

Female Substitutes and Shaykhs in the History of Sufism: The Case of the Mawlawiyya Sufi Order from its Early Phase to the Eighteenth Century*

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There were many distinguished female Sufis who owned and even led Sufi centres (*tekke*, *khānaqāh*)¹ in the classical period of Sufism.² In later years, this tradition ceased, probably due to the strengthening position of ‘official’ Islam. Yet, after their formation, some Sufi orders held the opinion that a woman can ‘attain God but cannot make others attain Him’. Rumi’s Order, the Mawlawiyya, is unique in that it officially appointed women shaykhs as heads of Mawlawī *dargāhs*, as narrated in *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn* and especially *Safīna-yi nafīsa-yi Mawlawiyyān*, our only sources on their lives. Unfortunately, these sources have not been adequately studied by researchers, who tend to merely list names of female shaykhs borrowed from other sources, whose authors in turn have done the same. The present study is a humble step towards filling this gap.

In the history of religion, debates on the roles of female mystical aspirants are as ancient as the religions themselves. Many researchers are unaware that mystics in general, and Sufis in particular, held differing views on the issue. In this article, I will first identify the biographical sources that contain information, even if scant, on Sufi women. Then, after citing examples of distinguished female Sufi masters in classical biographical sources, this article will concentrate on

* The author is greatly indebted to Dr Leonard Lewisohn and Dr Muhammad Isa Waley for their valuable comments regarding some of the footnotes, which are definitely more than editors usually provide.

1 See below, pp. 110–13.

2 Here the early and middle period of Sufism, that is, the period before the seventh/thirteenth century is meant.

Mawlawī women shaykhs from the beginning down to the eighteenth century, highlighting those who held distinguished positions.

In the early period of Sufism, along with male saints, called *rāhibs* (monks), there is also evidence of female saints, called *rāhibas* (nuns), examples being ʿUthmān b. Sawda's mother, Rāhiba, and a woman called 'Rāhiba of Mosul' (third/ninth century).³ One of the great early saints of Islam was a woman, Rābi'a al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801), who introduced the concept of pure love into the austere ascetic outlook of early Sufism. She influenced Sufis and Sufi writers with her exuberant poems of divine love, to such an extent that even Ibn al-ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) chief student and interpreter, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), who rarely refers to any philosopher except Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) and his own Shaykh, Ibn al-ʿArabī, referred to Rābi'a al-ʿAdawiyya when discussing the meaning of pure divine love.⁴ Rābi'a al-ʿAdawiyya's words are quoted in countless books. For her biography, we only have a few early sources like al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*,⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*⁶ and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's (d. 618/1221) *Tadhkirat al-awliyāʾ*. More importantly, ʿAṭṭār mentions her only hesitantly, and he feels it necessary to justify her inclusion:

If anyone says, 'Why have you included Rabe'a [Rābi'a] in the rank of men?' my answer is, that the Prophet himself said, 'God does not regard your outward forms.' The root of the matter is not form, but intention, as the Prophet said, 'Mankind will be raised up according to their intentions.' Moreover, if it is proper to derive two-thirds of our religion from A'isha [ʿĀ'isha], surely it is permissible to take religious instruction from a handmaid of A'isha. When a woman becomes a 'man' in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman.⁷

3 See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* (Cairo: Dār Ibn Khaldūn 1415/1994), vol. 2, pp. 268, 383.

4 See Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *Ijāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl Umm al-Qur'ān*, ed. ʿA. A. ʿAṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha 1389/1979) p. 374.

5 Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*, in al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. M. ʿA. ʿAṭā, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1424/2003), pp. 387–425.

6 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, vol. 2, pp. 255–57.

7 A. J. Arberry, (trans.), *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' ('Memorial of the Saints') by Farid al-Din Attar*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966), p. 40.

He went further and implied that she was more acceptable to God, since she, who set out to visit the Ka'ba by only praying, was met by the Ka'ba, while Ibrāhīm ibn Adham of Balkh (d. c. 165/782), who while travelling to the Ka'ba prostrated himself in worship at every step he took, could not find it when he arrived in Mecca.

It is not necessarily true that there are fewer female saints than male ones, as some authors claim.⁸ There are, however, fewer female saints *mentioned* in Islamic biographies than male saints. Al-Jāhiz's (d. 255/869) renowned books *Kitāb al-Bayān* and *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* are the earliest books including information on female saints such as Mu'adha bint 'Abd Allāh al-'Adawiyya (d. 83/702 or 101/719), Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Wahāṭiyya Umm al-Faḍl (fourth/tenth century [?]).⁹

Abū Sa'īd b. al-'Arabī's (d. 341/952) *Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk* is another early book that mentions Sufi women. We see references to this work in other biographical books like Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*,¹⁰ a biographical book entirely dedicated to early Sufi women. There al-Sulamī states that in *Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk* mention was made of Shabaka al-Baṣriyya,¹¹ who probably lived in the fourth/tenth century, as did Abū Sa'īd b. al-'Arabī, or earlier. Al-Sulamī himself mentions eighty-four Sufi women in his aforementioned book.

Other biographical works wholly or partly concerned with women include *Manāqib-i Rābi'a*, by an anonymous author, which is no longer extant, Abū Nu'aym's (d. 430/1038) *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*,¹² Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya* and his treatise about Rābi'a, which is also lost,¹³ Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār's (d. 618/1221) *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*,¹⁴ Ibn

8 See, for instance, Azim Malikov, 'Islam. Saints and Sacred Geographies (Central Asia)', *EWIC*, V (Leiden: Brill 2007), p. 223.

9 See al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. 'A. M. Ḥārūn. vols. 1–3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1388/1968); *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. 'A.M. Ḥārūn, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī 1389/1969), vols. 1–6.

10 al-Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*, pp. 387–425. Translated by Rkia E. Cornell as *Early Sufi Women* (Louisville: Fons Vitae 1999).

11 See his *Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*, pp. 387–425: 391.

12 Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* (Cairo: Dār Rayyan and Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī 1407/1987).

13 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār Ibn Khaldun 1415/1994. He mentions his treatise on Rābi'a in vol. 2, p. 258.

14 Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. M. Isti'lāmī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zawwār 1374 A.Hsh./1995).

Mulaqqin's (d. 804/1402) *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā'*,¹⁵ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 892/1487) *Nafahāt al-uns*,¹⁶ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī's (d. 973/1565) *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* and *Lawāqih al-anwār fī ṭabaqāt al-akhyār*,¹⁷ 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Munāwī's (d. 1031/1622) *al-Kawākib al-durriyya*,¹⁸ Amina Jāwida Khānim's (d. after 929/1523?) *Manāqib-i waliyyāt al-nisā'*,¹⁹ and Yūsuf al-Nabhānī's (d. 1350/1931) *Jāmi' karāmāt al-awliyā'*.²⁰ As one can easily see, the only female author here is Amina Jāwida Khānim. In general, it should be noted that we know only of a couple of Sufi works written by women prior to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the *al-Ishārāt al-khaṣṣiyya fī manāzil al-ʿaliyya*, a commentary on the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1088) by a certain Ā'isha bt. Yūsuf al-Dimashqiyya (n.d.)²¹ and *Kashf al-kunūz*, a commentary of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Mashāhid al-asrār al-qudsiyya* by Sitt al-ʿAjam bt. al-Nafīs b. Abī'l-Qāsim al-Baghdādiyya (d. 852/1448).²²

Among the abovementioned *male* authors, Ibn al-Jawzī is the most engaged with the subject, criticizing others for not studying women Sufis adequately. He especially finds fault with Abū Nu'aym for not devoting enough attention to women in his *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-asfiyā'*, and emphasizes that the omission of Sufi women is also detrimental to accounts of male Sufis, some of whom had links with Sufi women.²³

There are also certain works that provide information on female Sufis of a specific order. For instance, al-Aflākī's (d. 761/1360) *Manāqib al-ʿarifīn* and Thāqib Mustafā Dede's (d. 1148/1735) *Safīna-i nafīsa-i Mawlawiyyān* contain biographies of certain female Mawlawī shaykhs, as will be examined later on in this essay.

15 Ibn Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā'*, ed. N. Sharība (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī 1393/1973).

16 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. M. Ābīdī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Iṭṭilā'āt 1373 A.Hsh./1994).

17 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* and *Lawāqih al-anwār fī ṭabaqāt al-akhyār*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1414/1993).

18 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya*, ed. A. S. Ḥamdān (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth 1994).

19 Amina Jāwida Khānim, *Manāqib al-waliyyāt al-awliyā'* (s.l.: s.n., n.d.).

20 Yūsuf al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi' karāmāt al-awliyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1409/1989).

21 See Hacı M. Zihni Efendi, *İz Brakan Meşhur Kadınlar*, 2 vols, ed. Bedreddin Çetiner (Istanbul: Şāmil 1982), vol. 2, p. 25. Sadly, Ā'isha bt. Yūsuf al-Dimashqiyya's book is not available today.

22 See Süleymaniye, Ayasofya, no. 2020. Other copies (Süleymaniye, Esad Efendi, no. 1522 etc.) lack the title of *Kashf al-kunūz*. The published version is: *Kashf al-kunūz*, ed. A.F. al-Mazidī, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Bulaq: al-Maṭba'at al-Kubrā al-Anṭariyya, 1427/2006.

23 See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣīfat al-ṣāfiya*, vol. 2, p. 13.

Classical Sufi books also include narratives from early Sufi women. For instance, in renowned works by Qushayrī, Hujwīrī, Ghazālī and Suhrawardī, we find accounts of distinguished early Sufis, such as Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, Rayhāna al-Wāliha, ʿĀisha al-Makkiyya (late second/seventh early third/ninth centuries), Fāṭima al-Maʿrūf (before seventh/thirteenth century), and Juwayriya (third/ninth century).²⁴ In these books, however, it should be pointed out that female Sufis are sometimes mentioned in a degrading way. For instance, in the section that he devoted to the theme of ‘combating the lower self’ in his *Iḥyāʾ*, Ghazālī first introduces examples of how male Sufis struggle against themselves, before commenting: ‘If your lower self finds it difficult to follow the example of these great male Sufis, now I will offer you some accounts of female Sufis. You should blame your lower self if it falls below a woman in religious and worldly attainments.’²⁵ Here he gives the impression that he considers his readership to consist primarily of males. He also advises male Sufis not to accompany female Sufis.²⁶ Even Ibn al-ʿArabī, who perceives woman as part of man, that is, not other than him,²⁷ and holds her in high regard as being the locus of the divine in creation,²⁸ perceives woman to be inferior to man since she was created from his rib-bone, and therefore not capable of fully comprehending him.²⁹

In the classical Sufi literature we also see frequent references to the famous *ḥadīth*: *Ḥubbiba ilayya min al-dunyā thalāth . . .* ‘Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume, while the coolness of my eye was placed in ritual prayer.’³⁰ Al-Ghazālī’s interpretation on this *ḥadīth* is very distinctive. He presents these three things as allusions to certain senses. The reference to

24 See ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, ed. M. Zurayk and A. A. Baltajī (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1413/1993), pp. 86, 96, 111, 114, 139, 195, 306, 328, 375, 377; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. Qāsim Anṣārī (Tehran: Kutubkhāna-i Ṭahūrī 1373), pp. 24, 140, 149, 150, 467; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadīth 1412/1992), vol. 2, p. 92; vol. 4, pp. 48, 49, 653-38; idem, *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya 1414/1994), p. 11; Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-maʿārif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1426/2005), p. 35.

25 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 4, p. 635.

26 Al-Ghazālī, *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1409/1988), p. 96.

27 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, preface by M. Maṭarajī, 8 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr 1414/1994), vol. 8, p. 375.

28 Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 167–8. 29 Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 20–21, 167–8.

30 For the tradition see: al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan* (Istanbul: Çağrı 1401/1981), s.v. *ʾIshrat al-nisāʾ*, 1.

woman is restricted by him to allude simply to the purely physical senses of sight and touch. He states that perfume alludes to the sense of olfaction or smell, the love of woman alludes to the senses of sight and touch, whereas prayer 'involves a sixth sense whose seat is the heart,' that is to say, a sixth sense beyond the normal five senses.³¹

Yet some classical Sufi works use the word 'woman' metaphorically to allude to the deterioration and decline of Sufis in their times.

*Ammā l-khiyāmu fa-innahā ka-khiyāmihim
wa arā nisā'a l-ḥayyi ghayra nisā'ihā*

As to the tents, they resemble their [Sufis'] tents –
yet I see that the women of the region are not their women.³²

That is, the Sufis of today are not of the same high quality as Sufis of earlier times.

In the twentieth century, authors like Zaynab al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1914),³³ Mehmed Zihni Efendi (d. 1914),³⁴ and ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla (d. 1987),³⁵ composed special books on renowned women and included Sufi women among them. There are now a number of works in English on Sufi women, like Margaret Smith's *Rabīʿa, the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam*,³⁶ Javad Nurbakhsh's *Sufi Women*³⁷ and Camille Adams Helminski's *Women of Sufism*.³⁸

31 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 4, p. 454. [For an English translation of this passage, see Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment (Kitāb al-maḥabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-riḍā*, trans. Eric Ormsby (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society 2011), p. 12. – Ed.]

32 See e.g., al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, p. 36; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Rūḥ al-quḍs* (Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥajar 1281/1864), p. 5.

33 Zaynab al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbat al-khudūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā 1312/1894).

34 Mehmed Zihni Efendi, *Meşhur Kadınlar [Mashāhīr al-nisāʾ]*, ed. B. Çetiner. (Istanbul: Şâmil 1982), 2 vols.

35 ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Aʿlām al-nisāʾ*, (Dimashq: al-Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥāshimiyya 1378/1959), 2 vols.

36 Margaret Smith, *Rabīʿa the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* (San Francisco: Rainbow Press 1977 [1st ed. 1928]).

37 Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women*, trans. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqah-Nimatullahi Publications 1990).

38 Camilla Adams Helminski, *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (Boston: Shambala 2003).

What we infer from the reading of these books is that in the early phase of Sufism, there were Sufi women known as *ustād* (master) and *mu'addiba* (instructress). For instance, Ḥukayma al-Dimashqiyya was called the *ustād* of Rābi'a b. Ismā'īl al-Shāmiyya (d. 135/752).³⁹ Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/777), an ascetic and a *muḥaddith* (traditionist), used to refer to Rābi'a al-ʿAdawiyya as his '*mu'addiba*'.⁴⁰ He and another famous *muḥaddith*, Shu'ba b. al-Hajjāj (d. 160/770), were narrators of her words and wisdom.⁴¹ She also inspired other ascetics like Ṣāliḥ al-Murri (d. 176/792).⁴² Dhu'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859) described Fāṭima al-Nisābūriyya (d. 223/837) as 'a saint and his *ustād*'.⁴³

From the second/eighth century onwards, there were Sufi women who directed Sufi convents, that is, a *tekke* or *zāwiya*, or attended a *tekke* and succeeded to the position of spiritual director or shaykh after performing the duties of the shaykh of the *tekke*. Ḥafṣa bint Sīrīn (d. 101/719 or 110/728) had a *tekke* called '*masjid*' or '*muṣallā*' (a place for prayer), which she did not once leave for thirty years.⁴⁴ Karīma bint Sīrīn also had a *muṣallā*.⁴⁵ Al-Sahāwī states that in Egypt there was a *ribāṭ* which was built by a pious man named Khawwās. After he died, it was led by his daughter (Bint Khawwās), therefore the *ribāṭ* came to be called the *ribāṭ* of Bint Khawwās. The *ribāṭ* was built in a shape imitating the rooms around the *masjid* of the Prophet in Medina. The inhabitants of the *ribāṭ* were mostly widows or elderly women, ascetics and pious people. It was a place where preaching was done.⁴⁶

There were also some Sufi women who gave spiritual leadership to their husbands. For instance, ʿAmra (second/eighth century) used to wake up when her husband Ḥabīb al-ʿAjamī (d. 115/733) was still asleep, and say: 'Get up, man! The night has gone, day has come. A long journey lies before you, and you have few provisions with you. The caravan of the righteous has gone ahead before us, and we have not caught up with them.'⁴⁷ Al-Sulamī's grandfather Abū ʿAmr Ismā'īl b. Nuḡayd praised his wife, Fakhrawayh (d. 313/925), highly, saying that

39 See his '*Dhikr al-niswat al-muta'abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*', p. 397.

40 Ibid., pp. 387–89. 41 Ibid., p. 387. 42 Ibid., p. 389. 43 Ibid., p. 401.

44 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya*, vol. 2, pp. 253–54.

45 Ibid., p. 255.

46 ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb wa-bughyat al-tullāb fī-l-khuṭaṭ wa-l-mazārāt wa-l-tarājim wa-l-buqāʿ al-mubārak* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya 1406/1986), p. 155.

47 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya*, vol. 2, p. 262.

he had benefited from her exhortations as much as from those of his own shaykh, Abū ʿUthmān al-Ḥirī (d. 298/910).⁴⁸

Wahāṭiyya Umm al-Faḍl, a disciple of Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. Khafīf (d. 371/981), was visited by many revered Sufis of her time, including Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulaymān, Abū Qāsim al-Rāzī, Muḥammad Farrāgh and ʿAbd Allāh Muʿallim.⁴⁹ Shabaka al-Baṣriyya, who probably lived in the same century or earlier, was the most distinguished female Sufi master according to al-Sulamī, although she was not described as such in Sufi sources; she had special rooms in her basement for both her 'students' and 'disciples', meaning that she used her house like a boarding school and a *tekke*. Shabaka gave sermons to them on Sufism in general and instructed them on how to combat and overcome the lower self.⁵⁰ Although she herself attended her brother's sermons, her brother's name is unknown to us,⁵¹ a bizarre situation since normally it is the Sufi women whose names remain unknown, not the men! From her biography it would appear that she succeeded him in being a celebrated person of piety.

After the fifth/eleventh century, one of the most distinguished examples of a male Sufi with a high regard for women is to be found in the 'Supreme Master' (al-Shaykh al-Akbar) Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). During his days as a novice in Sufism, he was guided by several female Sufis and benefited from many others he met. He also used the term 'divine mother' for one of his female shaykhs, Fāṭima bint Ibn al-Muthannā (d. 595/1198).⁵² This term can be compared with the term 'spiritual father' used by earlier Sufis, such as Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), who explains that a human being possesses two kinds of 'father'. The first is an earthly one, that is, one's biological father; and the second is a spiritual one, that is, one's master, who educates the spirit.⁵³ It should be noted that while this explanation refers to a 'spiritual father', no mention is made concerning the existence of any 'spiritual mother.' It was Ibn al-ʿArabī, or rather his shaykh Fāṭima, who used the latter term.⁵⁴

48 al-Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswat al-mutaʿabbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*, p. 408.

49 Ibid., p. 418. 50 Ibid., p. 391. 51 Ibid., p. 391.

52 For details, see Hülya Küçük, 'From his Mother Nūr al-Anṣāriyya to his Ṣayḥ Fāṭima bt. Ibn al-Muṭannā: Important Female Figures around Muḥyī l-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240)', *Arabica*, 59/6 (2012), pp. 685–708.

53 Suhrawardī, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, p. 54.

54 Cf. Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfiyya* (Beirut: Dandara 1401/1981), pp. 124–25.

In later times when the major Sufi orders were formed, the *tekkes* were led mainly by men. However, there were still some exceptional women who built *tekkes* and *khānaqāhs* for Sufis. In this regard, Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions a *zāwiya* in Damascus called ‘Zāwiyatu ʿĀʾishā’.⁵⁵ He also refers to a convent called ‘Dār al-Falak’ for women ascetics in Baghdad on the banks of the Tigris near al-Muthannā, the house of the Imām.⁵⁶ There were other *ribāṭs* in Baghdad directed by women, such as Tazkār Bay Khātun; the Ribāṭ al-Baghdādiyya, which was built in 684/1285 and directed by Fāṭima bint ʿAbbās al-Baghdādiyya, known as Umm Zaynab (d. 714/1314), the daughter of a certain ʿAbbās b. Abūʾl-Faṭḥ al-Baghdādī. Comprising accommodation and a place of prayer for women undergoing divorce, it was an institution with strict rules and etiquette. The *ribāṭ* also served as a *madrassa* in which debates between Fāṭima bint ʿAbbās al-Baghdādiyya and male scholars of the city took place.⁵⁷ The latter used to ascend the pulpit on Fridays to preach to men, although the renowned scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) would try to prevent her doing so. Nevertheless, after a dream in which he saw the Prophet instructing him not to do so, Ibn Taymiyya abstained from such meddling behaviour.⁵⁸ However, after 806/1403 such institutions went into decline.

In Egypt, there was also the *ribāṭ* of Sitt-i Kalīla, built in 694/1295 by Sitt-i Kalīla, otherwise known as Ṭulāy bint ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṭātāniyya, wife of Amīr Sayf al-Dīn al-Burī. The convent was built by the wife of the Mamluk Sultan al-Mālik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwun (who ruled, with some interregna, between 693/1294 and 741/1341).⁵⁹ Dughay Khātun, known as Umm Anwak (d. 749/1348), is another instance. According to the historical accounts, she was a beautiful and a pious woman. She built a *tekke* at Bāb al-Barqiyya in the desert, settled Sufis in it, bequeathed it as an endowment (*waqf*), and gave every maidservant of hers a room there. She lived a virtuous life that none of the other sultans’ wives could match. After her husband died in

55 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 8, p. 370.

56 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʾir al-aʾlāq, sharḥ Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Unsiyya 1312/1894), p. 184.

57 Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawāʾiz wa-l-iʿtibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār (al-Khiṭaṭ)* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thāqāfat al-Dīniyya n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 477–78; see also Mehmed Zihnî Efendi, *Meşhur Kadınlar*, vol. 1, pp. 165–66.

58 Mehmed Zihnî, *Meşhur Kadınlar*, vol. 2, p. 17.

59 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2, p. 428; see also Mehmed Zihnî, *Meşhur Kadınlar*, vol. 1, p. 352.

729/1329, she continued to be revered. When she died in 749/1348, she left an enormous inheritance of 1,000 maidservants and eighty servants. She also built the *madrassa* of Nāṣiriyya close to her daughter's grave, endowing it as a *waqf* for the poor. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) describes this complex as amongst the most prosperous historic buildings of his time.⁶⁰

It is true that women were generally found not at the centre but the periphery of Sufi activities during this period, and this was especially so of Ottoman women. After the fifteenth century in particular, Sufism experienced much repression at the hands of the exoteric scholars ('*ulamā'*), partially as a consequence of the process of urbanization. Although women could still be disciples of male shaykhs, this had to be done through the intermediary of the shaykhs' wives, who were called *anas* (mothers) or *bājīs* (sisters). Only the Jarrāḥiyya, Bektāshīyya and Mawlawiyya Orders, which are briefly examined below, continued to appoint female shaykhs.

Among Bektāshī female shaykhs, the names of Fāṭima Bājī (Kadinjik, died in the last quarter of seventh/thirteenth century) and Āmina Khātun may be mentioned.⁶¹ In the Jarrāḥiyya order, a renowned female poet Fiṭnat Khānim (d. 1194/1780)⁶² was the spiritual director appointed by Yaḥyā Sharaf al-Dīn Efendi.⁶³ Recently, in the twentieth century, mention should be made of women like Fatma Mükerrrem (n.d.), Emine Binnaz Bacı (d. 1380/1960) and Emine Nimet Bacı (n.d.), who were spiritual directors appointed by İbrahim Fahreddin Şevki Efendi (Erenden, d. 1386/1966).⁶⁴

Members of most other Ottoman Sufi orders generally held the previously mentioned idea that 'a woman can attain God, but cannot make others attain Him' – a woman cannot be a spiritual director or guide. Thus some Sufis used to deliberately seek shaykhs other than

60 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 1, pp. 425–26; see also Mehmed Zihni, *Meşhur Kadınlar*, vol. 1, p. 64.

61 For details and other examples, see İbrahim Bahadır, *Alevî ve Sünnî Tekkelerinde Kadın Dervişler* (İstanbul: Su 2005), pp. 146–56.

62 Ömer F. Akün, 'Fiṭnat Hânım,' *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 1996), XIII, pp. 39–46.

63 Şenay Yola, 'Cerrâhiye,' *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 1999), VII, p. 418.

64 See Mehmet C. Öztürk, *Cerrâhilik* (İstanbul: Gelenek 2004), p. 149; M. Fahrettin Dal, 'Fahreddin Erenden' in *Tasavvufî Görüşleri*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü (İstanbul 2006), pp. 28–29.

women, even though they had originally entered the Sufi way under the guidance of a female shaykh. The case of Ummī Sinān-zāde Hasan Efendi (tenth/sixteenth century) illustrates just such an instance. Although he completed his wayfaring (Sufi education) under the guidance of his grandmother, he eventually opted for a certain Haydar Efendi from the Sufi Khalwatiyya Shamsiyya Order for the above-mentioned reason.⁶⁵ Even in the twentieth century, it was unusual for a woman to hold the position of shaykh. Although there were female shaykhs in some Sufi orders, for instance, in the North Caucasus, it has been asserted that they held these positions largely due to the political manipulations of outside forces, such as the Soviet bureaucracy.⁶⁶

FEMALE SUBSTITUTES AND SHAYKHS IN THE MAWLAWIYYA SUFI ORDER

The Mawlawiyya is generally known to be a woman-friendly Sufi order, considering Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) favourable words concerning women, some of which will be cited below. Rūmī sees women as superior beings compared to men, citing the following verse from the Qur'ān: 'Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet. Women and sons, heaped-up hoards of gold and silver . . .'⁶⁷ Mawlānā says that these things allure men; they cannot escape this fate since it is something determined by God, and even a man as powerful as Rustam, the legendary Iranian hero, fell under a woman's sway. Rūmī concludes:

Partaw-i ḥaqqast ān, ma'shūq nīst
Khāliqast ān gūyā makhluq nīst

She is a ray of divine light, more than just a loved one.
You could almost say she is a Creator, not a creature.⁶⁸

65 See Osman Türer, *Osmanlılarda Tasavvufi Hayat. Halvetilik Örneği* (İstanbul: İnsan 2005), p. 625.

66 See Chantal Lemercier-Quelqejay, 'Kuzey Kafkasya'da Tarikatlar,' in Alexander Popovic and Giles Veinstein, eds., *İslam Dünyasında Tarikatlar*, trans. Osman Türer (Ankara: Sûf 2004), pp. 69–90: 85.

67 Qur'ān 3:14.

68 Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, facsimile of an early Konya manuscript (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism 1995), f. 34 b. The verse in question can

Rumi explains that for men of refined sensibility, women appear to be endowed with Godlike qualities of creativity, which is why women dominate and prevail over such men, whereas unintelligent men of a brutish temperament domineer women. Any man cognizant of the divine nature within woman behaves well towards her and respects her.⁶⁹ In some men, however, there is a 'woman' concealed, which makes them effeminate, and for those men who adore mere outward appearance (*zāhir-parastān*), woman thus becomes their virtual direction of prayer (*qibla*).⁷⁰

However, Rūmī also assigns some negative attributes to woman as well, such as when he mentions an elderly 'witch-woman',⁷¹ or where he explains that those who engage in self-mortification are brave and manly whereas those who like worldly things are effeminate wimps and women.⁷² He says that the lower soul (*nafs*) prevails in woman's nature, and therefore she likes worldly things.⁷³ He also says that only in very few women, the Virgin Mary being the most outstanding exemplar, there lies a heroic 'Rustam' concealed.⁷⁴ Rūmī pities anyone whose reason or intellect is dominated by 'female' traits while his wicked fleshly soul (*nafs*) dominates him like the male.⁷⁵ Despite these negative images, he had many female disciples, such as Nizām Khātūn and Gumaj Khātūn.⁷⁶

be found in Rumi's *Mathnawī-yi ma'navī*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1357A.Hsh./1978), I: 2437.

69 *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I: 2433-36. Some specialists assert that the couplet (I: 2437) about woman being the locus of God's attribute as 'the Creator' relates to the fact that her body contains a womb where creation takes place. Although this interpretation is not totally wrong, it is far-fetched when one considers the context of Rūmī's verses and especially the particular Prophetic Tradition that he is interpreting.

70 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f. 292a (VI: 1890; 1905); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, VI: 1885; 1900.

71 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f. 200a (IV: 3190); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, IV: 3190 ff.

72 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f. 292a (VI: 1911); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, VI: 1882-85; 1906.

73 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f.243b (V: 2464-67); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, V: 2459-66.

74 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f. 292a (VI: 1889-1906); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, VI: 1884.

75 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Konya MS., f.243a (V: 2462); *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, V: 2461.

76 For details on early female Mawlawī women, see Hülya Küçük, 'Türk Tarihinde Kadın Veliler: İlk Dönem Mevlevîliği Örneği,' *İSTEM*, 10 (2007, Mevlânâ Özel Sayısı/Special Mawlanâ Issue) pp. 65-74.

With regard to woman shaykhs in the Mawlawiyya order, we begin with the period of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī. Rūmī used to address Sultān Walad's (d. 712/1312) daughters, Muṭāhhara Khātun and Sharaf Khātun, as *ābida* (worshipper) and *ārifa* (female gnostic) respectively. In Aflākī's words, 'A great many women of the Anatolia were disciples of Muṭāhhara Khātun and Sharaf Khātun.'⁷⁷ At that time, there were other women shaykhs who guided women, such as Ustād Khātun or Shaykh-i Khawātīn.⁷⁸ They were generally known by attributes such as 'female saint,' 'learned,' 'master,' and 'teacher of Sultan's daughter'. Women in Konya used to gather at their homes and ask them to invite Rūmī to their meetings because he was very well disposed towards them.⁷⁹

The main authorities in the Mawlawī Sufi tradition were the Chalabīs, descendants of Rūmī. According to Gölpınarlı, they included female descendants, *Ināth* Chalabīs. It can even be said that a substantial number of Mawlawī shaykhs were descendants of female Chalabīs. This type of *silsila* (initiatic chain of spiritual succession) never existed in other Sufi orders.⁸⁰ Furthermore, although Mawlawī shaykhs were primarily male, there were several female shaykhs or substitutes. However, only two sources mention them, namely Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Aflākī's *Manāqib al-ārifīn*⁸¹ and Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede's *Safīna-i nafīsa-i Mawlawiyyān*.⁸² Sadly, these publications are rarely

77 Aḥmad Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ārifīn*, ed. T. Yazıcı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1980), vol. 2, p. 990.

78 See *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 727. 79 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 490. 80 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevilik*, p. 367.

81 Aflākī was a disciple of Badr al-Dīn of Tabrīz, son of Akhī Nātur. In 690/1291, when he came to Konya, he visited Sultān Walad and frequented his sermons from then on. As he was devoted to Ulu 'Arif Chalabī, he was called al-ārifi. *Manāqib al-ārifīn*, the outcome of thirty years of study and writing was completed in the 718/1318 at 'Arif Chalabī's request. The biographies in this work are arranged chronologically. While some of the narratives are based on the author's recollections, most were derived from other sources: principally the works of Sultān al-'Ulamā Bahā' al-Dīn Walad (d. 629/1231), Faridūn b. Aḥmad Sipahsālār (d. 690/1291), Rūmī, Sultān Walad (d. 712/1312), and Shams-i Tabrizi (d. 645/1247) appear as sources. For instance, 95 per cent of the couplets are from Rūmī's *Mathnawī*. Aflākī also made use of Sultān Walad's *Ibtidā-nāma*, *Rabāb-nāma*, *Intihā-nāma*, and especially *Ma'ārif*. See Hülya Küçük, *Sultan Veled ve Ma'ārif'i. Kitābu'l-Hikemiyye Adlı Ma'ārif Tercüme ve Şerhi (İnceleme-Metin)* (Konya: KBŞB 2005), pp. 19–22.

82 Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede was the shaykh of the *Mawlawikhāna* of Arghūniyya in Kütahya, built to commemorate Jalāl al-Dīn Arghūn Chalabī (d. 774/1372). A descendant of the renowned Sufi theosopher Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, he was appointed as shaykh of the *Mawlawikhāna* of Kütahya after Khwāja Faṭīma Khānim, who will be discussed later in this article. See Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı,

read by researchers, let alone examined deeply. Female shaykhs' names were first mentioned by Gölpınarlı, who introduced their names and presented some information on one of them, Gunash Khān (Güneş Han).⁸³ Other researchers merely cited their names by borrowing from him.

According to Gölpınarlı, the *Safīna-i nafīsa-i Mawlawiyyān* is full of mistakes concerning historical facts. This is especially regrettable in that it is our only source for the years concerned with here.⁸⁴ The same applies to *Manāqib al-ʿārifīn*. But although the above-mentioned sources are hagiographies, a genre whose value as a historical source is questionable, it is widely accepted that they can be useful, provided that they are carefully analysed and compared with authentic historical sources.⁸⁵ In fact, besides narratives full of extraordinary happenings and superstitions, hagiographies can provide valuable information on social, economic and cultural conditions, with much more detail than can be found in any other work.⁸⁶

As the first officially appointed female Mawlawī substitute, the name of ʿĀrifa-yi Khwush-liqā-yi Qunawī should be mentioned. She was a substitute of Ulū ʿĀrif Chalabī (d. 719/1319), son of Sulṭān Walad, in Tokat and the elite of the region were her disciples. She was a mighty and influential woman, even for visitors to the city. A *mufasssır* (exegete) called Nāṣir al-Dīn Wāʾiz was one example. He was an ardent speaker who influenced the inhabitants of the city. ʿĀrifa-yi Khwush-liqā heard that he spoke unfairly about Ulū ʿĀrif Chalabī during his speeches, so she invited him to her home as guest for a few days. During their discussions she offended him so much that he left Tokat and headed for Niksar, a town in the same region. However, he became ill at the first Friday prayer and was forced to return to Tokat with the aim of becoming a disciple of Ulū ʿĀrif Chalabī. However, it was too late; he was already damned by God,⁸⁷ according to *Manāqib*

Mevlânâ'dan Sonra Mevlevîlik (İstanbul: İnkılâp ve Aka 1953), pp. 15–16.

83 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevîlik*, pp. 278–81. 84 See *ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

85 For detailed information on the subject, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Kültür Tarihi Kaynağı Olarak Menâkıbnâmeler: metodolojik bir yaklaşım* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1982), p. 65 ff.

86 For detailed information on the subject, see Mehmet F. Köprülü, 'Anadolu Selçuklularının Yerli Kaynakları,' *Belleten*, VII, nos. 25–27 (1943), pp. 421–25. See also Ahmet Ateş, 'Menâkıp,' *İslam Ansiklopedisi* VII (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1993), p. 702.

87 It should be noted here that in Sufism, if any harm befalls a person who behaves disrespectfully towards a saint, or even criticizes their actions, it is regarded as a

al-ʿarīfīn, and died a couple of days later.⁸⁸ This event shows us that a female substitute was accepted as legitimate by scholars, and could even invite an influential *mufasssīr* to her home, and have a dispute with him.

The *Mawlawīkhāna* of Afyonkarahisar,⁸⁹ which was run by Dīwāna Mehmed Chalabī (d. 936/1529), was assigned to his descendants after his death.⁹⁰ Hence, Dastinā Khātun (d. 1040/1630) was appointed as the *postnīshīn* (shaykh of Mawlawī *dargāh*) after her father, Shāh Muḥammad Chalabī, grandson of Dīwāna Muḥammad Chalabī. It is important to note that she was acting on behalf of her sons, who were young at that time.⁹¹ That is to say that her sons were the genuine heirs of the position. Thāqīb Dede notes that her Sufi life began as a child. She abandoned the world by becoming an ascetic, learned the Qurʾān by heart, and attended her father's *Mathnawī*, *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* courses, becoming distinctive in these fields. She used to spend most of her time at the tomb of Sultān-i Sāti' al-Burhān Abū'l-Sayf in a special room assigned for women. Although she was the shaykh, she appointed people to teach the *Mathnawī* and perform the other tasks that needed to be done, engaging in worship. She became emaciated because of lack of sleep and food, but in response to people who told her to lie down to sleep a little on a tanned skin, she used to say: 'We laid down our tanned skin under the feet and so we gained the Beloved's good pleasure. Especially the tanned skin that became

just punishment, which in turn is attributed to the miraculous powers of that saint. This is because such behaviour is considered to be impious by Sufis, in accordance with this authentic *ḥadīth* 'Who shows enmity towards my saints, I declare war against him.' See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*. vol. 3 (Istanbul: Çağrı 1981), Rīqāq, 38.

88 Nāṣir al-Dīn Wāʿiḍ is described as the son of a certain Mawlānā Rukn al-Dīn Urmawī al-Waladī. Aflākī says that while he was preaching in Niksar for Friday prayers, he had a vision concerning Ulū ʿArīf Chalabī in which he saw him entering the mosque on a horse with a spear, heading towards him and thrusting the spear into his left side. Deeply afraid, he became ill. For details, see Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn*, II, p. 928.

89 On the Mawlawīkhāna, see Barihüda Tanrıkorur, 'Karahisar Mevlevihānesi,' *İslam Ansiklopedisi* XXIV (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 2001), pp. 418–21.

90 For some details on Dīwāna Muḥammad Chalabī, see Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevilik*, pp. 101–12.

91 Thāqīb Muṣṭafā Dede, *Safīna-i nāfisa-yi Mawlawīyān*, 3 vols (Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Wahbiyya 1283), vol. 1, pp. 252–53. Tanrıkorur does not mention Shāh Muḥammad Chalabī as shaykh of the *dargāh* before Dastina Khātun. She also says that Dastina's leadership was in the 1560s. See Tanrıkorur, 'Karahisar Mevlevihānesi,' p. 418.

abandoned for the Beloved, is now under the feet. Therefore, not sleeping is a hundred times better than the cloak of sleeping.' She is believed to talked to the *rijāl al-ghayb* (invisible saints) in her room. People also saw various fruits there that seemed to have been from other parts of the world brought as gifts to her by her invisible visitors. As she performed certain kinds of wondrous miracles that can be compared to that of the Virgin Mary, she was nicknamed '*Marzūq-i Ghaybī*' ('Sustained from the Unseen'), as was Mary.⁹² She gave all the offerings brought to her away to the needy, whence came the belief that she was the genuine spiritual heir of her father.⁹³

Another example of a female shaykh is Gunash Khān. In *Safīna-yi nafīsa-yi Mawlawiyyān*, at the end of the section concerning Dastinā, it is stated that Kuchuk Muḥammad (ʿArif) Chalabī (d. 1050/1640) was appointed as shaykh, but retired into a kind of seclusion after the death of his mother. In place of himself, he appointed substitutes who could fulfil the tasks on his behalf and after his death at the age of eighty, one particular substitute, Gunash Khān was appointed as shaykh.⁹⁴ She took over the position in around 1095/1683, also acting on behalf of her sons who were still young at the time.⁹⁵ Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede (d. 1148/1735) states that Kuçuk Muḥammad Chalabī had four daughters, namely Gunash Khān-i Buzurg (or Kubrā),⁹⁶ Karīma, Raḥīma and Saḥar. He adds that among these girls, Gunash Khān was distinguished in the esoteric and exoteric sciences, and had an angelic disposition and manner, revelations and wondrous gifts, and was known as 'God's Greatest Name' (*Ism-i Azam*). He adds that she gave all the property she inherited from her father, and gifts presented by visitors, to the poor around her and to the *dargāh*. It was amazing that after listening to a dream reported to her by a virtuous woman and interpreting from it that she would die soon, she divided all of her property among her children and gave away the rest of her possessions to the needy. When she died shortly afterwards, she was buried next to Dastinā Khātūn. Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede states that

92 This is an allusion to the verse about Mary being nourished directly by God (Qur'ān, 3: 37).

93 Thāqib Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, pp. 252–3.

94 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 253.

95 See Tanrıkorur, 'Karahisar Mevlvihānesi,' p. 418.

96 She was called *buzurg*, that is, 'senior' or 'elder', since there were other Gunash Khāns in the family line.

Gunash Khān's hagiography was so long that if all of it had been written down, it would have formed a book, and cites a panegyric written for her by a certain Mawlawī poet named Darwīsh Yaqīn.⁹⁷ Gölpınarlı believes that this type of poem for a woman is the first of its kind and extremely rare in classical Turkish literature.⁹⁸

During the period of spiritual guidance (*mashyakhāt*) of both Dastinā Khātun and Gunash Khān, the *Mawlawīkhāna* of Afyonkarahisar burnt down and was then rebuilt. In 1291/1874 there was another fire, and the *dargāh* was repaired with money donated by Rāshid Chalabī, a member of the Mawlawī family at that time.⁹⁹

Besides the *Mawlawīkhāna* of Karahisar, there is the *Mawlawīkhāna* of Kütahya,¹⁰⁰ which was run by two female shaykhs between the years of 1010/1601 and 1101/1689. These women were *Mathnawīkhān* Kāmila Khānim, daughter of Sultan Mehmed III (that is, Kūchik 'Ārif Chalabī, d. 824/1421), and her daughter: the poetess Khwāja Fāṭima Khānim (d. 1122/1710). Kāmila Khānim was the second daughter of Kūchik 'Ārif. His other daughters included Gunash Khān-i Sughrā, 'Ā'isha and Karīma. It is said that Kāmila Khānim was the most spiritually distinguished of the sisters. She had thaumaturgic gifts as a child, such as being able to predict the future. She performed these miracles everywhere, little understanding their significance, until her father fed her something unsuitable from the market,¹⁰¹ after which she could no longer perform them.¹⁰²

When Kāmila Khānim reached puberty, her father wanted to put her under the tutelage of a female scholar, rather than a male; the latter, according to their interpretation of Islam, was not permissible. However, she refused to follow the courses, seeing the tutelage of a woman as degrading. Here is an example of a woman herself believing women to be inferior to men! This may be because at that time women were not well educated, and thus were considered incapable of giving instruction. Reportedly she preferred learning from her

97 See Thāqib Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, pp. 253–5.

98 See Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevilik*, p. 279.

99 See Tanrıkorur, 'Karahisar Mevlevihānesi,' pp. 418–9.

100 For some notes on the *Mawlawīkhāna*, see Sevgi Parlak and Bârihüda Tanrıkorur, 'Kütahya Mevlevihānesi,' *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 2003), XXVII, pp. 1–3.

101 That is, he fed her in a way not accepted for a Sufi, since at the market one can taste things before buying them.

102 Thāqib Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, p. 255.

father, although his duties as a shaykh occasionally interrupted the process. Through divine grace, it is said, she was sent tutors during her sleep, who taught her more useful knowledge and gnosis, which she passed on to others.¹⁰³

When Kāmila reached marriageable age, she married a certain Muṣṭafā Agha from Kūtahya, where she revived the Mawlawī Sufi tradition. She gave birth to ten children, six boys and four girls, named Muḥammad, Ḥusayn, Abū Bakr, Khiḍr Shāh, Khalīl, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Āmina, Khadija and Rābiʿa. Only three of the boys and Fāṭima survived into adulthood; the rest died in infancy.¹⁰⁴

Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede provides detailed information on Kāmila Khānim's knowledge and thaumaturgic gifts, among which was her knowledge of *ʿilm-i qiyāfat* (the science of physiognomy). He narrates, for instance, that one day her daughter, Fāṭima Khānim, sent a newly bought slave-girl to her mother, Kāmila Khānim, to introduce herself. Kāmila Khānim, looking her up and down, said that she would die three days after the day she was bought, and her prediction came true.¹⁰⁵

Kāmila Khānim gave all of her property and money to the needy, so much so that she herself became one of them. One day, when she had few provisions, some guests arrived. She offered the small amount of food she had to them, leaving nothing for her family members. When they were about to go to bed hungry, they heard a knock at the door. Upon opening the door they saw an old man with an illuminated face who had brought food for them. After this miraculous event, there was an abundance of food not only for them, but for other people of the city too.¹⁰⁶

Kāmila Khānim was appointed as shaykh to the Kūtahya Arghūniyya *Mawlawikhāna*. Her appointment reveals many interesting aspects of family life and the social conditions that prevailed at that time. After Kūchik ʿArif Chalabī died, his son Walad (the son of his slave girl Shīrẓād, who was made an *umm walad*)¹⁰⁷ was appointed as deputy to the post of the Arghūniyya *Mawlawikhāna* by order of the vizier Kara Muṣṭafā Pasha (d. 1095/1683). When the daughters heard this decision, they became extremely sad at not being

103 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 256. 104 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 255–56. 105 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 256. 106 Ibid.

107 In Islamic jurisprudence, if a slave-girl is made *umm walad* (mother of her owner's child), she is to be set free when she has given birth to the child.

appointed just because they were girls. Among them, Kāmila Khānim said ‘*In kār ba‘d al-istiqrār ma‘lūm shawad*’ (this business will be made known after it has been settled), implying that Walad’s appointment was not final. Indeed, he became paralysed on his first day in the post and died a couple of days later. The post was offered to Kāmila Khānim, but she said that it was Gunash Khān who deserved it. Gunash Khān was made a deputy, Kāmila Khānim the shaykh.¹⁰⁸ After Kāmila’s death her sisters Gunash Khān and Karīma Khānim also served as shaykhs,¹⁰⁹ a point not mentioned by the sources, probably because they were not officially appointed by the state.

After this period, first Kāmila Khānim’s son, Ḥusayn Chalabī (n.d.), and then her daughter, Khwāja Fāṭima Khānim (d. 1122/1710), were appointed to the post. She was described with the sobriquets of ‘*Khayr al-nisā’ al-ṣālihāt*’ (the best of righteous women), and ‘*Fakhr al-qānitāt al-‘ārifāt*’ (pride of pious gnostic women), and was renowned as ‘a woman exerting herself in performing all kinds of prayers.’ Her piety was shaped by events; she married as a young girl ‘Uthmān-Pashaz da Maḥmūd Beg and gave birth to a girl named Khadīja, who died in infancy. She could not stand the sorrow caused by this pain, so much so that she turned her back on the profane world and became an ascetic. She gave her husband some of her maids and spent the rest of her money on making a pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by many servants, providing them with the chance to visit the Kā’ba. After her husband’s death she retired into seclusion, completely following the path of her predecessors Dastinā and the other female Mawlawī shaykhs. After several years, her brother Ḥusayn Chalabī died, leaving a daughter, Ḥawwā’ Khānim. Khwāja Fāṭima Khānim took her niece under her care until she married Thāqīb Muṣṭafā Dede, author of *Safīna-yi nafīsa-i Mawlawiyyān*, the main source of this article.¹¹⁰

Khwāja Fāṭima Khānim inherited from her mother Kāmila Khānim not only her beauty but also her knowledge and wisdom. She had a command of literature, both in verse and in prose. Because of her

¹⁰⁸ Thāqīb Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, pp. 258–59. If I understood this correctly, when this was told to Walad Chalabī before his death, he sacrificed forty animals to celebrate this event and show that he did not feel sorrow for their appointments; however, his illness was considered to be a consequence of his jealousy.

¹⁰⁹ Thāqīb Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, pp. 258–59.

¹¹⁰ See Thāqīb Muṣṭafā, *Safīna*, vol. 1, pp. 261–63.

mystic tendencies, she was called the 'Second Rābī'a',¹¹¹ and because of her great distinction in charitable matters, '*al-Mawlawiyya Umm al-Fuqarā'*' (Mawlawī mother of the poor). The books she owned were bestowed as an endowment upon those who retired into seclusion in the Arghūniyya *Mawlawikhāna*, and other righteous people of piety. After her death, she was buried next to the tomb of Jalāl al-Dīn Arghūn,¹¹² as she had requested.¹¹³ Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede devoted a great many pages in his books to her, probably because he knew so much about her as she was both a contemporary and a relative. He and his contemporaries all relate how charitable and virtuous she was. Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede states at the end of these biographies that women retired into seclusion in small and dark rooms around the *dargāh*, fasting, performing *dhikr* and worshipping day and night under the leadership of these female shaykhs, just as men did under the leadership of male shaykhs.¹¹⁴

Interestingly, the Mawlawīs seem not to have been affected by Shams-i Tabrizī's (d. 645/1247) unfavourable opinion about women being shaykhs in his *Maqālāt*, where one paragraph expresses rather negative thoughts on women. In conversation with Rūmī, Shams says that it is not necessary for a woman to become a shaykh. In response to Rūmī's words of 'Yes, it would be out of place,' he feels it necessary to rephrase his opinion more explicitly:

You mean that it would be better if a man becomes a shaykh. No, I mean much more than that. I mean this is definitely not for women. Either in place or out of place, I would change my faith in the Prophet Muḥammad, had Ḥaḍrat Fāṭima [d. 11/632]¹¹⁵ and 'Ā'isha become shaykhs. Thank God, they did no such a thing.¹¹⁶

111 Here the famous female Sufi Rābī'a al-ʿAdawiyya is meant, who was deemed a model for female Sufis. See Hülya Küçük, 'Menâkıbü'l-Ârifin'de Râbia ve Râbia Timsâli,' *Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası*, No. 144 (Hz. Mevlânâ Özel Sayısı/Special Rūmī Issue), 4 (2007), pp. 87–93. For detailed information on Rābī'a, see Smith, *Rābī'a the Mystic and her Fellow-Saints in Islam*.

112 Jalāl al-Dīn Arghūn Chalabī was the grandson of Muṭahhara Khātun (and the son of Burhān al-Dīn Ilyās Pasha). He lived in the fourteenth century. The exact date of his death is not known; 734/1374, the date given by Thāqib Dede, was found to be inaccurate by Gölpınarlı. See his *Mevlevîlik*, p. 124.

113 Thāqib Muṣṭafā, *Safina*, vol. 1, pp. 261–4. 114 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 253.

115 Daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad.

116 Shams-i Tabrizī, *Maqālāt*, Mawlānā Museum MS., no. 2145, f. 80b.

Shams thinks it impossible for a woman even to become a saint, let alone become a shaykh; since he believes that if a woman were given a sublime place on God's Throne and then she saw a suitable position for her sexual desire on earth, she would prefer to descend from that sublime place.¹¹⁷ However, it seems that Shams' opinion did not greatly influence either Rūmī or other Mawlawī Sufis, and female saints and shaykhs are known to have been appointed officially throughout the history of the Order, though only in the absence of male substitutes.

Gölpınarlı evaluates the issue of Mawlawī women occupying leading posts in the order's history as follows. It seems that during the early years when the Mawlawī Sufi tradition had first spread to the villages, women were not excluded from society and were not considered inferior to men, at least in villages where the Mawlawī Sufis flourished. Nevertheless, due to the Mawlawī Order's direct relation with the state in the social context of the institution of charitable endowments (*waqf*) and its consequent connection with the position of Shaykh al-Islām, the Mawlawīs had to restrict women's positions in the order. After the seventeenth century,¹¹⁸ we no longer encounter any female Mawlawī shaykhs, just as we do not encounter any village *Mawlawikhānas*. In spite of everything, Mawlawī women obtained a fairly high position in the Mawlawiyya, at least in comparison with other Orders. Mawlawī women could wear special costumes and could perform the Mawlawī whirling ritual (*Samāʿ*), sometimes even together with elderly Mawlawī Dadas accompanied by the *nay* and *qudum*.¹¹⁹ But this was allowed only as a form of consolation: Mawlawī etiquette rituals had taken their final shape with men in all leading positions, leaving no room for women to initiate others into the order, perform seclusion, or even enter the Mawlawī ritual square.¹²⁰

These reforms came at a time when the fierce conflict between religious scholars and Sufi shaykhs led to *fatwās* issued against *Samāʿ* and the Sufi orders in general, as being sources of heretical innovation and so against the *Shariʿa*. At the same time, the Qaḍīzādalīs issued a

117 See al-Aflākī, *Manāqib al-ʿarifīn*, vol. 2, pp. 640–41.

118 Gölpınarlı is in error when he says 'after the 17th century . . .' He does not consider that Khwāja Fāṭima Khānim died in 1122/1710.

119 A small double drum used for rhythm in Mawlawī music.

120 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevilik*, p. 281.

proclamation of war on the Sufis, which led to the slaying of thousands of Mawlawī Sufis in 1076/1665.¹²¹

In later years, the Mawlawī woman turned into 'a queen with no crown,' longing for her earlier days of glory when the order was not affected by Islamic scholars' pressure or control. Currently, they can enter the order only as novices, with a couple of exceptions. For instance, Hayat Nur Artıran was appointed as a substitute by the *Mathnawī-khān* (*Mathnawī* teacher) Şefik Can Dede shortly before he died in January 2005.¹²² It can be inferred from this that a forgotten tradition is now being revived. In fact, Esin Çelebi Bayru's (Rūmī's descendant from the twenty-second generation) activities as a representative of the Çelebi family provide enough evidence for women's exalted position in the order since she acts as the head-Mawlawī shaykh in an unofficial way, besides participating in all state-supported activities, such as the annual commemorations of Rūmī's death and the re-opening of historic *Mawlawīkhāna* buildings throughout Turkey.

In the USA, Camille Adams Helminski (b. 1951), who is one of the founders and directors of the Threshold Society, is currently a prominent female representative of the Mawlawī order there. She has been working within the Mawlawī Sufi tradition for about twenty years, together with her husband Kabīr Edmund Helminski (b. 1947), who was appointed a shaykh by Dr Celaledin Çelebi (1926–96), Rūmī's descendant from the twenty-first generation of Istanbul, Turkey. As Camille Helminski has not been directly appointed shaykh by Çelebi, she can be deemed only as 'co-director' of the society and the Mawlawī Order which tries to apply traditional Sufi principles to the conditions of contemporary life.¹²³

121 For details, see İsmet Kayaoğlu, 'Raks ve devran etrafında tartışmalar.' In *3rd International Rūmī Congress* (Konya: Üniversite 2004), pp. 291–302. For the conflicts between scholars and Sufis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Madeline C. Zilfi, 'The Kadızadeli: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth Century İstanbul,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 85 (1986), pp. 251–69; Reşat Öngören, *Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf: Anadolu'da Süfler, Devlet ve Ulema (XVI. Yüzyıl)* (İstanbul: İz 2000), pp. 342–57.

122 Nuriye Akman, 'Mesnevihan Şefik Can Vasiyetini Açıkladığı Son Röportajı Zaman'a Verdi.' *Zaman Gazetesi*, 25 January 2005; Hayat Nur Artıran, 'Mevlevi Erkânı İçinde Kadının Yeri,' unpublished paper presented at the Mevlâna'da Buluşma Sempozyumu, İstanbul 17 December 2005.

123 For details, see Hülya Küçük, 'A Brief History of Western Sufism', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 36 (2008): 292–320: 314.

CONCLUSIONS

There were many leading female Sufis and shaykhs during the early years of Sufism. They largely led their lives in an atmosphere of relative freedom, often having male masters or teaching male disciples, and sometimes having special rooms for them at their homes. In later years, due to the deterioration of the social position of women in Muslim societies, this freedom was curtailed solely to discipleship. Yet, after the formation of the orders, some Sufis adhered to the idea that women were incapable of having a position of spiritual directorship within an order. The Mawlawī, however, held the opposite view, with the exception of Shams of Tabrīz. In the Mawlawiyya, we thus see that women shaykhs were officially appointed as heads of *dargāhs*. Aflākī's *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn* and Thāqib Muṣṭafā Dede's *Safina-yi nafisa-yi Mawlawiyyān* are the only sources that provide us with the biographies of female shaykhs in the Mawlawī Order, together stretching from the early phase of the order down to the twelfth/eighteenth century. Thāqib Dede points out that under their leadership, many female disciples, taking advantage of female guides, retired into seclusion in the main *dargāh* just as men used to do under the guidance of male Sufi masters. Today, there currently exist a few Mawlawī women who enact the role of spiritual guide to Sufi seekers.

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