*, 187.

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'an and the Sunna.'"⁵

By embracing the prophetic model both in his own conduct and in his teaching and guidance of others, the shaykh is linked to the chain for the transmission of the Prophet's mystical knowledge or blessing. As the living heir of the Prophet, the shaykh had relationships with his disciples that were analogous to the all-encompassing, albeit no less hierarchical, relationships between the Prophet and his companions.⁶ In an analogy that became increasingly popular in Sufi circles, it was said, "The shaykh in his congregation is like the Prophet amid his companions (*ṣaḥāba*)."⁷ Originally associated with the companions of the Prophet, who internalized his message and disseminated his teaching, and as such, carrying a strong symbolic message, the word *ṣuḥba*—companionship or discipleship—was applied from early times in the fields of *ḥadīth* and the law, and, above all, Sufism. Sufi writings depict the ties between a Sufi master and individuals who submit themselves to intense training under his tutelage as paramount in terms of attachment and reciprocal obligations.⁸

The call to acquire a spiritual and moral guide for traversing the Path, which runs like a thread through the writings of the great Sufi thinkers and masters, was closely related to the consolidation of the moderate, ethical Sufi tradition, which found ways to control spiritual ascent and situated Sufism in a normative framework of Islam. Early formulators and prominent representatives of the tradition, such as Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988) and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), set forth to define the fundamental beliefs and practices of "genuine" Sufis and to draw a clear distinction between mainstream Sufism and its margins. They were followed by a generation of Sufi masters, most prominently Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī and his famous nephew 'Umar, who, while opening the door to lay affiliates, set the boundaries of association with their communities and delineated the contours of their solid core.⁹ Their literary efforts

5 al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn*, 31.

6 This presentation is lucidly expressed in the writings of al-Sulamī. On which, see the comments by Kohlberg in his introduction to al-Sulamī, *Jawāmī*, 11 and 11n28.

7 Quoted from 'Alī al-Hujwīrī, *Qashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. V. Zhukovsky (Teheran: n.p., 1957; St Petersburg: n.p., 1899), 62; cf. *The Revelation of the Veiled (Kashf al-Mahjub)*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1976), 55.

8 On the meaning and significance of *ṣuḥba* in the world of the religiously learned, see especially George Makdisi, "Ṣuḥba et riyasa dans l'enseignement médiéval," in *Recherches d'islamologie: Recueil d'articles offerts à Georges Answati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et amis* (Louvain: Peeters, 1978), 207–21. For the all-embracing meaning of the term *ṣuḥba* in the early Sufi parlance, see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "Ṣuḥba," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, new edition, 15 vols. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005), 13:123–24.

9 For extensive discussions of the attitude towards lay affiliates and the distinction between frivolous and truthful imitators in the writings of Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, see Ian R. Netton, "The Breath of Felicity, *adab*, *aḥwāl*, *maqāmāt* and Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī," in *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Kaniqahi Nimatullahi, 1993), 464–67;

paralleled with practical means employed by Sufi masters to keep their disciples within legally and socially accepted bounds and establish the Sufi shaykh's role as "master of training" (*shaykh al-tarbiya*)—as distinct from his role as "master of instruction" (*shaykh al-ta'lim*).¹⁰ Surely, training in Sufism was never sharply distinguished from teaching.¹¹ However, from the late tenth century onwards, Sufi masters took on a new and far more encompassing role in the education of their disciples. In his guise as a training master, the guide would monitor his disciple's progress and supervise his conduct to the point of being involved in his private inner life.

The Sufi discourse that gave the mainstream Sufi tradition its final shape and normative tone echoed and reaffirmed a change from the fluidity of the spiritual wayfarer's environment of the earlier generations of mystics and ascetics to a much more structured, authoritarian, master-disciple relationship. The Sufi shaykh's unquestionable authority as a spiritual and moral guide, along with the new and deeper bonds binding guides and disciples, laid the ground for lasting loyalties. Previously, members of Sufi circles had sought instruction and guidance from multiple shaykhs. Increasingly, however, they began to attach themselves to a single mentor. The shaykh, for his part, was fully committed to the service of his disciples. Inducting them into the chain of companionship that extended back to the Prophet and the companions while monitoring their conduct and safeguarding their steps, he combined the roles of an authority figure, counsellor, and spiritual father. This is what Jürgen Paul sees as a shift to a model in which the authoritative master becomes a patron saint rather than a simple teacher, and Thierry Zarcone identifies as a move to a more typically Islamic model of saintly practice.¹² It was thus that even without formal patterns of initiation and advancement along the Path or an institutional hierarchy of mentors and disciples such as those that developed in medieval Western monasticism, the stage was set for the transition from loose and mobile circles to coherent local congregations. Indeed, as argued persuasively by Denis Gril and others, the emergence of a circle of devotees around a shaykh of recognized charismatic authority came to be the main

and Arin Salamah-Qudsi, "The Idea of *Tashabbuh* in Sufi Communities and Literature of the Late 6th/12th and Early 7th/13th Century Baghdad," *al-Qanṭara* 32 (2011): 179–97. For a detailed exposition of the Sufi hierarchy as formulated by 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, see Ohlander, *Sufism*, 226ff.

10 The designations of *shaykh al-tarbiya* and *shaykh al-ta'lim* were coined by the fourteenth-century Moroccan Sufi Ibn 'Abbād al-Rundī. They were first borrowed by Fritz Meier in "Hurasan und das Ende der klassischen Sufik," *Atti del Convengo internazionale sul Tema: La Persia nel Medioevo* (Rome: n.p., 1971); "Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism," in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane with editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 190–92.

11 Laury Silvers-Alario was the first to draw attention to the overlap between guidance and teaching in early Sufism in her richly documented article: "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the *shaykh al-tarbiya* and *shaykh al-ta'lim*," *The Muslim World* 93 (January 2003): 88–90.

12 Jürgen Paul, "Au début du genre hagiographique dans le Khorasan," in *Saints orientaux*, ed. Denise Aigle (Paris: De Boccard, 1995), 27–34; Zarcone, "L'Hagiographie dans le monde turc," in the same volume, 66–67.

manifestation of the social consolidation of Sufism.¹³ This evolution was part of the broader transformation of Muslim societies in the central Islamic lands following the dissolution of the Abbasid caliphate and the rise to power of military regimes beginning in the eleventh century. Networks of personal ties defined by family, ethnic origins, or sectarian or professional homogeneity evolved, laying the ground for the creation of cohesive local associations of people with a common identification and shared patterns of loyalty and leadership.¹⁴

The more established the authority of the Sufi shaykh became and the more his dual role as master of training and patron saint—a channel to God—was displayed, the more the master-disciple bonds tightened, leading to a palpable change in the character of Sufi associations and communality. Beginning around the twelfth century, it became common for a master to preside over a group of committed disciples who constructed their identity and fidelity around him.¹⁵ This trend was apparent in the Syrian milieu of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods. Locally embedded groups of disciples and companions clustered around particular shaykhs, who put down roots in both urban and rural environments, transmitted moral and ritual guidance, knowledge, and blessing, and were venerated as saints in Sufi congregations and beyond.

What were the measures applied by these shaykhs to solidify their leadership over those who sought their guidance and blessing? How did they sustain their spiritual and charismatic authority and form a congregation of committed followers? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by probing the embodied manifestations of the shaykhs' charismatic virtues and the enactment of spiritual power and grace within his group of disciples and companions. It shows how, while deriving from the embodied qualities of its holder, the charisma of the revered shaykh was routinized in symbolic practices and embedded in material objects and places. My central proposition is that the subtle dialectic between the Weberian definition of "primary" (pure; resting solely on an idiosyncratic set of qualities) as opposed to "institutional" (secondary) forms of charisma, owed its meaning and force from its elaboration in specific settings

13 See Denis Gril, *La Risāla de Ṣaḥīl-Dīn ibn al-Manṣūr ibn Zāfir: Biographies de maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du VII^e/XIII^e siècle* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1986), 72. See also Ira Lapidus' observation that everywhere, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, individual Sufis, and their followings of disciples and lay believers, were the basic unit of Sufism: Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 171.

14 See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 176–77. The most comprehensive study of the social bonds that created the social structure in the Buyid and Seljuk periods (mid tenth to twelfth centuries) is that by Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*.

15 For studies that point to the linkage between the elevation of the authority of the Sufi master to new heights and the formation of his community of disciples, see Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 116–34; Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 101–5. Looking at this evolution from the perspective of later developments, Alexander Knysh notes that the authoritarian model of a strict master-disciple relationship as a model of social belonging marked the beginning of the Sufi orders. See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 173–74.

and its embodiments in practices and physical effects that highlighted the shaykh's extraordinary traits and virtues and perpetuated his legacy.¹⁶

Venerated Masters of the Path

The best available documentation suggests that by the twelfth century, calling upon an accomplished guide for the Path had become firmly rooted in the culture of Sufism both in theory and in practice. The model of the master of training that was shaped in Sufi discourse and circles in the eastern Islamic lands of Iran and Iraq matured and spread to other Sufi centres. Ideas of total obedience to the Sufi master and truthful heir of God's Messenger, who possesses unquestionable religious authority and spiritual power, were increasingly activated.¹⁷

Hagiographical accounts of the method of teaching and guidance employed by the Sufi shaykhs and God's Friends whose saintly *vitas* are studied for this book afford us illustrative examples of how they perceived and practised their position as masters of the Path. A most telling example is contained in the *vita* of Ibn Qawām. The shaykh employed his mind-reading ability to control the divine disclosure (*kashf*) of his disciple and warned him of crossing the boundaries of mystical knowledge with which the Prophet was blessed. Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khābūrī, Ibn Qawām's companion and beloved former close disciple recalled how his master set limits to his mystical unveiling:

I went out to visit the shaykh, and it entered my mind to ask him about the Spirit (the *rūḥ* that engages in the struggle against the *nafs*, the "lower-self" or "ego-soul," the seat of selfish lusts and passions).¹⁸ But when I came into his presence, my awe of him made me forget the question I had intended to ask. When I bade him farewell and proceeded on my way, he sent one of the Sufis (*fuqarā'*) after me, who said to me, "Speak to the shaykh!" So I returned to the shaykh. When I entered his presence, the shaykh turned to me, saying, "Oh Aḥmad." I said, "At your service, my master." He said, "Do you not read the Qur'an?" I said, "Indeed I do, my master." He said, "Read my son: 'They ask you about the Spirit. Say, the Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only given a little knowledge' (Q 17:85). My son, a matter on which even the messenger of God, may God pray for him and give him peace, does not speak, how can we speak about it?"¹⁹

¹⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:242.

¹⁷ For examples of the ascendancy of the authoritative master in eleventh-century Khurāsān, see Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations," 432–35. For an overview of the origins and spread of the authoritarian model of the master-disciple relationship, see Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykhs* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 29–44.

¹⁸ For more on these terms, see Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, 79–80, 226.

¹⁹ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 4b–5a; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:403.

In another account, Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Baṭā'ihī, known as “the blind man,” related how Ibn Qawām singled him out as a close disciple after recognizing his sincerity and commitment. Here, the seeker of the master’s guidance and blessing relinquished his licence (*ijāza*) to inherit his father’s position as head of a scholarly group in Damascus. Having set out on a long journey from Damascus to the marshlands of southern Iraq and obtained this licence from the legal scholars of his place of origin, Ibrāhīm experienced a great yearning for Ibn Qawām’s guidance. Thereupon, he cast aside his licence and directed his steps to the shaykh of Bālis. When he reached his destination, he found many people in Ibn Qawām’s presence. He sat among them and listened to his words. The shaykh spoke at length and then gazed at him and said, “Oh Ibrāhīm.” Ibrāhīm said, “At your service, my master.” Ibn Qawām then said, “You are mine and my disciple (*murīd*).” Next, Ibn Qawām instructed those in his presence to turn their gaze to Ibrāhīm’s forehead and describe what they saw. They answered, “We see a crescent of light between his eyes.” At this, he responded, “This is the sign of the blessing bestowed on my companions (*aṣḥāb*).”²⁰

Elsewhere in the vita, Ibn Qawām is portrayed as exercising his ability to presage and guard the steps of his disciple and distance him from sinners, as well as perform his self-designated role as arbiter of the duty of commanding right and prohibiting wrong—a topic we shall revisit. His hagiographer recorded an account that passed by his father ‘Umar:

I heard the Shaykh Ibrāhīm son of the Shaykh Abū Ṭālib al-Baṭā'ihī saying, “I was on my way to visit the shaykh, and on the road, I was accompanied by people who spoke about wine and drinking wine in a company. When I came to the shaykh, he said, ‘What is this state of yours?’ I said, ‘What is it, Oh Master?’ He said, ‘You have wine and its utensils before you.’ I said, ‘Oh Master, I travelled in the company of people who spoke about wine, and what you said affected me.’ The shaykh said, ‘You are right my son. Associate with the good and avoid evil as much as you can. For if you associate with evil, it would be a shame in this world and the next.’”²¹

We further read of the shaykh acting as behavioral supervisor of his disciples in an account about Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. He forbade a group of ascetics who attached themselves to him to eat any of the food, not even dough made of bulgur and sour milk (*kishk*), served to them in the house of a member of the military elites, suspecting that it was ill-begotten and thus *ḥarām*. When asked why he ordered them to leave the place, he replied, saying, “Woe is to the ascetic should he eat the food of a wrongdoer.” Then one of his companions brought him potherbs and butter, and he and the ascetics ate.²²

20 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 12a–b; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:410–11.

21 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 15b.

22 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 13a–14b.

By the time of the famous shaykhs of Bālis and Baalbek, new, more institutional forms had emerged that gave concrete and symbolic form to the master's authority vis-à-vis those who orbited him. These included practices of initiation: the investiture with the patched cloak, the *khirqā*, and the taking of the oath of fidelity, the *'ahd* or *mubāya'a*, which was applied in ways that signified the binding relationships with a Sufi master. Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, author of the widely read Sufi manual, tells of a man who refused to wear the *khirqā* after having been informed of the duties imposed on those wearing it: clearly, the practice of conferring the Sufi *khirqā* carried with it enough weight to assure the surrendering of the disciple to his master.²³ 'Umar al-Saharawardī anchored the distinctive Sufi form of initiation in a prophetic precedent: Being dressed with the *khirqā* signals the disciple's willingness to submit to the authority of the shaykh, which is equivalent to the authority of God and the Prophet. This practice re-enacts the rite of swearing allegiance (*mubāya'a*) to the messenger of God.²⁴

The initiatory lineages, the *silsilas*, which supported the consolidation of the *ṭarīqas* as networks of authority, identity, and loyalty, crystallized over time. The sacred biographies and saintly vitas presented here are but a sampling of the shaykhs in the medieval Syrian milieu linked to the alleged founders of the Sufi orders through their masters. The conferral of the cloak and the taking of the oath appear in the initiation narratives preserved in them as symbolic markers either of the aspirant's commitment to training under a particular master or his successful traversing that master's path at the end of his period of training transition.²⁵ In both cases, the Sufi habit of initiation symbolized the aspirant's transformation into a formal disciple of his training master and the personal binding relations between them rather than initiation into an organizational entity. The term "our shaykh" (*shaykhuna*), which peppers the biographical narratives, further attests to the highly individual character of association with the master, both current and former. With masters and former disciples travelling from place to place, visiting and hosting each other, the result was long-lasting relationships. Recall, for example, Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and his companion and former disciple Shaykh Shams al-Dīn ibn al-'Abbāsī. When Shaykh 'Abdallāh came to visit Aleppo, Ibn al-'Abbāsī "wore the cloak of initiation (*khirqā*) given to him by his shaykh, who loved him and favoured him over his other young disciples." Ibn al-'Abbāsī, who by then moved to the city and cultivated his own circle of disciples, prepared an elaborate meal in honour of his master and invited him to spend the night in his lodge.²⁶

23 The story is told by his nephew 'Umar al-Suhrawardī in his famous manual, *'Awarif al-ma'ārif*, 68.

24 On the practice of investiture with the Sufi *khirqā* and its symbolic significations in the writings of 'Umar al-Suhrawardī, see Ohlander, *Sufism*, 209–13. Ohlander notes the distinction the celebrated Sufi theorist and master made between two types of *khirqā*: *khirqat al-irāda* ("the habit of aspiration") and (*khirqat al-tabarruk*) ("the habit of benediction"). The former is intended only for the true aspirant—the one who is sincere in his intentions; the second is available to all those seeking to be associated with the shaykh's group and to acquire blessing from him without being required to adhere to the conditions of discipleship.

25 This confers to the conferral of the *khirqat al-irāda* described by 'Umar Suhrawardī. On which see Ohlander, *Sufism*, 210, 212.

26 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 31b.

Initiation narratives and their symbolic significations must have also served to legitimize the disciple's own claims to authority—Ibn Qawām's testimony about his early days as an aspirant under the strict supervision of his shaykh springs to mind. The testimony of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī has a similar ring to it. In this following account, two types of initiation and ordination are brought together. The first is a "spiritual initiation" that occurs through a vision at the beginning of the traversing of the Path after the aspirant has proven his sincerity and complied with his master's requests. Here again, the aspirant is dependent on his shaykh for his mystical experience and ascent. The second type is an initiation into the path of Sufism by the shaykh who authorizes his disciple to spread his teachings and the tradition of the Prophet (*sunnat al-nabīy*).

Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Swidān, son of the chief judge of the town of Ajloun (on the northeastern bank of the Jordan river), who reportedly gave up his position in a well-known scholarly family, left his homeland, and attached himself to the revered shaykh of Manbij, related:

Once, I asked Shaykh 'Aqīl about traversing the Path with his own master Shaykh Maslama, to which he offered the evocative reply, "In his hands, my condition was like when a man is purifying a corpse, which he can turn to each side at will." In the course of my training, whenever I wished to relate to the shaykh about my mystical states (*aḥwāl*), he would interject, saying, "If you continue, you will receive blows that you will never be able to endure." Yet he commanded me to continue with my worship and prayers, saying, "Oh 'Aqīl, keep the secrets and then the blessings will pour down on you."

At one point, I recounted to the shaykh a mystical vision I had experienced, in which light in the shape of a chain (*silsila*) wound itself around my back. The shaykh said responded, "Thank God, Oh my son!" He then kissed me on the brow and told me, "Now that the act of grace has been completed, do you know what that chain was? [. . .] Oh, my son! That is the chain of the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad, may God's prayer and peace be upon him. And now it obligates you to educate the aspirants (*murīdūn*) to command right and forbid wrong."²⁷

The narrative that follows provides us with an illustrative example of the practices of authorization and their embodiment in the *khirqā* and other physical effects that served to transfer the shaykh's God-given blessing. Noteworthy is the symbolic significations of the material objects that hint at the role of spiritual leader designed for 'Aqīl. Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Swidān related:

Having imparted to 'Aqīl his knowledge about the Path (*ṭarīqa*), Shaykh Maslama handed to him his rosary (*misbaḥa*), crown (*tāf*), sword (*sayf*), staff, and prayer carpet (*sajjāda*), and allowed him to go where he desired, saying: "Oh 'Aqīl, do not forget the testament (*waṣīya*) regarding your path, which is the path of the Prophet and the people of the Sunna and the community (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a*), and

27 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 17.

refrain from mitigation or unwanted innovation on your path." [. . .] He then prayed to God to be with him on his way, and gave him a morsel of bread and hyssop (*za'tar*). 'Aqil took it all and went to the shaykh of Ḥawrān, Hiyā' ibn Qays al-Ḥawrānī, who dressed him in the patched cloak and blessed him with it.²⁸

Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Swidān further relates that the shaykh of Ḥawrān favoured 'Aqil to the point that, during prayer, he would position him in front of the other worshippers. He implored the aspirants to learn the Path from 'Aqil and to give him their oath of fidelity.²⁹ Shaykh 'Aqil taught them how to perform right deeds and observe God's commands, and performed beneficial miracles (*karāmāt*) for them, saying:

I am the shaykh of the spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*). I am the shaykh of the divine realities (*al-haqā'iq*). I am the hope for the disappointed, and the intermediary (*al-wasīla*) for whoever pleads to God in my name, asks for my help, trusts me, and accepts my spiritual path. And I am the goal of the aspirants (*murīdūn*) and the master of whoever has no master.³⁰

Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Swidān then blessed his revered shaykh, saying, "May God be pleased with him and with those who replace him (*khulafā'ihī*), and with the Friends of God who attain the high [spiritual] ranks, and with the leaders of the Sufis who follow his path in this generation and the next."³¹

Through aspirants from various parts of the Muslim world seeking the guidance and blessing of a chosen shaykh, taking the patched cloak from him and swearing commitment to him, the authority of that shaykh was carried far beyond his homeland. Consider, for instance, a narrative about an aspirant who travelled from India and traversed vast distances to visit Ibn Qawām in his lodge in the village of Bālis. Upon reaching his destination, he asked the shaykh to take the oath of fidelity from him so that he might become his disciple. Ibn Qawām, whose spiritual perception allowed him to envision his visitor's qualifications, placed his hands upon the visitor's head and uttered a secret formula of invocation. The following day, the shaykh granted permission to his new companion to return to his homeland and his people. He summoned his disciples to bid him farewell, and, to the astonishment of the spectators, placed his hands on his shoulders and pushed him to the doorstep of his house.³²

Recounted in the form of memoirs of the companions and former disciples who, together, may be considered a "hagiographical community," to borrow Ahmet Karamustafa's apt term, this and other narratives that feature the venerated shaykh's charismatic virtues sustained his charismatic authority and perpetuated his memory.³³

28 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fol. 20.

29 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fols. 19–20.

30 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fol. 19.

31 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fol. 90.

32 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 7a.

33 Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 145.

Saintly Authority Sustained: The Master–Disciple Tie

The ideal of discipleship and companionship, whose origins lay in early Sufi thought and practice, was nourished and disseminated in oral accounts that passed orally by disciples and would be lifelong companions of the revered shaykhs, and eventually put into writing. For all their legendary layer, idealized images, and resonance of hagiographical tropes, the narratives preserved in the saintly *vitas* offer an embarrassment of riches concerning the relationship between masters and their disciples. All of these narratives relate to concrete environments and real situations.

Two narratives, in particular, convey the notion of the master–disciple tie as a seminal metaphor and practice. Both are framed in the context of a journey. In the first, the shaykh's garment serves as a marker of discipleship and companionship, and emphasis is placed on his transregional connections and the spread of his reputation as a prominent master and Friend of God.

Ibn Qawām's former disciple, Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Baṭā'ihī, recalled:

I was staying with the shaykh, may God be pleased with him, when it entered my mind to travel to Iraq. I asked him for permission to do so, and he gave it to me. He said, "Ibrāhīm, I wish to take off my robe and put it on you. If you wear it, all those whom you encounter will be delighted with you and will serve you because of it." And indeed, it was as he said, "all those whom I went to see served and honored me."

When I entered Baghdad, I stayed at several Sufi hostels (*ribāṭs*), where I was served and honored. One night, the people of the *ribāṭ* were invited to a particular place. I accompanied them, and we entered, and sat down. There were many people there, one of whom, a Turk, arose and said, "Oh companions of ours, this Syrian Sufi (*faqīr*) is wearing a robe the likes of which I have never seen." So I said to them, "It was a gift from my shaykh." And all said, "May God return us his blessing and the blessing of those like him."³⁴

In the second story, another beloved disciple of the revered shaykh of Bālis asks his permission to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Ibn Qawām dresses him with his coat that served to transfer his *baraka* and thus to protect him along the way. In the vision of the disciple, his shaykh guards his every step through the physical presence of the garment. The shaykh, on his part, knows every detail of his disciple's journey and is mysteriously aware of his need for assistance, and arrives instantaneously to rescue him. What we see here is an example of the display of the saintly stock marvel of quickly crossing great distances by "rolling up the earth" (*ṭayy al-'ard*).³⁵ The miracle served

³⁴ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 12a–b; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:411.

³⁵ For more on the prominence of the marvel of instantaneous travel in hagiographical literature, see Renard, *Friends of God*, 115–16.

here as a potent affirmation of the shaykh's privileged access to arcane knowledge and supernatural powers, as well as his role as protecting patron.

Shaykh 'Alī ibn Sa'īd, the righteous and pious ascetic, known as the "little starling," relayed:

The shaykh [Ibn Qawām] took the oath of fidelity (*'ahd*) from me when I was a youth. It entered my mind to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and I asked him for permission to do so. He said, "My son, you are young, and I fear for you." But as I insisted, he permitted me, saying: "I shall place my coat over you like an iron cage." [...] He also said, "When you arrive at a village near Damascus, enter it, ask for Shaykh 'Alī ibn al-Jamāl, and visit him, for he is one of God's Friends (*awliyā' Allāh*)."

I stayed with him for some days and then left to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of al-Khalīl (Abraham) [in Hebron], may God pray for him and give him peace. When I approached Hebron, four highway robbers came toward me. When they were near me, they were startled and gazed at something behind me. I looked and saw a masked man wearing white clothes. He said to me: "Proceed on your way." So I continued walking, and he remained with me until I came near Hebron. I saw him standing and prompting. So I entered the town and performed the pilgrimage.

When I returned to Bālis, the first thing I did was to greet the shaykh. After I greeted him, he informed me of everything that had happened to me during my journey and said, "Had it not been for the masked man, the highway robbers would have taken your clothes." So I knew that it had been the shaykh, may God be pleased with him."

I said, "This is indeed how a shaykh behaves toward his disciple, for it is said, *'The shaykh brings you together when you are present, protects you when you are absent, improves you through his character, disciplines you by having you bow your head to him, and lights up your inside through his illumination.'*"³⁶

On other occasions, the saintly marvel of instantaneous travel is associated with protection against assault by the Franks. Such activation of clairvoyance and spiritual power is revealed in a hagiographical tale that features the marvellous act performed by the mighty Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī as a protecting patron, culminating in the surrender of the Frankish assailants and their conversion to Islam. His former disciple and lifelong companion, Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl, related:

Three shaykhs whom I encountered expressed to me their desire to visit Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. My father permitted me to take any amount of money from his shop's safe. I took 500 dinars, bought candles and sweets for provisions, and joined their company. We proceeded on our way until we arrived at the shaykh's

36 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 14b–15a; and Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:414–15.

sojourn place in Mt. Lebanon. But when we wished to ascend the mount, the shaykh forbade us to go lest Frankish thieves assail us, and he pointed out the place where we would stop, under a lemon tree near a pool at the foot of the mountain. But we did not heed him.

On our way, we encountered five men with bows and weapons. One man shot an arrow at me and hit my leg, leaving a mark; another arrow hit another man. I then implored the help of my shaykh, asking him to come to our aid at once. And I swear in the name of God that at that moment, the shaykh appeared. In his hand, he held a bow, and he began to describe before those present the reward that God had prepared for His Friends. Upon seeing the shaykh and hearing his words, the assailants prostrated themselves before him and converted to Islam. We took the assailants and returned home.³⁷

The same notion is expressed in the story of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, who appeared at Mt. Lebanon to rescue a disciple who ascended the mount to worship there and was attacked by Frankish soldiers. His master appeared to him as praying with a sword in hand. He rushed to him, taking refuge under the folds of his cloak. Upon completing his prayers, the master turned to the Crusaders and stated, “You are hereby warned not to draw near or disturb the ascetics.” Immediately, they withdrew.³⁸

At other times, the shaykh’s ability to rescue his disciples is attributed to his control of natural powers, often wind and water that may occur during his lifetime or after his death. Such a mysterious marvel is found in an account of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī, whose spectacular feats gained him fame as a patron saint. His companions narrated that they were at sea when a storm began, and they almost drowned. They asked God to save them with the blessing of Shaykh ‘Aqīl. The image of the shaykh suddenly appeared, circling in the air and commanding the sea to be still. The sea became calm and they were saved.³⁹

Other accounts illustrate the embodiments of *baraka* in the garments and other material objects conferred by the revered shaykh to his close disciples, objects that remained with them after his death and sustained his saintly presence. Their effect surfaces, for instance, in reports relayed by Ibn Qawām’s companions and former disciples.

Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Khābūrī narrated how he continually sought out Ibn Qawām to hear his words and receive his blessings. Once, he discovered that his shaykh was staying in a certain place among his companions. Arriving there with his rosary, he handed it to him. The shaykh cycled through the beads once while repeating the words, “There is no God but God,” and by so doing, transferred his *baraka* to them.⁴⁰ It is further reported that Ibn Qawām and his son ‘Umar were in Aleppo in the year 658 (1260), when the city was captured by the Tatars. Their house there was set on fire by the invaders, but the shaykh’s

37 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 9a–b.

38 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 22a–b.

39 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 70.

40 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 6b.

camel-hair coat, permeated with his blessing, remained intact. As he fled from the flames dressed in the coat, 'Umar granted it to one of his father's companions, who probably sought the shaykh's *baraka* to protect him at times of trouble and danger.⁴¹ The effect of the *baraka* embodied in the part of the coat of the revered shaykh that remained with them, they claimed, could be felt after his death.⁴²

The role played by disciples, and would-be companions in commemorating their shaykh as a paragon of virtue and object of veneration can hardly be overstated. The image of the shaykh, as constructed in such reports, is that of an authoritative master, a mindful patron, miracle-worker, and caring benefactor. Taken together, these reports shed light on the social dynamic of the construction of the shaykh's authority in Sufi circles and the significance of the binding master-disciple relationship for the formation of a committed circle of adherents. Particularly noteworthy is the affinity between the shaykh's virtues and ascetical existence and his generosity toward his disciples and companions. Recall the image of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī receiving an overcoat, only to pass it directly to his companions. Ibn al-Qawām, who gave his disciples that money the Ayyubid princess essentially forced upon him, is another such example.⁴³ The *vitae* of the revered masters are also packed with first-hand testimonies of their teaching and guidance at the physical location of their home *zāwīyas* and the evolution of their lodges as the primary locus in the construction of a locally embedded community of committed disciples—a topic to which we shall return.

From the twelfth century onwards, the elevation in the authority of the Sufi shaykh gained new meaning in the Syrian milieu and other parts of the Muslim world. Alongside the solidification of their leadership over groups of committed disciples and companions, the charismatic Sufi shaykhs in Syrian cities and surrounding towns and villages diffused their authority across the entire canvas of society and expanded the socio-religious and geographical scope of their operation.

41 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 12b–13a.

42 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 24a. On the fear and anxiety caused by the Mongols' invasion of the Syrian region, see Harun Yilmaz, "Dimaşki'in En Zor Yili: Şehrin Moğollar Tarafından İşgali (658/1260)/The Hardest Year of Damascus: The Invasion of the City by the Mongols (658/1260)," *İslām Araştırmaları Degesi* 37 (2017): 75–78.

43 See Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 10b–11a.

Chapter 4

EXPANSION OF OPERATION: THE SHAYKH, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

SPIRITUAL AND CHARISMATIC leadership may be understood to stem from the intersection of three dimensions: a leader's message, his areas of activity, and his modes of operation. In this model, it is only by the leader operating in a given community that his message can take hold and his authority becomes realized. At the same time, his areas of activity and modes of operation must be affected by the specific conditions and religious climate of a concrete historical setting. This model, current in modern research, is my working hypothesis for this chapter that situates the discussion of the expansion of the charismatic Sufi masters' scope of operation within the broader political, religious, and social milieu they inhabited.

The middle of the twelfth century marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Syria. In the Syrian cities of the interior—Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Baalbek and Damascus—that remained under Muslim rule, the Islamic Counter-Crusade movement arose, accompanied by a series of campaigns for the unification of Syria into a single political entity, and energetic efforts to render the Sunna victorious. Nūr al-Dīn, praised by medieval Muslim historians for his devotion to the military mission and struggle against the infidels, personal piety, and support for Sunni Islam within, was the first significant leader of this movement. Saladin, while still serving as a general in the army of Nūr al-Dīn, acquired control over Fatimid Egypt (in 1171) and subsequently consolidated his rule over most of Syria and the Jazira. By the end of the twelfth century, following the conquest of Jerusalem (in 1187), Saladin had regained almost all of the formally Islamic territory. Shortly after his death, however, the Ayyubid domains in Syria and Palestine became fragmented amongst several principalities based at Aleppo, Hama, Damascus, and other centres. These were all held by princes of the Ayyubid family, who usually used the title *malik* and were subject to the loose control of the Ayyubid sultan in Cairo. Frequent internal strife, ongoing confrontation with the Crusades along and beyond the borders of the Latin coastal principalities, and powerful enemies from without, put an end to the confederation. In 1260, the Mongols invaded Syria and sacked Aleppo. They were beaten back by the Mamluks, who effectively incorporated the Ayyubid kingdom into the Mamluk sultanate.¹

¹ The most comprehensive study of the political and military history of the period is that of Stephen R. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany: SUNY, 1977).

Demographically, long after the so-called “Sunni reaction,” which began with the Seljuk conquest of Syria and the subsequent overthrow of the Shiʿi-tinged dynasties in the late eleventh century and was completed by the Zangids around the mid-twelfth century, the Syrian Muslim population—especially that of the northern region—still included sizable Shiʿi groups.² Among them were the Ismāʿīlīs, who left a sombre mark in the southern Damascene quarter of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr for a century and a half after their persecution and massacre (in 1154). The Mamluk Sultan Baybars seized their last fortress outside the city’s gates (in 1273). As the Mamluk period drew to a close, they concentrated in the mountains between Homs and the sea and no longer exercised ideological influence. The Nuṣayrīs, another extreme Shiʿi sect, also established themselves in the mountainous area over Lattaqiya. As for the Imāmī Shiʿis, they were far from being a marginal group. In the cities and towns of northern Syria, the Shiʿi inclination of the residents seems to have retained its strength. In Damascus, some of them inhabited the Bāb Tūmā quarter (in the northwest part of the city) among Christians and Sunnis. These were the so-called *rawāfiḍ*—those who “refused” to recognize the first three caliphs in order to legitimize ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib alone—a term that from the early Mamluk period covered all forms of Shiʿism.³ The Christians, more numerous than the Jews, formed diverse communities in Syria. In Damascus, their presence was visibly marked by churches, notably the Greek Orthodox Church of Maryam (also called the Church of the Christians), located in the traditional Christian quarter of Bāb Tūmā, and the church of the Jacobites south of the Christian quarter.⁴ Other churches, as well as a handful of monasteries, stood in the countryside surrounding the Orontes river, which flows north from Mt. Lebanon and passes through Homs and Hama, and in the villages of the Beqaa Valley (see Figs. 2 and 3). As for Mt. Lebanon, it was the home of the isolated Maronite community, as well as the tightly knit community of the Druze. Encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim urban dwellers and villagers in built and natural environments were a matter of course, a fact reflected in the saintly *vitas*.

The chapter commences with an examination of the role played by Sufi masters as active participants in the Sunnization movement that aspired to recast Islamic religious and social life based on the norms of the Holy Law and the prophetic tradition and to cleanse society of immorality and deviant practices. Specifically, it seeks to demonstrate how their constant concern with self-purity and morality was tightly tied to the concern for the moral conduct of others and how they employed their charismatic virtues to make fellow believers repent, spur their Shiʿi neighbours to turn from their deviant

² On the “Sunni reaction” in Syria, see Jean-Michel Mouton, *Damas et sa principauté sous les Saljoukides et les Bourides* (468–549/1076–1154) (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale), 377.

³ On the various Shiʿi groups that came under Sunni rule, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 250–55; and Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 63.

⁴ On which, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 306–7.



Figure 2. The Valley of the Christians west of Homs.
(Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

practices, and prompt Christian neighbours to forsake their old faith. The narratives depicting the encounters leading to conversion attest to the shaykh's prominent stature, the breadth of his activity, and the fascination with his presence and marvels. Drawing converts to Islam is displayed as yet another manifestation of the virtues and powers of the Sufi shaykh. At the same time, accounts of conversion also echo the motivations and expectations of the converted people.

The discussion that follows centres on the role of the revered shaykhs who served as patron saints and communal leaders. It examines how they understood and practised the activist, community-oriented Sufi tradition they embraced and the modes of their interaction with ruling authorities and ordinary Muslims. These modes are related to the influence the shaykhs exerted on local governors and their ability to take over the role of central political leadership in lobbying for public welfare and mediating disputes in addition to the enactment of their extraordinary virtues to protect their fellow believers from their external enemies and unjust rule. In so situating the accounts of their activities, my further aim is to highlight the correlation between the presentation of the saintly figures and the concerns and expectations of the surrounding society.



Figure 3. Late-twelfth–early-thirteenth-century frescoes in the historic Roman Orthodox Church of St. Elian in Homs. (Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

Arbiters of Normative Praxis and Disseminators of True Religion

Like other representatives of the emerging Sunnization movement that began in the eastern lands of Iran and Iraq and filtered into Syria in the twelfth century, Ibn Qawān al-Bālīsī and ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī joined scholars of the established Sunni legal schools to shape Islamic religious and social life and purify society. The phrases “he was one of the performers of commanding right and forbidding wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*) and a disseminator of the traditional knowledge and the proper Islamic conduct (*al-‘ilm wa-l-‘amal*) reoccur in the biographies of scholars, Sufis, and pious figures of their epoch. The sources sometimes specify the details of the Qur’anic injunction to command right and forbid wrong, and where and how it was performed. In the Syrian milieu, the revered shaykhs inhabited, this injunction most often concerned the private drinking of wine, or selling of wine, wrongs that performers of this duty encountered from earlier times.⁵

⁵ For an extensive discussion on the wrong of wine as a recurring theme from early Islamic history, see the monumental work of Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 67ff.

Sufi masters who performed the duty “to command and forbid” were generally affiliated with legal and theological schools that relied heavily on the prophetic traditions for belief and conduct and as a source of the law. Some figures thus assimilated into the Shafīʿī rite of legal interpretation that gained dominance in Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria and cultivated Ashʿarī theological tendencies,⁶ while others found a home in the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, in which piety and religious activism had been a solid base for the position of leadership from the time of its founder.⁷ However, to judge from hagiographical narratives about their encounter with wrongs that were transmitted by their disciples and companions, what distinguished these Sufi shaykhs from other virtuous figures acting as arbiters and disseminators of true religion and proper conduct was the extent to which they enacted their outstanding virtues. No less significant seems to be the diffusion of their moral authority throughout society and in private and public spaces, beyond the courts and law colleges (*madrasas*) that were controlled by the elites of scholars and office-holders and situated in the great urban centres of Damascus and Aleppo.

Accounts in the vita of Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, probably one of the most celebrated Sufi master and Shāfiʿī legal scholar in Ayyubid Syria, make no mention of the doctrine of commanding right and forbidding wrong that was shaped in the literature of his legal school, starting with al-Ghazālī and petering out over the following centuries.⁸ At the same time, the shaykh appears as an ardent practitioner of the duty. His preoccupation with self-purity—refusing food suspected of or detected as being impure, declining invitations to royal feasts and private homes where wine and illegally acquired food were served—was entwined with interest in the moral behavior of others.

In his celebrated treatise *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (the Revitalization of Religious Disciplines), al-Ghazālī enumerates five levels (*marātib*) of performance of forbidding wrong: informing, polite counselling, harsh language, physical action against objects, and the threat of violence or use of actual violence (*mubāsharat al-ḍarb*) that involves

⁶ See Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 355, for examples of Shafīʿīs known for the performance of the duty in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Cook notes that although the inspection of the tables of contents of the classical handbooks of Sufism shows that forbidding wrong is not a Sufi topic, people referred to in the sources as Sufis freely engaged in forbidding wrong (*Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 460–61).

⁷ For an important work on the significance of religious activism in the building of authority within the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* in tenth-century Baghdad, see Nimrod Hurvitz, “Authority within the Ḥanbalī *Madhhab*: The Case of al-Barbahari,” in *Religious Knowledge, Authority, and Charisma: Islamic and Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Daphna Ephrat and Meir Hatina (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2014), 36–49.

⁸ The most important contribution to the discourse on the duty of forbidding in the milieu studied here is the commentary by the Damascene Shāfiʿī traditional and legalist Imām Nawawī (d. 676/1277) upon which subsequent Shāfiʿī commentators based themselves. On the Shāfiʿī literature on forbidding wrong after al-Ghazālī, see Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 348–52.

the infliction of blows with the hand or foot.⁹ Offences can arise when one has been admitted to another's home and encounters a wrong, or in public places, in the street or in the market.¹⁰

Stories in the saintly vita of Ibn Qawām give us a glimpse of his moral authority at play, the context in which the offence was encountered, and the means to which the omnipotent shaykh resorted to performing the duty. The first tells of a lay believer who once came to visit Ibn Qawām. Upon his entry to the shaykh's lodge, Ibn Qawām inspected the food the visitor had eaten, proclaiming, "This food is *ḥarām*; I can see smoke coming out of your mouth." The man left the place to inquire about the food, and when he discovered that the shaykh was correct, he asked for God's forgiveness.¹¹ In two other stories, Ibn Qawām performs the duty of forbidding by threat and the use of force. The first tells of a young merchant who arrived from Bālis to Aleppo and came upon an unexpected situation of committing wrong. The shaykh, whose arcane knowledge made it possible for him to expose wrongdoing even in his physical absence or lack of informant, arrived on the scene at once. Here, he used just enough force to make the innocent young man leave the place, thereby preventing him from sinning. Ibn Qawām's grandson and hagiographer recorded the following story:

I entered Aleppo with my paternal uncle when I was a youth. A member of my family took me to a certain place, fetched some wine, and said to me, "Drink!" When I took the cup and was about to drink, I suddenly saw the shaykh standing before me. He struck me on my chest with his hand and said, "Arise and leave!" I was in a high place, from which I fell and my face and head bled. I returned to my uncle with blood trickling from me. He asked me, "Who did this to you?" As I told him what had happened, he said, "Praise to God who caused His saints (*awliyā*) to look after you and to protect you."¹²

The offence encountered in the second cited story is what al-Ghazālī defines as a "wrong of hospitality," which is among the "wrongs that are commonly met with." According to him, if one cannot protest when faced with improper conduct such as listening to musical instruments and singing girls, wearing silk, as well as serving forbidden food or wine, one has to leave the place.¹³ In this case, the shaykh appeared in a private home where wine was served and harshly punished a prince who associated with wrongdoers and did not refrain from drinking in the company. In the words of the narrator:

I heard the prince 'Alām al-Dīn al-Shirāzī telling my father about his first visit to Damascus in the time of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf [r. 1236–60] in order to take

⁹ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 431. See also 338–41, on the eight levels (*darajāt*) in al-Ghazālī's treatment of the duty.

¹⁰ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 100.

¹¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 23b. A similar story was related by a young merchant from Manbij who was invited to the garden of one of his relatives where food and wine were served: al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fols. 46–47.

¹² Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 11b.

¹³ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 444–45.

care of his affairs. He said, "After I had taken care of all the necessities, one of my companions invited me to his garden and offered me alcohol. At first I refused, but the friend prevailed upon me. Just after I drank, the figure of the shaykh appeared before my eyes. The shaykh beat me in the chest and said, 'Rise now and leave this place.' I then fled that place at once, as one seized by frenzy. I asked for God's forgiveness and never repeated the act."¹⁴

The more fearless shaykhs directed their zeal for the duty to expose the wrongdoings of rulers by reprimanding them harshly. Thus, for example, when al-Malik al-Amjad Bahramshah, grand-nephew of Saladin and governor of Baalbek (r. 1182–1230), would visit the shaykh to seek his blessing and intercession (*shafā'a*), the shaykh would "call him out for his acts of injustice and was able to point out these deeds in detail."¹⁵ A further tale is told of the shaykh of the village of Sulaymiyya 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Nu'aym mentioned above. It is related that the governor of the city once sent him skins of wine to test him. When the surfaces were opened and nothing came out, 'Izz al-Dīn ordered to trample them, and the most excellent honey began to flow. The Sufis (*fuqarā'*) ate some of it and sent the rest to the governor, who denied sending the wine—thus proving he was an oppressor.¹⁶ These stories broadcast the political relevance and broader context of forbidding wrong. In the first account, the shaykh holds the ruler responsible for the spread of immorality and, by implication, criticizes his unwillingness or inability to take action against wrongdoers. In the second story, the ruler is the target of the duty of forbidding oppression—a harshly confronted offence to which we shall return.

It was in this framework of the larger scheme of commanding right and forbidding wrong that Ibn Qawām spurred their Shi'i neighbours to cast aside their devotional practices, and 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī made Christian neighbours forsake their old life and faith. In addition to their concern with the moral conduct of individual members of the Sunni communities and the ruling elite—shown by their uncovering of offence and inducing offenders to become better Muslims under their guidance—these shaykhs aspired to cleanse the public sphere of the unwarranted conduct of religious minorities. Narratives that describe them acting as agents of "repentance" (*tawba*) and conversion further attested to their spiritual power and prominence.

The hagiographer of Ibn Qawām attributes his grandfather's unprecedented success in prompting repentance to his insistence upon establishing what the true faith and his ongoing condemnation of deviant practices (here: *bida'*) was. Among those whom he made repent were Shi'is in his hometown of Bālis, which seems to have retained its Shi'i character ever since the end of the rule of the Ḥamdānīs Shi'i dynasty in the middle of the eleventh century and long after the occupation of the town by the Sunni Zangids in the early twelfth century.¹⁷

¹⁴ Muḥammad Ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 4b–5a.

¹⁵ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 15a.

¹⁶ al-Nabhānī, *Jamī' karāmāt al-awliyā'*, 2:322.

¹⁷ On which, see André Raymond and J. L. Paillet, *Balis II: histoire de Balis et fouilles des îlots I et II* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1955), 35. See also Stephennie Mulder's extensive

Scholars have noted that the Sunni rulers and population of the Zabgid and Ayyubid periods tolerated the continuous presence of Shi'i communities in Syrian cities and towns as long as their loyalty to their faith remained discreet.¹⁸ Violation of this commonly accepted rule may explain why Ibn Qawām made Shi'is (*rawāfiḍ*) in Bālis forsake the public celebration of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala on 'Āshūrā', the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram (apparently performed since at least the Buyid period in the tenth and so-called Shi'i century). The shaykh similarly strove to put an end to the public prayers in remembrance of the killing of the martyr that were held during the ceremony.¹⁹ A young man in the town was of Shi'i inclinations, as well as a committed wine-drinker. Upon being received kindly by the shaykh, he renounced his devotional practices and turned to him in repentance. He then became the shaykh's loyal servant (*khādin*), made the pilgrimage to Mecca with him several times, and complied with all his requirements concerning the performance of the obligatory prayers and all other religious ordinances (*farā'id al-Islām*).²⁰

Drawing converts to Islam must have held particular significance in a period marked by energetic efforts to restore Islam's supremacy and solidify its dominance over non-Muslim communities that came under the control of the Zangid and Ayyubid regimes. Such sentiments may explain why the narratives that extol 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī as an agent of conversion are closely associated with his charismatic zeal in propagating true religion and cleansing the public sphere from the improper conduct of his Christian neighbours such as drinking or selling wine. A telling account narrates an encounter between the shaykh and a Christian wine-seller that led to his conversion. Significantly, the story was related by a jurist who recognized the shaykh's extraordinary abilities and complied with his request. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ya'qūb, the judge of the town of Karak (east of the River Jordan and the Dead Sea and known for its crusader castle), related:

Once I saw Shaykh 'Abdallāh, God be pleased with him, performing ablution in the river Tora, close to the White Bridge in Damascus, when a Christian passed by him, and with him was a mule carrying wine. All of a sudden, the animal stumbled on the bridge, and the load fell. I then saw the shaykh who had finished the ablution. All this happened on a scorching day, and no one besides us was on the bridge at that time. The shaykh approached me and said, "Come here, oh jurist, and help us place this load on the animal." And so I did. The Christian

discussion of the architectural evidence of the Shi'i character of Bālis in *The Shrines of the 'Alids*, chap. 1: "The Mashhad of Balis," 18–62.

18 See especially, Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 190–91; and Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 64.

19 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 20a. For the history of the rituals of the Shi'i 'Āshūrā, see Gerald R. Hawting, "The Tawwābūn, Atonement and 'Āshūrā'," in *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, ed. Gerald R. Hawting (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 183–88.

20 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 22a. A later example of a charismatic shaykh who utilized his charismatic personality and influence to "convert" a Rāfiḍī is that of 'Umar al-'Uqaybī (d. 951/1544). In this case, the Shi'i who wished to become the shaykh's disciple was required to praise the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, instead of publicly cursing them. On which, see Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 65.

mounted the mule and embarked on his way. I was overwhelmed by this deed of the shaykh and followed the Christian and his mule as I was heading the city.

The Christian took the animal to [the Damascene neighbourhood of] ‘Uqayba and went to a wine-seller there. The seller started to inspect the load and to his great amazement, found out that it contained vinegar, not wine. The Christian burst into tears and said, “I swear to God that this was wine. Now I know where this comes from.” He then tied his mule in a nearby rest house (*khān*) and set out on foot to the mosque.

Upon entering the mosque, he observed the shaykh who had already performed the midday prayer and was engaged in praising the almighty God. The Christian approached him and said, “Oh my master, I embrace Islam as my creed. I proclaim that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is the messenger of God.” And from that time on, he became a pious-ascetic and virtuous believer.²¹

Accounts of causing Christians to change religious course through intimidation or force are rare in the saintly vita of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. Much more prominent are stories that show him making converts to Islam by virtue of his charismatic personality and his willingness to intercede God with their behalf. Narratives depicting encounters between the shaykh and his Christian neighbours that lead to their conversion attest to his prominent stature and the wide scope of his activity. At the same time, the conversion stories reflect the fascination exerted by the presence of the Muslim holy man and the awe he inspired. In this regard, an account of a Christian woman who trembled at the sight of Muḥammad, the son and successor of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, dismounting from his horse to approach her and let her embrace the faith at his hands, comes to mind.²² Such holy figures were considered capable of deploying their authority and manipulating their *baraka* to avert calamities, pursue justice, and fulfill the religious and material needs of believers—among them, converts. It may be surmised that Eastern Christian villagers, seeking means of subsistence, charity, and blessing, were attracted to charismatic Sufi masters. Their conversion sometimes involved becoming their disciples and entering a life of commitment under their guidance.

Several conversion stories present encounters between ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and the Christian villagers in Mt. Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley and expose the motivations of the converts. (The headings are mine.)

The Story of Ibrāhīm the Christian from the Village of Jibbat Bushra

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Sakākīnī, one of the close adherents of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī related: “One night I was staying in the town of Baalbek, after one of the men had invited me, insisting that I accept his invitation to spend the night in his home. In the middle of the night, I said to myself, ‘How can I sleep here when the shaykh [‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī] is on the mountain?’ So I rose and walked out

21 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 6a.

22 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 47b.

until I arrived at the place of the pillar of the monk. Then I descended, left the village, and went up to the shaykh's lodge (*zāwiya*) [. . .]. The shaykh said, 'Oh my companion, are you sending me people so that I provide for their needs? Who am I for you to send me people to provide for their needs? Ibrāhīm the Christian (al-Naṣrānī) from [the village of] Jibbat Bushra came to me for assistance and asked me to pray for him to intercede with God on his behalf.'

At night, I retired to go to sleep at the shaykh's lodge [. . .] on the second night, as I was sitting at the entrance to the lodge, I saw someone and wondered what this person was doing here, for there was nothing that he could get. I rose and gazed at him and then discovered it was Ibrāhīm the Christian from Jibbat Bushra. I asked him, 'What do you seek in this place?' He asked for the shaykh's whereabouts, and I replied, 'He is in a cave immersed in contemplation and recollection of God (*dhikr*).' I asked, 'What do you want from him?' He replied, 'Yesterday, in a dream, I saw God's messenger, God pray for him and give him peace, and he said, "Go to Shaykh 'Abdallāh and convert to Islam by his hand, as he has already interceded with God on your behalf.'"

I then accompanied him on his way to the shaykh who at that time was sitting in a cave. When the shaykh saw him he inquired, 'Yes, companion, what is your need?' and then the man related what he had seen in his dream. Upon hearing the story, the shaykh burst into tears and said, "The messenger of God has designated me to be a shaykh." Ibrāhīm converted to Islam and was a good and righteous man to whom God will be merciful."²³

The Story of the Christian from the Village of al-Rās (in the Beqaa Valley)

Sharaf al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan transmitted an account according to which Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, God bless his soul, travelled to Aleppo one day. When he left Aleppo for Homs, numerous people to whom he showed kindness and benefited escorted him to bid farewell. When he left Homs in the direction of Baalbek, a Christian from al-Rās followed him. When they were on the way to the city, the Christian thought, "If only the shaykh had given me a small portion of his possessions, it would have been enough to meet my own needs and the needs of my entire family."

When the shaykh approached the olive trees of the village, he addressed his servant saying, "Give the Christian all our possessions." The servant obeyed the shaykh's order. The Christian was so amazed that he almost lost his mind. He then returned to his house and family and recounted to them his encounter with the shaykh. They were delighted, converted to Islam, and began to serve the shaykh until they became his close companions.²⁴

By the close of the twelfth century, mainstream Sufi masters joined legalists in denouncing the irreligious practices of antinomian groups that had sprung up in the

²³ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 12b–13a.

²⁴ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, 39b.

Arab Near East and beyond.²⁵ Some ascetics and Sufi groups, such as the *muwallahūn* (Fools of God), which seem to have been a distinctly Damascene phenomenon, the Ḥarīriyya, the Ṣaydariyya, and the Qalandariyya, outwardly defied the ideals of Muslim piety by living in a state of ritual impurity, wearing soiled clothing, and not praying. Improper or provocative attire, as in the case of the disciples of ‘Alī al-Ḥarīrī, was seen as a threat to social identities and boundaries.²⁶

Occasionally, the political authorities lent their support to legal scholars and mainstream Sufis as part of their general policy of strengthening what may be labelled as a mainstream Sunni camp—*sharʿi*-minded theology, moderate Ḥanbalī theology, and moderate Sufism—against its rivals. Radical Ḥanbalī theologians, philosophers, claimants to prophecy, and ecstatic and antinomian Sufis were regarded as a threat to established norms—and thereby challenging, albeit indirectly, the political authorities and the public order.²⁷ Two well-known examples concern the antinomian groups of the Qalandars and the Ḥarīriyya, which gained influence in the Syrian milieu of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods. Ibn Kathīr relates that the Qalandars of Damascus, whose “evil” practices that disregarded the principles of the Shariʿa intensified after the death of their leader Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwujī (in 630/1232), were suppressed by the Ayyubid governor of Damascus al-Malik al-Ashraf. Later on, the Mamluk sultan Ḥasan issued a decree forcing them to wear “Islamic dress” and ordered that the disobedient be punished.²⁸ Al-Ḥarīrī, the foremost representative of antinomian Sufism in Syria in the Ayyubid period, was found deserving of death by several leading Damascene legal scholars and was arrested by al-Malik al-Ashraf in 628/1231. By the end of the decade, he and his disciples had been banished from Damascus, as had the dervishes of the Qalandars.²⁹ Their expulsion seems to have marked the disappearance of heterodox Sufism from Damascus for some thirty years.³⁰

²⁵ See the examples in Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, especially 5–6. About individual and groups of antinomian Sufis in Ayyubid Syria, see Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyubids (1146–1260)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 239–42. On the literary efforts of mainstream Sufis to confront the spread of antinomian groups, see Daphna Ephrat, “Purifying Sufism: Observations on the Marginalization and Exclusion of Undesirable and Rejected Elements in the Earlier Period (Late Fourth/Tenth to Mid-Seventh/Thirteenth Centuries),” *al-Qantara* 35 (2014): 267–71.

²⁶ See Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 18–19, on the coiffure, apparel, and paraphernalia of antinomian dervishes.

²⁷ See Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 227ff., on the concern of the Ayyubid political rulers with what she calls the *content* of struggles against impiety and religious dissent and their support for the construction of boundaries between right and wrong. For a different interpretation, see Michael Chamberlain's argument that political considerations were disguised as debates about religion in thirteenth-century Damascus: Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16–73.

²⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:274.

²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:173–74, 148; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar alʿālam al-nubalāʾ*, ed. B. ʿA. al-Marʿūf and M. H. Sirḥān (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1984–85, vols. XXI–XXIII), 23:224–28.

³⁰ See, Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 209–10.

Discernable already in the late Ayyubid rule in Syria, the endeavour of Sufi masters to purify society, and the public sphere in particular, of irreligious praxis became increasingly apparent in Mamluk times. Sufis, acting as groups of masters and companions and sometimes resorting to the use of force, struggled vigorously against the spread of offences and prohibited innovations. To judge by the frequency of their mention in contemporary sources, drinking alcoholic beverages and using *hashīsh* topped the list of encountered offences. Sufis often took aggressive steps against those who used these forbidden substances by destroying the plants producing them, the warehouses in which they were stored, and other sites connected with them. The economic and political crises that marked the end of the Mamluk period saw a rise in alcohol use in Syria, which in turn witnessed an uptick in Sufi protest of this phenomenon. Responses ranged from protest marches and street demonstrations to destruction of containers in stores and warehouses, and even lodging complaints with the authorities.³¹

By the close of the thirteenth century, then, charismatic Sufi masters had diffused their moral authority in the broader society and exerted their influence over political rulers who were aware of their religious and social status and sought their blessing. Moreover, Sufi shaykhs employed their authority and *baraka* to perform communal roles—to improve the lot of ordinary Muslims, to assume the tasks of the political powers in providing public welfare, to intervene with these authorities on behalf of individuals and local communities—in addition to their role as protectors of the people from external enemies and unjust rulers. Such areas of operation stood at the heart of the shaykhs' veneration by the broader society.

Patron Saints and Communal Leaders

For members of local communities living in the historical setting under study, the true measure of a saint's power was his ability to enact his heroic virtues on the mundane plane. This ability is revealed in its brightest light in the saintly life of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, the most famous "warrior-saint" of the Syrian milieu during the Counter-Crusader period. 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī came to be known as the "Lion of Syria" (*asad al-Shām*) thanks to the might he inspired and the part he played in the ongoing confrontations with the Crusaders at the side of Saladin and his successors. A collection of stories in the shaykh's saintly vita is devoted to his feats as a zealous warrior, who "would never stay behind and abstained from participating in battles for the sake of religion (*ghazawāt*) that took place in Bilād al-Shām in his days [. . .], and shot a bow that weighed eighty *ratl*.³² [. . .] His hope was to die for the sake of God in a war against the infidels (as a *shahīd*)), risking his honorable soul for this cause."³³

One narrative in particular illustrates the scope of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī's activity as a fighter and his association with the glorious jihad hagiographical tradition that depicts

31 On which, see Hatim Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics in Late Medieval Syria* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic, 2013), 212–13.

32 One unit of *ratl* weighs 5 pounds in Syria and 15¾ ounces in Egypt.

33 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 17a.

ascetic Sufi saints as fulfilling a martial role.³⁴ Like Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 161/777), the famous warrior-saint and archetype of piety and self-denial, ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī is described as blending asceticism with holy war, an exemplary jihad warrior (*mujāhid*) who refused to mount a horse during military campaigns and rejected the spoils of war.³⁵ The narrator elaborates on each of his steps in the continuous military campaign that took place in the Beqaa Valley and the region bordering Homs:

It was related that when al-Malik al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Dīn [the brother and principal heir of Saladin in Syria] arrived in the town of Ṣāfita (southeast of Tartus) in AH 592, Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī told his servant to go to Baalbek and bring a mule from there. The servant returned with the mule, the shaykh mounted it, and they set out on their way in the dead of night, reaching the village of Ḥarthā before dawn. The servant turned to the shaykh and said, “Oh my master, in this place, there are many crusaders; please do not raise your voice.”

The shaykh shouted, “Allāh Akbar!” and his shouts echoed back from the mountains. He then prayed the dawn prayer, and after sunrise continued on his way, riding the mule until he arrived at a place where there was not a living soul, not even a bird. But from afar, on the side of the Castle of the Kurds (Ḥiṣn al-Akrād),³⁶ “something white” appeared to him.³⁷ The shaykh thought that there were crusaders there, and he yelled, “Allāh Akbar, there is no day more blessed than this day when I arrive!” and rushed in the same direction at which he was raising his sword. The servant said to himself, “The shaykh is mounting a mule with a sword in hand and wants to attack crusaders?” Then the shaykh realized that they were not crusaders but only a herd of wild donkeys. At this, he was broken-hearted, and his enthusiasm waned.

People said, “Oh shaykh, you must thank God, who saw you alone, riding a mule, and wishing to combat one hundred crusaders.” People also said that when the shaykh and his servant stopped in Homs, the Warrior King [al-Malik al-Mujahid] came to visit him and gave him one of his horses. The shaykh fought by his side and performed wondrous deeds.³⁸

The prominence of Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī as a potent guardian of the people of Baalbek is evident in his vita. According to his companions’ reports, the city’s residents turned to him in anticipation of the crusader attack. In response, he proclaimed, “I am the shaykh

34 About the beginning of the Sufi jihad hagiographical tradition, see Neale, *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Traditions*, 92–109.

35 For a collection of anecdotes involving warfare from the life of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, see Neale, *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Traditions*, 94–95. See also Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 107ff.

36 Krak des Chevaliers, which was first fortified by the Kurds and then reconstructed by the Knights Hospitaller who took control of the site in the twelfth century.

37 Probably the White Castle built by the Crusaders after the First Crusade.

38 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 17a–b.

[of the city], and they will not reach here." The Crusaders, it was reported, turned back in fear.³⁹ Along similar lines, eyewitnesses conveyed his composure in the face of political power.

The following account describes how the charismatic Sufi shaykh's spiritual might transformed into temporal power and how he leveraged this capacity on behalf of the people of Baalbek, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

It was related that a Christian stonemason once came to the shaykh to complain to him that he had worked for al-Malik al-Amjad (the governor of Baalbek) and labored much, but the ruler had paid him nothing, and he was a poor man with many children. The shaykh sent someone to al-Malik al-Amjad to ask him to visit his lodge (*zāwiya*), and went out and sat on a rock waiting for him with an axe in his hand. The ruler arrived, kissed his hand, and sat beside him on the rock. The shaykh said, "Oh al-Malik al-Amjad, I would like you to hew a prayer niche for me in this rock." Al-Amjad said, "Take a stonemason who will perform for you what you desire." The shaykh said, "No, I want you to hew with your own hands," and he gave him the axe.

Al-Malik al-Amjad was unable to avoid [the task] and began to work until his hand was aching, and he complained about it to the shaykh. But the shaykh ignored him and ordered him to continue until the axe had left marks on his hands and the ache that he felt intensified. Then the shaykh said, "How can you use these poor people and ultimately avoid giving them what they are due?" When al-Malik al-Amjad heard the shaykh's words, he mounted his horse and returned to the citadel [of Hama]. He asked one of his men to go to the shaykh and say to him, "If Baalbek belongs to you, then give it to me. But if Baalbek belongs to me, then leave it and go elsewhere." Then the men left and sat in front of the shaykh but did not dare to speak a word.⁴⁰

In what follows, the hagiographer records how the shaykh of Baalbek compelled its unjust governor to leave the city, allowing him to return after he had repented of his misdeeds.

The shaykh said [to the ruler's messenger], "Oh my son, go to al-Malik al-Amjad and tell him that Baalbek is mine and that he should leave it." When the man returned, he found that the ruler had already left on a hunting trip. He followed him but uttered not a word that shaykh had spoken [. . .]. Finally, al-Malik al-Amjad summoned the man, saying, "Each time I wish to enter the city, I feel as though an iron wall was blocking me." [. . .] When the man told him what had happened, al-Amjad said, "Go to the shaykh and request his permission to enter Baalbek." So the man went on his way, conveyed the request, and the shaykh granted his permission [. . .]. Afterwards, al-Amjad came to the shaykh, kissed his hand, sat before him, and asked forgiveness for his deeds. The shaykh said, "Oh

39 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 15a.

40 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 23a–b.

my son, Baalbek was mine, and you only made an appearance there, and now it is yours, but when I go, you too will lose it." After a short while, the shaykh, may God's goodwill be upon him, passed away, and al-Malik Amjad, mercy be upon him, lost the city of Baalbek.⁴¹

The historian Ibn Kathīr wrote that

Whenever al-Malik al-Amjad visited Shaykh 'Abdāllah al-Yūnīnī, he would sit in front of him and the shaykh would say, "Oh al-Amjad, you did this and you did that." He would then command that which he needed to command him to do and forbid him from that which he ought to forbid. Al-Amjad, in turn, would obey the shaykh.⁴²

The content of these orders is lost to history, but the overall sense of the encounter resonates with moral intent.

Yet the daring of the shaykh of Baalbek went further still. He was known to get into confrontations with the Ayyubid sultan al-ʿĀdil and his son and successor as governor of Damascus al-Malik al-Muʿazzam ʿIsā (r. 1201–18). During one of their visits to 'Abdāllah al-Yūnīnī, the shaykh expressed his protest about what he claimed was the spread of alcohol and *hashish* use in the state by refusing the money offered to him by the rulers and denying them his blessing.⁴³ An account in the *vita* tells of the encounter between 'Abdāllah al-Yūnīnī and a messenger of al-Malik al-ʿĀdil that took place in the Ḥanbalī mosque and their stronghold in the city, where the shaykh and his group of disciples and companions would gather to participate in study sessions with scholars and their students. It is related that once, while they were sitting in the mosque, a man in soldier's dress entered and began to distribute gold coins to the ascetics. When he reached the prayer rug of the shaykh, who had gone out to perform the ablution before prayer, he placed the money beneath the carpet and asked the servant to request that the master pray on his behalf. Upon returning and noting the gold, the shaykh inquired as to its source, and the servant replied that al-Malik al-ʿĀdil had provided the money and requested 'Abdāllah al-Yūnīnī's blessing. In response, the holy man took a stick and pushed the gold from underneath the rug, instructing the soldier to take it away. He did so and asked the shaykh to pray on his behalf. The shaykh replied, "How can I invoke God's blessing for you while alcohol flows everywhere in Damascus? How can you request my intercession when you collect taxes on behalf of the sultan from a woman who weaves clothing to make a living?"⁴⁴ Later, when al-Muʿazzam came to the shaykh to ask him to invoke God's blessing, the shaykh replied, "Do not be sinister like your father [. . .] He assisted fraudulent dealings and incited quarrels among believers." Al-Muʿazzam left, returning the following day with 3,000 dinars to buy provisions for the shaykh's boarders and guests at his lodge. The shaykh peered at the ruler, stating,

41 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 23b.

42 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:263–64.

43 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 7a–b.

44 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 7b–8a.

"Oh, he who comes to test me, oh initiator of prohibited innovations, rise and leave before I ask God for the earth to swallow you. Be aware that we are sitting on a rug, and beneath it is a ditch of gold and silver."

However, the interaction between the charismatic Sufi masters and the rulers did not conform to a single pattern. More often than not, the shaykhs would not eschew the relationship with the powerful and wealthy. Some associated with the rulers and accepted their hospitality, despite their declared rejection of worldly wealth and power. The influence and prestige these figures acquired among political leaders led the latter to invite them to the court-castle (the *qaṣ'a*)—the locale of government, the residence of the ruler, and the seat of military and political power—or their private homes, to partake of their devotional practices, in addition to offering them moral and material support.⁴⁵ Thus, for instance, the powerful governor of Damascus, al-Malik al-Ashraf (r. 1229–37), invited Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, the renowned Sufi legal scholar of Baalbek, to the castle to pray in his presence and hear prophetic traditions at his side. After the shaykh had performed the ablution, the governor shook his towel and spread it on the ground for him to walk on, swearing that it was clean and that he should step on it. It was said that "kings venerated and exalted him, and that the children of al-ʿĀdil and others used to come to Baalbek to visit him."⁴⁶ Another example concerns the Ḥusām al-Dīn Lāḡīn (r. 1285–96), the Mamluk army commander and governor of Damascus, who invited a group of Sufi masters and disciples to hold the *dhikr* gatherings at his home and served them meals himself to demonstrate his devotion. Later, Lāḡīn offered them new sets of clothing.⁴⁷

Reciprocally, charismatic Sufi masters hosted rulers in their lodges and gave them entry to their congregation. While the participation of an Ayyubid or Mamluk ruler governor in the spiritual life of the shaykh and his group did not make him into a member of the society, it did serve to bridge the gap between the official and public spheres.⁴⁸ Moreover, the charismatic shaykhs refrained from employing their influence to challenge the legitimacy of the political authorities and their authority as enforcers of law and order in the public sphere. Instead, they sometimes took over the tasks of the rulers during civil conflicts, and in matters of public welfare, in addition to frequently intervening with the powerful on behalf of individuals and local communities and to catering to the poor and the needy.

Accounts of Sufi shaykhs and God's Friends often portray them as benefactors of individuals and as communal leaders, associating their authority and spiritual power

⁴⁵ In this regard, Bachrach notes that the dwellers of the citadel often descended from it into the city for a variety of worldly and religious purposes, and, while most city-dwellers probably never entered the citadel, some officials, merchants, artisans, religious scholars, and Sufis certainly did: Jere L. Bachrach, "The Court-Citadel: An Islamic Urban Symbol of Power," in *Urbanism in Islam*, ed. Yukawa Takeshi (Tokyo: Middle Eastern Cultural Center, 1989), 3:207–8.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3:227; Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl*, 2:269.

⁴⁷ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Mukhtār min taʾrīkh ibn al-Jazarī*; *Ḥawāḍith al-zamān wa-anbāʾihi wa-wafayāt al-akābir wa-l-aʿyān min abnāʾihi* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya li-l-Ṭibāʾa wa-l-Nashr 1988), 265–66.

⁴⁸ For an elaboration of this argument, see Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 155–57.

specifically with their communal roles. For all of their idealized dimension, episodes in the saintly *vitas* shed light on the interaction between the shaykhs and members of the society around them, as well as on the concerns and expectations of fellow believers. These eyewitness stories brim with details on the lives of lay believers. Taken together, they show us how the shaykhs activated their power in the service of society, which, in turn, shaped their image as patron saints and communal leaders.

A most telling account that portrays the charismatic shaykh as an influential and authoritative mediator on the mundane plane is incorporated in the *vita* of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. It is narrated that the residents of Yūnīn accused a certain Nūfal al-Badawī and others of murdering a member of their clan. For this, al-Badawī was imprisoned in a jail in Baalbek. The family of the accused sent messengers to the governor of Damascus, al-Malik al-Ashraf, to plead for amnesty, and he sent a group of notables to intercede with the victim’s clan. They then turned to Shaykh Muḥammad, the son of Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, and asked him to join them. The shaykh agreed and left in their company until they arrived at the home of the murder victim. As his clan refused to accept the plea for forgiveness, the shaykh threw off his turban and lay down his head on the ground. Upon seeing the shaykh’s action, the people—men and women—shouted and laid their heads on the ground. The narrator said, “I swear by God that I have witnessed everything that occurred in the village. Everyone, including trees and objects, prostrated on the ground. I, too, seeing this, prostrated myself on the ground. After the shaykh, may God be pleased with him, lifted his honorable head from the ground, the family of the deceased agreed to accept the plea, to forgive the accused and release him.”⁴⁹

Shaykh Aqīl al-Manbijī was another influential shaykh who wielded his authority in matters of crime and punishment. On one occasion, the shaykh noted the location of sheep thieves and mobilized his companions to catch them, turn them over to the ruling authorities, and return the flock to its shepherd.⁵⁰ On another occasion, he sent his companions to accompany the soldiers of the governor of Damascus to find highway assassins in a place he could name. They beat the assailants until they confessed their deed, after which they sentenced them to death. The narrator concluded, “The day of their execution became a day of note in Damascus. Thank God.” In appreciation, his close companion, Aḥmad ibn Swidān, composed a poem in which he refers to the followers of Shaykh ‘Aqīl like persons of profound faith, courageous individuals who “hover like the wind.”⁵¹

The charismatic Shaykh Ibn Qawām, for his part, initiated a major public-works project to provide the people of his hometown with their basic needs. In the Ayyubid period, the Euphrates began to change its course, eventually flowing some eight kilometres from the city.⁵² This fact might have motivated the shaykh to rally his many followers to excavate a canal to bring water to the people of Bālis after their request for

49 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 43b–44a.

50 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 49–50.

51 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, 70–72.

52 On which see Raymond and Paillet, *Balis*, 42.

the public work was refused by the sultan al-Malik al-ʿĀdil.⁵³ Besides, Ibn Qawām dug a pool next to the town since its residents would only drink water from the Euphrates river, and this, according to the narrator, created many hardships, especially for the poor and the weak (perhaps because of the distance they had to traverse to reach the river while making their way on foot). It was said that when people heard that he had touched the water, they would immediately follow him to be blessed by it.⁵⁴

Many other accounts present the venerated shaykhs as generous benefactors. While they satisfied themselves with wheat, barley, and water, they catered to the material needs of others and dispensed as a charity the gifts they received. The relationship of austerity to giving and the extension of the principle of service to others beyond the shaykh's circle of intimates appear in a series of anecdotes in the *vita* of Ibn Qawām, who refused to accept gifts of money, saying that the sums offered to him could make a poor person affluent. Once, a wealthy person presented him 3,000 *dirhams*, which he had his son distribute to the poor and weak, leaving not a single coin for his family's use.⁵⁵ He would bring the contents of his own home to widows: money, clothing, and assorted items. On another occasion, a woman complained to him that her domestic beast had died and there was no one to remove it; he asked her to secure a rope and leave it near the creature so that he could send someone to drag it away. The shaykh himself showed up, tied a rope around the animal, and pulled it to the gate of the town. As this episode occurred during the harvest season in the fertile agricultural plain that sprawls between Bālis and the Euphrates, many people joined the shaykh in his effort.⁵⁶

These are but a few examples of the phenomenon of charismatic shaykhs placing their authority and sanctity in the service of others. The more the scope of their activities extended, the more their spiritual and charismatic authority was enacted on the mundane plane. By the close of thirteenth century, their lodges and graves evolved both as centres of their small congregations and as focal points of domination and sacrality central to the life of members of local communities.

53 Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 20b.

54 Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 21b.

55 Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 24b.

56 Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fols. 20b–21a.

PART TWO

EMPLACEMENTS OF AUTHORITY AND HOLINESS

Chapter 5

THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPATIAL LAYOUT OF PHYSICAL SETTINGS

WHILE THE MYSTICAL tradition of Islam initially flourished in private houses and other informal places or nearby mosques, from the fourth Islamic century onwards, buildings appeared that became the primary centres associated with Sufism. After an early period of evolution, which is still obscure, these structures grew into durable foundations and became a characteristic feature of the urban and rural physical landscape. Some were large-scale hospices, lavishly endowed by the members of the ruling elites of Iran and the Near East for the benefit of groups of Sufis, where they could reside, receive their meals, and conduct their rituals. Many others were modest residences and meeting places built by or for individual Sufi masters and their small circles of disciples and typically comprising their tombs. A substantial number of works have noted the importance of the rapid growth of the structures that gave materiality to the Islamic spiritual tradition and inscribed Sufi religiosity in space. However, only recently have scholars started highlighting the temporal and regional variations of this process and the range of functions and designations of different physical settings, as well as the changes in their characteristic features over time.¹

The construction and diffusion of spiritual and charismatic authority in the medieval Syrian milieu were never confined to any single type of physical setting or pious foundation. Instead, the life stories of this book's subjects often demonstrate that such shaping took place wherever the revered Sufi masters sat amid his adherents. As such, disciples constructed their identities and loyalties around a particular training master regardless of his place of residence. Nor did the cosmopolitan world where masters and companions travelled from one place to another—visiting each other, forging and maintaining ties that cut across geographical and political boundaries—fade away altogether. However, the proliferation of Sufi structures of various types across the country helped entrench the masters who presided over them in their regional and local

¹ Examples are the contributions made by Nathan Hofer and Ethel Sara Wolper. Focusing on Egypt during the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods (1173–1325), Hofer typifies the Sufi structures founded in the country according to the functions and relational structures that occurred within the buildings rather than the terms used to denote them: Hofer, *Popularization of Sufism*, especially 36, 51–54. Wolper, studying the proliferation of dervish lodges—called *tekkes* or *zāwiyas*—in Anatolia from the mid thirteenth to the mid fourteenth century, shows how their structural and spatial arrangements served a wide range of functional designations: Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 25–32. See also Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 115–16, for the changes in the character and functions of the Sufi structure called *zāwiya* that was founded in Ayyubid and Mamluk Jerusalem and the flexibility with which the term was used.

settings and furthered the concentration of authority in their hands. A process of local embedment, described in the first chapter of this book, began in the mid-twelfth century and gained momentum in the course of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The sphere dominated by the revered Sufi masters evolved relatively apart from the official sphere governed by members of the ruling elites—even though the favourable environment created under the Zangids, Ayyubids, and early Mamluks and the support granted to Sufi shaykhs of recognized virtues and social standing played a role in this process. These masters of spiritual paths—sometimes settled, more frequently immigrants—established themselves in particular localities, formed groups of disciples and companions and along the way won over the hearts of both the local population and members of the ruling elites. In view of their growing popularity in the public sphere and as a testimony to their religious piety, sultans, princes, provincial governors, and other wealthy patrons, including women of the royal families, applied the law of the pious endowment, the *waqf*, to build and support Sufi structures.² This interplay of internal dynamics and patronage by the powerful and wealthy became apparent in Syria from the Zangid period onwards.

The second half of the twelfth century marked the beginning of patronage of Sufis and Sufi structures by the political rulers of Syria. Nūr al-Dīn was the first sovereign to provide the Sufis who came under his rule—both natives and newcomers—with moral and material support. He enlarged the dwelling and gathering places of individual Sufi masters and ensured their upkeep with regular revenues. The story about the house he bought for the venerated Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī and its endowment with incomes that assured the maintenance of the complex of the small mosque and lodge comes to mind.³ In addition to supporting individual Sufi shaykhs, Nūr al-Dīn built hospices, called *khānqāhs*, and endowed them liberally for the benefit of different Sufi groups.

The Ayyubids and Mamluks followed the lead of the Zangi sovereign, and under their rule state-founded and funded establishments known as *khānqāhs*, as well as less official, privately sponsored Sufi structures, became increasingly common. The functions of the *khānqāh* changed as well: while the early *khānqāhs* in the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultanates were places for the instruction of Sufism devoted exclusively to housing Sufis, the later foundations often also served as centres of legal education, in much the same way that *madrasas* did. Constituting a marker of the rapprochement between mystical and juristic Islam, the fusion of educational and devotional activities in the royal establishments founded in Cairo and the Syrian principal cities ruled by the Mamluks was so complete that, by the end of the Mamluk period, it had become increasingly

² For a somewhat different interpretation of this dynamic, see Ovamid Anjum's argument that the development of Sufi institutions which enjoyed lavish endowments from Mamluk patrons served to accelerate the change from the fluidity of the earlier mystical wayfarers to the more structured, authoritarian, master-disciple relationship. Ovamid Anjum, "Medieval Authority and Governmentality," in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World*, ed. John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 80–81.

³ See the first story cited in [Chapter 1](#).

difficult to distinguish the establishments that supported the activities of the mystics from those that provided for the jurists. Similarly, the terms *madrasa*, *khānqāh*, and sometimes *jāmi'* (congregational mosque) are often used interchangeably.⁴

Patronage of Sufis by members of the ruling elites through the foundation and endowments of *khānqāhs* was a clear indication of their recognition as disseminators of the message of Islam alongside the leaders of the traditional legal schools. Beginning with the Great Seljuks in the mid-eleventh century, the new alien elites supported mainstream Sufism, thoroughly grounded in the Qur'an and the prophetic *sunna*, as part of their public policy of patronizing Sunni scholarship in exchange for ideological support. The *khānqāh* thus functioned as an ideological branch of the state apparatus, in the sense that the Sufis who lived there wittingly or unwittingly participated in legitimizing the endowing rulers as supporters and defenders of Islam. Funded by endowment trusts for the benefit of legalist Sufis and guardians of faith and housed in glorious buildings, the *khānqāh* might have been used as another instrument of public policy to bolster the rulers' prestige.⁵ At the same time, as in the cases of other charitable foundations in the public sphere, such as mosques, *madrasas*, and shrines, the foundation of *khānqāhs* was considered an act of piety, one that could have established a bond of shared values between the rulers and the beneficiaries and generate public opinion that condoned or even outright legitimized the rule of the royal donor. Architectural patronage of *khānqāh*, like that of other pious establishments, may thus also be seen as a means of acquiring cultural capital by the possessors of political and economic capital.

The formal institutional structure of the *khānqāh*, however, could hardly contain the activities and energy of the growing numbers of medieval Muslim men and women who self-identified as Sufis. No less important 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 that was founded by the powerful and wealthy and closely associated with the official sphere. It is no wonder, then, that informal groups of Sufi masters and their disciples continued to gather in mosques and private homes. Alternatively, they

4 For examples of this blending in Mamluk Cairo, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 47–50, 56–60. On this subject generally, see Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn, "al-Awqāf wal-ta'lim fī Miṣr fī zamān al-Ayyūbiyyīn," in *al-Tarbiya al-'Arabiyya al-Islāmiyya* (Amman: n.p., 1990), 3:817–18; and Leonor E. Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution: The Khanqah* (Berlin: Schwarts, 1988), 20, 33, 39–41. Fernandes' observations concerning the stages in the development of the Egyptian *khānqāh* as a multipurpose foundation are germane for the Syrian region, although these changes began earlier in Syria than in Egypt. On which, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 208–9.

5 For the political claims that motivated the construction and endowment of institutions of religious learning, see especially Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Pre-modern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), xxv, xxix–xxx, 4–5, 96–97; and Said Amir Arjomand, "The Law, Agency, and Polity in Medieval Islamic Society: The Development of Institutions of Learning from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century," *Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999): 263–92.

would congregate in the much more modest and less organized Sufi foundation known mostly as a *zāwiya* and sometimes as a *ribāṭ*. Apparently, this was the tendency in medieval Syria beginning in the Zangid period.

Whatever the terms used to denote the foundations associated with Sufism, their patterns of development, and their changing functions, a significant distinction existed from the outset between the *khānqāh* and the *zāwiya*. Unlike the legally established *khānqāh* designed by its founders and patrons to serve a group of Sufis under their supervision, the *zāwiya* was the dominion of an individual shaykh and his successors and was consistently associated with its first shaykh. Typically, the *zāwiya* was founded on the private initiative of the shaykh who presided over it. The shaykh, or one of his associates, built or bought a building for the purpose of living and providing a space for his spiritual guidance. In these cases, the shaykh and his successors were often buried in or near their home *zāwiya*.⁶

The hereditary lodge became common in the Syrian milieu from the thirteenth century onwards. Such, as we have seen, was the Yūnusiyya *zāwiya* on the outskirts of Damascus that was headed by the sons of its founder, Shaykh Yūnus ibn Yūsuf al-Shibānī, after his death (in 619/1222).⁷ Moreover, even when sultans and other powerful and wealthy patrons started to build or fund *zāwiyas*, the endowment for the *waqf* of the *zāwiya* was of a personal nature in that it was dedicated by a particular benefactor to a particular beneficiary and, after his death, to his heirs. In this respect we might consider Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (r. 1293–94, 1299–1309, 1310–41), who was known as an enthusiastic supporter of the Sufis throughout Egypt and Syria. He dedicated a *waqf* to Shaykh ‘Uthmān al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 710/1310) and his sons and even purchased houses around his *zāwiya* to accommodate disciples and guests.⁸ This type of *zāwiya*, involving the patronage of a particular shaykh, which became commonplace in late Mamluk Egypt, can be traced back to the Ayyubid era in Syria.⁹ Provincial governors and military commanders (*amīrs*) who rose to power in the politically disintegrated Syrian Ayyubid domain probably sought to secure their properties as well as to acquire status and spiritual benefit by dedicating buildings for masters of the spiritual paths.

By the close of the thirteenth century, Sufi structures of various types had become a characteristic feature of the entire Syrian landscape, alongside other old and new

⁶ Éric Geoffroy makes these observations about the *zāwiyas* that were founded in Syria and Egypt in the late Mamluk period: Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme*, 168. For the fundamental difference between the *zāwiya* and the *khānqāh* as developed in Egypt, see Donald P. Little, “The Nature of Khānqāhs, Ribāṭs, and Zāwiyas under the Mamlūks,” in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. Wael Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 93–96; and Fernandes, *The Evolution of the Sufi Institution*, 16–32.

⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 22.

⁸ al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:202.

⁹ For the establishment and proliferation of *zāwiyas* of this type across Mamluk Egypt, especially in Cairo, see Hofer, *Popularization of Sufism*, 52–53.

pious foundations, contributing to anchoring Islamic presence and asserting its political and cultural dominance over the land.¹⁰ Apparent in the Jerusalem area following the restoration of Islamic rule in the city in 1187, the significance of the proliferation of foundations specifically associated with Sufism both to deepening the Islamization of space and to the creation of new Islamic spaces dominated by the Sufis became evident in other areas of Bilād al-Shām areas as well.¹¹

The Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr, travelling to Syria from Iraq and the East in 580/1184, provides us with an early, first-hand testimony of the visibility of the buildings that housed the Sufis and the aura of religious domination and piety they evoked. He describes the buildings (called *ribāṭs* in this description) that stood in the great cities of Mosul, Aleppo, and Damascus, and along the transportation routes connecting them, as magnificent royal palaces, and the affiliates to the Sufi group (*al-ṭāʾifa al-ṣūfiyya*) dwelling in them as “kings of this land.” In the mind of the famous traveller, this was because God had allotted to the Sufis the harvest of this earth and its surplus, having them inhabit places that resembled heaven on earth.¹²

Drawing on selected testimonies by contemporary and later historians and geographers, the following discussion centres on the patterns of development and spatial expansion of Sufi structures in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo and their suburban districts from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth century. Such an examination will serve to cast light on the affinity between their character, location, and functional and symbolic designations. More specifically, it will advance an understanding of the evolution of the lodge of the Sufi master and God’s Friend as the centre of his sphere of domination and as a social space for the visible manifestation of his authority and veneration that will be discussed in the following chapter.

10 For a study that offers insightful observations on the landscape as a fundamental ingredient in creating, transforming, and projecting cultural dominance and political hegemony, see Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Her discussion of “the sense of place and the politics of space” (pp. 15–20) points to the social, political, and sensual-experimental dimensions involved in the process of the production and transformation of the historic cultural landscape and emphasizes the relationship of scholarship on landscape history to work on cultural identity.

11 On the significance of Sufi structures to the Islamization of the Jerusalem area in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods, see Nimrod Luz, “Aspects of Islamisation of Space and Society in Mamluk Jerusalem and its Hinterland,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 133–54; Nimrod Luz, “Sufi Brotherhoods in the Urban Landscape: Islamisation and Religious Radicalization in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Jerusalem,” in *Conversion, Sufism, Revival and Reform in Islam: Essays in Memory of Nehemia Levtzion*, ed. Aharon Layish (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute/Hakkibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2012), 178–206 (in Hebrew). See also Y. Frenkel, “Baybars and the Sacred Geography of Bilād al-Shām: A Chapter in the Islamisation of Syria’s Landscape,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 153–70, on the intensive and deliberate policy of Islamization of the landscape initiated by the Mamluk sultan al-Ẓāhir al-Baybars in the second half of the thirteenth century.

12 Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: n.p., 1984), 256–57.

A View from Damascus

Damascus of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods offers an obvious focal point for studying the relationship of the historical conditions to the creation of Sufi-dominated spheres. During these periods, the city re-ascended as a prime Islamic centre, the political rulers granted the Sufis unprecedented support, the building of Sufi structures accelerated, and increasing numbers of Sufis adopted the major Syrian city as their centre of operation. Henri Pouzet provided a comprehensive survey of individuals and various groups of mystics, ascetics, and holy men with affiliation to spiritual paths who settled in the city and its environs during the thirteenth century, and who were incorporated as a vital component of religious life and structure.¹³ Still, questions remain regarding the dynamics and variations of this process and its tangible material manifestations in the physical environment and sacred topography of the city.

The primary source on the development of pious foundations of various types in medieval Damascus is *al-Dāris fī ta'rikh al-madāris* by the fifteenth-century historian of Damascus, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Nu'aymī. According to the extensive list he provides, forty-nine Sufi structures—variously called *khānqāhs*, *ribāṭs*, and *zāwiyas*—stood in and around the city by the mid-fourteenth century.¹⁴ More than three-quarters of the physical structures for which we can determine the period of foundation (listed in Table 1) made their appearance in Ayyubid and early Mamluk times (i.e. around the end of the third reign of the Mamluk sultan Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad, d. 741/1340). Such was the overall increase in their number that they had become an integral part of the urban fabric of Damascus and the countryside surrounding the city.

Several structures housing Sufi masters and some of their disciples or built by a wealthy patron for the benefit of a group of Sufis predate the Ayyubid period. Among them, we find the hospice called the Sumaysāṭiyya Khānqāh. Accounts of the history of this *khānqāh* well illustrate the role and ramifications of the support granted to Sufi masters by the rulers of Damascus and the changes that sometimes occurred in the character of the Sufi foundation. More specifically, the accounts demonstrate the dynamic of the transformation of a modest lodge, independently owned and operated, into a state-endowed foundation. The beginning of the Sumaysāṭiyya was due to Shaykh 'Alī al-Sumaysāṭī (d. 453/1061), a *ḥadīth* scholar and astronomer whose ancestors (or he himself) came to Damascus from the ancient city of Somosata (Sumaysāt; on the upper Euphrates, in Anatolia). Establishing himself in the city, he bought a building, in the vicinity of the Great Mosque, that was formerly the palace of the Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān (r. 717–20). He was buried in this house, which he left as an endowment for use by his Sufi disciples.¹⁵ In the course of the subsequent two centuries, the Sumaysāṭiyya would become one of the most significant Sufi establishments in Syria

¹³ Pouzet, *Damas*, 207–43. On a similar trend in Ayyubid Aleppo, see Eddé, *La Principauté ayyubide d'Alep*, 419–22.

¹⁴ al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:141–205.

¹⁵ al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:151–53; and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:363.

Table 1. *Khānqāhs*, *zāwiyas*, and *ribāṭs* founded in Damascus up to the mid-fourteenth century.

Period of establishment	Inside the city walls	Outside the city walls, close to the gates and cemeteries	Outskirts of Damascus	al-Šālihiyya (Mt. Qāsyūn)	Total
Before the Seljuk/Zangid period	Z = 2				2
Zangid period (1154–74)	R = 1 K = 2	R = 1	K = 2		6
Ayyubid period (1174–1260)	Z = 2 R = 2 K = 2	Z = 1 K = 1	Z = 3 K = 3	Z = 6 K = 2	22
Early Mamluk period (1260–1350)	Z = 2 R = 1 K = 1	Z = 3 K = 1	Z = 1 K = 1	Z = 4 R = 1 K = 1	16
Exact period unknown	K = 1 R = 1	K = 1			3
Total	17	8	10	14	49

Key: Z: *zāwiya*; R: *ribāṭ*; K: *khānqāh*.

especially after wealthy Ayyubid and Mamluk officials dedicated large endowments for its maintenance and upkeep and for lodgings for a succession of foreign Sufis and scholars coming from eastern Iran and Baghdad. The prestige and importance of the Sumaysāṭiyya *khānqāh* were such that its shaykhs held the formal position of *shaykh al-shuyūkh* (lit., master of the masters; i.e. the chief Sufi). Nūr al-Dīn was the first to establish in Syria the prestigious stipendiary position that had been instituted in Seljuk Baghdad in the late eleventh century as part of the bureaucratization of the learned society in the city.¹⁶ The sultan appointed ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Ḥamawayh (d. 563/1167), a Khurasani shaykh and one of the senior Sufi masters of the time, as supervisor of all Sufi affairs and establishments in the major Syrian cities, including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Baalbek, and located the office in the Sumaysāṭi *khānqāh* in Damascus. The office would stay within ‘Imād al-Dīn’s family for another three generations and become one of the more prestigious and influential offices in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Syria, carrying a substantial stipend and wielding influence with the ruling elites. Usually, the sultan

¹⁶ On the creation of the office of *shaykh al-shuyūkh* in Baghdad and its adoption by the ruler of Damascus, see Nathan Hofer, “The Origins and Development of the office of the ‘Chief Sufi’ in Egypt, 1173–1325,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 3 (2014): 8–9.

himself appointed the *shaykh al-shuyūkh*; less frequently, his delegate in the region (the governor) was in charge.¹⁷

Accounts of the *khānqāhs*, *ribāṭs*, and *zāwiyās* founded in Damascus during the period covered here bring to light the distinctions between their patterns of development and spatial layout. Several large-scale sponsored *khānqāhs* were founded by members of the ruling classes inside the city and others outside its walls. It is noteworthy that already under the Zangids, *khānqāhs* were often located in the heart of old Damascus, neighbouring the Umayyad Mosque and the citadel. The religious and political centrality of this area can hardly be overestimated. Examples of prestigious *khānqāhs* founded there include al-Najmiyya west of the Great Mosque, al-Andalusiyya, dedicated to western Sufi immigrants and situated north of the mosque, and al-Shihābiyya inside al-Faraj Gate, north of the citadel.¹⁸ Although no deeds of endowment or remnants have survived that might have allowed us to reconstruct the dimensions and architectural structure of these Sufi establishments, we may surmise that regardless of the density of the area, the buildings were sufficiently spacious to house groups of Sufis. Moreover, naturally, only people of means and stature could purchase expensive lands in the proximity of the Great Mosque.

Noticeable already during the Zangid reign, the foundation of endowed *khānqāhs* in the hinterland of old Damascus became increasingly apparent under their successors.¹⁹ Channels and branches of the Baradā river supplied the oasis of al-Ghūṭa, surrounding Damascus from the south and west, with plenty of water for daily use and agriculture. In the fertile and open spaces that extend between the old city and Mt. Qāsyūn, known as *al-Sharafayn* (the upper and the lower), members of the ruling elite dedicated vast lands as *waqf* for the foundation of Sufi establishments and situated them close to their palaces, orchards, and promenades (*mutanazzahāt*).²⁰ Later historians of Damascus depict the beauty of the landscape of al-Sharafayn. ‘Abdallāh Abū l-Baqā’ al-Badrī, writing in the late fifteenth century, extols the merits of each part of al-Sharafayn, with its places for promenading, leisure, and amusement, as well as its religious institutions

¹⁷ On the shaykhs of the Sumaysāṭiyya, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:151, 161. The appointments of the shaykhs of the *khānqāh* were documented in a voluminous work completed in the early fourteenth century by the Egyptian writer and scribe of the scroll in the Mamluk chancery Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā* (Beirut: n.p., 1987), 12:101–3, 409–15.

¹⁸ On these *khānqāhs*, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:141, 161–62, 174–77.

¹⁹ For more on the location of *khānqāhs* in Damascus under the Zangid, Ayyubid and early Mamluks, see Daphna Ephrat and Hatim Mahamid, “The Creation of Sufi Spheres in Medieval Damascus (Mid-6th/12th to Mid-8th/14th Centuries),” *Journal of the Royal Asian Society* 25 (January 2015): 189–209.

²⁰ On the development of a unique recreational culture in this part of al-Ghūṭa during the medieval and Ottoman periods, see Georgina Hafteh, “The Garden Culture of Damascus: New Observations Based on the Accounts of ‘Abd Allāh al-Badrī (d. 894/189) and Ibn Kannān al-Ṣāilī (d. 1135/1740),” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 61 (December 2012): 297–325. See also Mouton,

with their bountiful endowments and beautiful landscaping.²¹ About 200 years later, Ibn Kannān al-Ṣālīhī, writes, “One can find plenty of domiciles and orchards for promenades in al-Sharafayn, as well as several palaces.”²²

Significantly, the *khānqāhs*, both in Damascus and outside its walls, were often set close to *madrasas* of the same endowers and were named after them. The choice of their location was not simply a matter of spatial proximity. It signified the piety and role of members of the royal families and the ruling elite as benefactors of pious establishments of all types. Al-Ḥusāmiyya *khānqāh*, for instance, was founded by the Ayyubid princess Sitt al-Shām in memory of her son Ḥusām al-Dīn ibn Lājīn, and located beside her *madrasa*—al-Shāmiyya al-Barrāniyya.²³ Other examples are the Khātūn *khānqāh* beside the Khātūniyya *madrasa*, which was endowed by Khātūn bint Mu‘īn, wife of Sultan Nūr al-Dīn (and later of Saladin),²⁴ and al-Shibliyya *khānqāh* opposite the Shibliyya *madrasa* of the same donor, the *amīr* Shibl al-Dawla Kāfūr (d. 623/1226).²⁵

As for the *ribāṭs* of Damascus, although there are no details of the activities that took place in them, it seems that, apart from being a centre for whoever sought the shaykh’s guidance, they served as a hostel providing food and shelter for foreigners and devout poor people—Sufi and non-Sufi alike.²⁶ Frequently, *ribāṭs* were founded by members of the ruling elite and located inside the city gates along the main roads to serve newcomers and residents. Such was the *ribāṭ* al-Bayānī. Built by Nūr al-Dīn and named after its shaykh Muḥammad Abū l-Bayān, the *ribāṭ* al-Bayānī stood in the neighbourhood of Darb al-Ḥajar, inside Bāb Sharqī (the city’s eastern gate), near the straight road across old Damascus.²⁷

Already in Ayyubid times, some of the state-founded and endowed *ribāṭs* of Damascus began housing both Sufi rituals and classes in the religious and traditional sciences, especially for the teaching of *ḥadīth*.²⁸ Thus, for example, al-Nāṣiriyya al-Barrāniyya (founded in 654/1256) began as a *ribāṭ* and later functioned also a centre for the teaching and transmission of *ḥadīth* (*dār al-ḥadīth*), as well as a *madrasa*.

Damas, 12–15, on the richness of the gardens and verges of this area where notables purchased lands, and the fertile countryside and abode of the rural population of al-Ghūṭa.

21 ‘Abdallāh Abū a-Baqā’ al-Badrī, *Nuzhat al-anām fī maḥāsīn al-shām* (Beirut: n.p., 1980), 41–50.

22 Muḥammad ibn Kannān al-Ṣālīhī, *al-Mawākib al-islāmiyya fī l-mamālik wal-maḥāsīn al-shāmiyya* (Damascus: n.p., 1992), 1:205.

23 Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:143–44.

24 Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 1:503, 507–8, 2:144–46.

25 Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:136, 1:531–32; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:105–6.

26 On the term *ribāṭ* and the designation of the foundation as a place of refuge for Sufis or non-Sufi poor in Mamluk Egypt, see Muḥammad Amīn, *al-Awqāf wa-ḥayat al-ijtimā‘iyya fī Miṣr 648–923/1250–1517* (Cairo: Dār al-Nahda, 1980), 111.

27 On Abū l-Bayān and the foundation of his *ribāṭ*, see Chapter 1, p. 21.

28 For a list of the individuals appointed to teach in the *ribāṭ* and holding the endowed position of the *mashaykha*, see al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 1:117, 119–22.

Concurrently it became common for the endowment of the *khānqāh* to make provision for the support of lessons in Islamic jurisprudence according to one or more legal schools that were normally held in the college of law, or for *madrasas* to house Sufis and provide a setting for their rituals.

The term *zāwiya* could signify a particular corner in a large mosque, but in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, it often referred to a small mosque or independent building that served as a residence of a shaykh and some of his disciples and as a forum for holding teaching sessions and gatherings. Such physical structures made their early appearance in Damascus in the vicinity of the Umayyad mosque and soon developed in the residential quarters inside the city and outside its walls (see Table 1 and Figure 4 below). Some ascetics coming from foreign Muslim lands settled in the city quarters not far from the gates and the Great Mosque.²⁹ Examples are the Egyptian Ṭayy al-Maṣrī, whose home *zāwiya* stood near Bāb al-Salām, northeast of the Umayyad mosque; and the Egyptian ascetic (*al-zāhid al-quḍwa*) Bahā al-Dīn Hārūn al-Marāghī, master of a *zāwiya* that stood in the al-Ṣāgha al-ʿAtīqa quarter south of the mosque.³⁰ Other *zāwiyas*, outside old Damascus, stood close to large mosques and main cemeteries. Examples are the lodge near Jarrāḥ mosque, in the vicinity of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery (the Cemetery of the Small Gate), the one near Tankiz mosque, west of Bāb al-Naṣr in the vicinity of the Ṣūfiyya cemetery (the Cemetery of the Sufis), or the one near al-Tawba mosque, in the vicinity of al-Daḥḍāḥ cemetery, north of Bāb al-Farādīs (Figure 4 below).³¹ Regular visits to the Damascene cemeteries where venerated figures were (or were believed to be) buried—companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and relatives of the Prophet, leaders, warriors, scholars, and God's Friends—were probably a strong motive of Sufi shaykhs to settle near them.³² One of these was Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Salsabīlī al-Maṣrī (d. 770/1368) who directed his steps to the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr every Saturday.³³

No less significant seems to be the wish to be secluded and cut off from others as a pious act, alone or with one's disciples, in a *zāwiya* near a cemetery or even in the graveyard itself. In this respect, we may consider the shaykhs of the antinomian Qalandariyya who took up residence in the Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery in the second half of the thirteenth century as a manifestation of their aspiration for extreme poverty.

²⁹ In this regard, George Maqdisi observed that *zāwiyas* developed near the large mosques of Syria and Egypt to serve the Sufi shaykhs and their followers in the same way that the *khān* (hostel) and *ribāṭ* developed in Iraq and the East. See George Maqdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 20–22, 33–34.

³⁰ On these *zāwiyas*, see al-Nuʿaymī, 2:203, 204–5; on al-Marāghī, see Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Durar*, 4:389–99; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:344.

³¹ For these and other examples, see al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:167, 204, 209–12.

³² For a description of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr and other cemeteries around Damascus as objects of pious visits, see al-Badrī, *Nuzhat al-anām*, 221–25, and the account of the famous traveler Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat ibn Baṭṭūṭa* (Beirut: Dār Ṣadr, 1992), 97–99.

³³ Al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:162.

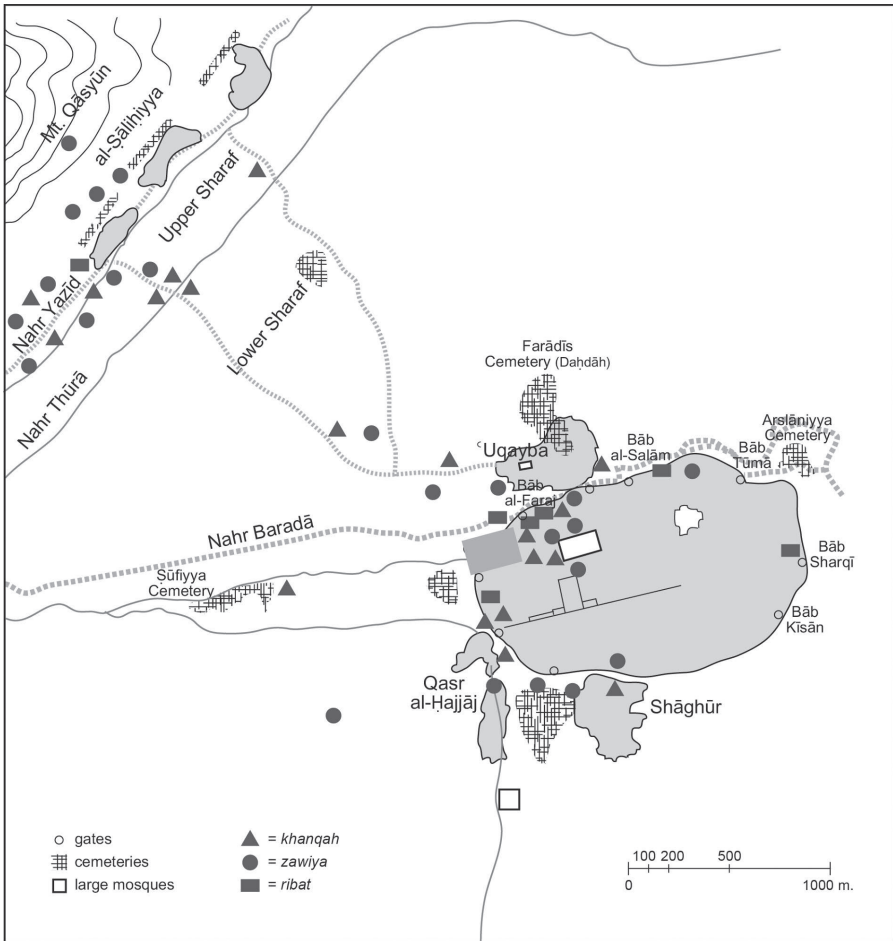


Figure 4. The spatial layout of Sufi establishments in mid-fourteenth-century Damascus. (Drawn by the author.)

Several other *zāwiyas* stood west of old Damascus. In the rural landscape of al-Ghūta, far from public spheres and outside of the established social order, some antinomian Sufi and ascetic groups accused of deviant practices and heretic beliefs erected their lodges.³⁴ The examples of the followers of the Ḥarīriyya and the mendicants of the Qalandariyya-Ḥaydariyya come to mind. It is related that when the latter entered Damascus (in 655/1257), with their conical caps (*ṭarāṭīr*) and shaved beards, they were condemned by

³⁴ See about these *zāwiyas*, al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:197–99, 212, 213–17.

the public for violating the established norms, and they eventually left the city to follow their shaykh, Ḥaydar.³⁵

Even more conspicuous was the concentration of Sufi structures of the *zāwiya* type in the area of Mt. Qāsyūn and the quarter of Ṣālihiyya in the northern suburbs of Damascus (Figure 4). Nearly half of the *zāwiyas* established in Damascus up to the mid-fourteenth century clustered in the mount and the Ṣālihiyya which was founded by Ḥanbalī religious scholars who migrated from Palestine to Syria in the mid-twelfth century.³⁶ Most of these Sufi structures seem to have developed independently of the financial support of the rulers. These included the Armawī *zāwiya* (north of Rawḍa cemetery), the Dāwūdiyya and ‘Imādiyya-Maqdisiyya (on the mount), the Qawāmiyya Bālisiyya (west of Mt. Qāsyūn on the bank of the Yazīd river), and many others.³⁷

The holiness of Mt. Qāsyūn probably drew many ascetics, both locals and newcomers, seeking to be near its sacred sites. In his *Kitāb al-ishārāt fī ma‘rifat al-ziyārāt*, perhaps the first guide for pilgrimage sites in Syria, the famous scholar and traveller ‘Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī (d. 611/1215) mentions three holy sanctuaries in Mt. Qāsyūn: Maghārat al-Dam (the Grotto of Blood) in which Cain is said to have killed Abel; Maghārat Ādam (the Grotto of Adam) in which he lived; and Magharat al-Jū‘ (the Cave of Hunger), where forty prophets are said to have starved to death.³⁸ Ibn al-Ḥawrānī writes about the merits of Mt. Qāsyūn and its pilgrimage sites, saying, “Whoever comes to the site of blood (*mawḍi al-dam*), his prayer and supplication will not fail.”³⁹ Yūsuf ibn al-Hādī (919/1503), author of the first historical work devoted to the Ṣālihiyya, writes, “Travellers frequent it and visit there the ancient sites because of the presence of the prophets, the saints (*awlīyā*) and the scholars of religion (*‘ulamā*), and before that the presence of the burial places of the prophets.”⁴⁰

At the same time, during the Crusader and Ayyubid periods, the mount and the Ṣālihiyya served as a secure refuge from political upheavals as well as an arena for a

³⁵ Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:212.

³⁶ On the early history of the Ṣālihiyya, see Toru Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus: The Ṣālihiyya Quarter from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), chap. 1.

³⁷ For details, see Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:196–97, 201–2, 205–6, 208. See also Ibn Kannān’s account of the many great *zāwiyas* in al-Ṣālihiyya (*wa-bihā al-zawāya al-mufakhkhama*) in his *al-Mawākib al-islāmiyya*, 1:278–79.

³⁸ On which see *A Lonely Wayfarer’s Guide to Pilgrimage*, ‘Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī’s *Kitāb al-Ishārāt fī Ma‘rifāt al-Ziyārāt*, translated with an introduction by Josef W. Meri (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 24. On the ancient holy sites of Mt. Qāsyūn, Sourdel-Thomine, “Les Anciens Lieux,” 71.

³⁹ Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *al-Ishārāt*, 106. See also the accounts of Ibn Baṭṭuṭa, *Rihlat ibn Baṭṭuṭa*, 101–2; and Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā‘id al-jawhariyya fī ta’rīkh al-ṣālihiyya*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Majma‘ al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya, 1980), 1:87, regarding the merits of Mt. Qāsyūn.

⁴⁰ Cited by Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 51.

variety of religious venues.⁴¹ To be secluded on the mount and its slope—devoting one's life to pious acts, spiritual exercises, and mystical exertions (*mujāhadāt*), away from public life and the spaces surrounding the powerful and the wealthy—seems therefore to be another significant motivation for establishing Sufi foundations there. Indeed, the shaykhs who made Mt. Qāsyūn their home are typically portrayed as pursuing an ascetic mode of life, disassociating themselves from the rulers and avoiding their patronage. One of these shaykhs was Shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn Qawām al-Bālisī. Moulding his ascetic conduct after his grandfather, the celebrated shaykh of Bālis, he refused various offers made by officials to dedicate *waqfs* and provide support to his disciples in his *zāwiya*, which continued to survive solely on the support provided by righteous individuals and wealthy associates.⁴²

A View from Aleppo

The Ayyubid period marked the epitome of the construction of pious foundations of all kinds in the major Syrian city of Aleppo. Among them were foundations specifically designed for and associated with the Sufis. Details on Sufi and other pious establishments in medieval Aleppo are not as copious as they are for Damascus. Accounts in the writings of historians of the city, however, reveal another indication of the link between these establishments' nature, location, and designation.

The famous thirteenth-century historian of northern Syria and Aleppo, Ibn Shaddād, listed thirty-one Sufi structures of various types that existed in the city and its hinterland in the second half of the thirteenth century.⁴³ His survey shows that during the early phases of their development under the reign of Nūr al-Dīn (1147–74), almost all the *khānqāhs* were situated in the foothill of the citadel and the palace. According to Nikita Éliasséeff, this was a way to be close to their protector patrons. Nūr al-Dīn himself built three, all near the citadel, and his princes and associates another four, also close to the citadel.⁴⁴ Later on, in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods, Sufi foundations (called either *khānqāhs* or *ribāṭs*) clustered south of the citadel. The area beneath the citadel (*taḥt al-qal'a*) gained increasing importance as Aleppo was transformed from a military garrison to a fortified palatial city, due in large part to al-Malik al-Zāhir Ghāzī (r. 1186–1216), the sovereign and most celebrated architect of the city. The proximity of this quarter to the centre of power entailed a disproportionately large number of

⁴¹ The clan of Banū Qudāma, for instance, found a refuge near the holy places on Mt. Qāsyūn after fleeing from a rural area of Nablus about fifty years after the Crusader occupation (in 1099) because of the harsh attitude of the Frankish local governor. On the causes of their immigration and settlement on Mt. Qāsyūn, see Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā'id*, 1:66–83.

⁴² al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:209; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 14:102–3.

⁴³ 'Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Shaddād, *al-'Alāq al-khaṭīra fī dhikr umarā' al-Shām wa-l-Jazīra* (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārāt al-Ma'ārif, 1991), 223–57.

⁴⁴ Nikita Éliasséeff, *Nūr al-Dīn: un grande prince musulman de Syrie au temps des Croisades (511–569/1118–1174)* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1967), 3:767.

aristocratic residences and pious institutions. Other *khānqāhs* and *ribāṭs* were situated in al-Farāfra and al-ʿAqaba—the prosperous northern and northeastern quarters of the walled city that were inhabited by state officials who probably sought to settle close to the Great Mosque and the citadel (Figure 5 below).⁴⁵ A few other Sufi foundations were constructed by their patrons outside the city gates but not far from them. The circles of patrons broadened as well. Besides sultans and state officials, traditional patrician families and women of the court played a significant role in the foundation of *madrasas*, *khānqāhs*, and *ribāṭs*. Yasser Tabbaa, studying the history of architectural patronage in the city, points out that this notable feature was peculiar to Ayyubid Aleppo.⁴⁶

The Khānqāh al-Qadīm, by the moat, adjacent to Dār-al-ʿAdl (court of grievances), and the Khānqāh al-Farāfra, in the Farāfra quarter, present us with nearly unique evidence of the earliest history of the foundation in Aleppo. Built by Nūr al-Dīn, whose name with the epithet “al-Zahid” (The Ascetic) is inscribed on its portal, the Khānqāh al-Qadīm survived well enough to be described by Rāgheb al-Ṭabbākh in the earliest decades of the twentieth century in his monumental history of Aleppo. Ṭabbākh depicts a substantial building disposed around a courtyard with a central pool. It had a prayer hall, a series of chambers that contained stairs leading to another pool of water, and a monumental entrance.⁴⁷

Khānqāh al-Farāfra is the only *khānqāh* to have survived in Aleppo to the present. The inscription on the densely carved portal of the magnificent building states that it was constructed during the reign of al-Nāṣir II ibn al-Malik al-ʿAzīz in AH 635, the second year of the regency of ʿĀyfa Khātūn, who ruled in the name of a young grandson until her death (in 641/1244). The name of the queen is also mentioned as the builder and patron of a structure inside Bāb al-Arbaʿīn. She is praised by nearly all contemporary chronicles for her justice, charity, and generosity, and especially her inclination to learning and Sufism.⁴⁸ Art and architectural studies by Ernst Herzfeld, Yasser Tabbaa, and others point to similarities in the overall design between the Khānqāh al-Farāfra associated with the generous queen and contemporary *madrasas*. The heart of these complexes always included a courtyard with an ornamented fountain, a richly decorated *muqarnas* portal, and buildings laid out around it, housing a mosque, a grand hall (*iwān*), and living cells. Yet the Farāfra differed from most of the *madrasas* by its additional buildings and, in particular, its relatively large number of living units.⁴⁹ These living units are an important indication of the initial designation of the *khānqāh* of the early Sufi foundation of this type and the functions it served.

⁴⁵ On which, see Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 19–26.

⁴⁶ Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power*, 39–49.

⁴⁷ Rāgheb Muḥammad al-Ṭabbākh, *Iʿlām al-nubalāʾ bi-taʾrīkh Ḥalab al-shahbāʾ* (Aleppo: Dār al-Qalam al-ʿArabī, 1989), 2:28; 4:228.

⁴⁸ Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety*, 165–66.

⁴⁹ For a detailed description of the building, see Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety*, 164–68; Ernst Herzfeld, *MCIM: Syrie du Nord*, pt. 2, *Monuments et inscriptions d'Alep* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1954–56), 2:303–5.

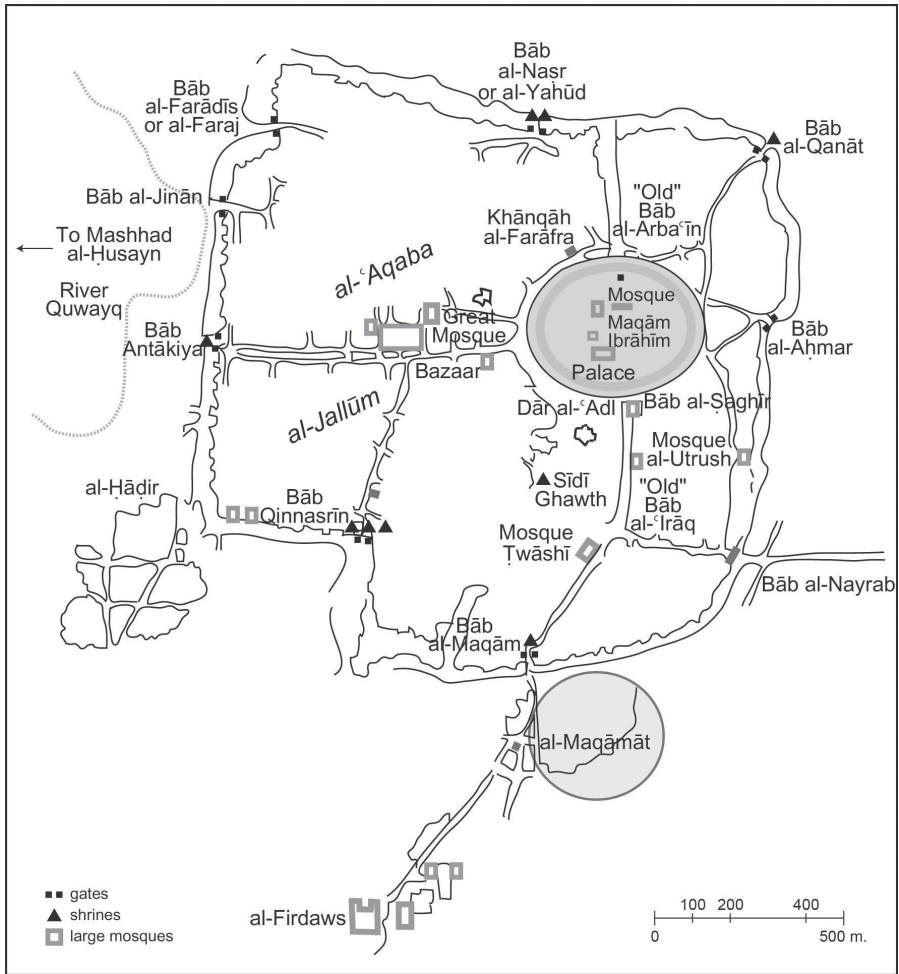


Figure 5. Thirteenth-century Aleppo. (Adapted from Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*, figure 4, with the permission of the author and the University of Pennsylvania Press.)

As for the much less official and more modest *zāwīyas* in Aleppo of the time, the best available information derived from historical and biographical accounts indicates that most stood in the alleys that branched out of the vast bazaar, in the heart of the old city and the centre of public life, or in the residential neighbourhood of Jallūm (south and southwest of the Great Mosque, between Bāb al-Antakiya and Bāb Qinnasrīn) that was inhabited mostly by Sunni Aleppine (Figure 5). There the shaykhs dwelt and interacted with members of the local society around them as a matter of course. Examples of *zāwīyas* in the heart of the old city are the *zāwīya* of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Aṭʿānī in the neighbourhood of the candle-makers and sellers, the *zāwīya* of the family of Shaykh

al-Ḥilawī in the small market of the stonemasons, and that of Shaykh Hilāl Ḥamdānī in the neighbourhood of Jallūm. Originally, a small mosque and a residence place of its founder Shaykh Hilāl Ḥamdānī, the *zāwiya* Hilālīyya was enlarged to serve as a space for group gatherings and prayers.⁵⁰ Some other *zāwiyas* stood outside the city's gates around the area known as the Shrines (al-Maqāmāt), south of the Bāb al-Naqām, which connected the Maqāmāt with the city or its northern environs (Figure 5). By and large, the *zāwiyas* in Aleppo and its outskirts were small-scale structures where disciples orbited around their masters for spiritual guidance and blessing, prayer, and *dhikr*. Others, especially those situated in open areas outside the city's gates, doubled as inns, offering accommodation and meals for travellers and visitors, and perhaps ritual spaces for both residents and visitors.⁵¹

As noted above, already in the Ayyubid period local military governors began to found or fund *zāwiyas* for the benefit of particular Sufi masters. This trend was particularly evident in the areas surrounding Aleppo, where semi-independent governors managed to purchase private houses or take control of lands. Thus, for instance, the governor of the city, *amīr* Jibān, took control of one of the private and most beautiful leisure resorts overlooking the Quwayq river and the orchards of Aleppo and built a *zāwiya* there (in 631/1233) for the shaykhs of two of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* that put down roots in the city—al-Aḥmadiyya and al-Adhamiyya.⁵² Later on, when Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur, the commander and governor of Homs, visited Aleppo, he took advantage of his stay to buy a fertile piece of land in the village of Ḥaryatān in the city's district. He then dedicated a share of its income to the *zāwiya* of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Jabrīnī (d. 744/1343) that stood in the nearby village of Bayt Jabrīn. It is related that the shaykh, who was well known for his virtues and good deeds and never took anything from anyone, was forced to accept the donation.⁵³ Nonetheless, the *zāwiya* retained its character as the domain of its shaykh and his successors.

The foundation and patronage of Sufi structures in medieval Syria, particularly the elaborate *khānqāhs* that housed groups of Sufis and were headed by shaykhs entrusted with the supervision of their endowments, helped regulate the life of their residents and concentrate authority in these masters' hands. However, from the start, the shaykhs of most prestigious *khānqāhs*, first of Damascus and later also of Aleppo and Hama, depended on the political rulers for their status. They received their appointments to the lucrative office of the masters of the *khānqāhs* from the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultan or the governors of the principal Syrian cities and became state employees.⁵⁴ Moreover,

⁵⁰ For information about these and other *zāwiyas* in medieval Aleppo, see the modern work by Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, *Ḥiṭaṭ al-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Nūrī, 1983), 5:145–46.

⁵¹ For examples, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 219–20.

⁵² Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn al-Shiḥna, *al-Durr al-muntakhab fī tā'rikh mamlakat Ḥalab* (Damascus: n.p., 1984), 245.

⁵³ For his biography, see Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar Ibn al-Muẓaffar ibn al-Wardī, *Ta'rikh ibn al-Wardī* (Beirut: Maṭba'a al-Ḥaydariyya, 1966), 2:327.

⁵⁴ On which, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 217.

in the course of the late Mamluk period, as interdependent economic crises and political instability led to the collapse of the *waqf*, the *khānqāh* lost its initial designation as a state-supported foundation housing large numbers of Sufis, and it eventually declined.⁵⁵

By that time, Syria—both the great cities and the smaller towns and villages—had long been dotted with *zāwiyas* that centred on particular shaykhs and holy men who did not depend on any official recognition or formal institutional framework for their leadership status. Standing wherever the shaykhs dwelt and symbolizing their presence and authority, the *zāwiyas*, especially when containing their gravesites, developed as centres of disciples and admirers and as focuses of domination and sanctity. In them, circles of masters, disciples, and companions crystallized, and to them lay believers turned to receive the shaykhs' blessings, partake in the devotional life of their inhabitants, and, at times, to be provided with food and shelter. Such were the functional designations and the symbolic message of the *zāwiyas* of the three Sufi masters and Friends of God whose saintly *vitas* are studied for this book: that of 'Aqīl al-Manbijī in the town of Manbij, that of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī in the village of Yūnīn in the Beqaa Valley, and that of Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī in his hometown of Bālis. It is to the stories that shed light on the early evolution of these and other lodges as the spiritual dominion of the shaykhs who presided over them and as local spaces central to the life of the community that we now turn.

55 For an extensive discussion of the various circumstances that effected the disruptions of *waqf* affairs in late Mamluk Syria, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 113–29.

Chapter 6

FROM DWELLING PLACES INTO SAINTLY DOMINIONS AND LOCAL SPACES

DURING THE THIRTEENTH century, the lodge presided over by a revered Sufi master—the *zāwiya*, the *ribāt*, and the *tekke*—developed into the primary Sufi setting. There the master guided his disciples in his distinctive spiritual path, supervised their conduct, set up hierarchies among his disciples and followers, and formed a community of devout followers. The literature known as *ādāb al-murīdīn* (“rules of conduct for seekers of the Path”), which had its origins in the writings of the great mystics of the Islamic East, laid down the conceptual foundations for the organization, regularization, and routinization of lodge communities. As noted above, one of the earliest and most widely read works of Sufi rules for novices was written in the twelfth century by Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī. This literature matured in the writings of his nephew and disciple ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī. Having been trained in the *ribāt*-based community established by his paternal uncle in Baghdad, ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī was probably the first master to present a systematic description of the regulations of life in the Sufi lodge in his famous manual, *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*. The system he left behind was elaborated upon by his son ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 655/1257) in a prescriptive manual of Sufi *adab* known as the *Kitāb zād a-musāfir wa-adab al-ḥāḍir* (*Book of the Quest’s Provisions and the Resident’s Comportment*). It detailed the hierarchy within the *ribāt*; the rights, obligations, and roles of its various members; the activities they engaged in; and the manners and customs by which they interacted with one another.¹ However, while the centrality of the discourse on *adab* for the institutionalization of the distinctive Sufi mode of organization has received considerable attention, little is known on the early Sufi lodge as a lived space and its functions and use as a cultural and social construct as delineated in bio-hagiographical narratives.

The masters of the *zāwiyas* in the medieval Syrian milieu did not leave behind any handbooks with rules for the organization and day-to-day management of their lodge communities. Nor is there any indication in their life stories of regularization of life within the walls of their lodges through established manners and conduct relating to daily matters such as residing, eating, drinking, dress, attending rituals, and admitting

¹ For a perceptive analysis of these manuals and their importance to the institutionalization of life in the Sufi lodge and the formation of its community, see the introductory remarks of Menahem Milson to Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* (Jerusalem: Studies in Arabic and Islam, 1978); Netton, “The Breath of Felicity”; Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 194–247; and Ohlander, “Situating Group, Self and Act in the Medieval Sufi *ribāt*: The *Kitāb zād a-musāfir wa-adab al-ḥāḍir*,” in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi adab*, ed. Francesco Chiabotti, Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, and Luca Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

newcomers. No matter how unstructured their home *zāwīyas* might appear as a framework of operation and organization, they evolved into focuses of their authority, spiritual power, and symbolic domination. Whether located within the walls of the major cities or in provincial towns and rural districts, these spaces shared essential characteristics. All had their origins as the dwelling places of the venerated shaykhs, centred on them throughout their lifetimes and after their deaths, and came to play an essential role as an arena for the performative affirmation of their leadership status in relation to their disciples and devotees and for constituting a locally embedded lodge community around them. Practices of construction and sustainment of leadership and companionship, described in the third chapter of this book, were embodied, asserted, and routinized in the space of their lodges that symbolized their presence and authority and served to further tighten the binding relations between masters, disciples, and residents.

Moreover, it was not long before the lodges of the shaykhs and holy men attracted followers and admirers and emerged as new local and public places central to the interaction between the master and his lodge community and fellow believers, as well as to the devotional life of the society as a whole. Many lodges contained the graves of their venerated founders whose beneficence was sought through vigils, prayers, and offerings. Most were modest buildings. Yet every lodge had a part in enabling its community and visitors to attain close attendance upon the shaykh to benefit from his constant ministrations. There the master forged relationships with individual members of the community built upon an informal system of exchanges in which the faithful gave material and symbolic proofs of their devotion, while the saint provided protection and solved problems, such as illness or poverty.

These general propositions lie at the centre of this chapter, which draws on biographical narratives that shed light on the development of the *zāwīya* in the medieval Syrian milieu as the dominion of its shaykh and as a centre around which a locally embedded religious and social space emerged. These include references to the *zāwīyas'* residents and visitors, information about the management of their resources and sources of livelihood, accounts of encounters between their masters and ordinary believers and of popular assemblies that convened at them during rituals and at funerals and burials.

The Lodge as a Space of Spiritual and Social Domination

A series of anecdotes about renowned Sufi shaykhs turning their private homes into centres for teaching and spiritual guidance, as well as the dwelling places of a committed group of disciples, afford glimpses of the evolution of their home *zāwīyas* into social sites for the manifestation of their authority and spiritual power as masters of training. Often the shaykhs of the *zāwīyas* are depicted as superintending the communal activities of their disciples, determining what they should eat and what tasks they should perform, as well as urging them to persist in their litanies, pray the proper supererogatory prayers, and adhere to the norms and ordinances of the prophetic *sunna*. Visiting Sufis

and incoming mendicants (*fuqarāʾ*) were expected to adopt the manners of the shaykh's disciples and permanent residents at his lodge.

An account in the saintly vita of Ibn Qawām extols his position and role as a master of training of the group of committed disciples that coalesced around him in his *zāwiya* in Bālis. One of his companions, Shaykh Abū Faṭḥ al-Katānī, is recorded as repeatedly urging his own disciples in Aleppo to address their steps to the *zāwiya* of Shaykh Ibn Qawām in order to behold the supreme effort his disciples were investing in worshipping, nighttime prayers, and virtuous deeds. "He would say this to rouse their hearts and strengthen their faith and will. He [Ibn Qawām] was one of those blessed by divine grace in his time, and he used to pray thirty hundred times every night."² Another account depicts how the shaykh imparted to the disciples in his *zāwiya* manners and moral values through his exemplary conduct. His hagiographer recorded:

I heard my father relating that if the shaykh felt thirsty, he would serve himself. He did so to educate the disciples. And at his lodge, there was an older man who suffered from a urinary disorder and sometime he would urinate on the carpet. Then the shaykh would rise and pour water on the place and his companions would clean the carpet. He would teach his disciples the conduct required when entering the homes of shaykhs and sitting with them.³

The authority of the venerable master extended beyond his free reign over the spiritual progress and conduct of his group of disciples in the confines of his *zāwiya*. Occasionally, Ibn Qawām would employ his absolute authority to mobilize them to public works for the benefit of the people of their hometown. On one such occasion, when the revered shaykh of Bālis and his disciples worked as a group in excavating a canal,⁴ the shaykh reproached his disciple Ibrāhīm al-al-Baṭāʾilī who abstained from joining the others, saying,

Oh Ibrāhīm, you cannot endure working with us, and I do not like to see you sitting idly. Go to the lodge to pray instead of sitting idly with us. I do not want to see the ascetic avoiding involvement in things that are useful for our lives, and not immersed in the worship of God in preparation for the Day of Judgment. [. . .] He would encourage his disciples to devote themselves to the worship of God, to adhere to the *sunna* of the Prophet and to follow in the footsteps of God's Messenger.⁵

As to the awe-inspiring Shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Yūnīnī, his companions related that he had a stick that he would use at night to rouse the mendicants (called *fuqarāʾ* in this account) for prayer and that he was strict with his disciples in the *zāwiya*.⁶ A servant

2 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 20a.

3 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 21b.

4 See Chapter 4, p. 80.

5 Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 20b.

6 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ʿAbdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 6b. According to ʿUmar al-Sahrawardī, the mendicant is a probationary disciple who is not actively engaged in a comprehensive program of spiritual training under the direction of the shaykh and therefore not

(*khādīm*), who seems to have been his senior disciple, functioned as his personal assistant and delegate in supervising the day-to-day conduct of the lodge residents.⁷ He would inspect the eating habits of the *zāwiya* residents and report them to the shaykh and would verify that they performed the night prayers and other supererogatory acts of worship. Thus, for example, when one of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī’s companions was asked how his disciples led their lives at the lodge, he answered, “Once, Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī asked his servant Tawba about my conduct and about what I eat. The servant replied, ‘He eats a flatbread every ten days.’”⁸ Guests hosted at the lodge were also subjected to inspection by the shaykh’s servant. One anecdote concerns a wandering Sufi who came from Iraq to the lodge holding a jug and a walking stick and spent the night there. In the middle of the night, the shaykh rose as usual to pray the nighttime prayer. When his servant sensed that the shaykh had arisen, he rose too, performed the ablution before the prayer, and awakened the guest. Still, he did not rise. Then he invoked the shaykh’s name, and the guest rose at once. He turned toward Mecca and began to pray.⁹

At the same time, stories about life in the *zāwiya* of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī stress the subordination of the servant to his master who might punish him or even strip him of his position at will. One account, in particular, illustrates this point. Eyewitnesses related that when a group set out from Baalbek and sat down by the lodge to drink wine, the shaykh’s servant poured out the unlawful drink that was in their possession and smashed the jugs of beverage. The wrongdoers turned to Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and complained of the damage to the vessels. The shaykh then summoned his servant and reproached him, saying that to have poured out the alcohol was a religious obligation, but smashing the vessels was prohibited by religious law.¹⁰ The servant said, “Oh my master, they dared come to our place and defile it.” The shaykh became angry and said, “I swear by the almighty God that you must serve the people who drink alcohol for seven years.” And he scolded him and evicted him from the lodge to Mt. Lebanon, where he was captured by Frankish soldiers and sold to an owner of a tavern. It was not before seven years of selling wine in the tavern had passed that the shaykh allowed him to return to the lodge and resume his position and tasks.¹¹ He rendered various

entitled to receive support from the lodge coffers. At the same time, the mendicant is not expected to adhere to the stricter discipline of those who stand above him in the lodge hierarchy. On which see, Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 208, 226.

7 On the position and role of *khādīm* in the writings of ‘Umar al-Surwawardī, see Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 206–8.

8 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 14b.

9 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 14a.

10 According to the school of Ibn Ḥanbal with which ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī was affiliated, containers of liquor, like musical instruments, should be broken—though occasionally the liquor may be poured out, or otherwise spoil, without damage to the container itself. But here, the shaykh adhered to the Shāfi‘ī posture as formulated by al-Ghazzālī, according to which wine should be poured out when possible without breaking the vessels containing it. On this matter, see Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 97, 440.

11 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 32b–33b.

services to the lodge population, acted as the shaykh's personal assistant, and attached himself to his master, accompanying him wherever he turned.

As to Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī, soon after his miraculous journey from his village in northern Iraq to the provincial town of Manbij, he founded a lodge and lived there until his death (see Chapter 1). Accounts preserved in his *vita* depict the *zāwiya* over which he presided as a self-sufficient and self-managed Sufi centre. Some denizens of the *zāwiya* seem to have performed various tasks assigned to them by the shaykh. Interestingly enough, the door of his lodge was open to individuals wishing to serve and assist the permanent residents who were actively engaged in spiritual wayfaring, on the condition that they proved their sincere intention and commitment to a life of companionship and servitude. To use 'Umar al-Sahrawardī's terminology, these individuals belong to the category of "companionship of *khidma*" (*aṣḥāb al-khidma*), as opposed the master's servant and advanced disciple (the *khādim*). By serving the group, the newcomers may have accumulated their blessing and become educated in their manners, and eventually set out on the path of discipleship under the direction of the lodge master.¹²

A telling hagiographical narrative preserved in the *vita* of Shaykh 'Aqīl relates to a man who once came to him and expressed his wish to serve his disciples and become his "protégé." (Here the word *ṣuḥba* is used to denote entry into a master-disciple relationship with him.) The shaykh replied that there were no tasks to perform in the lodge other than to bring its inhabitants a bundle of grass each day. The man said it would be his honour to perform this labour, and from then on every day would take a knife for uprooting grass and would go out to the pasture and return with grass until one day he complained of a fierce pain in his hands. He threw away the knife and left the place. When he was on the way out, he became fatigued and fell asleep. He dreamt that it was the Day of Judgment and that people were passing over a bridge. Among them were some who passed to the other side and others who fell into a fiery chasm. He then began to pray for God's help but was not able to cross the bridge and was in great danger as he nearly fell into the chasm. He searched for something to grasp but found nothing until he almost lost his mind. Nevertheless, suddenly, beneath him, he saw a pile of grass, and by falling on it he was able to cross to the other side. He then rose from his sleep, shaken by the frightening dream. He went back to Shaykh 'Aqīl, and when the shaykh saw him, he said, "Did we not say to you that there is no task more fitting for you than to bring a bundle of grass?" The man replied, "I beg forgiveness from God, Oh master, and I repent." He returned to his former labours until he earned his reward from the shaykh. (The narrator does not specify what the reward was.)¹³

Originally designed for small groups of disciples orbiting around their spiritual masters, the lodges of the Sufi masters soon attracted followers and admirers from various social strata. Ordinary believers, notables, and rulers flocked to the lodges to

¹² On this category of affiliates in the writings of al-Sahrawardī and its significance as an alternative means of affiliation to a particular master and his lodge, see Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 239.

¹³ al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 65–66.

partake in the rituals of their permanent residents, whether prayer or *dhikr* recitation, to listen to the master's teaching and preaching, to seek his blessing, or to benefit from his proximity. An example is a diverse crowd that was attracted to the lodge of 'Aqil al-Manbijī. It is narrated that

many people used to visit the shaykh after he appointed a time for public gathering at his lodge. Ascetics, scholars of religion, and officials of the regime assembled at his lodge to listen to the words of the shaykh. The provincial governor and the magistrate also arrived until it was extremely crowded. No one knew anybody else since so many people were present.¹⁴

We may also consider the stories about visits to the lodge of Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī. It is related that, after he had performed the evening prayer, he would continue to recite his litanies. Later, before daybreak, he would pray to God on behalf of the people who had come to his lodge to have their wishes fulfilled.¹⁵ Other accounts record the frequent visits to the shaykh's *zāwiya* made by the governor of Baalbek, al-Malik al-Amjad. Disciples at the lodge related that when the ruler would visit, the shaykh would scold him for his acts of injustice and was able to point out these deeds in detail. Despite this, the ruler kept up his visits to the shaykh, sitting humbly before him and offering his apologies.¹⁶

Still, as we have seen, Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī never confined his activities to the space of his lodge. Accounts of his journeys and references to the various places of his dwelling or sojourn serve as fine examples of what I have defined as a shifting saintly sphere, created and revitalized wherever the shaykh was or believed to be present and enact his spiritual power and grace. While turning his lodge in the village of Yūnīn on the outskirts of Baalbek into a centre for the transmission of his teaching and guidance and the bestowal of his blessing, the revered shaykh would also travel far and wide, attracting men and women wherever he dwelt. His companions and former disciples related:

Our master, the great shaykh Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, had a *zāwiya* to which people would travel and visit. He would sometimes live in the mountains of Lebanon. He would retreat in the winter to the hot springs of al-Qāsriya (at the foot of the mountain range east of Damascus, overlooking the village of Douma). He built a small mosque there, and people from Damascus would set out to the place to meet him. He would at times come to Damascus and stay at the foot of Mt. Qāsyūn.¹⁷

In what follows, the narrators describe the encounter between the shaykh and a woman who addressed her steps to his place of sojourn:

14 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqil al-Manbijī*, fol. 29.

15 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 18a–19a.

16 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 15a.

17 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 16b.

It once happened that a righteous woman was filled with desire to visit the shaykh. She left Damascus and arrived at his place of retreat after the evening prayer. After performing ablution at the springs, she set out in the direction of the shaykh's place, until she arrived at the door's threshold, where she encountered a slumbering lion laying there. At first, she froze in her steps in fear but then managed to drag her legs away and flee toward the village, where she slept. As the sun came up, she saw the lion walking away into the distance. Then the shaykh came out and met her at the place where she had spent the night, and asked, "Oh, what is it that you fear?"¹⁸

The veneration of Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and attraction to him wherever he was present had other expressions as well. Thus, for example, when the shaykh and his servant, Tawba, lived for a long time in the Damascene suburb of al-Babwa, on the western bank of the Baradā river, the people (*al-nās*) of the neighbouring suburbs would frequent his place of dwelling in order to serve him, bringing with them various gifts and food. When he and his servant decided to depart the place and set out to Mt. Qāsyūn carrying a jug of water with them, the governor of Damascus summoned the servant to ask what the shaykh's favourite food was. The servant replied, "Seeds," and the governor gave him 100 *dirhams*. The servant bought seeds for half the sum and saved the remainder.¹⁹ Situated in concrete settings, these last accounts afford glimpses of the interaction of the shaykh with various segments of society within which he was embedded and the extension of his sphere of authority far beyond his group of committed disciples.

The Emergence of the Lodge as a Local Space

By the close of the thirteenth century, the lodges of the Sufi masters and God's Friends in the Syrian milieu had become arenas for the public manifestations of their spiritual power and grace and the enactments of their social relationships with members of the society around them. This development was closely related to the masters' growing prominence as well as to the use and experience of the space of their *zāwiyas* by the broader population and the functions they served. Along with their role as focuses of spiritual guidance, central for the concentration of authority in the hands of their shaykhs and the consolidation of their congregations, the lodges of the shaykhs emerged as local spaces, central to the life of indigenous individuals and local communities as a whole. This development must have played a pivotal role in enlarging the following of the masters of the lodges and their sphere of domination.

To begin with, some of the *zāwiyas* in the Syrian milieu of the period covered had taken over the character of *ribāṭs* and mosques in which Sufis and non-Sufis alike could conduct their communal devotional life. As mosques, they provided facilities for prayer and sermons. One example concerns Shaykh Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, the successor of

18 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 16b.

19 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 37a.

his father as the head of their home *zāwiya* in the village of Yūnīn. He built a mosque in proximity to the lodge and summoned stonemasons to erect a dome atop of it. In addition, the shaykh and his sons and disciples cleansed the outside of the mosque to use it as a *muṣallā*—an open space used for prayers and assemblies.²⁰

As *ribāṭs*, the lodges served as hostels, serving meals and providing shelter for visiting Sufis and others. The *zāwiya* of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī serves as an example. An account in his vita extols his hospitality toward two of his foremost companions and guests at his lodge in Manbij. Shaykh ‘Adī ibn Musāfir and Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī related:

We went out to visit Shaykh ‘Aqīl, may God be pleased with him, and when we arrived, he welcomed us graciously, and we stayed with him for a full month. There were eighteen of us, and when we asked permission to leave, he refused, saying, “You are no burden on me whatsoever, and you have caused no squandering of money. I swear in God’s name that I put three coins (*dirhams*) underneath the carpet, and the money is still there—none of it has been spent.”²¹

The architectural quality, size, and functions of the lodge depended on its location, whether in a dense urban quarter or a rural suburban district; the access to the wealth of the shaykhs who presided over it; and on charitable donations. In general, buildings that stood in rural areas and open spaces outside the cities’ gates seem to have grown into compounds, including a gravesite, a dome (or several domes), a courtyard, an entrance gate, a prayer hall, and a peripheral hall.²² It is also apparent that masters of lodges with direct access to revenues from fertile agricultural lands could use their wealth to enlarge their dwelling places, finance the upkeep of the buildings, and host people who were drawn to their lodges and serve them meals. Among them was the above-mentioned Muḥammad ibn Nabḥān of Bayt Jabrīn in the rural district of Aleppo, whom his biographers described as “well known for his virtue, famous for his good deeds, and for feeding all who came to him, whether underling or prince, notable or commoner.”²³ Likewise, his son ‘Alī, who presided over the family *zāwiya* village in Jabrīn after him and possessed wealth and servants, “received whoever came, the powerful and great and the weak and poor, with hospitality, on his father’s model.” His sons are reported to have done the same.²⁴

20 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 46a. For more on the use of the *muṣallā* in medieval Syria, see Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyubids (1146–1260)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 38, 60, 116, 124, 129, 133, 257, 263.

21 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 97–98.

22 For examples of *zāwiya*-tomb complexes that developed in Palestine during the Mamluk period and incorporated the basic functional and symbolic plan that was characteristic of dozens of local sanctuaries in its landscape, see Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 161–63, and the comprehensive survey of Taufik Canaan, “Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 4 (1924): 1–84.

23 Ibn al-Wardī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2:327.

24 Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 3:121.

Some lodges were supported by donations bequeathed by rulers and urban elites. More common, however, were the contributions made by ordinary believers. These lay believers from the public sphere are often referred to in Sufi literature as “lovers” and “supporters” of the Sufis (*muḥibbūn*). They were those who, in return for sharing in the spirituality of the local Sufi congregation and the blessing bestowed upon its fully committed members, were expected to render services to that congregation.²⁵

Ordinary believers, mostly villagers, often came to the masters of the lodges with food products and other supplies which they would distribute among its denizens or use for the maintenance of the building. Narratives in the saintly *vitas* attest to the significance accorded to such support for forging ties and sustaining the relationships between the shaykhs and their lodge communities and members of the local communities around them. Consider, for example, the description of an encounter between the shaykh and a black handmaid.

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Faqih, the celebrated Sufi jurist of Baalbek and close companion of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, recalled:

Once I accompanied the great shaykh [‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī] from Baalbek to his lodge [in the village of Yūnīn]. On the road, we met a black handmaid. She was carrying a tray with apricots covered by a cloth. The shaykh said to the handmaid, “Hand me the tray.” She handed him the tray, and he ate from the top row of fruit and handed it back to the handmaid who continued on her way. I wondered how the shaykh had eaten from the tray without the handmaid’s permission? The handmaid returned to her master, and when he removed the cloth he asked her who had eaten from the tray, and she told him what had happened. The master was glad and said, “I had sworn by the name of God that when the apricot tree blossomed I wished to give the shaykh all of the fruit it brought forth and to deliver the tray with a handmaid.” When the tray came to the place of the shaykh’s lodge, he passed it on to the ascetic disciples.²⁶

In the second story, indigenous men and women appear as suppliers and caterers of the bare necessities of life in the lodge of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, which, in turn, functions as a centre for distribution of charity. His disciples related:

Our master, Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, once asked a Christian artisan to repair the floor of the lodge. The man came and worked until noon without eating, but the shaykh had no food to offer. The man complained to Tawba, the shaykh’s servant. The servant turned to Shaykh Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and said, “Oh master, the artisan is complaining that he is hungry, and we have nothing to serve him.”

25 Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī was the first to distinguish between the two categories of affiliation with the Sufi congregation: that of the fully committed members who are obliged to undertake the rigors of self-imposed deprivations, and those who can partake of its spiritual life without forsaking their material possessions and social connections. In this he responded to the widespread phenomenon of the “lovers” of the Sufis. On which, see Netton, “The Breath of Felicity,” 461; and Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: Introduction to Sufism* (London: Tauris, 1989), 72.

26 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 38a–39a.

Then the shaykh lifted his honorable head to the heavens. The moment he had completed his supplication, we heard someone cry out loudly, "Oh dwellers of Baalbek." We then saw many people making their way to the lodge, and each one of them was carrying something in particular. One was carrying a satchel for food, another a bowl, and another a plate. Then the shaykh summoned his servant and asked him to take from them a sufficient amount of food for the Christian artisan and distribute the rest to the poor and the needy.²⁷

Two other stories narrate the encounters between Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī and villagers from the rural hinterland of Manbij. The first tells of a man who had a plot of land with mulberry trees. The shaykh, who "loved him more than all the others," asked him to donate a tree in order to build a door to his lodge, a request he was eager to fulfill.²⁸ In the second story, the shaykh is described as employing his extraordinary powers to multiply the fruits brought to his lodge to feed many.

The villager is reported as recounting:

I had a garden with a large fig tree, and I used to leave the figs unpicked until the end of the year in order to bring them to [the lodge] of Shaykh 'Aqīl, may God be pleased with him. At the end of the year, I came to Shaykh 'Aqīl, may God be pleased with him, with my son Yūsuf carrying forty figs as a gift. On that same day, there was a special event in the village, and Shaykh 'Aqīl found out that I was arriving with the figs. Many people were with him. Shaykh 'Aqīl asked what I was carrying, and I replied, "Figs." The shaykh said: "Indeed, this is the season of the fig harvest, and their appearance is very appetizing." He then told his servant to count those present, and he scored 240 people.

The shaykh covered the bowl with a cloth and ordered me to abstain from removing it. I was fearful of shaming the shaykh, knowing that the dish contained only forty figs. Then the shaykh placed his blessed hand on his thigh and said, "Oh righteous man, you must calm your heart. Even if there were more people, it would still suffice." And, then, each of the people received one fig, and one was given to the shaykh, to the servant, to my son who carried them and to me. I said to myself that I have never seen a greater blessing (*baraka*) than this my whole life. May God's grace be on the shaykh.²⁹

Narratives preserved in the *vita* of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī reveal another, most important characteristic function of the lodge as a prominent local centre, that of a space of communal assemblies for the performance of the ritual of the spiritual concert—the *samā'*. During the ritual, the assembly would "hear" or "listen to" the recitation of poetry, often accompanied by music and sometimes by bodily movements in order to engender spiritual experiences and excitement. Such, as we shall see below, was the kind of *samā'* conducted at the lodge of Shaykh 'Aqīl.

27 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 32a–32b.

28 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 96.

29 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 97–99.

The *samāʿ* which first appeared in the mid-ninth century among Baghdad Sufis and subsequently made its way to other parts of the Muslim world, was a point of debate, contention, and contestation both within Sufi communities themselves and between those communities and their non-Sufi detractors. Some simultaneously disparaged and affirmed certain forms of the communal audition and addressed warnings both to beginners who were incapable of the complete self-control of their masters and to imitators from among the ordinary believers who sought in the *samāʿ* a means of quickly inducing a state of trance. Others opposed the ritual altogether.³⁰ Among such opponents were leading legal scholars in Manbij of Shaykh ʿAqīl's day and age, who were determined to abolish the *samāʿ* and mobilized the support of the local governor for the cause. Despite their effort, Shaykh ʿAqīl persisted in conducting the ritual regularly and took even greater pains in its practice—so much so that “by day and by night, he and his disciples would neglect the prescribed supererogatory prayers (*al-nawāfil*) and only focus on practising the *samāʿ*.”³¹ A large crowd, seeking access to the *baraka* of the revered shaykh and participation in the collective rituals of his lodge community, gathered at its space and probably also on the surrounding town streets. Men and women from different segments of society partook of the ritual sessions which cut across the barriers between them. One story tells of a woman of the court who was attracted to the shaykh's lodge, and, when reaching the gate, she saw there men and women together preparing for the ritual.³² The *samāʿ* that was conducted by the revered shaykh of Manbij, which was open to all, enjoyed such popularity that its opponents were obliged to accept it and eventually joined in.

The following accounts allow us a glimpse at the performance of *samāʿ* at Shaykh Aqīl's lodge and the means to which he resorted to challenging the opponents of the ritual. The floor of the lodge was turned into a “stage” for the performative affirmation of the shaykh's religious authority and the public manifestation of his spiritual power. Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Swidān, his former disciple and successor as the leader of the spiritual path he had established in Manbij, relayed:

There were religious legal scholars in Manbij who opposed the *samāʿ*. One of them said, “I shall go to see what happens when the rite is performed.” He came to the lodge at the climax of the ceremony. Then Shaykh ʿAqīl came out, turned to

30 Scholarship abounds on the origins and spread of the *samāʿ* and the reactions of Sufi and non-Sufi scholars to the various practices that were involved in it. For general treatments of its origins and practice in the Muslim medieval world, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 178–93; Jean During, *Musique et extase: l'audition spirituelle dans la tradition soufie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988); Jean During, “Musique et rites: le *samāʿ*,” in *Les Voies d'Allah: Les ordres mystique dans le monde musulman des origines à aujourd'hui*, ed. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 179–98. On opposition to certain forms of *samāʿ* that were practiced in thirteenth-century Damascus, see Pouzet, *Damas*, 237–38.

31 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ʿAqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 77.

32 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ʿAqīl al-Manbijī*, fol. 108.

the religious scholar, and said, "Lift your head." The scholar lifted his head to the sky and saw a band of angels with drums enjoying the shaykh's musical concert and participating in the rite. The religious scholar returned to his colleagues and invited them to the place of the ceremony, but they persisted in their opposition. Shaykh 'Aqīl turned to them and said, "Oh religious sage, this is how it is with the *samā'*, and this is our spiritual path. He, who does not hear the sounds of the musical instruments calling out the name of God, must be deaf, blind, and dumb. Therefore, he must not participate in *samā'* of our spiritual path." They begged God's forgiveness and repented because they had been in error about the shaykh.

It is also narrated that one of the religious legal scholars from Manbij who had opposed the shaykh's practices during the *samā'* found himself to be whirling and rocking in the place where the rite was performed at Shaykh 'Aqīl's lodge. Shaykh 'Aqīl turned to him and asked, "Why are you whirling?" The religious sage said, "I was contemplating a legal issue, which I had not been able to resolve for many years, and when I succeeded, I whirled with joy and enthusiasm." The shaykh said, "Oh, this you have done for a legal issue, while you oppose our rejoicing in God?" The religious scholar begged forgiveness from God and became one of the Shaykh's most beloved followers.³³

Accounts of communal gatherings that convened at the funerals and burials of the revered masters of the lodges further reflected and reasserted the significance of the space that emerged around them and tightened their affinity to local communities and the land.³⁴ An example is the account of Shaykh Ṭayy al-Maṣrī, the shaykh of al-Ṭayyīya *zāwīya* whom his biographers describe as charming, wise, and much sought after by the city's notables and ordinary believers alike. He came to Damascus from Egypt and dwelt in his home *zāwīya* until his death (in 631/1233). Many people attended his funeral, and he was interred in his well-known lodge.³⁵ Another account concerns Shaykh Ibrāhīm, the son of Shaykh 'Abdallāh al-Armawī (d. 692/1292), who presided over the Armawī *zāwīya* after his father's death. It is related that he attracted many followers and that his funeral was attended by the "king of princes" (*malik al-umarā'*) and distinguished judges, and his corpse was carried on mourners' heads.³⁶ Likewise, notables and commoners alike are said to have attended the funeral of Ibn Qawān, seeking to be as close as possible to his casket. About twelve years after his death, when his casket was transferred from Bālis to Mt. Qāsyūn, many people from his hometown travelled all the way to the mount to escort their beloved shaykh on his final journey.³⁷

33 al-Ḥalabī, *Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī*, fols. 109–10.

34 For a detailed exposition of the rites that expressed the religious and social significance of funeral and burial of well-known figures in Muslim communities in medieval Syria, see Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 152–61.

35 On the Ṭayyīya *zāwīya* and its first shaykh see al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:205; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:128.

36 Al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:196.

37 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 27a–30a.

After a lifelong period of worship, spiritual guidance, and heroic deeds, Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī returned to his hometown and died there. A detailed account of his death day and his funeral and burial well illustrates how the figure of the revered shaykh was embedded in the local setting and his holiness emplaced in the land. His companions related:

Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī died on Saturday, 10 Dhu l-Hijjah of this year (617 AH). On Friday, the shaykh acted in preparation for his death. He washed and put on two tunics made of rough material and then said to the person who was with him, “This tunic will go to this person and that one will go to that person.” [. . .] He then entered the congregation mosque in Baalbek and offered the Friday prayer. The shaykh then began to ascend toward his *zāwiya*. Even before this, he instructed his disciples to remove a rock that was under an almond tree where he used to sit and sleep. He spent that night awake in *dhikr* of Allāh Most High, remembering his companions and those who were kind to him, and supplicating for them. And when he passed by his disciples, he commanded them to complete the job before sundown. When the time for the morning prayer came, he offered the prayer with his companions. He then sat leaning while performing the *dhikr* of Allāh Most High and in his hand was his prayer rosary (*subḥa*), and he died in this position. [. . .]

The news reached the ruler of Baalbek al-Malik al-Amjad. He came and saw him thus. He then said, “What if we were to build a structure around him and he would be kept like this so people could see a sign?” The people said to the ruler that this was a deviation from the *sunna*. The shaykh was then moved, washed, shrouded, and prayed over. [. . .]

The day of his passing was an important and special day. The town folk gathered in the mosque of Baalbek for mourning and prayer for the deceased (*ṣalāt al-janā’iz*). He was buried at the site of the rock that his disciples had removed from under the tree—may Allāh have mercy upon him and may He fill his grave with light.³⁸

With Sufi masters buried in their dwelling places or in close proximity to them, their *zāwiya*s became a focal point for worship and pilgrimage for members of all segments of society. As such, the proliferation of *zāwiya*s in medieval Syria and the development of the lodge-tomb compound were seminal to the evolution of saintly dominions and the expansion of a landscape of sacred places that took shape in the region from the late twelfth century onwards. This expansion was closely related to the fascination exerted by sainthood and the celebration of local Sufi shaykhs as holy by members of the society around him.

38 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 4a–5b; and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 13:85–86.

Chapter 7

THE GRAVESITE AND THE NEW SACRED LANDSCAPE

IN THE TWELFTH and thirteenth centuries, the traditional assemblage of holy sites in Bilād al-Shām as a whole grew at an unprecedented pace due to the appropriation and transformation of older sites as well as the establishment of new ones. Historians such as Joseph Meri, Daniella Talmon-Heller, and Yasser Tabbaa point to a dramatic proliferation of funerary and memorial structures (*mashāhid*) and shrines (*maqāmāt*) of various types and a substantial rebuilding of structures around them during the Crusader and Counter-Crusader periods, during which events provoked an overall religious excitement as well as re-Islamization and re-sanctification of the landscape.¹ More recently, Stephennie Mulder has demonstrated how changes in religious feelings and architectural patronage created a unifying “holy land” in medieval Syria that centred on the shrines of the ‘Alids, revered descendants of the Prophet, and cut across sectarian and social divides.² However, while the expansion of the sacred landscape that commemorated events in the life of revered figures of Islam’s glorious past or harboured a relic associated with them has received considerable attention, the creation of new spaces of sacrality around the burial places of contemporary saintly figures is still unexplored.

Transformed into sacred sites that provided proximity to the grace of the dead and a channel to God, the Sufi shaykhs’ gravesites—known mostly by the terms *qabr* and *ḍarīḥ*, and sometimes as *turba* and *maqām*³—were material evidence of the quest for sanctity shared by members of local communities. Visitation of graves (*ziyārāt al-qubūr*) and supplication and worship at them was a widespread phenomenon in the entire medieval Islamic Near East, where frequenting tombs and shrines of saintly figures developed into a fundamental feature of Islamic identity and spirituality. Pilgrimage guides, written for Egypt from the thirteenth century and for Syria from the early sixteenth century, attest

1 Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 257–61; Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 184–98; Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety*, 32–49.

2 Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*.

3 On the use of the terms *qabr* and *ḍarīḥ*, see Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 265–66. A *turba* often denotes a tomb complex that contains the tombs of the descendants of a family or dynasty. *Maqām*, which is often rendered as “oratory” or “station,” is a place that does not ordinarily contain a grave but is invariably associated with a holy figure, and is often used interchangeably with *mashhad* (shrine) and also with *masjid* (small mosque). For more, see Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 269–70. In the sources studied for this book, the naming of a place as *maqām* frequently refers to the place associated with a Sufi shaykh and the spiritual power that is to be found in that “station.”

that by the time they were compiled, the cults of saints and the prominence of visits to their graves had long become commonplace.⁴

How was the holiness of the revered Sufi shaykhs rooted in “embodied localities” and their closeness to the divine given a concrete form and enduring symbolic meaning?⁵ This final chapter relates to these questions through an examination of accounts that shed light on the incorporation of the burial places into the landscape of sacred sites, or *lieux de mémoire* (“places of memory”),⁶ in medieval Syria, and the beliefs, narratives, practices, and material means that sustained their sacrality and ensured the centrality of the saintly figures in the lives of Muslim communities across time and space.

The Burial Place

By the early fourteenth century, the Syrian milieu was dotted with the lodges and gravesites of the Sufi masters and Friends of God. The revered shaykhs were buried in their lodges, in cemeteries, or in natural environments. Successive generations of their biological descendants and companions were buried side by side in provincial towns and villages, as well as graveyards and open spaces, clustered around their resting places. Burial by the side (*mujāwir*) of the graves of the first generation of masters, or at least in close proximity to them (*bi l-qurb ‘inda*), served as a tangible means of maintaining companionship relationships in perpetuity and further expanded the horizons of the sacralized land.

Little is known about the shaykhs’ burial places as physical places in the period under study, that is, their structure, size, architectural features, or decorative elements. The historian of Islamic art and architecture Robert Hillenbrand has observed that nearly all conformed to the typical form of tombs and mausoleums, namely, of domed squares.⁷ Many of these structures were probably modest in size and not architecturally differentiated from the surrounding buildings. But whatever their size and form, their association with the sacred made them focal points for pilgrimages and devotional practices. Men and women would come to the burial places to seek the favours and

⁴ For the appearance of Egyptian and Syrian pilgrimage literature, see Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 144–52. On the scholarly discourse on visits to the graves and the practices performed around them in Ayyubid Syria, see Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 175–76.

⁵ The expression “embodied localities” is borrowed from the anthropological study by Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu on the embodiments of Sufi charismatic authority in the sacred landscape of saints’ shrines and cults in modern and contemporary South Asia. See Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, “Introduction: The Embodiment of Charisma,” in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (London: Psychology Press, 1998), 3–21.

⁶ Coined by Pierre Nora, the expression refers to any significant place that has become a symbolic element of the collective memory or heritage of certain communities: Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁷ Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 270.

mediation of the Sufi shaykhs whose holiness was embedded in the land and to be in close physical proximity to their bodies from which they believed a flow of grace continued to spring.⁸

A large number of mystics and ascetics established themselves in Damascus and Aleppo in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods were revered as God's Friends in their circles of disciples and companions and society at large and imprinted their tangible and durable mark on the cityscapes and the areas surrounding them. Still, the major Syrian cities differed in the categories of saintly figures who extended the spheres of their influence and operation, as well as their demographic composition and sacred topography. As noted by Anne-Marie Eddé, ascetics and Sufis constituted two distinctive categories of holy figures in Aleppo.⁹ Some ascetics and pious worshippers celebrated as holy with no Sufi affiliation mentioned in their bio-hagiographies seem to have inclined toward Shi'ism. Biographical and hagiographical accounts that display the merits of the saintly figures of Aleppo are indicative of their various categories and the lasting impact of Shi'ism on the religious fabric and sacred topography of a city.

Damascus was persistently Sunni in makeup and regained its primacy as a political and religious centre under Ayyubid rule. As for Ayyubid Aleppo, a sizeable Shi'i community remained in the city in the aftermath of the "Shi'i century." This community clustered primarily in the city's western part, close to the location of shrines, which were associated with the Shi'is and continued to dominate the sacred typography. Among them are the magnificent Mashhad Ḥusayn, a sanctuary that celebrated the place where a drop of blood fell from the decapitated head of the Prophet's grandson while being transported from Karbala to Damascus, and Mashhad al-Muḥasin. Both shrines were erected west of the city's gates and stand to the present.¹⁰

Regardless of the local particularities, in both Damascus and Aleppo, the burial places of locally venerated shaykhs—in their *zāwīya* homes, near the old cities' gates, and in cemeteries and other sacred areas outside the gates, where large numbers of people could gather and perform ritual acts—became an integral part of the hallowed ground of Syria that crystallized around the tombs and memorials of biblical prophets, the descendants and companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the martyrs of the Counter-Crusade, and connected local communities to their own heritage as well as to the sacred history of Islam.

Normally, shaykhs who dwelt in dense residential quarters were interred outside but still near the gates of the ancient cities of Damascus and Aleppo. The gravesite of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī outside the Gate of Tūmā comes to mind. Some other burial places stood, side by side, near or in cemeteries areas where the Prophet's companions

⁸ For a seminal study on the bodies of Sufi saints as arenas of spiritual power, see Kugle A. Scott, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 2007).

⁹ Eddé, *La Principauté ayyubide d'Alep*, 419–22.

¹⁰ For more on the history of these shrines, see Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids*, 63–99.

and followers (*min al-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābiʿīn*) and relatives were believed to lie.¹¹ Among these areas was the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr (in the immediate surroundings of Damascus, southwest of the gate), one of the most significant Damascene burial grounds. Descriptions of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr frequently appear in the writings of medieval Syrian historians and travellers.¹² The Shiʿis consider the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr to be the most important pilgrimage site in Syria. After the Battle of Karbala, the heads of many martyrs, including that of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, as well as captive ʿAlīd's women and children, were brought to Damascus by the Umayyad caliph Yazīd. A number of these holy figures died in the city and were buried in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr (see Fig. 6).¹³ Among them was Shaykh Muḥammad Abū l-Bayān, who gained renown in Damascus.¹⁴ About 100 years after his death (in 551/1156), Ibn Shaddād listed his tomb in the Damascene cemetery as one of the pilgrimage destinations around the walled city.¹⁵ It was also in the Damascene cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr that a tomb complex, to which we shall have the occasion to return, grew up around the lodge and grave of the shaykh of the Qalandariyya Muḥammad al-Balkhī, next to the shrine of Sukayna, the daughter of Ḥusayn.¹⁶

Two graveyards that surround the walls of old Damascus from all sides developed around the burial places of Sufi shaykhs: Maqbarat al-Arsilāniyya (on the outskirts of Bāb Tūmā) around the tomb of Shaykh Arslān, and Maqābir al-Ṣūfiyya, the cemetery of the Sufis.¹⁷ Situated in the vacant area to the west of the city, on the axis of Bāb al-Naṣr near the large mosque of Tankiz (see Figure 4), Maqābir al-Ṣūfiyya was the only burial ground in medieval Syria that was explicitly associated with the Sufis, though it was open to all. As Christopher Taylor has pointed out, *baraka* was a significant consideration for the placement of the dead: to be buried near the grave of a pious figure was a way of securing divine blessing for the person interred. A place devoted to a whole group of righteous figures such as al-Qarāfa cemetery in Cairo was therefore sure to have a vast reservoir of *baraka*.¹⁸ It was also for this reason that the Sufi cemetery, which, according

11 On the Damascene cemeteries and their sacred qualities, see Mouton, *Damas*, 281, 325; and Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 46–47.

12 Especially al-Badrī, *Nuzhat*, 221–22, and the accounts by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in *Rihla*, 97.

13 For the history and plan of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery, see Mulder, *The Shines of the ʿAlids*, 114–18.

14 On him, see Chapter 1, p. 21, and the references there.

15 al-Nuʿaymī cites Ibn Shaddād, saying: “his grave is visited in Bāb al-Ṣaghīr” (“*wa-qabruhu yuzāru bi-Bābi al-Ṣaghīr*”). See: *al-Dāris*, 2:192.

16 *al-Dāris*, 2:210–12.

17 For more on the cemeteries in medieval Damascus, see Mouton, *Damas*, 281, 325.

18 See Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 47–91, for the lofty places known for granting active assistance and intercession of the saints in al-Qarāfa. In this respect, May al-Ibrashy affords insights on the cemetery as a liminal arena between the sacred and the profane and the belief in the possibility of catching a glimpse of the afterlife and attaining some emanation of the promise of heaven that made



Figure 6. Bāb al-Ṣaghīr cemetery, early twentieth century. (Reproduced from ASP Creative: Paul Fern/Alamy Stock Photo/Copyrights © KE 37J0.)

to the fifteenth-century historian of Damascus, al-Badrī, “is the resting place of many pious religious scholars, Sufi shaykhs and Friends of God,” was a popular burial site in medieval Damascus.¹⁹

Over time, additional funerary structures were added to the traditional landscape of holy places on Mt. Qāsyūn and expanded the borders of the hallowed land of the mount and the Ṣālīḥiyya neighbourhood on its slope. Some shaykhs asked to be buried there in proximity to the sacred sites and the burial places of mythical and heroic figures. The story of Ibn Qawām serves as an example. On the verge of his death, the shaykh of Bālis asked to transport his coffin to the holy land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*). His sons and companions fulfilled his will and buried him in the slope of the mount. Another example concerns Shaykh Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī. He died in 663/1238 and was interred by the side of Yūsuf al-Fandalāwī, the religious scholar and jihad warrior who

it so attractive. See May al-Ibrashy, “Death, Life and the Barzakh in Cairo’s Cemeteries: The Place of the Cemetery in the Sacred Geography of Late Medieval Cairo,” *Jusur: The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, available at <http://international.ucla.edu/cnes/jusur/article.asp?parentid=15501>.

19 al-Badrī, *Nuzhat*, 223.

fought the army of the Second Crusade (1144–50) despite his old age and died as a martyr on the outskirts of Damascus (in 543/1148).²⁰

Maqbarat al-Ṣāliḥīn, south of old Aleppo outside Bāb al-Maqām (see Figure 5), developed around the shrine of Abraham (Maqām Ibrāhīm) and is still considered one of the noblest holy places in the city (see Figs. 7 and 8). The earliest description of the cemetery is preserved in the book of holy places for pilgrimage by ‘Alī al-Harawī:

In the cemetery (*maqbara*) is a station (*maqām*) of Abraham, the friend. South of the town on the main road leading to the Damascus road, there is a well attributed to Abraham the friend [. . .]. Its virtue is apparent. It [the cemetery] also contains the tombs of a group of righteous individuals.²¹

Under the patronage of Nūr al-Dīn and al-Zāhir Ghāzī, the ancient shrine was renovated and became the focus of a cemetery for Muslims who wished to be interred in the vicinity of the biblical prophet. The location of the sanctuary outside the city walls made it possible for the surrounding area to serve as a burial ground and a place for a spiritual retreat.²²

Several Sufi shaykhs in thirteenth-century Aleppo were buried side by side in Maqbarat al-Ṣāliḥīn, and their burial places are pinpointed in the sources as objects of worship and pious visitation. Noteworthy among these is Tāj al-Dīn Ja‘far, known as al-Sarrāj, who gained renown in the city and beyond. The fourteenth-century historian of Aleppo Ibn al-Wardī related in his *Ta‘rīkh*:

At the end of the month of Sha‘bān of the year 649 AH, the shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ja‘far ibn Sayf al-Ḥalabī, known as al-Sarrāj, a man of outstanding miracles and trustworthiness, died in Aleppo and was buried in the cemetery of the righteous (*maqābir al-ṣāliḥīn*). The graves of Shaykh Ja‘far, Shaykh Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Ḥaddād, and Shaykh Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī are close to each other, clearly marked and often visited. Shaykh Ja‘far was a companion of the shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn al-Shuhrawardī and quoted [his manual] the *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* in his name.²³ He trained several eminent righteous people [. . .]. He educated his disciples in the Sufi path (*al-ṭarīqa al-ṣūfiyya*), disclosed mystical states (*aḥwāl*) to them in their solitary spiritual retreats (*khalwāt*), and caused many people to return to God.²⁴

20 On him, see Jean-Michel Mouton, “Yūsuf al- al-Fandalāwī: Cheikh des Malekites de Damas sous les Bourides,” *Révue des études islamiques* 51(1983): 63–76.

21 Cited by Meri, *A Lonely Wayfarer’s Guide*, 12.

22 Yasser Tabbaa, “The Architectural Patronage of Nūr al-Dīn (1146–1174),” PhD diss., New York University, 1982, 243; Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety*, 106, 108. For the shrine of Ibrāhīm and cemetery that grew around it, see also Herzfeld, *Matériaux*, 180–82.

23 On the dissemination of the spiritual path of al-Shuhrawardī, see Ohlander, *Sufism*, 165–86, charts 6 and 7.

24 Ibn al-Wardī, *Ta‘rīkh*, 2:183–84. See also the description of the cemetery in al-Ṭabbākḥ, *I‘lām al-nubalā’*, 4:401.



Figure 7. Jāmi' al-Maḳāmāt, Aleppo, Syria, early twentieth century.
(Reproduced from Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology, the Creswell Archive,
Copyrights © 2017 EA.CA. 5860.)

In a city abounding in Shi'i monuments and ancient shrines, funerary structures of local Friends of God had been erected since the Hamdanid-Shi'i rule in the tenth century and became the focus of *ziyāra* and an integral part of the sacred topography. An early, fascinating example concerns the figure of Shaykh Ibn Abī Numayr, who lived in Aleppo, in the vicinity of the Qinnasrīn Gate (see Figure 5) during a period of continuous Byzantine siege. The historian of the city Ibn Shaddād, recording the significant events in the glorious history of the city, described the heroic virtues and deeds of the shaykh:

‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, known as Ibn Abī Numayr al-‘Ābid al-Ḥalabī, was a pious saint and a scholarly transmitter of traditions (*muḥaddith*). He worshipped at the al-Nūr Mosque near the Qinnasrīn Gate, in a tower of the city wall of Ḥalab. The light of divine blessing was seen to descend on him frequently.

It happened that the Byzantine king Romanus Argyros came to Aleppo in the year 421 AH (1030) with 500,000 people, mounted on foot, and lay siege to it. The people of Aleppo then came to Ibn Abī al-Numayr al-‘Ābid and said, “Invoke God for us, oh Shaykh.” It is said that Ibn Abī Numayr prostrated himself on a shield that was with him and invoked Allāh, may He be glorified, for a long time until ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib appeared before him and apprised him that his prayer had



Figure 8. Carved decorated sarcophagus in the cemetery of Ṣāliḥīn, early twentieth century. (Preserved in the National Museum of Aleppo, reproduced from the Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, copyrights © 2015 J-098 TIF.)

been answered. That night the king of the Byzantines heard a voice in a dream that said to him, “Leave this town, or you shall be destroyed. Will you attack it when there is the worshipper on the shield in it, in that tower?” He then pointed to the tower in which the Shrine of Light (*mashhad al-nūr*) was located.

The king of the Byzantines awakened and told his companions what he had dreamt and made peace with the people of Aleppo. He said, “I will not leave unless you inform me about the worshipper on the shield. After that, they revealed him and found him to be Ibn Abī al-Numayr, may God be pleased with him.”²⁵

Shaykh Ibn Abī Numayr worshipped in one of the many shrines associated with the Shi‘a, and the accounts of his marvels interweave with typical Shi‘i images. Alongside these images, we also find in those accounts elements that recall the story of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī, who lived in the Sunni stronghold of Damascus more than 100 years

²⁵ Ibn Shaddād, *al-A‘lāq*, 128. A somewhat similar account is recorded in Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat*, 1:461–62.



Figure 9. The tomb of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī in the agricultural hinterland of Manbij.

later. Both shaykhs and the Friends of God were linked to the glorious history of the holy war against the enemies of Islam, the Byzantines, and the Crusaders, and are depicted as miracle-makers bestowing divine grace on their fellow believers to protect their cities and avert calamities. Situated near the cities’ gates, the graves of the revered shaykhs emblemized their role as protecting patron saints. At the same time, the location of the sites guaranteed their visibility in perpetuity.

In small provincial towns and rural areas surrounding the major Syrian cities, shaykhs were normally buried in or near their home *zāwīyas*, which developed as primary local centres. These included the burial place of Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī in his lodge that stood in the eastern agricultural area (*al-rīf al-sharqī*) of Manbij (Fig. 9), and the grave of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī in the cave, in proximity to his abode in Yūnīn.

The concept of the cave as a sacred place of a protective enclosure, spiritual retreat, and burial is a universal motif in traditions from ancient times to the present.²⁶ Its sanctity as the resting place of a saintly figure is well exemplified in the locally

26 For an analysis of the motif of the cave as a sacred place of burial in the writing of the eleventh-century Persian poet, scholar, and traveler Nāṣir-i-Khusrau, see Jo-Ann Gross, “The Motif of the Cave and the Funerary Narratives of Nāṣir-i-Khusrau,” in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 130–68.

grounded hagiographical lore which depicts the funeral and burial of the revered ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and that of his son and successor Muḥammad.²⁷ The hagiographer of his father, who devoted a significant portion of his work to describing his son’s merits, recounted:

Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh [. . .], God’s grace be upon him, died in the month of Rajab of the year 651 AH. The day of his burial was very significant and special. A large crowd escorted him to the grave. He was buried by the feet of his father, the great shaykh.²⁸

Other righteous people and Friends of God are reported to have been buried in proximity to the grave of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī as well. Among them was his close companion Shaykh Muḥammad al-Faqih, the master of successive generations of shaykhs in Baalbek. One of his natural descendants is reported saying, “When I stood with him by the honorable grave of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh, he said to me, ‘Oh my son, twelve men celebrated for their religious learning and piety will resurrect from this hallowed land.’”²⁹ Invested with memories and hagiographical narratives and attracting visitors wishing to be near the revered shaykh, the resting place in the vicinity of Baalbek, in a cave under the almond tree, was incorporated into the sacred landscape and eventually acquired sacrality of its own.

Sacralization and Perpetuation

As in many religious traditions, in Islamic tradition a building can be rendered holy not only through its association with a righteous figure or glorious event but also by dint of the practices performed there.³⁰ Unlike late antique and medieval Christians, Muslim pilgrims and visitors in medieval Syria and the medieval Muslim world as a whole did not leave behind travel diaries or first-hand testimonies that would permit reconstruction of their experience of the sacred. However, inventories and descriptions of pilgrimage sites and the rituals and legends associated with them, as well as travel itineraries like the *Rihlas* of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūta and historical and topographical accounts, confirmed the importance of the sites in the eyes of the beholders and crafted them into a kind of a map to pilgrimage and holy sites. Believing that exceptional merit devolves upon the burial place of the righteous and that their graves are forever carriers of divine blessing, devotees across socio-economic levels played a pivotal role in the sacralization of shaykhs’ graves. They took part in funeral processions, visited the

²⁷ See the citation in [Chapter 6](#), p. 113.

²⁸ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 43a–b.

²⁹ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fol. 5a.

³⁰ Scholarship on the seminal role played by devotees in the creation of sustained sanctity is vast. For general discussions, see the introduction to Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2005); and Smith, *To Take Place*, 10, 86ff.

graves, conducted devotional rituals there, and made donations for the construction, restoration, and upkeep of the sites.

The phrases “his grave is visible (*zāhir*), is visited and sought for,” and “people came on pilgrimage to visit him and receive his blessing,” recur in historical works and pilgrimage guides composed in medieval Egypt and Syria. Occasionally, their authors describe the practices that sustained the sanctity of the sites and perpetuated the memory of the venerated shaykhs buried there. At the heart of these practices lies the notion of the continuous presence of the saints whose spiritual power continues to flow from their graves. As such, the burial places of the saintly figures, like other concrete places and physical effects that made them present postmortem, may be seen as material forms of belief, central to the commemoration of their historical legacy and the sustainment of the belief in the miraculous.³¹

An account in the *vita* of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī serves as a fine example of the intercessory objects that helped perpetuate the beneficial spiritual forte of the venerated shaykh at the physical location of his grave and maintain his presence in his absence. It tells of a group of companions who addressed their steps to his lodge in Yūnīn, seeking honey from the almond tree that stood above the grave of the revered shaykh and was believed to be permeated with his enduring blessing (*baraka*). A close companion of his son and successor Shaykh Muḥammad is related as saying:

Once I travelled to Baalbek with some of my companions. In the middle of the road, one of them said, “I have a craving to eat almond-honey.” Another companion asked, “Does the almond tree next to the grave of the great shaykh, our master ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, may God sanctify his soul, still yield fruit?” The third companion asked, “When did the great shaykh, may God sanctify his soul, die?” When we arrived at the village, we discovered that the lodge had already been prepared for our visit. Shaykh Muḥammad received us, and we kissed his hand.

When we sat at his feet, the shaykh said to his servant, “Oh Aḥmad, bring me the plate of honey.” And he said: “Oh, ascetic companions, I have kept this plate for you for three days.” The servant brought us a plate filled with honey, and we ate. He asked another servant, “Oh Ma‘alī, there are almonds in the corner of the lodge. Give each of them two. These are almonds from the tree planted by our master, the shaykh.” We said to ourselves that both of our wishes had come true [. . .], and left the place in astonishment.³²

As for the resting place of Shaykh Aqīl al-Manbijī, the epistle about the Black Death by the contemporary historian Ibn al-Wardī affords a first-hand testimony of the veneration of the local saint in a period of crisis and the belief in the special merits of his shrine by

31 For a collective work that informs much on the centrality of objects and spaces and the ways they are used and experienced for rooting and sustaining religious belief, see David Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010).

32 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*, fols. 44a–b.

virtue of him buried there. He observed that at the time of the epidemic, streams of light shone from the shrine (*maqām*) of Shaykh ‘Aqīl and that of a certain Shaykh Ya‘qūb that stood on the outskirts of Manbij. The lights passed from one to another until they blended and came over the town.³³

Other later observers grant a glimpse of the experience and symbolic use of the lodge and gravesite of the venerated shaykhs by wide circles of followers and visitors who sought access to spiritual power and divine grace. These accounts further heightened the centrality of the space and site and commemorated the saintly figures for future generations of local believers.

Writing in the sixteenth century, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī points to the enduring significance accorded to the place (*maqām*) associated with Arslān al-Dimashqī and the grave (*qabr*) of his contemporary Abū l-Bayān by members of local communities. According to his testimony, people in his day would come to the well the revered shaykh of Damascus had dug near his dwelling place in the Gate of Tūmā to drink from its water and receive his blessing.³⁴ As for the resting place of Abū l-Bayān, “it is well known and frequently visited, and blessings are sought from it (*yuzār wa-yutabarrak bihi*). It has an endowment for lighting its lamp on a nightly basis. May God requite us with him.”³⁵

The best available information suggests that, by the sixteenth century, visitation to tomb sanctuaries as a communal activity at fixed times (as opposed to the customary private and occasional endeavour) had long become a common practice. The sources also suggest that from around the middle of the thirteenth century, seasonal festivals (*mawsims*) and saints’ days drew large crowds to tombs and shrines scattered around Syria.³⁶ In this regard, we may consider the account of visits to the grave of ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Nu‘aym, the venerated shaykh of the village of Sulaymiyya (in the region of Hama), whom his hagiographers describe as one of the greatest Friends of God and a performer of supernatural miracles. It is said that “His grave (*qabr*) is well known and visited, and that every year a great celebration is held there on the anniversary of his death in AH 657.”³⁷

Some burial places of the shaykhs, especially those that attracted the architectural patronage of the political elites, developed into domed tombs or shrine complexes with religious spaces such as prayer rooms built atop and around them. The role of architectural patronage in forming a space invested in memories and practices is clearly revealed in the accounts of the complex of a shrine, mosque, and cemetery that developed around Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī outside Bāb Tūmā (see Chapter 1) and in descriptions of the mausoleum built around the burial place of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī in the Ṣāliḥiyya. Setting out on a journey to the East in 1201–2, the great mystic

33 Ibn al-Wardī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2:353–54.

34 See the full citation in Chapter 1, p. 19.

35 Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *al-Ishārāt*, 62.

36 Talmon-Heller makes this observation in *Islamic Piety*, 207. In Egypt, the first organized-group-visitation *ziyāra* took place in the first half of the thirteenth century. On which, see Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 62–63.

37 Cited from contemporary sources by al-Nabhānī, *Jamī‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*, 2:322.

of Islam ended up in Syria, where he remained until his death.³⁸ For two centuries after his death, the views of Ibn ‘Arabī spurred intense controversy among religious scholars and mainstream Sufis. Some even accused him of deviation. Most famous is the attack on the monistic doctrine ascribed to Ibn ‘Arabī by the celebrated Ḥanbalī legal expert and theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Yet, sometime in the late Mamluk period, a local mosque was built alongside his burial place in recognition of his fame and legacy. The burial place became a pilgrimage site and a landmark in the topography of Damascus especially after a tomb, a new mosque, and a public refectory were built above and around it at the command of the Ottoman sultan Selīm I (r. 1512–20) soon after his conquest of Damascus in 1516.³⁹ A divination treatise attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī predicted the coming of the Ottomans and Selīm’s patronage of the site that was the first Ottoman building complex constructed in the vast territories of Syria, Egypt, and Arabia.⁴⁰ Ibn Ṭūlūn, who served as the first prayer leader (*imām*) of the new mosque, informs us much about its halls and places of retreat, as well as about the nearby soup kitchen where bread was served daily to the poor and guests, and the other adjacent buildings. Called Selīmiyya after its founder and endowed in perpetuity by him, the complex developed into a renowned religious centre. Ottoman officials and religious scholars who came to the city were said to visit the place to pray there and receive the holy man’s blessing.⁴¹ Like the complex that grew up around Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī’s burial place, that surrounding the grave of Ibn ‘Arabī came to be one of the most significant landmarks in the scared topography of Damascus and Syria (see Figs. 10 and 11).

In the cemetery of Bāb al-Saghīr, the ‘Alid pair shrine to Sukayna, the daughter of Ḥusayn, and Umm Khulthum, the daughter of ‘Alī, attracted the attention of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars soon after his succession to the Mamluk sultanate in 1260. As observed by Mulder, the extensive patronage of the site was linked to the desire of the sultan to support the shaykh of the Qalandariyya Mauḥammad al-Balkhī and his companions, who took up residence next to the ‘Alid shrine in the second half of the thirteenth century.⁴² Al-Nu‘aymī, recording the history of the Qalandariyya *zāwiya* in the cemetery, tells that the sultan invited the shaykh, of whom he was fond, to move to the court, but he refused the offer. The sultan then erected a domed building (*qubba*) for the shaykh and his companions and consecrated for the building a sum of money

38 On the travels of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 164–65, and the references therein.

39 For a detailed study of the development of the complex and the architecture of its buildings, see Cigdem Kafescioğlu, “In the Image of Rūm: Ottoman Architectural Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Aleppo and Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 86–90.

40 On which, see Zeynep Yürekli, “Writing Down the Feats and Setting Up the Scene: Hagiographers and Architectural Patrons in the Age of Empires,” in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, ed. John J. Carry and Erik S. Ohlander (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 106, and the references there.

41 The account is contained in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s treatise on the merits of the Ṣālihiyya: *al-Qalā’id*, 1:121–23.

42 Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, 141.



Figure 10. (Continued on recto page)



Figure 10. The mosque and shrine of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī. (a) The entrance to the complex; (b) a view of the interior and the sarcophagus at its centre. (Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

deriving from the funds of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Moreover, every time Baybars visited the city from Cairo, he donated 1,000 *dirhams* and two tapestries for the upkeep and maintenance of the building.⁴³ During the late Ottoman period, under Sultan Abdülhamid II, the shrine of Sukayna and Umm Khulthum was supported by another generous act of architectural and devotional practice. A small mosque was added to the lavishly endowed shrine and attached to the mausoleum of the Qalandariyya. This mosque is visited and venerated to the present (Fig. 12).⁴⁴

The shrine of Ibn Abī Numayr in the Aleppo cemetery, standing close to the gate of Qinnasrīn, is a further example of the sacralization of the architectural site that developed around the venerated shaykh and its incorporation into a landscape of Islamic identity and sanctity that cut across sectarian and social divides.⁴⁵ The site, which dates back to

⁴³ al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:212.

⁴⁴ Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, 45–46. For more on the role of architectural sites in forming what Mulder calls “a landscape of deeds” in medieval Syria, see *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, chap. 5.

⁴⁵ For the location of the cemetery of Bāb al-Qinnasrīn which may be traced to the twelfth century, see Jean Sauvaget, *Alep: Essai sur le développement d’une grande ville syrienne des origines au milieu du xix^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuther, 1941), plate 54.

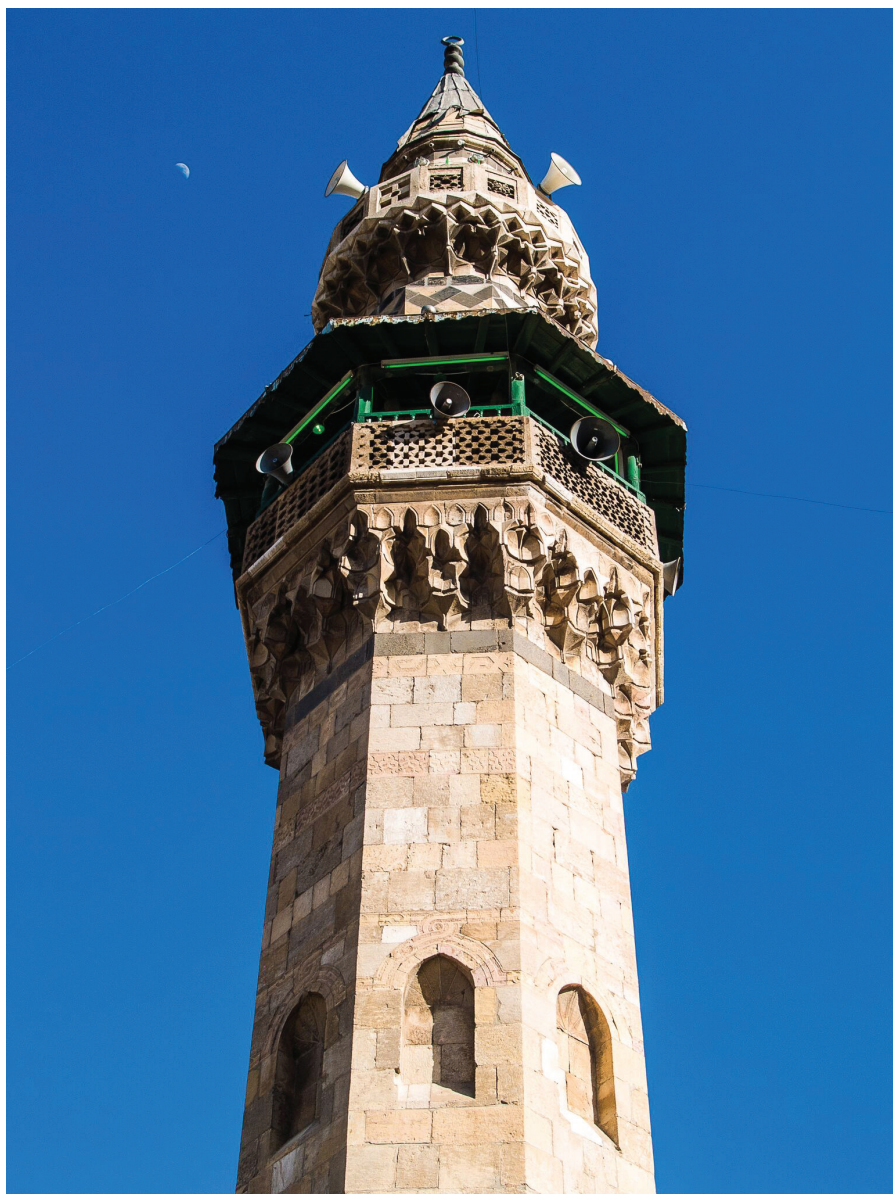


Figure 11. (Continued on recto page)



Figure 11. The mausoleum of Ibn 'Arabī in the Šālihiyya. (a) The mosque minaret;
 (b) the sarcophagus in a glass burial chamber on the underground level.
 (Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)



Figure 12. The Qalandariyya mausoleum in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr.
(Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

the early eleventh century, was renovated and remodelled by the Ottomans and became a well-known shrine and pilgrimage site venerated to our day. In his history of Aleppo, the modern historian Muḥammad al-Ṭabbākh notes that people make vows to Ibn Abī

Numayr and visit his grave even today: "It is said that his tomb was called the 'Opening of the Hour' (*samm al-sā'a*) because of its quick response to prayers. You can see people in groups and individually on their way to visit the saint."⁴⁶ Next to the shrine of Abī Numayr stands the shrine of the famous sixteenth-century Sufi shaykh Khalīl al-Ṭayyār—an object of worship surrounded by historical sites: mosques, *madrasas*, and shrines.

Equally significant as objects of visitation and worship in the modern and contemporary Syrian milieu are the burial places of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and 'Aqīl al-Manbijī. Their history, use, and experience over a long period remain obscure. However, there is no doubt that the sacredness of the sites that symbolized the presence and charismatic authority of the revered shaykhs was maintained and revitalized.

The author of the *vita* of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, who composed his work in the early eighteenth century, recorded stories of the shaykh's faithful disciples and companions that brings to light the creation of the site that, by his time, had long since evolved into a concrete and symbolic focus of a sphere of sacrality. Still an object of pious visitation, the site is included in the list of holy places in Baalbek by a tourist guide to religious sanctuaries in contemporary Lebanon. The sanctuary that came to be known as Zāwiyat al-Yūnīnī is described as

a cave divided into two rooms sculptured in the rock [. . .]. In the first southern room stands the praying niche (*miḥrab*) that is the middle of its wall. And near the corner lie the grave of el-Sheikh Abdullah el-Yunini as well as the tombs of many of his followers.⁴⁷

In early 2015, UNESCO reported that Salafist factions, mostly ISIS, who accuse Sufis of being supporters of the Syrian regime and denounce worship at tombs as heretical, destroyed all of the shrines in the Aleppo region. Among them was the shrine (*maqām*) of 'Aqīl al-Manbijī. The damage caused to this and other shrines in Syria has aroused much attention, both international and regional. Syrian websites have amplified the importance of the place and re-disseminated the stories about the life of the shaykh buried there. They describe the *maqām* of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī as one of the most important pilgrimage sites (*mazārāt*) and places of cultural heritage in the Arab homeland and note that people from all parts of the world frequently visited the grave (*qabr*) of the great shaykh, one of the most renowned Friends of God.⁴⁸

By the time the shrine of Shaykh 'Aqīl was demolished, his memory and legacy had already been perpetuated far beyond his homeland and the borders of the Islamic world. A local community centre established in Cambridge, Ontario, called Zawiya Fellowship is a most telling example of this dynamic. Its leaders identify themselves as followers of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī and as devout adherents to the 'Aqīliyya path which is traced back to its spiritual ancestor, the second of the four righteous caliphs of Islam's glorious past, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Khaṭṭāb. They state that their organization is designed to serve

46 al-Ṭabbākh, *I'lām al-nubalā'*, 4:402.

47 See www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb/en/TourismType/details/11/31

48 See, for instance, https://zamanalwsi.net.news_show/8601



Figure 13. The mosque of Shaykh ‘Aqil al-Manbijī in Cambridge, Ontario and in Manbij.

as a venue for local Muslims who seek to expand their knowledge about Islam and to support young members of the community in their quest of spiritual development and moral values. They conduct their activities in a mosque which they named Masjid Shaykh Aqil al-Manbijī, and which they modelled after the mosque of the revered shaykh in Manbij (see Fig. 13).⁴⁹ In this sense, the Zawiya Fellowship and the mosque named after the shaykh allow us to see how Sufism and Sufi charismatic authority are reproduced and inscribed in distant global settings.

⁴⁹ https://zawiyafellowship.com/th_gallery/mosque-of-shaykh-aqil-al-manbiji/

CONCLUSION

IN THE COURSE of the period that spanned from the mid-twelfth to the early fourteenth century, Sufi masters who functioned as embodiments of Islamic sainthood put down local roots in Syrian cities, towns, and villages, formed groups of disciples and larger circles of followers, and expanded the scope of their operation. By the end of the period studied here, a wave of lodges of native-born shaykhs and immigrant ascetics and mystics had swept the entire region, and their burial places had become an integral part of an expanding landscape of sacred sites. Whether standing inside the cities' gates and in small towns and villages, grounded in a natural environment, or formed wherever a venerated Sufi shaykh was present or buried, leaving a mark on the land, the concrete place that surrounded him became central to the expression of religious authority, communal devotion, and the belief in the miraculous. The expression "saintly spheres," coined for this book, has served as a key tool in analyzing this evolution. The study of their creation allows it to be seen as a history of the social construction of sainthood and the emplacement of holiness as viewed from a particular regional vantage point.

The acceleration of the authority of the Sufi masters to new heights and the rooting of their holiness in the land took place in the Syrian milieu of the Zangids, Ayyubids, and early Mamluks, a period marked by intense religious excitement, a revivification of the prophetic legacy, and the re-sacralization of the landscape for Islam. Situated within the broader political and socio-religious context framing this dynamic, the study exposes the concrete and distinctive manifestations of the emergence of charismatic Sufi leadership and the evolution of spheres of spiritual domination and sanctity during a seminal period in the history of Syrian Sufism and Islamic sainthood.

The first part of the book begins with a general overview that locates the figures in their regional and local settings. In particular, it discerns their places of origin and settlement and offers observations on the process of the localization of their spiritual routes. In what follows, I have drawn primarily on narratives about the lives and virtues of the three revered Sufi shaykhs whose saintly *vitas* are still in manuscript and have been tapped for the first time. Preceded by a discussion of general trends, the investigation centres on the sources of their spiritual and charismatic authority and the modes through which such authority was constructed and sustained within their groups of disciples and diffused into the society at large. A close reading of the bio-hagiographical narratives shows how various sources and venues were brought together on their road to sainthood and how they were put into practice in the milieu in which they were embedded.

The multifaceted figure of the Sufi master and God's Friend, representing a variety of religious traditions and pursuing several avenues, is well exemplified in the life histories of the three shaykhs studied for this book. Like other Sufi saints of their

epoch, both ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī brought paths of mystical and discursive knowledge to religious virtuosity and acquired renown as models of ascetic and upright behavior—attributes that had long served as a basis of constructing social standing and attaining authority in circles of religious scholars and Sufis. Both figures affiliated with the Qādiriyya, the most widespread spiritual path that was implanted in Syria, and both adhered to the dominant legal schools in the region. ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, an ardent Ḥanbalī traditionalist, is praised in his vita for his mystical states and especially for his ascetic habits; above all, he is lauded for combining an extreme mode of asceticism with jihad warfare. Much emphasis is placed on his awe-inspiring appearance and conduct, as well as his courage and heroic marvels in struggles against the Crusades. Ibn Qawām was a highly regarded legal scholar within the circles of the jurists of the Shāfi‘ī school to which he belonged. He is portrayed as a model of virtue and conduct due to his austerity, frugality, and humility, after the example of the Prophet. As for Aqīl al-Manbijī, he established a distinctive local spiritual path which was traced back to the righteous caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and was famed for his elevated spiritual genealogy, ascetic habits, religious knowledge, and ability to perform miracles. More than the two Qādirī shaykhs, he cultivated a reputation for miraculous authority, and his vita brims with stories about his spectacular evidentiary miracles. Moreover, his spiritual power was often publicly manifested in communal worship gatherings, in particular during the ritual “concert” (*samā’*) that involved dance and music.

For all the variety in the modes of their charisma and the overlapping sources of their authority, the revered shaykhs are distinguished in their vitas from other arbiters of true knowledge and revivers of the prophetic legacy by their lofty knowledge and the enactment of their extraordinary virtues. Similarly, while sharing with their contemporary pious and ascetic figures overzealous acts of worship and abstention from worldliness, they are set above any other believers. Moreover, they are said to have attained direct connection to God’s Messenger and the ultimate source of charismatic authority through dreams and visions, and, as such, are presented in the vitas as the most qualified to recast his legacy. Their superiority both as possessors of arcane knowledge and as embodiments of exemplary authority after the Prophet is nowhere more clearly displayed than in hagiographical narratives that demonstrate their extraordinary ability to detect food deemed to be ridden with misdeeds and hence forbidden. Refusal to accept food suspected of coming from confiscated lands or acquired by depriving the poor, decline of invitations to meals urged by rulers, and denial of rulers’ quests for the holy men’s blessing thus appear as essential means of expressing protest against acts of injustice. Accounts of their unceasing striving for purity in dietary matters and the employment of their knowledge of the hidden in pursue of morality and justice are, therefore, brought together in the vitas.

Through the embodiments of personal virtues and the enactments of *baraka* in concrete situations and in accommodation with the beliefs and expectations of others, the Sufi masters sustained their charismatic authority. In the words of the sociologist Pierre Deloof, “To be a saint means being a saint for others, that is being reputed as a

saint by others and perform the role of a saint for others.”¹ The charisma of the saintly figures is thus studied in this book with a view to what Pierre Bourdieu defined as an “embodied form” of cultural capital that was accumulated and sustained through its transformation into social capital.² This proposition is central for the discussion of the constitution of a committed group of disciples and companions around the Sufi Friends of God and their recognition as holy by the wider populace. Throughout, I have highlighted the performative character of their spiritual and charismatic authority as a cultural and social construct and its actual and symbolic manifestations in the shaykhs’ interaction with others.

Within small groups of disciples and companions, the shaykhs manifested and affirmed their authority in the symbolic practices of authorization: the bestowal of the patched cloak and the taking of the oath of fidelity. As formidable training masters, they supervised the inner experience and moral conduct of their disciples, interpreted their visions, rewarded truthful wayfarers, and punished those who strayed away. As champions of the poor and paragons of virtue, they provided generously for the needy among them and sought their well-being before they sought their own. As possessors of arcane knowledge, they performed the saintly marvel of instantaneous travel to protect their disciples in times of danger. Often, they granted to their close disciples and companions their cloaks or other physical effects that were believed to be capable of producing *baraka* and that would remain with them after their deaths and made the beloved shaykhs present in their absence. The disciples, for their part, expressed their submission and loyalty to their shaykhs by submitting themselves to their absolute authority, by maintaining close relationships with them long after they had formed their own groups of disciples, and by recounting stories of their virtues and miraculous deeds. Beyond their idealized and fantastical aura, these reports afford first-hand testimonies of the social dynamic of constructing and sustaining of charismatic authority and the expansion of the Sufi saint’s scope of operation far beyond small groups of disciples and companions.

In relation to the broader society, the Sufi masters and God’s Friends played a pivotal part in the movement for the revivification of the prophetic *sunna* that began in the Muslim East in the late tenth century and penetrated Syria in the twelfth century. They acted as zealous performers of the decree of commanding right and forbidding wrong and enacted their charismatic virtues to cleanse society and the public sphere from deviant and improper praxis, in particular, drinking or selling wine and the use of *hashish*. They made fellow believers turn to God in repentance, spurred their Shi’i neighbours to turn away from their deviant practices, and caused their Christian neighbours to forsake their faith. Repentance and conversion at their hands further validated their role as purifiers of the public sphere and disseminators of the true religion and attested

¹ Pierre Deloof, “Sociologie et canonizations,” in *Collection scientifique de la Faculté de Droit de l’Université de Liège* (Liège: Faculté de Droit, 1969), 7.

² Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed., ed. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (London: Routledge, 2011), pt. 1, chap. 5.

to the fascination the Sufi saints exerted on the converted people who believed in their spiritual power and were aware of their prestige and influence.³ My interpretation of the expansion of their operation is tied to the impact they exerted on local governors who sought their blessings and recognized their authority and social standing, their roles as patron saints against external enemies and unjust rule, and their ability to take over the task of a central political leadership in catering to public welfare and mediating disputes during a period of political fragmentation.

The second part of the book shifts to the spaces and sites that emerged around venerated Sufi shaykhs and their evolution into focuses of religious authority and spiritual power and as centres of communal gatherings and worship. Drawing on selected testimonies by contemporary and later historians and geographers and on relevant modern scholarship, the discussion begins with an overview of the foundation of Sufi structures of various kinds in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo and their suburban districts from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth century. My examination of their patterns of development and spatial layout has pointed out the affinity between their nature, location, and functional and symbolic designations. Usually, the *khānqāhs*, which were designed and bountifully endowed by members of the royal families and ruling elites to house groups of Sufis, were located close to the citadels and the great mosques and *madrasas* of Damascus and Aleppo. Others stood in residential quarters inhabited by their patrons, or in open spaces outside the cities' gates, close to the summer royal places. The location of the *khānqāhs*, I have suggested, was not simply a matter of spatial proximity. It signified the piety and role of members of the royal families and the ruling elite as benefactors of Sufis as one of the groups pursuing the truth of Islam. The much less formal and more modest home *zāwiyas*, by contrast, were built by or for a particular shaykh for the purpose of dwelling and guidance and were presided over by the founding shaykh and his successors. As such, the *zāwiya* stood wherever the master resided.

It was in the space of the Sufi lodge that centred on a locally revered shaykh and symbolized his presence and authority that a group of committed disciples consolidated and a broader circle of lay believers gathered to seek the holy man's blessings and to partake of the communal life of his group. Thus, the lodge of a Sufi master and God's Friend evolved as the focal point of his sphere of domination and as a social site for the visible affirmation of his spiritual and charismatic authority in relation to his disciples and companions and the society around him. This development, which came to be the prime manifestation of the prominence of Syrian Sufism as a social phenomenon,

³ In this regard, Devin Deweese has offered insightful observations on successful proselytization as a source of prestige and influence in the context of the late-fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century South Asian land of Kashmir, where Sufi saints were credited for much of the conversion that took place there. See Devin Deweese, "Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī and Kubrāwī Hagiographical Traditions," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 2: *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150–1500)*, 2nd ed., ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: One World, 1999), especially 149–53.

is traceable to the early generation of Sufi masters and God's Friends in the medieval milieu.⁴

Examination of accounts in the saintly *vitas* and other literary sources has served to illustrate the functions of the lodges as the dominions of their masters and as arenas for interaction with members of the society around them. Of particular importance are accounts that narrate their function as centres for the distribution of charity, as well as spaces that provided areas for large local communal gatherings convened at the ritual of the vocal *dhikr*, funerals, and burials, thereby projecting accessibility and outward orientation. With Sufi masters often buried in their lodges or close to them, the centrality of the *zāwiya* as a local public space continued long after their deaths.

Transformed into sites of visitation and veneration that provided proximity to the grace of the dead and the channels to God, the Sufi shaykhs' gravesites—in their home *zāwiyas*, in lodge-tomb or shrine complexes, in cemeteries or other spaces surrounding the built environment—were material evidence of their celebration as holy by all segments of society, and played a seminal role in expanding the sacred landscape. As other sites of meaning, memory, and spiritual power associated with a continuous presence of saintly figures and the miraculous character of their bodies, these gravesites became an integral part of a land of holy places that connected local communities to their own heritage as well as the sacred history of Islam, and eventually acquired *baraka* of their own.

The book as a whole examines a wide range of textual sources to shed light on the emergence of charismatic Sufi leadership and the creation of concrete and symbolic saintly spheres in medieval Syria. Throughout, I have fleshed out the significance of the oral traditions preserved in the saintly *vitas* and the works by Syrian historians, geographers and authors of pilgrimage guides, for the study of the construction and emplacement of Islamic sainthood in the region. Their analysis has yielded observations on the Sufi shaykhs' pathway to sainthood, their association with the glorious history and sacred topography of Syria, the inscription of their memory into the sacred landscape, their veneration by fellow believers and memorization for future generations.

Thus, my further hope is to offer ways to embed the history of medieval Sufism and Islamic sainthood in particular regional and local settings and to contribute to the interrogation of the intersection of hagiography, sanctity, and spatiality in the study of the creation and revitalization of saintly spheres across time and space.

⁴ For modern constructs, see Paulo G. Pinto, "Knowledge and Miracles: Modes of Charisma in Syrian Sufism," in *The Anthropology of Religious Charisma: Ecstasies and Institutions*, ed. Charles Lindholm (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 61–77.

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INDEX

Note: Page numbers in *italics* refer to figures; page numbers in **bold** refer to tables.

- Abbasid caliphate, 52
- ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, 6, 38–40, 66, 69, 136
- asceticism of, 39–40
- death of, 113
- grave of, 123–24, 133
- as Ḥanbalī traditionalist, 38, 135–36
- initiation of, 23, 46
- lodge of, 103–7, 109
- as shaykh, 39–40, 54, 55, 59
- spiritual chain of authority of, 46
- vita of, 7–9, 71, 74–78, 99, 125, 133, 136
- as warrior-saint, 74–75
- ‘Abd al-Razzāq, 46
- Abdūllḥamid II (sultan), 129
- Abraham, shrine of (Maqām Ibrāhīm), 120
- Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad, 24
- Abū l-Bayān, Muḥammad, 21, 21n6, 91, 118, 126
- Abū l-Ḥasan, ‘Alī, 23
- Abū l-Majd ibn al-Shaykh Abī l-Thanā, 41
- Abū Shāma (historian), 28, 38
- ādāb al-murīdīn* (rules of conduct for seekers of the Path), 101
- ‘Adawiyya path, 27
- Addai (Christian apostle), 27
- ‘Adī ibn al-Musāfir al-Ḥakkārī, 27, 108
- Aḥmad ibn Yahyā al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl, 7
- Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ‘Uthmān, 7–8
- Aleppo
- in the Ayyubid period, 117
- Bāb al-Naqām (Gate of al-Naqām), 98
- Bāb Qinnasrīn (Gate of Qinnasrīn), 97, 121, 129, 129n45
- bazaar, 97
- cemeteries in, 120, 129, 129n45
- citadel, 95–96
- destruction of shrines in, 133
- Farāfra quarter, 96
- Great Mosque, 96
- Ḥaryatān village, 98
- Jallūm neighborhood, 97–98
- Jami‘ al-Maqāmāt, 7
- khānqāhs* in, 96–99
- al-Maqāmāt (the Shrines), 98
- Mashhad Ḥusayn, 117
- Mashhad al-Muḥasin, 117
- Mashhad al-Nūr (Shrine of Light), 121, 129
- mystics and ascetics in, 117
- Quwayq river, 98
- shrines of Sukayna, daughter of Husayn, and Umm Khulthum, daughter of ‘Alī, 118, 127, 129
- Sufi structures in, 87, 95–99, 138
- thirteenth-century (map), 97
- zāwiyas* in, 97–98
- ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 28, 44, 45, 54, 64, 121
- ‘Alī ibn Sa‘īd, 59
- antinomian, 3, 28, 33, 72, 73, 73n25, 93; *see also* Ḥarīriyya; *muwallahūn* (Fools of God); Qalandariyya/Qalandars; Ṣaydariyya
- ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī, 26–27, 43, 56, 79
- encounters with villagers, 110–11
- family lineage, 7
- followers of, 27
- as Grand Shaykh of al-Shām, 27
- lodge of, 105–6, 108, 111–12
- as patron saint, 60
- miracles of, 26–27, 45, 57, 111
- tomb of, 123, 123, 125, 133
- visionary experience of, 45
- vita of, 6, 7, 26, 99, 105–6, 110–12

- ‘Aqīliyya (spiritual path), 26
- architecture
- architectural patronage, 14, 85, 96, 115, 126, 129
 - sacralization of, 129
 - of Sufi establishments, 69–70n17, 90, 96, 108, 116, 127n39, 129n44
- al-arḍ al-muqaddasa* (Holy Land), 25, 119
- al-Armawī, ‘Abdallāh, 12
- Arslān al-Dimashqī, 19, 84, 108, 122, 126–27
- association with Nūr al-Dīn, 19–20
 - becoming a Sufi, 20
 - birth and early life, 20
 - gravesite of, 20–21, 117–18
 - mosque and shrine of, 128–29
- Arslāniyya maqbara, 21
- asceticism, 25, 85
- dietary, 42, 54
- ascetics, 3, 4, 28, 34–35, 34n7, 72, 135
- ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, 39–40, 74
 - Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, 40
 - in Damascus and Aleppo, 117
 - Abū l-Bayān, Muḥammad, 21
 - al-Sāwuji, Jamāl al-Dīn, 29, 73
 - Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Zāhid, 25
 - Shaykh Arslān, 20
 - Sufi shaykhs as, 35–36, 37
- Ash‘arī theology, 67
- al-Aṭ‘ānī, Muḥammad, 97
- authority
- charismatic, 34, 37, 43, 48, 83, 134, 136–39
 - legal-rational, 34
 - saintly, 57–61
 - spiritual, 37, 83
 - of Sufi masters, 44, 48, 61, 103
- ‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif (*The Benefits of Intimate Knowledge*), 36, 101
- awliyā’* (Friends of God; saints), 3, 45, 48, 58, 68, 94; *see also* Friends of God; *walī*
- Ayyubid period, 3, 4, 21, 28, 33, 34, 35, 63, 67, 69–70, 73, 79, 84, 86, 89, 91, 135
- in Aleppo, 88, 95–96, 98, 117
 - in Damascus, 117
- Ayyubids, 4, 21, 84, 135
- Baalbek, Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, 5, 6, 7, 23–24, 27, 38–40, 55, 63, 69, 71, 72, 75, 78, 89, 104, 106, 109, 112–13, 124, 125, 133
- al-Badrī, ‘Abdallāh Abū l-Baqā’ (historian and geographer), 90, 119
- Baghdad, 20, 22–23, 27, 36, 46, 58, 67n7, 89, 101, 110
- Bālis, 6, 24–25, 40, 54, 57–59, 68–70, 79, 80, 95, 99, 103, 112, 119
- al-Balkhī, Muḥammad, 118, 127
- al-Baṭā’ihī, ‘Abdallāh, 23, 46
- al-Baṭā’ihī, Ibrāhīm, 54, 58, 103
- bāṭin* (esoteric knowledge), 44; *see also* knowledge
- Bayt Jabrīn, 29, 98, 108
- al-Bayānī *ribāṭ*, 21, 21n7, 91; *see also* *ribāṭ*
- Beqaa Valley, 23, 27, 64, 71, 72, 75, 99
- Bahā al-Dīn Hārūn al-Marāgī, 92
- Banū Yūnisī, 22
- baraka* (blessing; spiritual power), 12–14, 118, 136, 139; *see also* charisma
- Bayt al-Muqaddas al-Sharīf, 39
- biography, 24, 55; *see also* hagiographies
- bodies of the saints, 117, 139
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 137
- caves, 123–24
- cemeteries, 21, 116–18, 126
- of al-Daḥdāh (Damascus), 92
 - of al-Qarāfa (Qairo), 118, 118–19
 - of Bāb al-Qinnasrīn (Damascus), 129, 129n45
 - of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr (Damascus), 29, 92, 118, 119, 127, 132
 - of Bāb Tūmā (Damascus), 19
- Cemetery of the Sufis/Maqābir al-Ṣūfiyya (Damascus), 92, 118
- Maqbarat al-Arslāniyya (Damascus), 118
- Maqbarat al-Ṣāliḥīn (Aleppo), 120, 122
- of Rawḍā (Damascus), 94
- see also* graves; gravesites; tombs and shrines
- chain of companionship/chain of purification, 43, 51

- chain of transmission of mystical knowledge
and authority/spiritual chain, 21,
44, 46; *see also* *khirqā* (patched cloak);
silsila (chain of transmission of mystical
knowledge and authority)
- charisma, 12, 30–31, 37–38, 74, 136–37
primary vs. institutional, 52–53
- Christians
conversion of, 137–38
interactions with Sufis, 70–72, 75
monks, 27
Roman Orthodox, 66
in Syria, 64
Valley of the Christians, 65
see also Jacobites; Maronites; Nestorians
- churches
Church of Maryam (Church of the
Christians), 64
Church of St. Elian, 66
Church of the Jacobites, 64
Greek Orthodox Church, 64
- coffins, 25, 119
- commemoration, 6, 125
- Counter-Crusader period, 5, 8, 15, 16, 26,
35, 36, 48, 74, 115, 117
- Crusader period/Crusades, 5, 15, 16, 35, 36,
48, 63, 94, 115, 117
- cult of saints, 3, 4n9
- Damascus
in the Ayyubid period, 117
Bāb al-Farādīs (Gate of Farādīs), 92
Bāb Sharqī (The Eastern Gate), 91
Bāb Tūmā (Gate of St. Thomas the
Apostle)
cemeteries in, 92
city gates, 91–92
Darb al-Hajar neighbourhood, 91
Great/Umayyad Mosque, 88, 90, 92
Ghūṭa (the oasis around old Damascus),
22, 90, 90n20, 93
Ḥanbalī mosque, 38, 38n18, 76, 79
of Ibn ‘Arabī, 126–27
Jarrāḥ mosque, 92 (Damascus)
khānqāhs in, 88–92
Tankiz mosque, 92
Maghārat Ādam (Grotto of Adam), 94
Maghārat al-Dam (Grotto of Blood), 94
Magharat al-Jū’ (Cave of Hunger), 94
Mt. Qāsyūn, 6, 24, 25, 29, 46, 90, 94–95,
95n41, 106, 107, 112, 119
mystics and ascetics in, 6–7, 11, 117
palace of Ibn Marwān, 88
al-Šāgha al-‘Atīqa quarter, 92
Šālihiyya neighbourhood, 6, 24, 38, 94, 119
al-Sharafayn (the area between the old
city and Mt. Qasyūn), 90
spatial layout of Sufi establishments
(mid-fourteenth century), 93
Sufi structures in, 87, 88–95, 89, 138
Tankiz mosque, 92
*zāwiya*s in, 92–94
ḍarīḥ (grave), 115; *see also* graves;
gravesites
al-Darkizīnī, Jalāl al-Dīn, 29
Delooz, Pierre, 136–37
dervishes, 29
dhikr (recollection, invocation), 25, 36, 39,
72, 78, 98, 106, 113, 139
dietary matters *see* food
dreams, 44–46
appearance of the Prophet in, 45, 46
interpretation of, 48
see also visions
dress, 28, 35, 40–41, 42, 55, 56, 58, 61,
73, 101; *see also* asceticism; *khirqā*
(patched cloak)
Druze, 64
Eddé, Anne-Marie, 3, 117
Elias, Jamal, 44
faqīh (legal scholar, jurist), 23, 33
Faḳīh Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad, 23, 109, 124
fellow believers, 10, 13, 64, 65, 78, 102,
122, 137
fire-walking and fire-swallowing, 25
food, 35, 39, 40–42, 136
donation of, 39, 42, 91, 99, 107, 109–10
lawfully acquired (*ḥalāl*), 39, 42
prohibited (*ḥarām*), 42, 43, 54, 68, 136
refusal of, 42–43, 54, 67–68, 136

- Fools of God (*muwallahūn*), 73
- Franks, 59, 104
- Friends of God, 3, 5, 15, 25, 29, 34, 37, 53, 58, 78, 99, 107, 126, 135, 137, 138–39
- burial places of, 122, 124
- characteristics of, 38–39
- charisma of, 33
- funerary structures of, 120–21
- lodges of, 87, 116
- miracles of, 9–10
- see also awliyāʾ* (Friends of God; saints); *walī* (Friend of God; saint)
- funerary structures, 19
- of Friends of God, 120–21
- see also mashāhid* (funerary structures); tombs and shrines
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid, 49, 67, 68
- Geoffroy, Éric, 22
- geographical accounts, 15
- God's Friends *see* Friends of God
- graves, 19, 31, 80, 115, 118, 120, 124–25, 126, 133
- saints living in, 27
- visitation of, 3, 4n9, 20, 115–16, 121, 126, 126n36, 132, 139
- see also* cemeteries, *ḍarīḥ*, gravesites, *maqām*, *maqbara*, *qabr*, *turba*; tombs and shrines
- gravesites
- of al-Yūnīnī, 123–24, 133
- of ʿAqīl al-Manbijī, 27
- of Arslān, 20, 117–18
- of Ibn ʿArabī, 126–27, 130–31
- of Ibn Qawām, 25
- of ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Nuʿaym, 29, 126
- of shaykhs, 14–15, 20, 30–31, 99, 102, 108, 115, 116, 118, 122, 126, 139
- Gril, Denis, 51
- ḥadīth* (prophetic tradition), 22, 43, 91
- hagiographers, 28, 29, 54, 68, 69, 76, 103, 124, 126
- hagiographies, 6, 9–11, 15, 37
- of ascetics, 117
- firsthand accounts in, 8
- of ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Nuʿaym, 29
- of saints, 6–7
- as scholarly pursuit, 8
- self-testimonies in, 8
- see also* *vitas*
- Hama, 29, 30n50, 63, 64, 76, 89, 98, 126
- al-Hājj ʿUthmān ibn al-Hājj Muḥammad al-ʿUrānī al-Ḥalabī, 7
- al-Harawī, ʿAlī, 120
- al-Ḥarīrī, ʿAlī, 72
- Ḥamdānī Shiʿi dynasty, 69
- Ḥanbalī school (*madhab*), 24, 34n7, 67, 67n7, 76
- Ḥanbalī theology, 24, 73, 136
- al-Harawī, ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr (scholar and traveller), 94
- al-Harīrī, Muḥammad ʿAlī, 28
- Ḥarīriyya, 28, 33, 72–73, 93; *see also* antinomian
- Ḥaydar (shaykh of the Ḥaydariyya), 94
- Herzfeld, Ernst, 96
- Hilāl Ḥamdānī, 98
- al-Hilawī (shaykh), 98
- Hillenbrand, Robert, 116
- Hiyā ibn Qays al-Ḥawrānī, 56–57
- Hofer, Nathan, 5, 34
- Homs, 63–66, 72, 74–75, 89, 98
- hospices *see khānqāhs*
- Ḥusām al-Dīn ibn Lājīn, 78, 91
- Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, 70, 118
- Ibn Abī Numayr, 121–22
- shrine of, 129, 132–33
- Ibn al-ʿAdīm (historian), 24
- Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, 21, 126–27
- mausoleum of, 130–31
- Ibn Ḥanbal, 38
- Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, 19, 20–21, 94, 126
- ibn Swidān, Aḥmad, 56–57, 79
- Ibn al-Wardī (historian), 120
- Ibn Baṭṭūta, 124
- Ibn Jubayr (traveller), 87, 124
- Ibn Kannān al-Ṣālīḥī (historian), 91
- Ibn Kathīr (religious scholar and historian), 25, 28, 73, 76
- Ibn Khaldūn, 13

- Ibn al-Nu‘aym, ‘Izz al-Dīn, 29, 69, 126
- Ibn Qawām al-Bālīsī, Abī Bakr, 6, 24–25, 28, 40–43, 57, 58, 60–61, 67, 79–80, 135–36
- asceticism of, 40–41
- burial of, 119
- early days as aspirant, 55
- ethical purity of, 42–43
- funeral of, 112
- as legal scholar, 24, 25, 47, 67
- as mystic, 47–48
- vita of, 6, 24, 25, 53–54, 67–68, 69, 99, 103
- zāwiya* of, 103
- Ibn Rajab (biographer), 23–24
- Ibn Shaddād (historian), 95, 118, 121
- Ibn Taymiyya, 127
- Ibn Tūlūn, Muḥammad (religious scholar and historian), 6, 7n15, 24, 127
- Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, 75
- Ibrāhīm the Christian, 71–72
- ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, 101
- ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Ḥamawayh, 89
- ‘ilm* (esoteric knowledge), 34, 66; *see also* knowledge
- Imāmī Shi‘is, 64
- initiation practices, 55–56; *see also* *khirqā* (patched cloak)
- Ismā‘īlis, 64
- ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Nu‘aym, 29, 69, 126
- al-Jabrīnī, Muḥammad ibn Nabḥān, 29–30, 108
- Jacobites, 64
- jāmi‘* (mosque), 85; *see also* mosques
- Jāmi‘ al-Maqāmāt (Aleppo), 121
- Jerusalem, Sufi structures in, 87
- al-Jilānī, Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Qādir, 22, 23, 46
- jurists, 33–34, 37
- karāmāt* (extraordinary deeds, feats or miracles), 8, 10, 19, 27, 34, 37, 57; *see also* miracles
- Karamustafa, Ahmet, 57
- al-Katānī, Abū l-Faṭḥ, 42, 103
- Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, 20
- khadīm* (lit. servant, personal assistant at the master’s lodge), 103–4, 104n7, 105; *see also* lodge communities
- khānqāhs*
- in Aleppo, 95–96, 98–99
- al-Andalusiyya, 90
- in Damascus, 88–92
- endowed, 90–91
- al-Farāfra, 96
- al-Ḥusāmiyya, 91
- Khātūniyya, 91
- al-Najmiyya, 90
- al-Nāṣiriyya al-Barrāniyya, 91
- al-Shibliyya, 91
- al-Shihābiyya, 90
- Sumaysātiyya, 88–89
- Khiḍr (lit. “The Green One,” mysterious immortal saint and mystical guide), 44–46, 44n44, 48
- khirqā* (patched cloak), 12, 22, 24, 44–46, 54–56
- Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* (*Book of the Rules of Conduct for Seekers of the Path*), 35
- Kitāb Manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī* (*Book of the Virtues of Shaykh ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī*), 6
- Kitāb manāqib al-Shaykh ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī* (*Book of the Virtues of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī*), 6
- Kitāb zād a-musāfir wa-adab al-ḥāqir* (*Book of the Quest’s Provisions and Resident’s Comportment*), 101
- knowledge
- arcane, 13, 43, 59, 68, 136, 137
- discursive, 136
- esoteric, 21, 34, 44, 47, 66, 120
- about Islam, 12, 13, 25, 39, 43, 49, 52, 134
- mystical, 33–34, 36, 43, 46, 47, 50, 53, 136
- religious, 2, 22, 34, 47, 136
- traditional, 66
- truthful/true, 37, 136
- veridical, 37

- landscapes, 4–5, 15, 15n38–39, 83, 86, 87n10, 90, 93, 113, 115–16, 119, 124, 129, 135, 139
- lieux de mémoire* (places of collective memory), 116, 116n6
- Lefebvre, Henri, 13
- lineages (of saints and initiates), 7, 20, 22, 45–46, 55; *see also silsila* (chain of transmission of mystical knowledge and authority)
- Lion of Syria *see* ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī
- lodge communities, 101, 102–3, 104–6, 109, 111
- lodges, 1, 14, 22, 80, 135, 138–39
 of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, 38
 of ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, 24
 of al-Ḥarīrī, 28–29
 foundation accounts, 15
 functions of, 108
 hereditary, 86
 as local and public places, 102
 as local spaces, 107–13
 of Muḥammad ibn Nabḥān al-Jabrīnī, 30
 as ritual spaces,
 of Shaykh ‘Adī, 27
 of Shaykh ‘Aqīl, 26
 of Shaykh ‘Uthmān al-Rūmī, 29
 as spaces of spiritual and social domination, 102–7
 of Sufi masters, 61
 veneration of, 125
see also zāwiyas
- madhhabs* (Sunni legal schools), 1
- madrasas* (Islamic institutions for the study of legal and traditionalist sciences), 67, 84–85, 91, 138
 in Aleppo, 96
 in Damascus, 91
 Khātūniyya, 91
 al-Shāmiyya al-Barrāniyya, 91
 Maghārat Ādam (Grotto of Adam), 94
 Maghārat al-Dam (Grotto of Blood), 94
 al-Makkī, Abū Talib, 50
 Magharat al-Jū‘ (Cave of Hunger), 94
 al-Malik al-‘Ādil, 77, 80
 al-Malik al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Din, 75
 al-Malik al-Amjad, 76–77, 106
 al-Malik al-Amjad Bahramshah, 69
 al-Malik al-Ashraf, 73, 78, 79
 al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam ‘Isā, 77
 al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars, 127
 al-Malik al-Zāhir Ghāzī, 95
 Mamluk period, 33, 34, 35, 63–64, 67, 73, 84, 86, 89, 95, 117, 127, 135
 in Aleppo, 98–99
 in Damascus, 88
 Mamluk Sultan Baybars, 64
 Mamluks, 4, 22, 63–64
manāqib (virtues, meritorious deeds), 6, 8
see also hagiographies; *vitae*
Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, 6
 Maqābir al-Šūfiyya (the Cemetery of the Sufis), 118
maqām (lit. place; tomb; shrine), 19, 115, 120, 126, 133; *see also* graves; tombs and shrines
maqāmāt (stations of the mystical path), 21, 33, 48, 98, 115
maqbara, 21, 118, 120; *see also* graves; tombs and shrines
ma‘rifa (esoteric knowledge), 21;
see also knowledge
 Maronites, 64
 martyr (*shahid*), 19, 74
mashāhid (funerary structures), 115
 meditation, 36
 memorial structures (*mashāhid*), 115
 memorization, 39, 139
 Meri, Joseph, 115
 miracles, 9–10, 13, 15, 37, 126, 136
 controlling natural powers, 60
 detecting forbidden food, 42, 67, 136
 instantaneous travel, 58–59
see also karāmāt (miracles)

- Mongols, 5, 24, 61n42, 63
- mosques, 107, 138
 of Arslān al-Dimashqī, 128–29
 of Baalbek, 38, 113
 Great/Umayyad Mosque, 88, 90, 92, 96, 97, 127, 138
 at Ibn ‘Arabī burial place, 126–27
 of Shaykh Aqīl Manbijī, 133–34, 134
 used by Arslān al-Dimashqī, 20
 used by Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, 21
- Mosul, Sufi structures in, 87
- mountains
 Mt. Lebanon, 39, 59, 64, 71, 104
 Mt. Qāsyūn, 6, 24, 25, 29, 46, 89, 90, 94–95, 106, 107, 112, 119
- al-Mu‘addib, Abū ‘Amir, 20
- Muḥammad (Prophet)
 dream appearance of, 45, 46
 Sa‘d’s encounter with, 28
 Sufi shaykhs’ connection to, 43–48
- Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī, 21, 119–20
- Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, 38–39, 78, 107, 124, 125
- Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl, 59
- Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Qawām al-Bālīsī, 6, 24, 25, 95
- Mulder, Stephennie, 115, 127
- Muslima ibn Mukhallad al-Rūḥī, 26
- muwallahūn* (Fools of God), 72; *see also* antinomian
- mysticism, 20, 47–48, 83, 136
- mystics, 21, 33–34, 37, 46, 117
- al-Nāṣir II ibn al-Malik al-‘Aziz (sultan), 96
- al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (sultan), 86
- Nestorians, 27
- al-Nu‘aymī (historian), 11, 88, 127
- Nūr al-Dīn, 19–21, 63, 84, 89, 91, 95, 96, 120
- Nuṣayrīs, 64
- Ohlander, Erik, 36
- ordinary believers, 102, 105, 109, 111, 112
- patronage, 14, 84, 85, 86, 95, 96, 98, 115, 120, 126, 127; *see also waqf* (charitable endowment)
- Paul, Jürgen, 51
- “people of the Path,” 30
- piety, 34–35
- pilgrimage, 10–11, 58–59, 70, 94, 113, 118, 120, 124–25, 127, 132–33, 139
- pilgrimage guides, 15, 19n1, 21, 115–16, 125
- Pouzet, Henri, 88
- prayer rosary, 60, 113
- prayer rug/prayer carpet, 27, 47, 56, 77
- qabr* (grave), 115, 126, 133; *see also* graves; tombs and shrines
- Qādiriyya/Qādiri, 22–24, 136
- Qalandariyya/Qalandars, 28–29, 29n44, 72, 73, 92–93, 118, 127, 129, 132; *see also* antinomian
- Qalandariyya mausoleum, 132
- ‘Alī al-Qaṭanānī, 26
- Qur’an/Qur’anic verses, 22, 28, 47, 50, 53, 66, 85
- al-Qushayrī, Abū l-Qāsim, 49
- Quṭb al-Dīn Mūsā, 23
- Rāgheb al-Ṭabbākh, 96
- rawāfiḍ*, 64, 70
- Reid, Megan, 3, 42
- ribāṭs*, 86, 87, 101, 107
 in Aleppo, 95–96
 in Damascus, 88, 90, 91–92
- al-Rifā‘ī, Aḥmad, 25, 26
- Rifā‘iyya, 25–26
 Sa’diyya branch of, 27–28
- Roman Orthodox Church, 66
- royal families, 84, 91, 138
- rulers, 5, 41–43, 69, 74–78, 84–85, 88, 94, 95, 98, 106, 109, 113, 136
- ruling elites, 83–86, 89, 138
- sacralization/re-sacralization, 9, 124, 129, 135
- sacred sites, 5, 11, 94, 115–16, 119, 135

- Sa'd al-Dīn al-Jibāwī, 27–28
- Sa'diyya branch, 27–28
- sainthood
- embedment of, 6
 - embodiment of, 1, 3, 9, 11, 12, 56, 60, 135, 136
 - emplacement of, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 113, 135
 - popular spheres of, 3
 - road to, 5, 19, 31, 39, 135, 139
 - social construction of, 37–38, 42, 135
 - see also walāya; wilāya*
- saintly vitas *see* vitas
- saints
- categories and definition of, 3, 3n8
 - Christian, 9
 - hagiographies of, 6–7, 9–11
 - miracles of, 13, 15
 - vitas of, 6–9
 - see also awliyāʾ; walī; Friends of God; Friend of God; bodies of saints; cult of saints*
 - sajjāda* (prayer rug/payer carpet; symbol of authority), 47, 56
- al-Sakākinī, Muḥammad, 71–72
- Saladin, 63, 74
- Ṣālīhiyya neighbourhood, 6–7, 24, 38, 94–95, 94n36, 119
- samā* (ritual “concert”), 26, 110–12, 136
- al-Sarrāj, Tāj al-Dīn Jaʿfar, 120
- al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, Abū Naṣr, 50
- Sarī al-Saqāṭī, Abū l-Ḥasan, 20
- Ṣaydariyya, 73
- Sayf al-Dīn al-Rajīlī ibn Sābiq, 22
- Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur, 98
- Selīm I (Ottoman sultan), 127
- Selimiyya, 127
- Seljuk period, 52n14, 64, 85, 89
- Shāfʿī legal school/rite, 24, 40
- Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khābūrī, 47, 53, 60
- Shams al-Dīn al-Salsabilī al-Maṣrī, 92
- Shams al-Dīn ibn al-ʿAbbāsī, 55
- Sharaf al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan, 72
- Shariʿa, 34, 73
- shaykh al-shuyūkh*, 89–90
- Shiʿism/Shiʿi, 64–65, 69
- asceticism and, 117
- calling to repentance, 64–65, 69, 137
- in Syria, 64, 70, 117–18, 121
- see also* Imāmī Shiʿis; Ismāʿīlīs, Nuṣayris
- Sibt ibn al-Jawzī, 38
- silsila* (chain of transmission of mystical knowledge and authority), 20, 43–44, 44n42, 45, 47, 48, 55, 56; *see also* lineages (of saints and initiates)
- Sirāj al-Dīn ibn al-Mulaqqin, 24
- Sitt al-Shām, 91
- social capital, 137
- space, 13–14
- spatiality, 139
- al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn (biographer and jurist), 24
- Sufi buildings, 83–87
- in Aleppo, 95–99
 - in Damascus, 88–95
- Sufi lodges *see* lodges; *zāwiyas*
- Sufi masters
- as arbiters of normative praxis and disseminators of true religion, 66–74
 - authority of, 135
 - commanding right and forbidding wrong, 67–69
 - as communal leaders, 65, 74–80
 - connections to the Prophet, 43–48
 - disciples of, 137
 - as followers of God's Messenger, 36–37, 43
 - interactions with Christians, 70–72, 75
 - interactions with members of society, 78–80, 110–11
 - interactions with rulers, 69, 75–78
 - and the master-disciple tie, 67–61
 - as masters of the Path, 53–57
 - as “masters of training,” 49–52
 - as patron saints, 51–52, 65, 74–80
 - patronage of, 84–85
 - vitas of, 136, 139
- Sufi orders
- Qādiriyya, 22–23, 136
 - Rifaʿiyya, 25–27
 - Suhrawardiyya, 36
 - see also ṭarīqa*

- Sufi structures, 83–87, 138; *see also* *khānqāhs*; *ribāṭs*; *zāwiys*
- al-Suhrawardī, Abū l-Najīb, 35, 49–50, 55, 101
- al-Suhrawardī, ‘Umar, 35, 36–37, 50, 55, 101, 105
- al-Sulamī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, 49
- Sulaymiyya village, 69
- al-Sulamī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, 36
- al-Sumaysāṭī, ‘Alī, 88
- Sunna; prophetic *sunna*, 2, 34, 36–37, 43, 85, 102, 137
- Sunni Islam, 1, 4
- Sunni reaction, 64
- Sunni Revival, 1n3
- Sunnism, 33
- Sunnization movement, 64–65, 66
- supplication, 14, 94, 109–10, 113, 115
- Syria, map (mid-thirteenth century), 2
- Tabbaa, Yasser, 96, 115
- al-Tabbākh, Muḥammad, 132–33
- Tāj al-Dīn Ja’far (al-Sarrāj), 120
- Ṭālib ibn ‘Abdān al-Rifā’ī, 25
- Talmon-Heller, Daniella, 34, 115
- ṭarīqa* (spiritual path, Sufi order), 1, 21, 22, 26, 28, 30, 49, 55, 56, 57, 98, 120
- Taylor, Christopher, 118
- Ṭayy al-Maṣrī, 92, 112
- tekkes* (Sufi lodges), 101
- tombs and shrines, 4, 9, 14, 80, 115, 117, 117n10, 120, 122, 126, 133
- around the Qalandariyya lodge (Damascus), 29
- around burial places, 116–24
- caves, 123–24
- in cemeteries in Damascus, 92
- foundation accounts, 15
- funerary structures, 19
- in lodges, 102, 113, 116, 139
- al-Maqāmāt* (the Shrines), 98
- Mashhad al-Muḥasin (Aleppo), 117
- Mashhad Ḥusayn, 117
- Mashhad al-Nūr (Shrine of Light, Aleppo), 122, 129
- sacralization of, 124–27, 129, 132–34
- shrine of Ibn Arslān, 128
- shrine of Khalīl al-Tayyār, shrine of, 133
- shrines of Sukayna, daughter of Husayn, and Umm Khulthum, daughter of ‘Alī (Damascus), 118, 127, 129
- tomb of Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, 24
- tomb of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī, 123, 123
- tomb of Ibn Arslān, 20–21
- visitation of, 125–27, 132–33; *see also* *ziyāra*
- see also* cemeteries; graves; gravesites; *maqām*; *qabr*; *turba*
- topography, 15, 20, 88, 117, 121, 127, 139
- travellers’ literature, 15
- trees, 23, 40, 60, 72, 79, 109–10, 113, 124–25; *see also* caves
- turba*, 19, 115; *see also* graves; tombs and shrines
- ‘*ulamā*’ (religious scholars), 33; *see also* *faqih*; *ilm*; jurists
- ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Khaṭṭāb, 133
- ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 7, 45, 136
- ‘Uthmān (shaykh), 27
- ‘Uthmān al-Dīn Rūmī, 86
- Valley of the Christians, 65
- villagers, 27, 64, 71, 109–10
- visions, 44–45, 48; *see also* dreams
- vitas, 37, 135
- of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, 38–39, 71, 74–78, 99, 125, 133, 136
- of ibn Qawām al-Bālisī, 24, 25, 53–54, 67–68, 69, 99, 103
- of ‘Aqīl al-Manbijī, 26, 99, 105–6, 110–12
- complementary literary genres, 11
- firsthand accounts in, 12–13
- historical contexts of, 9
- rewards for authors of, 8
- of Sa’d al-Dīn al-Jibāwī, 28
- self-testimonies in, 45
- of Sufi masters, 37, 61, 136, 139
- see also* hagiographies
- walāya* (closeness to God; sainthood), 3, 3n8, 48; *see also* sainthood

- walī* (Friend of God; saint), 3n8, 21, 29, 47;
 see also Friends of God
- waqf* (charitable endowment), 84, 86, 90,
 95, 99; *see also* patronage
- Weber, Max, 34;
 Weberian paradigm, 12, 52
- wilāya* (exercise of spiritual power), 3, 3n8
- wine drinking, 54, 66–71, 104, 137
- women, 3, 5, 39, 42, 71, 77, 78, 80, 84, 85,
 96, 106–7, 109, 111, 116, 118
- world/realm of the unseen (*ghayb*), 5,
 43, 44, 46
- wrongs of hospitality, 68–69
- Yāqūt al- al-Ḥamawī (geographer), 26
- Yazīd (Umayyad caliph), 118
- Yūnīn, Beqqa Valley, Lebanon, 6, 23, 38–39,
 40, 46, 99, 106, 123, 125
- al-Yūnīnī, ‘Isā, 39
- Yūnis ibn Sa’īd, 22
- Yūnisiyya (spiritual path), 22
- Yūnus ibn Yūsuf al-Shibānī, 86
- Yūsuf ibn al-Hādī, 94
- Zangid period, 4, 21, 64, 69, 84, 90, 135
- Zangids, 4, 21, 64, 69, 84, 90, 135
- Zarccone, Thierry, 51
- zāwiyas*, 61, 86, 101–2, 107, 113, 138, 139
 in Aleppo, 97–99
 of al-Armawī, 94
 burial places in, 117
 in Damascus, 88, 90, 91–94
 Dāwūdiyya *zāwīya*, 94
 of Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī/Qawāmiyya
 Bālisiyya, 24, 94, 103
 ‘Imādiyya-Maqdisiyya, 94
 supported by donations, 109
- Zāwīya Fellowship, Ontario,
 Canada, 133–34
- Zāwīyat al-Yūnīnī (Yūnīn), 133
 see also lodges
- ẓāhir* (esoteric knowledge), 44; *see also*
 knowledge
- al-Ẓāhir Ghāzī, 120
- ziyāra/ziyārāt al-qubūr* (visitation of
 graves), 3, 4n9, 20, 115, 121, 126n36;
 see also pilgrimage