

WHAT IS A SUFI ORDER? REVISITING THE CONCEPT THROUGH A CASE STUDY OF THE KHALWATIYYA IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPT

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In this chapter I present some reflections on the concept of the *tariqa* ('mystical path', pl. *turuq*) and on how a *tariqa* may be expressed socially within modern society. I take one local example, that of the Khalwatiyya order in contemporary Egypt, as my point of departure. I argue that the primary conception of the *tariqa* as an association with a hierarchical structure that exercises a degree of control over its adepts or followers, as reflected in the common translation as 'Sufi order' or 'brotherhood', is in need of revision. Such a conceptual framing has been the predominant model of the *tariqa* in studies since the 1950s, and predictions of its gradual but inevitable disappearance, made by various historians and anthropologists (Arberry, 1950; Geertz, 1968; Gilsenan, 1971; Trimmingham, 1971; Gellner, 1981), were based on the perceived incompatibility of this type of association with modern society. The emergence of an educated urban middle class that embraced ideas of progress, individualism and democracy appeared to leave little space for the old-fashioned brotherhoods, which were believed to attract only marginalized segments of society with little education, low social status or ongoing rural connections.

A growing number of empirical studies have shown that the claims of such students of modernizing Muslim communities in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the decline of the *turuq* are no longer tenable.¹ It has become increasingly evident that the *turuq* not only have persisted but actually function meaningfully in modern societies, thereby refuting the view that Sufism, if not religion in general, is incompatible with modernity. However, the authors of these more recent empirical studies have also been confronted

with the difficulty of developing more appropriate theoretical frameworks for explaining the nexus of relations between Sufism and modernity. A number of obstacles hinder the elaboration of new approaches in research. One of these has been a rigid and homogenous conceptualization of *tariqa* as a 'brotherhood'. Yet the social expression of the *tariqa* has, in the course of its passage through time and geographical space, from West and North Africa to India and Southeast Asia, been remarkably flexible. Its forms have been adapted to different social settings and cultural contexts, and no single rigid model of social organization can do justice to these forms. Although it may be true that the various *turuq* existing today share a common substrate of ideas and practices, they nonetheless present an immense diversity in forms of social organization.

Another problem is that scholars have often shown a clear preference for studying those *turuq* that have a distinct and clear organizational structure and, if possible, accessible archives (witness the studies by Gilseman, 1973 and De Jong, 1978). The less tangible, more informally structured and perhaps less accessible *turuq* have received less scholarly attention. Finally, it should be noted that many studies have privileged those aspects of the 'path' that are more immediately perceptible, notably the patterns of formal organization to which it has given rise, at the expense of the spiritual aspects of the 'path' or the more fluid social patterns associated with it.

I therefore propose to explore another approach to the study of the *tariqa*, focussing on the types of spiritual affiliation between a master and his disciples, the forms of social relations between them, and those between companions of a same 'path' that these affiliations imply.² I show that, in the case of the contemporary Egyptian Khalwatiyya, the *tariqa* is based first on the person of the spiritual master (the shaykh), and more precisely on the idea of his role as heir of the Prophet and representative (*khalifa*) of God on earth on the esoteric level, and on the interpersonal relationships that the shaykh establishes with his disciples. In accordance with the social project he may have formed, the shaykh may have recourse to various social networks and intermediaries for expanding his *tariqa*. The malleable and elastic structure of the *tariqa* allows it to adapt to very different social environments. The longevity of the Sufi path – and implicitly its relevance in modernity – owes most to the fact that the *tariqa* is an individualized and humanized way of establishing a relationship with the Divine. This approach, I believe, enables us to better understand the religious culture of the Sufis and the spiritual and social implications of their practices in modern Egyptian society. What makes the case of the Khalwatiyya especially interesting is that this order has been expanding in urban environments while maintaining profound roots in the rural districts of Upper Egypt. It has been spread by learned shaykhs, often graduates of Al-Azhar, and it attracts disciples from all social circles.

The Khalwatiyya in Egypt: One path, various branches

In spite of the Turco–Persian origins of the Khalwatiyya, Egypt is now its most important centre in the entire Muslim world. For the past two centuries the Khalwatiyya has been spreading from Cairo to the Delta and all along the Nile valley. In the 1980s the Khalwatiyya was the largest of the officially recognized paths according to the Supreme Council of Sufi Orders (the official body that monitors the activities of the *turuq* in Egypt). At that time it had 19 distinct branches or sub-orders. The second and third largest *turuq* were the Ahmadiyya and the Shadhiliyya, with 18 branches each (Luizard, 1990). Although one has to be cautious with all statistics concerning the *turuq* (if only because the Council does not take account of the *turuq* lacking official validation), this placement indicates that the Khalwatiyya is by no means a marginal phenomenon in Egypt's spiritual and religious field. The Khalwatiyya owes its position to the ties that were established with the religious elite educated at al-Azhar in the eighteenth century. Those ties were crucial to its subsequent diffusion across the whole country.

The Khalwatiyya first arrived in Egypt in the late fifteenth century but initially remained restricted to Turkish and Persian circles in Cairo (Chih, 1998). It became an Egyptian order properly speaking with the initiation into the *tariqa* of the Egyptian shaykh of al-Azhar, Muhammad b. Salim al-Hifni (d. 1767), at the hands of the Syrian-born Mustafa Kamal al-Bakri (d. 1749). Al-Hifni's biography, written during the master's lifetime by one of his closest disciples, gives a clear description of the beginnings of the Khalwatiyya in Egypt (cf. Chih, 2000b). It presents the shaykh as a man of action, engaged in the revitalization and propagation of the Sufi path on the ground. Nonetheless al-Hifni left very few writings behind, devoting himself entirely to teaching and above all to the training of numerous disciples whom he then dispatched all over the country to spread the *tariqa*.

With al-Hifni, we also witness the beginning of the close association of the Khalwatiyya and the al-Azhar elite. From his time as shaykh, affiliation with the Khalwatiyya became a major factor, if not a necessary condition, for entering the higher echelons of al-Azhar hierarchy. This quasi-corporate identity of the Khalwatiyya in its connections with al-Azhar has continued until the present day.

The degree of attention given to proselytization has varied over the years, depending on the personality of the shaykh. Al-Hifni, as said, was very active in this respect. He allowed the rapid expansion to result in the emergence and functioning of quasi-independent branches of the *tariqa*, between which he was the only intermediary.

Al-Hifni's successor, Ahmad al-Dardir (d. 1786), also devoted much energy to the propagation of the *tariqa*. He hailed from Upper Egypt, and his activities ensured that this region would become the major seedbed of the order in Egypt. Al-Dardir was one of relatively few men with a provincial background who succeeded in making a brilliant career at al-Azhar. Trained in

Maliki jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in his native town of Bani `Adi, he came to occupy important positions at al-Azhar, including that of shaykh of the *rivaq* or dormitory for students from Upper Egypt, administrator of their pious foundations (*awqaf*), and Maliki *mufti*. These functions made him the most important person at al-Azhar for any student originating from the Nile valley, and the vast network of Upper Egyptians at al-Azhar served him well in his efforts to spread the *tariqa*. Most of the branches of the Khalwatiyya in Upper Egypt today go back to the shaykh al-Dardir.

The expansion of the *tariqa* continued during the following century, and Delanoue's study of intellectual life in nineteenth century Egypt shows that persons affiliated with the Khalwatiyya dominated the religious field (Delanoue, 1982). Until recently it was widely assumed that in the late nineteenth century a turning point was reached and that the order suffered a gradual but unstoppable decline in the twentieth century as a result of, on the one hand, modernization and secularization and, on the other, the rise of Salafism and Wahhabism (cf. Trimmingham, 1971: Ch. IX).

My field research in Upper Egypt, however, has led to a different conclusion. The Khalwatiyya continued its expansion there due to the activities of three Sufis, discussed below, who played influential roles in the course of the second half of the nineteenth and into the first half of the twentieth century. They are the founders of various new branches of the Khalwatiyya that are presently very active in the region, both as spiritual movements and as welfare associations. Frederick De Jong earlier made an inventory of the various Khalwatiyya branches active further north, in Middle Egypt (De Jong, 1978). One has the impression that these various branches together form a fine grid overlying the entire Nile valley. This raises the question about what sort of relations exist between these various branches.

The three Sufis on whom my research has focused were all Khalwatis, but they represent quite different types of spiritual masters (Chih, 2000a). The first, Ahmad Sharqawi (d. 1899), who was active in Jirja in the province of Suhaj, surrounded himself with an elite group of scholars based in both Cairo and Upper Egypt. However, he did not aim through his teaching to found an institutionalized *tariqa* and the chain of transmission (*silsila*) to which he belonged became extinct with the death of his sole spiritual heir (*khalifa*). His influence continues, however, because he wrote several books on Sufism and doctrine, most of which were published and remain in print. These works give the reader some insight into the mystical path and its future as understood by a learned Sufi in the late nineteenth century. The other two Sufis, `Abd al-Jawad al-Dumi and Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Hasani, have not left writings behind (or no works of importance, at any rate), but they devoted themselves throughout their lives for the spiritual training of disciples and the propagation of the Sufi path.

Al-Dumi (d. 1943), who hailed from Tahta in the province of Suhaj, studied at al-Azhar, and after completing his studies established himself as the

imam of a mosque in Sabtiyya, a ward of Cairo with a large community of migrants from Upper Egypt. He soon found himself at the centre of a large group of Azhar students who were Upper Egyptians like himself. Being Maliki, the Upper Egyptians studied at al-Azhar under shaykhs of the Maliki school of law, and they lived together in the same *rivaq* (dormitory) at al-Azhar or around the same mosque. Like al-Hifni, al-Dumi used this regional network to spread his *tariqa*. Many of his closest disciples made their careers in mosques or as teachers, inspectors or directors of the various new Azhar-affiliated institutes that were being established in the provinces. Thanks to their mobility and their strategic location in the system of religious education, these disciples were in a position to recruit numerous further disciples both among the future ulama and among the *`amma* (the common folk) in Cairo as well as in the provinces.

Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Hasani (d. 1955) represents a third category of shaykh. According to oral tradition, al-Hasani established himself, after his studies at al-Azhar, in a village near Luxor, where he married the daughter of a man locally considered as a saint. Al-Hasani then became a peripatetic teacher of the basic precepts of Islam and of the Sufi path, moving from village to village on horseback. His reputation as a learned and holy man spread like an oil slick and a steady stream of disciples, mostly belonging to the peasantry, came to visit him. The shaykh built a special structure called the *saba* (literally, 'court') to receive all these visitors. After his death, his son, and later his grandson continued his religious and social activities: a new sacred lineage was born.

These three Sufis have a number of traits in common with other masters of the Khalwatiyya. They were educated at al-Azhar and their ideal, reflecting their educations and expressed in their writings as well as their disciplining activities, was to lead people towards God through Qur'anic instruction. They refrained from extravagant claims concerning sainthood (*walaya*), divine grace (*baraka*) and supernatural powers (*karamat*). Even though much of their teaching in fact revolved around sainthood, they preferred discussing this indirectly through references to the Qur'an and Sunna. To some extent, perhaps, this was to protect themselves against criticism from circles that were hostile to Sufism and saint worship, but it was just as much from conviction and training. The learned Khalwati shaykhs, with all their variety, distinguish themselves quite clearly by their sobriety from the shaykhs of more popular (folk-oriented) *turnuq* such as the Ahmadiyya and Burhamiyya. The latter orders, often originating from the Delta, are characterized by a conception of sainthood that openly gives rise to veneration of the master as the bearer of the *baraka* of the founding saint.

The three Khalwati shaykhs, in spite of having gone through the same process of initiation and disciplining, had quite different approaches to their roles as teachers, leading to different modes of mobilization of disciples and different patterns of interaction with society. One chose to transmit his

message to a small circle of educated followers, a *khassa* (elite), whereas the other two wished to reach out to the masses, the *`amma* – al-Dumi at the national level and al-Hasani at the local level. The teaching of these three resulted in not two but three new branches of the Khalwatiyya. Each distinguishes itself from other branches by adding the name of the founder of the branch to that of the mother *tariqa*. The teaching of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Hasani thus gave rise to the emergence of the Khalwatiyya Hasaniyya and that of Shaykh `Abd al-Jawad al-Dumi to two distinct new branches, the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya and the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya. The *silsila* of Shaykh Sharqawi, as noted above, is extinct so there is no branch named after him.

We speak of branches here, implying that they issued from the same trunk, but properly speaking these bifurcations do not constitute new paths. They share the same spiritual heritage and it is only in social appearance that they differ from, and are independent of, one another. A single *tariqa* may thus exist in a variety of social forms one beside the other, which makes it different from the monastic orders of Christian Europe. Most, if not all, *turuq* have at most times shown this tendency towards segmentation and the emergence of autonomous subdivisions. The Egyptian Khalwatiyya is, from the point of view of social organization, not a single, unitary, hierarchical organization with a pyramidal structure. It has constantly divided itself into new segments and this is precisely what has helped it to propagate and extend itself all over the country, into various geographical and social environments. The Khalwatiyya is not a network either; its branches have no connections with one another and in each of them the pivot of the path is the shaykh. Each of the branches however can be considered as a network in the sense that it consists of all individuals who interact with the shaykh and with each other.

Affiliation with the *Tariqa*

Just as the common translations of *tariqa* as 'order' or 'brotherhood' may carry unwarranted connotations, the terms 'adept' or 'member' do not adequately represent the forms of spiritual affiliation or initiatory attachment to a *tariqa*. In the Egyptian Khalwatiyya, one does not become a member or adept of a *tariqa* but one attaches oneself to a master, who transmits the teachings that he has himself received from another master, following an initiatory chain of transmission (*silsila*) that goes back to the Prophet. Each branch has its own *silsila*, and the only ritual detail that distinguishes the branches from each other is the prayer invoking the spirits of the masters of the path (*al-tawassul bi-rijal al-tariqa*) at the end of the *dhikr* session. This minor difference is quite significant, however, as the following incident illustrates. At the end of the *dhikr* session held by a group of disciples of the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya in a town in the province of Qina, a disciple from a distant town asked the person who acted as the leader in the absence of the master

whether he would be allowed to attend the weekly meetings held by the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya in his hometown. The latter refused, saying, 'Those people (i.e. the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya) belong to one *mashrab* (initiatory tradition going back to the Prophet) and we to another; they have their own *madad* (invocation of assistance, protection) or *tawassul* (prayer for intercession by the masters of the path) and we another'.

In the Khalwatiyya, there are also different degrees of attachment to a master. One can be the *murid* (disciple, pl. *muridin*) of a shaykh or simply his *muhibb* (devotee, pl. *muhibbin*). At the moment of affiliation, a *murid*, a person who commits himself to the mystical path, concludes a pact (*`ahd*) with his shaykh and submits himself to the master by an oath of allegiance (*bay`a*). The term *`ahd* can also mean 'contract', and the term *bay`a* carries the connotation of an agreement between buyer and seller, as Denis Gril has explained (Gril, 1996: 92). The *murid* thus submits himself to the shaykh and through him to the Prophet and to God. The shaykh commits himself in exchange to guiding the disciple on the path but also to protecting, supporting and helping him. As we see below, for the disciple the shaykh is a *wali* ('friend of God', saint), meaning a person protected by God, as well as a protector, a patron and a client.

For the vast majority of the *muridin*, affiliation with the *tariqa* remains restricted to their reciting its litanies and prayers (*wird*, pl. *awrad*), participating in the congregational *dhikr* sessions, and regularly visiting the shaykh. Only those who share the life of the shaykh for many years may be further initiated into the spiritual secrets of the path and may become the master's *khalifa*. The latter are very few: Shaykh Sharqawi had only one *khalifa*, Shaykh al-Dumi three; and Shaykh al-Tayyib transmitted the path to a single person, his own son. These *khalifa* had a lifelong and intimate attachment to the shaykh. The *subba* (companionship) of Shaykh Muhammad al-Tahir with his master `Abd al-Jawwad al-Dumi lasted for more than 20 years. As Shaykh Muhammad al-Tahir testified himself, this long friendship was of great influence in the formation of his own religious, spiritual and moral personality. He explained during an interview with me, 'I was constantly together with my shaykh, whether in Cairo or when travelling; I was with him during the *dhikr* sessions and in the classes and interviews that he gave. Through this *subba*, the shaykh transmitted his knowledge in Qur'anic exegesis and Sufism'. After the shaykh's death, Muhammad al-Tahir renewed the pact of allegiance (*`ahd*) with the Shaykh al-Ramli, whom he was to succeed as the shaykh of the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya.

Unlike the *muridin* (the disciples), the *muhibbin* (the devotees) are not connected to the shaykh though an initiatory link but through a link of *mahabba*, love. The *muhibbin* have not passed through an initiation to the formulas of the *wird* because, in their own words, they do not feel capable of making the personal effort that the path demands, or they are simply not ready to make the effort. (This does not mean, however, that they might not

join in reciting the *wird* during collective rituals.) The affiliation to a *tariqa* is perceived as a very serious act that implies a change in behaviour, for the pact with the shaykh is considered to be a pact concluded with God. The new disciple is expected to lead henceforth a life in accordance with all that God has commanded and to refrain from all He has forbidden. One person strongly attached to a Khalwati shaykh in Karnak near Luxor claims he refuses formal affiliation out of fear he might stray from the straight path and thereby betray the commitment made in the *'abd*. A trader in the well-known Cairo market, the Khan al-Khalili, declared himself to be a *mubibb* of Shaykh al-Tayyib, whom he met on the occasion of a *mawlid* of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, which was held in his neighbourhood. Before this encounter, he never prayed or fasted; it was the shaykh, he explained to me in interview, who had set him on the right path. He had prayed regularly and fasted during Ramadan over the subsequent three years, but he still did not feel up to taking initiation. For such disciples, the shaykh represents a model of perfection that they are incapable of ever attaining themselves. The efforts demanded from a practising *murid* are also beyond them; the constraints of modern life make it even harder to reach such a degree of proximity to God. The *mubibbin* expect, however, that their weakness will be forgiven because of their attachment to and love of the *awliya* (pl. of *wali*).

Neither *mubibbin* nor *muridin* see their attachment as being first and foremost to a *tariqa*. The terms they use to describe themselves and their relationship with the shaykh are quite significant: they do not speak of themselves as Khalwati but as the children (*abna*, *awlad*) of the shaykh, or as his companions (*ashab*). This practice is not unique for the Khalwatiyya either. At the saints' day celebrations (*mawlid*) that are at the core of popular religiosity, various *ṭuruq* erect their own tents with flags and banners, and the writing on the banner typically identifies the groups as the children or companions of such and such a shaykh, from this or that village, adding only at the end the name of the *tariqa*. When one asks Sufis what distinguishes them from those who are not Sufis, one receives answers such as 'love of the shaykh' (*mahabba li-l-shaykh*), 'attachment to the shaykh' (*mulaṣamat al-shaykh*), or 'putting oneself at the shaykh's service' (*ḥidmat al-shaykh*). This relationship is what the classical Sufi manuals call *subḥa*, 'companionship', and it is modelled on the reciprocal affective relationship between the Prophet and his companions. In referring to spiritual fatherhood, to the proximity characterizing the relationship of master and disciple, and to intercession and guidance, as well as in invoking rules of proper behaviour and respect towards the master, people are ultimately referring to the example of the Prophet.³

An influential model of Muslim society contrasts the Islam of the saints with the scripturalist Islam of the ulama (the jurists). Sufi Islam is cast as hierarchical and the Islam of the ulama as more egalitarian (Gellner, 1969, 1981). The type of authority exercised by a saint allegedly demands unquestioning allegiance and submission, which would explain why it is

supposed to be incompatible with modernity and particularly with the primacy of the individual in modern societies. Such a model ignores the reciprocal dimension present in the *bay`a* (as explained above) and the agency inherent in the choice of the pious followers. Religious authority in Islam has in fact always been fluid and fluctuating and has frequently been questioned (Gaborieau and Zeghal, 2004). In the domain of sainthood, it has usually been the *vox populi* that has prevailed (Goldziher 1880).

But what are the criteria for recognizing the authority of a shaykh, and what is the basis of his legitimacy in the eyes of the community? A study of the connections between Sufism and sainthood would exceed the limits of the present chapter, but one might state briefly that the authority of a shaykh amounts to the application of the various modalities of *walaya* and/or *nilaya*, concepts translated as ‘sainthood’. Important recent studies on the subject have noted that in the Qur’an the term *walaya* refers to proximity but also to command (Chodkiewicz, 1986; Cornell, 1998). For the Sufis, this *walaya* is the result of access to an esoteric and inspired knowledge of God: the shaykh is an *`arif bi-llah*, one who has knowledge derived from God. This knowledge confers on him a form of spiritual authority that may eventually be converted into social authority. Esoterically, the shaykh may be invested with functions similar to those of the *khalifa*, God’s representative on earth. He is an heir to the Prophet, whose behaviour he emulates. His proximity to God allows him to intercede on behalf of those who place themselves under his protection and come to their support. This is what Egyptians refer to by the term frequently uttered in the presence of a living saint or to call upon the spirit of a deceased saint: *madad*, ‘assistance, protection’. A shaykh’s disciples offer him allegiance in exchange for his *madad*. It is in recognition of this reciprocity that the social ties between the disciples and their shaykh and between companions on the path take their shape. There is, however, a wide variety of social arrangements in which this reciprocal relationship between master and disciples can be expressed. Within each branch of the *tariqa*, the forms of affiliation with the shaykh and the ties between disciples vary according to social environment and personality of the master. The following section illustrates this variety by comparing the functioning of Khalwatiyya branches in a rural and an urban setting.

The Social Setting: Shaykh al-Tayyib and his *saha*

In his village near Luxor, Shaykh Muhammad Ahmad al-Tayyib is a popular and influential personality. From his *saha* (court), he oversees various matters concerning the village and its surroundings. He belongs to the social class of local notables, but he is much more than that; he is a shaykh, like his father before him and like his grandfather, the first to spread the *tariqa* Khalwatiyya in the village. Certain anthropologists have analyzed the hereditary transmission of the *baraka* (blessing) as amounting to the routinization of charisma, as theorized by Max Weber. The authority of the

shaykh is, in this view, explained in terms of his management of symbolic capital, which he may turn into material capital, to be redistributed among his faithful followers. There is some confirmation for this view in the fact that Shaykh Muhammad M. Ahmad al-Tayyib's *saba*, which was originally constructed to respond to the needs of the *tariqa*, now responds to the needs of the entire village community. It is here that the shaykh feeds the people, arbitrates in conflicts, receives government officials, and listens to the complaints of the inhabitants.

However, as explained above, the shaykh is a *wali*, who needs to be engaged as a party to a *bay'at* in order to fulfil the role expected of him. His designation as a shaykh by a master or not is irrelevant as long as he has not also been designated as such by his community, which shows its recognition by renewing the pact of allegiance, thus transferring loyalty from the deceased master to the new shaykh. The three shaykhs of the al-Tayyib family have acquired this public recognition due to qualities that were, in the eyes of their followers, different in each case but that made them all nonetheless true holders of *walaya*. Family background, relations with the state and the support of local networks played crucial parts in the present shaykh Muhammad M. Ahmad al-Tayyib's rise to religious authority; but for his followers these are the external signs of his election by God.

Shaykh Muhammad al-Tayyib (d. 1988) received from his father, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayyib, a proper written *ijaza* (authorization), which made him both genealogically and spiritually his *kehalifa*. Everybody in the region remembers this strong personality, who was so different from his father. The latter was, in the memory of the old people of the village, a warm and genial personality, close to the people, accepting their hospitality and happily sharing their meals on his never-ending tours through the district to spread the Word. The son, shaykh Muhammad, was a very different type of Sufi. His presence would inspire awe and fear, even when he would be sitting, in the way of all spiritual masters, in the circle of his disciples. His behaviour and his physical appearance reinforced this impression. He never spent the night away from his *saba*, always returning home from his visits on the same day, and he refused the food and gifts that were offered to him.

Only one person, his daughter Kulthum, was allowed to prepare his single, sober daily meal, consisting mostly of vegetables and some meat cooked without salt or spices. He drank no tea, coffee, or any other drink, apart from a glass of aniseed tea in the evening. Towards the end of his life he reduced his intake of food to a few spoonfuls of milk. His skin became so delicate that he had to cover his hand with a shawl so that his numerous visitors could touch him. He spent long periods of retreat in a cell that was connected with the mosque of the *saba* by a small door and which he left only to perform his prayers. His physical appearance added to the fascination: he was entirely dressed in white, from his shoes to the scarf that covered his head. Following the example of the Prophet, he used perfume and he wound his turban so

that a loose tail would hang down on his neck. People say that he inspired a mixture of respect and fear (*hayba, rabba*) so that they would lower their eyes in his presence. 'When I found myself in the presence of the shaykh', one disciple remembered to me, 'I was overcome by a feeling of fear, as if I had unwittingly done something wrong'.

Anthropologists and sociologists have analyzed sainthood in terms of the ways in which the shaykh constructs his charisma through his self-representation (e.g., Gilsenan, 1973; Elboudrari, 1985; Touati, 1989). Even where succession to the position of shaykh generally follows the line of family descent, being the son or other descendant of the founding master is not sufficient either for selection by the shaykh or for the chosen descendant's acceptance by others as a legitimate successor. The successor also has to be acknowledged by the people as one who has inherited his predecessor's knowledge and spiritual stature. Austerity, self-denial and humility are recognized as external signs of sainthood; these traits may help the successor to gain recognition of his status as the new shaykh. To his faithful followers, Shaykh Muhammad al-Tayyib was a saintly person of great majesty who had devoted his life, which was marked by extreme self-denial, entirely to God. He inspired a reverential fear in his followers but at the same time a profound love. His body was, as some say, 'pure and luminous as those of the saints' for he was himself one of the Friends of God.

The present shaykh, Muhammad Muhammad Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Hasani, is Shaykh Muhammad's eldest son. One could hardly imagine a greater difference from his father, who was likewise very different from the grandfather. The grandson has a round face and does not hide his corpulence, showing that he appreciates a good meal. He dresses according to the local custom. He is a friendly and genial man who loves a good joke, especially at the expense of others, and he enjoys pulling your leg in public. He is, finally, a man of action, *'amal*, rather than a man of knowledge, *'ilm*. He has, it is true, studied at al-Azhar, but not up to a high level – unlike his brother Ahmad, who holds a doctorate in Islamic philosophy from that institution's Faculty of Theology (*usul al-din*). However, in spite of this mild and good-natured appearance he inspires fear and respect like his father, for he is a man of power who reigns in his *saba* with an iron fist.

It has to be said that the times have changed: administering the *saba* he inherited from his father has become a heavy task. There are many *saba* in Upper Egypt, both small ones that are closed and reserved for a narrow circle of disciples, and large ones that are open to all visitors. All depends on the social and economic as well as the therapeutic roles played by the shaykh concerned. The present *saba* probably resembles only in a few respects the *saba* that the grandfather had built to house his family and receive his disciples. The family has expanded but even more so has the number of disciples, which increased as the population of the village and the wider region increased and as the shaykh came to play a more important role in

society. The original structure of sun-baked clay bricks has been replaced by one of concrete and cement. Since the 1970s, the *saba* has had its own mosque, and in the 1990s it also received a minaret. Rooms have had to be added to provide lodging for visitors coming from afar, and a large kitchen was built to prepare dozens, or even hundreds, of meals served after the weekly *dhikr* sessions following the Friday prayer and at the larger celebrations of the religious holidays. The *saba* is always open; any passer-by can enter it to pray, meditate and pass the night if he wishes, or simply to take a rest, seated on a bench in the courtyard, in the shadow of the trees, in the calm and quiet atmosphere of this holy place. A servant will offer the visitor tea, and even a meal.

Besides the weekly distribution of food after the *dhikr*, more substantial food distributions take place in the *khidma* organized by the shaykh on the occasion of major religious festivals.⁴ He organizes such *khidma* at the time of the two great annual *mawlid* of Cairo, the festivals in honour of the Prophet's grandchildren sayyida Zaynab and sayyid al-Husayn, and during the *mawlid* of the al-Tayyib shaykhs in Upper Egypt. The organization of these festivities obviously requires considerable financial resources. The shaykh also provides sustenance to the needy. Whereas the state has been failing as a provider of social security and of redistribution, the shaykh has stepped in and assumed these functions. This helps to explain why the *saba* has been so successful.

It proved impossible to measure the economic flows that make the *saba* the centre of redistribution. Like every Sufi establishment, the *saba* no doubt owes much to alms and to private gifts. Whatever may have been the forms of material accumulation and enrichment of the al-Tayyib family, in the eyes of their followers the present shaykh is a rich man because he is pious; this manna is the fruit of his *baraka*, the sign of God's beneficence towards him. The shaykh's *walaya* is revealed, made visible, through these daily actions of his for the well-being of his community. Generosity is one aspect of sainthood: the shaykh gives to the faithful without keeping anything for himself. He is said to 'serve the people [for free]' (*yakhdam al-nas*), i.e. to serve them for the love of God. The *wali* is at the same time also a man of power, and this quality is also recognized in Shaykh al-Tayyib, who acts as the mediator and arbiter of conflicts in his village.

The *saba* of Shaykh al-Tayyib receives a continuous stream of visitors, some of them people from the village or its surroundings, others from nearby towns or more distant cities such as Aswan, and including not only Muslims but also Christians; not only adult men but also women and youths. Some come to request his intercession with local authorities, others to ask his advice, moral support or material assistance. Women come to seek his protection against a violent husband or father; young people seek his blessing before undertaking a voyage, investing money or contracting a marriage. But it is especially to seek his help in arbitration that people come to see the shaykh. His father and grandfather already functioned as arbiters and

mediators in the feuds that for a long time caused much bloodshed in the region. The feuds have not disappeared, but the present shaykh is especially active in resolving conflicts between spouses, brothers, cousins and neighbours – conflicts that are often about land or questions of inheritance. In arbitration he presides over a council consisting of the important personalities of the village, named the *majlis al-`arab*. His intercession is made more effective due to his connections with the local authorities.

The shaykh is also a political notable, even though he would not describe himself as such. He holds local power as a result of his political connections with the government, due to which he can intervene effectively on behalf of the community. He is a member of the ruling party, the NDP (National Democratic Party). Government officials often have recourse to him for taking care of problems in the village, and he regularly obliges them, assisted by his council of local notables. His authority and the prestige of his family increased even further when his learned brother, the said doctor Ahmad, was appointed as the *mufti* of the Republic by the Egyptian President himself and later was promoted to the position of president of al-Azhar university. For his followers, these relations of the shaykh with the holders of political power are not at all in contradiction with his status as a saint. They are perceived as recognition of his authority and as a form of allegiance of the powerful of this world to his spiritual leadership. They are seen as proof that the invisible power of the saint is superior to worldly power.

Once the followers have recognized the presence of *walaya* in the shaykh, they establish a relationship of allegiance with him that sociologically takes the form of a patron-client relationship. The shaykh protects the interests of the village and in exchange the people show him their recognition and allegiance. This is not very different from the way sainthood functioned in early Christendom. Students of the history and anthropology of Sufism may learn much from the methodological advances made by historians of sainthood in Christianity, among which especially Peter Brown's work on Late Antiquity (1982) has become a major reference. The relations of patronage that we have noted in the Egyptian case, where the shaykh takes care of the needs of the community, are inherent in the very concept of *walaya*: proximity to God implies patronage. As Michel Chodkiewicz has noted, the Sufi concept of *walaya* corresponds with the Roman term *amicitia*, which likewise, as Brown has shown, denotes simultaneously friendship, protection and power: 'The saint was the *patronus*, the protector with whom it was desirable to enter into a client relationship' (Brown, 1982: 15).

The people of the village experience their relationship with the shaykh as one of exchange and mutual benefits, which they exploit themselves. The shaykh is arbiter and intermediary at the same time: he intercedes with God, through the intermediary of the Prophet, on behalf of individuals and he intercedes with the state on behalf of the community. He represents in this sense the ideal patron as defined by Peter Brown:

He is a man who would use his power to smooth over the thorny issues of village life. He would provide – and help distribute – the all-important water supply of the village. He would arrange the cancelling of debts. He could settle disputes among the villagers on the spot, and so save them the long trek to the local town to conduct their litigations. (Brown, 1982: 117)

The *walaya* of a saint, here in Upper Egypt, has a clear territorial dimension, which reminds us of the dual meaning of the pair of homonyms *walaya* and *wilaya* – the former primarily referring to proximity to God, the latter to territory and authority. Against this background it is understandable that the ties to Shaykh al-Tayyib were complemented by ties of family, regional, or ethnic identity. The affiliations with the shaykh have a collective aspect and are often (though not always) hereditary.

This contrasts with the state of affairs in the two other branches of the Khalwatiyya discussed below. These have established themselves primarily in the urban environment, thanks to networks of institutions of religious studies and later of mosques. They are not localized *turuq* linked to a specific territory (whether a village, an urban neighbourhood or a town). From Cairo they have spread everywhere in the cities of Upper Egypt, where they have built some new kinds of social settings for their gatherings. Because the shaykh resides in Cairo, the primary social ties in these Upper Egyptian branches are those between brothers on the path rather than between master and disciple. Adherence to the *tariqa* is a matter of personal choice rather than heredity.

Another Social Setting: The *rawdā*

Shaykh `Abd al-Jawad al-Dumi preferred the spiritual transmission from master to disciple over that by inheritance. During his lifetime he issued *ijāzas* (certificates of permission to provide guidance) to three of his disciples, who became his *khalīfa* after his death. When a shaykh opts for transmitting his path to more than one disciple, he cannot logically choose a single successor among them. As a result, schisms are almost inevitable; these make up much of the vitality of a *tariqa*.

After the death of Shaykh al-Dumi, the majority of his followers elected his eldest disciple and *khalīfa*, Shaykh al-Ramli, as the new spiritual master of the *tariqa*. Shaykh Sulayman, who also had an *ijāza* from Shaykh al-Dumi defected from the *tariqa*, accompanied by another group of followers. They considered that Shaykh al-Ramli was not sufficiently learned to become their new shaykh. Shaykh Ramli was but a modest employee of the railways, whereas Shaykh Sulayman had a diploma from al-Azhar. The group around Shaykh Sulayman grew into a new branch, which took the name of Khalwatiyya Dumiyya, and the group led by Shaykh al-Ramli took the name of Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya.

These two branches are completely independent of one another at present. Even when they celebrate the *mawlid* of their common master, `Abd al-Jawad al-Dumi, they do so separately. Shaykh al-Ramli lies buried beside his master al-Dumi in the graveyard of Imam Shafi'i, south of the City of the Dead in Cairo (the Qarafa). But when Shaykh Sulayman died in 1959, his followers built a luxurious mausoleum for him in the graveyard of al-Basatin, further north. In spite of this evident break, however, both shaykhs and their *kehalifa* in turn have followed Shaykh al-Dumi's ways of organizing their *tariqa* and functioning in society.

The various activities of these two branches take place in a number of different settings: in private apartments, often in mosques, and especially in the *rawdā*, an institution specific to these branches. The *rawdā* (literally 'garden') is in fact a rather large building, usually consisting of a simple hall for gatherings but in some cases a building of several floors with a social and cultural centre attached. The first *rawdā* was established by Shaykh al-Dumi as a meeting and gathering place for his disciples in Cairo but especially for those who came to visit him from Upper Egypt. Then the members of the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya, whose shaykh resides in Cairo, built a *rawdā* in the capital (the one of al-Basatin) and established other *rawdā* in most big cities of Upper Egypt. As for the *rawdā* of the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya, they are all located in Upper Egypt where its successive shaykhs have lived. A biography of shaykh al-Dumi records a disciple's memories of the founding of the *rawdā*:

The shaykh held *dhikr* sessions on all Sunday and Thursday evenings, following the class and the evening prayer (*'isha*). Some people came from very far away to take part in the *dhikr*, and when they had no relatives in Cairo, they were lodged in the *rawdā* that their shaykh put at their disposal. (Tahir and Mahmud, 1961: 179)

Unlike the *saba* in the Upper Egyptian context, the *rawdā* is not open to the general public; it is reserved for the disciples. It is here that disciples who are passing through can spend the night, as does the master himself during his visits. Only rarely will a disciple stay in a *rawdā* permanently, although such cases do occur. One such long-time resident whom I encountered was Ibrahim, a student at al-Azhar. Ibrahim came from a village in the district of al-Maragha and he was initiated into the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya by Husayn Mu'awad, the present shaykh of the *tariqa*. Upon arrival in Cairo, he first found a place to stay in the *rawdā* of al-Basatin, in the Qarafa, and later moved on to that of Giza. He stayed in both places free of charge.

In the course of the 1970s, the number of such *rawdās* in Cairo and the cities of the Nile valley increased rapidly, due to the propagation of a network of associations for carrying out the religious and social activities of both branches of the *tariqa*. These associations collected voluntary contributions

(*tabarru`at*) for the construction of social and educational centres run by the *tariqa*. These complexes usually comprised a mosque and sometimes a Qur'an school, but also a clinic and sometimes even a hospital. The *rawdās* are often attached to these complexes.

The *rawdā* is an essentially urban institution. The size and splendour of the *rawdā* depend of course on the importance of the *tariqa* in the town. Most *rawdā* are of modest size. The *rawdā* in the town of Suhaj may serve as an example of an average one. It consists basically of a single large room, with lots of carpets and cushions on the floor and portraits of the shaykhs of the *tariqa* as the only ornaments on the wall. On one side, there is a bedroom, a tiny kitchen and a bathroom. One of the largest *rawdā* is that in the town of Jirja – a five-story building on the Corniche, built in the 1980s. On each floor there are rooms with two or three beds, intended for disciples who are passing through. A better-appointed bedroom, with attached bathroom and toilet, is reserved for the shaykh's use during his stays in the town. This *rawdā* also has a prayer hall and a modest library. The construction of such a *rawdā* may take many years and demand considerable funds. Rooms and facilities may be added when funds become available. Another exceptional *rawdā*, with a more specialized function, is the one that was established in the garden around the mausoleum of Shaykh Sulayman to provide lodgings to disciples and followers who come from afar to visit the shaykh's grave or to take part in his *mawlid*, which is celebrated every year on the first Friday of the month Muharram. For the rest of the year, the *rawdā* serves as a holiday retreat for the shaykh and his family; it is located at a quiet and airy site in the foothills of the Muqattam cliffs. This *rawdā* has several floors. On the ground floor are the kitchens and on the first floor are two salons, the smaller of which is reserved for women and also holds the shaykh's personal library. The upper floors have rooms for guests, and on top there is a terrace.

The *rawdā* was from the beginning conceived as the place for the brothers of the path to experience companionship among themselves, companionship (*subba*) being one of the pillars of the path according to all classical Sufi manuals. This is where they meet after the collective *dhikr* session. Seated in a circle and sipping tea, sometimes served with sweets, they discuss or follow lessons. These *rawdā* are run by the oldest and closest disciples of the master, all of them Azharis and usually retired men, who have both enough free time and sufficient religious knowledge to organize the *majlis* (the *dhikr* session), to lead the prayer, and sometimes to initiate new disciples. It is these meetings in the *rawdā* that keep the ties between brothers on the path intact. Associating in the *rawdā* also contributes an internal cohesion to the group that compensates for the absence of the shaykh most of the time. The emphasis in the *rawdā* is on companionship and brotherhood. In this context, *subba* refers not only to the attachment to the shaykh but also to the sense of unity among companions at the *rawdā* as brothers on the path (cf. Gril, 1986: 43). The disciples feel united by their common loyalty and love for the shaykh and by

extension for the Prophet and all saints This common sentiment exemplifies the convivial and fraternal nature of Sufism.

The *rawda* have other important social functions: they provide a meeting point for non-resident urban followers and help to integrate new urban migrants into the urban environment. The recent massive migration from the countryside to the cities and the emergence of proletarian urban classes have influenced the ways in which the *turuq* are integrated into society. The *turuq* traditionally depended strongly on kinship, tribal relations, and local and regional ties for recruitment and cohesion. All of these traditional forms of social organization have been profoundly affected by the rural exodus, although they have not entirely disappeared. The Khalwatiyya Dumiyya and the Khalwatiyya Dumiyya Ramliyya reproduce in Cairo and the cities of the Nile valley local and regional solidarities that are still very strong. The *rawda* make it possible to maintain ties of solidarity among the disciples who are rural migrants to the urban environment. In Cairo, new migrants, who are often quite young, find a new family with their shaykh and with their brothers on the Path.

Conclusions

The debates on Sufism and modern society in Egypt have been and remain dominated by Michael Gilsenan's study of an urban branch of the Shadhiliyya and Fred de Jong's study on the institutionalization of the *turuq* by the state. Gilsenan attributed the survival of the *turuq* in modern urban society to a Weberian rationalization of its forms of organization and its practices. De Jong attributed the changing organization of the *turuq* in Egypt primarily to the role of the state.⁵ Official support and a certain degree of modern organization no doubt played a part in the development and the religious and social integration of the *turuq* into modern Egyptian society, but these have not been decisive or dominant factors. It is true that the connections between the holders of political power and the Sufi shaykhs have a long history and are well established in Egypt. At least since Ottoman times, the state has made efforts to intervene in the functioning of the *turuq*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the government established a Sufi council, which had the task of overseeing and administering the social world of mysticism (De Jong, 1978). In the 1980s, some 70 *turuq* were registered by this council, but at least as many if not more had to do without its stamp of recognition.

The branches of the Khalwatiyya examined in this chapter have always refused official registration. Their shaykhs are not public personalities like the shaykhs studied by previous researchers.⁶ They do not take part in the conferences and public discussions of religious questions that are organized by the state, nor are they present at the official openings of religious ceremonies, and they do not have seats on the Sufi council. Like many Azharis, they have experienced as traumatic events both the reforms of al-Azhar carried out under Nasser in the 1960s, and the transformation of its

ulama into civil servants. Many men of religion (and this includes many Sufis) feel in their hearts a strong wish to free themselves from control by the state (cf. Zeghal, 1996).

The shaykhs of the Khalwatiyya did not need the state to have their authority recognized; it exists outside the state. Their authority has to do with exoteric knowledge, acquired at al-Azhar, and with a spiritual transmission that makes them guides in this world and in the hereafter. It is true that from the moment a *tariqa* takes form as a social body it cannot completely escape interference by the state. However, it is not as easy for the state to reform the *turuq* as it was to reform al-Azhar; neither their ideology nor their social or institutional form is susceptible to such intervention. The common approach therefore has been to establish patron–client networks with the shaykhs. Sufi shaykhs have themselves also engaged in a reciprocal strategy of seeking patronage from bureaucrats and politicians. The social microcosm studied here illustrates a situation that is prevalent in the entire country: the state exerts administrative power, but moral authority is exercised by informal leaders who are accepted by the government but not directly controlled by it.

It is not possible to fully separate analysis of the *tariqa* as a spiritual path and as a pattern of social relationships. The *turuq* represent only one aspect and only one vector of a religious culture that has been forged in Islam in the course of the centuries. This culture revolves around sainthood. The saints follow models that have been transmitted to them in the course of their initiation and education, and all emphasize some particular attribute or quality of the Prophet.⁷ Each shaykh or saint represents a spiritual profile. The profile of the Khalwati shaykh is that of a Sufi attached to the principles of the Sunna, who is engaged in a form of social activism adapted to his environment. For his disciples he is himself a model to emulate, and if the shaykh's example is too difficult to imitate, the disciple may at least seek daily contact and proximity to him. Communication with the shaykh, the love felt for him, and the services willingly rendered to him are also forms of spiritual realization. This personal relation transforms the disciple, and the transformation affects his relations with his companions on the path, with his family, and with his entire universe.

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