

Overview: Iranian Islam and Persianate Sufism

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I. RECENT RESEARCH ON PERSIAN SUFISM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While the conspicuous entry of 'fundamentalist Islam'¹ onto the contemporary political scene has underlined the need for the deeper study of mediæval Islam and its culture and literature²—the accelerated pace of present-day political events in Iran has tended to eclipse historical and literary studies of Persian culture. Major research work done on mediæval Persian culture over the past thirty years has largely been overlooked by non-specialists, and consequently, the role of Sufism in the formation of the intellectual life of mediæval Iran, found in all its diverse contexts—from ethics to political science, from philosophy to the visual arts, from cosmology to theology, from psychology to poetry—remains comparatively neglected.

When in 1956, A.J. Arberry likened classical Persian literature³ as a wilderness yet to be signposted and surveyed, some two hundred and fifty years of orientalist scholarship stood behind him as testimony both to his predecessors' efforts to establish the prominent landmarks and to the dearth of real and intimate recognition of the Persian literary masters by its students. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, despite passage of decades, Persian literature, especially that of the late mediæval period—from the 13th to the 15th centuries, which is the focus of the present book—remains an enigma both to those generally familiar with world literature in translation and, on occasion, to scholars deeply engaged in its study as well.

One reason for this is an evident unfamiliarity with the mystical side of Islam, or Sufism. Yet it is upon the very principles and practices of Sufism that a great deal of Persian poetry, from the twelfth century onwards, was based. One of the most distinguished scholars of Persian Sufi literature, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrinkūb, has

1. Among the vast and growing literature on the subject, the following works are especially relevant to our discussion here: A.K.S. Lambton, 'The Clash of Civilizations: Authority, Legitimacy, & Perfectibility' in R.M. Burrell (ed.) *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Royal Asiatic Society 1989), pp. 33-47, and B.B. Lawrence, 'Fundamentalists in Pursuit of an Islamic State' in his *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (London: I.B. Tauris 1990), pp. 189-226.

2. In part, herein lies the motive for researches into the historical background of Islamic fundamentalism by sociologists such as Said Amir Arjomand; e.g. his *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (University of Chicago Press 1984).

3. *Classical Persian Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin 1956), p. 303.

12 Introduction and Historical Overview

gone so far as to say that, "Persian poetry of classical times was so extensively influenced by Sufi philosophy that almost every great lyric poet of that period was a Sufi, as nearly every great Sufi of the time was a poet."¹ In examining the historical background of Persian Sufism it is apt to bear this important observation in mind, which attests to the importance of Sufism in formulating the Persian models of literature, both classical and vernacular, which evolved during the mediaeval period – still used and elaborated upon today throughout Central Asia, Northern India, Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia.²

Sufism is, in fact, the central facet of traditional Islam and as Victor Danner observes in *The Islamic Tradition*, constitutes its very essence. Danner notes that "when al-Ghazzālī (d.1111) turned to Sufism to save his soul, the world of Islam had already been worked over by these numerous popular expressions of Sufism: the Sufi saints and their charismatic deeds were well known and loved by the people and even by some of the doctors of the Law." He goes on to comment that Sufism flowed into the molds of Islamic civilization established in the eighth century with relative ease, mainly because "The ground of Islam had been well churned over by Sufism and had yielded considerable spiritual fruit everywhere. Sufism was not, in other words, a tangential or exotic element in the Islamic world, as the term 'mysticism' in the pejorative meaning it has today, might lead us to believe. It was, instead, an all-pervasive reality that touched everyone, even the scoffer and critic of the Path."³

In the second volume of his monumental study of Islamic cultural history, *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall G.S.Hodgson also emphasizes "the pre-eminent place in Persian letters"⁴ enjoyed by mystical poetry since the eleventh Islamic century, and underlines the fact that "from the twelfth century on, increasingly Sufism was the inspiration of more and more of the important poets....It was a recognized part of religious life and even of religious 'ilm knowledge. Thus gradually Sufism, from being one form of piety among others, and by no means the most accepted one either officially or popularly, came to dominate religious life not only within the Jamā'ī-Sunni fold, but to a lesser extent even among Shī'is."⁵ Hodgson also stresses the predominance of Sufi attitudes and aspirations in eleventh-century Islamic

1. 'Persian Sufism in its Historical Perspective', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 3, nos. 3 & 4 (1970), pp. 139-40. Cf. J.C. Bürgel's remark (made in reference to Sanā'ī, Nizāmī, and Rumi): "There can be no doubt that without the miracle wrought by Islamic mysticism, Islamic poetry would not have developed as it did." *The Feather of Simurgh: The Licit Magic of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York University Press 1988), p. 84. Many of the observations made by H. Moayyad, in 'Lyric Poetry' in (ed.) E. Yarshater, *Persian Literature* (New York 1988), especially in his section on 'The Influence of Sufism', pp. 132-37, are also highly relevant in this context.

2. A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (N. Carolina: Chapel Hill 1975), pp. 327-402; As *Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York 1982), Chap. 4.

3. V. Danner, *The Islamic Tradition* (New York 1988) p. 95.

4. M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2: *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (University of Chicago Press 1977 rpt.), p. 295. The theme of poetry as the 'monumental art' of Persia also has been admirably expounded by Ehsan Yarshater ('Some Common Characteristics of Persian Art and Poetry' in *Studia Islamica*, 16, 1962) and its pre-eminent importance in Persian literature noted by Muḥammad Dabir Sayāqī (See the introduction, p. 12, to his edition to the *Kulliyāt-i Shāh Dā'ī Shirāzī* [Tehran 1339 AHsh]).

5. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 203.

poetry and aesthetics.¹

During the Mongol and Timurid domination of Persia three fundamental social institutions underpinned Muslim civic life: Islamic 'canon' law (*Shari'a*); the charitable (*waqf*) foundations; and the Sufi Orders (*ṭariqa*), the creditability of the last two depending upon the observance of *Shari'a* norms.

Accordingly, in addition to the ordinary mosque, each Muslim community now had its *khānaqāh* (Arabic, *zāwiyah*), where the Sufi *pīrs* lived. There they instructed and housed their disciples, held regular *dhikr* sessions (often for a fairly wide congregation), and offered hospitality to wandering Sufis, especially those of the same *ṭariqa*.² Even when endowed by an *amīr*, they retained this air...the *khānaqāhs* became the foci of the more private, personal side of worship.³

The political substructure and social fulcrum of the Sufi Orders lay in the establishment and diffusion of these centres, so understanding their traditional status in mediæval Persian society is necessary to grasp the historical situation of Sufism. In the 7th/13th century the *khānaqāh* institution became greatly diffused throughout all Islamic lands touched by Persianate culture, reaching the apex of its social and political influence. Aḥmad Rajā'ī, describing this growth of institutional Sufism, notes that in the 6th/12th and 7th/13th century:

Khānaqāhs were not reserved exclusively for the Sufis but were also open to all travelers, functioning as hotels where room and board were provided. This social aspect of the *khānaqāh* greatly increased its appeal, especially since all classes of people were allowed to participate in the Sufi assemblies, listen to their sermons, public teachings and musical concerts....In fact, so widespread did the social influence of the *khānaqāh* institution during this period become, that the State authorities began to 'credit' the institution officially — giving the director (*pīr*) of the *khānaqāh* the title of *Shaykh al-shiyukh*, ('Master of masters') which, like the rank of *Qaḍī al-Quḍāt* ('Attorney-general'), became an official position.⁴

According to Qāsim Ghānī, the *khānaqāh* institution during this period had both a private and a public aspect. The public, social dimension of the *khānaqāh* involved the giving of spiritual counsel to non-initiates, delivery of public homilies on various moral themes as well as general proselytizing of Sufi teachings. The private, individual dimension addressed contemplative disciplines such as fasting, meditation, prayer and retreat. The atmosphere of the *khānaqāh* was especially enlivened by the presence of *Samā'* ceremonies, which tended to dissolve class differences.⁵ Such a bold 'mixing of classes' was quite uncharacteristic any other institution in mediæval Europe of the same period. "Perhaps more than their peers in any other major cultural environment," observed Marshall Hodgson (describing Persian *ṭariqa* Sufism), "the Sufis succeeded in combining a spiritual elitism with

1. *Ibid*, II, pp. 304-05.

2. Cf. V. Danner's comments on 'The Early Development of Sufism' in S.H. Nasr, (ed.) *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad 1987), p. 263.

3. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 211-214.

4. *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ḥāfiẓ* (Tehran 1985, 2nd ed.), p. 456; these reflections are also echoed by Q. Ghānī, *Baḥṭh dar āthār wa afkār wa aḥwāl-i Ḥāfiẓ* (Tehran 1967, 3rd. ed.), p. 500.

5. Q. Ghānī, *op. cit.*, p. 501.

14 Introduction and Historical Overview

a social populism.”¹

By the fifth/eleventh century *khānaqāhs* or similar houses of retreat for mystics existed in all the major towns in Khurasan and Persian Central Asia. In the following century, the construction of *khānaqāhs* continued apace. It is known, for example, that Shaykh Aḥmad Jām (d. 536/1142) constructed some ten *khānaqāhs* during his lifetime throughout this region. In the seventh/thirteenth century the Bākhārzi family, to give but one example out of a myriad, constructed and endowed the most impressive *khānaqāh* in Fathābād, a suburb of Bukharā which contained a *madrasa* attached to it. Abū’l-Mafākhir Bākhārzi (d. 736/1336)² constructed a hospice for travellers, stables and a public bath in the 8th/14th century annexed onto the original edifice there.³ Throughout the rest of Persia intensive activity in the construction of *khānaqāhs* continued during this period. In the seventh/twelfth and eighth/thirteenth centuries in the province of Yazd (southern Persia) alone, according to the mediæval histories (such as the *Tarikh-i Yazd* and the *Tarikh-i jadid-i Yazd*) some forty-five *khānaqāhs* are recorded as having been constructed and charitably endowed.⁴

Although it is pure hyperbole to declare (as does J.S. Trimingham) that from their very inception the *khānaqāhs* “had been defined and regulated by the state – the price they paid for official recognition and patronage,”⁵ it is true that the Sufis often enjoyed close relations with local authorities and dignitaries, who in turn greatly respected the mystics’ rites conducted within their cloisters. According to Hodgson (who here strongly disagrees with Trimingham), the *khānaqāhs* were basically designed to house wandering Sufis, especially those of the same order. The *khānaqāhs* were so widespread that they could be found in every Muslim community which contained a mosque. Often, the *khānaqāhs* were financed by laymen and partially connected with an order whose primary affiliation was to a guild and so provided financing for its upkeep. They “had some of the same functions as a European monastery,” being “basic centers of social integration” for both men and women. It was the mosque rather than the *khānaqāh* which was the particular protégé of the State:

The worship at the mosque never ceased to be associated in some degree with political authority; it was a state function. The *khānaqāhs* were eminently private from the very beginning. Even when endowed by an *amir*, they retained this air. When the *khānaqāhs* became the foci of the more private, personal side of worship, they reinforced the fragmentation of Muslim societies in apolitical social forms (and at the same time gave these forms legitimacy and spiritual support).⁶

The *khānaqāh* institution was thus relatively apolitical, emphasizing the individual's relation to God, rather than his condition as a social or political entity. Albeit, the socio-political dimension of the institution became stronger in the late fifteenth

1. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 217-18.

2. See the essay on his mystical rule and writings by M. Waley in the present volume.

3. *Tārīkh-i khānaqāh dar Irān* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna Tāhūrī, 1369 A.Hsh./1990), pp. 192-95.

4. Irāj Afshār, ‘Khānaqāh-hā-yi Yazd’ in *Sufi: Faṣl-nāma-yi Khānaqāh-i Ni’matullāhī*, no. 8 (Fall 1369 A.Hsh.), p. 11.

5. *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford University Press 1973), p. 69.

6. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 213-14.

century and came to the fore in the Naqshbandī order, as, for instance, Jo-Ann Gross's study of Khwāja 'Ubaydullāh Ahrār (d. 895/1490) in this volume (chap. 3), illustrates.

Hodgson notes that from 692 to 945 A.D. (his so-called 'High Caliphal Period') the religious topography of Persia was totally pervaded and dominated by the forms of Sufi piety, that furnished "a pervasive set of spiritual presuppositions and sanctions which the undergirded the whole pattern"¹ of Islamic spirituality. Thus, it was largely the Sufi Orders which, from the twelfth century onwards, set the tone of Islamic spirituality – Sufism becoming from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries (as is still the case in many Muslim countries of West Africa such as Senegal) "an institutionalized mass religion."²

Sufism... became the framework within which all popular Muslim piety flowed together... Guilds commonly came to have Sufi affiliations. Men's clubs [i.e. the *futuwwah* institution] claimed the patronage of Sufi saints... It is probable that without the subtle leaven of the Sufi orders, giving to Islam an inward personal thrust and to the Muslim community a sense of participation in a common spiritual venture quite apart from anyone's outward power, the mechanical arrangements of the *Shari'ah* would not have maintained the loyalty essential to their effectiveness.³

Writing in the 1950's, the same decade as Hodgson, G.E. von Grunebaum, also described twelfth-century Sufism as "the repository of the religious psychology of Islam;...its analysis of the religious life the timeless enrichment of human self-interpretation and the most delicate crystallization of the Muslim's spiritual aspirations," noting, as does Danner, that after Ghazzālī secured "Sufism its place within orthodoxy, the emotive life of Sunnite Islam came to be concentrated in the Sufi orders."⁴

Such testimony by two of the foremost Western orientalists (many others having made similar observations) concerning the pre-eminent role played by Sufism in the formation of the intellectual life of mediæval Persianate Islam, is also echoed by many prominent Iranian literary historians of this century. A good example is Qasim Ghani's survey of the life of Ḥāfiẓ, *Baḥth dar āthār wa afkār wa aḥwāl-i Ḥāfiẓ*⁵ (*Studies in the Life, Works, and Thought of Ḥāfiẓ* – and subtitled *A History of Sufism from its Origin until the Age of Ḥāfiẓ*). Ghani stresses the importance of Sufism to the formation of Persian poetry and civilization:

Sufis recited poetry both in their circles of remembrance of God and in public preaching assemblies, believing discourse to be ineffective without the proper poetic

1. *Ibid.*, II 125.

2. See 'Sufism as institutionalized mass religion: the techniques of *dhikr*', *ibid.*, II, pp. 210-14.

3. *Ibid.* Also cf. J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, p. 9ff.; A.J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization* (University of Michigan 1990 rpt.), p. 16.

4. G.E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (London: RKP 1961 2nd ed.), p. 28. However, von Grunebaum was biased in his other views about Sufism, equating the focus of the Sufis on contemplative disciplines with political quietism and perceiving mysticism as a direct cause of cultural decay and social decline.

5. This work, though owing much to the historical researches of E.G. Browne's four-volume *A Literary History of Persia*, displays greater comprehension of the importance of Sufism to the Persian psyche than Browne's.

16 Introduction and Historical Overview

devices to adorn it. Because of the illustrative brilliance of their verse, Sufi poetry came to be widely diffused and popular, in turn giving great social impact to Sufism. Although in the Sāmānid and Ghaznavid epochs, Persian poetry was broadly patronized by aristocrats and princes... its imaginative reach and range of ideas was strictly limited by its panegyric orientation. Sufism gave poetry a new and independent lease on life, broadening its conceptual scope and imaginative power, effectively transforming it into a public art-form.¹

Both Hodgson and Ghani in the late fifties and early sixties had perception enough to voice such insights about the fundamental importance of Sufism in the cultural history of Islam. Both had to overcome preconceptions: on the one hand, the anti-mystical, rationalist bias of a secular academic milieu,² and on the other, the fundamentalist prejudices inherited from an exoteric Islamic conservatism which repudiates mysticism.³ Nevertheless, they were ahead of their times, for the dominant view of Persianists remained that Sufism's esoteric nature made it a 'tangential' and 'exotic' phenomenon (in Danner's words) and hence, outside mainstream Islamic culture and piety.⁴

In fact, up until the early sixties and the following decade which heralded the advent of the pioneering researches "*En Islam iranien*" by Henry Corbin,⁵ accompanied by the penetrating historical scholarship of S.H. Nasr, H. Landolt, A. Schimmel, and several others—the role of Sufism in guiding mediæval Persian literary history remained largely unrecognized. The voices of individual scholars like L. Massignon, R.A. Nicholson, Laurence Binyon⁶ and G.M. Wickens,⁷ who earlier in this century had accorded some positive cultural or sociological signifi-

1. *Baḥṭh dar āthār...Ḥāfiẓ*, II, p. 555.

2. On the conflict between the secular and sacred visions of religion see S.H. Nasr, 'The Rediscovery of the Sacred' and 'Knowledge and its Descralization' in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY 1989), pp. 1-64, 93-129; and the same author's 'Islam and the Encounter of Religions' in *Sufi Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin 1972), pp. 123-51.

3. Fundamentalism, as S.H. Nasr has observed in *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: KPI 1987), is, along with modernism, one of the chief enemies of both traditional Islam and Sufism. "The attitude of traditional Islam to Sufism reflects that which was current during the centuries prior to the advent of puritanical and modernist movements in the 12th/18th centuries... considering it as the inner dimension or heart of the Islamic revelation." (p. 15)

4. Western anti-religious secularism and Islamic puritanism are both, for altogether different reasons, opposed to Sufism. The radical Iranian modernist, Aḥmad Kasravi (d. 1940), for instance, held mysticism to be an opiate infused into the Eastern soul by Western imperialism to prevent its awakening. See Kasravi's *On Islam and Shi'ism*, translated by M.R. Ghanoonparvar (Washington, D.C.: Mazda 1990). The Shi'ite '*ulamā*' also have had a historical antagonism to Sufism; see J.R.I. Cole, 'The Battle with Sufism' and 'Uṣūli-Sufi Polemics', *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* (University of California Press 1988), pp. 146-155; M. Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse University Press 1982), pp. 26-27.

5. *En Islam iranien (Aspects spirituels et philosophiques)*, 4 vols. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard 1971).

6. See L. Binyon's comments on the close association between Persian painting and Sufi poetry in 'Art in Persia', in *The Spirit of Man in Asian Art* (Harvard University Press 1935), pp. 123, 132; and in the introduction to his edition of illustrations by Persian miniaturists to *The Poems of Nizami* (London 1928, p. 134) in a 16th-century MS. in the British Library.

7. Who, on the role of Persian Sufism in Islamic history, commented: "In Sufism we have what is generally regarded, and not without much justice, as the supreme manifestation of the Persian mind in the religious sphere." 'Religion' in A.J. Arberry (ed.) *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford University Press 1963 reprint.), pp. 158-59.

cance to Sufism's role in Persian history, were all but drowned in the rising tide of Western secular humanism, branding mysticism as anathema.

In Iran the situation was slightly more hopeful, thanks to a generation of scholars raised in the 1940s and the 1950s such as 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat,¹ Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar,² Irāj Afshār,³ Ehsan Yarshater,⁴ and Qāsim Ghānī⁵ had produced works which showed the centrality of Sufism in mediæval Perso-Islamic literary culture. In 1970, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb contributed a lengthy article to *Iranian Studies* (vol. 3, nos. 3 & 4), on 'Persian Sufism in its Historical Perspective'. This overview of the main theosophical doctrines of Sufism was followed by a weighty tome with a more historical focus: *Justujū'-i dar taṣawwuf-i Irān*.⁶ Here Zarrīnkūb devotes an entire chapter to 'The Sufi Masters of Khurasan', concluding an instructive review of the subject with a convincing argument that Khurasan was the "cradle of Islamic Sufism."⁷

Also in the 1970s Western scholars made similar observations about the dominance of Khurasan as the centre of intellectual ferment in classical Islamic culture and Sufism. Richard Frye's studies, for example, brought him to conclude that "the manpower, or brainpower, for the 'Abbasid flowering came from Khurasan, and not from western Iran, Arabia, Syria or elsewhere." He also emphasized "the immense contribution of the Iranian peoples to the culture of Islam, so much so that one might be entitled to designate the Islam which came into being in the tenth and eleventh centuries as Iranian Islam using the Arabic language."⁸ The views of Western Persianists such as Frye and Schimmel, and of Iranian scholars such as Zarrīnkūb and Ghānī, have been confirmed by the researches of A. Bausani and H. Corbin as well.

Perhaps one of the main reasons for this lack of recognition of classical Persian Sufism lies in the effective political eradication of the *khānaqāhs* and the cultural

1. Cf. his Persian translation of the third volume of E.G. Browne's *Literary History of Persia*, entitled *Az Sa'dī tā Jāmī* (Tehran 1960).

2. Cf. his articles, 'Fārābī wa taṣawwuf', 'Abū 'Alī Sīnā wa taṣawwuf', Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī wa Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn', in *Majmū'ah-yi maqālāt wa ash'ār Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī Dihkhudā 1351 A.Hsh.)

3. I. Afshār has published several critical editions of classical Sufi texts and is the compiler of a 3-volume *Index Iranicus: Répertoire Méthodique des Articles Persans concernant les Études Iranologiques, publiés dans les Périodiques et Publications Collectives* (Tehran 1910-1989).

4. Cf. his *Shi'r-i fārsī dar 'ahd-i Shāh Rukh* (Tehran University Press 1955).

5. *Op. cit.*

6. *Researches in Iranian Sufism* (Tehran: Amir Kabir 1978).

7. *Justujū'-i dar taṣawwuf-i Irān*, pp. 81-83. Although Zarrīnkūb's observations were partially derived from the researches of S. Nafisi's *Sar-chishma-yi taṣawwuf*, recent Iranian scholarship, such as M. Kiyānī's *Tārikh-i khānaqāh dar Irān* (e.g. p. 182), confirms their accuracy.

8. 'Iranian Contributions to Islamic Culture' in *The Golden Age of Persia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1975), p. 165.

obliteration of the activity of the Sufi Orders under the Safavids.¹ The Safavid's "totalitarian state" as Roger Savory termed it,² was based on a politicalization of the master-disciple relationship, focusing upon an idolatrous cult of personality built around the ruler as both 'perfect master' (*murshid-i kāmīl*) and absolute monarch.³ Shāh Ismā'il became apotheosized by his followers as a divine incarnation: they alternated between lauding him as Mahdī and God.⁴ Here he followed the extremist cult of personality instituted by the previous Safavid masters Junayd (1447-1460) and Ḥaydar (1460-1488) who had transformed the peaceful Safavid Order into "a militant *ghāzī* movement,"⁵ thus beginning what was to become—with the possible exception of the Tijāniyya *jihād* conducted in West Africa in the late nineteenth century by Ḥajj 'Umar⁶—the darkest chapter in the entire history of Islamic Sufism.

Of course, Sufism did not 'vanish' under the Safavids. The sun of Gnosis, says Rumi, does not ever set, for the Orient of its dawning lies forever in the human heart and intellect.⁷ But its outer rites did suffer an eclipse. Writing in 975/1567 of a certain *khānaqāh* in Tabriz deserted by Sufis but still standing, Ibn Karbalā'ī laments the lack of dervishes in Persia, declaring, "This age is under the aegis of the divine Name 'the Inward' (*al-Bāṭin*). Outwardly there are no mystics in the world but inwardly they exist, because the world could not last an instant without this class

1. According to Ḥāfiz Husayn Ibn Karbalā'ī, Shāh Ismā'il I (reg. 1501-1524) "eradicated, destroyed and extirpated most of the initiatic lineages [*silāsīl*= Sufi Orders] of the Sayyids and Shaykhs" in Persia (*Rawḍāt al-janān wa jannāt al-jinān*, ed. Ja'far Sulṭān al-Qurrā'ī [Tabriz, B.T.N.K., 1344 A.H.sh/1965], vol. II, pp. 159). In 909/1503 he drove the followers of the Kāzīrūnī out of Fars after a massacre of 4,000 persons and the desecration of the tombs of the Sufi Shaykhs of that region (Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 112). As for the Naqshbandiyya, all trace of this Order "was extirpated from Western and Central Iran by the Safavids, for whom the slaughter of Sunni scholars and shaykhs was an essential part of establishing Shi'i supremacy," (H. Algar, 'The Naqshbandī Order': A Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance', *Studia Islamica* 44, 1976, p. 139) When Ismā'il I conquered Herat in 1510, he desecrated Jāmī's tomb. (Arjomand, *ibid.*) The Khalwatī Order fled the Shi'ified Safavid regime for the more congenial Ottoman domains and the Nūrbakhshī branch of the Kubrawī Order also declined sharply—the great grandson of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, Qawām al-Dīn was executed by Shāh Tahmāsp (reg. 1524-1576). (Arjomand, *ibid.* p. 115) During Tahmāsp's reign Sufi practices were abandoned as politically inexpedient and with the succession of his son, Ismā'il II, further efforts to eradicate Sufism from Persia (e.g. the massacre of the Sufis in Qazwin) were made. 'Abbas the Great (1587-1629) continued this anti-Sufi policy with the massacre in 1023/1614 of his Safavid Sufi followers in Qarajadājh who were accused of collaboration with the Ottomans. (Arjomand, *ibid.*, p. 110)
2. 'Some Reflections on Totalitarian Tendencies in the Safavid State', *Der Islam*, 52 (1976), pp. 226-41.
3. S.A. Arjomand, 'Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran (1501-1722)', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 15, no. 1 (1981), pp. 4-5; R. Savory, 'The Consolidation of Power in Safavid Persia', *Der Islam* (1976), p. 91; R. Canfield, 'Theological "extremism" and social movements in Turko-Persia' in R. Canfield (ed.) *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press 1991), pp. 132-60.
4. R. Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge University Press 1980), p. 17.
5. Arjomand, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
6. See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press 1965), pp. 108-28.
7. *Mathnawī-yi ma'navī* (ed.) R.A. Nicholson (Gibb Memorial Series, n.s. 4, London 1925-40), *Daftār* II 43.

of people [the Sufis]."¹ One notable form in which Sufi teachings did continue to flourish in the Safavid period was in the remarkable elaboration of the philosophical '*irfānī*' tradition, which brought together Kalām, Peripatetic and illuminationist philosophy and the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī. The outstanding figure in this endeavour was Mullā Ṣadrā,² who, following on the writings of the Pre-Safavid Ḥaydar Āmulī, effectively integrated Ibn 'Arabī into the new Shi'ite-Persian religious world.

Aside from the above-cited historical factors, the survival of institutional Sufism in any society depends upon public opinion, which is susceptible to the vagaries of changing relations between the ruling authorities and the '*ulamā*' with the mystics. The terrorist policies of the Safavid sovereigns combined with a bitter propaganda campaign carried out by the Shi'ite clerics against Sufism effectively signified the social obliteration of the *ṭarīqas* and their traditions from the frontiers of Persia.³

Although the beginning of the destruction of institutionalized Sufism was largely a political act by the early Safavid Shāhs aimed at eradicating any opposition from the same popular Shi'ite-*ghāzī* background, their initiative was largely supported by the Shi'ite clerics from Iraq, Lebanon and Syria who were welcomed when the Safavid state turned to consolidating Shi'ism as the official religion. The background to the historically long-founded antipathy between the clerics and both organized and unorganized Sufism is examined in the next section.

II. SUFIS AND MULLAS

God created no one more onerous and troublesome for the Folk of Allah than the exoteric scholars ('*ulamā*' *al-rasūm*)....In relation to the folk of Allah the exoteric scholars are like the pharaohs in relation to God's messengers.

– Ibn 'Arabī⁴

The history of Islam testifies to the continuous use of the metaphysical categories of the esoteric and exoteric within polemical debate, and to the development of religious and social dichotomies which these terms came to represent. In particular, any history of Persian Sufism must give some account of the demonstrable antagonism between the clerical perspective and the Sufi outlook, which was largely seen by both sides in terms of the esoteric/exoteric polarity. W. Chittick devotes several pages of his study of Farghānī to discussing what he terms the "creative tension" between these two groups and an analysis of this dichotomy is also fundamental to Jo-Ann Gross's essay in this volume.

Opposition to dogmatic clericalism appeared in Iranian Islam quite early in Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's (d. 261/875) bold characterization of the transmitters of prophetic traditions as "dead people narrating from the dead."⁵ Bāyazīd also

1. *Rawḍāt al-janān*, II, p. 75.

2. See S.H. Nasr, *Sadr al-Dīn Shirāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1978).

3. Muḥsin Kiyānī, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

4. *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. I, p. 279, cited by W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics of the Imagination* (Albany: SUNY 1989), p. 247.

5. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 249.

claimed to have visited the Almighty's court and to have found it empty of all members of the clergy ('*ulamā*') and devoid of any jurists (*fuqahā*').¹ Expression of such opinions (along with other provocative behavior) caused him to be exiled seven times from his native city to Gorgan. Similar opinions led to Sahl Tustarī's (d. 283/896) exile to Basra from Ahwaz and Ḥakīm Tirmidhī (d. 295/908) being driven out of Tirmidh.² With Ḥallāj's (d. 309/922) espousal of Islam as a 'religion of love', Sufism was transported, in Louis Massignon's words, "to the political plane as a social force, for he had given it an original theological and philosophical superstructure; but this also had made it vulnerable, exposed to theological charges of *tafīr*, and even threatened by effective legal penalties."³ Thus, by the fifth/eleventh century, historians of Sufism such as Sulamī (d. 412/1021) would begin to formulate lists of *miḥan al-sūfiyya* (inquisitions conducted by legalists against Sufis).⁴ Summarizing the historical origins of the exoteric/esoteric controversy, Danner observes:

Sufism arose to denote the esoteric Path precisely at the time the different schools of exoteric Law arose...The exoteric aspect of Islam soon grew into a body of teachings, practices, and moral legislation, all under the watchful control of the '*ulamā*'. The rise of Islamic exotericism in an institutionalized fashion provoked the rise of Sufi esotericism, with its own Shaykhs, its own practices, and eventually its own institutions. From that period on down to our time, we will find the two levels of authority in operation throughout the Muslim world, the Sufi Shaykhs and the '*ulamā*'.⁵

The veneration which the founders of the fundamental schools of Islamic jurisprudence, Shāfi'i and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, had for Sufi teachings, considering them an integral element of Koranic studies, if not actually its basis, demonstrated the high respect which Muslim mysticism enjoyed among the intelligentsia during the High Caliphal Period. But this union of jurisprudence and Sufism was unfortunately short-lived – fanatical exotericism being a better ideology for blood-thirsty empire-builders than tolerant mysticism of an anti-sectarian and ecumenical nature. A good summary of the early relations of Sufism with legalism is given by Muḥsin Maḥdi, who notes that in the seventh and eighth Christian centuries:

Sufism meant the effort to follow all the demands of the divine law as fully as possible....As understood by the Lawgiver, his companions, and the generation that followed them, these demands consisted of external acts of worship, customary practices, and ways of life, and internal acts promoting the good attributes or virtues of the heart. These internal acts were considered more important than the external acts and the source that feeds and controls them and determines their efficacy. For early Muslims, "faith" (*īmān*) meant primarily these internal acts of the heart; good intention (*niyya*) was the principle, the "soul," of all actions; and the discordance between external and internal acts was "hypocrisy" (*nifāq*) and tantamount to a return

1. Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū*, p. 44.

2. Muḥsin Kiyānī, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

3. *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, translated by H. Mason, Bollingen Series 97 (Princeton University Press 1982), vol. I, pp. 379-80.

4. See *ibid.*, I, pp. 384 for lists of some early inquisitions conducted against the Muslim mystics.

5. *The Islamic Tradition*, pp. 91-92.

to *shirk*, to associating someone other than God with him as the object of one's worship and devotion.¹

Early Sufism began as an attempt to observe the 'rule of the heart' in accordance with the spirit of the *ḥadīth*: "Seek the decree of the heart, even if the judges decree otherwise,"² – for as Ibn 'Arabi was to comment, "The name *faqīh* is much more appropriate for the Tribe [i.e. the Sufis] than for the exoteric scholar, for... it is he [the Sufi] who calls to God 'upon insight',³ just as the Messenger of God calls upon insight." The Sufi speaks from vision, not from ratiocinative reason. "He does not call on the basis of the 'predominance of surmise' (*ghalabat al-zann*), as does the exoteric scholar. When a person is upon insight from God and 'upon a clear sign from his Lord' (11:17) when he calls to Him, his giving pronouncements and speaking are totally different from those of the one who gives pronouncements in the religion of God by the predominance of his surmise."⁴

Mahdi also observes that true understanding of what such esoteric *tafaqquh* (striving in religion) implied, gradually became eclipsed with the spread of Islam as a political power, so that "the majority of Muslims... concentrated instead on the external acts. The few who continued to engage in the battle for piety and salvation in the world to come and who preserved the original emphasis on the acts of the heart stood out as a distinct group and were given such names as 'ascetics', 'worshippers', and finally 'Sufis'.⁵ Hence arose the differentiation between the internal demands of the divine Law, the piety of the heart before God (*fiqh al-bāṭin*), and the external demands of the divine law (*fiqh al-ẓāhir*). Mahdi reflected that

Out of fear of the loss and complete forgetfulness of the more important part of the divine law, the early Sufis elaborated on the other hand the demands of the divine law regarding the acts of the heart into the knowledge of the internal demands of the divine law (*fiqh al-bāṭin*), which is contained in al-Muḥāsibī's "Devotion," (*al-Ri'āya*) the writings of Ibn 'Atā al-Adamī (d. 311/928), and al-Ghazzālī's "Revival."

The separation of the jurist's inquiry into the divine law from that of the Sufi is, nevertheless, accidental as far as the true Muslim is concerned; for the two inquiries deal with two complementary aspects of his religious life and two complementary aspects of the divine law.⁶

By the twelfth century, however, this "accident" had developed into a "substance," and the struggle between the partisans of the jurisprudents of the heart (the Sufis) and the dogmatic jurists of the letter of the Law (the Mullas)—the eternal conflict between *Eros* and *Nomos*⁷—had become the vendetta of mediæval Islamic history.⁸ "Wherever the '*ulamā*' became unusually strong, the life of the high

1. See Muhsin Mahdi, 'The Book and the Master as Poles of Cultural Change in Islam' in (ed.) S. Vyonis, Jr.) *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages* (Wiesbaden 1975), pp. 9-10.

2. See Abū Naṣr Sarraj's *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, Gibb Memorial Series No. 22 (Leiden and London 1914), p. 16.

3. From the *Futūḥāt*, chap. 54, cited by W. Chittick, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

4. *Ibid.*

5. 'The Book and the Master' *loc. cit.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Cf. A. Nygren, (trans. P.S. Watson) *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love* (London SPCK 1982), pp. 334-48.

8. Muḥsin Kiyāni, *Tārīkh-i Khānaqāh dar Irān*, p. 498.

22 Introduction and Historical Overview

Islamicate culture was put in doubt,” stated Hodgson, noting that between the exoteric Mullahs – “the *Shari‘ah*-minded guardians of the single Godly moralistic community,” – and the Sufis, whom he characterizes as “the sophisticated culture of Islamdom... a frustrated tension which they could successfully condemn but not effectively destroy,” was maintained.¹

Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī’s mystical rule, as analysed by J.T. Walbridge (below, chap. 5) clearly exemplifies this “sophisticated culture” of mediæval Sufism, showing the highly refined ethical conception of *fiqh al-bāṭin* held by the mystics. B.T. Lawson’s discussion in this volume (chap. 4) of the persecution endured by Rajab Bursī (d. 843/1440) at the hands of the jurists (characterized by this Shī‘ite Sufi as “those whose belief is corrupt”) not only illustrates the Sufi background of Shī‘ite mysticism of this period, but also demonstrates the general antipathy of most Muslim esotericists—whatever *madhhab* they adhered to—for the exoteric jurists. The tension and hostility between the two opposing camps also appears vividly in H. Norris’s study of the Sufi origins of Ḥurūfism in this book (chap. 3), in what he deems the founder of the Ḥurūfī movement, Faḍlullāh As-tārābādī’s (martyred 1394) “theodicy of suffering.” It is highly instructive to see how the greatest sixteenth-century historian of Persian Sufism, Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Ibn Karbālā‘ī, describes in his *Rawḍāt al-janān* how during Jahānshāh Qarā-qūyūnlū’s reign (ca. 850/1447—872/1467) “some five hundred adherents of Ḥurūfism and many other Ḥurūfī-sympathizers...were slain and burnt” in Tabriz in accordance with the *fatwā* of a bigoted jurist. Ibn Karbālā‘ī concludes his account of the massacre with typical Sufi tolerance, however, remarking, “But the most extreme accusation that one can level at Faḍhallāh, is that his disciples did not understand his esoteric knowledge (*ma‘rifat-i way rā mu‘taqidānash nafahmīda-ānd*) and so fell into heresy and apostasy.”² – a tale which encapsulates the tragedy of the esoteric/exoteric schism in mediæval Persian society.

The polarization of the Sufis and Mullahs into two opposing camps was also due to the fact that the mediæval Persian clerics were salaried servants of the State, as Aḥmad ‘Alī Rajā‘ī notes:

Since most of the jurists and ‘*ulamā*’ [in the 12/13th centuries] were on the payroll of the State treasury and received regular stipends from the government, naturally their legal pronouncements were usually unfair, tending to abuse and prosecute the public sector instead of questioning the activities of the local authorities. If people had any respect for these clerics, it was simply because they were forced by social circumstances to comply with and pay them lip-service and external obedience. The jurists’ position as official state prosecutors made it natural that the people should turn towards the Sufi masters, famed for their unworldliness and indifference to social status and political power. The Sufis were also renowned for their highly ethical natures, and usually did not forgo any opportunity to admonish and upbraid the *amīrs* and princes of their epoch to behave with justice and beneficence to their subjects.³

1. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 200.

2. *Rawḍāt al-janān wa jannāt al-jinān*, I, pp. 480-81.

3. *Op. cit.*, pp. 456-57.

Anti-clericalism was as much a topos among the mediæval Persian Sufi poets as anti-sectarianism, and as J.T.P. de Bruijn's essay (chap. 2) demonstrates, anti-clericalism particularly typifies those poets who composed verses in the *qalandariyyât* genre. Following the 'Greatest Master', the Persian poets of Ibn 'Arabî's school who flourished during this period such as Fakhr al-Dîn 'Irâqî (610/1213-688/1289), Awḥad al-Dîn Kirmânî (d. 635/1238), Muḥammad Shîrîn Maghribî (d. 810/1408), Maḥmūd Shabistari (687/1288-737/1337), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (b. 817/1414-d. 898/1492) often gave vent to their ill-opinion of the mediæval Mullas. Shabistari, to cite one example from a myriad, concludes his 6000-line *mathnawī* poem, the *Sa'adatnāma* by virulently deriding the jurisprudents:

Although the Mulla takes sixty kilograms of water to make his ablutions to pray, his head seems hollower than a calabash in Koranic recitation. Like the Devil performing the act of ritual prayer, he will reveal to you worlds of scruples and irresolution. The Mulla's flesh and blood receives all of its nourishment from the kitchen of the local *amīr*: Look, he wipes his arse with his own sweat. They are all enslaved by property and possessions – don't call them 'jurisprudents' because they are lords... Through them the world becomes an idiot's kingdom, so 'donkey-head' is a proper epithet for a jurisprudent. By them all artists are discomposed, for they all wear scowls on their faces.¹

The Sufi poet Qāsim-i Anwār (d. 837/1433-34) composed much poetry upon the same lines. The following verses, for example, reflecting his own personal distaste for this class as well as the general schism in mediæval Persian society between the two camps:

*Go ask His Reverence, His Worship, the learned municipal judge,
"What use is your prattle, when your heart is dead?"
Snow showers down from the clouds of the realm of imitative learning (taqlid) —
That is why the speech of ascetics is so frozen.*

* * *

*Will Qāsim tolerate the society of the imitative jurisprudent?
We'll recite an incantation to avert such a calamity!*²

This unfortunate controversy between Mullas and Sufis continued to rage on through the centuries following the Safavid takeover in Iran. Two hundred years later, the ecumenical Sufi Dārā Shikuh,³ in the introduction to the first Persian translation of the Upanishads, would refer to the jurisprudents as "brigands on the path of God."

A thorough analysis of this profound dichotomy in Iranian Islam, however, would require a monograph in itself and thus far excels the scope of the present essay. Mention of this schism is given below: in section VI where the divergences

1. *Majmū'ah-yi āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistari*, ed. Šamad Muwaḥḥhid (Tehran: Ṭahūrī 1365 A.Hsh), *Sa'adatnāma*, vv. 1535ff.

2. *Kulliyāt-i Qāsim-i Anwār*, ed. S. Nafīsī (Tehran 1958), pp. 727, 729, 467.

3. See Daryush Shayegan, 'Muḥammad Dārā Shikuh: Bāni-yi 'irfān-i taṭbiqī', *Iran Nameh*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1990).

24 Introduction and Historical Overview

between exoteric and esoteric Islam, and the ascendancy of the latter during the late mediæval period in Persia, are discussed in its socio-cultural context, and in two other sections (IV and V) where the political background and renaissance of twelfth and thirteenth-century Sufism during the Mongol and Timurid periods in Iran are analysed. The following section is devoted to an exploration of the notion and characteristics of Iranian Islam.

III. IRANIAN ISLAM AND PERSIANATE SUFISM

The term 'Persian' usually denotes the rich and widespread cultural heritage of a Persian-speaking peoples and races which predated Islam.¹ From the fourth/tenth century onwards, as Hodgson observed,

in an increasingly large part of Islamdom, [Persian was] the language of polite culture; it even invaded the realm of scholarship with increasing effect. It was to form the chief model for the rise of still other languages to the literary level... Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims likewise depended on Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call these cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, 'Persianate' by extension.²

It is this Persian or 'Persianate'—as Hodgson terms it—element which is the 'eternal' spirit and abiding 'genius' which has survived through the dismal centuries of ruthless autocratic dynasties. As A.J. Arberry notes, the value of Persian literature lies less in its form but in "the spirit which inhabited that form....In her writings, as in her art, the soul of Persia lives; compared with this abiding triumph, the ruin of her politics matters very little."³ Whether the Sufi or *darwishī* element is to be considered as a part of a distinctly Iranian ethos, as do many anthropologists,⁴ or the Persian predilection for mysticism as an innate trait of the Iranian 'national character'⁵ or one element among many in an Iranian 'belief sys-

1. Cf. Ehsan Yarshater's observation: "To educated people everywhere the name 'Persia' is associated with a number of pleasing notions that in the main emphasize the country's cultural heritage. One speaks of Persian art, Persian literature, Persian carpets, Persian miniatures, Persian mosques, and Persian gardens, all of which attest to a general refinement of taste and culture. It is true that 'Persia' also brings to the Western mind the Persian wars with Greece, and the home of an absolute monarchy that is often contrasted to Greek democracy; but even then 'Persia' does not evoke the image of a weak or backward country, but rather of a robust and mighty empire... 'Iran', on the other hand, possesses none of these associations. It is a barren word in languages other than Persian, denoting a country without a past or a distinctive culture." — 'Communication' in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1989), p. 63.

2. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 293.

3. 'Persian Literature' in *The Legacy of Persia*, p. 228.

4. See M.C. Bateson, J.W. Clinton, J.B.M. Kassarijan, H. Safavi, M. Soraya 'Šafā-yi Bāḡin: A Study of the Interrelations of a Set of Iranian Ideal Character Types' in (ed.) N. Brown & N. Itzkowitz, *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies* (Princeton 1977), pp. 267-71.

5. Cf. D. Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press 1958); and Roy Mottahedeh's observation, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (London 1987, p. 144): "Mysticism, the ambiguity of poetry, belief in the many-faced subtlety of evil, and the never fully resolved choice between the roles of hedonistic cynic and selfless devotee have created the great interior spaces in which the Iranian soul has breathed and survived over at least half a millennium."

tem' as understood by the sociologists¹—is not the focus of our discussion here.

In the present context our purpose is to define the parameters of Iranian Islam and to sketch a portrait of Persianate Sufism as it existed during a certain historical period. In the present volume our purview is confined to the 13th through the 15th centuries, beginning as the great Sufi orders are experiencing their first expansion and ending with the suppression of most of the outward forms of Sufism in Safavid Iran. Although some scholars² have maintained that the term 'mediaeval' (coined, as it was, by Petrarch in 1341 to refer to a period of darkness from the time of the adoption of Christianity by the Roman emperors to his own time), is inappropriate with reference to Islamic civilization, this negative view overlooks its convenience as a chronological term.

The 13th through the 15th centuries saw the appearance of major Sufi Orders, and of great intellectual figures among the Sufis. These include 'Aṭṭār, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, 'Umar Suhrawardī, Rumi, Shabistārī, Ḥāfiz, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, 'Ala' al-Dawla Simnānī, Ibn al-Farīd, and Ibn 'Arabī, all of whom, excluding the last two, were of Persian background and origin. There were, of course, a host of others who, had they been Westerners, would surely today be world-renowned, and who, to quote W.C. Chittick, "would have been looked upon as landmarks in the spiritual and intellectual geography of Islam, had lived at any other time and place."³

This volume explores the legacy of the Persianate (including Ottoman Turkish, Timurid and Mongol) culture of Sufism from what Victor Danner has called the "thirteenth century revival of Sufism"⁴ down to the beginnings of the Safavid era (1501-1722). More precisely, it focuses on the literary and philosophical renaissance which began with the flourishing of the Kubrawiyya, Suhrawardiyya, and Mawlawiyya Orders in the 13th century and ended with the suppression and exile from Iran of the Ni'matullāhiyya and Nūrbakhshiyya *ṭariqas* in the late sixteenth century.

Discussing the cosmopolitan nature of the composite high-cultural tradition of this period, Hodgson observes that many of the "basic forms and institutions" of Islamic culture "can be first traced to Khurāsān: the *madrasah* college, the *ṭariqah* form of Sufi organization, the acceptance of kalām as integral to Islam."⁵ Hodgson furthermore commented how the greater part of the Fertile Crescent, the Iranian highlands, and the Syr-Oxus basin, "has been more or less Iranian in ethnic colour – a point that emerges the more strongly if one includes the Syr-Oxus basin along with the Iranian highlands proper. Only the Fertile Crescent has been predominantly Semitic. Scholars used to debate about the extent to which the flowering of Islamic culture was due to some disproportionate 'Persian' (or even 'Aryan') genius; as if the most ordinary Muslims were Semitic, but had yielded to the cultural leadership of a Persian minority."⁶

1. See R. Loeffler, *Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village* (New York: SUNY 1988), introduction.

2. Cf. R.M. Rehder, 'Persian Poets and Modern Critics', *Edebiyat*, vol. 2, No. 1 (1977), p. 111-12.

3. See his article in the present volume, s.v. 'The School of Qūnawī'.

4. *The Islamic Tradition*, pp. 99-100.

5. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 69-70.

6. *Ibid.*

26 Introduction and Historical Overview

This is, in fact, a gross misconception for any serious student of Islamic history; we “must learn to revisualize our material,” Hodgson stresses, “and deliberately choose sounder categories; recognizing that the majority of the main cited areas from Nile to Oxus used one or another Iranian tongue (among which, Persian, was, of course, merely the most prominent).”¹

As noted above, Hodgson was not the first historian to perceive this all-pervasive influence of the ‘Persianate genius’ on Islamic culture.² Alessandro Bausani, in attempting to define the concept and reality of ‘Iranian Islam,’ singled out the ‘Persianate element’ as the essential catalyst in the alchemy of Islamdom and asserted that Persian civilization expressed a “perfect balance” between a primitive and undeveloped Islam and the rich archaic culture of ancient Mazdean Iran. Only the addition of the Persianate element to Islam, he speculated, was capable of producing a “universal culture”:

At the end of the Sassanian Empire both Islam and Iranism were nourished, in different ways, by the syncretic soil formed by the dissolution of the great archaic civilizations during Hellenistic time, so that late Sassanian Iran is not an essentially “pure” Iranism (which perhaps never existed as such) and Islam, too, was not that “monolithic” pure monotheism...From this mutual fecundation is born Iranian Islam. It is a universal culture, whose dynamic extremes are the purity of the monistic faith of Abraham on one side and the ever present archaic-mythical symbolism on the other. Between these two poles Irano-Islamic culture at its best created expressions of perfect balance.³

Another Italian Islamicist, Francesco Gabrieli, had expressed nearly identical views, stating that:

The Persian genius alone gave to Muslim mysticism the glory of a luxuriant poetic bloom in which the innate aptitude of the Iranians for narration and the sentence combined with the energy of a highly stimulated emotionality and with the audacity of the most unbridled esoteric speculations.... All the great minds of the West, from Goethe to Hegel, who sought to approach this aspect of Muslim spirituality, actually took as their guides not the Arabic ascetics or doctors but the great Persian poets we have just named.⁴

Outlining the legacy of Persian culture to Islam in general and to Sufism in particular, other scholars, such as G. M. Wickens (whose knowledge and love of Persian poetry was expressed in his numerous translations and studies of Sa‘di and Ḥāfiz),⁵ likewise affirmed that “in Sufism we have what is generally regarded, and not without much justice, as the supreme manifestation of the Persian mind in the religious

1. *Ibid.*

2. On Hodgson's terms ‘Islamdom’ and ‘Islamicate’, see *The Venture of Islam*, I, p. 58.

3. A. Bausani, ‘Muhammad or Darius? The Elements and Basis of Iranian Culture’ in (ed.) S. Vryonis Jr., *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1975), pp. 47-48.

4. ‘Literary Tendencies’ in (ed.) G.E. von Grunebaum, *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (University of Chicago Press 1955), p. 100.

5. ‘The Persian Conception of Artistic Unity in Poetry and its Implications in Other Fields’ in *BSOAS*, vol. 14, part 3 (1952), pp. 239-43; ‘An Analysis of Primary and Secondary Significations in the Third Ghazal of Ḥāfiz’ in *BSOAS*, vol. 14, part 3 (1952), pp. 627-38; (trans.) *Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned (The Bustan of Sa‘di)*, (Toronto, London and Buffalo 1974).

sphere.”¹

The purpose of adducing such quotations is not to revive the so-called ‘Aryan-reaction’ theory popularized by a few German scholars at the end of the 19th century such as I. Goldziher,² that Sufism is essentially a product of the Persian mind – a theory refuted in 1912 by R.A. Nicholson.³ Spirituality transcends nationality. Prophecy is the grace of God, not the stock-in-trade of Arabs or Persians, as Rumi says:

*Whether they hail from Baghdad,
come of Ray – or from Herat,
the Sufis are all the Prophet's kin
beyond their bodies.
A rose is still a rose
no matter where it grows;
The vat of wine only ferments wine
– wherever the vat is put it boils fine.
If the sun should raise its head
from the West
it's just the sun
–naught else.⁴*

Yet few will dispute the fact that the cultural development of Islamic spirituality owes much both to Iranian Islam and to Persianate Sufism. This is especially true during the period under consideration.

The principal language of both the Mongol and Timurid courts was Persian. In India, “more Persian works than Iran proper” were produced. “India was the home of poets writing in Persian as early as the eleventh century. ... In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries mystical and mystically inclined poets like Amir Khosrau and Ḥasan Dihlavi created a highly refined lyrical poetry... The literature of the Sufi urban orders was generally composed in Persian, the standard language of literature and, from the late fifteenth century, of administration.”⁵ Many of the Timurid princes were not only familiar with Persian *belles-lettres*; some actually composed poetry in Persian,⁶ in which regard the Divans of Sulṭān Aḥmad Jalāyir⁷ (1382-1410) and Jahān-shāh Qara-quyunlu (d. 872/1467), as well as the Persian

1. G. M. Wickens, ‘Religion’ in A.J. Arberry (ed.) *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford University Press 1963 reprint), pp. 172, 151, 158.

2. ‘The Influence of Parsism on Islam’, trans. G.K. Nariman, in (ed.) C.P. Tiele, *The Religion of the Iranian Peoples* (Bombay: Parsi Publishing Co. 1912).

3. ‘A Historical Enquiry concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism, with a list of definitions of the terms *ṣūfī* and *ṭaṣawwuf*, arranged chronologically’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906), pp. 303-53. Nicholson’s reflections on Sufism’s origins have been considerably updated by later scholars, in particular H. Corbin, V. Danner and Martin Lings.

4. *Mathnawī-yi ma’nawī*, edited by R.A. Nicholson, *Daftar VI*: 187-189.

5. A. Schimmel, *As Through A Veil* (Columbia University Press 1982), p. 55 and N. Aḥmad, ‘The Influence of Persian and Persian Culture in India’, *Indo-Iranica*, vol. 38, nos. 1-4 (1984), pp. 1-30.

6. See E. Yarshater, *Shi’r-i fārsī dar ‘ahd-i Shāh Rukh*, p. 5, 49.

7. See F.R. Martin, *Miniatures from the Period of Timur in a Ms. of the Poems of Sultan Aḥmad Jalair* (Vienna 1936); D. E. Klimburg-Salter, ‘A Sufi Theme in Persian Painting: the Divan of Sultan Ahmad Galair in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.’, *Kunst des Orients*, vol. 11, nos. 1-2 (1976-77), pp. 43-84.

correspondence carried on in verse between Jahān-shāh Qara-quyunlu and his son Pir-Būdāq, comes to mind.¹ Even in non-Persian-speaking lands, Persian literary models were widely preferred, as E. Yarshater noted:

In the vast territory stretching from Asia Minor to Turkestan and to Bengal, poetry employed the same outlook, literary conventions, forms, metres, rhyming patterns, and above all the same imagery. The choice of language was an accident of birth, habitat, patronage, or predilection, but the models for it were and continued to be Persian.²

Elsewhere, Prof. Yarshater points out that “Sufism developed in all Muslim lands, but its literary expression reached its zenith in the countries located within the sphere of Persian cultural influence.”³ On both the contemplative disciplines and the literary forms of Sufism, as A. Schimmel has noted, Persian also had an overwhelming influence.⁴ The main spiritual themes of languages such as Kurdish, Baluchi, Simnani, as S.H. Nasr and J. Matini have shown, “remains close to the themes found in Persian Sufi literatures.”⁵

In respect to Turko-Persian culture, Victoria Holbrook in this volume (chap. 3) emphasizes that Persian remained the sacred language of the Mevlevi order, that an Ottoman literary Persian was developed and a Mevlevi spoken Persian even survived into the twentieth century. (The first Turkish translation of the *Mathnawī* was not produced until the eighteenth century.) Although in the sphere of Sufi philosophy, the school of the Andalusian sage, Ibn ‘Arabī, prevailed over that of the Persian, Suhrawardī, the Master of Illuminative Wisdom, the majority of the well-known commentators on Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, especially his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, were Persians.⁶

To summarize then, Iranian Islam and Persianate Sufism might best be viewed as separate yet inextricably linked tableaux of a single cultural mural. The ‘New Persian’ language that developed under the Persian Sāmānīd dynasty (reg. 262/875-388/998), which contained a composite vocabulary of Middle Persian or Pahlavi, and Arabic, and after a few decades, became the main administrative and literary language of Central Asia and Transoxiana, soon rivalled Arabic in importance, and subsequently became the lingua franca of all Middle Eastern high culture. The simultaneous rise of Iranian Islam and Persianate Sufism in the fourth/tenth centuries and their socio-political co-development over the succeeding centuries is the most salient (if not the most important) historical feature in Islamic cultural history.

1. See Dawlatshāh’s *Tadhkirat al-shu‘arā*, ed. M. ‘Abbāsī (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī Bārānī 1337 A.Hsh.), pp. 518-523; also cf. V. Minorsky, ‘Jihān-shāh Qara-qoyunlu and His Poetry’ in *Medieval Iran and its Neighbours* (Variorum Reprints, no. xii; London 1982), pp. 271-97.
2. E. Yarshater, ‘Persian Poetry in the Timurid and Safavid Periods’ in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge University Press 1986), vol. 6, p. 979.
3. ‘The Development of Iranian Literatures’, in (ed.) E. Yarshater, *Persian Literature* (New York: Persian Heritage Foundation 1988), p. 23.
4. See her ‘Mystical Poetry in the Vernacular’ in *As Through a Veil*, pp. 135-69.
5. See S.H. Nasr & J. Matini, ‘Persian Literature’ in *Islamic Spirituality II* (New York: Crossroads 1991), p. 347.
6. See Muḥsin Jahāngīrī, *Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī: Chihra-yi barjasta-yi ‘irfān-i islāmī* (Tehran 1980), p. 422 and S.H. Nasr’s ‘Introduction’ above.

In the following section, the spiritual background of Mongol and Timurid politics is examined, followed by a study (section V) of the twelfth and thirteenth-century renaissance of Sufism in Persia. The final section, devoted to Sufism as the common ground of Iranian Islam, elaborates and brings to a close our discussion begun above.

IV. THE POLITICS OF PERSIANATE SUFI CULTURE IN THE IL-KHANID AND TIMURID PERIODS

If the formulation of Sufi metaphysics in Persian began in the twelfth century with the writings of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī (executed 525/1131) and Shihab al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (executed 587/1191)¹ this development owes a great deal to the patronage of a branch of the Saljuqs of Asia Minor (470/1077-707/1307), who actively supported Persian culture and *adab* and introduced Persian as the literary and administrative language in Anatolia.² Yet the actual reasons for the rise and ascendancy of the Persian over the Arabic language are hard to ascertain. There are the linguistic explanations advanced by Hodgson, that "Persian poetry is more varied in content than Arabic"³ and hence easier to translate and more susceptible to cultural transference; and by Frye: that, as the English language which is rich in vocabulary because it has a double source for words (Latin, French and a German basis), so "the New Persian language...draws on Arabic as well as its own Iranian base....Arabic provided the catalyst to make a world literature in New Persian...whereas the Persians gave their energies to many facets of culture, the Arabs concentrated on the spoken word."⁴ There are also more historical reasons adduced by Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), the founder of Islamic sociology and himself of Sufi affiliation,⁵ who (basing his view on a saying ascribed to the Prophet: "If wisdom were to be found in the Pleiades, the Persians would find it there") remarks how the vast majority the great scholars of *ḥadīth*, jurists, Koranic exegetes, speculative theologians, philosophers, and natural historians in the history of Islam were, from its first generation, of Persian descent.⁶

Hodgson describes the florescence of Persian literary culture in the twelfth century as representing "a new overall cultural orientation within Islamdom," transcending the realm of mere literary influences. While "Arabic held its own as the primary language of the religious disciplines and even, largely, of natural science and philosophy,

Persian became, in an increasingly large part of Islamdom, the language of polite culture; it even invaded the realm of scholarship with increasing effect. While Arabic remained the language of science and religious scholarship... Persian became in

1. See S.H. Nasr & J. Matini, 'Persian Literature' in *Islamic Spirituality II*, p. 336.

2. Ehsan Yarshater, *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, p. 978.

3. *Op.cit.*, II, pp. 296.

4. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

5. See Stephen Casewit, 'The Mystical Side of the *Muqaddimah*: Ibn Khaldun's View of Sufism', *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1985), pp. 183.

6. F. Rosenthal (trans.), Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (New York 1958), III, pp. 311-15. Cf. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

wide areas the language of polite intercourse and poetry... Arabic during this period continued to be a major literary tongue, but it was increasingly restricted as to the area where cultivated circles used it for *belles-lettres*; even in the Fertile Crescent some rulers, notably in Iraq, eventually preferred Persian.¹

Sufism in its Persianate form was to develop into a culture unto itself; from its inception it exerted a civilizing and “democratizing”² influence upon both the fanatics and the bloodthirsty tyrants of its times. It was ultimately through the cultivation of Sufism that the Persian soul managed to survive the Mongol holocaust. “It was the wide vogue of mysticism, far more than formal theology, that enabled Islam to survive this appalling catastrophe,” pronounced A.J. Arberry. The spiritual disciplines developed by the Sufi mystics and

the hope and realization of experiencing the love of God, sustained the men's hearts and souls through the senseless butchery and insane devastations of the terrible thirteenth century. By then the political device which had contrived, though in decreasing effectiveness, the unity of Islam, the Baghdad caliphate, vanished in the holocaust; it was replaced by a less spectacular but in the end more enduring bond, the worldwide network of the Sufi brotherhoods.³

The Sufis—the Kubrāwīyya in particular—generally considered the Mongol invasion of Khwārazm in the years 615/1218–620/1223, ultimately resulting in ninety years of rule by non-Muslim ‘infidels’, as due in part to the misbehaviour shown by previous Muslim rulers towards the ‘Friends of God’. In line with the Sufis’ conception of the sovereignty (*dawlat*) of the worldly ruler as being subject to the spiritual authority (*wilāyat*) of the saints,⁴ Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī (639/1242–717/1317) believed, for instance, that the execution of Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī (d. 616/1219) at the hands of the Shāh of Khwārazm, Muḥammad ibn Tikish, was the true cause of the Mongol holocaust. He interpreted the destruction of the kingdom of Khwārazm, as a “summons issued from the court of Divine Grandeur to the *Simurgh* of Kingship (*salṭānat*) to fly from the blessed branch of Islam and to alight on the cursed tree of Infidelity (*kufr*).”⁵ This opinion held by many Sufis, that temporal powers make secret obeisance to the spiritual hierarchy, and that the true imperial court was in fact, the *khānaqāh*, was also buttressed by scriptural references which lent their outlook credence.⁶ This mystical point of (over-) view

1. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 293–94, 307.

2. The term is used here by Y.E. Bertels (*Taşawwuf u adabiyât-i taşawwuf*; translated into Persian by S. Izadi [Tehran 1976], p. 46), in reference to mediæval Persian Sufism.

3. A.J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1967), p. 16.

4. According to Simon Digby, “The territorial *wilāyat* of the Sufi shaykh was considered as having a direct influence on the political events and material destiny of the realm over which it was exercised....The corollary of the belief that an offence against a Sufi shaykh will lead to the downfall of a ruler, is the belief that such shaykhs also have had the power to bestow kingship upon individuals whom they encountered, or to foresee the attainment of a throne by such men.” – ‘The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India’ in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, vol. 28 (1990), pp. 71, 75.

5. Cited by H. Landolt, *Nuruddin Isfarayini: Le Reveleateur des Mysteries* (Paris: Verdier 1986), French introduction, p. 34.

6. E.g. “There is no power beyond God’s power” and “The hand of God is above their hands” [Koran XLVIII 10].

was reiterated in Rumi's *Mathnawī*,¹ while verses such as the following by Ḥāfiz are often interpreted in the same sense by the Sufis:

bar dar-i maykada rindān-i qalandar bāshand
kay sitānand u dahand afsar-i shāhanshāhi²

*Around the tavern door
the wild, the vigilant swarm
They withdraw and they bestow
the diadems of Empire.*

qadam mana ba kharābāt juz ba sharṭ-i adab
ki sākanān-i darash mahramān-i pādishahand.³

*Without manners never attempt to step
within the tavern of ruin,
for the residents of its court
are confidants of kings.*

However, such explanations offer small consolation before the utter horror and terror of the Mongol conquests, which brought genocide and a scorched earth policy; recent scholars have confirmed the possibility of a ninety-percent extermination rate among the Persian populace of Khurasan.⁴ Chingiz Khān's catastrophic invasion of northern Iran, for instance, was accompanied by the systematic extermination of the civilian population of all its major towns (Balkh, Marv, Nishapur, Herat, Tus, Ray, Qazwin, Hamadan, Ardabil, etc.).⁵ These ravages by both Mongol and later, Timurid, tyrants, whose capricious wills wreaked havoc with the feudal economy of mediaeval Iran, transforming it into a slave economy⁶—brought lasting destruction. A constant state of insecurity, violence, internal warfare, banditry on the highways and the pillaging of private property by state officials, prevailed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁷ The Mongol tax collectors produced unprecedented economic distress, previously free peasants—now serfs and slaves—being forced to keep their dwellings in deliberate dilapidation lest they risk a visit from a Mongol dignitary whose very presence entailed a tax (*nūzūl*).⁸ In the words of a contemporary Iranian scholar, 'Alī Rajā'i Bokhārā'i, (penned by way of exposition of the political backdrop of the mystical ambience sustaining the poetry of Ḥāfiz during this period in Persia):

1. *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, (ed.) R.A. Nicholson, V: 2341.

2. *Diwān-i Ḥāfiz*, edited by P. Nātil-Khānlari (Tehran 1359 A.Hsh.), p. 974.

3. *Diwān-i Ḥāfiz*, p. 408.

4. I. P. Petrushevsky ('The Consequences of the Mongol Invasion' in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, pp. 484-88) discusses the Mongol massacres in Tabaristan (Mazandaran) and Khurasan in great detail.

5. *Ibid.*

6. A. Bausani, *The Persians: From the Earliest Days to the Twentieth century*, translated by J. Donne (London 1971), p. 116; Ghani, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-99.

7. See Anjawi Shirāzi (ed.), *Divān-i Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiz* (Shiraz 1982), introduction, p. 85ff.

8. Bausani, *The Persians*, p. 115.

The Persian writer of the twelfth and especially the thirteenth century has witnessed his house burned down, his city destroyed, his beloved relatives murdered and his independence eradicated. Foreigners control his possessions, his property, his very being. In such circumstances, how can one sing songs of joy or compose rhapsodies, how should the world be thought a happy abode or life seem sweet? Thus the poetry of this period and the following century [eighth Islamic/fourteenth Christian century]—composed, as it was, by writers subjected to savage marauding Mongols and plundering Turks—is little more than an attempt to offer condolences to the reader.¹

Nonetheless, Sufism paradoxically survived during this gloomy period—in fact, not only survived, but blossomed, becoming

the sole force capable of saving the soul of the Iranian populace, casting a ray of hope and courage into the traumatized hearts of the inhabitants of mediaeval Persia. For the Sufi masters promised the populace—in the safety of Sufism—liberation from the aggravation of their corrupt contemporaries, offering as companions individuals of refined and sensitive feelings, instead of blackguards and tyrants. They allowed their followers to pass their days without trouble in their *khānaqāhs*, engaged in musical concerts and dance, states of rapture and spiritual feelings.²

Thus, in spite of anxiety, despair, apathy, political corruption and psychological terror, the Mongol rule of Persia did have compensations. In terms of the arts, Persian miniature painting flourished in the ateliers of Shiraz, Baghdad, and Tabriz almost without any break of style,³ while in Iraq and Azerbaijan under the patronage of the Jalāyirid Mongol princes (1336-1410) Persian miniature painting entered its formative period. In calligraphy, the *ta'liq* style which had been developed by the Tabrizi master, Mīr 'Alī (d. 1420), in the fourteenth century was transformed into the *nasta'liq* script under later Timurid patronage in Herat,⁴ while Persian Sufi poetry, in particular in its *mathnawī* and *ghazal* form, realized its greatest perfection in the poetry of Sa'dī and Ḥāfiz.⁵

If terrorism was the norm in political life during the thirteenth century, in the realm of ideas there was a "greater freedom of speech and thought than in Seljuq times while open expression of ideas and divergent religious beliefs prevailed."⁶ Insofar as the Mongols espoused Buddhism and made it the official creed in the lands they ruled (at least from 1221-1295), Muslims were forced to tolerate differences of religious belief, leading among other factors, to the rise in the popularity of Sufism—to which tolerance is second-nature.

1. *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ḥāfiz*, pp. 454-55.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17. See also L. Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson & B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (New York: Dover Books repr., 1971), p. 21. According to Sussan Babaie and M.L. Swietochowski (*Persian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* [New York 1989], p. 3), "The earliest substantial number of Persian drawings on paper that have survived date from the second half of the fourteenth century, the period associated with Muzaffarid and Jalayrid rule in Iran."

4. A. Schimmel, 'Poetry and Calligraphy: Some Thoughts about their Interrelation in Persian Culture', in R. Ettinghausen & E. Yarshater (eds.), *Highlights of Persian Art* (Colorado: Westview Press 1979), p. 196.

5. J. Rypka, 'Poets & Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods' in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, p. 555.

6. 'Aziz-i Nasafi, *Zubdat al-haqā'iq*, edited by H. Nāsiri (Terhan 1985), introduction, p. 13.

One important aspect of the Mongol conquest is that for the first time Persia and other large areas of the Muslim world found themselves governed, at least from 1221 to 1295, that is to say for three generations, by non-Muslim rulers, pagan shamanists or Buddhists who ignored differences of religious belief among their subjects, who used Christian auxiliaries, and who employed Jewish ministers alongside administrators from the Far East.¹

In the first volume of his *Tārīkh-i jahāngushā'ī*, 'Aṭā Malik Juwaynī states that Chingiz Khān followed no particular religion, opposing all religious bias towards both paganism and monotheism.² This policy provided very favorable conditions for Sufi mysticism and an original 'Islamic transcendentalism' to emerge and blossom. For the above reasons, during most of the thirteenth century under Mongol rule, when Persia was administered by non-Muslims, the originality of Sufism as the quintessential Islamic expression transcending the sectarian distinctions of Sunnism and Shi'ism and demonstrating its capacity for inter-faith communication, became apparent. The Sufi concept of the Transcendent Unity of Religions (within the framework of Islamic *tawḥīd*) permits, for example, understanding and toleration of the doctrines of Hindu Advaita Vedānta, Jewish Cabbalism, Christian mysticism and Zen Buddhism—providing greater possibilities for a universal expression than exists when exoteric Islam dominates.³

V. THE TWELFTH & THIRTEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL OF SUFISM

"The twelfth century was a great age, probably the culminating age, of religious poetry." So wrote Charles Haskins, one of the foremost scholars of mediæval history concerning the revival of the Latin mystical tradition in the so-called European 'Dark Ages' in his study of *The Renaissance of the 12th Century*⁴ – remarks which appear remarkably relevant to Islamic civilization during this period as well. William Chittick in this volume and Victor Danner, elsewhere, have described this religious revival as derivative in part from two of the many major prodigies among Sufi poets of this period, namely Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī:

The philosophical mysticism of Ibn 'Arabī and the poetical mysticism of Rūmī are but two of the different genres used by thirteenth-century Sufism to effect a spiritual re-animation of Islam that would be the literary counterparts to the eruption of Sufi order all over the face of the Islamic world... In more ways than one, it is possible to speak of the Sufi literary and spiritual fruits of the thirteenth century as forming, in their ensemble, a veritable spiritual message that would govern the general outlook of Islamic civilization and affect all facets of society for centuries.

For the Islamic faith, the definitive ascendancy of thirteenth-century Sufism, with its gnostic and devotional spirituality that included all aspirations, kept the door of spiritual realization open to its seekers for centuries, right into the twentieth century. It had no need to hide the Path under a thicket of dissimulative practices and teachings. The Caliphs, the sultans, the *amīrs*, and even many of the religious chiefs of the later States, often had their own Sufi teachers whom they consulted regularly. The

1. Bausani, *The Persians*, p. 117.

2. See Ḥ Nāsirī, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

3. See S.H. Nasr, 'Islam and the Encounter of Religions' in *Sufi Essays* (London 1972), pp. 123-51.

4. (New York: World Publishing Company 1961), p. 166.

34 Introduction and Historical Overview

Path was everywhere in evidence; the many Sufi orders had millions of adherents coming from all ranks of society.¹

These broad-based observations are further substantiated by the observations of other scholars, such as J.S. Trimingham, who describes the two-century period prior to the Safavid regime in Persia as

a time of ferment, crucial for the future of Islam in the region. The immediate consequences of the Mongol conquests had been the displacement of Islam as the state religion throughout the region. Islam had now to prove itself and accommodate itself to non-Muslim rulers, shamanist, Buddhist, or crypto-Christian. It was a time pregnant with possibilities, and the outcome was the triumph of Islam as the dominant religion of Central Asia. Sufism's role was of considerable significance... It is significant that two of the first Mongol princes to adopt Islam, Berke of the Golden Horde and Ghāzān of Tabriz, sought out a Sufi rather than a Sunni 'alim before whom to make their public declaration of adhesion to Islam.²

The conversion of the Mongol ruler Berke (reg. 1257-67) to Islam was officiated by the Kubrāwī master, Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī;³ that of Ghāzān Khān in 694/1295 was presided over by another Kubrāwī Shaykh, Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ḥamūya. A recent study of the latter ceremony demonstrates that Ghāzān not only embraced Islam but was also initiated into Sufism on this occasion, demonstrating the "clear preference among the Mongols for Sufism rather than the more formal orthodox *madhabs*, due in part to various areas of similarity between Shamanist and Sufi rituals and ideas."⁴ This predilection of Mongol princes for Sufi rather than purely exoteric and legalistic religiosity has been established by H. Landolt's monograph on the Kubrāwī master Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī.⁵ Sufi affiliations of the Mongol Īl-Khān Öljeitü (reg. 1304-1316) appear in his reconstruction of the tomb of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī⁶ and his naming of three sons after this Sufi saint: Bisṭām, Bāyazīd, and Ṭayfur.

One may also see how deeply the Iranian culture of the period was steeped in mysticism by recalling the tale related by Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī⁷ about Isfarāyīnī's illustrious disciple 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (659/1261-736/1326) presiding over a convocation of four hundred scholars assembled by Öljeitü Khān. Here, and elsewhere in his biography Simnānī appears in the history of his day as the scholar who 'held the King's ear', the Sufi master most heeded by the Tartar state. According to

1. *The Islamic Tradition*, pp. 99-100.

2. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, pp. 90-91.

3. See the article by M.I. Waley in the present volume on Bākharzī's grandson, Yahyā, in the present volume (chap. 5).

4. C. Melville, 'Pādīshāh-i Islām: the conversion of Sultan Maḥmūd Ghāzān Khān', in (ed.) C. Melville, *Pembroke Papers* (Persian & Islamic Studies in Honour of P.W. Avery), I (Cambridge 1990), p. 168. Melville furthermore notes that Ghāzān Khān was obliged to wear wool (*ṣūf*) during his conversion ceremony and that this "apparently confirms the Sufi affiliations of Ṣadr al-Dīn and suggests that Ghāzān was himself initiated as a Sufi."

5. See 'Le milieu baghdādien: politique et religion' in H. Landolt, *Nūriddīn Isfarāyīnī: Le Révélateur des Mystères (Kāshif al-Asrār)* (Paris: Verdier 1986), 'Étude Préliminaire', pp. 31-36.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Recounted by M. Molé, 'Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'hégire', *Revue des études islamiques*, 29 (1961), pp. 112-13.

the *Habib al-siyar*, Öljeitü's successor to the Mongol throne, Sultan Abū Sa'īd, on visiting Simnānī, "after rising to pay his respects, sat the Shaykh beside him, and then knelt respectfully before him."¹ It is also interesting to note that the post of 'Shaykh al-Islām', archbishop or supreme authority in matters pertaining to the religious law, was held in Northern India from the thirteenth century down to Mughal times by the Sufi masters,² reflecting the general political position of the Sufi masters in their post of *Shaykh al-shiyukh* in mediæval Muslim Persia.³

Sufism's centrality in late mediæval Persian culture is also reflected in the literary history of the period, as Ehsan Yarshater notes:

What is clearly evident, however, is that mystical concepts, Sufi theoretical constructs and the theosophical doctrine of dervishhood (*mashrab-i darwishī*) permeated the entire socio-cultural milieu, so that one rarely encounters a poet or scholar in the annals of the age who did not 'relish the taste of Sufi theosophy' or who had not traveled a few steps along the Sufi Path.⁴

For this reason Hodgson characterizes Sufism during this period as "the most important inward religious experience in the region from Nile to Oxus,"⁵ while S.H. Nasr describes Sufism as "the most important spiritual force to be reckoned with in studying the background of the Safavid period."⁶ During the later part of what Hodgson describes as the "Earlier Middle Period [945-1258]," the most significant period of activity in the development of Sufism occurred:

The '*ulamā*' scholars, who had been wary of the early Sufism of an elite, were mostly persuaded by the early twelfth century to accept the new Sufism of the masses....Then with their acceptance, around the latter part of the twelfth century the reorganization of Sufism was completed with the establishment of formal Sufi brotherhoods or orders (*ṭarīqah*)....The distinctive marks of the new Sufism were two: its organization into these formal 'orders' and its concentration on a formal method of mystical worship, the *dhikr*.⁷

Thus, gradually, Sufism became the dominant cultural and intellectual current during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. By the end of the period, "the most important religious issues were no longer fought out, for the most part, between schools of *fiqh* or *kalām* but rather within and between differing *ṭarīqa* orders. Often it was the same perennial human issues that were being debated, only now cast in Sufi terms."⁸ "It was reserved for the thirteenth century," notes Victor Daner, "to witness the explosive nature of Sufism in the century-long manifestations

1. See the introduction by Dhahībullāh Šafā to 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ḥaḳīqat (ed.) *Divān-i kāmīl-i ash'ār-i fārsī wa 'arabī-yi 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī* (Tehran 1985), p. 15. On the Mongols' patronage of Sufism, see Aḥmad Rājā'i's lengthy discussion (*Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ḥāfiẓ*, pp. 465-68) where he observes that "the strongest patrons of the eighth [fourteenth]-century Sufis were the Il-Khānid Mongols."

2. See Aziz Ahmad, 'The Sufi and the Sultan in Pre-Mughal Muslim India', *Der Islam* (1963), pp. 142-43.

3. Cf. Ghānī, *op. cit.*, p. 500 and *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ḥāfiẓ*, p. 456.

4. *Shi'r-i fārsī dar 'ahd-i Shāh Rukh*, p. 19.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, p. 658.

7. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 211.

8. *Ibid.*, II, p. 455.

of its spiritual and intellectual vitality. From then on, the term *ṭarīqah* would refer simultaneously to the mystical Way in general and to the specific Sufi orders in particular.”¹

The historical rise of Sufism to a position of dominance in mediæval Persian religious culture during the twelfth century has also been otherwise documented by Marshall Hodgson who describes this renaissance as “a reorientation of the piety of Islam on the basis of Sufism.”² The role of Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (450/1058–505/1111) in this renaissance was central, insofar as he “combined a mastery of the teachings of the ‘*ulamā*’ scholars on *Sharī‘ah* and kalām with a respect for the independent wisdom of the Sufi mystics.” Thus Ghazzālī’s teachings

helped to make Sufism acceptable to the ‘*ulamā*’ themselves. By the twelfth century it was a recognized part of religious life and even of religious ‘*ilm*’ knowledge. Thus gradually Sufism, from being one form of piety among others, and by no means the most accepted one either officially or popularly, came to dominate religious life not only within the Jamā‘i-Sunnī fold, but to a lesser extent even among Shī‘is.

From this point on, Islam presented persistently two faces: one, *Sharī‘ah*-minded, concerned with outward, socially cognizable behavior; the other mystical-minded, concerned with the inward, personal life of the individual, accepted as their care by the Sufi *pīrs*. Often the same religious leader was at once *pīr* and *Shar‘ī* scholar, or at least took both sides of Islam very seriously; just as most of the Muslim public respected and took guidance from both *pīrs* and ‘*ulamā*’.³

In the following section some of the socio-cultural and psychological factors which provoked this rise of Sufism are examined, and concluding reflections upon the relation, in both an essential and historical sense, of Persianate Sufism to Iranian Islam are provided.

VI. SUFISM: IRANIAN ISLAM'S COMMON GROUND

Sufism and the Persian Psyche

There are a number of reasons why in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries what appeared as the Persian fusion of Islam into Sufism, or, as Hodgson expressed it above, “the reorientation of the piety of Islam on the basis of Sufism,” was accomplished: why Islam, in its Persianate milieu, came to be conceived of in primarily mystical terms. How Sufism, with its exotic symbolism, esoteric disciplines, its highly refined aesthetics and arcane philosophy – came to dominate the religious conscience and popular piety of the entire Islamic world is difficult (for modern man, at least) to understand. The mystical perspective is particularly alien to the present age – we equate science and knowledge with a dispassionate ‘objective’ analysis of particular ‘facts’, find our intellectual salvation in a bland business-like

1. *The Islamic Tradition*, p. 96.

2. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 203.

3. *Ibid.*

pursuit of secular 'truths', and are extremely uncomfortable in discovering the presence of an unquantifiable ecstasy or beauty in our psychologies.¹

Yet the existence of certain *psychological* factors and causes underlying the predominance of mysticism in the religious piety of the period is possible to demonstrate. (Some of the diverse *socio-cultural* factors stimulating the rise of Sufism to the foreground of mediaeval Persian society—a society which bears many striking resemblances to Renaissance Italy during the same period²—are discussed below). However, the specifically psychological factors appear to be principally three:

1. The legalistic and moralistic values espoused by the *Shari'a*-centered '*ulamā*' of the period tended to downgrade basic intellectual and academic freedoms, recovery of which was only possible in another religious guise. Sufism here filled the vacuum: since (in M. Hodgson's words) "mystical forms and language can sanction elements of religious life downgraded by a strongly kerygmatic approach."³ Research by many modern Iranian writers, such as Sa'īdī Sirjāni, into the history of this period, testifies to the validity of Hodgson's thesis.

2. Reliance on mystical experiences and metaphysical speculation for the purposes of science is forbidden only when human experience and self-knowledge is based on research into purely material phenomena. However, when the psychosociological mores of a society, such as those of the mediaeval Islamic *umma*, are non-material—condoning religious sentiments as sources of information—a Sufi orientation easily becomes 'rational'. Hence, "Mystical experiences... however private they still remain, take on comprehensive implications [and] become conscious objects of cultivation. If such experiences carry authority and are found relevant to our ordinary course of living—the decisive criterion of mysticism from a historical viewpoint—then their consequences will be unpredictable and may invade any sphere of human activity. Once their validity is accepted, they must determine all of life."⁴ Here then is the reason why philosophy in mediaeval Persia became wedded irrevocably to Sufism:⁵ rationality combining with visionary experience (*shuhūd*) both in the 'Oriental Theosophy' of Suhrawardī⁶ and in the transcendental theomonism of Ibn 'Arabī.

3. However, the prime psychological cause of the efflorescence of Sufism during the mediaeval period might be posited as what 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb describes as an innate predisposition to mysticism in the Persian psyche:⁷ or what H. Corbin

1. Cf. Henry Corbin, 'The Configuration of the Temple of the Ka'bah', part 4: 'Potestas clavium' in *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. Phillip & Liadain Sherrard, (London: KPI 1986), pp. 253-62.

2. Cf. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 372.

3. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 204-5.

4. *Ibid.* Cf. Qāsim Ghani's observations, *Bahth dar āthār... Ḥāfiẓ*, II, p. 501; as well as Zarrīnkūb's study of Al-Ghazzālī, *Farār az madrasa* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1364 A.Hsh.), p. 96.

5. See the provocative discussion of the relationship between philosophy and Sufism in mediaeval Persia by S.H. Nasr, 'Rābaṭa-yi bayn-i ṭaṣawwuf wa falsafa dar farhang-i Irān', *Iran Nameh*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1982), pp. 46-56.

6. See H. Corbin (translation et notes), *Shihāboddīn Yahya Sohravardī: Le Livre de la Sagesse Orientale (Kitāb Hikmat al-Ishrāq)* (Paris: Éditions Verdier 1986).

7. *Justujū-yi dar ṭaṣawwuf-i Irān*, pp. 1-29.

has called "le génie iranien...la vocation imprescriptible de l'âme iranienne."¹ This thesis is not, I think, merely a few orientalist's subjective and personal sentiment, but represents the opinion of a wide spectrum of Islamicists, literary historians,² religionists³ and historians.⁴

Socio-cultural Causes of the Mediæval Sufi Renaissance

Hodgson describes *ṭarīqa* Sufism as providing "a wide field of free development for the exceptional individual" and as "a vehicle for expressing every aspect of popular piety within Islam."⁵ This popular outreach of Sufism, based on its tolerant blend of popular spirituality and "Sunni *Shari'ah*-mindedness"⁶ came to provide the moral support for the *madrasa* colleges and became, in Hodgson's words, "a mainstay of the international social order."⁷ The first socio-cultural factor by means of which Sufism broadened its appeal to the masses, which was to be become, in fact, the hallmark of the *ṭarīqas*, was, in fact, tolerance.

1. Tolerance

'Tolerance' was a central characteristic of Persian mysticism during the 13th-15th centuries, as Hodgson observes:

The Sufis tended to be as naturally tolerant of local differences as the *Shar'ī 'ulamā'* tended to be intolerant. The '*ulamā'* had to concentrate on matters of external conformity, as dictated by the *Shari'ah*, in order to maintain the legal and institutional framework for social unity...For the Sufis, on the contrary, externals were secondary. For many of them, especially by the Earlier Middle Period, even the difference between Islam and other cultural traditions such as Christianity was of secondary importance in principle; of still less moment were the various differences in social custom within the community of Muḥammad. What mattered was the inner disposition of the heart to God.⁸

1. See *En Islam iranien*, I, p. x, where Corbin describes this genius as "Aptitude...à conjoindre la recherche philosophique et l'expérience mystique..."

2. Cf. A. Schimmel, 'Tiny Mirrors of Divine Beauty: Classical Persian Mystical Poetry', *As Through a Veil*, pp. 49-55. Cf. M. Ṭawḥīdīpūr's introduction to Jāmi's *Nafāḥāt al-uns* (Tehran 1964).

3. Cf. S.H. Nasr, 'Sacred Art in Persian Culture', *Islamic Art & Spirituality* (Suffolk: Golgonooza Press, 1987), pp. 64-83; A. Coomaraswamy, 'Note on the Philosophy of Persian Art', *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers on Traditional Art and Symbolism*, vol. 1, Bolligen Series 89 (Princeton University Press 1977), pp. 260-65; Daryush Shayegan, *Henry Corbin: La topographie spirituelle de l'Islam iranien* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence 1991), p. 24.

4. Cf. R. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia*, p. 234. Thus B.S. Amoretti argues (in reference to the politicalization of the *pīr/murīd* relationship) that during 9th/15th century "the particular kind of religious feeling permeating, with its longing for renewal, the conscience of the Iranian Islamic world at that time, had as its essential component a certain type of sufism." 'Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods', *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, p. 631.

5. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 218.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, II, p. 220.

8. *Ibid.* However, A. Rajā'i is of the opinion that the Sufi doctrine of religious tolerance had its social origins in the popular disgust felt by Persians for the both the Crusades and internal sectarian intracreedal fighting of Muslim theologians. *op.cit.*, p. 455.

The same scholar goes on to note that despite the fact that the “*Shari‘ah* Law afforded legitimatization on a universal basis, on the assumption that nothing mattered legally but relations between individuals, equal anywhere in the world,” this theoretical egalitarianism was rarely put to practice since it was the local grouping (class-structures, guilds, etc.) which ultimately determined a Muslim's status. Sufism was thus a leaven which molded nobles and commoners together, providing the necessary ethical integrity for the Muslim community to survive. “Persian Sufism,” states H. Landolt, “is animated essentially in its practice as well in its theory, by something which must be called its poetic spirit, a spiritual liberty whose corollary is the absence of all rigorous legalism.”¹ Hodgson believed that it was the broad-mindedness and “the spiritual authority of the Sufi *pīrs* and the ethic they preached [which] proved able to relate the conscience of ordinary men to the institutions they needed.” Furthermore, Sufism became a kind of mediæval ‘counter-culture’:

The Sufi tie at once deepened the local moral resources and tied them in to a system of brotherhoods in some way as universal as the old caliphal bureaucracy had been, which had disappeared. The refusal of some Sufis to permit any association with the *amīr*’s court served to underline the alternative social outlook. It was as if the court were carefully quarantined so as to minimize its influence. Thus Sufism supplemented the *Shari‘ah* as a principle of unity and order, offering the Muslims a sense of spiritual unity which came to be stronger than that provided by the remnant of the caliphate. They developed a picture of the world which united the whole *Dār al-Islām* under a comprehensive spiritual hierarchy of *pīrs*.²

Prof. Holbrook's study in this volume of the spiritual genealogy and ideals of the successive leaders of the order founded by Rumi illuminates the unique role which ‘Mevlevi tolerance’ (which she defines as “a relaxed attitude marked by acceptance of diversity in points of view and a more specific disregard, even an aggressive challenging of exclusive norms of behavior characteristic of establishment Muslim sensibilities”) played in mediæval Seljuk and later Ottoman Anatolia. The Sufis’ doctrine of tolerance is also exemplified in the literary motif of the *qalandar*, which, as Prof. de Bruijn's essay on this topos in the present volume demonstrates, made its first appearance in the early eleventh century. The *qalandar* motif is, in fact, an ancient feature in Persian Sufism,, associated with the figures of Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī’l-Khayr (357/967-440/1049) and Aḥmad Ghazzālī (d. 520/1126), denoting the type of mystic, who, in Einstein's words, finds “solitary virtue better than ostentatious piety” and who seeks to find truthfulness (*ṣidq*) before God in his devotions by subjecting himself to public censure (*malāmat*) by purposely dissimulated anti-nomian behavior.³ In the early thirteenth century, according to Prof. de Bruijn,⁴ special *qalandar* Sufi Orders made their appearance with extremely tolerant rules and rites set aside for extravagant manifestations of the spiritual life. In general, tolerance and social egalitarianism earmarked the subsequent history of Sufism in

1. ‘Two Types of Mystical Thought in Muslim Iran: An Essay on Suhrawardī *Shaykh al-Ishrāq* and ‘Aynulquṣāt-i Hamadānī’, *Muslim World*, vol. 68 (1978), p. 192.

2. *The Venture of Islam*, II, pp. 221-22.

3. See Javad Nurbakhsh, *Farhang-i Nūrbakhsh* (London 1364 A.Hsh.), vol. 6, p. 167, s.v. *qalandar*.

4. See chap. 2 below.

Asia Minor and Persia:

The sufi movements... were characterized by a progressive socialization, the first consequence of which was access to the 'mystic path', open to those social classes who, because they were poor, were ready to accept any authority having the seal of religious legality, as opposed to the political reality which was proving more and more disappointing. The shaykhs to whom they had recourse appear to have represented a court of appeals for complaints, even when the only solution they could suggest was a disdainful liberation from worldly needs pending the arrival of better times.¹

The philosophical mainstay of this religious tolerance was the doctrine of the 'unity of religions', analyzed by L. Lewisohn and R. Vassie in this volume (chap. 6). According to this doctrine all true religions represent diverse manifestations of One Being, their divergent principles being but 'forms' of Archetypal Meanings (*ma'ānī*) attired in the vestments of multiplicity.

Hodgson contrasts the persuasive power of the Sufi preachers with the dogmatic homiletics of the exoteric clergy, remarking how "the comprehensive humanity from which a Sufi could preach gave the Sufi tradition an often spectacular advantage."² ...The Sufi piety, tolerant of human weakness, did not generally separate itself from common beliefs and from the sensibilities of the common people; unlike the Manicheans, the Sufis were willing to accept as valid at least externally whatever religious notions they found among them."³ On the other hand, this tolerance espoused by the Sufis did not obscure or 'water-down' its essentially Islamic character, as Danner emphasizes:

Even when the Sufis are eclectic, drawing now from Neoplatonic or now from Hindu formulations... this eclecticism is organic and compatible with the integrity, or let us say the *ṭawḥīd*, of the Islamic revelation... It is more than likely that when Islam sees *ṭawḥīd* as underlying the different revelations given to the world, so that Islam is merely a reconfirmation of what was previously revealed, it is really of that ultimate, non-anthropomorphic Divine Unity, that is speaks, not of God in personal nature as Lord of the Creation, possessed of anthropomorphic aspects. The abstract, nontheistic Divine Unity permits the integration of Buddhism into the perennial message of *ṭawḥīd*. But that is a proposition that ordinary, exoteric Islam cannot make.⁴

This 'Sufi tolerance' is central to many of the essays by contributors to the present volume, in particular: V. Holbrook, L. Lewisohn, and R. Vassie.

2. *Anti-sectarianism*

Although there were admittedly 'dark chapters' in mediæval Persian Sufism (the cases of the Mar'ashī Shi'ite Order, the dervish founders of the Sarbidār movement, and Shi'ite Sufi militancy of Shāh Ismā'il I in the early 16th century clearly exemplifying perversions of the ideal) due to politicization of the master-disciple relationship, the general attitude of the mystics of the period towards the four orthodox

1. B.S. Amoretti, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, VI, p. 613. Cf. *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Hāfiẓ*, p. 457.

2. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 209.

3. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 207.

4. *The Islamic Tradition*, pp. 103, 107.

legal Islamic legal schools was anti-sectarian. For example, describing the sensibility of the Sufi poet, Qāsim-i Anwār (d. 837/1434) towards religious creed (*madhhab*), the great Iranian scholar Sa'īd Nafīsī remarked:

The Sufis essentially believed their doctrine to transcend the confession of a certain Sunni or Shi'ite creed. From the Sufi perspective, both Sunnis and Shi'ites — nay, even Muslims and non-Muslims — are to be considered equally. Sufis have always upheld the Principles (*uṣūl*) of Religion, paying scant heed to the Derivatives (*furū'*) of Faith. For this reason, one finds that in the works of Qāsim-i Anwār the orthodox Sunni caliphs as well as the Shi'ite Imams, such as 'Alī, Husayn, Ja'far al-Šādiq, are mentioned. Moreover, it may generally asserted that this honour, veneration and impartial consideration which all Persian Sufis accorded to both Sunni caliphs and Shi'ite Imāms alike in their compositions, is something very evident. It must be definitely recognized that Sufism is something more universal, or better said — more transcendent — than this sort of dualistic sectarian vision.¹

3. Direct Experience (*taḥqīq*) versus Dogmatic Imitation (*taqlīd*)

The intellectual foundation of this mystical vision of Islam, as noted above, was indebted to Muḥammad Ghazzālī's revalorization of Sufism in the late eleventh century. Ghazzālī recognized that sectarian dogma must necessarily be complemented by the inwardness and inspiration of the doctrines found in Sufism.² "...Thus the Sufis were assigned a crucial role in supporting the historical Muslim community as a body, as well as in guiding personal lives."³

One reason for this was the open-minded attitude of the Persian Sufis, and their respect for genuine spiritual research (*taḥqīq*): a virtue the philosophers shared with them. The Sufis' conviction that the truths of mystical vision (*kashf*) equalled, or at least paralleled, the certainty found by following the 'revelation-theology' of the scholastic jurists, was shared by Peripatetic philosophers such as Avicenna (d. 428/1037) whose 'Treatise on Love' provided a speculative basis for the love-mysticism of 'Aṭṭār and Sanā'ī. Thus Avicenna stimulated the development of both theoretical (speculative) and practical (ecstatic) Sufism.⁴ It should be emphasized that all mediaeval 'ulamā', Sufi and *faqīh* alike, supported the mystical doctrine of 'unveiling' (*kashf*) as a proper means of scientific knowledge or 'ilm. Even scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, firmly believed in the authority of mystical unveiling as an alternate source of learning alongside the study of the Koran and the pursuit of the Prophetic Sunna.⁵

Ghazzālī's demonstration of the complementarity of esoteric and exoteric knowledge, so that the latter no longer appeared to be in competition with the former, but rather as its valid and acceptable complement, was central to the devel-

1. *Kullīyyāt-i Qāsim-i Anwār*, ed. S. Nafīsī (Tehran 1958), p. 90.

2. Cf. A.J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*, p. 16; *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 188.

3. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 188..

4. See J.N. Bell, 'Avicenna's Treatise on Love and the Nonphilosophical Muslim Tradition', *Der Islam* (Bond 63, 1986) pp. 73-89; Furūzānfar, 'Abū 'Alī Sīnā wa taṣawwuf' in *Majmū'a-yi maqālāt wa ash'ār Bādī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar*, pp. 310-15.

5. See Muhsin Mahdi, 'The Book and the Master as Poles of Cultural Change in Islam', p. 13; J. Michell, 'Ibn Taymiyya's *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* of 'Abd al-Qādir Jilānī', *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1981), pp. 8-9.

opment of Islamic esotericism.¹ The late twelfth century's intellectual renaissance was generated, in part, from the increased metaphysical speculations on the part of Sufis, since "Sufism, especially the new intellectualizing expression of it, served more than any other movement to draw together all strands of intellectual life."²

Henry Corbin has demonstrated that the sources of the Ishrāqī philosophy of Suhrawardī can ultimately be traced to notes that Avicenna wrote on the margin of the so-called 'Theology of Aristotle'.³ In these notes, Avicenna referred to a certain *ḥikmat mashriqiyya* or Eastern/Aurorial/Illuminative Wisdom: the very term which Suhrawardī, (whom Corbin described as "an irregular Sufi of no formal affiliation")⁴ was later to employ and elaborate his theosophy upon. Corbin observed that the term *ḥikmat ishrāqiyya*, which persisted down to the times of the later Iranian sages, Mulla Ṣadrā Shirāzī (d. 1640) and Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1878) derived from what he designates as "Avicenna's 'erfān'" and that no one belonging to the Persian Ishrāqī tradition "ever doubted that the author of the last section of the *Ishārāt*... was an 'ārīf, a mystic-gnostic. What has been doubted is the fidelity of these Orientals' to Islam, and it is this that distinguishes them from orthodox Sufism."⁵

Corbin also convincingly identified Suhrawardī's *ishrāq* with the "philosophy of *Xvarnah* of Zoroastrian Persia," giving this concept an Iranian geographical context and connotation.⁶ Avicenna, according to Corbin (who bases his assertions on Muḥammad Mu'in's edition of the *Dānish-nāma-yi 'Alā'ī*) was conscious of the dual geographical/metaphysical notion; in fact, the later development of Iranian Avicennism under Ishrāqī auspices amplifies and confirms this latent identity of 'Oriental Philosophy' with ancient Persian sources.⁷ Again, the "esoteric tone" of Muslim philosophers such as Suhrawardī, stresses Hodgson, owed its vitality to "the persuasive importance of Sufism in Islamicate culture."⁸ I.R. Netton in this volume (chap. 4) also demonstrates by semiotic analysis how "*falsafa* metamorphoses into *taṣawwuf* in Suhrawardī's thought, revealing the inseparability of Sufism and philosophy in the intellectual life of Islam."

Despite the very real presence of the *contra inanem philosophiam* motif (the famous 'theologians versus philosophers' dichotomy) in Islam,⁹ many of the Sufis did respect certain aspects of Avicenna's teachings. In fact, in contradistinction to

1. *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 195.

2. *Ibid.*, II, p. 230.

3. H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, translated by W. Trask (Dallas: Spring Publications repr. 1980), p. 39.

4. *En Islam iranien*, II, p. 340.

5. *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 39.

6. *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 40: "The philosophy of *Ishrāq* is in the last analysis a philosophy of the *Xvarnah*, of the celestial lambence of the sacral light of Zoroastrianism."

7. Cf. the correspondances between Avicenna's theory of Intelligences and Suhrawardī's Zoroastrian-based angelology. (*Ibid.*, p. 120); also see the same author's notes on 'Visionary Geography,' *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), translated by N. Pearson, pp. 17-36; p. 110.

8. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, II, p. 198.

9. See Chittick, 'Mysticism Versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The Al-Tūsī, Al-Qūnawī Correspondence', *Religious Studies* 17 (1981), pp. 87-104.

the jurists, they usually sided with the philosophers in the call for direct experience and research in all matters of the spirit and the psyche. Thus, 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī praised the Koranic hermeneutics of Avicenna, and in his later compositions, such as the *Tamhidāt*, followed his eschatological doctrines.¹ 'Azīz Nasafī made frequent praiseworthy references to his treatises, while Shabistārī observes with enlightened fairness that "Vanity is still vanity, although a 'saint' (*walī*) confess it / Truth is truth, although Avicenna profess it."² In psychology, "the Sufi study of the unconscious self eventually came to presuppose the terminology of Ibn Sina."³

4. Mystical Aesthetics & Beauty

Another by-product of the Sufis' receptiveness to direct experience, their tolerance and ecumenical vision which "transcended the Gods of Belief,"⁴ was their practical patronage and support for the arts of music, painting, and poetry. In fact, without Sufism, iconoclastic tendencies in Muslim jurisprudence would have severely censored if not totally destroyed the imaginative arts.⁵

To summarize then, the 12th-13th-century revival of Sufism was chiefly due to a type of theological humanism (or even 'sacred humanism'),⁶ the origins of which are evident quite early in the Persian ecstatic Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875) and Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), being subsequently reaffirmed in Ghazzālī's legitimization and inclusion of esotericism into the curriculum of mediæval religious studies. Whether this reanimation, this 'revival of soul' of mediæval man by medium of Persian Sufism was due to Persian genius—as would Corbin, Bausani and Zarrīnkūb would have it—is secondary. More importantly, what permitted Sufism's revival—and probably its survival—were certain humanitarian values: tolerance, anti-sectarianism, the emphasis on direct experience in spiritual matters and love of beauty coupled with veneration for aesthetics. Such were the virtues which have endeared the Sufis to the hearts of Persians, both medieval and modern.

1. *Tamhidāt*, edited by Afif Osseiran (Tehran 1962), p. 289; and the editor's introduction, pp. 69-70.

2. Shabistārī, *Sa'ādāt-nāma*, in Šamad Muwaḥḥid (ed.) *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī*, vv. 713.

3. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, II, 173-74.

4. See W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Chap. 19: 'Transcending the Gods of Belief'.

5. "In orthodox Islam most of the fine arts—poetry, music, and in particular painting—were usually viewed with more or less objection or reprobation. Had they not been so cultivated by Islamic mysticism, these arts would have probably have dried up in Islamic culture sooner or later. Painting did, in fact, cease to flourish after the thirteenth century in large parts of the Sunni world. Secular poetry lost its buoyancy, and music had to give ground time and again to the attacks of the orthodox." J.C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh*, p. 7.

6. The use of the term "humanism" and sacred humanism here is inspired by V. Holbrook's exposition in this volume of the "spiritual humanism represented in Mevlevi practice and literature" as well as by G. Makdisi's recent study of *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh University Press 1991; pp. 88-115). Makdisi, who constantly translates the word *adab* as "humanism" or "humanistic studies", observes that (p. 113) "The ties between *adab* studies and religious studies being as close as they were, it was almost a contradiction in terms to speak of secularist humanism. There was never a break between humanism and religion." The term 'sacred humanism' perhaps may serve to absolve any such secularist connotations which remain in the word today.

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VOLUME II

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