

## **PART TWO**

# **EMPLACEMENTS OF AUTHORITY AND HOLINESS**



## Chapter 5

# THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPATIAL LAYOUT OF PHYSICAL SETTINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> See the first story cited in [Chapter 1](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:202.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A View from Damascus

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

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup> al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:141–205.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:143–44.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>33</sup> Al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:162.

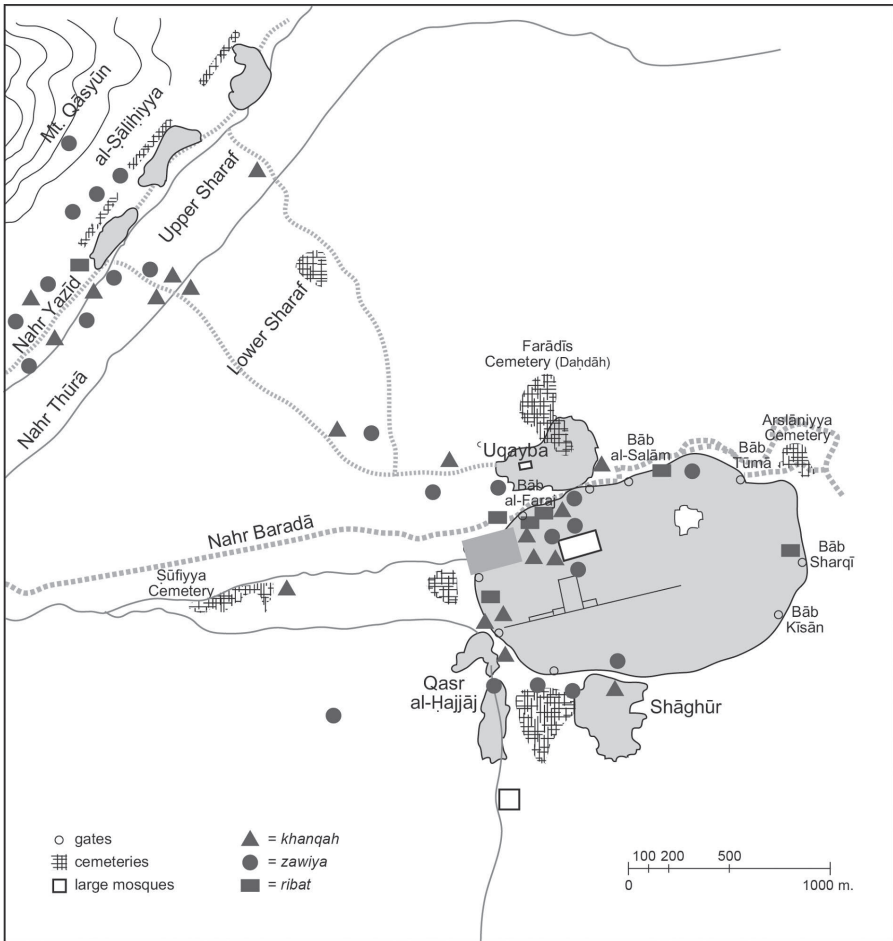


Figure 4. The spatial layout of Sufi establishments in mid-fourteenth-century Damascus. (Drawn by the author.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup> Al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:212.

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

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

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

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

<sup>40</sup> Cited by Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 51.

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

### A View from Aleppo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>46</sup> Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power*, 39–49.

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

<sup>48</sup> Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety*, 165–66.

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

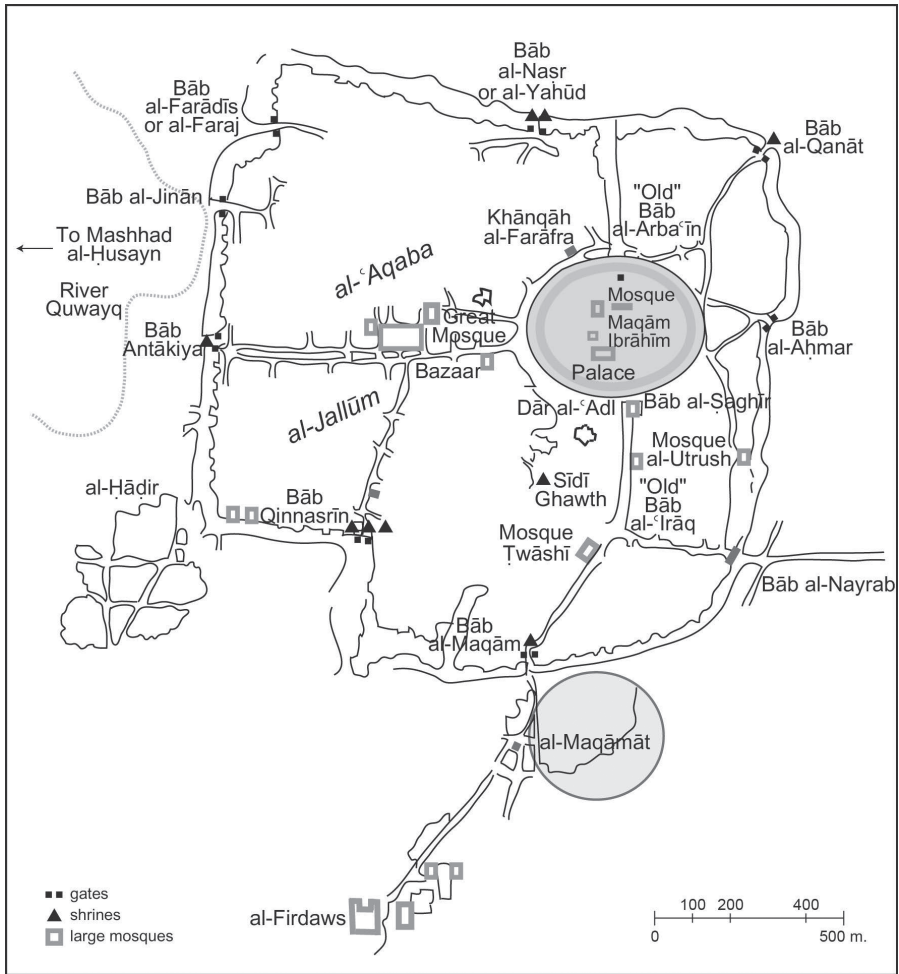


Figure 5. Thirteenth-century Aleppo. (Adapted from Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*, figure 4, with the permission of the author and the University of Pennsylvania Press.)

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>51</sup> For examples, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 219–20.

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

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

<sup>54</sup> On which, see Mahamid, *Waqf, Education and Politics*, 217.

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

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

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



## Chapter 6

### FROM DWELLING PLACES INTO SAINTLY DOMINIONS AND LOCAL SPACES

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Lodge as a Space of Spiritual and Social Domination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 See Chapter 4, p. 80.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Emergence of the Lodge as a Local Space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**23** Ibn al-Wardī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2:327.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The villager is reported as recounting:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36 Al-Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:196.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Chapter 7

# THE GRAVESITE AND THE NEW SACRED LANDSCAPE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Burial Place

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> Eddé, *La Principauté ayyubide d'Alep*, 419–22.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 *al-Dāris*, 2:210–12.

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

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



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

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

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

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

19 al-Badrī, *Nuzhat*, 223.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup> Cited by Meri, *A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide*, 12.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Sacralization and Perpetuation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An account in the *vita* of ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī serves as a fine example of the intercessory objects that helped perpetuate the beneficial spiritual forte of the venerated shaykh at the physical location of his grave and maintain his presence in his absence. It tells of a group of companions who addressed their steps to his lodge in Yūnīn, seeking honey from the almond tree that stood above the grave of the revered shaykh and was believed to be permeated with his enduring blessing (*baraka*). A close companion of his son and successor Shaykh Muḥammad is related as saying:

Once I travelled to Baalbek with some of my companions. In the middle of the road, one of them said, “I have a craving to eat almond-honey.” Another companion asked, “Does the almond tree next to the grave of the great shaykh, our master ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, may God sanctify his soul, still yield fruit?” The third companion asked, “When did the great shaykh, may God sanctify his soul, die?” When we arrived at the village, we discovered that the lodge had already been prepared for our visit. Shaykh Muḥammad received us, and we kissed his hand.

When we sat at his feet, the shaykh said to his servant, “Oh Aḥmad, bring me the plate of honey.” And he said: “Oh, ascetic companions, I have kept this plate for you for three days.” The servant brought us a plate filled with honey, and we ate. He asked another servant, “Oh Ma‘alī, there are almonds in the corner of the lodge. Give each of them two. These are almonds from the tree planted by our master, the shaykh.” We said to ourselves that both of our wishes had come true [. . .], and left the place in astonishment.<sup>32</sup>

As for the resting place of Shaykh Aqīl al-Manbijī, the epistle about the Black Death by the contemporary historian Ibn al-Wardī affords a first-hand testimony of the veneration of the local saint in a period of crisis and the belief in the special merits of his shrine by

**31** For a collective work that informs much on the centrality of objects and spaces and the ways they are used and experienced for rooting and sustaining religious belief, see David Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010).

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

virtue of him buried there. He observed that at the time of the epidemic, streams of light shone from the shrine (*maqām*) of Shaykh ‘Aqīl and that of a certain Shaykh Ya‘qūb that stood on the outskirts of Manbij. The lights passed from one to another until they blended and came over the town.<sup>33</sup>

Other later observers grant a glimpse of the experience and symbolic use of the lodge and gravesite of the venerated shaykhs by wide circles of followers and visitors who sought access to spiritual power and divine grace. These accounts further heightened the centrality of the space and site and commemorated the saintly figures for future generations of local believers.

Writing in the sixteenth century, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī points to the enduring significance accorded to the place (*maqām*) associated with Arslān al-Dimashqī and the grave (*qabr*) of his contemporary Abū l-Bayān by members of local communities. According to his testimony, people in his day would come to the well the revered shaykh of Damascus had dug near his dwelling place in the Gate of Tūmā to drink from its water and receive his blessing.<sup>34</sup> As for the resting place of Abū l-Bayān, “it is well known and frequently visited, and blessings are sought from it (*yuzār wa-yutabarrak bihi*). It has an endowment for lighting its lamp on a nightly basis. May God requite us with him.”<sup>35</sup>

The best available information suggests that, by the sixteenth century, visitation to tomb sanctuaries as a communal activity at fixed times (as opposed to the customary private and occasional endeavour) had long become a common practice. The sources also suggest that from around the middle of the thirteenth century, seasonal festivals (*mawsims*) and saints’ days drew large crowds to tombs and shrines scattered around Syria.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, we may consider the account of visits to the grave of ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Nu‘aym, the venerated shaykh of the village of Sulaymiyya (in the region of Hama), whom his hagiographers describe as one of the greatest Friends of God and a performer of supernatural miracles. It is said that “His grave (*qabr*) is well known and visited, and that every year a great celebration is held there on the anniversary of his death in AH 657.”<sup>37</sup>

Some burial places of the shaykhs, especially those that attracted the architectural patronage of the political elites, developed into domed tombs or shrine complexes with religious spaces such as prayer rooms built atop and around them. The role of architectural patronage in forming a space invested in memories and practices is clearly revealed in the accounts of the complex of a shrine, mosque, and cemetery that developed around Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī outside Bāb Tūmā (see Chapter 1) and in descriptions of the mausoleum built around the burial place of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī in the Ṣāliḥiyya. Setting out on a journey to the East in 1201–2, the great mystic

33 Ibn al-Wardī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2:353–54.

34 See the full citation in Chapter 1, p. 19.

35 Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *al-Ishārāt*, 62.

36 Talmon-Heller makes this observation in *Islamic Piety*, 207. In Egypt, the first organized-group-visitation *ziyāra* took place in the first half of the thirteenth century. On which, see Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 62–63.

37 Cited from contemporary sources by al-Nabhānī, *Jamī‘ karāmāt al-awliyā’*, 2:322.

of Islam ended up in Syria, where he remained until his death.<sup>38</sup> For two centuries after his death, the views of Ibn ‘Arabī spurred intense controversy among religious scholars and mainstream Sufis. Some even accused him of deviation. Most famous is the attack on the monistic doctrine ascribed to Ibn ‘Arabī by the celebrated Ḥanbalī legal expert and theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Yet, sometime in the late Mamluk period, a local mosque was built alongside his burial place in recognition of his fame and legacy. The burial place became a pilgrimage site and a landmark in the topography of Damascus especially after a tomb, a new mosque, and a public refectory were built above and around it at the command of the Ottoman sultan Selīm I (r. 1512–20) soon after his conquest of Damascus in 1516.<sup>39</sup> A divination treatise attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī predicted the coming of the Ottomans and Selīm’s patronage of the site that was the first Ottoman building complex constructed in the vast territories of Syria, Egypt, and Arabia.<sup>40</sup> Ibn Ṭūlūn, who served as the first prayer leader (*imām*) of the new mosque, informs us much about its halls and places of retreat, as well as about the nearby soup kitchen where bread was served daily to the poor and guests, and the other adjacent buildings. Called Selīmiyya after its founder and endowed in perpetuity by him, the complex developed into a renowned religious centre. Ottoman officials and religious scholars who came to the city were said to visit the place to pray there and receive the holy man’s blessing.<sup>41</sup> Like the complex that grew up around Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī’s burial place, that surrounding the grave of Ibn ‘Arabī came to be one of the most significant landmarks in the scared topography of Damascus and Syria (see Figs. 10 and 11).

In the cemetery of Bāb al-Saghīr, the ‘Alid pair shrine to Sukayna, the daughter of Ḥusayn, and Umm Khulthum, the daughter of ‘Alī, attracted the attention of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars soon after his succession to the Mamluk sultanate in 1260. As observed by Mulder, the extensive patronage of the site was linked to the desire of the sultan to support the shaykh of the Qalandariyya Mauḥammad al-Balkhī and his companions, who took up residence next to the ‘Alid shrine in the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Al-Nu‘aymī, recording the history of the Qalandariyya *zāwiya* in the cemetery, tells that the sultan invited the shaykh, of whom he was fond, to move to the court, but he refused the offer. The sultan then erected a domed building (*qubba*) for the shaykh and his companions and consecrated for the building a sum of money

**38** On the travels of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 164–65, and the references therein.

**39** For a detailed study of the development of the complex and the architecture of its buildings, see Cigdem Kafescioğlu, “In the Image of Rūm: Ottoman Architectural Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Aleppo and Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 86–90.

**40** On which, see Zeynep Yürekli, “Writing Down the Feats and Setting Up the Scene: Hagiographers and Architectural Patrons in the Age of Empires,” in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, ed. John J. Carry and Erik S. Ohlander (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 106, and the references there.

**41** The account is contained in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s treatise on the merits of the Ṣālihiyya: *al-Qalā’id*, 1:121–23.

**42** Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, 141.



Figure 10. (Continued on recto page)



Figure 10. The mosque and shrine of Shaykh Arslān al-Dimashqī. (a) The entrance to the complex; (b) a view of the interior and the sarcophagus at its centre. (Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

deriving from the funds of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Moreover, every time Baybars visited the city from Cairo, he donated 1,000 *dirhams* and two tapestries for the upkeep and maintenance of the building.<sup>43</sup> During the late Ottoman period, under Sultan Abdūḥamid II, the shrine of Sukayna and Umm Khulthum was supported by another generous act of architectural and devotional practice. A small mosque was added to the lavishly endowed shrine and attached to the mausoleum of the Qalandariyya. This mosque is visited and venerated to the present (Fig. 12).<sup>44</sup>

The shrine of Ibn Abī Numayr in the Aleppo cemetery, standing close to the gate of Qinnasrīn, is a further example of the sacralization of the architectural site that developed around the venerated shaykh and its incorporation into a landscape of Islamic identity and sanctity that cut across sectarian and social divides.<sup>45</sup> The site, which dates back to

<sup>43</sup> al-Nu‘aymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:212.

<sup>44</sup> Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, 45–46. For more on the role of architectural sites in forming what Mulder calls “a landscape of deeds” in medieval Syria, see *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, chap. 5.

<sup>45</sup> For the location of the cemetery of Bāb al-Qinnasrīn which may be traced to the twelfth century, see Jean Sauvaget, *Alep: Essai sur le développement d’une grande ville syrienne des origines au milieu du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuther, 1941), plate 54.

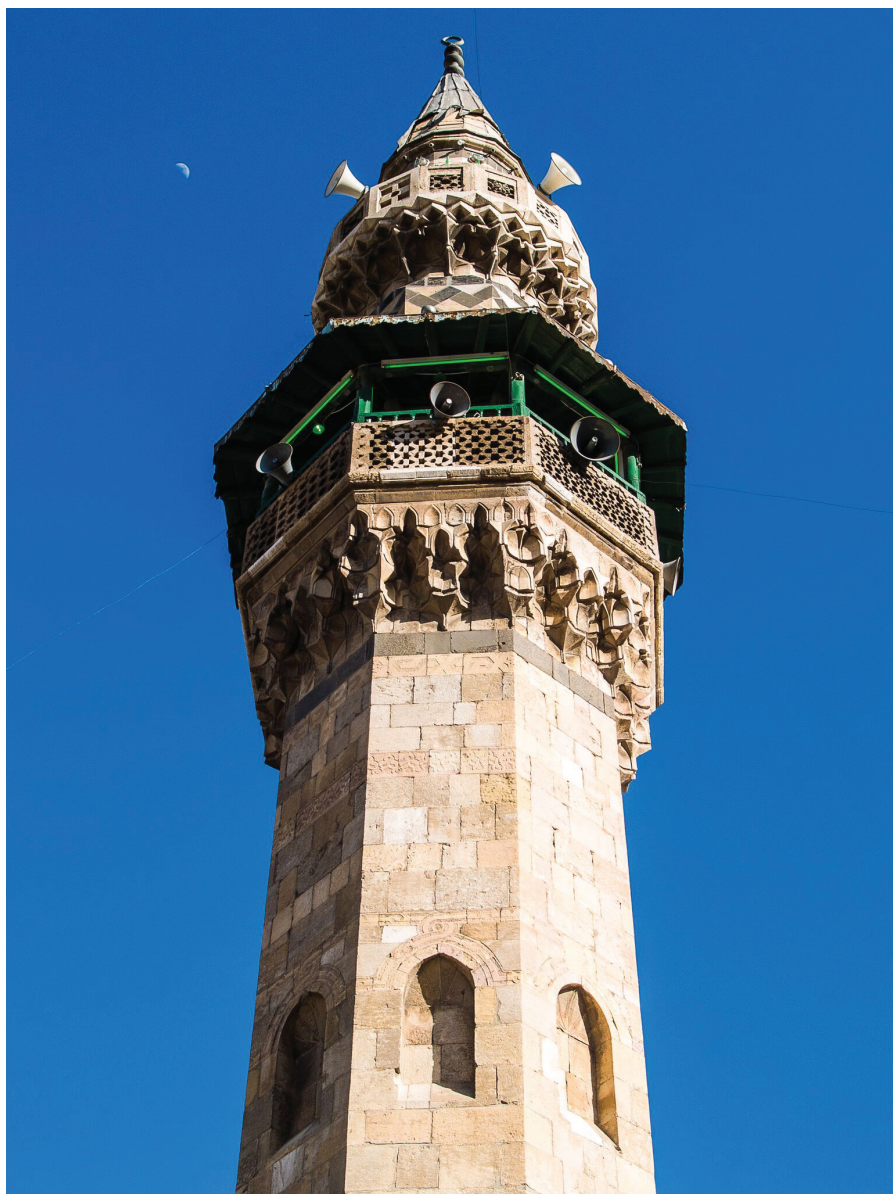


Figure 11. (Continued on recto page)



Figure 11. The mausoleum of Ibn 'Arabī in the Šālihiyya. (a) The mosque minaret;  
 (b) the sarcophagus in a glass burial chamber on the underground level.  
 (Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)



Figure 12. The Qalandariyya mausoleum in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr.  
(Photo: Daniel Demeter/Syria Photo Guide.)

the early eleventh century, was renovated and remodelled by the Ottomans and became a well-known shrine and pilgrimage site venerated to our day. In his history of Aleppo, the modern historian Muḥammad al-Ṭabbākh notes that people make vows to Ibn Abī

Numayr and visit his grave even today: "It is said that his tomb was called the 'Opening of the Hour' (*samm al-sā'a*) because of its quick response to prayers. You can see people in groups and individually on their way to visit the saint."<sup>46</sup> Next to the shrine of Abī Numayr stands the shrine of the famous sixteenth-century Sufi shaykh Khalīl al-Ṭayyār—an object of worship surrounded by historical sites: mosques, *madrasas*, and shrines.

Equally significant as objects of visitation and worship in the modern and contemporary Syrian milieu are the burial places of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and 'Aqīl al-Manbijī. Their history, use, and experience over a long period remain obscure. However, there is no doubt that the sacredness of the sites that symbolized the presence and charismatic authority of the revered shaykhs was maintained and revitalized.

The author of the *vita* of 'Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, who composed his work in the early eighteenth century, recorded stories of the shaykh's faithful disciples and companions that brings to light the creation of the site that, by his time, had long since evolved into a concrete and symbolic focus of a sphere of sacrality. Still an object of pious visitation, the site is included in the list of holy places in Baalbek by a tourist guide to religious sanctuaries in contemporary Lebanon. The sanctuary that came to be known as Zāwiyat al-Yūnīnī is described as

a cave divided into two rooms sculptured in the rock [. . .]. In the first southern room stands the praying niche (*miḥrab*) that is the middle of its wall. And near the corner lie the grave of el-Sheikh Abdullah el-Yunini as well as the tombs of many of his followers.<sup>47</sup>

In early 2015, UNESCO reported that Salafist factions, mostly ISIS, who accuse Sufis of being supporters of the Syrian regime and denounce worship at tombs as heretical, destroyed all of the shrines in the Aleppo region. Among them was the shrine (*maqām*) of 'Aqīl al-Manbijī. The damage caused to this and other shrines in Syria has aroused much attention, both international and regional. Syrian websites have amplified the importance of the place and re-disseminated the stories about the life of the shaykh buried there. They describe the *maqām* of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī as one of the most important pilgrimage sites (*mazārāt*) and places of cultural heritage in the Arab homeland and note that people from all parts of the world frequently visited the grave (*qabr*) of the great shaykh, one of the most renowned Friends of God.<sup>48</sup>

By the time the shrine of Shaykh 'Aqīl was demolished, his memory and legacy had already been perpetuated far beyond his homeland and the borders of the Islamic world. A local community centre established in Cambridge, Ontario, called Zawiya Fellowship is a most telling example of this dynamic. Its leaders identify themselves as followers of Shaykh 'Aqīl al-Manbijī and as devout adherents to the 'Aqīliyya path which is traced back to its spiritual ancestor, the second of the four righteous caliphs of Islam's glorious past, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Khaṭṭāb. They state that their organization is designed to serve

46 al-Ṭabbākh, *I'lām al-nubalā'*, 4:402.

47 See [www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb/en/TourismType/details/11/31](http://www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb/en/TourismType/details/11/31)

48 See, for instance, [https://zamanalwsi.net.news\\_show/8601](https://zamanalwsi.net.news_show/8601)



Figure 13. The mosque of Shaykh ‘Aqil al-Manbijī in Cambridge, Ontario and in Manbij.

as a venue for local Muslims who seek to expand their knowledge about Islam and to support young members of the community in their quest of spiritual development and moral values. They conduct their activities in a mosque which they named Masjid Shaykh Aqil al-Manbijī, and which they modelled after the mosque of the revered shaykh in Manbij (see Fig. 13).<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the Zawiya Fellowship and the mosque named after the shaykh allow us to see how Sufism and Sufi charismatic authority are reproduced and inscribed in distant global settings.

<sup>49</sup> [https://zawiyafellowship.com/th\\_gallery/mosque-of-shaykh-aqil-al-manbiji/](https://zawiyafellowship.com/th_gallery/mosque-of-shaykh-aqil-al-manbiji/)

## CONCLUSION

IN THE COURSE of the period that spanned from the mid-twelfth to the early fourteenth century, Sufi masters who functioned as embodiments of Islamic sainthood put down local roots in Syrian cities, towns, and villages, formed groups of disciples and larger circles of followers, and expanded the scope of their operation. By the end of the period studied here, a wave of lodges of native-born shaykhs and immigrant ascetics and mystics had swept the entire region, and their burial places had become an integral part of an expanding landscape of sacred sites. Whether standing inside the cities' gates and in small towns and villages, grounded in a natural environment, or formed wherever a venerated Sufi shaykh was present or buried, leaving a mark on the land, the concrete place that surrounded him became central to the expression of religious authority, communal devotion, and the belief in the miraculous. The expression "saintly spheres," coined for this book, has served as a key tool in analyzing this evolution. The study of their creation allows it to be seen as a history of the social construction of sainthood and the emplacement of holiness as viewed from a particular regional vantage point.

The acceleration of the authority of the Sufi masters to new heights and the rooting of their holiness in the land took place in the Syrian milieu of the Zangids, Ayyubids, and early Mamluks, a period marked by intense religious excitement, a revivification of the prophetic legacy, and the re-sacralization of the landscape for Islam. Situated within the broader political and socio-religious context framing this dynamic, the study exposes the concrete and distinctive manifestations of the emergence of charismatic Sufi leadership and the evolution of spheres of spiritual domination and sanctity during a seminal period in the history of Syrian Sufism and Islamic sainthood.

The first part of the book begins with a general overview that locates the figures in their regional and local settings. In particular, it discerns their places of origin and settlement and offers observations on the process of the localization of their spiritual routes. In what follows, I have drawn primarily on narratives about the lives and virtues of the three revered Sufi shaykhs whose saintly *vitas* are still in manuscript and have been tapped for the first time. Preceded by a discussion of general trends, the investigation centres on the sources of their spiritual and charismatic authority and the modes through which such authority was constructed and sustained within their groups of disciples and diffused into the society at large. A close reading of the bio-hagiographical narratives shows how various sources and venues were brought together on their road to sainthood and how they were put into practice in the milieu in which they were embedded.

The multifaceted figure of the Sufi master and God's Friend, representing a variety of religious traditions and pursuing several avenues, is well exemplified in the life histories of the three shaykhs studied for this book. Like other Sufi saints of their

epoch, both ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī and Ibn Qawām al-Bālisī brought paths of mystical and discursive knowledge to religious virtuosity and acquired renown as models of ascetic and upright behavior—attributes that had long served as a basis of constructing social standing and attaining authority in circles of religious scholars and Sufis. Both figures affiliated with the Qādiriyya, the most widespread spiritual path that was implanted in Syria, and both adhered to the dominant legal schools in the region. ‘Abdallāh al-Yūnīnī, an ardent Ḥanbalī traditionalist, is praised in his vita for his mystical states and especially for his ascetic habits; above all, he is lauded for combining an extreme mode of asceticism with jihad warfare. Much emphasis is placed on his awe-inspiring appearance and conduct, as well as his courage and heroic marvels in struggles against the Crusades. Ibn Qawām was a highly regarded legal scholar within the circles of the jurists of the Shāfi‘ī school to which he belonged. He is portrayed as a model of virtue and conduct due to his austerity, frugality, and humility, after the example of the Prophet. As for Aqīl al-Manbijī, he established a distinctive local spiritual path which was traced back to the righteous caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and was famed for his elevated spiritual genealogy, ascetic habits, religious knowledge, and ability to perform miracles. More than the two Qādirī shaykhs, he cultivated a reputation for miraculous authority, and his vita brims with stories about his spectacular evidentiary miracles. Moreover, his spiritual power was often publicly manifested in communal worship gatherings, in particular during the ritual “concert” (*samā’*) that involved dance and music.

For all the variety in the modes of their charisma and the overlapping sources of their authority, the revered shaykhs are distinguished in their vitas from other arbiters of true knowledge and revivers of the prophetic legacy by their lofty knowledge and the enactment of their extraordinary virtues. Similarly, while sharing with their contemporary pious and ascetic figures overzealous acts of worship and abstention from worldliness, they are set above any other believers. Moreover, they are said to have attained direct connection to God’s Messenger and the ultimate source of charismatic authority through dreams and visions, and, as such, are presented in the vitas as the most qualified to recast his legacy. Their superiority both as possessors of arcane knowledge and as embodiments of exemplary authority after the Prophet is nowhere more clearly displayed than in hagiographical narratives that demonstrate their extraordinary ability to detect food deemed to be ridden with misdeeds and hence forbidden. Refusal to accept food suspected of coming from confiscated lands or acquired by depriving the poor, decline of invitations to meals urged by rulers, and denial of rulers’ quests for the holy men’s blessing thus appear as essential means of expressing protest against acts of injustice. Accounts of their unceasing striving for purity in dietary matters and the employment of their knowledge of the hidden in pursue of morality and justice are, therefore, brought together in the vitas.

Through the embodiments of personal virtues and the enactments of *baraka* in concrete situations and in accommodation with the beliefs and expectations of others, the Sufi masters sustained their charismatic authority. In the words of the sociologist Pierre Deloof, “To be a saint means being a saint for others, that is being reputed as a

saint by others and perform the role of a saint for others.”<sup>1</sup> The charisma of the saintly figures is thus studied in this book with a view to what Pierre Bourdieu defined as an “embodied form” of cultural capital that was accumulated and sustained through its transformation into social capital.<sup>2</sup> This proposition is central for the discussion of the constitution of a committed group of disciples and companions around the Sufi Friends of God and their recognition as holy by the wider populace. Throughout, I have highlighted the performative character of their spiritual and charismatic authority as a cultural and social construct and its actual and symbolic manifestations in the shaykhs’ interaction with others.

Within small groups of disciples and companions, the shaykhs manifested and affirmed their authority in the symbolic practices of authorization: the bestowal of the patched cloak and the taking of the oath of fidelity. As formidable training masters, they supervised the inner experience and moral conduct of their disciples, interpreted their visions, rewarded truthful wayfarers, and punished those who strayed away. As champions of the poor and paragons of virtue, they provided generously for the needy among them and sought their well-being before they sought their own. As possessors of arcane knowledge, they performed the saintly marvel of instantaneous travel to protect their disciples in times of danger. Often, they granted to their close disciples and companions their cloaks or other physical effects that were believed to be capable of producing *baraka* and that would remain with them after their deaths and made the beloved shaykhs present in their absence. The disciples, for their part, expressed their submission and loyalty to their shaykhs by submitting themselves to their absolute authority, by maintaining close relationships with them long after they had formed their own groups of disciples, and by recounting stories of their virtues and miraculous deeds. Beyond their idealized and fantastical aura, these reports afford first-hand testimonies of the social dynamic of constructing and sustaining of charismatic authority and the expansion of the Sufi saint’s scope of operation far beyond small groups of disciples and companions.

In relation to the broader society, the Sufi masters and God’s Friends played a pivotal part in the movement for the revivification of the prophetic *sunna* that began in the Muslim East in the late tenth century and penetrated Syria in the twelfth century. They acted as zealous performers of the decree of commanding right and forbidding wrong and enacted their charismatic virtues to cleanse society and the public sphere from deviant and improper praxis, in particular, drinking or selling wine and the use of *hashish*. They made fellow believers turn to God in repentance, spurred their Shi’i neighbours to turn away from their deviant practices, and caused their Christian neighbours to forsake their faith. Repentance and conversion at their hands further validated their role as purifiers of the public sphere and disseminators of the true religion and attested

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Deloof, “Sociologie et canonizations,” in *Collection scientifique de la Faculté de Droit de l’Université de Liège* (Liège: Faculté de Droit, 1969), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed., ed. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (London: Routledge, 2011), pt. 1, chap. 5.

to the fascination the Sufi saints exerted on the converted people who believed in their spiritual power and were aware of their prestige and influence.<sup>3</sup> My interpretation of the expansion of their operation is tied to the impact they exerted on local governors who sought their blessings and recognized their authority and social standing, their roles as patron saints against external enemies and unjust rule, and their ability to take over the task of a central political leadership in catering to public welfare and mediating disputes during a period of political fragmentation.

The second part of the book shifts to the spaces and sites that emerged around venerated Sufi shaykhs and their evolution into focuses of religious authority and spiritual power and as centres of communal gatherings and worship. Drawing on selected testimonies by contemporary and later historians and geographers and on relevant modern scholarship, the discussion begins with an overview of the foundation of Sufi structures of various kinds in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo and their suburban districts from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth century. My examination of their patterns of development and spatial layout has pointed out the affinity between their nature, location, and functional and symbolic designations. Usually, the *khānqāhs*, which were designed and bountifully endowed by members of the royal families and ruling elites to house groups of Sufis, were located close to the citadels and the great mosques and *madrasas* of Damascus and Aleppo. Others stood in residential quarters inhabited by their patrons, or in open spaces outside the cities' gates, close to the summer royal places. The location of the *khānqāhs*, I have suggested, was not simply a matter of spatial proximity. It signified the piety and role of members of the royal families and the ruling elite as benefactors of Sufis as one of the groups pursuing the truth of Islam. The much less formal and more modest home *zāwiyas*, by contrast, were built by or for a particular shaykh for the purpose of dwelling and guidance and were presided over by the founding shaykh and his successors. As such, the *zāwiya* stood wherever the master resided.

It was in the space of the Sufi lodge that centred on a locally revered shaykh and symbolized his presence and authority that a group of committed disciples consolidated and a broader circle of lay believers gathered to seek the holy man's blessings and to partake of the communal life of his group. Thus, the lodge of a Sufi master and God's Friend evolved as the focal point of his sphere of domination and as a social site for the visible affirmation of his spiritual and charismatic authority in relation to his disciples and companions and the society around him. This development, which came to be the prime manifestation of the prominence of Syrian Sufism as a social phenomenon,

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Devin Deweese has offered insightful observations on successful proselytization as a source of prestige and influence in the context of the late-fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century South Asian land of Kashmir, where Sufi saints were credited for much of the conversion that took place there. See Devin Deweese, "Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī and Kubrāwī Hagiographical Traditions," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 2: *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150–1500)*, 2nd ed., ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: One World, 1999), especially 149–53.

is traceable to the early generation of Sufi masters and God's Friends in the medieval milieu.<sup>4</sup>

Examination of accounts in the saintly *vitas* and other literary sources has served to illustrate the functions of the lodges as the dominions of their masters and as arenas for interaction with members of the society around them. Of particular importance are accounts that narrate their function as centres for the distribution of charity, as well as spaces that provided areas for large local communal gatherings convened at the ritual of the vocal *dhikr*, funerals, and burials, thereby projecting accessibility and outward orientation. With Sufi masters often buried in their lodges or close to them, the centrality of the *zāwiya* as a local public space continued long after their deaths.

Transformed into sites of visitation and veneration that provided proximity to the grace of the dead and the channels to God, the Sufi shaykhs' gravesites—in their home *zāwiyas*, in lodge-tomb or shrine complexes, in cemeteries or other spaces surrounding the built environment—were material evidence of their celebration as holy by all segments of society, and played a seminal role in expanding the sacred landscape. As other sites of meaning, memory, and spiritual power associated with a continuous presence of saintly figures and the miraculous character of their bodies, these gravesites became an integral part of a land of holy places that connected local communities to their own heritage as well as the sacred history of Islam, and eventually acquired *baraka* of their own.

The book as a whole examines a wide range of textual sources to shed light on the emergence of charismatic Sufi leadership and the creation of concrete and symbolic saintly spheres in medieval Syria. Throughout, I have fleshed out the significance of the oral traditions preserved in the saintly *vitas* and the works by Syrian historians, geographers and authors of pilgrimage guides, for the study of the construction and emplacement of Islamic sainthood in the region. Their analysis has yielded observations on the Sufi shaykhs' pathway to sainthood, their association with the glorious history and sacred topography of Syria, the inscription of their memory into the sacred landscape, their veneration by fellow believers and memorization for future generations.

Thus, my further hope is to offer ways to embed the history of medieval Sufism and Islamic sainthood in particular regional and local settings and to contribute to the interrogation of the intersection of hagiography, sanctity, and spatiality in the study of the creation and revitalization of saintly spheres across time and space.

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<sup>4</sup> For modern constructs, see Paulo G. Pinto, "Knowledge and Miracles: Modes of Charisma in Syrian Sufism," in *The Anthropology of Religious Charisma: Ecstasies and Institutions*, ed. Charles Lindholm (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 61–77.

