

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 (*adhkār*) 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-Jilānī, 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-Jilānī 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-Jilānī'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 Šāliḥiyya 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-Raḥmān 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-Sāwujī (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-Sāwujī’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-Sāwujī, 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 dwelled 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 (*‘abāya 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-Mu‘azzam ‘Isā, urged ‘Abdallāh 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 ‘Umar, *Manāqib al-Shaykh Abī Bakr ibn Qawām*, fol. 23a.

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

36 Reid, *Law and Piety*, 14.

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

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

39 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *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 *khirqā* 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 *khirqā* is used metaphorically to connote his initiation into the *silsila* al-‘Umariyya and the authority and legitimacy acquired through this honourable lineage. Through the *khirqā*, 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 Ansawati 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 vidas 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 Shi‘i-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 Shi‘i groups.² Among them were the Ismā‘īlīs, 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 Shi‘i sect, also established themselves in the mountainous area over Lattaqiya. As for the Imāmī Shi‘is, they were far from being a marginal group. In the cities and towns of northern Syria, the Shi‘i 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 ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib alone—a term that from the early Mamluk period covered all forms of Shi‘ism.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 Shi‘i 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 Shi‘i 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 *qal'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.