

7. The ‘Ayyārs, Sufism, and Chivalry

Ei mihi! Dic mihi per miserationes tuas, domine deus
meus, quid sis mihi. Dic animae meae: Ecce aures
cordis mei ante te, domine; aperi eas et dic animae
meae: saluas tua ego sum.

– St. Augustine

A true knight ... matchless, firm of word,
Speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue;
Not soon provoked nor being provoked soon calm’d:
His heart and hand both open and both free;
For what he has he gives, what thinks, he shows;
Yet gives he not till judgment guide his bounty,
Nor dignifies an impure thought with breath.

– *Troilus and Cressida*

The connection between the ‘*ayyārān* and Sufism dates back to the ninth century; we have just seen that some of the strongest Ṣaffāriid supporters in Khurāsān, particularly during ‘Amr’s period, were Sufis of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* persuasion, many of whom were said to have been *fityān* or concerned with *futuwwa*, and at least one of whom also had some kind of ties with ‘*ayyārān*,¹ to the extent that he was interested in learning from an ‘*ayyār* the definition of *javānmardī* (chivalry).² Thus we see, from a very early period, a close intertwining of Sufis, ‘*ayyārs*, and chivalry.

Although Cahen found such an association puzzling,³ it should not surprise us when we consider the milieu out of which both the Sufi and the volunteer warrior movements grew. All of the important *mutaṭṭawwi‘* figures we examined in Chapter Two, the progenitors of the movement of which the ‘*ayyārān* were an offshoot, appear in the Sufi literature and associate closely with many of the outstanding figures, such as Junayd and Sufyān al-Thawrī, considered by that literature to have been leading early Sufis. As we noted in that context, these progenitors even wrote books on asceticism. The connection, therefore, between ‘*ayyārs*

¹ E. g. Abū Ṣāliḥ Hamdūn b. Aḥmad al-Qaṣṣār, who studied with Ibn Ḥanbal’s friend Muḥammad b. Yahyā al-Dhuhli and was on cordial terms with Nūḥ, the leader of the ‘*ayyārān* of Nishāpūr; *vide supra*, Chapter Six.

² We shall return to this story presently. On the linguistic and signifiatory equivalence of *futuwwa* (Arabic) and *javānmardī* (Persian), see H. Corbin, “Introduction analytique,” *Traites des compagnons chevaliers (Resā’il-e javānmardān)*, Tehran, 1991, pp. 5-6.

³ Although note that Cahen was unaware of Sufi-‘*ayyār* connections earlier than the eleventh century; *vide supra*, Chapter One.

and Sufis seems to have existed almost since the earliest times for which we have a record of *‘ayyārs*. As we saw in Chapter Two, the early ascetics and Sufis also appear to have been particularly active in volunteer border warfare, and closely associated with the founding figures of the *mutatawwi‘a* movement; hence the dual use of the term “*ribāt*,” in Persian and Arabic, to denote both a Sufi monastery and a fortress of Sunni border warriors.⁴ In short, there is a connection between Sufis and *‘ayyārs* virtually from the inception of both movements.

Let us examine in chronological order some more of the evidence for *‘ayyār*-Sufi ties. The earliest mention of an *‘ayyār* in a Persian work is by Rudakī,⁵ in a highly enigmatic poetic reference upon whose meaning, literally, no one is able to agree,⁶ but which clearly includes the phrase “*fozbe pīr*.” *Pīr*, of course, could mean simply “old man.” It is very frequently, however, a religious title of the Sufi kind. The fact that this *pīr* is dirty – most likely because he is an ascetic – adds weight to this interpretation. In other words, the language strongly suggests that this *‘ayyār* has something to do with religion – more specifically, the Sufi variety of it.

A less ambiguous reference can be found in Sufi literature. Obviously, there is in some cases a certain methodological problem in using these works, because they frequently date from a later period (the tenth and eleventh centuries) than the people being discussed, but this cannot be helped; they are the earliest Sufi works we have. One of these works – the eleventh-century *Kashf al-mahjūb*, the first mystical treatise in Persian, baldly states that one of the foremost fathers of Sufism was an *‘ayyār*:

Among [the prominent Sufis was] the vessel of truth and excellence, and the repository of nobility in holiness, Abū’l-Fayyād Dhū al-Nūn b. Ibrāhīm al-Maṣrī, son of a Nubian named Thawbān. He was of the best of this people [*akhyār-i qaṭm*] and was of the great ones [*buzurgān*] and *‘ayyārān* of this order [*ṭarīqa*]. He sought the path of affliction and walked the path of blame [*malāma*].⁷

This “path of *malāma*” refers to the *malāmatiyya*, Sufis who wished to preserve their religious merit hidden and unacknowledged, and even to be commonly de-

⁴ Vide J. Chabbi, s. v. “Ribāt,” *EI2*, who is, however, puzzled by the connection in the absence of previous examination of the border warrior movement. Thus, she writes in this context as though the Sufi and holy warrior Sunni strains were unrelated: “In the sources of the 4th/10th century, the representation of *djihad* seems to be promulgated in two major directions. On the one hand, there is Sufism, which tends to lay claim to an irreproachable past ... But it seems that certain minorities within Sunnism professed parallel ideas, advocating exterior activism and inner moralisation.”

⁵ Abū ‘Abdallāh Ja‘far b. Muḥammad Rudakī, *Divān-i Rudakī*, Tehran, 1374, p. 27.

⁶ When the present author discussed this passage at the Fourth International Conference on Iranian Studies of the Societas Iranologica Europaea, in Paris, September 1999, a fierce argument erupted among the literary experts and philologists, which ended inconclusively only when terminated by the panel’s chair.

⁷ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, pp. 124-125.

spised as an exercise in humility and self-mortification.⁸ One of the most extensively documented examples of this kind of person given by our source is the *mutaṭṭawwiʿi* Ibrāhīm b. Adham, who, when asked if he had ever reached his desire, answered that he had indeed enjoyed this bliss twice: once when traveling incognito on a ship and he was constantly mocked, scorned and reviled, including being urinated upon; the other when he was refused admittance to shelter on a rainy, wintry night and, having been turned away from all the mosques, ended up in the smoky corner of a bathhouse.⁹ Again, we are led back to the early militant proto-Sunnis.

Later we get a full explanation of *malāmatiyya* under the section dealing with the Qaṣṣāriyya, the followers of Abū Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdūn b. Aḥmad b. ʿUmāra al-Qaṣṣār, the Ṣaffārid supporter whom we examined in the previous chapter. al-Qaṣṣār is termed “among the great ʿulamāʾ and lords of this way [*ṭarīqa*] and his path was the manifestation and spreading of *malāma*.”¹⁰ Al-Qaṣṣār himself encapsulates his philosophy as “God’s knowledge of you, May He be exalted, is better than that of people could be,” which Hujvīrī interprets to mean the following: “It must be that in privacy with God, may He be exalted, [your] deeds are better than that which you do in company with men, for the greatest concealing/veiling of truth is the preoccupation of your heart with people.”¹¹ Al-Qaṣṣār then relates the following story:

One day while I was walking towards the river bank in Ḥira in Nishāpūr, I saw Nūḥ, known for ʿ*ayyārī* and renowned in *futūwwa* – all the ʿ*ayyārs* of Nishāpūr were under his command – upon the path. I said: “O Nūḥ, what is *javānmardī*?” He replied: “Do you want [to know about] my *javānmardī* or yours?” I said: “Tell me both.” He said: “My *javānmardī* is such that I take off this garment, cover myself in the *muraqqaʿa*, and perform such deeds that I may be a Sufi and from the modesty of people in this garment I abstain from sin. Your *javānmardī* is that you put off the *muraqqaʿa* so that neither you against the people, nor the people against you, cause any *fitna* [discord]; therefore, my

⁸ J. Chabbi defines the movement as follows: “Le Malamtisme est un mouvement essentiellement urbain ... issu du milieu des petits métiers du Bazar de Nisābūr. Musulmans convaincus et même piétistes, contrairement à leurs rivaux karramites, l’ascèse est pour les *Malāmatis* une affaire personnelle ... Leur principe de base pourrait se définir comme la recherche de la non-différence, autrement dit du conformisme apparent, au plan social et politique. Leur force était de ne rien laisser paraître à l’extérieur de ce qu’ils sont en réalité. Selon Sulamī, des Mystiques qui, aussi bien que les Soufies atteignent les sommets de la Proximité (*qurb*), de l’Union ... et sont gratifiés de charismes.” Chabbi, “Remarques sur le développement historique des mouvements ascétiques et mystiques au Khurāsān IIe/IXe siècle-IVe/Xe siècle,” *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977), pp. 55-56. For a similar Pietistic phenomenon in late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century Rhineland Judaism, see T. Alexander-Frizer, *The Pious Sinner; Ethics and Aesthetics in the Medieval Hasidic Narrative. Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism* 5, Tübingen, 1991, particularly Chapter 4.

⁹ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 228; al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 103, calls him “*imām-i ahl-i malāma*.”

¹¹ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 228.

javānmardī is the preserving of the *Sharīʿa* openly [*bar izhār*], whereas yours is the preserving of truth in secret.”¹²

This story depicts ʿ*ayyārī* as a religious discipline akin to Sufism; moreover, it shows a Sufi consulting an ʿ*ayyār* on the meaning of a term that was important to – though differently practised by – both groups. Second, it confirms that ʿ*ayyārs* at least occasionally wore the special dress of Sufis (the patched garment, or *muraqqāʿa*).¹³

At least one other important early Sufi work, al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, contains two anecdotes illustrating the purity and piety of this same Nūḥ the ʿ*ayyār*:

I heard Manṣūr the Maghribī say: Somebody wanted to test Nūḥ al-Naysābūrī the ʿ*ayyār*. So he sold him a slave-girl in the clothing of a slave boy, claiming that he was a boy; and she was surpassingly fair of face. Nūḥ bought her on the understanding that she was a boy, and she remained with him for many months. Then it was said to the slave-girl: “Does he know that you are a slave-girl?” She answered: “No, for he has not touched me, so he believes that I am a boy.”

And it is said: One of the *shuṭṭār* demanded that [Nūḥ] hand over to the ruler [*al-sultān*] a *ghulām* who served him, but he refused, so he beat him 1000 whiplashes, but [Nūḥ] would not hand [the boy] over. Then it happened that [Nūḥ] had a nocturnal emission that very night, and it was very cold. When he got up in the morning he performed his ablutions in the freezing water, and it was said to him: “You are risking your life.” He replied: “May I be ashamed before God, that I should bear 1000 lashes for the sake of a creature, but that I should not suffer enduring the cold of the ablution for His sake!”¹⁴

Nūḥ the ʿ*ayyār* is thus depicted not only as being pure himself, but as enduring great torment and risking his own life in order to save an innocent fellow creature (the young *ghulām* – for it is pretty clear why “*al-sultān*” wanted him) from being defiled. The image of the bloody, half-dead Nūḥ dragging himself out to perform his ablutions is a very powerful one. Whether this image is historically accurate or not is immaterial for our purposes; for it in any case shows the religious ideal that Sufis attached to the term ʿ*ayyār*.

The ʿ*ayyārs* of Nishāpūr appear in connection with another famous early Sufi, Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh – again, a *malāmatī*.¹⁵ The Sufi-ʿ*ayyār* connection surfaces constantly in connection with this figure. al-Qushayrī calls Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh

Among the greatest shaykhs of Khurāsān ... He came to Naysābūr, and visited [*zāra*] Abū Ḥaḍḍ. . and he was great in *futuwwa*.

Abū Ḥaḍḍ said: I never saw anyone greater in zeal [*himma*], nor [is there anyone] more truthful now than Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh.¹⁶

¹² al-Hujviri, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 228.

¹³ Ibn al-Jawzī, writing several centuries later, confirms this; *vide infra*, Chapter Eight, the passage cited from *Talbīs iblīs*.

¹⁴ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 304.

¹⁵ al-Hujviri, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 149.

¹⁶ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 58.

Elsewhere, Ibn Khidrawayh is referred to as “the commander [*sarhang*] of the *javānmardān* and the sun of Khurāsān.”¹⁷ His connection to ‘*ayyārs* appears in al-Qushayrī’s chapter on *futuwwa*:

I heard the Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, may God have mercy on him, saying: “Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh said to his wife Umm ‘Alī: ‘I want to hold a convocation, to which I will invite a cunning ‘*ayyār* [*‘ayyār^{am} shāṭir^{am}*],’ who was the leader of the *fityān* [*ra’īs al-fityān*] in their city. His wife said: ‘You are not rightly guided, to invite the *fityān*.’ He replied: ‘It is necessary.’ She said: ‘If you do thus, kill sheep and cattle and donkeys, and lay them from the gate of the man’s house to the gate of your house.’ He said: ‘Regarding the sheep and the cattle, I know [why you have said this]. But why the donkeys?’ She replied: ‘Invite a *fatā* to your house, and at least there should be [some] good for the dogs of the quarter.’”¹⁸

Umm ‘Alī is obviously not enamored of *fityān*, who seem here to be explicitly equated with ‘*ayyārs*. Her statement implies that nothing good will come of consorting with *fityān* unless one leaves some donkey meat for the dogs of the neighborhood to enjoy – then at least the dogs will have derived some benefit. Umm ‘Alī’s attitude, however, should not blind us to the fact that Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh nevertheless obviously did consort with ‘*ayyārs* and *fityān*; and, as we have seen from the preceding stories, Nūḥ, at least, was highly regarded religiously by other Sufis as well. Moreover, a different version of this precise story is repeated in the *Kashf al-mahjūb* – only there the guest is not an ‘*ayyār*, and Aḥmad’s wife states that the donkeys should be killed “Because when a noble comes as guest to the house of a noble all the inhabitants of the quarter should know about it.”¹⁹

Ibn Khidrawayh’s connection is by no means a lone example: ‘*ayyārs* frequently crop up in this kind of biographical literature regarding the whole period of the ninth–eleventh centuries. For instance, the following anecdote is inserted into the biography of a mid-tenth century Sufi from Shīrāz: “Shaykh al-Islam said: “Once an ‘*ayyār* said to a Sufi: ‘The difference between us and you is this: That we do everything that we say [we will do],²⁰ whereas all that you meditate, and that comes to pass in your heart, you do.””²¹

Another such case of an ‘*ayyār* cropping up in a Sufi biography occurs in the *vita* of one Transoxanian ‘*ālim*, Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Nūḥ b.

¹⁷ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 149. Note that the military term *sarhang* is frequently used for ‘*ayyār* leaders as well; *vide supra*, Chapter Three.

¹⁸ al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, pp. 302–303. As Hartmann notes (“*Futuwwa* und *Malāma*,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 72 (1918), p. 195), “The fact that the *Fityān* had a leader [*Vorstand*], presupposes at any rate a certain organization.”

¹⁹ al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, p. 150.

²⁰ Cf. Farāmūz b. Khudādād, *Samak-i ‘ayyār*, ed. P. Khānlārī, Tehran, 1347/1968, vol. 1, p. 46: “a man of valour [*mardī*] is one who speaks the truth and says [only] those things which he is capable of realizing.”

²¹ al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 423.

Ṣāliḥ b. Sayyār al-Kamdādī (Kamdād is one of the villages of Bukhārā), which states:

He transmitted from Abū Nu‘aym al-Astarābādī and the most venerable ones. He was *qāḍī* in Nasaf twice: the first time in the year 340/951f., and the other in the year 399/1008f. [*sic*] after the destruction of Nasaf and the burning of its houses and castles and markets. [He arrived] one day with al-Ḥasan al-Banafghānī the ‘*ayyār*. He died in Bukhārā in the year 391/1000f. [*sic*]²²

Once again, then, we find a pious sufi closely consorting with an ‘*ayyār*.

Perhaps the most interesting such example is that found in the biography of one Sufi Ḥanbalite *imām* of the Sāmānīd period, Abū’l-Muẓaffar al-Tirmidhī, because it unites all three of the strands, Sufi, Traditionist and ‘*ayyār*. Al-Tirmidhī, “Ḥanbalite *imām*” and “shaykh of his time,” was said to have been “good in deeds [*mu‘āmalāt*], asceticism [*zuhd*], chastity [*wara’*], and piety [*taqwa*].”²³ We are told that al-Tirmidhī’s son, who spent his time in a *ribāt* on the eastern border,

... was a miracle worker [*khudāvand-i karāmat*] and an associate of Khidr. He was also one whose prayers are answered, and the teacher of Shaykh al-Islām. He had friends, all of whom were lords and masters of miracles [*sādat u khudāvand-i kirāmat*], such as Pīr-i Pārsī, ‘Abd al-Malik Askāf, Bū al-Qāsim Hīnāna, Ḥasan Ṭabarī and ‘Arīf the ‘*ayyār* and his *pīr* Shaykh al-Islām Bū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Anṣārī, may God have mercy on them ...²⁴

Here we have a Ḥanbalite Sufi, one of whose Sufi friends, a “lord of miracles,” is said to have been an ‘*ayyār* – not merely an ‘*ayyār* associate of Sufis. And he is not the only Sufi ‘*ayyār*.

One of the major fifteenth-century Sufi manuals, when describing the training of a *murīd* (a Sufi novice),²⁵ holds up the ‘*ayyārān* several times as models for emulation, depicting them by implication as a branch of Sufism equivalent to the *malāmātiyya*:²⁶

If one is asked how many are the desirable actions [*mustaḥabbāt*] of a *murīd*, state five: The first, that he should perform perfect ritual ablution from every prohibited thing of the *sharī‘a* and prohibited thing of the *ṭarīqa*, still more from whatever is not justice and truth.

Second: He should be an ‘*ayyār* in nature and a *malāmātī* in mode of conduct, and not be afraid of the speech or hearing of [other] people.

²² Nasafī, *al-Qand fi dbikr ulamā’ Samarqand*, p. 87. It is unclear to the present author how the man could have become *qāḍī* after he had been dead already for nearly a decade, but this conundrum obviously did not perturb Nasafī in the slightest.

²³ al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, pp. 522-523.

²⁴ al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, pp. 525-526. On p. 527 ‘Arīf-i ‘Ayyār appears in Abū’l-Muẓaffar’s assemblies.

²⁵ On the Sufi aspirant and his relationship to his master see Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1973, p. 3.

²⁶ On the identification of *futuwwa* and *malāmātiyya* see Hartmann, “*Futuwwa* und *Malāma*,” in particular p. 197.

Third: He must be of *qalandar*-like life;²⁷ that is, good reputation and infamy, encomium and censure, rejection and acceptance of [other] creatures, in his regard must be the same.

Fourth: He should be strong-hearted and disregard dangers.

Fifth: He must be indigent, and at no time not give to any needy person ...

The passage concludes by stating that if one is asked when the *murīd* becomes the “perfect ‘*ayyār*”, one should reply: “When he does not turn his glance toward the world and the people of the world.”²⁸ Interestingly, holy warfare is still a part of the vision being presented: “... the bow should be taken to hand with the aim of expeditions against the infidel and the repelling of the wickedness of tyrants from the Believers. Third, as *ghāzīs* always to be reciting the *takbīr* ...”²⁹ Clearly, ‘*ayyār*’ is being used as a religious term, indicating a model toward which the Sufi *fatā* should aspire and strive.

We see the same, exalted meaning given to the term in earlier Sufi manuals as well. Al-Anṣārī, when discussing divine unity, *tawḥīd*, informs us that “the ‘*ayyār*’ of *tawḥīd* [‘*ayyār-i tawḥīd*] has come beyond intellect; [for] the source of *tawḥīd* is guarded from thought.”³⁰ While the philosophical thought being discussed may be somewhat nebulous, the labelling of a certain ideal Sufi behaviour with the term ‘*ayyār*’ is quite clear.

These, of course, are depictions of ideal Sufi ‘*ayyārs*, not real ones. There were other real Sufi ‘*ayyārs*, though, apart from ‘Ārif-i ‘Ayyār. One of the most famous and influential tenth-century Sufis of Nishāpūr was a man called Sa‘īd al-‘Ayyār (aka Abū ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Nu‘aym b. Ishkān or Ishkāb) who was also – unsurprisingly, given the strong ‘*ayyār*-Traditionist connection we have already seen – a *muḥaddith* and the associate of well-respected Sufi and Traditionist religious figures;³¹ he was, in fact, one of the outstanding *muḥaddithīn* of his day:

He heard from the *shaykhs* of Khurāsān; he was famous in *ḥadīth*; [and] he was the companion of a group of the *shaykhs* of Khurāsān. He heard Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* from Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Shabawī in Marv and related it in Nishāpūr ... and he heard from Abū Ṭāhir b. Khuzayma, al-Makhladī, Abū Bakr b. Hānī, Abū’l-Faḍl al-Fāmī and al-Jawzaqī ...

²⁷ Defined by T. Yazici, *EI2*, s. v. “*Qalandar*,” as follows: “[A] name given to the members of a class of dervishes which existed formerly, especially in the 7th/13th century, in the Islamic world ... they resembled, with some minor differences, the “hippies” of today, distinguishing themselves from other Muslims by adopting *Malāmāṭiyya* [q. v.] doctrines and by their unconventional dress, behaviour and way of life.”

²⁸ Husayn Vā‘iz Kāshifī Sabzavārī, *Futurvat nāmab-i sulṭānī*, ed. Muḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjūb, Tehran, 1350/1971, p. 80.

²⁹ Kāshifī, *Futurvat nāmab-i sulṭānī*, p. 361.

³⁰ al-Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 173.

³¹ Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl*, vol. 6, p. 287; al-Nasafi, *al-Qand fī dhikr ‘ulamā’ Samarqand*, p. 563.

He was born in the year 345/956f. and died in Ghazna in the year 457/1065. Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Fārisī transmitted from him.³²

In keeping with our picture of both the early *mutaṭawwi‘a* and ‘*ayyār*s in the mold of Ya‘qūb b. al-Layth, Sa‘īd al-‘Ayyār was an ascetic (*zāhid*). He was also said to have been “a brilliant, charming shaykh ...”³³ Sa‘īd al-‘Ayyār is also said to have followed the path of *malāmatiyya*; his biography in one of the great Persian Sufi works describes him as

The revered Shaykh and the foremost among the great ones, Sa‘īd b. Abī Sa‘īd al-‘Ayyār. He was a master of the traditions of the Prophet [*ḥafiz-i ḥadīth-i payghambar*], led a good life, and saw many shaykhs. He was strong in Sufism and intelligent, but he went concealed/hidden; his virtue [*ma‘nā*] he did not show to anyone.³⁴

The case of Sa‘īd, though, unlike the case of ‘Ārif-i ‘Ayyār, may possibly confirm that ‘*ayyārī*, though in many ways closely related to Sufism as a kindred spiritual discipline, was indeed a separate and distinct path; Sa‘īd himself, according to one thirteenth-century tradition, had apparently left ‘*ayyārī* for Sufism: “Ghayth al-Armanāzī said: I asked a group: Why was he called ‘*al-‘ayyār*? They said: Because in his beginning [*ibtidā’ihī*] he followed the ways of the ‘*ayyār*s.”³⁵ What militates against any interpretation of mutual exclusivity, however, is the fact that there are other ‘*ayyār malāmatī* Sufis other than Sa‘īd, who are **not** said to have abandoned their ‘*ayyārī* in order to have pursued the Sufi path.

In addition to all the example adduced above, the very same source that tells us of Sa‘īd also describes another *malāmatī* practitioner as

Shaykh-i ‘ayyār and miner of secrets [*ma‘dan-i asrār*] Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakīm, known as Murīd, may God have mercy on him. He was among the intoxicated from the proximity of the Presence of Truth, and in his art [*fann*] he had no second [*thānī na-dāsh*]. His state was hidden from people, but he had clear proofs [*barāhīn-i zāhir*] and shining signs [*āyāt-i zāhir*]; and in friendship [with God] his state was better than that which [is apparent] to sight.³⁶

Also, given both the lateness and the uniqueness of the statement depicting Sa‘īd as having left ‘*ayyārī* for the kindred but distinct spiritual discipline of *malāmatī* Sufism, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from it – the author may have added it because in his own time ‘*ayyārī* and Sufism were quite distinct, in a way in which they had not been a few centuries earlier.

For, whereas in the ninth and tenth centuries the religious meanings, both *mutaṭawwi‘* and Sufi-related, of ‘*ayyārī* almost wholly predominated, by the end

³² al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Ghafir b. Ismā‘īl al-Fārisī, *Ta’rīkh Nisābūr*, p. 741; Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, vol. 18, p. 86.

³³ Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, vol. 18, p. 86.

³⁴ Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 217.

³⁵ Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, vol. 18, p. 87.

³⁶ Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 217.

of the eleventh-century and throughout the twelfth century the meaning of the term *ʿayyār*, as we shall see in the next chapter, had become predominantly chivalric.³⁷ Note, though, that in the eleventh-century itself the religious meanings – including the Sufi meaning – had not yet been eclipsed; we still read, among the Sufis who lived in Qūhistān, Azerbaijan, Ṭabaristān and adjacent areas, of one Pādishāh-i Tāʾib,³⁸ “An *ʿayyār* in the way of truth.” [*Mardī ʿayyār būd dar rāb-i haqq*]³⁹

In fact, a model for Dhahabī’s interpretation of Saʿīd al-ʿAyyār’s name appears in the story, found in the late twelfth-century “Book of Penitents,” of an *ʿayyār* who is said to have turned entirely from the world at some point in order to become a Sufi:

It is related that a man, who was known as “Dinār the *ʿayyār*,” had a mother who used to admonish him, but he would not take her advice. Then one day he passed by a graveyard [in which were buried] many important people. He took from it a rotting bone and it crumbled in his hand; then he reflected, and said to himself: “Woe unto you! It is as though I see you tomorrow; your bone has already become like these mortal remains, and the flesh is dust; yet I today have the audacity to commit sins.” Then he regretted, and resolved upon repentance. He raised his head to the sky and said: “My God! I cast before you the keys of my destiny: receive me and have mercy upon me!”

Then he went to his mother changed in aspect, heart-broken, and said: “O mother! What is done to the fugitive slave whose master catches him?” She replied: “His food and clothing are coarsened, and his hand and foot are shackled.”

Then he said: “I want a *jubbā* of wool, and bread loaves of barley, and that you treat me as a runaway [slave] would be treated; perhaps my Master will see my humility and have mercy on me.” So she did what he had asked.

And when the night would descend, he would begin to weep and wail, saying to himself: “Woe unto you, O Dinār! Will you be able to manage the Fire? How could you have exposed yourself to the wrath of the Almighty?” And so forth until the morning.

Then his mother said to him one night: “Treat yourself gently.” But he replied: “Bid me [rather] toil a little so that perhaps I shall rest a long time ...”

She said: “Rest a little.” He replied: “I seek rest; can you vouchsafe me deliverance?” She replied: “And who can vouchsafe it to me?” He replied: “Then pray for me, and what I have embarked upon, as though you, O my mother, were tomorrow going to be among those creatures who are conveyed to paradise, and I conveyed to the Fire.”

She passed by him one night while he was reciting, “By your Lord, We shall question them all, regarding what they used to do.”⁴⁰ And he reflected upon it, and wept, and began to sway like a serpent, until he fell down swooning. His mother came to him and cried out to him, but he did not answer her. She said: “Delight of my eye, where shall we meet [lit. : where is the meeting place]?” He replied in a weak voice: “If you don’t

³⁷ Chivalrous is defined by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as “Pertaining to or characteristic of the ideal knight; gallant, honourable, courteous, disinterested.” For comparable definitions culled from Islamic writings *vide infra*.

³⁸ The name means, literally, “King of the contrite.”

³⁹ Hujviri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ Qurʾān 15: 92-93; trans. Fakhry.

find me in the court of resurrection [*‘arāṣat al-ḡiyāma*], then ask an angel about me.”⁴¹
Then he moaned a [last] moan and died.⁴²

Almost as interesting as the story itself is what can be gleaned from the context in which it is set. This source, as in the parallel medieval Christian repentance literature, was concerned largely with people of social standing. The story appears in a section, placed immediately after the section dealing with kings and Sufis, which surveys respectable people; many of the stories in this section are related by Sufis. We are also told specifically what many of the people were repenting of – e. g. a youth repenting of frittering away his time in sport and amusement; another youth rueing his general preoccupation with this world; the contrition of a castellan for possessing wealth; the repentance of a government official for committing fornication; the repentance of a youth for effeminacy and displaying effeminate behaviour; the penitence of a woman circumambulating the Ka’ba; the repentance of a man over unnamed things he had done; the repentance of an entertainer of the people of Madīna for his profession and his renunciation of entertainment by means of his mother; Dinār the *‘ayyār*’s repentance of unspecified sins; the “repentance of a man of love of his songstress slave-girl who diverted him from God;” the repentance of a neighbor of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and so forth.⁴³

All of the people in this list are middle to upper class; with the exception of the fornicator and the homosexual, none of these people was a great sinner, and most of them were repenting simply for their own normal worldliness and failure to make God their all-absorbing thought – a standard and crucial element in Sufi life.⁴⁴ If the word *‘ayyār* had truly meant “bandit,” “thief,” or “outlaw,” one would, first, have expected Dinār to have repented of those crimes specifically, not merely for his waywardness and lack of suitable devotion to God in his life; and, second, one would also be rather surprised by the inclusion of a hoodlum

⁴¹ Mālik; lit. , an owner/possessor [of power] – according to the textual note, “*mālik khāzin al-nār*.” Obviously, some kind of supernatural being other than God is meant here.

⁴² Muwaffaq al-Dīn ‘Abdullāh b. Aḥmad b. Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-taṣawwūb*, Beirut, 1410/1990, pp. 266-267 (# 105).

⁴³ Ibn Qudāma, *Kitāb al-taṣawwūb*, pp. 257-272.

⁴⁴ Vide e. g. al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, p. 156: “For repentance is the first way station of the way stations of those following the spiritual life [*al-sālikin*].” We have already seen this element in Chapter Two, in the *vita* of the great ascetic Ibrāhīm b. Adham, who was not guilty of any crime either, other than worldliness. Compare this with, for instance, the words with which St. Ephraem of Edessa laments his own human failings in a final address to his readers: “Again at evening I say, ‘I shall keep vigil all night, and I shall entreat the Lord with tears, to have mercy on my sins’: but when night has come, I am full of sleep... my Lord makes haste to come; and behold my heart trembles and I weep the days of my negligence and know not what excuse to bring. Have mercy on me, Thou that alone art without sin, and save me, Who alone art pitiful and kind ... and lead me out of the prison-house of my sins ... Remember me that am without defence, and save me, a sinner ...” St. Ephraem of Edessa, “The Life of St. Mary the Harlot,” in Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers: Translations from the Latin*, New York, 1998, pp. 208-209.

or criminal amongst the government functionaries and ordinary, economically comfortable people on this list.⁴⁵ Obviously, the status and respectability of a person's associates, and the social class to which his friends belong, matter greatly in trying to determine how a given person and his profession were viewed in his own historical context; both here and in the next chapter, we shall see that 'ayyārūn are repeatedly depicted as consorting with the most respectable and even exclusive circles.

One important piece of evidence regarding the religious associations and the respectability of 'ayyārs during the tenth century is supplied by Tanūkhī's *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*. Tanūkhī's testimony is important for several reasons: First, he is an eyewitness to the events he is describing. Second, he was a *qāḍī*, and therefore a member of the religious class; and, like many other clerics,⁴⁶ he personally was not a fan of the 'ayyārs. Thus, for instance, when Tanūkhī is editorializing in the beginning of his work, he classes "the people of loss/damage [*ahl al-khasāra*] and the 'ayyārūn" together.⁴⁷ Yet, despite this consciously negative view, he nevertheless provides us with information that allows us to see clearly that 'ayyārūn had a connection with the Sufis of Baghdad and with the Sunni religious establishment generally.

Tanūkhī informs us that he was personally present in the *majlis* of Abū Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī, in the days when one of the incessant Sunni-Shi'ite *fitnas* of the Buwayhid era broke out: "the commonalty of Baghdad was stirred up ... civil disorder grew mighty, so [al-Muḥallabī] seized a group of the 'ayyārīn and bearers of knives [*ḥamalat al-sakākīn*], put them in covered boats, conveyed them to Birūdh [near al-Ahwāz], and jailed them there." Tanūkhī goes on to say that the story became the talk of the town, and in particular, one segment of it:

Talk of the[se] occurrences increased in the mosques, and [among] the heads of the Sufis, so that [al-Muḥallabī] feared a renewal of the *fitna*. So he arrested a group of [the Sufi leaders] and jailed them, fetched Abū al-Sā'ib, the chief *qāḍī* [*qāḍī al-quḍāt*] ... and a group of the *qāḍīs*, and the witnesses, and the *fuqabā'* – I was among them – in order to reprove them; and the members of the police, that we might believe in their harmfulness [*viz.* , of the Sufi leaders], when the proofs were shown against them.

⁴⁵ One might reasonably ask how 'ayyārī could be construed as in any way ignoring God, given everything we have just shown about its deep religious component. One must remember, first, that we are speaking in relative terms, and that the lengths to which Dinār goes – starving himself to death and doing nothing but groan, weep, and pray all day – are certainly more God-oriented than his previous behaviour, however commendable that might have been. Second, one must keep in mind that this source is late twelfth-century – from the time of *Samak-i 'ayyār*, in fact – and that the chivalric meaning, which we shall be discussing below, particularly in the next chapter, had largely superseded the religious aspect of 'ayyārī by this point. The transformation that the 'ayyār movement underwent in the twelfth century, and even more so after the Mongol conquest, is unfortunately outside the scope of this work.

⁴⁶ *Vide infra*, Chapter Eight, which expounds this antipathy in greater detail.

⁴⁷ al-Qāḍī Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin b. 'Alī Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa-akhbār al-mudhākara*, Beirut, 1995, vol. 1, p. 4.

It was agreed that he should begin with a man from among the leaders of the Sufis, known as Abū Ishāq b. Thābit, living in Bāb al-Shām, one of the *rabbāniyyīn*, among his companions ...⁴⁸

Al-Muhallabī, in his attempt to discredit this Sufi leader, proceeds to humiliate the man, dissecting some of his Sufi theology and terminology in order to claim that Abū Ishāq is really an infidel, and unfit to be preaching to the people because he teaches them follies and errors, and denounces the authorities. Al-Muhallabī accordingly forbade the Sufi from preaching to the people or surrounding himself with a circle of students.⁴⁹ This treatment had, presumably, the (from al-Muhallabī's point of view) salutary effect of intimidating the other religious figures into silence on the subject of the exiled *ʿayyār*s. Once again we see the elements of Sufis, *ʿayyār*s, and warfare for Sunnism (in this case, in the form of internecine warfare against the Shiʿites) combined.

And, in fact, if the equation we saw above between *ʿayyārūn* and *fityān* holds good in other contexts as well,⁵⁰ then there is another outstanding example in the biographical literature of this potent mix of Sufism, *ʿayyārī*, and holy warfare. al-Samʿānī, in his biographical dictionary, defines the *nisba* "al-Ribātī" as follows:

This *nisba* belongs to the *ribāt*, and this is the name of a place in which there are cavalry [*al-khayl*] and which is known for the holy warriors [*ʿurifa bi'l-ghuzāt*]. For when they have settled down in the *thaghr*, and stationed themselves in front of the enemy, repelling their ... assault upon the Muslims, then this place is called a *ribāt*. God, may He be exalted, said: "From the lining up of horsemen [*ribāt al-khayl*] you will frighten them." [Qurʾān 8:60, Sūrat al-Anfāl]

One of his very first entries under this *nisba* is one Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Ribātī al-Marwazī,

... among the great shaykhs of the Sufis: he journeyed with Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī, and came to Baghdad, and Junayd b. Muḥammad used to praise him and exaggerate in depicting him [*yubālighu fi waṣfihi*] ... He was versed in knowledge of open things [*ʿulūm al-zāhir*] and knowledge of [hidden] truths [*ʿulūm al-ḥaqāʾiq*]; and he was among the close friends of Abū Turāb ... in his journeys. Al-Junayd used to say: ʿAbdallāh al-Ribātī is head of the *fityān* of Khurāsān [*raʾīs fityān Khurāsān*].⁵¹

This, of course, sounds reminiscent of Aḥmad b. Khidrawayh's Nishāpūrī *ʿayyār* whom he had wanted to invite for dinner, who is also referred to as *raʾīs al-fityān*.

Thus far we have repeatedly mentioned chivalry (*futuwwa/javānmardī*), which was the bonding element of *ʿayyār*-Sufi relations, without ever probing the mean-

⁴⁸ Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, vol. 3, p. 144.

⁴⁹ Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, vol. 3, p. 145.

⁵⁰ There is no way of ascertaining whether the identification is absolute or not. This author's working supposition, derived from acquaintance with the sources, is that, while all *ʿayyārūn* are by definition *fityān*, not all *fityān* are necessarily *ʿayyārūn*; even though the terms are frequently fungible, one can never assume that they are so absent an explicit statement to that effect in the source in question.

⁵¹ Al-Samʿānī, *al-Ansāb*, vol. 3, pp. 43-44.

ing of this term for ‘*ayyārs* and Sufis respectively. At this point, our focus inevitably must shift from the ‘*ayyār*-Sufi ties toward an examination of *futuwwa* – chivalry – itself. Clearly, this was a shared value of the ‘*ayyārs* and the Sufis; let us now attempt to elucidate precisely what *futuwwa* entailed.

Futuwwa/Javānmardī (*Chivalry*)

First and foremost, *futuwwa* was a code of conduct. The definitions are almost as multifarious as the sources in which they are given, but seem invariably to contain some element of fairness or generosity. In the words of one scholar,

It would be difficult to give a definition of *futuwwa* capable of covering the significance of this term in every milieu and in every period in which it has been used ... but here we are concerned only with its technical sense as a complex of moral virtues, comprising courage, generosity, liberality, hospitality, unselfishness, and spirit of sacrifice ...⁵²

In fact, the first author to devote a treatise to *futuwwa* declares that the definition of *futuwwa* varies with context: “There is a *futuwwa* fit for your behaviour toward God ... yet others toward the pure ones of the past, your sheikh, your brotherhood ...”⁵³ It is significant, however, that Sulamī’s next several pages after this

⁵² G. Salinger, “Was the *Futuwwa* an Oriental Form of Chivalry?” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94 (1950), p. 481. The present author disagrees with the rest of Salinger’s article; due to his expressed desire to be sociologically *au courant* (p. 481), Salinger ends up quite weak in historical methodology, suffering especially from a lack of historical context. The present author rejects particularly his view of holy warriors as “dubious elements who sought in the Holy War to satisfy their desire for looting.” (p. 483) Jürgen Paul’s explanation – of the precise incident used by Salinger to state his case, no less – is far more convincing. In this incident, a large group of Khurāsānī Sunni volunteer holy warriors demanded of the Buyid governor of Rayy that he hand over the tax revenue, the *kharāj*, to them, “since it was meant exactly for the purpose they were serving, fighting the infidels and defending the *Dār al-Islām*.” (Paul, *The State and the Military*, p. 16; cf. *The Sea of Precious Virtues*, p. 216: “... The *Bayt al-Māl* rightfully belongs to the ‘*ulamā*’, the judges, the Koran readers, the poor, the orphans, and the *ghazis*. But [the unjust, tyrannical kings] have taken it all, and have established a treasury for astronomers, physicians, musicians, buffoons, cheats, wine-sellers, and gamblers. ‘Woe to them; and again woe to them.’ Whoever does such or condones it is no Muslim.”) Upon the ruler’s refusal to hand over the money in support of the *ghazw*, the volunteer warriors subsequently clashed with the Shi‘ite Daylamite troops. As Paul observes: “There are clearly two political principles in conflict here; The state (in this case, the Buyid governor) insists on its right to decide on matters of peace and war, and above all, of taxation, whereas the volunteers brandish the banner of their religious legitimation.” (Paul, *loc. cit.*) One strongly suspects that Salinger had not read the major chronicles in depth, and was consequently unaware of how frequently Sunni holy warrior bands ended up fighting Shi‘ites within the *Dār al-Islām* instead while on their way to the Christian infidels on the frontier. Mottahedeh, too, never doubts the sincerity of the volunteers, and seems to view this episode in much the same light as does Paul – that is, one of conflicting agendas and priorities. (Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, p. 34)

⁵³ al-Sulamī, *al-Futuwwa*, ed. I. al-Thāmīrī and M. al-Qadhāt, ‘Ammān, 1422/2002, pp. 5-6; tr. Tosun Bayrak al-Halveti, *The Book of Sufi Chivalry: Lessons to a Son of the Moment*, New York, 1983, p. 36.

deal with loyalty and forbearance toward one's friends, and with generosity.⁵⁴ Another important ideal is truthfulness,⁵⁵ and helping the down and out.⁵⁶ As we shall see, these are all important *ʿayyār* virtues.

One Nishāpūrī Sufi, Abū Ḥaṣṣ ʿUmar b. Maslama al-Ḥaddād, who died in the 260s/870s, defines *futuwwa* as “the performance of justice [*adāʾ al-inṣāf*], [together with] the renunciation of the demand for justice.”⁵⁷ A version of this tradition (also attributed to Abū Ḥaṣṣ) exists in Persian as well: “*Javānmardī* consists of giving justice [*inṣāf dādan*] but not soliciting justice [for oneself].”⁵⁸ That is, a practitioner of *futuwwa* will mete out fairness to others but will not demand it for himself. Another anecdote relates how, when Abū Ḥaṣṣ was about to leave Baghdad, he was attended by “whomever was in [the city] of the shaykhs and the *fityān*,” and they asked him to define *futuwwa* for them. He replies; “*Futuwwa* enjoins action and behaviour toward others, not speech.” In the same context Abū Ḥaṣṣ is asked whether one can identify a *fatā* by any particular sign. He replies: “Yes! Whoever sees the *fityān* and is not ashamed before them by his character and his deeds, is a *fatā*.”⁵⁹ This particular definition would seem to imply nobility of action and conduct. Abu Ḥaṣṣ is also quoted in another tradition stating that *futuwwa* means that one “weigh his deeds and affairs at all times by the Qurʾān and the Sunna.”⁶⁰ Clearly, a religious dimension enters into this last definition.

This same last source gives a whole page of definitions of *futuwwa*. Thus, at one point it quotes definitions, such as Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Tirmidhī's, which explain *futuwwa* as the equal treatment of all persons, regardless of social status: “*Futuwwa* is that the resident and the foreigner are equivalent in your eyes.” In a similar vein, *futuwwa* is defined as practicing indiscriminate hospitality toward all, by not distinguishing “between a holy man [*walī*] or an infidel [*kāfir*] eating at one's [house].” We are also treated to the Ḥanbalite understanding of *futuwwa* as the execution of one's duty despite personal pleasure or preferences: “I heard ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal say: My father was asked: ‘What is *futuwwa*?’ He replied: ‘The leaving of what you love for what you fear.’” The famous Sufi Junayd defines *futuwwa* as “The cessation of wrong and the bestowing of generosity,” while the almost equally famous al-Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh defines the term as “Adherence to the

⁵⁴ al – Sulamī, *ibid.*, pp. 6-17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 13; cf. *Samak-i ʿayyār*, vol. 1, p. 65: “Know and be aware that in the world nothing is worth [so much as] the truth, and one must speak the truth anywhere [that one] may be, before [both] high and low, the wise and the foolish, and especially before the king, particularly because we may speak nothing but the truth, for our good name is bound up in *javānmardī* and we ourselves are *javānmardān*.”

⁵⁶ Sulamī, *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, p. 60; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 105.

⁵⁸ Mustawfī Qazvinī, *Taʾrīkh-i guzīda*, p. 644.

⁵⁹ al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, p. 60.

Sunna” and al-Qushayrī himself reports the meaning of the word as “the keeping of promises and the upholding of loyalty [*al-wafā’ wa’l-ḥifāẓ*] ...”⁶¹

A different, equally seminal Sufi source states that “It is [a characteristic] of *futuwwa* that the *fatā* should observe five things: faithfulness [*al-amāna*]; guarding [*al-ṣiyāna*]; truthfulness [*al-ṣidq*]; brotherhood; and good deeds [*al-ṣāliḥa*]”⁶² This same source quotes the following injunction from Junayd: “Do not concern yourself with ensuring your livelihood; perform your work with which you were charged, for this is the course of action of the noble and the *fityān*.”⁶³ Here, the meaning seems to be once again that one should be concerned with performing one’s obligations regardless of personal considerations or predilections.

Another key aspect of *futuwwa*, for the Sufis as for the ‘*ayyār*s, was loyalty and patience toward one’s brethren in the movement;⁶⁴ in fact, Taeschner long ago labeled this quality – friendship – the most salient ideal of *futuwwa*.⁶⁵ In this vein, one Baghdadi Sufi, Ruwaym b. Aḥmad b. Yazīd, defined *futuwwa* thus: “That you should forgive your brethren their errors, and not treat them [i. e. the faults] with that for which you need to be forgiven [*viz.* , one must not treat his brother’s faults as he treats his own; rather, one should be more lenient toward others’ failings than toward his own]”⁶⁶

Perhaps the best definition of Sufi *futuwwa*, however, is that promulgated by one modern scholar who has, insightfully, placed *futuwwa* in its context as a form of spiritual Jihad:

... La *fotowwat* ou *javānmardī* est une sorte de chevalerie spirituelle, de *jehad* majeur: un combat, non plus armes à la main, mais un combat intérieur pour se conformer à un modèle de vie, pour se perfectionner et travailler à l’épanouissement des forces spirituelles intérieures, pour devenir un “chevalier de l’âme”, un “chevalier de la foi”, libre de toutes les passions et concupiscences, et de toutes les infirmités et ténèbres de l’âme.⁶⁷

⁶¹ al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, p. 302. This is another element of *futuwwa*/*javānmardī* that is very prominent in *Samak-i ‘ayyār*; *vide e.* g. vol. 1, p. 112.

⁶² al-Sulamī, *al-Muqaddima fi’l-taṣawwuf*, ed. Ḥusayn Amīn, Baghdad, 1984, p. 39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Samak-i ‘ayyār*, *passim*; Samak, the ideal ‘*ayyār*, devotes his entire career to helping his friends. At one point he expounds this philosophy: “We are called ‘*ayyārān* by profession, and the profession of ‘*ayyār* cannot be [anything] but [that of] *javānmard*, and *javānmardān* by definition perform many deeds, and bear afflictions and sacrifice their lives for others ... O king, we have accepted [Khorshid Shāh] among us into *javānmardī* and have aided him in his affair, and with one soul with him we have striven only to realize his goal ... (*Samak-i ‘ayyār*, vol. 1, p. 65)

⁶⁵ To be precise, he calls “Freundschaft das hervorstechendste Ideal” of *futuwwa*; F. Taeschner, “Die islamischen Futuwabünde. Das Problem ihrer Entstehung und die Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 12 (1934), p. 6.

⁶⁶ al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 149.

⁶⁷ Ehsan Naraghi, *Enseignements et changements sociaux en Iran du VIIe au XXe siècle*, Paris, 1992, p. 12.

The very idea of spiritual Jihad itself, which is much later than that of Jihad in its early, purely military sense,⁶⁸ was developed by those who, like Ibn al-Mubārak, strove to live as pure Muslims while fighting the good fight against Infidels; hence, as noted previously, the double use of the same word, *ribāṭ*, for both a fortress of border warriors and a Sufi monastery. Obviously, if *futuwwa* was thought of as part of Jihad it is easy to see how the ‘*ayyārs*, as holy warriors in the Jihad, would have been interested in developing their spiritual perfection in this aspect as well. Thus, when discussing “les compagnons chevaliers,” Naraghi notes that theirs was

une chevalerie spirituelle populaire inséparable (comme l’idéal chevaleresque en général) d’une certaine ferveur religieuse ... L’éthique transmise par l’idéal des compagnons-chevaliers est celle qui conduit l’être à purifier son âme et son cœur, par tout un échelonnement de qualifications morales.⁶⁹

What did *futuwwa* mean for the ‘*ayyārs*, though? Although, as we have seen, the ‘*ayyārs* were close to the Sufis, the two epithets are not coterminous. In what way, therefore – apart from being more concerned with this world – did their conception of *futuwwa* differ from that of the Sufis? Regarding the pre-Sāmānid ‘*ayyārs*, the question is virtually impossible to answer, since no surviving sources from the period that deal with ‘*ayyārs* also mention *futuwwa*. This fact accords well with our hypothesis that the meaning of the word ‘*ayyār* evolved: if, prior to the ninth century, the word ‘*ayyār* meant, quite simply, “Sunni holy warrior who fought in *mutatawwiʿ* brotherhoods,” it is not surprising that we fail to encounter the word *futuwwa* in an ‘*ayyār* context, since no chivalric meaning had yet accrued to the term.

Beginning in the tenth century, however, pieces of evidence begin to appear which suggest that the word ‘*ayyār* was indeed acquiring a new, chivalric dimension.⁷⁰ Both Ṭabarī and Balʿamī’s so-called translation of Ṭabarī mention the word ‘*ayyār* in conjunction with *fatā* during the Fourth Fitna, albeit in different places and with different connotations. Ṭabarī does so in a poem which contains the phrase “*al-fatā al-ʿayyār*,”⁷¹ while Balʿamī has his ‘*ayyār* declare while defeating a Khurāsāni soldier: “Take that! For I am *ibn al-fatā*.”⁷² This is one of our first indications that, by Ṭabarī’s time if not earlier, the association in at least one courtier’s mind between ‘*ayyārī* and *futuwwa* existed.

⁶⁸ For the dating see D. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 32-48.

⁶⁹ Naraghi, *Enseignements*, pp. 68-69.

⁷⁰ What Taeschner referred to as “the knightly ideal” (F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften*, p. 18).

⁷¹ Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 8, p. 458.

⁷² Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Balʿamī, *Taʾrīkh-nāmah-i Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan, Tehran, 1366, vol. 4, p. 1223.

Even more intriguing, however, is Bal‘amī’s use of the word ‘*ayyār*’ anachronistically as a descriptive term for one of the early Muslims. What is particularly exciting about this story is how he has changed Ṭabarī’s depiction of the man’s character. Ṭabarī’s story runs as follows:

‘Umayr b. Wahb al-Jumāhī⁷³ was sitting with Ṣafwān b. Umayya after the misfortune of the people of Badr from Quraysh [i. e. the Qurashis who fought against the Muslims at the battle of Badr] ... ‘Umayr b. Wahb was one of the arrogant young men of Quraysh [*shayṭān min shayāṭin Quraysh*];⁷⁴ he was of those who harmed the Prophet ... and his companions ... His son Wahb b. ‘Umayr was among the prisoners of Badr ...⁷⁵

The story goes on to relate how ‘Umayr and Ṣafwān planned to kill the Prophet. Upon confronting the Prophet in Medina, however, ‘Umayr is convinced of the Prophet’s divine inspiration and supernatural knowledge, converts to Islam, and praises Allāh for having brought him to the only correct religion.⁷⁶

Let us now look at what Bal‘amī does with this story:

In the midst of Quraysh there was a man whose name was ‘Umayr b. Wahb al-Jumāhī, a courageous and brave man although poor [*darvīsh*];⁷⁷ he was an ‘*ayyār* and performed many deeds of intrepidity and manliness. [*va kārbāye-i tabāvarur u mardānegī bisyār kardī*]⁷⁸

Moreover, “*rābhāye bādiye dānestī*” – “he knew the desert roads.” The definition of an ‘*ayyār*’ is explicitly synonymous here with a brave, manly person. The element of “one who knows many roads” also implies errantry, which would fit in nicely with the Arabic etymological root of the word. In Bal‘amī’s time and milieu, accordingly, it seems that when one wanted to describe an admirable and intrepid man, it was natural to call him an ‘*ayyār*’.

There was yet another essential component of ‘*ayyār*’ chivalry which we can glean from the sources: their considerate treatment of women. Ironically, the same clerical authors of the chronicles who inveigh against the ‘*ayyārs*’ also provide us with invaluable information regarding this chivalric treatment of the fair sex. Ibn al-Jawzī, one of the writers most responsible, through the denigrating epithets he applied to the ‘*ayyārs*’ in his chronicles, for the modern ‘*ayyār*’-as-bandit paradigm, writes:

Of this kind are his [Iblis’s] wiles [practised] upon the ‘*ayyārīn*’ in [their] taking people’s [*al-nās*] money, even though they call themselves *fityān* and say: “a *fatā* does not commit fornication and does not lie, and preserves the sacredness of women, and does not

⁷³ On the historical Abū Umayya ‘Umayr b. Wahb b. Khalaf b. Wahb b. Khudhāfa b. Jumāh, see al-Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi bi’l-wafayāt*, vol. 23, pp. 89-90. Note that ‘Umayr is described as one of the notables of Quraysh (“*la-bu qadr wa-sharaf*”), not some outlaw or low-status person.

⁷⁴ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 1552. This seems to be the best translation, other than the English “young devil” or “hell-raising young men,” for “*shayṭān*” in this context.

⁷⁵ Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 472.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 472-478.

⁷⁷ There is a possible Sufi undertone meant here.

⁷⁸ Bal‘amī, *Ta’rīkh-nāmah-i Ṭabarī*, vol. 3, p. 147.

violate their modesty.” But in spite of this, they do not restrain themselves from seizing people’s property, forgetting the bad blood they cause by taking property. They call their order (*ṭarīqa*) *futuwwa*. Sometimes one of them swears by the truth of the *futuwwa* [*bi-ḥaqq al-futuwwa*], and abstains from food and drink. They dress trousers (*sarāwīl*) upon the initiate into their rite [*madhhab*], as the Sufis clothe the initiate in a patched garment (*muraqqā’a*) ... Frequently one of them boasts of his endurance to affliction.⁷⁹

Obviously, Ibn al-Jawzī is well aware of the chivalric and even the Sufi aspect of the phenomenon; note his use of Sufi terminology and imagery – *ṭarīqa*, *madhhab*, the special clothing and the parallel drawn with the Sufis at the end.

This interesting information about the ‘*ayyār* attitude toward women is also borne out by accounts in the chronicles themselves. Ibn al-Jawzī describes at various points the chivalrous behaviour of individual ‘*ayyār* leaders toward women. One such ‘*ayyār*, nicknamed Aswad al-Zabad and active in the 360s/970s, bought a slave-girl for a thousand dīnārs. When Aswad wished to have his way with her, however, the girl demurred; upon his asking what she did not like about him, she replied that she simply disliked him. He then inquired “What do you want?” She responded: “That you sell me.” Aswad said that he would do better than that, however, took her to the *qāḍī*, manumitted her, and bestowed one thousand dīnārs upon her; “and all the people [*al-nās*] were amazed by his generosity, the more so since he did not punish her for her dislike towards him.”⁸⁰ Another Baghdādi ‘*ayyār*, al-Burjumī, active in the 420s/1030s, was reported never to harm a woman nor to take anything from her;⁸¹ in the words of one of Ibn al-Jawzī’s fellow chroniclers, “[al-Burjumī] ruined the people [*al-nās*] in Baghdad, and there were many tales about him; yet together with this he had *futuwwa*, and *murwwa*; he would not stand in the way of a woman, nor of one who had submitted to him.”⁸²

For the fullest exposition of the ‘*ayyārūn* as practitioners of *futuwwa*/*javānmardī*, however, one must turn to the eleventh-century *Qābūs nāmah*. The excerpt is from the chapter entitled “On the Institution of *Javānmardī*”:⁸³

Know, O my son, regarding the profession of *javānmardī*, first what *javānmardī* is and of what it is composed ... Know, O my son, that the philosophers have formed an image – in words and not physically – of virtue and wisdom. To that image they have attributed body, soul, senses and ideas, in human fashion and declared: the body of that shape is “*javānmardī*” ... That class whose allotted portion is body are the cavalry-soldiers [*sipāhī*-

⁷⁹ Abū’l Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, Cairo, 1415/1995, p. 405.

⁸⁰ *Idem.*, *al-Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 235.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 15, p. 233. Sabari also notes (*Mouvements populaires*, p. 83): “On racontait ... de lui qu’il ne molestait jamais une femme et ne lui prenait jamais rien.”

⁸² Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 439.

⁸³ Levy translates this word as “nobility” but the present writer thinks “chivalry” would be more appropriate. The translation used throughout this passage is a combination of this writer’s own and Levy’s, which was highly impressionistic in key places

yān] and the knights-errant [*‘ayyārān*] and the merchants, who are given the name “*javānmardī*” by people ...⁸⁴

After a discussion of the next class – *faqīrs* – our author returns to the theme of *javānmardī* and connects it specifically with *‘ayyārān*:⁸⁵

(243)[181] ... “*javānmardī*” consists of three things: One, that everything you promise you fulfill; two, that you do not diverge from [or oppose] the truth; three, that you see a deed through in patience ... Know then that the noblest of *‘ayyārs* [*javānmardtarīn-i ‘ayyārān*] is he who is endowed with several virtues: One of them is that it behooves him to be brave [*delīr*] and manly. Then he must exercise patience in every action, be pure in his sexual life and in his thinking. He must never desire other men’s loss for his own benefit; on the contrary he must regard as proper the incurrence of loss for himself in order to benefit his friends. Let him never oppress the weak or let his hand be stretched out extortionately against prisoners; he must grant aid to those who are deprived of means and he must repel harm from any who suffer wrong.

As he speaks the truth, let him listen to it, granting justice of his own body [*az tan-i kbūd*]. To that table at which he has eaten bread he must not do evil. It behooves him never to requite good with evil, always to hold hypocrisy a disgrace and not to regard hardship as a misfortune ... [182]

I have heard that one day ... a group of *‘ayyārān* were seated together in the mountains when a man approached and after greeting them said, “I am an envoy to you from the (244) *‘ayyārān* of the city. They send you greetings and request that you will hear three questions which I will put to you. If you can answer, they will consent to own themselves your inferiors, but, if you cannot, they demand that you acknowledge their superiority.”

“Speak,” said they.

Whereupon he asked, “What is ‘nobility’ and what distinguishes ‘ignoble’ conduct from ‘nobility’? Lastly, suppose an *‘ayyār* to be seated at the roadside as a man comes by. Suppose, further, that a little while later another man comes by, with a sword in his hand for the purpose of slaying the first man, and demands of the *‘ayyār* whether he has seen a man of such-and-such a description passing. What reply should he give? If he says that such a man did pass that way, that constitutes a direction. If he says the man did not pass that way, it is a lie. Both of these two [i. e. people who would answer in one of these ways] are indubitably not *‘ayyārān*.”

When they had listened to these queries, the mountain *‘ayyārs* looked at each other. Now there was amongst them a man ... he rose and said: “I shall give the answer ... The fundamental principle of ‘nobility’ is to perform everything you promise; the distinction between ‘nobility’ and ‘ignoble’ conduct lies in endurance; and the response to be made by that *‘ayyār* is that he must immediately take a step onwards, seat himself again and then say, ‘While I have been sitting here nobody has passed.’ Thus he will have spoken the truth.”

When you have comprehended these words the nature of (245) *javānmardī* will be plain to you. After we have mentioned the *javānmardī* which is in *‘ayyārān*, in the cavalymen

⁸⁴ Kaykāvūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs b. Wushmgīr b. Ziyār, *Kitāb-i naṣīḥat nāmāh, maʿrūf bah Qābūs nāmāh*, ed. Amīn ʿAbdulmajīd Badavī, Tehran, 1963, pp. 179-181; *A Mirror for Princes: the Qābūs Nāma*, tr. Reuben Levy, London, 1951, p. 242.

⁸⁵ In the following section the Persian page numbers will be inserted in brackets while the pages of Levy’s translation will appear in parentheses.

[*sipāhīyān*] also the appearance of this practice is a condition most perfectly fulfilled; soldiery is the most perfect form of *‘ayyārī*. In the soldier, generosity, hospitality, open-handedness, gratitude, chastity and the condition of being abundantly armed should be present in a higher degree than in the rest of mankind, but while a cavilling tongue, regard for self, obedience and submission to command are [183] merits in a soldier, they are faults in an *‘ayyār* ...

(258)[190] On behalf of your friends keep three things open: the door of your house, a place at your table and the fastenings of your purse, to the full extent of your powers.

Never utter a lie; ignoble men betray themselves by their lying and the whole essence of ignoble conduct lies in falsehood. Should a man throw himself upon your chivalry, then, even if he has slain the one dearest to you and though he be your greatest enemy, once he has surrendered to you, admitted his helplessness and entrusted himself to your chivalry rather than that of any other man, though your life is likely to be imperilled by your act, let it go. Have no fear; fight for your life on his behalf and thus achieve ‘nobility.’

The royal author excoriates falsehood, covetousness and treachery, and enjoins generosity and kindness. He concludes: “The greatest of men in the world is he who lives in the manner I have described, for he will inherit both this world and the next.”

In at least one eleventh century courtly circle, then, *‘ayyārī* was regarded as a noble and praiseworthy form of chivalric conduct very similar to the knight-errantry familiar to scholars of Western European history.⁸⁶ This long excerpt clearly presents the main calling of *‘ayyārī* at this time as a code of honourable conduct, of virtue, honour, truthfulness – albeit in a somewhat idiosyncratic, attenuated form – loyalty and generosity; in a word, of chivalry. It is something desirable and to be prized, even by a prince. The religious element still exists (note the connection to *faqīrs* and Sufis as well as the conclusion about inheriting “both this world and the next”), but it is now subordinate to what can only be called the knightly.

In conclusion, then, we see that, from the tenth century at latest, to be an *‘ayyār* meant to be a chivalric person. We also see that in many sources – including Sufi religious texts – *‘ayyārī* is portrayed as a noble calling. This positive, chivalric portrayal raises an important question, which lies at the root of the confusion surrounding the essential meaning and definition of *‘ayyārī*: how does one reconcile the *‘ayyār* avowal of chivalric ideals with their oftentimes violent behaviour? This issue has puzzled many previous scholars (most notably Cahen), and has led some of them to conclude either that the *‘ayyārs* were Robin-Hood types of outlaws⁸⁷ or that there were two, mutually contradictory and irreconcilable definitions of *‘ayyārs*.

⁸⁶ This point is expanded upon at length in Chapter Eight.

⁸⁷ Here one can see the Marxist influence on Cahen; to anyone not predisposed to see the world in terms of proletarian class war, the evidence surely suggests the noble Götz von Berlichingen model far more than the Robin Hood one.

There is another possibility, however, one which has not hitherto been proposed: that chivalry of necessity implied violence, and that the *bellatores* of medieval Islamic society, as of medieval European society, frequently used violence in ways that the non-fighting portion of the population – particularly the clerics – vehemently disliked. It is this inseparable entwining of chivalry and violence that forms the subject of our next and final chapter.

