

CHAPTER TWO

THE ASCETIC AND MYSTICAL LEGACY OF AL-ḤASAN AL-BAṢRĪ

It is generally maintained in modern scholarship that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī significantly influenced the formation and development of Islamic mysticism.¹ Irrespective of whether or not mysticism existed in the first two centuries of Islam,² the role al-Ḥasan is perceived to have played revolves around particular ascetical and spiritual practices and ideas associated with him that were incorporated into the mystical tradition. The impact of his sermons on later generations of Muslims, it is argued, was immense, not only on morality and religious rhetoric but also on dogma.³ Moreover, it is believed that al-Ḥasan's spirituality resolved the natural clash in Islamic theology between predestination and free-will, by endeavoring to attain the mystical state of *Riḍā*, or "reciprocal acceptance and contentment between God and the soul."⁴ In other words, modern scholarship justifies the relation of al-Ḥasan to mysticism on the basis of the references to him in mystical literature. Yet the question that one has to pose is not whether or not mystical compilations cite al-Ḥasan, for they cite a large number of notable early Muslim figures whom they consider their founding fathers. It is rather the way he is cited that needs to be examined in order to deduce the degree of his contribution to the formulation of mystical ideas and practices in medieval Islam. Do mystics acknowledge al-Ḥasan as their founder, or is he simply one of many founding fathers? Do they cite him

¹ For simplicity, I will use the terms mysticism/mystics/mystical, and not sufism/sufis/sufi, mainly because it has been established that *ṣūfism* was but one form of mysticism in medieval Islam: on this, see J. Chabbi, "Remarques sur le développement historique des mouvements ascétiques et mystiques au Khurāsān," *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977), 5–72; idem, "Réflexions sur le soufisme iranien primitif," *Journal Asiatique* 266 (1978), 37–55; and A. T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

² For a discussion of this issue, see C. Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth century C.E.," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996), 51–70.

³ Massignon, *Essay*, 132–34.

⁴ Massignon, *Essay*, 134.

exclusively for particular practices and views? When does the claim first appear, and where? Is there a link between those who were claiming him and the city of Baṣra?

In modern scholarship, these questions are either not raised or not fully addressed. The role al-Ḥasan allegedly played in the emergence of Islamic mysticism is inferred from the anecdotes and stories that are associated with him in mystical literature. For instance, R. A. Nicholson describes al-Ḥasan as “the most famous representative of the ascetic movement” in Islam.⁵ Nicholson carefully avoids calling al-Ḥasan a mystic, but nevertheless makes him the forerunner of mysticism.⁶ L. Massignon, however, believes that Islamic spiritualism started with al-Ḥasan⁷ and that al-Ḥasan laid down the foundations of the “science of hearts (*ilm al-qulūb*) or mystical psychology.”⁸ He argues that reflection was a very fundamental practice in al-Ḥasan’s teachings; it called for the return to one’s self to examine one’s conduct. Massignon describes al-Ḥasan’s central ascetic doctrine in the following manner:

His rule for living is characterized by scrupulous denial (*waraʿ*) and strict renunciation of all legally dubious actions (*shubuhāt*); more than that, it is asceticism (*zuhd*), a complete and universal abandonment of the world and all that perishes.⁹

In general Massignon relies for his presentation of al-Ḥasan on the anecdotes by or about him in medieval literature, especially mystical sources, which represent his ascetic practice and preaching, as well as his spiritualism and mystical reflection. Massignon recognizes the challenge of authenticating these particular anecdotes and subsequently the mystical tradition of al-Ḥasan, to the exclusion of anecdotes that point to the contrary. He resolves this problem by arguing that the conflict about reporting al-Ḥasan’s teachings resulted from three groups of his disciples. First, there were the mystics, who were—according to Massignon—al-Ḥasan’s most faithful disciples and the most honest interpreters of his thought. Second, there were the Muʿtazilites, who strayed from his teachings on fundamental points. Third, there were the Sunnite *Ḥadīth* scholars; these are the faithless disciples, for they abandoned al-Ḥasan’s

⁵ R. A. Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906), 304.

⁶ Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry,” 305.

⁷ Massignon, *Essay*, 134.

⁸ Massignon, *Essay*, 132.

⁹ Massignon, *Essay*, 131.

doctrine entirely and even attacked him.¹⁰ In other words, the teachings of al-Ḥasan that were passed down by his mystical disciples are the only teachings to be accepted as authentically coming from him, and the rest are to be rejected. This is largely the basis of Massignon's reconstruction of al-Ḥasan's mystical rules and spiritualism, and one is left wondering how Massignon comes to the conclusion that the only honest trustees of al-Ḥasan's teachings are his mystic disciples.

Following closely the writings of Massignon, Anawati and Gardet equally emphasize the fundamental role al-Ḥasan played in the foundation of Islamic mysticism. They even nickname him "*patriarche de la mystique musulmane*" (patriarch of Islamic mysticism).¹¹ A. Schimmel also uses the nickname, indicating the level of acceptance and diffusion of such perceptions in modern scholarship.¹² W. M. Watt, similarly, believes that it is al-Ḥasan's "ascetic and mystical sayings which have been best preserved."¹³ He also maintains that eschatology was central in al-Ḥasan's thought, but he disagrees with Massignon about whether it translated as a call for rejecting all that pertains to this world.¹⁴ In other words, Watt argues that al-Ḥasan's doctrine did not require a complete ascetic life-style. Al-Ḥasan's preaching and attitude, according to Watt, exhibit a great emphasis on proper conduct "in himself and in other people."¹⁵

A. Knysh also examines al-Ḥasan's proto-mystical teachings. His view is that al-Ḥasan's religious personality promoted him among his contemporaries, who revered him because he sincerely applied to himself what he preached to others.¹⁶ Knysh generally agrees with Massignon that al-Ḥasan's emphasis on self-scrutiny to guide one's actions had a tremendous impact on later mystical practice:

This psychological analysis was to become the cornerstone of Sufi self-discipline and introspection which were brought to fruition in the work of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857).¹⁷

¹⁰ Massignon, *Essay*, 137–38.

¹¹ G. Anawati and L. Gardet, *Mystique musulmane: aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1986), 24.

¹² A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 30.

¹³ Watt, *The Formative Period*, 79.

¹⁴ Watt, *The Formative Period*, 79.

¹⁵ Watt, *The Formative Period*, 79.

¹⁶ A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 11.

¹⁷ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 12.

What primarily moved al-Ḥasan in that direction, Knysh maintains, was his belief that humans were responsible for their sins, not God.¹⁸ Knysh also argues that certain mystical practices were developed by al-Ḥasan:

Al-Ḥasan's brotherly feeling towards his contemporaries (*ukhuwwa*) and his altruism (*ithār*) were also appropriated by later Sufis as an attitude conducive to the mystical goal. They became the foundation of the doctrine of chivalry (*futuwwa*)—a hallmark of many Sufi associations in the subsequent epochs.¹⁹

Knysh admits, however, that al-Ḥasan's "real relation with the nascent ascetic and mystical movement in Islam is difficult to ascertain," partly because he was free spirited, reluctant to commit to one movement.²⁰ Knysh also acknowledges that al-Ḥasan's great reputation "made him a convenient figurehead for various later religious schools and movements."²¹

The examination of al-Ḥasan's presumed ascetic and mystical experience in modern scholarship has generally been based on some selectivity with regard to the material attributed to him in medieval scholarship. What is emphasized is the similarity between concepts that al-Ḥasan upheld and advocated in the sermons ascribed to him and concepts elaborated in later works on mysticism. For example, Massignon argues that al-Ḥasan's reflection on *muḥāsaba* (examination of one's conduct and conscience), which is reported in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Revivification of the Religious Sciences), prepared the way for al-Muḥāsibī's formulation of this mystical practice.²² But, as will be discussed later, al-Muḥāsibī, who flourished two and a half centuries prior to al-Ghazālī, makes no indication whatsoever that he owes this concept to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

In this chapter I will reexamine al-Ḥasan's contribution to asceticism and mysticism in order to better understand his religious personality and teachings, as well as the way he was received by early and later mystics. The chapter is divided into three sections :

1) First, I will revisit the issue of the authenticity of the corpus of ascetic and mystical sayings attributed to al-Ḥasan in order to establish

¹⁸ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 12.

¹⁹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 12.

²⁰ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 13.

²¹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 13.

²² Massignon, *Essay*, 132. Knysh makes a similar observation: *Islamic Mysticism*, 12.

their reliability and the extent to which they were subsequently shaped by the motivations of those who transmitted them and/or the authors who documented them. This examination will be based on the earliest images of al-Ḥasan in medieval scholarship, from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries.

2) Next, I will examine the early works on asceticism and mysticism for references to al-Ḥasan's teachings in order to establish his influence on the emerging mystical doctrines and practices. Here we must differentiate between sermons and anecdotes in those works associated with al-Ḥasan and clear statements about his direct influence on the development of mystical concepts and practices. In the first case, he was quoted, just as were so many other founding fathers of mysticism, whereas in the second case he was distinctively acknowledged as the fountainhead.

3) Finally, I will analyze al-Ḥasan's portrayal by later mystics, and see if it conforms to the results of the first two steps, or if, instead, it suggests his transformation into a legendary mystical figure. Here the element of motive must not be overlooked. First, there is the issue of the sanctification of the founding fathers, which led to an overemphasis on particular aspects of their presumed teachings and practices. Second, some mystical movements were challenged either by other mystical movements or by non-mystical groups as to their legitimacy, and one common reaction by many such movements was to enlist in their ranks a large number of famous figures from the first two centuries of Islam and claim to follow their lead. One must therefore reexamine the legacy of al-Ḥasan in mystical sources, keeping in mind the element of motive as a factor that might have determined the way he was presented by their authors.

2.1 THE EARLIEST IMAGES OF AL-ḤASAN

2.1.1 *The austere ascetic al-Ḥasan*

The most common image of al-Ḥasan, especially in ascetic and piety literature from as early as the second/eighth century, is that of a very pious figure who uttered valuable sermons and anecdotes about piety, which emphasize proper worship and the deceitful nature of this world. These sermons and anecdotes are recorded either in scattered order or arranged in chapters, and their intent is to emphasize al-Ḥasan's piety and exemplary conduct as well as to justify certain religious practices and

modes of worship advocated by the religious groups who transmitted them. Such works include three with the same title: *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (Book of Asceticism) by ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), by Waki’ b. al-Jarrāh (d. 197/812), and by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).²³ One even finds a large number of these anecdotes in works of belles-lettres and wisdom literature, such as *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (On Rhetoric and Exposition) by al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), *‘Uyūn al-akhbār* (The Jewels of Narratives) by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), and *al-Kitāb al-Kāmil* (The Complete Book) by al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900).

These works do not present al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as a mystic. Rather, he was perceived as one out of hundreds of early Muslim pious figures—the founding fathers—whose sermons and life-stories were intended and used as guidelines for later generations of Muslims.²⁴ In these early sources, the presentation of al-Ḥasan as an exemplar of piety was not unique. Every other significant early Muslim figure had a similar portrait: they all reflect on piety, and call for proper worship and the renunciation of this world.

Let’s turn to the earliest piety/ascetic biography of al-Ḥasan to get a feel for what such a portrayal was like. In *Kitāb al-Zuhd* by Ibn al-Mubārak, the material on al-Ḥasan is scattered over several chapters, each of which deals with an aspect of piety. The fact that Ibn al-Mubārak scatters the material in different chapters does not minimize the significance of his portrayal of al-Ḥasan; this statement applies to other figures as well. On the contrary, it was the material that Ibn al-Mubārak collected on piety and renunciation that provided one of the foundations upon which later scholars of piety and morality, asceticism and mysticism based their presentation of al-Ḥasan and so many other exemplars of early Muslim piety.

Al-Ḥasan, according to Ibn al-Mubārak, is someone who enjoined

²³ These books could also have been collected by the disciples of these figures. In particular, Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd* was transmitted by his son ‘Abd Allāh, who added to it a large amount of material he collected himself from informants other than his father. Similarly, Ibn al-Mubārak’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd* includes material not transmitted by him. This conclusion is based on my personal examination of these two texts.

²⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd* includes several major early figures who were known for their piety. Abū Nu‘aym’s *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* includes Companions, religious scholars, known ascetics, and mystics up to his own time; the only common denominator is their piety. He is clearly attempting to provide a broad dimension for mysticism, even though not all of those named were mystics.

renunciation of the world. In his work, he has al-Faḍl b. Thawr²⁵ ask al-Ḥasan:

(B1) O Abū Saʿīd, which do you say is better, a man who sought the permissible in this world and became rich, spent on his family and relatives and did charitable things, or a man who renounced this world? Al-Ḥasan replied: "I prefer the one who renounced the world." I repeated it, and he repeated what he said.²⁶

According to this anecdote, al-Ḥasan chose renunciation of the world over the permissible things.²⁷ Further on, al-Ḥasan is quoted saying that the individual has to exert his energy in the way of God and constantly live in fear of God:

(B2) The dearest drop to God is a drop of tears caused by fearing God or a drop of blood spilt [fighting] in the path of God.²⁸

Equally important is that the believer should tame his soul. Al-Ḥasan is said to have reported:

(B3) Once, ʿUmar [b. al-Khaṭṭāb] visited ʿĀsim b. ʿAmr and found him eating meat. He asked: "What is this?" ʿĀsim replied: "I craved it." ʿUmar said: "So, do you eat everything that your soul craves? It is prodigal that a man eats everything that he desires."²⁹

Al-Ḥasan here promotes self-restraint when it comes to food. In another report, he seems to be stressing that piety requires a humble character:

(B4) By God, [the messenger of God] used to sit on the ground, place his food on the ground, wear coarse dress, ride a donkey and let someone ride behind him, and lick his own hand.³⁰

Yet the strongest image of al-Ḥasan that comes out of Ibn al-Mubārak is the one that presents him as overwhelmed by sorrow and the fear of eternal punishment and preoccupied with constant worship, as the following anecdotes show.

²⁵ The biographical dictionaries do not provide a date for al-Faḍl's death.

²⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 189–90 (no. 564). Al-Muḥāsibī attributes the same report to one of the notable Successors: see al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, 53.

²⁷ In a different account, al-Ḥasan praises having money and spending it in charitable ways: see (B28) below.

²⁸ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 216 (no. 672).

²⁹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 237 (no. 769). In al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, 63, the report is attributed to one of the Successors.

³⁰ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 192 (no. 575), and 296 (no. 995: not via Ibn al-Mubārak).

(B5) Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna reported from a man that al-Ḥasan said: “A man asked a friend of his: ‘My friend, have you been told that you are doomed to Hell?’ He replied: ‘Yes.’ [The first] asked: ‘Have you been told that you will be released from it?’ [The second] replied: ‘No.’ [The first] asked: ‘Why then are you laughing?’ Ever after [the second man] was not seen laughing till he died.”³¹

(B6) Mālik b. Mighwal reported that al-Ḥasan said: “God was never better worshiped than by constant sorrow.”³²

(B7) Yūnus [b. ‘Ubayd] reported that al-Ḥasan said: “The true believer should wake up overtaken by sorrow, and retire for the night overtaken by sorrow.” Yūnus said: “You seldom see al-Ḥasan but [grieved], as if just struck by a disaster.”³³

(B8) Yūnus said: “I have never seen a person more overtaken by sorrow than al-Ḥasan, for he used to say: ‘We laugh but we do not know whether God has seen some of our actions and said: ‘I am not accepting anything from you.’”³⁴

(B9) Al-Mubārak [b. Faḍāla] reported that al-Ḥasan said: “I was told that if the worshiper sleeps while prostrating, God would say: ‘Look at my worshiping servant. His soul is with me and his body is in my service.’”³⁵

(B10) Mālik b. Dīnār said: “I asked al-Ḥasan about the punishment of the scholar; he replied: ‘[It is] the death of the heart.’ I asked: ‘What is the death of the heart?’ He replied: ‘Seeking [the pleasures of] this world by fulfilling the duties of the next world.’”³⁶

(B11) Al-Mubārak b. Faḍāla reported that al-Ḥasan said: “Protect your soul, O son of Adam, for if you are thrown in Hell it (your soul) will never recover.”³⁷

³¹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 124 (no. 311).

³² Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 78 (no. 126), and 422 (no. 1546); and Wakīf, *al-Zuhd*, II, 459 (no. 205).

³³ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 295 (no. 989). This report is part of the additional material added by the transmitters of *Kitāb al-Zuhd*. The second part of this account is related in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 368 (no. 1454) and Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, II, 134, but via informants other than Yūnus. See also Ritter, “Studien,” 17–18.

³⁴ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 413–14 (no. 1499); and al-Kharrāz, *al-Ṭariq ilā Allāh*, 25 (variant). A similar version is quoted in Ritter, “Studien,” 17.

³⁵ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 346 (no. 1213).

³⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 416 (no. 1514).

³⁷ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 425 (no. 1564). The expression “*Ibn Ādam*” (Son of Adam) is used in Islamic literature, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to mean “human being” in the sense that all humans descended from the first man, Ādam. I am translating the expression literally.

(B12) Sufyān [b. ‘Uyayna] reported from a man that al-Ḥasan said: “Faith is attained neither by hopes nor by good appearances. It is rather attained by what is revered by the heart and confirmed by deeds.”³⁸

These sermons and anecdotes reflect a person deeply concerned about his proper conduct and fate. He lived in constant sorrow, always preoccupied with worship and frightened of eternal punishment.

The image of al-Ḥasan that Ibn al-Mubārak presents is repeated in Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, which was collected by his son ‘Abd Allāh (d. 290/903). The text largely follows Ibn al-Mubārak’s model and uses it as a primary source, but it also includes reports that Aḥmad and his son ‘Abd Allāh collected from other sources. The biography of al-Ḥasan is tailored by Ibn Ḥanbal/‘Abd Allāh in such a way as to emphasize the same dominant theme: al-Ḥasan as an exemplar of asceticism and piety. According to this image of al-Ḥasan, the pious believer has to be constantly sorrowful, reminding himself of the Day of Judgment.³⁹

(B13) A man asked al-Ḥasan: “How are you, and how are you doing?” He replied: “In the worst possible condition. What do you expect from someone who wakes up and retires at night waiting for death, not knowing what God has in store for him?”⁴⁰

Al-Ḥasan is also portrayed as having little patience with hypocrisy and excessive piety. For instance, it is reported that Farqad al-Sabakhī (d. 131/749), a disciple of al-Ḥasan, reprimanded a man for his voracious appetite. Al-Ḥasan, who was present at the meal, became angry and, according to Khālid b. Shawdhab, reproached Farqad:

(B14) What is the matter with you? May God do such and such to you. Let the man eat. I was told that you say: “I wish we eat ash.” May God make it (ash) your sustenance.⁴¹

The purpose of an account like this one is to stress the importance of matching words with deeds. In another presumed encounter between al-Ḥasan and Farqad, al-Ḥasan is said to have reproached him as well for wearing a woolen garment (*jubba*). According to the same Khālid b. Shawdhab, al-Ḥasan held Farqad by his garment and said to him:

³⁸ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 425 (no. 1565); and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ādāb al-shaykh al-Ḥasan*, 46.

³⁹ See, for example, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 367–69 (nos. 1449–59: some not via Ibn Ḥanbal).

⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 372 (no. 1479: not via Ibn Ḥanbal).

⁴¹ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 376 (no. 1500: not via Ibn Ḥanbal). On the problem of al-Ḥasan and Farqad stories, see below.

(B15) O my dear Farqad—he repeated it two or three times—piety is not in this dress. Piety is rather what is established in the heart and sanctioned by acts and deeds.⁴²

In a third instance, a man wept loudly while al-Ḥasan was delivering a sermon. Al-Ḥasan said to him:

(B16) I swear that God will ask you on the Day of Judgment what you meant by this act.⁴³

Such reports portray al-Ḥasan as someone impatient with hypocritical religious attitudes and insincere excessive piety. The message that is conveyed here, which gains significance as a result of its being associated with someone like al-Ḥasan, is that hypocrisy, fanaticism, and exaggeration have no place in honest piety. Words have to be fulfilled by acts, and the truly pious person should not care about displaying his piety in dress or exaggerated performance.

We must recall that, as discussed in the Introduction, the circles of Ibn al-Mubārak and even Ibn Ḥanbal had a vested interest in promoting *jihād* along the Byzantine frontiers. Therefore, one purpose of attributing such anecdotes and reports to al-Ḥasan and to figures of similar significance was to encourage the recruits and motivate them to aspire to imitate the lives and piety of the founding fathers. Overall, the underlying objective was to rewrite the lives of these founding fathers so that they become exemplars of true faith as understood and championed by these groups.

Other issues in the biography of al-Ḥasan come up in Ibn Ḥanbal/ʿAbd Allāh, although they are somewhat tangential to the main theme. They seem to have been necessitated by the hostility at the time between the various religious groups over issues like the predestination and free-will (*Qadar*) controversy. For instance, ʿAbd Allāh quotes al-Ḥasan affirming predestination:

(C1) Ibn ʿAwn transmitted from al-Ḥasan that he said: “He who denies *qadar* (predestination) has reneged his faith.”⁴⁴

Here, the term *qadar* means predestination, not free-will. This must be the case because the report is transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAwn (d. 151/768), a major proto-Sunnite traditionist and jurist from Baṣra

⁴² Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 379 (no. 1522: not via Ibn Ḥanbal).

⁴³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 382 (no. 1537: not via Ibn Ḥanbal).

⁴⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 401 (no. 1650: not via Ibn Ḥanbal).

who believed in predestination.⁴⁵ The inference is therefore that al-Ḥasan upheld the predestinarian creed. Ibn Ḥanbal also ascertains that al-Ḥasan was not involved in the *fitnas* (intra-Muslim civil wars) of the first/seventh century. He quotes an account, already discussed in Chapter 1, by the ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 130/748) of an encounter with the advocate of *Qadar* theology, Maʿbad al-Juhanī, who was executed shortly after 83/703 for his participation in the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath against al-Ḥajjāj, the Umayyad governor of Iraq.

(B17) Mālik b. Dīnār said: “Maʿbad al-Juhanī met me; we were both riding. He said to me: ‘O Mālik, I traveled to all regions and saw the scholars, but I have not seen anyone like al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan. I wish we had listened to him. I wish we had listened to him.’”⁴⁶

Mālik b. Dīnār is claiming here that Maʿbad al-Juhanī expressed regret for not listening to the advice of al-Ḥasan not to join the uprising of Ibn al-Ashʿath. In other words, Ibn Ḥanbal is indirectly telling his readers that al-Ḥasan advocated nonparticipation in the *fitnas* among Muslims.⁴⁷ The fact that Ibn Ḥanbal inserted these controversial sentiments into his presentation of al-Ḥasan shows how the piety image was used and for what objective. This is, after all, not surprising, since the school of Ibn Ḥanbal was one of the earliest proponents of the dogma of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (the rightly-guided predecessors), who are none other than the founding fathers of his vision of Sunnite Islam and who neither believed in free-will nor participated in *fitnas* (civil wars).

The various presentations of al-Ḥasan in early medieval scholarship as a person focused on piety, sorrow, and fear of punishment are not restricted to ascetic and piety literature. The following examples are taken from works of belles-lettres:

(B18) ʿĪsā b. ʿUmar said: “We heard al-Ḥasan saying: ‘Restrain [your] souls because they are inquisitive. Do not obey them, for if you obey them, they will lead you to a miserable end. Constantly remind them with the mentioning of God for they very quickly grow rusty.’”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, V, 130–31; and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, V, 346–49.

⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 395 (no. 1613).

⁴⁷ Concerning this report and variant ones, see Introduction 2 (Life).

⁴⁸ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, I, 297–98; and al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 187 (slightly variant). The first part of this saying—restrain your souls because they are inquisitive—is quoted by Ibn Manẓūr in support of the most common meaning of *q-d-* ‘(to restrain): see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, VIII: 260b. Interestingly, a distorted version of this saying—“pleasure your hearts because they quickly grow rusty” (*rawwihū l-qulūba*

(B19) Al-Ḥasan said: “Preaching good is better than silence, but silence is better than preaching evil.”⁴⁹

(B20) Ya’qūb [b. al-Qa’qā’] said: I heard al-Ḥasan saying: “Son of Adam, you are but a number [of days]. If one day passes away, a part of you passes away.”⁵⁰

The piety images of al-Ḥasan show him to have been consumed with sorrow and fear and obsessed with upright conduct and worship. Yet there is nothing in these early sources suggesting that al-Ḥasan isolated himself from the world or from people, built a pillar and sat on top of it, or had a cell where he exercised asceticism. Moreover, we know from medieval literature that he was not celibate. Therefore, what we are dealing with here are early images of al-Ḥasan that fit within only the broadest definition of piety. There are some extremes in these images, such as constant sorrow and fear of eternal punishment, but there is little asceticism and spiritualism, and no mysticism whatsoever. After all, one would not expect to find any mysticism in these sayings, since mystical reflection in Islam was not yet invented.⁵¹ Moreover, because the emphasis in sources like Ibn al-Mubārak’s and Ibn Ḥanbal’s is primarily on al-Ḥasan as an exemplar of piety, it became an established theme that could not be ignored by later authors.

The number of accounts concerning al-Ḥasan’s piety and asceticism continued to grow in medieval literature. In Ibn al-Mubārak, we find approximately 170 reports. In Ibn Ḥanbal/ʿAbd Allāh the number grows to 215; some of them overlap with Ibn al-Mubārak. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā also collected around 215 accounts in his works on piety;⁵² some but not all overlap with Ibn al-Mubārak and Ibn Ḥanbal. Obviously, then, the material is expanding, even as the image and legend of al-Ḥasan as an austere and pious figure is growing.

fa-ʿinnahā sarīʿatu l-duthūrī)—is quoted in support of the game of chess in the anonymous *Risālat al-Shaṭarānj*: See *Libro del Ajedrez de sus problemas y sutilezas de autor árabe desconocido*, ed. and trans. Félix M. Pareja Casañas (Madrid: Imprenta de Estanislao Maestre, 1935), I, 8.

⁴⁹ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, II, 113.

⁵⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, II: 361; and Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, II, 400–401 (no. 582).

⁵¹ On this, see Melchert, “The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism.”

⁵² For a list of these works, see the Bibliography.

2.1.2 *The world-affirming al-Ḥasan*

The pious, constantly sorrowful and fearful image of al-Ḥasan was not the only one presented in early Islamic scholarship. Some early medieval sources report that al-Ḥasan enjoyed good food, and that he ridiculed people who renounced it. He appreciated handsome presents, were they money or fine clothes. He did not abhor wealth, and was often seen wearing fine costumes when coming to the mosque to pray.

(B21) Ḥumayd [al-Ṭawīl] said: “Al-Ḥasan used every day to buy meat for half a dirham. I never smelled a sauce more appetizing than al-Ḥasan’s [meat-]sauce.”⁵³

(B22) Dāwūd [b. Abī Hind] said: “I told al-Ḥasan: ‘You consume a lot of these foods!’ He replied: ‘There is no lavish spending when it comes to food.’”⁵⁴

(B23) ‘Uqba [b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṣamm] said: “I came to al-Ḥasan while he was eating bread and meat. He said [to me]: ‘Come, eat the food of the free people.’”⁵⁵

(B24) Jarīr b. Ḥāzim [al-Baṣrī] said: “Every time I visited al-Ḥasan I saw his cooking-pots full to the brim with meat.”⁵⁶

(B25) ‘Umāra⁵⁷ said: “I was at the place of al-Ḥasan when Farqad entered, and [al-Ḥasan] was eating *khabiṣa* (kind of sweet). He said: ‘Come, eat with us.’ [Farqad] replied: ‘I am afraid that I might not give enough thanks [to God] for it.’ [Al-Ḥasan] said: ‘You stupid man, do you give enough thanks [to God] for cold water?’”⁵⁸

(B26) Al-Ḥasan heard a man cursing the *Fālūdhaj*. He said: “It is the best of wheat mixed with the juice of bees (honey), and pure butter. No Muslim should curse this.”⁵⁹

⁵³ Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 167. Another report by Ayyūb also attests to the appetizing smell of al-Ḥasan’s meat-sauce: Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 167.

⁵⁴ Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, III, 234; and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, VI, 293 (includes only al-Ḥasan’s reply).

⁵⁵ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Islāḥ al-māl*, 69 (no. 190); and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī, *al-Imtā’ wa-l-mu’ānasa*, III, 37 (slightly variant).

⁵⁶ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Islāḥ al-māl*, 69 (no. 193).

⁵⁷ He may be either Abū Salama ‘Umāra b. Zādhān al-Ṣaydalānī al-Baṣrī quoted below in (B31), or Abū Sa’īd ‘Umāra b. Mihrān al-Baṣrī: see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, VII, 424.

⁵⁸ Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 176; slightly variant in Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, III, 203; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, VI, 293; and Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālāsa*, III, 43 (no. 641). In Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Shukr li-llāh*, 3334 (no. 71), the person is not named.

⁵⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, III, 203; and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, VI, 293.

(B27) A man asked al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: “O Abū Saʿīd, what do you say about *ghināʾ* (singing)?” He, [understanding it to mean wealth], replied: “What an excellent helper for obeying God. A man can [use it to financially] assist his family, and share it with his friend. . . .”⁶⁰

(B28) Al-Ḥajjāj sent twenty thousand dirhams to al-Ḥasan. He said: “Thanks to God who remembered me.”⁶¹

(B29) Hishām b. Ḥassān [al-Baṣrī] said: “Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik sent to al-Ḥasan a garment and a cloak. He accepted them. I would sometimes see him in the mosque wearing the cloak over the garment.”⁶²

(B30) ʿUmāra b. Zādhān [al-Baṣrī] said: “I saw al-Ḥasan wearing a thick cotton shirt, [over it] a striped garment, a Turkish outer-garment and a blue cloak.”⁶³

The personality depicted in these sayings and anecdotes is a joyful and sociable one, not sorrowful or frightened. Al-Ḥasan cared about his appearance when in public, so he was always well dressed and neat. He spent lavishly on food and loved to entertain his company and friends. His pots were full, as if he always expected visitors to eat when they came to see him. And, above all, he appreciated having money and receiving handsome gifts. If we contrast these sayings and anecdotes with the ones noted earlier in this chapter, those that ascetic- and piety-oriented books emphasize, we can see the evident contradiction, and the actual promotion of two incongruent images of al-Ḥasan.

Beside these joyful presentations of al-Ḥasan that do not show any indication of asceticism, one even finds a description of his physical condition as somewhat obese. Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl is reported to have said:

(B31) When we washed [the body of] al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, we found his belly multi-layered with fat.⁶⁴

Ḥumayd is saying that he participated in the washing of the body of al-Ḥasan when the latter died; this is an Islamic ritual necessary before the burial. He saw that al-Ḥasan’s belly had many layers, indicating that he had a huge belly, which again does not fit into any category of asceticism.

⁶⁰ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, VI, 10.

⁶¹ Al-Ṭurtūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk*, 321.

⁶² Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 173; and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, I, 318 (slightly variant).

⁶³ Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 173. This anecdote is followed by a similar one: “al-Ḥasan wore Yemen-made garments, fine cloaks and turbans.”

⁶⁴ Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-dhakhāʾir*, 95.

The descriptions of al-Ḥasan and his lifestyle as reflected in the anecdotes quoted above point to a personality who could not have been at the same time obsessed with sorrow and proper worship for fear of eternal hell. The two images—the fearful pious versus the world-affirming—are contradictory and confusing. But one can say with certainty that the former reputation appealed much more to later generations than the latter one. Probably Ḥumayd and others who reported on the world-affirming al-Ḥasan were indirectly responding to the ascetically rigorous image that was promoted by other disciples of al-Ḥasan. That al-Ḥasan had a huge belly and indulged himself in the delicacies of life clearly violates the basic practices of asceticism and thus disproves the allegations that he was an ascetic.

The biography of al-Ḥasan in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* does not avoid engaging in that debate. Ibn Saʿd's al-Ḥasan endorses a form of moderate piety but not asceticism; thus Ibn Saʿd tells his readers about the shape of al-Ḥasan's ring, his neat attire, his love for food, the appetizing smell that comes out of his kitchen, and so forth. Ibn Saʿd might have been eager to demonstrate that al-Ḥasan was simply a normal person, and not an austere ascetic as the proponents of asceticism claim. It is no surprise then that Ibn Saʿd inserted in the middle of the section on al-Ḥasan's "normality" a report in which al-Ḥasan curses "those who wear the wool," which is an obvious hit at certain ascetic and proto-mystical groups of Ibn Saʿd's time,⁶⁵ who emphasized that piety could be displayed in dress.

2.1.3 *Problems with the ascetic corpus associated with al-Ḥasan*

2.1.3.1 *Misattribution of anecdotes to al-Ḥasan because they matched his style of preaching*

The famed piety of al-Ḥasan and his style of preaching were known well beyond the confines of Baṣra. It is said that

(B32) a man familiar with the sayings of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was circum-ambulating the Ka'ba. He heard a person saying: "I marvel at a group of people who were ordered [to prepare] supplies and were called for departure, but did nothing. I wish I knew what they are waiting for." The man said: "I said to myself this must be al-Ḥasan."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 169.

⁶⁶ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, II, 323; and al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 57 (variant). Al-Ābī only recorded al-Ḥasan's saying: see al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 186.

The supplies refer to the good works; surely among them are the religious duties. By their fulfillment in this world one is rewarded in the next; hence the need to prepare for departure to the next world. The unidentified man who heard this saying in Mecca was familiar with the sayings of al-Ḥasan, but clearly he had never met him. Once he heard the saying above, he assumed that it must be al-Ḥasan. Interestingly, one notices the man's indifference to actually meeting al-Ḥasan himself, as if what mattered most were the words and not the person.

A similar story about al-Ḥasan's preaching style was reported by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894) on the authority of the famous traditionist and jurist from Kūfa and Mecca Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 196/811):

(B33) Sufyān b. 'Uyayna was heard saying: "I swear by God that God offered [the pleasures of] this world to whom he offered them only as a test. He concealed them from whom he concealed them only by selection. The proof for that is that the messenger of God, praise and peace on him, was made [to suffer from] hunger but you eat your fill. Son of Adam, be ready for the disputation and prepare for your judgment. [On the Day of Judgment], you will be asked about the tiny spot on the date pit (*al-naqīr*), the thin skin of the date pit (*al-qaṭmīr*), the wick (*al-fatīl*), and what is less or more significant than that (i.e., you will be questioned about the infinitesimal sins). For life that is followed by death is never a profit." Sufyān was asked: "O Abū Muḥammad, who says this?" He answered: "Who other than al-Ḥasan says this?"⁶⁷

In this narrative, Sufyān gives a sermon in which he emphasizes the need to guard oneself even from the trivialities of things. Someone in the audience asks him who said it, and Sufyān replies by affirming that none other than al-Ḥasan could have uttered sayings like this. Sufyān, like the man from Mecca, never met al-Ḥasan; he was born in 107/725. The pattern here is not that these figures met and studied with al-Ḥasan, or heard him uttering these words. It is rather that there is a style of preaching that is automatically associated with him, irrespective of whether or not the sayings are his. In other words, when one hears such sermons, the image that comes to mind is that of al-Ḥasan.

Even in poetry, certain references were directly taken to mean al-Ḥasan. For instance, the blind poet of Baṣra Bashshār b. Burd (b. ca. 95/714, d. 168/785) mentions in one of his poems a *qiss* (priest):

⁶⁷ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb Dhamm al-dunyā*, 75 (no. 139).

(B34) Had they (the women) not interfered with me,
O *qiss*, I would be a *qiss* like you.⁶⁸

Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī identifies this *qiss* as none other than al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He was angry with Bashshār for luring five women to join him in eating and drinking. Bashshār replies, in the line of poetry above, that it was the women who seduced him, otherwise he would have been able to restrain his desires, as one expects of a *qiss*. But the reference to *qiss* cannot be to al-Ḥasan, as is generally maintained, because Bashshār was very young when al-Ḥasan died in 110/728.⁶⁹ What it shows is that because Bashshār was from Baṣra, his reference to the *qiss* had to be to a pious figure from Baṣra, hence it had to be to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. The line of poetry in question supposedly led to a feud between Bashshār and his townsman the ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār,⁷⁰ which makes it likely that Mālik was the person referred to as *qiss*. After all, Mālik was nicknamed “*rāhib*” for his purported acquaintance with Christian monks,⁷¹ and is believed to have pressured caliph al-Mahdī to ban Bashshār’s rather erotic and licentious *ghazal* (love-poetry).⁷²

Politicians too were familiar with the distinguished pious reputation of al-Ḥasan. The Būyid sultan ‘Izz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār (d. 367/978), for instance, was so angry with the Ḥanafite jurist Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Rāzī (d. 370/981), who was known for his austere piety,⁷³ that he said:

(B35) Does this old man Abū Bakr al-Rāzī think that I am not aware of his hypocrisy? ... Does he consider himself al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī giving a [reprimanding] sermon to al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf?⁷⁴

‘Izz al-Dawla is ridiculing Abū Bakr al-Rāzī by making the analogy to the known feud between al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and al-Ḥajjāj. He does not deserve Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s criticism because he is better than al-Ḥajjāj, and Abū Bakr is in no way comparable to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

⁶⁸ Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, III, 40, and VI, 244.

⁶⁹ On Bashshār, see R. Blachere, “Bashshār b. Burd,” *EI2*, I, 1080a.

⁷⁰ Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, III, 40–41, and VI, 49.

⁷¹ On Mālik b. Dīnār and his association with Christian monks, see Ch. Pellat, “Mālik b. Dīnār,” *EI2*, VI, 266b–67a; and Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 7–32.

⁷² J. S. Meisami, “Bashshār ibn Burd,” *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), I, 138–39.

⁷³ Probably ‘Izz al-Dawla felt insulted by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, for the latter turned down the position of judge of Baghdad that was offered to him: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdad*, IV, 314–15 (no. 2112).

⁷⁴ Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtā’ wa-l-mu’ānasa*, III, 158.

These examples illustrate one of the most problematic issues with regard to the authenticity of the early corpus of sayings attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. It is very hard to distinguish between what he had actually said and what was attributed to him merely because it matched his peculiar style of preaching and his famed personality.

2.1.3.2 *Confusing al-Ḥasan's name and agnomen with those of others*

The problem of authenticity becomes more complicated when one examines sayings and sermons attributed to al-Ḥasan purely on the basis of confusion between him and others with the same first name or agnomen. For instance, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) quotes a legal opinion attributed to our al-Ḥasan. The exact same legal opinion is also found quoted by Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī (d. 333/944), but there its author is al-Ḥasan b. Ḥayy:

(B36)

Ja'far b. Muḥammad reported from Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥanẓalī from Yaḥyā b. Ādam from al-Ḥasan b. Ḥayy that he said: "I saw a grandmother of twenty-one years of age." He [also] said: "The [legal] age for a woman to become pregnant is nine, which is the [legal] age of marriage."⁷⁵

Ishāq b. Rāhawayh said: "Yaḥyā b. Ādam informed us from al-Ḥasan that he said: 'I saw a grandmother of twenty-one years of age.' He [also] said: 'The [legal] age for a woman to become pregnant is nine, which is the [legal] age of marriage.'"⁷⁶

Abū Zakariyā Yaḥyā b. Ādam al-Kūfī (b. after 130/747, d. 203/818) was the famous author of *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Book of Taxation), and he was known to have transmitted traditions from al-Ḥasan b. Ḥayy, not al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, whom he could never have met.⁷⁷ This example shows that if the chain of authorities had only the name al-Ḥasan, then the saying could be easily mistaken, even purposely so, as one by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, as if he were the only person carrying that first name.

Similarly, al-Jāḥiẓ reports the following two anecdotes, the first by Abū Sa'īd al-Zāhid and the second by an anonymous person:

⁷⁵ Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 518 (no. 1133).

⁷⁶ Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, II, 66.

⁷⁷ On Yaḥyā b. Ādam, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IX, 522–29.

(B37) Abū Saʿīd al-Zāhid said: “The Jews chided Jesus son of Mary, God’s peace and praise on him, for [his] poverty. He replied: ‘You have been led astray by riches.’”

Someone said: “It suffices to establish the nobility of poverty that you never see anyone disobeying God to become poor.”⁷⁸

Both anecdotes are combined in one anonymous saying in Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Kitāb al-Waraʿ*:

(B38) The Israelites chided Jesus for his poverty. He said to them: “Wretched people, you have been led astray by riches. Have you ever seen anyone who disobeyed God in order to seek poverty?”⁷⁹

In Ibn Qutayba, however, we find the two anecdotes attributed as one saying to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī:

(B39) Al-Ḥasan said: “The Jews chided Jesus son of Mary for [his] poverty. He replied: ‘You have been led astray by riches. It suffices to establish the nobility of poverty that you never see anyone disobeying God to become poor.’”⁸⁰

Ibn Qutayba likely confused the name Abū Saʿīd al-Zāhid as a reference to al-Ḥasan, whose agnomen was Abū Saʿīd. This issue leads to a larger problem with our sources. What does one do when coming across expressions like “al-Ḥasan said,” “Abū Saʿīd said,” etc.? Should they be automatically identified with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī? Were there other al-Ḥasans or Abū Saʿīds at that time who could have been confused with our al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī?

In later medieval scholarship, a reference to al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī was followed with the usual “*alayhi s-salām*” (peace on him); hence the distinction can be made between him and others. But in the early period, it was not always clear if the person referred to as al-Ḥasan was al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī or al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Moreover, one finds in the historical record several individuals from the city of Baṣra and contemporaries of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who had the name “al-Ḥasan” or the agnomen “Abū Saʿīd.” Curiously enough, some have at the same time the first name and agnomen, and were disciples of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, as will be presented below.

⁷⁸ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 155.

⁷⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Waraʿ*, no. 228. See also Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 92–93 (no. 75).

⁸⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, I, 247; and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, III, 209 (first part only). No mention of Jesus and the Jews in al-ʿĀbi, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 199.

We have already seen the two cases of al-Ḥasan b. Ḥayy and Abū Saʿīd al-Zāhid. An additional case comes from a certain al-Ḥasan b. Saʿīd al-Baṣrī (fl. third/ninth century) who authored the *Waṣīyat al-Nabī li-Abī Hurayra* (The Prophet Muḥammad's Advice to Abū Hurayra). This work is falsely attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī merely as a result of name confusion. A fourth case of name confusion is the *Risāla fī l-aḥādīth al-mutaḥḥarriqa* (The Collected *ḥadīths*) by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, wrongly identified by Fuat Sezgin as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. A fifth case is Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Wāʿiẓ (fl. before 766/1365), the likely author of two letters falsely attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.⁸¹

Other cases of name confusion could have resulted from wrongly identifying, as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's, sayings by any of the following contemporaries and disciples of his:

- Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥakam al-Baṣrī.
- Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. Dinār al-Baṣrī.
- Al-Ḥasan b. Dhakwān al-Baṣrī.
- Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Zayd al-Baṣrī (d. 131/749).⁸²

One can even add names of individuals who lived long after the death of al-Ḥasan and who were either nicknamed after him or could be confused with him:

- Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Baṣrī (d. 261/875). Al-Dhahabī introduces him in the following way: *al-ḥāfiẓ al-muttaqī al-imām* (the great authority of *ḥadīth*, the pious, the master).⁸³
- Sharaf al-Dīn Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar b. al-Rashīd al-Mawṣilī al-Muqriʾ (b. 604/1207– d. 698/1299). He was nicknamed al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He studied with the famous mystic ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/234).⁸⁴

As we have seen, these individuals could easily have been confused with our al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and some were, in fact, mistaken for him. A saying by any of these figures taken out of context, or a letter perceived to be consistent with the style of al-Ḥasan, particularly on issues relating to piety, could easily be falsely identified by a reader as one of al-Ḥasan's and subsequently presented as his.

⁸¹ On these authors and their works, see Chapter 4.

⁸² See Appendix III.

⁸³ See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, XII, 508.

⁸⁴ See al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, XI, 117, and XII, 314.

2.1.3.3 *Textual confusion: mixing al-Ḥasan's sermons with those by others*

A third serious problem in the literary corpus attributed to al-Ḥasan is the mixing of his sermons with those by others and transforming them into long ones by him. Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* reveals the origin of one of those sermons attributed to al-Ḥasan:

(B40) Al-Ḥasan once said: "The son of Adam is the hostage of hunger and the victim of satiety."⁸⁵

This anecdote is followed by three anecdotes by other individuals, the third of which was attributed to the philologist al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828):

(B41) I was told [about the attitude of] a group of people. They wear luxurious shawls and soft turbans. They enlarge their houses but narrow their graves. They fatten their beasts but malnourish their faith. The food [each] one of them [eats] is usurped, and his servant is a forced laborer. He reclines on his left side and consumes not from his wealth. When he overstuffs himself, he calls [his maid]: "O maid, get me some digestives." Damn you, you are destroying nothing but your faith. Where are your poor people [to help them]? Where are your orphans? Where is what God commands you to [do]? Where? Where?⁸⁶

Half a century later, the two separate anecdotes of al-Ḥasan and al-Aṣmaʿī became one anecdote. In the first case we have al-Aṣmaʿī transmitting it from al-Ḥasan.⁸⁷ In the second case, al-Aṣmaʿī's name is dropped.⁸⁸

The anecdote reported in Ibn Qutayba was preceded by a short report about caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705) inviting a man to eat with him. The man turned down the invitation because he had already overstuffd himself, and ʿAbd al-Malik rebuked him for being in that situation. The same story is reported by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, but here the encounter is between al-Ḥasan and an unnamed man, who turned down the invitation of al-Ḥasan because he was full, and al-Ḥasan reprimanded him for eating till he could eat no more:

⁸⁵ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, III, 219.

⁸⁶ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, III, 220.

⁸⁷ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, III, 202. For the Arabic text, see (B41a).

⁸⁸ Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 45 (no. 645). The wording of the anecdote in al-Dīnawarī is closer to Ibn Qutayba than to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih; not surprising since his work is mostly derived from Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*. For the Arabic text, see (B43).

(B42)

‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān invited a man for lunch. [The man] said: “There is no space left [in my stomach].” ‘Abd al-Malik said: “What an ugly habit of a man to eat until there is no space left [in his stomach]....”⁸⁹

Al-Ḥasan invited a man to eat with him. He replied: “I have eaten and I can no longer eat.” [Al-Ḥasan] said: “By God, does the believer eat till he can no longer eat!”⁹⁰

2.1.3.4 *Transfer of authorship, misattribution, and forgery*

The list of problems grows even longer and more serious when one compares some of the sayings attributed to al-Ḥasan with similar ones attributed to other famous Muslim figures, and even some pre-Islamic figures. In most cases, these sayings were initially not al-Ḥasan’s; only at a later stage were they attributed to him. Some examples are the sayings common to Jesus and al-Ḥasan:

(B43) ‘Awf reported that al-Ḥasan said: “We have been informed that the messenger of God, God’s praise and peace on him, said: ‘Jesus, God’s praise on him, saw a man—I guess he said: “one of the disciples”—stealing gold. Jesus asked him: “Hey you, did you commit theft?” The man answered: “No, I swear by him than whom there is no other god, I did not steal.” Jesus said: “God has spoken the truth but my eye lied [when I thought I saw this man stealing].”’⁹¹

(B44) [Al-Ḥasan wrote:] “... [Jesus son of Mary] used to say: ‘My seasoning is hunger, my slogan is fear, my clothing is wool, my ride is my foot, my lamp at night is the moon, my source of heat in winter is the sun, my fruit and perfume are what the earth brings forth to predators and cattle. I retire at night owning nothing, and no one is richer than I.’”⁹²

(B45) Ja’far b. Ḥayyān reported that al-Ḥasan said: “Son of Adam, you see the minute particle in the eye of your friend, but ignore the shaft in your eyes.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, III, 219; and Abū Bakr al-Dinawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 44 (no. 643).

⁹⁰ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Iṣlāḥ al-māl*, 105 (no. 360).

⁹¹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 222 (no. 697). The emphasis at the end is mine.

⁹² Abū Nu’aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, II, 137; see also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 159 (no. 189). This quote is from the *Treatise on Asceticism* falsely attributed to al-Ḥasan, in which Jesus is referred to as *ṣāḥib al-rūḥ wa-l-kalima*, a reference to the Qur’ānic description of Jesus as a spirit (*rūḥ*) and word (*kalima*) from God. On the *Treatise*, see Chapter 3.

⁹³ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 98 (no. 211); and Ibn al-Fuwaḍī, *Majma’ al-ādāb*, V, 283 (no. 5093).

(B46) Al-Ḥasan used to say: "Think of this world as a bridge. Cross it but never inhabit it."⁹⁴

(B47) Al-Ḥasan said: "This world, if you think of it, is but three days. A day that passed away, you cannot change it. A today you are in, you should seize its opportunity. And a day that will come, you do not know whether you will attain it, and you do not know perhaps you will die before you reach it."⁹⁵

(B48) Al-Ḥasan used to say: "You shall not attain what you love unless you abandon what you desire, and you shall not reach what you aspire unless you persevere with what you hate."⁹⁶

(B49) Al-Ḥasan used to say: "One should not wonder about him who was damned how he was damned. One rather should wonder about him who was saved how he was saved."⁹⁷

Five of these seven sayings were known as Jesus sayings before they were ascribed to al-Ḥasan. (B43) is reported in the *Ṣaḥīfa* (Ḥadīth Journal) of Hammām b. Munabbih (d. 131/748),⁹⁸ at least half a century earlier than its ascription to al-Ḥasan in Ibn al-Mubārak. Similarly, (B44) is a known Jesus saying in the Muslim lore, found in Ibn Qutayba, Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, and Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991);⁹⁹ in al-Dīnawarī, the *isnād* includes the name of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Khallāl, which might indicate a confusion between him and al-Ḥasan that resulted in the quote being falsely ascribed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.¹⁰⁰ (B45) is a Gospel saying.¹⁰¹ (B46) is found in Ibn Qutayba, a decade earlier than its ascription to al-Ḥasan in al-Mubarrad.¹⁰² (B47) is encountered almost two centuries earlier in

⁹⁴ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 58 and 231.

⁹⁵ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, II, 138.

⁹⁶ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 164.

⁹⁷ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 91; al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Amālī*, I, 162; al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 187; and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ādāb al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*, 21–22.

⁹⁸ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, 34 (no. 41). See also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 51 (no. 1).

⁹⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, II, 269; Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 266 (no. 902: slightly variant); and Ibn Bābawayh, *Maʾānī al-akhbār*, 252 (slightly variant). See also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 159 (no. 189), who suggests that the origin of this saying is the Scythian Anacharsis (fl. ca. 600 BCE), whom the Greeks considered one of the Seven Sages.

¹⁰⁰ See Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 266 (no. 902), where the *isnād* is: "al-Mu'tamir b. Sulaymān al-Taymī → al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Khallāl → Muḥammad b. Yūnus al-Baṣrī."

¹⁰¹ Matthew 7.3: *Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?*

¹⁰² Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, II, 328; and Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, III, 173. See also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 106 (no. 99).

Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).¹⁰³ Only the last two sayings (B48) and (B49), it can be argued, were known as al-Ḥasan sayings before they became Jesus sayings.¹⁰⁴

One can argue that al-Ḥasan was involved in the transmission of Jesus's teachings and, more broadly, biblical sayings, and that thus an explanation can be given for these cases. We do find a few anecdotes in medieval scholarship in which al-Ḥasan quotes the *Torah*,¹⁰⁵ or Jesus and John the Baptist.¹⁰⁶ But if one looks at the fact that Jesus's name was omitted from most of these accounts and replaced with that of al-Ḥasan, then we are very likely dealing with cases of transfer of authorship (or reattribution of sayings)¹⁰⁷ that fit under the islamization process discussed in the Introduction.

The authenticity of the Jesus/al-Ḥasan sayings can be further verified if we examine the comparison that was made between the two. In two examples, al-Ḥasan's piety is said to have matched that of Jesus:

(B50) I was told that two monks entered Baṣra from the direction of Syria. They saw al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. One of them said to his friend: "Let's stop by that person whose appearance (*simatahu*) is that of the Messiah." They stopped by him and found him prostrating, putting his chin in his hands, and saying: "I wonder about a group of people who were ordered to prepare supplies and called for departure, but were reluctant. I wish I knew what are they expecting!"¹⁰⁸

We recall the similar anecdote, mentioned earlier, about the unidentified man in Mecca who heard the parable while circumambulating the Ka'ba and guessed that it was al-Ḥasan's.¹⁰⁹ In this case, however, we have two monks coming from Syria to Baṣra, who decided to pay a visit to al-

¹⁰³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 98; and al-Ghazālī, *Minhāj al-ābidīn*, 29. See also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 77 (no. 44) and 185–86 (no. 241).

¹⁰⁴ For (B49) as a Jesus saying, see Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, II, 268; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb Dhamm al-dunyā*, II, 104 (no. 214); al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 265 (no. 901); al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, IV, 61; and Ibn 'Asākir, *Sirat al-sayid al-Masīh*, 178 (no. 207). For (B50) as a Jesus saying, see al-Samarqandī, *Tanbih al-ghāfilīn*, 220; and Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 136 (no. 151).

¹⁰⁵ See the examples in al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 291; al-ʿAmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, 166; and Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majma' al-ādāb*, V, 631.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 122 (no. 392); al-Huwwārī, *Tafsīr*, III, 8–9; and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, VIII, 318.

¹⁰⁷ On Bible sayings in Arabic and issues of reattribution, see Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, II, 346–62; and G. Lecomte, "Les citations de l'ancien et du nouveau testament dans l'œuvre d'Ibn Qutayba," *Arabica* 5 (1958), 34–46.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 57; and al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durriya*, I.1, 255.

¹⁰⁹ See B32.

Ḥasan. They had already heard about his piety and its resemblance to that of Jesus. The “two monks” variation clearly intended to use symbols of religious authority—the monk as a holy figure—to acknowledge al-Ḥasan’s superior piety and behavior as comparable to Jesus’s. One might consider this an isolated case if not for the following anecdote attributed this time to the Catholicos of Baṣra:

(B51) The Catholicos saw al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and prostrated before him. The Christians asked him: “Why did you prostrate before him?” He replied: “By God, I see in him the disciples (*ḥawārī*) of Jesus son of Mary.”¹¹⁰

The case of the Nestorian Catholicos is a much more powerful attestation, this time by the head of the Christians in Baṣra. He likened al-Ḥasan to the disciples of Jesus. He even prostrated before him. What better can be said about al-Ḥasan than having the Christians themselves likening him to Jesus and his disciples? Al-Ābī (d. 421/1030) quotes the “two monks” version but without mentioning them, showing that by the fifth/eleventh century, there was no longer any need to have non-Muslim figures acknowledging the distinctiveness of al-Ḥasan’s piety. It was already well established, and no such endorsements were necessary.¹¹¹

That authoritative figures of Christian piety likened al-Ḥasan to Jesus suggests a transfer of authorship process. It implies that if al-Ḥasan and Jesus were similar in looks and words then what is said by one can be easily transferred to the other.¹¹² The transfer of authorship process can be also detected in anecdotes where al-Ḥasan (or Jesus) is described as overwhelmed with sorrow, whereas his notable contemporary Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (or John the Baptist) was a man of laughter:

(B52)

John the Baptist used to laugh until his eyes became full of tears, but Jesus used to speak and weep.¹¹³

Ibn Sīrīn used to laugh until his eyes became full of tears, but al-Ḥasan used to speak and weep.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, VI, 329 (no. 2719).

¹¹¹ Al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 186.

¹¹² On this issue, see Kilito, *The Author*, 65.

¹¹³ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Ikhwān*, 190 (no. 136); Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, VI: 380–81; al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Baṣā’ir wa-l-dhakhā’ir*, VII, 197 (no. 379); idem, *Risālat al-ṣadāqa*, 105; Ibn ‘Aqil, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, 635–36; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Sirat al-sayid al-Masīh*, 200–201 (no. 246); and al-Damīrī, *Hayāt al-ḥayawān*, II, 205. See also Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 120–21 (no. 124). Another variant story has the two identified as Peter and John the Baptist: Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, VI, 380; and Ibn ‘Asākir, *Sirat al-sayid al-Masīh*, 216 (no. 262).

¹¹⁴ Al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Ma’rifā*, II, 33; and Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 162 (slightly variant).

Other cases of transfer of authorship can be detected in anecdotes that involve al-Ḥasan and other early Muslim figures, like the Companion Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687) and the disciple of al-Ḥasan, ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd:

(B53)

‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ said: “I have never seen a teaching circle more resourceful, richer in knowledge and bigger in attendance than the teaching circle of Ibn ‘Abbās. The students of Qur’ān were there to learn from him, the students of Arabic language were there to learn from him, and the students of poetry were there to learn from him. Each group of them would leave with extensive lessons.”¹¹⁵

[Al-Ḥasan’s] teaching circle in the mosque [of Baṣra] would address Ḥadīth, Jurisprudence, Qur’ānic science, Language, and all other sciences. Sometimes he would be even asked about Sufism, and he would answer. Some would accompany him to learn Ḥadīth, some to learn Qur’ān and Qur’ān recitation, and some to learn Rhetoric. Others would accompany him to learn about mystical devotion and knowledge.¹¹⁶

(B54)

Ibn al-Sammāk was asked to describe ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd. He replied: “If you see ‘Amr coming, you think he is returning from burying his parents. If you see him sitting, you think as if he is about to be put in chains. If you hear him speaking, you think it is as if Heaven and Hell were only created for him.”¹¹⁷

Yūnus was asked to describe al-Ḥasan. He replied: “If you see him coming, you think he is returning from burying his dearest friend. If you see him sitting, you think as if he is a prisoner waiting his beheading. If Hell is mentioned to him, you think it is as if it was created only for him.”¹¹⁸

In the first example, the teaching circle of al-Ḥasan seems to match that of Ibn ‘Abbās, in the sense that his vast knowledge attracted to him all types of scholars. In the second example, the reputation of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd is being likened, verbatim, to that of al-Ḥasan. It is important

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 337 (no. 1175: additional material not transmitted by Ibn al-Mubārak). ‘Aṭā’ was a famous jurist and traditionist from Mecca; he died in 115/733; see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, VII, 199–203.

¹¹⁶ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IV, 579, quoting Abū Sa‘īd al-A‘rābī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk*.

¹¹⁷ Al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī, *Sharḥ*, f. 46b; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 36. A variant version is found in al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī, *Maqālāt*, 69.

¹¹⁸ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 171; and Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, II, 355–56.

to emphasize here that the transfer of authorship can go either way; it is not necessarily always imposed on al-Ḥasan.

The occurrence of transfer of authorship and reattribution of sayings and stories is further attested in several similar sayings, sometimes verbatim, that are simultaneously ascribed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35–40/656–60) and to al-Ḥasan.¹¹⁹ One such example comes from a sermon by ‘Alī reported by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894), which shows up in al-Ḥasan’s presumed *Treatise on Asceticism* to ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, first quoted by Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī (d. 429/1038). This sermon compares the world to the snake and stresses its deceitful nature:

(B55)

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib once wrote to Salmān al-Fārisī: “Know that this world is like a snake. It feels soft when touched but its venom kills. So turn away from what you might like from it because little of that will accompany you [to the next world]. Drop its worries [from your heart] for you realize that soon you will depart from it. Be content but always on your guard from it for whenever its consort happily relies on it, it leads him to disaster. Peace.”¹²⁰

[Al-Ḥasan wrote:] “... Be always on your guard from this world because it is like a snake. It feels soft when touched but its venom kills. So turn away from what you might like from it because little of that will accompany you [to the next world]. Drop its worries [from your heart] for you have witnessed its calamities and realized that soon you will depart from it. Accept its hardships as that leads to your comfort. Be content but always on your guard from it for whenever its consort happily relies on it, it leads him to disaster.”¹²¹

The following sayings are additional examples of material common to ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan encountered in medieval scholarship:

¹¹⁹ I. ‘Abbās discusses this point at length; it is by no means limited to the case of al-Ḥasan and ‘Alī: I. ‘Abbās, *al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: siratuh wa-shakhṣīyatuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1952), 14–17.

¹²⁰ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb Dhamm al-dunyā*, 44 (74); al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk*, 66; and Warrām, *Tanbīh al-khawāṭir*, I, 147–48. A slightly variant version is in al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, II (*al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī*), 136 (no. 22). The translation is of the text in Warrām, since it is far better edited than Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. Warrām depended on Ibn Abī al-Dunyā for a large number of anecdotes, copying entire sections from the works of the latter into his book.

¹²¹ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā’*, II, 135. On other similar versions of this report by figures other than ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan, see Chapter 3.

(B56)

‘Alī said: “. . . I have never seen anything like the seeker of Heaven who is sleeping, nor have I seen anything like the escapee of Hell who is sleeping. . . .”¹²²

Al-Ḥasan said: “Harim b. Ḥayyān said: ‘I have never seen anything like the escapee of Hell who is sleeping, nor [have I seen] anything like the seeker of Heaven who is sleeping.’”¹²³

(B57)

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said: “. . . You shall not attain what you want unless you abandon what you want—meaning what you desire—and you shall not reach what you aspire unless you persevere with what you hate.”¹²⁴

Al-Ḥasan used to say: “You shall not attain what you love unless you abandon what you desire, and you shall not reach what you aspire unless you persevere with what you hate.”¹²⁵

(B58)

The Commander of the Faithful [‘Alī] said that the messenger of God, God’s peace and praise on him, sent a squadron [on a raid]. When they returned, he said to them: “Welcome, you are a group who fulfilled the lesser *jihād* but still have the greater *jihād*.” He was asked: “O Messenger of God, what is the greater *jihād*?” He replied: “The struggle against the soul.”¹²⁶

Al-Ḥasan said: “A group [of Muslims] returned to the Prophet, God’s peace and praise on him, from a raid. He said to them: ‘Welcome, God salutes you. You have fulfilled the lesser *jihād* but still have the greater *jihād*.’ They asked him: ‘O Messenger of God, what is the greater *jihād*?’ He replied: ‘The man struggling against his soul and desires for the sake of God.’”¹²⁷

(B59)

‘Alī said: “I saw ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb circumambulating the Ka’ba and wearing a garb with twenty-one patches from animal skin.”¹²⁸

Al-Ḥasan said: “The garb of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb had twelve patches, some from animal skin.”¹²⁹

¹²² Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, IV, 69.

¹²³ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 55 (no. 28).

¹²⁴ We have already come across this saying as a Jesus saying: see note 104 (B48).

¹²⁵ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 164.

¹²⁶ Ibn Bābawayh, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, 160.

¹²⁷ B. Radtke (ed.), *Adab al-mulūk: Ein handbuch zur islamischen Mystik aus dem 4./10. Jahrhundert* (Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991), 18.

¹²⁸ Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, II, 421–22 (no. 605).

¹²⁹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 289 (no. 964: not via Ibn al-Mubārak).

(B60)

Abū ‘Abd Allāh said: “The Commander of the Faithful [‘Alī] used to say: ‘O son of Adam, if what you want from this world is what suffices you, then the little in it will suffice you. But if you want treasures to suffice you, then all that is in it will not suffice you.’”¹³⁰

[Al-Ḥasan said:] “O son of Adam, if what suffices you does not make you rich, then there is nothing here [in this world] that will make you rich. But if what suffices you makes you rich, then the little in this world will make you rich.”¹³¹

These sayings address different topics. B56 intends to enjoin people to act, and not be lazy, for only by endeavoring does one escape eternal punishment and receive the reward of the next world. B57 emphasizes the renunciation of all desirables and perseverance with the troubles of this life in order to win eternal rewards. B58 affirms that the struggle (*jihād*) against one’s desires is much more important than military *jihād*. B59 speaks about the ascetic-like look of the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), whose old garb was full of patches. B60 enjoins the listener to seek only what he essentially needs, for that is the true riches. Interestingly, it is also encountered as an independent saying by the Shī‘ite Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and by the traditionist from Kūfa Abū Ḥāzim Salmān al-Ashja‘ī (d. ca. 100/718); the wording of the saying of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is almost verbatim that of al-Ḥasan.¹³²

The similarity between the sayings of ‘Alī and those of al-Ḥasan caught the attention of the famous Twelver-Shī‘ite theologian al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044). He was so intrigued by the fact that they look identical that he explains it in the following way:

(B61) Al-Ḥasan’s eloquence was impressive. His sermons were articulate, and his knowledge was vast. Most, if not all, of his sermons on preaching and ridiculing this world are borrowed, either word for word or simply the ideas, from the sermons of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace on him. After all, he (‘Alī) is the exemplar and the desired model.¹³³

Thus, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s eloquence and vast knowledge were attained only as a result of his studying the sermons of ‘Alī; interestingly, as we

¹³⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, II (*al-uṣūl min al-kāfī*), 138–39 (no. 6), and 140 (no. 11: slightly variant).

¹³¹ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 136, and 147; and al-Ābi, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 197.

¹³² For these two sayings, see (B60a) and (B60b) in Appendix I.

¹³³ Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Amālī*, I, 153.

saw in Chapter 1, other sources relate that al-Ḥasan's eloquence and vast knowledge was attained as a result of his nursing from Umm Salama. The motivation of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā is to glorify 'Alī by arguing that he educated influential Muslim figures such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Here too, the transfer of authorship could have gone either way.

There are additional sayings common to al-Ḥasan and other Muslim figures, such as the ones quoted below:

(B62)

Mu'adh said: "The feet of man will not perish [on the Day of Judgment] until he is asked about four things: How did he use up his life? What did he do with his knowledge? From where did he earn his wealth and how did he spend it? And how did he wear out his body?"¹³⁴

Abū 'Abd Allāh (i.e., Ja'far al-Ṣādiq) said: "Among the advices of Luqmān to his son is this: '... And know that tomorrow when you stand in the presence of God you will be asked about four things: How did you wear out your youth? How did you use up your life? From where did you acquire your wealth? And how did you spend it? ...'"¹³⁵

'Awf said that al-Ḥasan said: "The feet of the son of Adam will not perish [on the Day of Judgment] until he is asked about three things: How did he wear out his youth? How did he use up his life? And from where did he earn his wealth and how did he spend it?"¹³⁶

(B63)

Luqmān said to his son: "O my son, sell this life of yours for your other life and you will gain them both. But do not sell your other life for this life, for you lose them both."¹³⁷

Al-Ḥasan said: "O son of Adam, sell this life of yours for your other life and you will gain them both. But do not sell your other life for this life, for you lose them both."¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Wakī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, I, 227–30 (no. 10). This anecdote becomes a prophetic *ḥadīth*: see al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, IV, 529 (no. 2416); also in Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, I, 295–98 (no. 7). There is also a Mujaḥid saying, identical to Mu'adh's, in al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, 21. Mu'adh b. Jabal is a famous Companion, and died in 18/639: see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, X, 186–88.

¹³⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, II (*al-uṣūl min al-kāfī*), 134–35.

¹³⁶ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 125.

¹³⁷ Warrām, *Tanbīh al-khawāṭir*, I, 137.

¹³⁸ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 132.

(B64)

Al-Aḥnaf saw a man tossing a dirham. He said to him: "It is not yours until it leaves your hands."¹³⁹

Al-Ḥasan passed by a man tossing a dirham. He asked him: "Do you love your dirham?" The man replied: "Yes." He said: "It is not yours until it leaves your hand."¹⁴⁰

(B65)

ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, God be pleased with him, said: "Remembering divine grace is giving thanks for it."¹⁴¹

Mubārak b. Faḍāla said that al-Ḥasan said: "Often remember these divine graces, for remembering them is giving thanks for them."¹⁴²

(B66)

Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth al-Nakhaʿī said: "I heard Mūsā b. Jaʿfar standing by a grave and saying: 'What leads to this end has to be renounced from the beginning, and what starts with this, its consequence must be feared.'"¹⁴³

Al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār said: "Al-Ḥasan saw a man rebuking himself. He said: 'What leads to this end has to be renounced from the beginning, and what starts with this, its consequence must be feared.'"¹⁴⁴

(B67)

Ibrāhīm b. Adham said: "Renunciation divides into three types: obligatory renunciation, virtuous renunciation and precautionary renunciation." He said: "The obligatory renunciation is to renounce forbidden things.

Renunciation divides into two types: obligatory renunciation and virtuous renunciation. The obligatory renunciation is to abandon forbidden things and reject them. The virtuous renunciation is to renounce

¹³⁹ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Faḍīl*, 35. This saying is attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-farīd*, III, 34. Al-Aḥnaf b. Qays was a Companion and died after 67/687: see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, I, 191.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, III, 180. A similar saying is quoted in Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 155; see also Ritter, "Studien," 24.

¹⁴¹ Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *al-Tarīq ilā allāh*, 70.

¹⁴² Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 396 (no. 1434).

¹⁴³ Ibn Bābawayh, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, 343. Mūsā al-Kāzīm is the seventh Twelver-Shīʿite Imām. He died in 183/799: see E. Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāzīm," *EI2*, VII, 645a–48b. Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth (d. 195/811 or 196/812) occupied the position of judge of Kūfa, and later Baghdad, and was a companion of Mūsā's father, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq: see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, II, 415–18.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 127; and al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 326, where the man was praising himself.

The virtuous renunciation is to renounce lawful things. And the precautionary renunciation is to renounce things you have doubts about.”¹⁴⁵

lawful things. This is the opinion of al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others.¹⁴⁶

(B68)

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn said: “The eyes of Jacob turned white from something less than what befell me. For he only lost one of twelve sons. But I have witnessed thirteen of my family massacred.”¹⁴⁷

It is related that when the brother of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī died, he wept dearly over him. A man said to him: “Even you, Abū Sa‘īd, are weeping!” He replied: “Jacob had wept for Joseph until his eyes turned white, and God did not reprimand him for that.”¹⁴⁸

The authenticity of authorship of all these sayings can be questioned. It may be that most of the discussed cases reflect practices of reattribution and transfer of authorship; there is no guarantee that their original authors were any of the individuals identified by our sources.¹⁴⁹

There are additional cases that point to problems with the attribution of sayings and letters to al-Ḥasan. The presumed exchange of letters between al-Ḥasan and caliph ‘Umar II b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–20) is mostly inauthentic,¹⁵⁰ as will be discussed in the following chapter. Parts of this correspondence address the issues of human free-will and predestination, but most of the letters deal with piety. The purpose of the letters was to transform the two characters—the scholar and the caliph—into exemplars of piety and leadership; they exchanged advice for their own personal benefit, and for the benefit of the Muslims. Several

¹⁴⁵ Ibn al-‘Arābī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 58; Abū Bakr al-Dīnawārī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 270–71 (no. 905); and Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, VIII, 26. The celebrated ascetic Ibrāhīm b. Adham died in 161/777: see R. Jones, “Ibrāhīm b. Adham,” *EI2*, III, 985b–86b.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū’*, 51–52.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Fāḍil*, 105; and Abū Bakr al-Dīnawārī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 76 (no. 692: variant).

¹⁴⁸ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Fāḍil*, 64–65; and Abū Bakr al-Dīnawārī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 75–76 (no. 691: variant); and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-farīd*, III, 234 (variant).

¹⁴⁹ These figures include companions of prophet Muḥammad, Shī‘ite Imāms and ascetic figures.

¹⁵⁰ A number of presumed correspondences between al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and ‘Umar II are listed in Appendix I (B94–B110).

letters in the exchange are also attributed to other figures. In one case we find the following:

(B96) Be in this world as if you never existed, and in the next world as if you have always been [there].¹⁵¹

The text of this letter is also encountered as part of a sermon by ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in *Nahj al-balāgha*,¹⁵² another example of material shared by both ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan.

These examples bring us back to the question of the authenticity of al-Ḥasan’s literary corpus. There are sayings that were attributed to him because they fit his famous piety and style of preaching. There are sayings that were attributed to him simply because later scholars confused his first name or agnomen with those of others. There are even sayings and sermons that became his because they happened to be listed near his sayings in earlier sources and then became mixed up with his when copied into later sources. And there are, more importantly, sayings by major early figures deliberately turned into his in later literature. The very existence of these cases raises significant doubts regarding the authenticity of any part of the literary corpus attributed to al-Ḥasan. Yet, as will be discussed later, all these sayings, irrespective of their authenticity, contributed to the consolidation and spread of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s legacy and helped enshrine him in the imagination of later generations of Muslims as one of the major founding fathers.

2.1.3.5 *Absence of context*

The issue of context, as applied to the piety theme in relation to the presentation of al-Ḥasan, also raises questions about authenticity. The following table shows three different contexts for a saying attributed to al-Ḥasan regarding the type of dessert called *Fālūdḥaj*:

(B69)

Rawḥ b. al-Qāsim told us that a relative of his became an ascetic, and started saying: “I don’t allow myself to eat

Al-Ḥasan heard a man denouncing *Fālūdḥaj*. He said: “It is wheat flour mixed with honey and pure butter. The Muslim should not denounce it.”

‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim said: “Al-Ḥasan brought *Fālūdḥaj* home, and called his son Sa’īd saying: ‘O my son, come and eat

¹⁵¹ Al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, II, 70, and III, 139–40.

¹⁵² Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, I, 102.

Khabīṣ—or said: I don't allow myself to eat *Fālūdḥaj*—for I cannot thank [God] enough for it.” I met al-Ḥasan and mentioned that to him. He replied: “This man is stupid. Can he render enough thanks for the cold water!”¹⁵³

Al-Ḥasan said to Farqad al-Sabakhī: “O Abū Ya‘qūb, I was told that you do not eat *Fālūdḥaj*!” Farqad replied: “O Abū Sa‘īd, I fear I cannot thank [God] enough for it.” Al-Ḥasan said: “You stupid man! Can you thank [God for] cold water!”¹⁵⁴

some.’ Sa‘īd replied: ‘I fear its harmful consequence.’ Al-Ḥasan said: ‘O my son, it is wheat flour mixed with honey and pure butter. No harm can be caused by it’—or he said: ‘No man is harmed by it.’”¹⁵⁵

The common theme in the three anecdotes is the *Fālūdḥaj*.¹⁵⁶ But the context and the details in each instance are different. This shows that the original anecdote was not transmitted in its own context, and thus there was a need to introduce a context for it. Had there been any attention to the real context of the report, we should have at least the same person in the same setting. What mattered most about such reports was the lesson to be derived from it, and the lesson varied according to the biases and objectives of the transmitter. The person with whom al-Ḥasan had a discussion, or is made to have had a discussion, as well as the location, can be changed. But the change also reflects a different purpose for each context in which the story is retold.

In the first case, in Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Ḥasan is made to rebuke and condemn excessive asceticism. Rawḥ b. al-Qāsim asks al-Ḥasan whether the behavior and piety of his ascetic relative were sound. Al-Ḥasan replies by pointing to the stupidity of Rawḥ’s relative for his excessive asceticism. In the second case, in Ibn Qutayba, the emphasis is on moderation and the appreciation of God’s bounties. But here it is Farqad al-Sabakhī, again the disciple of al-Ḥasan, who receives the reproach. In this second report, there are two separate anecdotes: one about the ingredients that go into making the *Fālūdḥaj*, and the second reproaching Farqad for refusing, out of excessive piety, to eat the *Fālūdḥaj*. In light of the examples discussed earlier, one might infer here a trend toward

¹⁵³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 375 (no. 1492).

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akḥbār*, III, 203.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, 2491.

¹⁵⁶ Not even so. Some accounts have *Khabīṣ* instead. Besides the first report above, see Ibn Saʿd *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 176.

replacing such reproaches by al-Ḥasan for the excess in religious piety in the context of him and Farqad irrespective of whether that was the case or not.¹⁵⁷ In other words, the reproach is assumed to have been made to Farqad, who becomes a metaphor for the excessive ascetic. In the third anecdote in al-Ṭabarī, however, it is Saʿīd, the son of al-Ḥasan, who is lectured about the *Fālūdḥaj*. There is no mention here of excessive piety or, for that matter, of moderation. Al-Ḥasan is assuring his son that eating *Fālūdḥaj* causes no harm, clearly meaning stomach pain or indigestion. In this respect, the context of al-Ṭabarī's report lacks the piety aspect dominant in the reports of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Qutayba. The context carries an indirect message about al-Ḥasan that gets built into his reputation and the way he is perceived by later generations. There is nothing special in al-Ṭabarī's version, but there is every reason to believe that the other two versions contributed to the solidification of the perceived piety image of al-Ḥasan.

It has been argued above that the presentation of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in the early medieval literature reveals two persons: the highly pious al-Ḥasan who renounced this world and lived in constant sorrow, and the highly sociable al-Ḥasan who loved the delicacies of this world and the company of people. Clearly, it is the first of these two images that was more popular and had a larger appeal to Muslim scholars. As we have seen, there was a great need to shape an Islamic identity and create the founding fathers as exemplars for later Muslims to follow and imitate. Also, the political and religious clashes within Muslim society led to the emergence of several conflicting movements, each of which searched for retroactive support and legitimacy from the founding fathers. It is not surprising, given the fact that in the ancient Near East the models of piety—the holy men—exercised great spiritual and social authority,¹⁵⁸ to see that Muslim scholars too emphasized piety and renunciation of this world as fundamental elements in the creation of the founding fathers.

Al-Ḥasan is not the only example from the first two centuries of Islam who was revered and presented in this way; he is simply one of many. His

¹⁵⁷ On this, see also the two other reports in Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 156–57; and Ritter, “Studien,” 39.

¹⁵⁸ On the holy man in the Near East before Islam, see P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), especially the chapter on “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity.”

presumed pious image along with the relevant corpus attributed to him started to take form in the literary sources as early as the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries. No doubt the early crystallization of the pious words and deeds attributed to him was responsible for the expansion of the literary corpus associated with him in medieval scholarship, and for the way he was perceived and even recast by later scholars of Islam. Thus one needs to be extremely cautious about the sayings and sermons attributed to him and the anecdotes about his life. We have seen above many instances, be they accidental or intentional, of textual confusion and of later attribution to him of earlier material by others, and of descriptions of his character that he shared with other figures. With the available sources and in light of such serious problems, one cannot verify beyond reasonable doubt any authentic part of the literary corpus attributed to him or any real aspects of his character. Of course, one should not ignore the crucial role that the perceived reputation, image, words, and practices of al-Ḥasan played in the later development of Islamic thought. In the sections below, I will examine how proto-mystics and mystics starting in the third/ninth century perceived al-Ḥasan and how and when he started to play, according to our sources, a fundamental role in Islamic mysticism.

2.2 EARLY MYSTICAL LITERATURE ON THE ROLE OF AL-ḤASAN (THIRD/NINTH–MID-FOURTH/TENTH CENTURY)

As is to be expected, early proto-mystical and mystical literature was more concerned with the pious reputation of al-Ḥasan than the world-affirming one. The early proto-mystics were aware of the two images as portrayed in the literature of the period, but obviously had a preference for only one of them. They quoted him and referred to his practices that were already recorded. But at no point did they make the claim that he was a mystic or that he had anything to do with the emergence of the mystical movement. In other words, there is no evidence whatsoever that the early proto-mystics perceived al-Ḥasan as a mentor when it came to mystical knowledge. Here we must distinguish between a person being quoted for an idea and the explicit mention of him in a particular context, to the exclusion of other figures. In the former case, unless that person is the only one quoted for that practice, his example serves only to substantiate a claim and add to the list of legitimizers, whereas in the latter case, he is clearly perceived as a formulator of an idea or a practice.

Moreover, here again it is irrelevant whether or not mysticism existed at the time of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, since we are examining the way he is portrayed in proto-mystical and mystical sources.¹⁵⁹

Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) is a fundamental source for our study of the perception of al-Ḥasan by early proto-mystics.¹⁶⁰ He quotes al-Ḥasan in almost all his works, although infrequently. In *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* (Observing the Duties Owed to God), al-Muḥāsibī reports that some groups were confused about al-Ḥasan's opinion on fame (*shuhra*).¹⁶¹ Al-Muḥāsibī rejects their assertion that al-Ḥasan hated fame, and describes him in these words:

(B70) He only enjoined the renunciation of seeking fame. He himself chose to stick to preaching, recitation [of the Qur'ān] and giving legal opinions, for he realized his strength in them. This confers much more fame and status than all that has been mentioned about [those who volunteer to] remove dirt and harmful objects (*raf' al-adhā*) [from the streets] and practice weeping.¹⁶²

Volunteering to remove dirt (objects, including excrement, that cause impurity to the body) from the streets and practicing weeping were performed by some early ascetics; on the surface, these acts pointed to their humility, but actually brought them great fame. Al-Muḥāsibī argues that al-Ḥasan was famous for what he did, and he knew that, and therefore could not have denounced fame. He only denounced seeking fame. Here one has to follow closely what al-Muḥāsibī is saying. Al-Ḥasan was a preacher, a reciter of the Qur'ān, and a jurist. He chose these things because he realized his gift in preaching, recitation, and law. Had al-Muḥāsibī considered al-Ḥasan a forerunner of Islamic spirituality or, for that matter, of the movement al-Muḥāsibī represents, he would not have described him in a way that eschews any mention of al-Ḥasan as an ascetic, let alone the founder of Islamic asceticism.

¹⁵ On the shift from asceticism to mysticism in early Islam, see Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism."

¹⁶⁰ Al-Muḥāsibī was not a mystic and he did not even describe himself as a *ṣūfī*: see J. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt von Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961), 6; and M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162 and 179.

¹⁶¹ Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 158.

¹⁶² Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 160. On *raf' al-adhā*, see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-mizān*, XIV, 27 ('-dh-y).

Al-Muḥāsibī does not single out al-Ḥasan as the ultimate authority on any particular ascetic or quasi-mystical topic. The sayings of al-Ḥasan appear among other sayings by famous early Muslim figures. At no point does al-Muḥāsibī begin his discussion of any ascetic or quasi-mystical practice by quoting first al-Ḥasan. His sources of legitimization, which helped him elaborate on the theme he addresses, are the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth*, and then the sayings of famous early Muslim figures. For instance, in the sections on reflection and the disciplining of one's soul, al-Muḥāsibī lists some relevant Qurʾānic verses and *ḥadīths*, and then quotes a large number of sayings on these two themes attributed to first/seventh and second/eighth-century figures.¹⁶³ In this respect, al-Ḥasan's anecdotes on reflection and disciplining one's soul do not differ much from the sayings of other figures. They all praise and enjoin self-reflection and discipline. Therefore, the anecdotes by al-Ḥasan cannot and should not be taken as a set of mystical teachings started by him and later borrowed and expanded by mystics. Al-Muḥāsibī clearly argues that those ascetic and quasi-mystical practices and beliefs are enforced by God and his messenger Muḥammad, and that the early Muslims closely followed the teachings of the Qurʾān and the example of their Prophet. It is therefore misleading to infer from al-Muḥāsibī that he perceived al-Ḥasan as the initiator of "reflection and self-scrutiny" as a mystical practice, as some modern scholars have claimed.¹⁶⁴

Nor do the other extant works of al-Muḥāsibī give any prominent mention of al-Ḥasan separate from other early figures.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it is important at this stage to point out that, with very few exceptions that will be discussed below, the way al-Ḥasan was presented in early medieval proto-mystical and mystical scholarship was not in any way distinctive. What was ascribed to him was similarly attributed to other contemporaries of his. They all held similar religious views and practiced the same duties. We are dealing here with a genre of piety literature that revered a large number of early religious figures—the founding fathers—one of whom was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Moving to the fourth/tenth century, al-Ḥasan was still not acknowledged in the most popular mystical circles. Al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) mentions al-Ḥasan only three times in his celebrated *Kitāb al-Luma'*

¹⁶³ Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 12–18, and 88–92.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Massignon, *Essay*, 132; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ This statement is based on an examination of the following works by al-Muḥāsibī: *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, *Kitāb al-Khalwa*, *al-Waṣāyā*, *al-Qaṣd wa-l-rujū' ilā Allāh*, *Risālat al-Mustarshid*, and *Adāb al-nufus*.

(The Flashes of Light). He does not consider him in any way relevant to the mystical movement. Al-Sarrāj believes mystical knowledge started with the first caliph Abū Bakr (d. 13/634),¹⁶⁶ with al-Ḥasan having played no role in its propagation. This perception is further confirmed by al-Sarrāj: he refutes the argument that the term *ṣūfiya* (those who wear the wool, i.e., mystics) was coined at a later stage in Baghdad, as some people in his time were claiming. Al-Sarrāj argues that the term was definitely known in the time of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and even before, for the latter reported seeing a *ṣūfi* while performing the circumambulation of the Ka'ba.¹⁶⁷ Al-Sarrāj does not say that al-Ḥasan was a mystic, or that al-Ḥasan had acquired or taught mystical knowledge. It was clear for al-Sarrāj that al-Ḥasan's association with mysticism was limited to his seeing a *ṣūfi* in Mecca.¹⁶⁸ It is therefore evident that al-Sarrāj does not consider al-Ḥasan to belong to the mystical movement in any way.

Other mystics of the fifth/eleventh century who compiled prosopographies or lists of mystics also do not include al-Ḥasan in their works. Al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) provides no biography for al-Ḥasan in his *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya* (The Generations of Sufis), and does not mention him in any particular way at all. Moreover, he does not quote al-Ḥasan in his two other celebrated mystical manuals, *Jawāmi' ādāb al-ṣūfiya* (Collections of the Mystics' Manners) and *Uyūb al-naḥs wa-mudāwātuhā* (The Vices of the Soul and Their Cure). Similarly, al-Ḥasan is not listed among the notable mystics in *al-Arba'in fī shuyūkh al-ṣūfiya* (The Forty Mystical Mentors) by al-Sulamī's contemporary al-Mālīnī (d. 412/1021), nor is he listed in the *Risāla* (Epistle) by al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). Even the Sunni heresiographer 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) does not include al-Ḥasan among the notable mystics of Islam.¹⁶⁹

Here we should note that early mystics, starting with the emergence of Islamic mystical movements around the mid-third/mid-ninth century, were divided into several competing groups; for instance, *al-Ṣūfiya*, which originated in Baghdad, *al-Malāmatiya* and *al-Karrāmiya* in Khurāsān, and *al-Sālimiya* in Baṣra.¹⁷⁰ Often, these groups were

¹⁶⁶ Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, 121–24 (ed. Nicholson), and 168–72 (ed. Maḥmūd and Surūr).

¹⁶⁷ Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, 22 (ed. Nicholson), and 42 (ed. Maḥmūd and Surūr).

¹⁶⁸ In the historical context of the first century of Islam, this means a person wearing a woolen garment. But al-Sarrāj understood it, or at least he wanted his readers to understand it, as a proof of the existence of mystics and mysticism at the time of al-Ḥasan.

¹⁶⁹ 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, 315–16.

¹⁷⁰ On these various mystical groups, see their respective entries in *EI2*.

subsumed as *ṣūfīya*. One expects that these rival movements esteemed the teachings and practices of different early Muslim figures and did not necessarily claim to follow the same ones.¹⁷¹ Hence, the harmonization was done at a later stage, as in the case of Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī’s *Hilyat al-awliyā’*.

2.3 AL-ḤASAN’S TRANSFORMATION INTO A MYSTIC (MID-FOURTH/MID-TENTH–FIFTH/ELEVENTH CENTURY)

The most elaborate, and probably the earliest, presentation of al-Ḥasan as a mystic comes from *Qūt al-qulūb* (Nourishment of the Hearts) by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), who was a famous representative and leader of the Sālīmīya mystical and theological school of Baṣra.¹⁷² This presentation clearly demonstrates that by the late fourth/tenth century, some mystical movements in Baṣra started to make the claim that al-Ḥasan was their founder. Al-Makkī was eager to show that mysticism started in Baṣra, and that his townsman al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī planted its first seeds. This claim must be understood in the context of the legitimacy challenge to the members of the Sālīmīya movement. There is evidence that by the time of al-Makkī they were under severe attack by their opponents—rival mystical groups and theological schools—who labeled them as heretics, and al-Makkī composed his voluminous work *Qūt al-qulūb* partly to answer those allegations.¹⁷³ It is in this context that one must interpret al-Makkī’s presentation of al-Ḥasan: an effort to legitimize the Sālīmīya tradition by linking it to Muḥammad through, by then, the most renowned figure of Baṣra, namely al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Al-Makkī describes al-Ḥasan as “our master” and “the master of our masters,”¹⁷⁴ and comments:

¹⁷¹ Melchert touches on this issue of rivalry in “The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism.”

¹⁷² This school was established by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sālīm (d. 297/909) and his son Aḥmad (d. 356/967). The father was a disciple of Ṣaḥl al-Tustarī when the latter was in Baṣra. On the Sālīmīya mystical movement, see L. Massignon/B. Radtke, “Sālīmīyya,” *EI2*, VIII, 993b; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 84–87.

¹⁷³ One such refutation of the doctrines of the Sālīmīya movement, *al-Radd ‘alā Ibn Sālīm* (The Refutation against Ibn Sālīm) which is now lost, was composed by the famous Ash‘arite mystic Ibn Khafif al-Shīrāzī (d. 371/982). See L. Massignon/B. Radtke, “Sālīmīyya,” *EI2*, VIII, 993b; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 87.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, I, 190–91 (Gramlich, I, 416–17), II, 22 (Gramlich, I, 477), and II, 88 (Gramlich, II, 56).

(B71) We trace his footsteps and follow his path. From his lamp we take light. We have transmitted from him, master (*imām*) to master (*imām*), this [doctrine of mysticism] with the consent of God almighty.¹⁷⁵

Al-Makkī states that he is following in the steps of the great master al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. The tradition started with him, and then was transmitted from one master to another, generation after generation. Al-Makkī even goes further, affirming that not only was al-Ḥasan the inceptor of the mystical tradition of Baṣra, but that all mystical learning started with him:

(B72) Al-Ḥasan was the first to create a method for this doctrine [of mysticism]. He made the tongues speak it, uttered its meanings, showed its lights, and by the light he uncovered its secrets.¹⁷⁶

Al-Makkī had to substantiate such a strong statement for fear that it might be thought that al-Ḥasan introduced a religious innovation. For that purpose, al-Makkī traces al-Ḥasan's mystical knowledge back to Muḥammad. Al-Ḥasan, according to al-Makkī, had learned about mysticism from the Companion Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656), whom Muḥammad had entrusted with mystical knowledge to the exclusion of all other Companions.¹⁷⁷

The claim that al-Ḥasan met and received any learning from Ḥudhayfa¹⁷⁸ is very unreliable, and, in fact, impossible. Al-Ḥasan spent his first fifteen years in or around Medina.¹⁷⁹ Ḥudhayfa was the governor of al-Madā'in, in central Iraq, during the caliphate of 'Umar and until the death of 'Uthmān, and he died there in 36/656.¹⁸⁰ In other words, the two could not have met. Al-Dhahabī records that Muḥammad revealed to Ḥudhayfa the names of the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) who will come after Muḥammad's death.¹⁸¹ Al-Sarrāj makes a similar statement about Ḥudhayfa exclusively receiving secret knowledge from Muḥammad, but does not mention that Ḥudhayfa passed it to al-Ḥasan.¹⁸² Similarly

¹⁷⁵ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 22 (Gramlich, I, 477).

¹⁷⁶ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 23 (Gramlich, I, 478), and II, 47 (Gramlich, I, 523).

¹⁷⁷ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 23 (Gramlich, I, 478).

¹⁷⁸ See also Massignon, *Essay*, 132.

¹⁷⁹ Even if al-Ḥasan's association with Medina was the result of mere fabrication, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, it remains the case that no context of his encounter with Ḥudhayfa can be established.

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 317; and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, II, 361–69.

¹⁸¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, II, 364.

¹⁸² Al-Sarrāj records that Muḥammad entrusted Ḥudhayfa with secret knowledge to the exclusion of all other Companions, and that 'Umar used to ask Ḥudhayfa if he ('Umar) was one of the hypocrites, implying that that secret knowledge was about the names of the hypocrites: al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, 378.

al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) describes Ḥudhayfa as *ṣāhib sirr al-rasūl* (keeper of the secret of the Messenger), here too with no mention of al-Ḥasan.¹⁸³ This explains why certain mystics from Baṣra had to associate al-Ḥasan with Ḥudhayfa. They used such *ḥadīths* and interpreted them to mean that Muḥammad actually revealed to Ḥudhayfa the secrets of mystical knowledge and that Ḥudhayfa passed them to al-Ḥasan.

A particular *ḥadīth* mentioned in the anonymous mystical text *Adab al-mulūk* (The Good Manners of Kings) reveals how the claim of the transmission of mystical knowledge from Muhammad to Ḥudhayfa and then to al-Ḥasan was made. *Adab al-mulūk* was supposedly composed around the same time as al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*, and its unknown author belonged to a mystical group from Baṣra.¹⁸⁴ It is in *Adab al-mulūk* that we come across a *ḥadīth* defining esoteric knowledge as a secret shared only between God and his saints.

(B73) It is said that Aḥmad b. Ghassān said: I asked al-Hujaymī about esoteric knowledge (*ilm al-bāṭin*), and he replied: I asked 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd about esoteric knowledge, and he replied: I asked al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī about esoteric knowledge, and he replied: I asked Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān about esoteric knowledge, and he replied: I asked the messenger of God, God's praise and peace on him, about esoteric knowledge and he replied: "It is a knowledge [shared only] between God and his saints. None of the angels or any of his other creation knows about it."¹⁸⁵

Abū 'Amr Aḥmad b. 'Aṭā' al-Hujaymī (d. 200/815) was from Baṣra. He was known to have accompanied a controversial disciple of al-Ḥasan named 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. after 150/767).¹⁸⁶ Al-Hujaymī also had a disciple named Aḥmad b. Ghassān (d. before 230/845) who replaced him in the leadership of the ascetic movement he had created.¹⁸⁷ According to the lost work *Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk* (Generations of Ascetics) of Ibn al-A'rābī (d. 340/952), al-Hujaymī was the first person in Baṣra to

¹⁸³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, I, 161–62; and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, II, 361.

¹⁸⁴ Radtke dates this work to around 374/984, and argues that its author is very likely the mystic 'Alī b. Ja'far al-Sirawānī (d. 396/1005): see Radtke (ed.), *Adab al-mulūk*, 17–20 (German introduction).

¹⁸⁵ Radtke (ed.), *Adab al-mulūk*, 34.

¹⁸⁶ He is usually confused with 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Ziyād, also from Baṣra, but whose death date is around 177/793. On 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Ziyād, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VII, 714–15; and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhib al-tahdhib*, VI, 434–35. On 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VII, 137–38.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IX, 408–9; and Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mizān*, I, 320–21. He is different from another al-Hujaymī from Baṣra named Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. 'Alī (d. 351/963): see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, XV, 525–26.

establish a place dedicated only to ascetic practices (*'ibāda*).¹⁸⁸ But given that al-Ḥasan could never have met Ḥudhayfa, here too we are dealing with a late claim by al-Hujaymī's school to link their movement to al-Ḥasan and from him back to Muḥammad via Ḥudhayfa.

Interestingly, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) reports from the celebrated Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) a *ḥadīth qudsī* (a revelation from God to Muḥammad, but not found in the Qur'ān) similar to that of *Adab al-mulūk*. It does not, however, speak of esoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-bāṭin*); rather it speaks of *al-ikhhlāṣ* (sincere devotion):

(B74) God said: "It (*al-ikhhlāṣ*) is a secret of mine that I place in the heart of every worshiper of mine whom I love."¹⁸⁹

As the chain of authorities (*isnād*) for this *ḥadīth*, al-Qushayrī reproduces an "I asked ... about ..., and he replied" formula very similar to that seen in *Adab al-mulūk*:

God → Gabriel → Muḥammad → Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān → al-Ḥasan → 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd → Aḥmad b. Ghassān → Abū Ya'qūb al-Sharīṭī → Aḥmad b. Bashshār → Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Khaṣṣāf → 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Shaqīqī → 'Alī b. Sa'īd and Aḥmad b. Zakarīyā → Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī → al-Qushayrī

Moreover, the bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) also produces a list of masters and apprentices connecting the mystic from Baghdād Abū Muḥammad Ja'far al-Khuldī (d. 348/959) to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions that he saw this list written by the hand of Ja'far al-Khuldī, and also heard it from him:

(B75) I (Ja'far al-Khuldī) studied with Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910), who said to me: "I studied with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sarī b. al-Mughallis al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867)." He said: "Al-Sarī studied with Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), Ma'rūf al-Karkhī studied with Farqad al-Sabakhī (d. 131/748), Farqad studied with al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥasan studied with Anas b. Mālīk (d. after 91/709). Al-Ḥasan also met seventy of those who witnessed the Battle of Badr."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IX, 408. Al-Dhahabī had a copy of this lost work and used it occasionally in his *Siyar*. On Ibn al-ʿArābī's *Ṭabaqāt*, see also Meier, *Abū Sa'īd-i Abū l-Hayr*, 304–5; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 18.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 162 (187, English translation); see also al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, 78.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, 235 (ed. Tajaddud), 183 (ed. Flügel). Interestingly, Abū Nu'aym studied with Ja'far al-Khuldī, and he was not aware of this: see Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, X, 381–82; and J. Pedersen, "Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī," *EI2*, I, 142b–43a.

In the case of these testimonies from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, one can argue that what we are dealing with are *isnāds*, primarily of *ḥadīths*, being transformed into mystical *silsilas* to justify the transmission of mystical knowledge from Muḥammad. For instance, *Adab al-mulūk* relates nothing but a *ḥadīth qudsī*, which states that esoteric knowledge is a secret between God and his designated saints. It does not say that Muḥammad revealed the secrets of mysticism to Ḥudhayfa, or that Ḥudhayfa related it to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Only when a later interpretation of this *ḥadīth* turned the *isnād* into a mystical *silsila*, affirming that esoteric knowledge was passed down through the people named in the *isnād*, was al-Ḥasan established as a founder of mysticism. This point is further supported by al-Sulamī's silence about the identities and significance of those persons named in the *isnād* of al-Qushayrī after the name of al-Ḥasan. He does not provide in his short prosopographical dictionary *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiya* a biography for any of them. In his work, 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Thughrī and Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Zakariyā al-Nasawī appear only as informants of his. Their significance is therefore minimal and corroborates the argument presented here, namely that we are dealing with a *ḥadīth*, and not the family tree of mysticism. Had this been anything other than a *ḥadīth*, and had al-Sulamī perceived it as a mystical *silsila*, then he definitely would have included prosopographies for them,¹⁹¹ especially for al-Ḥasan.

This fact reveals an important reality about the earliest association of al-Ḥasan with mysticism. Around the mid to late fourth/tenth century, some mystics in Iraq, in particular Baṣra, became eager to claim al-Ḥasan as the founder of their tradition, most likely as a result of clashes with other mystical and non-mystical groups there. The followers of al-Hujaymī, who were accused of upholding Qadarite beliefs, started circulating *ḥadīths* about the righteousness of their practices. Al-Makkī, and possibly other Sālīmīya mystics, advanced similar claims. They interpreted those *ḥadīths* as describing the actual transmission of mystical knowledge. As we have seen, al-Makkī does not name any of the people involved in the transmission of esoteric knowledge from Muḥammad → Ḥudhayfa → al-Ḥasan. He only refers to them in

¹⁹¹ 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Thughrī and Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Zakariyā al-Nasawī related to al-Sulamī material from 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Shaḥīqī: al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 139 and 187.

the ambiguous statement “we have transmitted from him (al-Ḥasan), master to master...” He was aware of the controversial beliefs of the movement of al-Hujaymī.¹⁹² Probably too that movement was among the adversaries of the Sālīmīya group in Baṣra. Al-Makkī might have borrowed the first three names (Muḥammad → Ḥudhayfa → al-Ḥasan), and dropped the controversial ones (‘Abd al-Wāḥid → al-Hujaymī → Aḥmad b. Ghassān). After all, the founder of the Sālīmīya school Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sālīm was the disciple of the celebrated mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).¹⁹³ Therefore, al-Makkī would not enlist the problematic figures of al-Hujaymī’s school as his ancestors.

To return to al-Makkī’s treatment of al-Ḥasan, he also addresses the question of how al-Ḥasan came to merit being selected to learn and then propagate mystical knowledge. Al-Makkī reports that a contemporary of al-Ḥasan from Baṣra named Abū Qatāda al-‘Adawī said:

(B76) We have not seen a person who did not accompany the messenger of God but was like the Companions of the messenger of God except him (al-Ḥasan).¹⁹⁴

Abū Qatāda was attesting to the distinctiveness of al-Ḥasan who, though he was not a Companion, was like the Companions in his conduct. Here al-Ḥasan is elevated well above the scholars of his day.¹⁹⁵ Even more, al-Makkī presents him as having surpassed some of the Companions in his vast knowledge.¹⁹⁶ We have come across this effort to distinguish al-Ḥasan from his generation and even most of the Companions in Chapter 1. Al-Makkī follows this very methodically. He also reports that when ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib entered Baṣra following the Battle of the Camel (36/565), he went to the city mosque, where

(B77) he started chasing out the storytellers (*quṣṣās*), loudly saying: “Storytelling is a heresy.” Lastly, he reached the circle of a young man lecturing to a group of people. He listened to him and was impressed by his words and said: “O young man, I will ask you about two things. If you answer them correctly I will let you lecture to people. Otherwise, I will throw you out like I did with your friends.” Al-Ḥasan replied: “Ask,

¹⁹² For a brief exposition of the allegations against the beliefs of al-Hujaymī and his ascetic movement that were prevalent in the fourth/tenth century, see al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IX, 408–9; and Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mizān*, I, 320–21.

¹⁹³ See L. Massignon/B. Radtke, “Sālīmīyya,” *EI2*, VIII, 993b; and Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 84–87.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 22 (Gramlich, I, 477–78).

¹⁹⁵ Similar examples have been quoted in the Introduction.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 19–20 (Gramlich, I, 472–73).

O Commander of the Faithful.” ‘Alī asked: “Tell me what makes faith righteous and what makes it corrupt.” Al-Ḥasan replied: “Piety makes it righteous, and greed makes it corrupt.” ‘Alī then said: “You have spoken the truth. Continue, it is persons like you who are fit to lecture to people.”¹⁹⁷

The purpose of relating the encounter between al-Ḥasan and ‘Alī was not primarily its historicity but rather its implication. It is ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, then the caliph, who endorsed the outstanding gift and deep knowledge of al-Ḥasan. By the time of al-Makkī, ‘Alī was hailed as a central figure in Islam. When ‘Alī went into the mosque of Baṣra to chase out storytellers and condemn storytelling (*qaṣaṣ*), he was astonished and impressed when he got to the circle of al-Ḥasan and heard his words. ‘Alī not only saved al-Ḥasan the embarrassment but also gave him unequivocal approval to proceed with his way of storytelling.

The historicity of this encounter is highly dubious. The original narrator of the account did not take note of several known aspects of the early life of al-Ḥasan. First, at the time when this account supposedly took place, al-Ḥasan was barely fifteen years old,¹⁹⁸ and therefore highly unlikely to be a notable orator. Second, all references to al-Ḥasan’s early life state that he left Medina after the Battle of Ṣiffin (37/657)—a year after this presumed encounter in Baṣra—to join the Arab army in Sistān.¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, al-Qushayrī mentions a similar anecdote about al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī seeing one of the sons of ‘Alī in Mecca and asking him the exact same questions ‘Alī purportedly asked al-Ḥasan in the mosque of Baṣra. The unnamed son of ‘Alī replied to al-Ḥasan’s inquiry with the same answers al-Ḥasan gave to ‘Alī.²⁰⁰ Here we have the roles reversed; in the case of ‘Alī’s son, al-Ḥasan was not testing him but rather seeking to learn from him.

Equally puzzling is yet a second version identical to that of al-Makkī, reported by al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 520/1126), a Mālikite jurist who was originally from Spain but lived most of his active life in Alexandria. In this version, the notable Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar (d. 73/693), not ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, was identified as the person who went into the mosque to chase out storytellers. When he reached the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, he

¹⁹⁷ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 88 (Gramlich, II, 56); also reported in a slightly variant form in al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 225 (no. 14).

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma‘ārif*, 440; al-Shirāzī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 87; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2387; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, II, 69 and 72; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, IV, 564; and Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 344.

²⁰⁰ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 92.

listened to him and departed without asking al-Ḥasan to leave.²⁰¹ The setting is not identified in the report of al-Ṭurtūshī, but presumably it is the mosque of Medina. Whatever the case might have been, the reliability of any of the versions is highly debatable as well.

Al-Makkī clearly had his say about what to include and what to leave out from the stories and sayings by or about al-Ḥasan that were available to him. As we might expect, he edited out all the sayings already in circulation attributed to al-Ḥasan that condemn mysticism,²⁰² and was eager to collect any words and sermons attributed to al-Ḥasan that praise mysticism or mention his mystical knowledge and teaching. This selective presentation of al-Ḥasan by al-Makkī underlines his intent, but ironically does not unequivocally substantiate his claim that al-Ḥasan was the founder or even a major figure of early mysticism. Putting the issue of authenticity aside, the references to al-Ḥasan are accompanied by references to other Muslim figures and major early mystics, leaving no room for the belief that he was peculiar to any given mystical topic or practice.

It was in Baṣra, around the late fourth/tenth century, that al-Ḥasan started to emerge as a mystical figure. Most probably al-Makkī and his Sālīmīya school were among the first to introduce al-Ḥasan into the mystical movement, not as an ascetic whose teaching they valued, but as a mystic who was versed in the secrets of mysticism and who planted its first seeds.

The anachronistic association of al-Ḥasan with mysticism was not limited to the followers of the mystical movement. Their opponents made use of him to utter condemnations of mystics and the mystical tradition. This is already attested in early third/ninth century by Ibn Sa'd, who reports that the *ṣūfīs* (those who wear the wool) were once mentioned in the presence of al-Ḥasan, and he described them by saying:

(B78) They shelter arrogance in their hearts but show modesty in their dress. By God, each one of them is more proud in his dress than the owner of the shawl in his shawl.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Al-Ṭurtūshī, *al-Ḥawāḍith wa-l-bida'*, 91.

²⁰² See, for example, Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 169; Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, II, 402; and al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 153.

²⁰³ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 169; see also Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, II, 402. Slightly variant in al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, III, 153; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 245; and al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 179.

Al-Muḥāsibī was clearly annoyed with this saying. He does not challenge its ascription to al-Ḥasan, which clearly indicates that it was already accepted at al-Muḥāsibī's time as an authentic saying by al-Ḥasan. But interestingly, he reinterprets it to mean that al-Ḥasan was actually praising the proto-mystics for wearing the wool. For, according to this, they have the right to show their pride in the presence of those who care about the wealth of this world and ignore their faith.²⁰⁴

A similar condemnation of wearing the wool as a sign of excessive piety was reported by 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Here, al-Ḥasan rebukes his disciple Farqad for wearing a woollen garment, saying that piety is belief, acts, and deeds, and not a robe:

(B79) Khālid b. Shawdhab said: "I saw Farqad al-Sabakhī wearing a woollen garment. Al-Ḥasan held him by his garment and said: 'O [my] son Farqad,' he repeated it twice or three times, 'piety is not in this dress. Instead, piety is what is firmly established in the heart and fulfilled by act and deed.'"²⁰⁵

Another fundamental ascetic practice, which was later adopted into mysticism, is reported to have been cursed by al-Ḥasan, namely *i'tikāf* (worship in some form of seclusion). Ibn al-Mubārak reports the following on the authority of al-Ḥasan's disciple Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl:

(B80) Al-Ḥasan once visited Thābit al-Bunānī [to ask him] to go [with him] to attend to someone's need. Thābit said: "I am staying in my house for worship (*mu'takif*)."²⁰⁶ Al-Ḥasan replied: "I much prefer to fulfill the need of a Muslim brother of mine than stay at home for worship for an entire year."²⁰⁶

Al-Ḥasan angrily answers his townsman Thābit for what he considers irresponsible behavior in giving priority to worship in seclusion over helping a Muslim.²⁰⁷ His words emphasize that proper belief requires a balance between worship and being active in one's society. Interestingly, later sources report only al-Ḥasan's reply, with no mention of Thābit.²⁰⁸ Once the context of the words of al-Ḥasan is removed, they imply a broader condemnation of the practice of *i'tikāf*,²⁰⁹ indirectly hinting at the excessive practices of the ascetics and mystics.

²⁰⁴ Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, 245.

²⁰⁵ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 379 (no. 1522).

²⁰⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 231 (no. 747).

²⁰⁷ An identical report is attributed to al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī in which he reprimanded his brother al-Ḥusayn for not helping a person because of seclusion: see al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi*, II (*al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*), 198.

²⁰⁸ Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, III, 175; Abū Bakr al-Dinawarī, *Kitāb al-Mujālasa*, III, 89 (no. 714); and al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, V, 201.

²⁰⁹ On *i'tikāf*, see G. H. Bousquet, "I'tikāf," *EI2*, IV, 280a.

There is no historical foundation whatsoever to substantiate the claim that al-Ḥasan said anything about mysticism and mystical practices, whether in praise or condemnation. After all, the mystical movement originated in the third/ninth century. But seemingly al-Ḥasan's famed piety encouraged those who despised and did not approve of mysticism to use him to curse it as a heretical and pretentious movement. The mystics too, starting in the fourth/tenth century with people like al-Makkī, did not miss the opportunity to answer back, by using the same al-Ḥasan to legitimize and endorse their beliefs and practices. They drew him spiritually closer to them. Perhaps this is why they introduced al-Ḥasan into their movement over the years, not as an apprentice but directly as a master.

A few decades after al-Makkī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 429/1038) compiled his famous ascetic/mystical prosopography *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* (Ornament of the Saints). He includes there a relatively long section on al-Ḥasan that particularly highlights the ascetic aspect of his life and personality. One needs to keep in mind that Abū Nu'aym includes as well a large number of Muslim religious figures with only one thing in common among all of them: piety and religious devotion.²¹⁰

Abū Nu'aym builds his image of al-Ḥasan with one concern: to present him as a founding father of the mystical movement. He uses as proof primarily the scattered reports on al-Ḥasan's piety and asceticism, and picks his ingredients from several sources, including Ibn al-Mubārak and Ibn Ḥanbal/ʿAbd Allāh. Abū Nu'aym opens the biography of al-Ḥasan with the following words:

(B81) Among them [Islam's saints] the ally of fear and sorrow, the companion of agony and grief, the antagonist of sleep and slumber, Abū Sa'īd al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan, the ascetic jurist and the devout worshiper. He renounced the trivialities and adornments of this world, and admonished the desires and arrogance of the soul.²¹¹

With this introduction, Abū Nu'aym sets the tone and the boundaries of this particular image/biography of al-Ḥasan: he was an exemplar of asceticism and proper piety.

²¹⁰ Abū Nu'aym includes in his *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* companions, religious scholars, ascetics, and mystics; the only common trait is their piety. It is largely an attempt on his part to provide a personal dimension for mysticism, even though not all of the names listed refer to mystics.

²¹¹ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, II, 131–32. Al-Munāwī reproduces Abū Nu'aym's words verbatim at the beginning of his biography of al-Ḥasan: see al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durriya*, I, part 1, 254.

Abū Nuʿaym goes on to record a large number of reports about al-Ḥasan collected from a variety of sources. The main theme remains the same throughout all of them: piety and severe renunciation of worldly pleasure and fame. Abū Nuʿaym also highlights al-Ḥasan's uniqueness vis-à-vis his generation. He relates an account on the authority of al-Ḥakam b. Ḥajal, a friend of the famous traditionist and jurist from Baṣra Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/729). Al-Ḥakam claims to have seen Ibn Sīrīn in a dream and had a discussion with him:

(B82) I saw him [resting] in a palace; . . . I asked him: "O my brother, I see you in a situation that delights me. But what happened to al-Ḥasan?" Ibn Sīrīn replied: "He was raised ninety levels above me." I asked: "Why was that?" He replied: "Because of his life-long sorrow."²¹²

The purpose of this account is obviously not to belittle Ibn Sīrīn. On the contrary, it uses this well-reputed early Muslim scholar to recognize that al-Ḥasan's piety exceeds his.²¹³ Abū Nuʿaym reinforces this theme by a quote from the Twelver-Shīʿite imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, who would say every time al-Ḥasan was mentioned in his presence: "Oh, that one whose words are like the words of prophets."²¹⁴ Abū Nuʿaym does a similar thing with many other figures, which indicates that he was not singling out al-Ḥasan for any special treatment. Rather, he was eager to glorify the founding fathers of the mystical tradition. These somewhat new biographies/prosopographies, especially that of al-Ḥasan, reflect the continuing eagerness of medieval scholars to emphasize the distinctiveness of each one of the founding fathers so that their presumed teachings, sermons, and practices would be revered, and would subsequently support and endorse certain political or religious doctrines. In my opinion, despite the fact that each author or biographer builds upon earlier sources, and his information is mostly taken from them, yet the way he selects his material about each person by picking and choosing from his sources creates a new image or biography.

We also find the theme of seeing al-Ḥasan in a dream in Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), who reports a saying attributed to the ascetic Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 130/747):

²¹² Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 132.

²¹³ On dreams as opportunities for rallying legitimization, see L. Kinberg, "The Legitimization of the *madhāhib* through Dreams," *Arabica* 32 (1985), 47–79; and her introduction to *Kitāb al-Manām* by Ibn Abi al-Dunyā: *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Manām* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

²¹⁴ Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 147. We have already come across this in Chapter 1, where the other person who compares al-Ḥasan to prophets is ʿĀisha.

(B83) I saw al-Ḥasan, God have mercy on him, in my dream after he had passed away. He was happy, [his face] very white and his tears sparkling. I asked [him]: “Are not you dead?” He replied: “Yes.” I asked: “What happened to you after death, for, by God, your sorrow lasted long in this world?” He replied: “By God, that sorrow was transformed into guidance to the abodes of pure ones, and because of its reward, I am housed in the abodes of devout ones. By God, that was only possible because of God’s grace upon us.” I asked: “What do you command us to do, O Abū Sa‘īd?” He replied: “What can I say? Only the man with the longest sorrow in this world will [get] the longest happiness in the next world.”²¹⁵

We have already come across the story of Mālik b. Dīnār seeing the rebel Ma‘bad al-Juhanī in Mecca, in which Ma‘bad expresses remorse for not listening to the advice of al-Ḥasan. Here, however, Mālik b. Dīnār sees al-Ḥasan in a dream and seizes the opportunity to get advice on how to be saved from this world and obtain the rewards of the next world. Despite all his knowledge and ascetic fame, he needs the guidance of al-Ḥasan.

Abū Nu‘aym’s emphasis on al-Ḥasan’s sorrow was not meant to show weakness of character. On the contrary, it is a sign of a strong personality that fears only God. This strength, according to Abū Nu‘aym, is demonstrated in such anecdotes as the encounter al-Ḥasan had with ‘Umar b. Hubayra, the Umayyad governor of Iraq between 102/720 and 105/724. It was said that Ibn Hubayra summoned al-Ḥasan and the traditionist from Kūfa, al-Sha‘bī, to consult with them about a decree he had received from caliph Yazīd II, which he could neither implement nor reject. Al-Sha‘bī was anxious not to offend the governor and advised him to do as the caliph asked, whereas al-Ḥasan stood firm in condemning the caliph, saying that one should fear only God.²¹⁶

Abū Nu‘aym also believes that nothing could present al-Ḥasan better than his own writings. This is partly why he reproduces a *Treatise on Asceticism* that al-Ḥasan presumably wrote to caliph ‘Umar II b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–20).²¹⁷ It is presented as a direct exposition of al-Ḥasan’s thought, in his own hand, on the deceitful nature of this world.

Abū Nu‘aym does not present al-Ḥasan in a radically unique and peculiar way different from that of other early figures; his approach

²¹⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ādāb al-shaykh al-Ḥasan*, 30–31.

²¹⁶ Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, II, 149–50. Other versions of this report feature a third scholar, namely Muḥammad b. Sīrīn: see Chapter 1 (A21).

²¹⁷ Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, II, 134–40. This *Treatise* and its doubtful authenticity will be discussed in Chapter 3.

with every major figure he includes in his *Hilyat al-awliyā'* is to affirm and stress his superiority and distinctiveness. Nor, for that matter, is he peculiar in comparison to earlier sources on asceticism and mysticism. Yet the section on al-Ḥasan reflects and perfectly summarizes the image al-Ḥasan had attained by the early fifth/eleventh century and the preoccupations of Abū Nu'aym. In many respects, Abū Nu'aym selects material he likes and molds it to present al-Ḥasan in a relatively new light, and ends up producing a new biography of al-Ḥasan. This is the first time that this collection of reports is put together in that way, and by doing so, Abū Nu'aym presents to his readers an image of al-Ḥasan made to meet the expectations of Abū Nu'aym and the movement he represents. Although he was not transforming al-Ḥasan into a mystic similar to Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, yet his presentation of him significantly contributed to later perceptions of the fundamental role al-Ḥasan played in the formation of mysticism.

The Persian mystic al-Hujwīrī (d. between 465–69/1072–77) was equally fascinated by al-Ḥasan, though confused about his identity. He lists al-Ḥasan in *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Unveiling the Hidden), and calls him “Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, but other people call his agnomen Abū Muḥammad or Abū Sa‘īd.”²¹⁸ It seems that al-Hujwīrī confused several persons who were known as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. It is very possible that “Abī al-Ḥusayn” is a scribal error for “Abī al-Ḥasan”;²¹⁹ hence al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan. But al-Hujwīrī is the only medieval source to call the agnomen of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī “Abū ‘Alī” or “Abū Muḥammad”: nothing is known about him having sons named ‘Alī or Muḥammad.

Al-Hujwīrī was very familiar with the works of earlier mystics, in particular those of al-Sarrāj, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. He actually organizes his own *Kashf al-mahjūb* following their works.²²⁰ But he does not simply expand and update those earlier mystical manuals. His *Kashf* was “an innovative work” whose “aim is to accommodate a contentious subject, and thus extend the boundaries of acceptability in Sufism”²²¹ — one might add the acceptability of mysticism itself.

²¹⁸ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 103, also 87–88 (ed. Nicholson), and I, 294–95 (ed. Qandil).

²¹⁹ Actually only one manuscript of al-Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb* has it Abī al-Ḥasan.

²²⁰ See H. Hosain and H. Masse, “Hudjwīrī,” *EI2*, III, 546a; and most recently Mojaddedi, *Biographical Dictionary Tradition*, 125–47.

²²¹ Mojaddedi, *Biographical Dictionary Tradition*, 146–47.

The short narrative in al-Sarrāj that al-Ḥasan saw a man wearing wool in Mecca is borrowed by al-Hujwīrī and edited in a very interesting way:

(B84) Ḥasan Baṣrī said: "I saw Salmān wearing a woolen garment with patches."²²²

Here, the identity of the unknown person wearing wool is made clear: he was the Companion Salmān al-Fārisī (d. before 37/657). Al-Hujwīrī similarly borrows an already known anecdote attributed to al-Ḥasan about the seventy Companions who fought at Badr and whom he had met.²²³ He simply adds to it that the seventy Companions wore wool, which implies, in al-Hujwīrī's opinion, that they were mystics:

(B85) Ḥasan Baṣrī said: "I saw seventy Companions [who fought at] Badr. All of them had woolen garments."²²⁴

Al-Hujwīrī even makes al-Ḥasan wear wool, like two other celebrated ascetics, Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 130/747) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778):

(B86) Ḥasan Baṣrī, Mālik b. Dīnār and Sufyān Thawrī were owners of woolen patched garments.²²⁵

Al-Hujwīrī even mistakes some names in the mystical sources as references to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. For instance, he relates an account about an encounter between al-Ḥasan and a pious black man living in the ruins of 'Abbādān.²²⁶ He copies this account either from al-Sarrāj's *Kitāb al-Luma'* or from al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*. Going back to these two texts, the person who had the encounter with the pious black man was Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, and not al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.²²⁷ It is not possible to determine whether al-Hujwīrī intentionally misread the name or simply guessed the person to be al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. In any case, it is apparent that he, like al-Makkī, was initiating the association of al-Ḥasan with mysticism, since his conclusions are not supported by the sources upon which he depends for much of his information. In other words, what

²²² Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 50, also 45 (ed. Nicholson), and I, 242 (ed. Qandil).

²²³ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 183 (ed. Flügel); and al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 22.

²²⁴ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 50, also 45 (ed. Nicholson), and I, 241–42 (ed. Qandil).

²²⁵ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 50, also 46 (Nicholson), and I, 242 (Qandil).

²²⁶ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 297–98, also 232 (ed. Nicholson), and II, 469 (ed. Qandil).

²²⁷ Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, 316 (ed. Nicholson), and 391 (ed. Maḥmūd and Surūr); and al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 282.

we have here with the case of al-Hujwīrī is an ongoing expansion of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's legacy as an exemplar for mysticism.

Al-Hujwīrī's work, in this respect, represents an era when the image of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣī as a mystic was still under construction. One can argue that, especially in the case of al-Hujwīrī, it was not an exclusive treatment of al-Ḥasan to the exception of other mystical figures. Other problematic mystical prototypes, like al-Ḥallāj, received similar attention.²²⁸

2.4 AL-ḤASAN AS THE MYSTICAL MASTER (STARTING FIFTH/ELEVENTH CENTURY)

The new prosopographies of al-Ḥasan that mystics like al-Makkī, Abū Nu'aym and al-Hujwīrī produced, along with their claims that he played a significant role in the formation of mysticism, resulted in the spread of his reputation and the inclusion of his name in mystical *silsilas* on a large scale. The function of mystical *silsilas* was to legitimize mysticism by tracing it back to Muḥammad and claiming a continuity with his teachings. From the fifth/eleventh century onward, al-Ḥasan figures as the master who passed down the secrets of mysticism from Muḥammad and his Companions to later mystics. In other words, he became a cornerstone for the initiation and transmission of mystical learning.

The famous Sunnite traditionist of the late Fāṭimid Egypt Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), for instance, reproduces the *silsila* that he received from his mystical teacher from central Asia, Abū al-Mufaḍḍal b. al-Jalakht al-Rāzī, in the following way:

Muḥammad → 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib & other Companions → Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) → Ḥabīb al-Rā'ī (d. ca. 140/757) → Dawūd al-Ṭā'ī (d. 165/781) → Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815) → Al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867) → Al-Junayd (d. 298/910) → Abū Muḥammad al-Murta'ish (d. 328/940) → Al-Sirawānī → Abū al-Mufaḍḍal al-Rāzī al-Muqri' (d. 481/1088) → Al-Silafī (d. 576/1180).²²⁹

The most interesting change here is the name of 'Alī substituting for that of Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān that figures in earlier *silsilas*, very likely in

²²⁸ On al-Hujwīrī's treatment of al-Ḥallāj, see Mojaddedi, *Biographical Dictionary Tradition*, 131–33.

²²⁹ Al-Silafī, *Mu'jam al-safar*, 209–10. Al-Sirawānī is either Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ja'far, or his father 'Alī b. Ja'far (d. 396/1005). He cannot be the more celebrated Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Sirawānī, who was a student of Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ (d. before 291/904) and of al-Junayd. On Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Sirawānī, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*.

order to give more authority to mystical *silsilas* and mystical learning. But the striking difference is that al-Ḥasan now became the person who passed the mystical secrets to the major figures of early mysticism, such as Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, al-Sarī al-Saqāṭī, and al-Junayd. Such *silsilas* were clear attempts to connect those major mystics in terms of mentor and apprentice all the way back to Muḥammad. Thus, by the end of the fifth/eleventh century, al-Ḥasan was already praised as a crucial spiritual authority for Islamic mysticism. One must note here that the *silsilas* that were known in Baṣra—as seen from al-Makkī²³⁰ and *Adab al-mulūk*—do not include, after the name of al-Ḥasan, any of the mystics who were listed in later *silsilas*, like this one.

The source that takes the issue of al-Ḥasan's supposed mystical experience beyond the historical realm is undoubtedly *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* (Memoirs of the Saints) by Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 617/1220). The material about al-Ḥasan in al-'Aṭṭār is obviously of a legendary nature. Still, it is useful in understanding how the adherents of mysticism perceived al-Ḥasan and mythically transformed his image. As we saw in the previous chapter, al-'Aṭṭār simply claims the impossible. By his eagerness to affirm al-Ḥasan's distinctiveness and outstanding knowledge, he links him, as seen in Chapter 1, directly to the Prophet Muḥammad.

(B87) It was reported that one day in the house of Umm Salama, when al-Ḥasan was a child, he drank the water from the jug of the Prophet. The Prophet [when he returned] asked: "Who drank the water?" They replied: "Al-Ḥasan." He said: "He will be given of my knowledge as much as he drank from that water."²³¹

(B88) It was reported that one day the Prophet came into the house of Umm Salama. They placed al-Ḥasan at his side. The Prophet prayed for him. Whatever [knowledge] he (al-Ḥasan) had acquired, he acquired [it] from the blessing of [the Prophet's] prayer.²³²

Al-'Aṭṭār wants his readers to believe that al-Ḥasan had actually met the prophet of Islam in the house of Umm Salama, and was blessed by him.²³³ Possibly al-'Aṭṭār ignored the fact that al-Ḥasan was born ten years after

²³⁰ One has to assume in the *silsila* of al-Makkī his name and that of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sālim, the founder of the Sālīmiya mystical group.

²³¹ Al-'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, I, 24; and Behari, *Selections*, 8. Behari translates this saying incorrectly: see his preface, v.

²³² Al-'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, I, 24–25; Behari, *Selections*, 9–10; and Arberry, *Muslim Saints*, 20–22.

²³³ For other examples, see al-'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, I, 24–25.

the death of Muḥammad. This is a much more significant anachronism than al-Makkī's report about the presumed encounter between al-Ḥasan and 'Alī in Baṣra, or about al-Ḥasan receiving the secrets of mysticism from Ḥudayfa. Nevertheless, the issue for al-'Aṭṭār, or even for those who circulated such accounts, if al-'Aṭṭār was not the one who forged it in the first place, was to provide a direct prophetic blessing for al-Ḥasan's distinguished insight and knowledge, as if the miraculous breastfeeding of Umm Salama was not considered powerful enough. Such prophetic approval would also cover al-Ḥasan's supposedly mystical learning and teaching, which would consequently provide mysticism with a direct prophetic blessing and legitimization. It is because of this legitimization that al-'Aṭṭār links al-Ḥasan directly to the source, Muḥammad, and not to any Companion.

Al-Ḥasan's conversion to mysticism is also reported by al-'Aṭṭār in another legendary story. Al-Ḥasan, it is said, was a jewel merchant, known as Pearl Ḥasan. While on a business trip to Byzantium, he witnessed the funeral of the son of the king of Byzantium, which tremendously influenced his vision of life and death. At once, he returned to Baṣra and took up a life of solitude. He spent seventy years in isolation, and then became a great miracle worker (*ṣāhib karāmāt*).²³⁴

This story does not match the known facts. Al-Ḥasan was known to have been married and to have had three children (Sa'īd, 'Abd Allāh, and a daughter). Thus he would have been at least twenty years old when he supposedly had this experience, and was already dead when he gave up the life of solitude to start his miracle working. In addition, there is nothing known about al-Ḥasan being a merchant or for that matter having traveled to Byzantium or living a life of solitude. From all that is available about his life, we know he never left southern Iraq after he returned from the conquests in and around Sīstān, except for performing the pilgrimage to Mecca twice.²³⁵

The tendency to take al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī out of his time and attribute to him events that either predate his birth or postdate his death seems to have been very common in Persian literature. We have seen with al-Hujwīrī how Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī becomes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Similarly, Shī'ī Sabzawārī attributes an anecdote to al-Ḥasan in which he

²³⁴ Al-'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, I, 32–34; Behari, *Selections*, 12 and 25; and Arberry, *Muslim Saints*, 22–25.

²³⁵ On the two pilgrimages performed by al-Ḥasan, see Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 175.

spoke of Baghdad,²³⁶ whose construction did not begin until 145/762, i.e., 34 years after al-Ḥasan's death. Other Persian sources link al-Ḥasan to an incident in the marketplace of Baghdad,²³⁷ and report encounters between him and the semi-legendary female ascetic Rābi'a al-'Adawiya (d. 185/201).²³⁸

Perhaps these examples might suggest a tendency in Persian mystical lore to glorify al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who was after all believed to be of Persian descent.²³⁹ One can see the origin of this in *Tārīkh-e Sīstān* (History of Sīstān) which greatly praises al-Ḥasan, and reports that he was the architect of the mihrab and the pulpit of the Friday mosque in Sīstān, built by the then governor Ibn Samura. Al-Ḥasan was also said to have taught the Qur'ān there for three years.²⁴⁰ In other words, *Tārīkh-e Sīstān* implies that al-Ḥasan was the person who laid down the first foundations of Islamic learning and worship in Sīstān. But similar cases from Arabic sources suggest a much more widespread glorification process of al-Ḥasan than just the Persian.

As presented above, the justifications for associating al-Ḥasan with mysticism are not based on historical evidence. They reflect the obvious interests of the mystics who argued for such an association. Al-Makkī, for example, was eager to legitimize the Sālīmīya mystical school of Baṣra by arguing that al-Ḥasan was its fountainhead. Similarly,

²³⁶ Shī'ī Sabzawārī, *Maṣābiḥ al-qulūb*, 118–19.

²³⁷ This anonymous report is found in manuscript Arabic Mss suppl. 456 (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), folio 96a. Some works in this manuscript are on mysticism and include mystical *silsilas*, and are dated to 1078/1667–68.

²³⁸ On the legendary encounters between Rābi'a and al-Ḥasan, see Smith, *Rābi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*. For an updated study of Rābi'a, see Ch. Pellat, "Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya," *EI2*, VIII, 354b–56a; R. Caspar, "Rābi'a et le pur amour de Dieu," *IBLA* 121 (1968), 71–95; and J. Baldick, "The Legend of Rābi'a of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts," *Religion* 20 (1990), 233–47.

²³⁹ This tendency in Persian popular lore brings to mind the cases, in Arabic literature, of the famous comic characters Ash'ab and Juḥā, or the characters of the impossible-love stories Jamil and Majnūn Laylā. They became models for humorous anecdotes and love stories, which in fact reflect social conditions rather than actual historical events. The characters, be they al-Ḥasan, Ash'ab/Juḥā or Majnūn/Jamil, were simply mannequins dressed with anecdotes and stories that fit perfectly their perceived images: al-Ḥasan with respect to piety and wisdom, Ash'ab/Juḥā with respect to humor, and Majnūn/Jamil with respect to impossible love. On these four figures, see F. Rosenthal, "Ash'ab," *EI2*, I, 690b; Ch. Pellat, "Djuḥā," *EI2*, II, 590b–92b; F. Gabrieli, "Djamīl al-'Udhri," *EI2*, II 427b–28a; and Ch. Pellat, J. T. P. de Bruijn, B. Flemming and J. A. Haywood, "Majnūn Laylā," *EI2*, V, 1102b–7a. On Juḥā in a Jewish context, see Matilda Koén-Sarano, *Folktales of Joha, Jewish trickster* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003).

²⁴⁰ *Tārīkh-e Sīstān*, 71.

al-Hujwīri and al-ʿAṭṭār wanted to glorify their own mystical traditions. Their remarkable fascination with al-Ḥasan reflects an intense need to sanctify him in order to promote their own interests, even if that meant transforming him completely into a myth.

The linking of al-Ḥasan to mysticism, which started in Baṣra in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, was not about presenting him simply as a pious figure, as was the case in most of the earlier sources cited above. The intent was rather to actually place al-Ḥasan, as a mentor, at the center of the emergence of the mystical movement in Islam. Substantiation of such claims was lacking in the earlier sources that provided material on al-Ḥasan's life and teachings. The need to make up and circulate such stories and anecdotes was apparent, even if those tales violated what was already known about al-Ḥasan.

With the coming of the Mamluk period (mid-seventh/thirteenth century), the praise of al-Ḥasan increased; by then mysticism had become so influential that most scholars had mystical affiliations. The famous Egyptian poet and mystic of the Shādhiliya order Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī (d. 694/1294)²⁴¹ composed a poem about his mystical *silsila*, which includes the names of all major mystics, going all the way back to al-Ḥasan and then to ʿAlī and Muḥammad. In al-Būṣīrī's poem, one finds the first "mystical" description of al-Ḥasan:

(B89) from the unique al-Ḥabīb al-ʿAjamī,
from his mentor al-Baṣrī, the one with illuminations
I mean by him al-Ḥasan, whose mystical states (*aḥwāl*)
they have documented in compilations.²⁴²

Al-Ḥasan is described by al-Būṣīrī as the one with illuminations, whose mystical states have been documented in compilations, and who learned it all from the commander of the faithful ʿAlī, who received it from the prophet Muḥammad, the master of the two worlds. Even the philologist and biographer al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) traces his mystical *silsila* through al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. In his *ʿAẓn al-ʿaṣr* (The Notable Contemporaries), al-Ṣafadī says that he learned mysticism from Mūsā b. Aḥmad al-Aqṣarrāʾī

²⁴¹ On al-Būṣīrī, see "al-Būṣīrī," *EI2* (supplement), 158b–59a.

²⁴² Beinecke Arabic Mss suppl. 465, ff. 61a–62a. This manuscript is a collection (*majmūʿ*); the earliest work in it is dated to 1212/1797. The poem of al-Būṣīrī is inserted on a blank folio. It could have been written by Ḥasan b. Khalīl al-Murādi, whose autograph appears on folio 67b with the date 5 Jamāda II, 1212/25 November 1797. Al-Murādi reproduces another mystical *silsila* similar to al-Būṣīrī's.

(d. 740/1339), and the *silsila* goes all the way back to al-Ḥasan, then 'Alī and Muḥammad.²⁴³

But there remained one major controversy over al-Ḥasan's association with mysticism that seemed very unsettling: the doubtful encounter between al-Ḥasan and 'Alī. It had to be settled, for by that time most mystical *silsilas* portray al-Ḥasan receiving mystical knowledge from 'Alī. The one who rose to answer the challenge was none other than the prolific Mamluk scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). He compiled a short treatise addressing precisely that problem, entitled *Mas'ala: ankara jamā'atun mina al-ḥuffāẓi samā'a al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī min 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* (The Question regarding some Ḥadīth scholars dismissing the possibility that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī heard Ḥadīth with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib). Al-Suyūṭī was eager to prove that al-Ḥasan had actually met with 'Alī. He might have been answering skeptics, like the famous traditionist/historian Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1448), who argued that al-Ḥasan could never have met 'Alī or, for that matter, Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān.²⁴⁴ For that reason, al-Suyūṭī lists several reports, not encountered before him, demonstrating how 'Alī and al-Ḥasan could indeed have met:

(B90) 'Alī used to pay periodic visits to the widows of Muḥammad, one of whom was Umm Salama, in whose house al-Ḥasan and his mother were living.²⁴⁵

(B91) When al-Ḥasan attained the age of seven, he was instructed to perform the daily prayers; and he used to pray directly behind 'Uthmān until his murder. 'Alī was then living in Medina, and he only left it for Kūfa after the murder of 'Uthmān. It is not strange then that al-Ḥasan had heard *ḥadīths* from him for he must have seen him in the mosque [of Medina] five times each day, from the time he attained seven and until the age of fourteen.²⁴⁶

Al-Suyūṭī argues that 'Alī used to visit the widows of Muḥammad, and given that al-Ḥasan was raised in the house of one of those widows, namely Umm Salama, then 'Alī must have seen him in her house. Moreover, al-Ḥasan, like any good Muslim, must have learned how to pray when he attained seven. Therefore, he must have seen 'Alī in the

²⁴³ Al-Ṣafādī, *A'yān al-aṣr*, V, 475–76. Both the *silsilas* of al-Ṣafādī and al-Būsīrī include the name of Ḥabīb al-'Ajāmī as the disciple of al-Ḥasan.

²⁴⁴ See Ibn Ḥajar, *Ta'rif ahl al-taqdīs*, 56; and al-Qārī, *Ta'līqāt*, ff. 36b and 34b. See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, II, 266.

²⁴⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *Mas'ala*, f. 1b; and idem, *al-Ḥawī li-l-fatāwī*, II, 96.

²⁴⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *Mas'ala*, ff. 1b–2a; and idem, *al-Ḥawī li-l-fatāwī*, II, 96.

mosque of Medina at least every day for seven years; 'Alī left Medina after the assassination of 'Uthmān. This new argument is backed by a long list of *ḥadīths* from major *Ḥadīth* compilations, like those of Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Nasā'ī, and al-Dāraquṭnī, which are allegedly transmitted from 'Alī by al-Ḥasan. Displaying the transmission of *ḥadīths* was meant to further confirm the actual meeting of the two.

The legitimacy of al-Ḥasan's mystical knowledge is all that al-Suyūṭī cared about. The only way to confirm it was for al-Ḥasan to have received it from 'Alī, who was perceived by many mystics of the Mamluk period as the sole trustee of mystical knowledge after Muḥammad. This would automatically justify, legitimize, and validate al-Ḥasan's mystical knowledge and experience, and subsequently mysticism itself. In other words, al-Ḥasan would be a weak link in the *silsilas* of many a notable mystic had he never met with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

The most elaborate proof that al-Suyūṭī provides comes at the end of the *Mas'ala*, namely in the *silsila* of Abū Bakr b. Musdī (d. 663/1265).²⁴⁷ Ibn Musdī, a traditionist par excellence, was said to have reported how he received mystical knowledge by shaking the hands of two prominent mystical teachers of his. This shaking-the-hand-of started when the palm of Muḥammad's hand, supposedly on his legendary night journey to heaven, touched the sides of the throne of God. Then 'Alī touched the hand of Muḥammad, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī shook the hand of 'Alī, etc.:

(B92) Muḥammad → 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib → al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī → 'Isā al-Qaṭṭār → 'Alī b. al-Razīnī al-Khurāsānī → Mumshād al-Dīnawarī (d. 299/911) → Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Niffarī in Niffar → Abū Marwān 'Abd al-Malik b. Abī Maysara → Muḥammad b. al-Faraj b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Saksakī → Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muqbil b. Muḥammad al-'Ajīnī → 1) Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Sayf al-Ḥuṣarī in Alexandria → Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Isawī al-Nafzāwī in Nafza and 2) Shibl b. Aḥmad b. Shibl → Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī al-Faḍl al-Mālikī in Alexandria → Abū Bakr b. Musdī.²⁴⁸

Ibn Musdī, though proud of his mystical *silsila*, admits that the *ḥadīth* that Muḥammad touched the sides of the throne of God was *gharīb*

²⁴⁷ His full name is Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Mūsā b. Musdī (or Masdī) al-Muhallabī al-Andalusī, originally from Granada. He left it for Egypt and Syria, and finally resided in Mecca where he was assassinated. According to al-Dhahabī, Ibn Musdī received the *khirqā* (the sufi cloak) in Granada from his grandfather Mūsā and from the mystic of the Qādiriya *ṭarīqa* 'Abd al-Laṭīf b. al-Narsī (d. 623/1226): al-Ṣālihi, *Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' al-ḥadīth*, IV, 234–35; and al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-islām*, 661–670H: 156–58.

²⁴⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *Mas'ala*, ff 4a–b; and idem, *al-Ḥawī li-l-fatāwī*, II, 98.

(singular). He also concedes that the authenticity of the *silsila* is only acknowledged among mystics. But al-Suyūṭī does not produce it because of its dubious nature. On the contrary, he is very keen to provide this particular tradition of Ibn Musdī as an additional proof that al-Ḥasan had indeed met with ‘Alī.

In the Ottoman period, the trend of granting al-Ḥasan a central role in the shaping of early mysticism continued and indeed was taken to an even higher plane. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), the most notable mystic of Ottoman Syria,²⁴⁹ argues that esoteric knowledge (*ṭarīq al-bāṭin*), referring to mysticism, goes all the way back to God. God entrusted it to the angel Gabriel to reveal it to the prophet Muḥammad. Muḥammad entrusted it to two of his companions, Abū Bakr and ‘Alī.²⁵⁰ Abū Bakr entrusted it to his son Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, and ‘Alī entrusted it to his son al-Ḥusayn and to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī;²⁵¹ strangely not to his eldest son al-Ḥasan.

By the time of the Twelver-Shī‘ite theologian al-Khwānsārī (d. 1895),²⁵² al-Ḥasan had become a mystic of tremendous stature, so great that al-Khwānsārī was not willing to accept that such a pillar of Islamic thought was not also one of the Shī‘ites’ founding fathers.²⁵³ Al-Khwānsārī’s statement needs no comment:

(B93) He is one of the great masters of mysticism. He has beautiful sayings, maxims, and exhortations that people repeat.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ For al-Nābulusī, see W. A. S. Khalidi, “‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā‘il al-Nābulusī,” *EI2*, I, 60a–b.

²⁵⁰ An ingenious idea to bridge the hostility between Sunnite and Shī‘ite Islam!

²⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Ḥaqīqa wa-l-majāz*, 45–46 and 49. A similar *silsila* is provided by al-Ḥasan b. Khalīl al-Murādī, the son of the famous Damascene biographer and historian Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, the author of the biographical dictionary of the notables of the twelfth century of the Hijra *Silk al-durar fī a‘yān al-qarn al-thānī ‘ashar*. The *silsila* is written in al-Ḥasan al-Murādī’s hand and dated to 5 Jumāda II 1212 (25 November 1797) as an *ijāza* (license) to his friend ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṣāliḥ b. Ismā‘il, the *imām* of the mosque of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī in Istanbul: Arabic Mss suppl. 465 (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), ff. 65b–67b.

²⁵² For al-Khwānsārī, see A. Hairī, “Khwānsārī,” *EI2*, IV, 1027b–28b.

²⁵³ Obviously Al-Khwānsārī was trying to make a case for al-Ḥasan, a sort of whitewash, against already existing negative perceptions of him in some Shī‘ite sources. Al-Rashtī (d. 1260/1844), for instance, reports an encounter between ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan, during which ‘Alī describes al-Ḥasan as the *Sāmīrī* of the Muslim community, a reference to the Qur’anic character (see Q 20.85, 20.87 and 20.95) who leads his community to perdition: see al-Rashtī, *Risāla fī al-mizān al-ḥaqq*, f. 184a. For the Arabic text, see Appendix I, B123.

²⁵⁴ Al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, III, 25.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Islamic sources from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries record a conflict about the lifestyle of al-Ḥasan and the way he is to be presented. Early sources, like Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt*, emphasize that al-Ḥasan was an exceptional figure, yet otherwise normal. The proponents of asceticism, however, argue that al-Ḥasan's warnings and cursing of this world were constant discourses that dominated his ascetic life and teachings. But one can find in their presentation of al-Ḥasan several cases of name confusion, transfer of authorship, and misattribution of ascetic sermons and sayings that were not originally his. In other words, an austere ascetic and rigorously pious image for him was created, and then sayings that matched this image were associated with it. It is this presentation of al-Ḥasan that was promoted by later scholars, especially the mystics. In particular, the mystics of Baṣra in the second half of the fourth/tenth century made the first claim that al-Ḥasan was the founder of mysticism. They were under severe criticism regarding their legitimacy and were searching for legitimization. Al-Ḥasan, as the most notable figure of Baṣra, was just the right figure for their purposes. Interestingly, outside of Baṣra the dominant mystical groups of that period did not give al-Ḥasan any prominent role in the formation of mysticism, which indicates that the claims of the Baṣran mystics were controversial at the least. But the situation started to change in the fifth/eleventh century, when mystics from all over the Muslim world began to pay attention to the legacy of al-Ḥasan. By doing so, they transformed him into a master mystic and magnified his role, teachings, and image. He grew in importance and significance over the centuries to become the acclaimed cornerstone of the mystical movement in Islam. Later mystics were unwilling to keep him out of their ranks, probably because they needed to believe that such a well-reputed and pious early Muslim was their major ancestor.

It is important to keep in mind that although the transformation of al-Ḥasan into a mystic does not have any basis in reality, later mystics were working mostly on the basis of previous ascetic and mystical literature that praised al-Ḥasan and presented him as an ascetic and forerunner of mysticism. However awkward their representation of al-Ḥasan might be, it reflects a trend in medieval Islamic scholarship that is a historical phenomenon in and of itself.

EARLY ISLAM BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY

*Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation
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BY

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