The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325

Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture
The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325
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The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325

Nathan Hofer
For Leah

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The Popularity of Sufism

In the mid-seventh/thirteenth century, the Andalusian historian, geographer and literary anthologist Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (d. 685/1286) spent several years in Egypt. In his description of Cairo Ibn Saʿīd observes that he found the city ‘particularly welcoming for the poor’ (al-faqīr), a term that clearly includes Sufis:

The wandering faqīr feels at ease [in Cairo] because of the large quantity of cheap bread, the prevalence of audition sessions, and pleasures both inside and outside the city. There is little objection to what he does and he is in charge of his own self, whether he wants to dance in the middle of the marketplace, wander alone, get high on hashish, or even to take up with beardless youths and other things like that, all of which differs from the lands of the Maghrib.

These phenomena, especially dancing, wandering, audition sessions (samāʿāt), eating hashish and gazing at beardless youths (murdān), were all typically associated with Sufis in Mamluk Egypt and were viewed with derision and disdain among certain sectors of society. While one suspects that Ibn Saʿīd exaggerates in order to compare Cairo negatively to his native Maghrib (he also claims that wine, musical instruments and naked women are ubiquitous in the city), his description is nevertheless illustrative of the increasing prominence and visibility of Sufis in early Mamluk Cairo. Arabic sources from this period attest to the growing popularity of Sufism across the socio-economic
spectrum in Egypt and to the increasingly visible roles Sufi played in a variety of social and political contexts.

Ayyubid and Mamluk amirs and their households competed with each other to patronise, subsidise and curry favour with Sufis. The sultans themselves consulted with prominent Sufi masters on a regular basis. Baybars al-Jashnakir (r. 708–9/1309–10) and al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 693–4, 698–708, 709–41/1293–4, 1299–1309, 1310–41) seem to have had a personal rivalry to outdo each other in founding and funding well-apportioned hospices for Sufis. The people of Cairo and Fustat used to come to the central bāyn al-qāsrayn district in Cairo every week to watch Sufis parade for Friday prayers. Large crowds gathered at mosques, madrasas, khānqāhs and ribāts from Alexandria to Aswan to hear the Sufis preach and collect a bit of baraka, or blessedness, from the most powerful masters. Visitors to the grave of the Upper-Egyptian Sufi ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī (d. 592/1195) claimed that any request uttered in the tomb’s vicinity would come true. Scores of people used to gather on the banks of the Nile to watch the ‘possessed’ Sufi Mufarrīj al-Damāmīnī (d. 648/1250) sail past. Alexandria was practically teeming with Sufi masters from all over the Muslim world, both East and West. Even members of the Jewish community of Fustat began practising their own form of Sufism. These and many other examples have led a number of historians to take note of the widespread popularity of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt, typically describing it as the ‘popular culture’ of its time.

But how did Sufism become so popular? While there certainly were Sufis in Egypt before this time, except for Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859) and a few others, the extant sources name only a handful before the sixth/twelfth century. But towards the end of Fatimid rule (358–567/969–1171) and increasingly thereafter, Sufis begin to appear in the sources more and more frequently. By the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century they are ubiquitous in the historical record. How did the ideas and practices of Sufism become so widespread, so influential and so popular in such a short time? Where did all these Sufis come from? And why at this particular time? Perhaps more fundamentally, what does it actually mean to say that Sufism was ‘popular’? Was it popular because it was a non-elite phenomenon? Or was it popular because everyone was doing it?

This book attempts to answer these questions by examining several Sufi
collectivities active in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt. In the following pages I present a detailed description of these groups, where they came from, how and why they came together, and the roles they played in spreading and popularising Sufism in Egypt. But my ultimate aim here is not to describe. Rather, these descriptions are in service to larger theoretical concerns, foremost among these being the question of popularisation. In this ‘post-classical’ period of Sufism, Sufis of various stripes could be found at every socio-economic level and in all the cities and villages of Egypt. In order to understand the processes whereby multiple groups in diverse settings adopted and adapted particular understandings of and orientations to the traditions of Sufism we must focus on the specific and variegated social and cultural contexts in which these processes occurred. Therefore, it is the basic assumption of this study that Sufism, to appropriate Durkheim’s dictum on religion, ‘is an eminently social thing’. As such, it is from within the analytical framework of the social that we might begin to formulate an understanding of Sufism’s popularity in medieval Egypt and the mechanisms by which this popularisation occurred. But given the persistent notion that Sufism is a form of mysticism, and thus inherently personal, my insistence on the social may strike some readers as a strange or even misguided approach to the subject. However, if we want to understand how and why Sufism became so popular, some widespread and common-sense approaches to the study of Sufism will have to be overturned. First and foremost are the related assumptions that Sufism is a (or the) fundamentally personal, spiritual and mystical form of Islam, and that as such it offered the most viable and attractive alternative to the essentially impersonal, mundane and legal Islam of the jurists (al-fuqahā’). There are a number of reasons that scholars have portrayed Sufism in these terms, but for the purpose of describing and explaining its growth and popularisation these terms are simply inadequate at best and misleading at worst.

It is difficult if not impossible to describe Sufism as mysticism except in the most simplified and essentialised way. The category of mysticism, like all categories, serves to sort and classify disparate phenomena according to particular epistemic regimes. In the case of mysticism, that sorting took place within and through gendered discourses of subjugation and colonial systems of power. These discourses and systems were then brought to bear on a variety
of Islamic data. Early in their discursive construction of Islam as an object of inquiry, Europeans described and classified Sufism as the ‘Islamic mysticism’ \textit{par excellence}. However, this was a mysticism stripped of any overtly Islamic trappings and therefore ‘borrowed’ from non-Arab/Muslim sources.\textsuperscript{7} Having been rendered ‘mystical’, Sufism became of central interest to comparativist historians of religion.\textsuperscript{8} But the congruence of ‘mysticism’ and ‘Sufism’ in these constructions is only that: mental constructions for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison, and not a great comparison at that, as Omid Safi and others have shown.\textsuperscript{9} ‘Mysticism’ is too often used as an analytical placeholder, deployed as a kind of shorthand in lieu of more detailed description and analysis. But unless one uses ‘mysticism’ for specific forms of subversive comparison, it will necessarily obscure more than it discloses at the granular level of analysis. While many historians of Sufism have come to recognise these problems, ‘mystocentrism’ is still widespread in Islamic studies more broadly. Many scholars still use ‘mysticism’ and its cognate adjectives uncritically to subsume a number of disparate movements under a totalising descriptive umbrella.\textsuperscript{10} For example, to describe both the Karrāmīya and the Śālimīya – two separate devotional movements that preceded the appearance of Sufism – as ‘mysticism’ tells us nothing in particular about either one and makes it much more difficult to disentangle the pre-history of Sufism. For these reasons I do not use the terms ‘mysticism’, ‘mystical’ or ‘mystic’ in this book.

In a similar vein, the modern terms ‘Sufism’ and ‘Sufi’ are discursive constructions with their own equally fraught history and a sometimes tenuous relationship to medieval Arabic \textit{taşawwuf}, \textit{mutaşawwif} or \textit{ṣūfī}. However, in this case, these are categories that bear some resemblance to local medieval usage. Individuals did call themselves \textit{ṣūfī} or \textit{mutaşawwif} and groups did argue about the meaning of \textit{taşawwuf}. Thus, rather than abandon a by-now standard convention, I will use ‘Sufi’ and ‘Sufism’ in these pages as an organising heuristic, in much the same way that Shahzad Bashir describes Sufism in his study of Sufi bodies as an ‘analytical horizon that allows me to explore a set of issues in intellectual and social history’.\textsuperscript{11} That is to say that my investigation of the popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egypt is an analytical question that takes for its object the history of those who have claimed, contested, embraced or rejected the traditions associated with \textit{taşawwuf} (Sufism) and the label \textit{ṣūfī} (Sufi).
Nevertheless, even if one were to grant that we can use mysticism profitably as a heuristic shorthand for an array of human phenomena of which Sufism is one example, there is good analytical precedent to treat those phenomena themselves as socially constructed. It has been more than thirty-five years since the publication of Steven Katz’s influential *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. In that collection Katz and his co-contributors argued that ‘there are no pure (unmediated) experiences’ that are then interpreted *post facto* in a culturally specific vein. Rather, all experience is at its core the product of specific social and cultural contexts and therefore not isolable from larger socio-cultural expectations. Likewise, it has been thirty years since the appearance of Wayne Proudfoot’s *Religious Experience*, in which he asks, among other thought-provoking questions, not what the content of an experience might be, but why and how certain experiences are labelled as ‘religious’ or ‘mystical’ in the first place, a perspective taken up more recently by Ann Taves. I adopt a similar approach here. I interrogate the specific social and political contexts in which Sufis and others articulated their specific claims of authority by means of the discursive and practical traditions of Sufism.

Furthermore, the idea that Sufism is at its core the individualised pursuit of a personal mystical experience ignores the highly social character of the medieval evidence. If anything, it is quite clear from medieval Muslim writers themselves – Sufis and non-Sufis alike – that Sufism was a collective pursuit, undertaken in its most basic and irreducible configuration by an individual under the guidance of another. The master-disciple relationship that stands at the conceptual and practical core of Sufism is a social association by definition, albeit one that might take many forms. My insistence on the fundamentally social character of Sufism is thus ultimately rooted in and derived from the Sufi texts themselves. All of this is not to say that the only or best way to approach the study of medieval Sufism is through the social. Nor do I wish to deny or downplay the role of experience in the history of Sufism. I simply contend that these experiences were shaped by social and cultural processes as much as the clothes Sufis wore or the languages they spoke. Ultimately, the ways in which Sufis transmitted, produced and popularised Sufism in medieval Egypt were all socially negotiated and constructed. Thus, for the theoretical task I have set here – describing and explaining this popularisation – the objects of inquiry are these social and cultural processes.
and not the unassailable inner worlds of individual experience. The question is a historical and social one; it demands a commensurate approach.

To this end, there are two ways I conceptualise the question of popularisation and from which I formulate an answer. The first is to revisit the notion of ‘popular culture’ in a medieval Islamicate context. While many scholars tend to use ‘popular’ as shorthand for ‘non-elite’ forms of culture, following the innovative work of Emil Homerin, Alexander Knysh, Ahmet Karamustafa and others, I widen the lens of the popular to include forms of culture that were widespread across society. That is, in order for something to be considered ‘popular’ it ought to be found among all levels of society. Sufism was popular not because the non-elite populace embraced it, but because it was produced and consumed at all levels of society, elite and non-elite alike. Second, this shift in focus to the production and consumption of a popular culture in medieval Egypt will necessitate a move away from the conception of a monolithic Sufism that served as a panacea to cure the spiritual ills of the populace. I argue instead that Sufis (not Sufism) were the agents of popularisation. It was the Sufis, through individual and collective outreach, who promulgated and popularised different forms of Sufism among the people. I will therefore draw on the sociology of institutions and organisations to make sense of the ways that individuals form collectivities and the structures and cultural systems that both constrain and sanction those collectivities’ actions. A byproduct of this kind of analysis is that the protean and diverse nature of Sufi collectivities will become much clearer. Sufis were not all the same and they did not always get along with each other. The epithet ‘Sufi’ did not, in and of itself, particularly mean anything outside the specific social, cultural and political context in which the epithet was claimed or applied.

In sum, the central argument of this book is that the institutionalisation of Sufi thought and praxis during the formative period (i.e. the late third/ninth century and the fourth/tenth century) precipitated and facilitated the mass production of cultures of Sufism in multiple geographic locations and in varied socio-political contexts, resulting in increasingly organised forms of Sufism at all levels of society. It was not, as many have argued, that the Muslim populace turned to Sufism out of some vague spiritual longing, crisis of identity or lack of legitimate authority. Rather, it was the Sufis, drawing on an array of institutionalised doctrines and practices, who performed, pro-
duced and popularised increasingly diversified Sufi cultures across the Muslim landscape. Thus, I am particularly interested in the agency of Sufi actors, and this study contributes to recent work in the field that has shifted the focus of Sufi studies away from doctrinal-textual studies towards an emphasis on the social agency of Sufis in their own right. Richard Eaton’s work on south Asia, Vincent Cornell on the Maghrib, Daphna Ephrat on Palestine, Ethel Wolper on Anatolia, Erik Ohlander on the Suhrawardīya, Dina Le Gall on the Naqshbandiya, John Curry on the Halvetiyya and others have all pioneered an agentive approach to Sufism. This focus on agency and social change will first require me to develop an analytical framework concerning the production and popularisation of multiple Sufi cultures. This framework will then be brought to bear on the historical material in the remainder of the book, wherein I examine several case studies involving the popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egypt.

The Problem of Sufism as Popular Culture

A number of historians of medieval Islam have described the growth of Sufism in the late medieval period as a popular response to what many have called the ‘dry legalism’ of Muslim jurists. They imagine Sufism as a kind of spiritual (i.e. mystical) salve that soothed the harsh legalism of juridical (sometimes ‘orthodox’) Islam. In this narrative, if there was any rapprochement between ‘the Sufis’ and ‘the jurists’ it occurred only after the synthesis of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who purportedly ‘evolved a new form of orthodoxy, in which the cold, flat dogmas of the theologians drew warmth and contour from the intuitive and mystical faith of the Śūfīs’. These narratives of popularisation generally follow a similar trajectory: in the aftermath of the social and political disruptions of the Crusader and Mongol invasions of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE, Sufism met the spiritual needs of the distraught and unlettered masses dissatisfied with normative Islam. This account of Sufism relies on three unspoken assumptions: that the Sufis were socially and culturally distinct from the jurists; that the social formation of jurists preceded that of the Sufis; and that non-Sufi Islam is inadequate to the religious needs of the populace. These assumptions are extraordinarily problematic, not least because they ignore the overwhelming evidence that jurists and Sufis were often the same people. Furthermore, Richard Bulliet
has argued that in the case of medieval Iran the growth of ascetic, pietist and Sufi movements, actually preceding the development of a class of jurists. And Megan Reid has shown that there have been many forms of Islamic piety, including ones associated with jurists, that were not associated with Sufism at all.

Besides promoting clearly Protestant notions of spirituality, analyses like these elide a more serious conceptual problem that obscures a critical slippage between two different modern discursive constructions of Sufism. On one hand, ‘Sufism’ might refer to the classical Sufi manuals of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries in which elite authors consciously constructed a vision of Sufism that drew from and participated in the growing ‘Sunni consensus’. In particular, ḥudūlī-minded Sufi authors such as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) and al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) attempted to link the efforts of the earliest Sufis to the generations immediately following Muḥammad and especially to Muḥammad himself. This was part of a larger process that Vincent Cornell calls the ḥudūlisation of Islamic knowledge, in which ‘innovative’ discourses and practices were cast in terms of the sunna of the prophet, thereby ensuring their ‘traditional’ quality. The Sufis’ embrace of this methodology was no different from those writing in other elite scholastic genres, including fiqh (jurisprudence), kalām (theology) and tārīkh (historiography); they authorised new traditions by linking their endeavours to the prophet and his companions in precisely these same ways. In this sense, the emergence and development of a discourse around the practice of Sufism is inextricably linked with the continual (re)formulation of the Sunni consensus itself. On the other hand, ‘Sufism’ might refer to certain Sufi practices that drew the ire and suspicion of some jurists and Sufi masters. Such practices might include the performance of samāʿ (audition), the veneration of Sufi saints and the visitation of saints’ tombs. In this construction, historians often artificially isolate the popular ‘Sufism’ of the masses from the ‘Sufism’ of the elites who wrote sophisticated theoretical treatments. Accounts of the growth and spread of Sufism then index popularisation in terms of the praxis of a popular Sufism while ignoring the elite provenance of much of the discursive tradition. The slippage between these two Sufisms relies on the notion of a medieval popular culture isolable from elite cultures and the central role that historians assign Sufism in that popular culture.
The most detailed treatment of popular culture in medieval Islam is Boaz Shoshan’s work on Cairo.29 Inspired by Peter Burke’s treatment of the subject in early modern Europe, Shoshan seeks to recover and describe the culture of ‘those socially inferior to the bourgeoisie; hence, supposedly also illiterate, at least by and large’.30 It is ‘the culture of ordinary people’, and Shoshan does amass an impressive array of ‘ordinary’ activities among the medieval Cairene population.31 He goes on to argue that much of this ordinary culture was Sufi in nature: ‘whatever was the religious world of medieval Cairenes, Sufism filled a significant part of it’.32 Here, as in much of the scholarship on popular culture, Sufism has become the culture of the non-elite, the culture that modulates the ‘the dry legalism of the ʿulamāʾ’.33 Nonetheless, Shoshan is careful to note that Sufism was not simply the purview of the masses but that there were elites who adopted certain aspects of popular Sufism as well. In order to explain this, he describes Islamic society in terms of ‘cultural blocks’ in which cultural forms move up and down a cultural ‘escalator’ (a metaphor borrowed from Stuart Hall).34 Shoshan argues that ‘popular forms . . . went up the cultural escalator, and found themselves on the opposite side. The result was a cultural “dialectic of change”; though the distinction popular/elite remained, the inventories of each of these two sub-cultures did alter in the process.’35 For Shoshan and many others, then, the popular culture of the masses and the high culture of the elites are separate fields, although certain cultural forms may move up and down (for Burke they are ‘sinking’ and ‘rising’) between the two groups.36 The popular culture of Sufism rises up to the elites who then modify aspects of it for dissemination in attenuated form to the masses, and so on.

The conceptual heart of such analyses is a two-tiered model of culture: elite and popular. Because Sufism is already understood to be the product of local, personalised, charismatic and especially non-juridical forms of Islam, it becomes synonymous with uncritical notions of ‘popular culture’. Such culture then stands in clear contrast to the ‘elite culture’ of the jurists, the universal consensus of the educated ʿulamāʾ, which is typically, but not always, synonymous with a purported ‘orthodoxy’. Ultimately, then, a series of fascinating correspondences emerges in the scholarship. Non-elite religiosity, often but not always expressed through Sufism, is taken as emblematic of ‘popular culture’ in medieval Islamic society. Elite religiosity, by contrast, is
primarily the expression of the jurists and represents ‘high culture’ in medieval Islamic society. In this equation, an *a priori* distinction about what constitutes ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’ forms of culture mediates the conceptual conglomeries of local/innovative/emotional/mystical Sufism (i.e. popular culture) versus trans-local/traditional/dry/orthodox/normative Islam (i.e. elite culture). This hierarchical division (the inherent valence of the hierarchy is itself another issue worth pursuing) is clearly at play in the most common explanation for Sufism’s popularity: the masses found in Sufism a spiritual antidote to the ‘dry legalism’ of the intellectual elites who represent orthodox Islam.

This account of popular culture and Sufism should give us pause because of the suspiciously consistent binaries that cut across all kinds of categories: high culture versus low culture; elites versus masses; jurists versus Sufis; great tradition versus little tradition; spirituality versus legalism; orthodoxy versus Sufism. Catherine Bell’s critique of ritual studies is instructive here. She argues that in most studies of ritual, scholars make an *a priori* theoretical distinction between action (the performance of ritual) and thought (the meaning of ritual). This distinction is then homologised to and reproduced at subsequent levels of analysis, in which ritual is theorised as a mechanism for the integration of action and thought. In other words, the *a priori* assumption that ritual comprises two components – action and thought – provides the logic for the subsequent analytical apparatus of ritual studies at multiple levels of abstraction. The scholars’ original conceptual distinction becomes the very key with which they are then uniquely qualified to unlock the ritual code. This is congruous to treatments of Sufism in which the original distinction between elite jurists and non-elite Sufis reproduces itself at multiple levels of abstraction and analysis. The *a priori* distinction between elite Islam and popular Sufism then allows the historian to describe and explain the existence of the distinction! The task then becomes to explain how Sufism moves from one cultural sphere (that of the masses) to another (that of the jurists), without demolishing the original distinction. We might respond to these constructions in several ways.

First, the evidence that Sufis and jurists were doing different things with respect to a normative *sunna* is not at all convincing. For every Ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) who launched a legal attack against an ‘innovative’ practice associated with the Sufis, there was a jurist like Taqī l-Dīn al-Subḵī (d. 756...
who embraced and traditionalised it. The social construction of ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ in medieval Islamic society was multivocal and fluid, and Sufis participated in this construction along with many others. Vincent Cornell, Emil Homerin and Richard McGregor have all argued against the artificial separation of Sufism from an imagined orthodoxy given that Sufis were often the very elites accusing others of bidʿa (innovative practice). Conversely, the arch-critic of bidʿa in medieval Egypt, the jurist Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 737/1336), vehemently condemned the ʿulamāʾ of his own day for precisely the kinds of things historians now describe as ‘popular culture’. Second, as I noted above, the two-tiered model of culture for medieval Islam has simply become untenable. While Boaz Shoshan and Jonathan Berkey in particular have made sophisticated attempts to rescue and deploy the model in innovative ways, it nevertheless relies on an unworkable theoretical foundation, already dismantled by Peter Brown. Brown has shown that the basic weakness of the ‘two-tiered’ model is that it is rarely, if ever, concerned to explain religious change other than among the elite. The religion of ‘the vulgar’ is assumed to be uniform. It is timeless and faceless. It can cause changes by imposing its modes of thought on the elite; but in itself it does not change. This is precisely how some historians of Islam have depicted medieval popular culture. Furthermore, the two tiers of culture, even when connected by an escalator, pre-emptively prevent us from imagining a truly popular culture in which all strata of society participate together to negotiate its multiple meanings. This is not to say there were no such things as elite and non-elite social spaces in medieval Islamic societies. While we can certainly differentiate the world of a blacksmith in Fustat from that of a chancery scribe in the royal diwān in Cairo, why label one the preserve of the popular and not the other? Both participated in the life of the city and together contributed to the construction of tradition and the popularity of Sufism.

The underlying problem with many treatments of medieval popular culture in general is that historians have paid too little attention to the historical and conceptual baggage that the concept carries. In the late eighteenth century European elites ‘discovered’ the culture of the peasantry in their folksongs, poetry and folktales. These discoveries served to shore up emergent
nationalisms and other political projects by recovering the authentic core of the people in their rediscovered culture.\textsuperscript{48} Thus we see in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Johann Gottfried von Herder (d. 1803) using the term \textit{Kultur des Volkes} in contradistinction to the \textit{Kultur der Gelehrten}, and François-René de Chateaubriand (d. 1848) using the term \textit{dévotions populaires} to describe the religious practices of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{49} Since Burke’s study, most scholars of medieval popular culture have taken this distinction between \textit{Kultur des Volkes} and \textit{Kultur der Gelehrten} for granted. However, John Storey has recently argued that Europeans did not discover popular culture so much as invent it for their own nationalist and romanticist projects.\textsuperscript{50} Not surprisingly, subsequent articulations of popular culture continued to rely on and rework these inventions for other ideological ends. The most influential of these inventions – the \textit{Volk} of Herder and the brothers Grimm, the mass culture of Matthew Arnold, the despised kitsch of the Modernists, and the culture industry of the Frankfurt school – have all been fundamentally predicated on the two-tiered model of culture.\textsuperscript{51} I would argue that by continuing to posit and describe the existence of distinct popular and elite cultures, medieval studies have been fraught with the conceptual problematic of using categories that are inexorably linked to the capitalist bourgeois economy of the modern industrialised West and its concomitant nationalist projects. These historical and conceptual roots have been shorn away in medieval studies by theorising popular cultures simply as ‘the cultures of non-elites’.

But given that the invention of popular culture is itself ineluctably bound up with economies of production, and thus not a local category anyway, I think it worth asking: what might a production–consumption model of popular culture look like in a medieval context? Rather than describing a popular culture as simply the antithesis of an elite culture, I suggest we imagine medieval popular culture as that which entails the mass production and consumption of cultural goods, regardless of who is doing the consuming. Thus, I follow scholars like Mikita Brottman and David Chidester, both of whom define popularity quantitatively, ‘as dependent on not \textit{who} is doing the consuming, but on \textit{how many} are doing the consuming’\textsuperscript{52}. In other words, ‘popular culture is popular because it is mass produced, widely distributed, and regularly consumed by a large number of people’.\textsuperscript{53} In our case, the popular cultures of Sufism – or what I would call the popularisation of
Sufism – involved large numbers of people across the socio-economic spectrum engaged in the collective and systematic manipulation of the discursive and practical traditions of Sufism. This formulation opens up a conceptual space to theorise and describe a truly popular culture that integrates rather than fragments the populace. It gets us away from thinking about the ‘movement’ of Sufism between social spheres and closer to describing Sufism in a more holistic way in which multiple social strata participated collectively to produce and reproduce cultures of Sufism.

I therefore suggest the following framework. First, the popularisation of Sufism is fundamentally linked to the social and cultural production of Sufism on a wide scale. By production, I mean the discursive and practical effects of people who call themselves Sufis doing ‘Sufi’ things: dressing in certain ways, dancing, chanting, writing treatises, teaching disciples, parading in the streets and so on. By popularisation, I mean the reception and consumption of those products by large numbers of people, regardless of social status. Second, the production of Sufism necessarily precedes popularisation. Third, and most importantly, the production of Sufism involves the interplay of multiple strata of society and thus cannot be represented as either an elite or a non-elite phenomenon. Despite socio-economic divisions that might obtain in other ways, Sufism was a cultural sphere in which these divisions often came together, even in conflict. Within this framework I find useful John Storey’s argument that any analysis of popular culture must take seriously both the structures of production and the agency of consumption, or what many have called ‘production in use’.

This raises another vexing question. The social formations and cultures of Sufism I examine here did not exist in Egypt before the Ayyubid period. How, then, do we account for the innovative and widespread production of new Sufi cultures within the context of pre-existing modes of cultural production? In other words, given the structures of medieval Egyptian society, structures that tended to be conservative, how do we explain the social and cultural shifts necessary for the widespread production and consumption of different forms of Sufism?
The Problem of Structure, Agency and Change

This issue of the relationship of pre-existing social structures to Sufi agents who institute new or modified structures is part of a larger set of questions that have long occupied sociologists. Indeed, arguments about the roles that agency and structure play in social life have been called ‘the heart and soul of sociology’, and oceans of ink have been expended on the subject. While most sociologists affirm the importance of both structure and agency, three basic positions concerning their relationship can be marked out, which I will oversimplify for the sake of space. On one side, there are sociologists who hold that structure is foundational and for whom all social action is predicated on a delimited range of potential actions constrained by that structure. On the other side, there are those who see individual agency as primary and for whom all social action is predicated first and foremost on the (rational or otherwise) self-reflective choices of individuals. Between these two positions are those who emphasise the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, in which both are mutually reinforcing and reciprocally implicated in social change. To a large extent these debates have not made their way into medieval Islamic studies and W. W. Clifford’s lament about ‘the gravitational pull of traditional research methods’ is still worth repeating. Nevertheless, there has been some work in this area and the same structure–agency fault line, albeit on a quite limited scale, has emerged in the study of medieval Muslim societies.

On the structural side, early studies of medieval Muslim societies were fundamentally functionalist (or more narrowly, ‘Parsonian’) in their orientation and conclusions. That is, the work pioneered by scholars such as Ira Lapidus and Roy Mottahedeh was indebted to Talcott Parsons’s emphasis on the structures and mechanisms that functioned to maintain equilibrium in a particular society in a given place and time. For these scholars, the study of medieval Muslim societies involved the study of the informal networks and personal relationships that made up the fundamental social structures that facilitated and sustained social equilibrium. More recently, however, functionalist sociology has fallen out of favour in the face of conflict theory, structuralism, symbolic interactionism and so on. In the wake of these developments a number of social historians of the pre-modern Middle East
have turned to questions of agency. This approach, first adopted in substantive detail by Michael Chamberlain, seeks to describe social dynamics and change, rather than equilibrium, through the repertoire of practices revolving around social competition, conflict and the agency of actors. The turn to agency has been taken up in Mamluk studies by Clifford, Jonathan Berkey, Konrad Hirschler, Jo van Steenbergen and Richard McGregor, to name only a few. But this focus on competition and change has led several historians to conclude that medieval Islamic societies lacked strong institutions, and that social practice, especially educational practice, was ad hoc and informal. As Joseph Lowry has concluded, ‘the trend in the field [of Islamic studies] seems to be moving in the direction of denying the existence or importance of strong institutions in pre-modern Islamic societies’.

However, these conclusions stem from an uncritical and underdeveloped conception of institutions and organisations in which a dearth of organised social behaviour is conflated with weak institutional structure. There is, in general, much confusion about the question of institutions in medieval Islamic societies. But a more precise understanding of these issues is exactly what is needed, to understand not only the popularisation of Sufism but the social context in which it took place more broadly. In what follows, then, I posit a distinction between, and simple definitions of, institutions and organisations that ought to facilitate the elaboration of more precise descriptions and explanations for the mechanisms of both social equilibrium and change in the medieval Islamicate context. I am especially interested in how the structures of Egyptian society both constrained and enabled Sufis to produce and popularise Sufism on such a large scale. I propose to conceptualise the popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt as the socially negotiated cultural production of different forms of Sufism. This production is constrained and enabled by the unfolding dialectic of structure/agency and mediated through the institutions of Sufism. This will require some explanation.

‘Social structure’ is a phrase that has been used across a wide range of disciplines, given a variety of meanings, and used to perform an assortment of analytical duties. The primary conceptual divergence in the way scholars use the term is whether structure refers to the relationships between individuals or the relationships between groups. Here I will use the term to describe...
relations between individuals. More precisely, following José Lopez and John Scott I use the term ‘relational structure’ to describe ‘the social relations themselves, understood as patterns of causal interconnection and interdependence among agents and their actions, as well as the positions that they occupy’.

But more importantly, I take up a critical distinction articulated by John Martin that structure is not an objective description of reality but rather an analytic construct; structure is the name sociologists give to a perceived regularity of action across a set of social actors. Thus, when I speak of structure here I refer to the observable and regular interactions of individuals within groups as the medieval sources describe them. For example, when I refer to the social structure of the nascent collectivity of Shādhili Sufis, I refer not to some architectonic social configuration but to the sources’ portrayal of their regularly recurring behaviour and interactions.

The effect of collective repetitive action over time is the emergence of stable social institutions that constrain and enable all subsequent interactions. Therefore, following Martin again, I heuristically separate structure from the institutions that structure produces. In other words, the repeated and regular interaction of individuals (structure) will ultimately produce patterned and predictable ways of acting. Once these patterned ways of acting enter the discursive realm of the actors – that is, once actors describe and name them – I call these institutions. Institutions are thus quite simply the socially constructed and accepted ‘ways of doing things’.

There are five essential elements of an institution as I will use the concept in the following chapters. First, institutions are social. They are generated by and exist in the repeated interpersonal relations of members of a group. The primary focus of any institutional analysis must therefore be on the set of individuals performing any given regularised behaviour. Second, institutions are normative. They both constrain and enable the behaviours of the actors of a given collectivity by comprising a social grammar, or what Bruno Latour calls ‘complex repertoires of action’ for any given situation. Third, institutions are linguistically and mimaetically performative. The difference between structure and institution is that the latter has entered the collective discourse. As such, institutional analysis must pay attention to the language used by actors of a given group and the array of mimaetically learned behaviours linked
to that language. Thus, one method to locate and describe institutions in a pre-modern setting is to attend closely to the standardised vocabularies of doctrine and practice in texts. This also provides a way to address the claim that there is insufficient quantitative data to allow speculation on patterned group behaviour for this period. Fourth, institutions are objective for the actors who perform them. As actors mimetically accumulate social knowledge over time, this knowledge, which Émile Durkheim famously called ‘social facts’, becomes constitutive of social reality itself. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann call this ever-accumulating and evolving store of objective social knowledge the ‘sedimentation of meaning’. The sedimentation of social facts that order social interactions has the effect of externalising the rules of social intercourse. Thus, these mimetic and linguistic performances that objectively pattern subsequent behaviour tend to reproduce themselves over time, giving stability to social interaction. In other words, while institutions are socially constructed they nevertheless appear to be the objective and time-honoured ‘ways of doing things’.

Finally, institutions are fundamentally dynamic and subject to change. In this regard, Anthony Giddens has done much to clarify the fluid relationship between agency and structure as they impinge on social change. He does this by means of what he calls ‘structuration’, the idea that there is a ‘duality of structure’ – the structure and the actor – that continually interact over time. Humans do not simply react to their social environment like very large amoebas. They are thinking beings who at any given moment can reflect on and explain why they are doing something. Institutions are those social facts that provide self-reflective actors with a delimited range of potential actions. The continual feedback loop of intentional acts and unintentional consequences is how institutions emerge and how they change over time. Thus, for Giddens, structure is always recursively constituted by individuals in action and is itself the very grounds of social change.

The duality of structure, or structuration, is the ongoing and recursively constituted dialectic of agency and structure, mediated through institutions. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice and the habitus is instructive here. The objectively observed rules of social intercourse are inculcated in individual subjects through the embodied performance of those rules and their attendant social knowledge. Bourdieu’s habitus is composed of these ‘systems
of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures . . . principles which generate and organise practices’.79 The *habitus*, to put it rather too simply, is the embodied knowledge of institutions and the somatic source of practical sense, it is ‘social necessity turned into nature’.80 Both Giddens and Bourdieu are well known (and have been criticised) for attempting to theorise such a clear middle ground between structure and agency in such a way as to foreground social change.81 But their interventions are extraordinarily helpful for our popularisation question because if we want to track the popularisation of Sufism we must describe the institutional elements of Sufism and Egyptian society as well as the agential production of new social forms across multiple social strata within those institutional contexts.

As I use the term, then, institutions both constrain and enable social behaviour. They enable by providing actors with a ‘complex repertoire’ of possible actions for any given situation. They constrain by limiting that repertoire to a mimetically learned set of intelligible and self-reflective actions. The relationship of the actor to the institution is admittedly a thorny one. But here I will insist – analytically and heuristically – on the priority of institutions through which actors express agency, who in turn recursively constitute the institutions anew, and so on. In this sense, it is the institutions of Sufism that constrain and enable the production of Sufi culture in any given time and place.

A critical subset of this concern with structure and agency is the question of goals and the pursuit of interests. This is a question of organisation, which will be quite helpful in sorting out of some of the relational structures I examine in the following chapters. Richard Scott has noted that institutions and organisations have been conflated a great deal in much social analysis and this is certainly the case for scholarship on medieval Islam.82 In order to differentiate institutions from organisations, some sociologists describe organisations as the deliberate and corporate instantiation of one or more institutions for a specific purpose, or as ‘tokens’ of ‘types’ of institutions.83 Other sociologists describe organisations as collective frameworks for the pursuit of mutual interest. The literature on organisations, like that of institutions, is vast.84 But based on my reading of some of this literature, I propose a simple hybrid definition that organisations arise from within highly institutionalised social
fields, wherein actors draw upon one or more institutions in the deliberate and collective pursuit of mutual or overlapping interests and goals. For example, the deliberate instantiation of the institutions of *waqf* (endowment), *uşūl al-fiqh* (formal jurisprudence) and *ijāza* (licence to teach or transmit) within a brick-and-mortar structure for the purposes of patronising and pursuing scholarship is an organisation known as a *madrasa*.

Another distinction is relevant here, that between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ organisations. Formal organisations are those in which ‘social positions and the relationships among them have been explicitly specified and are defined independently of the personal characteristics and relations of the participants occupying these positions’.

Informal organisations are those in which ‘it is impossible to distinguish between the characteristics of the positions and the prescribed relations and the characteristics and personal relations of the participants’. In other words, social roles in formal organisations are fixed independently of personality while informal organisations are dependent on the personalities of constituent actors. This will become a critical distinction in the chapters that follow as I describe the organisation of the state-sponsored *khānqāh* in Cairo as formal, while I would characterise organised Sufi brotherhoods (at least in their early stages) as informal.

To summarise: I theorise the popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt as the result of the socially negotiated production of different Sufi cultures at multiple socio-economic sites and across several political contexts. This production was constrained and enabled by the unfolding dialectic of structure/agency and mediated through the institutions of Sufism. While I am particularly concerned with Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt, I locate the beginning of this process in the formative period of Sufism: Baghdad in the middle of the third/ninth century. Prior to that time there were a number of distinct pious and devotional movements across the Muslim East. Sara Sviri has shown that there were several different groups whose defining characteristic was the wearing of wool (*ūf*) and were known as *šūfīs*. In Nishapur and its environs there were also competing movements like the Karrāmiya and the Malāmatiya. The writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. circa 295–300/905–10) represent an apparently unique ascetic or devotional movement from Khurāsān. In Baṣra there were the Sālimiya, a group of devotional theologians named after Muḥammad b. Sālim
(d. 297/909) and his son Ahmad (d. 356/967) but who traced their authority to Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).90 Baṣra was also home to Abū Ḥātim al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 260s/870s or 880s), who may have forged a link between earlier renunciants wool-wearing groups and the later Sufis.91 And of course, there were the Ṣūfīya of Baghdad, a collectivity primarily comprising the circle of devotees around the figure of Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910).92 It is this collectivity from which ‘classical’ Sufism developed and through which most subsequent Sufis would trace their authority. The disciples of these early Sufis, men like Abū Bakr al-Wāṣīṭī (d. circa 320/932), would venture outside Baghdad, particularly into Khurāsān and Transoxiana, bringing the institutionalised outlook and programme of the Ṣūfīya with them.93 ‘Sufism’s eventual success was secured by the vigorous propaganda of its values that was launched by a number of Baghdad-trained Sufis.’94

The encounter between Baghdadi Sufism and these local traditions precipitated the contestation and discursive construction of Sufism as a discrete tradition. These constructions mined many of the earlier devotional movements in order to create a coherent history connecting the Sufis to the first generations of Muslims. But it was the local structure of the Baghdad Ṣūfīya, a structure that quite clearly produced a technical vocabulary and repertoire of praxis – that is, institutions – that enabled and facilitated these constructions. Already in the late fourth/tenth century we see attempts to fit the textual traditions from earlier movements into the institutionalised vocabulary of the Baghdad Ṣūfīya and wrangle them into particular forms for particular ends. Both al-Kalābādhī (d. 380s/990s) and al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), for example, systematised and organised diverse materials and apophthegmata to construct and promote a version of Sufism for a non- Baghdad audience of interested readers.95 Conversely, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), a member of the Sālimīya who also studied with Sufis like Abū Saʿīd Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 341/952), deployed the institutionalised vocabulary and praxis of the Ṣūfīya within a non-Sufi framework. His Qūt al-qulūb seems to me to be a synthesis of the two movements, the Sālimīya and the Ṣūfīya, wherein he deployed materials from the latter in order to bolster the traditions of the former.96 Thus, the late fourth/tenth century represents this fecund moment when authors were using the institutionalised doctrines and practices of several different devotional movements for diverse and competing social ends,
a phenomenon not unusual in the Būyid period.97 And it was precisely at this time, spurred perhaps by an emergent Sufi discourse, that the formerly imbricated hadith folk and renunciants mutually disaggregated into separate movements.98

The literary ‘systematisation of the Sufi tradition’, or ‘construction of Sufism as a tradition’, reflected these earlier movements and developments while also creating the discursive framework that would become the hallmark of Sufism.99 Thus, for example, Abū Nuʿaym al-İsfahānī (d. 430/1038) extensively mined the first centuries of Islam to construct a monumental history of Sufism by connecting the Sufis to the first four caliphs, famous jurisprudents and a large number of early pious and renunciant Muslims.100 The individual perhaps most responsible for the normative construction of Sufism was Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), who was truly catholic in his use of earlier material to construct his vision of Sufism.101 What is particularly noteworthy in these early texts, from my perspective, is the extent to which these authors articulated their contested positions in an already institutionalised technical vocabulary. As I noted above, the presence of a standardised vocabulary linked to a practice indicates quite clearly the institutionalisation of those practices. This means that by the time of al-Kalābādī, al-Sarrāj and al-Makkī, and especially by the time of al-Khargūshī (d. 407/1016), al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), al-İsfahānī (d. 430/1038), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and al-Hujwīrī (d. 465–9/1073–7), the discourse and praxis of Sufism were already highly institutionalised.102

Ibn al-ʿArābī recorded an anecdote in his Ṭabaqāt al-nussāk concerning Abū l-ʿUsayn al-İnurî (d. 295/907) that illustrates my point quite well. Al-İnurî was one of the key figures of the early Şūfiya, a member of al-Junayd’s circle who spent almost his entire life in Baghdad.103 However, for fourteen years he lived in the Syrian city of Raqqa and lost touch with his Sufi companions. He later returned to Iraq and was brought to al-Junayd, who was overjoyed to see his old companion. However, after listening to al-Junayd and his companions discuss Sufism for a time, al-İnurî fell silent. They asked him to say something and he replied, ‘You are using terms (alqāb) that I do not know and speech (kalām) that I am not familiar with. Just let me listen so I might understand your point.’104 This narrative provides us with a remarkable window onto how quickly the doctrine and speech of the Baghdad
Şüfiya produced a formal vocabulary. In the fourteen years of his absence, the language of the group had become more precise, specialised and technical, all the hallmarks of institutionalisation. This is not to say the meanings of these terms were fixed at this point. Rather, it marks one early moment in the institutionalisation of Sufism. The famous lament of al-Būshanjī (d. 348/960) is actually quite apropos here: Sufism ‘is a name without a reality, but it used to be a reality without a name’. That is, the local structure of the Baghdad Şüfiya was the social reality that gave rise to the institutionalisation and, obviously, naming of Sufism as an object of construction and contention.

My larger point here is that it was the development and institutionalisation of Sufi doctrine and practice during the early formative period that would become foundational for subsequent Sufi constructions of authority and claims of legitimacy. Thus, when I write of the institutionalisation of Sufism I intend the period immediately prior to the classical manuals of Sufism and not the so-called ‘post-classical period’. It was institutionalisation that actually precipitated and facilitated the writing of these manuals. This claim marks a substantial break from most scholarship on Sufism, wherein ‘institutionalised Sufism’ describes the emergence of khānqāhs and ribāts in the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth centuries, or the Sufi orders of the seventh/thirteenth century and beyond. While these developments certainly drew on the institutions of Sufism and produced new institutions of their own, I would describe them as the organisation of Sufism. Not only is this a more precise description of the way in which Sufism developed after the formative period but it is useful in understanding how Sufism spread so quickly after the fourth/tenth century.

It was the institutions of Sufism, developed by the Baghdad Sufis and practised by their successors, that enabled and facilitated its rapid spread. Sufis – through the structured and patterned practice of an institutionalised Sufism – produced the conditions of their own social formation. Wherever Sufis went, they produced Sufi culture, ‘thereby reproducing the conditions of [their] own perpetuation’. While this took place on a relatively small and localised scale prior to the fifth/eleventh century, several developments took place that would ramp up production: the Seljuks’ state sponsorship of Sufism enacted primarily through the endowment (waqf) and stipendiary position (manşib); the development of dispensations (rukḥas) for Sufis...
with day jobs by Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168); the collapse of the Iranian economy that sent many Persian-speaking Sufis to the West; and the increasingly sophisticated outreach of individual Sufis, among many others. It was the prior institutionalisation of Sufism that enabled all these developments. For example, it was the institutions of *adab* and *ṣuhba* (both attested very early and increasingly formalised during this period, although perhaps not to the extent described by Fritz Meier) that patterned the relational structure of the state-sponsored *ribāts* in Baghdad.¹⁰⁸ The institution of *walāya* (sanctity) and its social manifestation in the *awliyāʾ* (saints) patterned and facilitated the interaction between Sufis and the increasing numbers of those who came to them for blessing. These institutionalised practices and doctrines were the very means by which the Sufis produced Sufism on an ever-widening scale.¹⁰⁹ Admittedly, the preceding account is overly schematic, lacks detail and requires more substantive research to flesh it out, but it should set the stage for the following chapters, in which I describe how these institutions constrained and enabled the production and popularisation of Sufism in Egypt.

**The Argument and Structure of this Book**

This book is divided into three parts of three chapters each. In each part I focus on one particular collectivity and the ways its members creatively worked with and on the institutionalised traditions of Sufism to produce the conditions that popularised Sufism in Egypt. As I hope to make clear here, the ways in which Muslims creatively drew on the institutions of Sufism in the service of new social formations were truly remarkable and gave rise to one of the most substantive and widespread social transformations in Egypt before the Ottoman period. I have organised these three collectivities according to a simple socio-political heuristic framework based on the relationship of each group to the Ayyubid and early Mamluk states, or more precisely their relationship to the actors constituting those polities.¹¹⁰ Broadly speaking, I conceptualise the Ayyubid and Mamluk states as composed of those members of the military patronage system who administered regional financial institutions (*jizya, kharāj, iqtāʾ, alḥbās* etc.) and claimed to protect and defend the Muslim *umma* and the non-Muslim *dhimmī* communities of their geographical territory.¹¹¹ Following Weber, then, my definition of these
The relationship of Sufi collectivities to the state is integral to my investigation because the production of Sufism was at least partially a function of their complementary claims to legitimacy. Both of these claims were rooted in varying conceptions of *walāya/wilāya* – authority derived from proximity to power, whether mundane or divine. The question is, how did different Sufis understand or represent their claims in relationship to the claims of Ayyubid and Mamluk polities? How did these claim to protect and promote Islam square – or not – with the claims made by different groups of Sufis to represent a normative Islam? The answers will not parse out according to a simple binary – aligned or not aligned – but rather along a continuum of socio-political configurations. I argue that it was the ways these claims of legitimacy interfaced that, in addition to the other social factors mentioned here, constrained and enabled certain forms of Sufi agency, cultural production and social formation.

Part One is a study of the state-sponsored Sufis of the *khānqāh* Saʿīd al-Saʿīd al-Suṣīdāʾ in Cairo. Saladin founded the *khānqāh* in 569/1173 as part of his effort to recruit Sunni scholars, whose approval and cooperation he needed to rule the populace effectively. In doing so, he created an organisational setting that led to an influx of scores of Sufis into Cairo from the East. These Sufis came to the *khānqāh* for a variety of reasons and in pursuit of different interests, most of which overlapped with those of the state. Importantly, the Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Saʿīdāʾ often came together in public spaces to perform and promote these mutual interests. These performances were one way in which they produced and popularised Sufism in Cairo.

In Part Two I turn to the state-sanctioned Sufis of the nascent Shādhilī brotherhood. Abū l-Óasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) and his successors worked with the tacit sanction of the Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers to produce and propagate their particular vision of Sufism across Egypt. In particular, I focus on the creation of an institutionalised identity linked to al-Shādhilī’s personality, which led to the informal organisation of the Shādhilī brotherhood. It was one of al-Shādhilī’s successors, Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309), who discursively mapped the nascent communal identity of al-Shādhilī’s followers onto the biography of al-Shādhilī. This biography then functioned metonymically as the perfect ‘Shādhilī Sufi’. In other words, al-Iskandarī constructed an ideal type in the biography of al-Shādhilī, a type
his followers then embodied performatively by emulating that ideal. The performed hagiography, in combination with a rhetorically sophisticated Shādhilī outreach, created the conditions that produced and reproduced a stable Shādhilī social identity that spread across Egypt.

In Part Three I turn to the unique context of Upper Egypt. One of the salient features of Upper Egypt during this period was the Ayyubid and Mamluk states’ ambivalent relationship to the region. Other than collecting taxes and putting down serial rebellions, the rulers tended to ignore Upper Egypt. Furthermore, unlike in other regions of Egypt, Ayyubid and early Mamluk sultans and amirs did not found or fund any madrasa or khānqāh there. The Sufis took it upon themselves to establish and propagate a normative Sunni praxis, build hospices and madrasas, and regulate communal boundaries. The Upper Egyptian context thus produced a very different form of Sufism from those described so far. These Sufis were antagonistic to the state and wary of its patronage, and formulated their authority explicitly in terms of their ability to perform miracles (karāmāt). In the public performance of this rhetoric of sainthood, they not only popularised Sufism in Upper Egypt, but radically changed the region’s social and religious profile.

There are many other individuals and groups of Sufis I might have examined in these pages (I return to this subject in my concluding remarks). But the three groups I bring together here are broadly representative of larger trends and might serve as a framework for future study. Nevertheless, in bringing together these very different groups I want to emphasise at the outset that the category or label ‘Sufi’ is not in and of itself terribly meaningful or indicative of any kind of stable identity; nor should it lead us to any a priori conclusions about that identity. The epithet only makes sense within very specific historical, social and political contexts. While the label ‘Sufi’ indicates some engagement with a larger discursive and practical tradition, what it meant to be a Sufi at the khānqāh often differed substantially from what it meant to be a Sufi in Qūṣ or a follower of al-Shādhilī. What all the individuals I examine here had in common was recourse to and contestation of a shared discursive and practical tradition transmitted through the institutions of Sufism. But the nature of this engagement – its specific valence and substance in any given instance – was entirely contingent.
Notes

3. Ibid., p. 31. This contempt for what Haarmann calls ‘the proverbial lasciviousness and levity of the people’ of Egypt (‘Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt’, pp. 57–8) is a consistent thread woven through travelogues until the end of the seventeenth century.
4. See, for example, the short list offered by al-Suyūṭī, Husn al-muḥāḍara, 1:511–16. While many historians have assumed that there were few if any Sufis in Egypt during the Fatimid period, I am now preparing a study that shows this to be not quite accurate.
10. Index Islamicus, for example, lists 443 publications between the years 1990 and 2012 with the terms ‘mysticism’, ‘mystical’ or ‘mystic’ in the title or abstract. The term ‘mystocentrism’ is from Wasserstrom, Religion after Religion, pp. 239–41.
14. Gobillot, ‘La Transmission de l’enseignement mystique’, for example, discusses a number of different types of master–disciple teaching relationships in the context of early Islamic Khurāsān. See also the comments in Green, Sufism, pp. 2–3.
15. See especially Ernst, ‘Mystical Language’. Massignon, Essai sur les origines and Nwyia, Exégèse coranique both argued that much of the Sufi technical vocabulary was generated from an ‘experiential dialogue with the text’ of the Qurʾān itself (Sands, Şûfî Commentaries, p. 2). See also Green’s judicious remarks in
Sufism, pp. 27–8. Sands also notes that al-Ghazālī’s ontology in the Mishkāt al-anwār was a result of theoretical speculation on the experiences of ḥaḍar and baqāʾ (Ṣūfī Commentaries, p. 117). Likewise, Böwering, ‘Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Concept of Time’ argues that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s complex theorisation was a product of his speculation on experience.


17. As will become clear, my periodisation of the institutionalisation of Sufism differs substantially from most others. For an overview of several different periodisation schemata for Sufi history see Anjum, ‘Sufism in History’, p. 238–42.

18. Cornell, Realm of the Saint; Curry, The Transformation; Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur; Ephrat, Spiritual Wayfarers; Le Gall, A Culture of Sufism; Ohlander, Sufism in an Age of Transition; Wolper, Cities and Saints. For a succinct overview of these trends see Le Gall, ‘Recent Thinking’.

19. This trope is far too common and examples far too numerous to cite all of them here. The most sophisticated version is certainly that of Marshall Hodgson, who argued that the popularity of Sufism was due ‘in part’ to the ways in which ‘mystical forms and language can sanction elements of religious life downgraded by a strongly kerygmatic approach’, while also stressing that it was the institutional forms that Sufism took that allowed it to spread through the Islamicate world so widely. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, vol. 2, pp. 201–6.


21. See Uždavinys, ‘Sufism in the Light of Orientalism’, p. 117, where he argues that this narrative owes much to ‘the Romantic approach to religion and, ultimately, to the universalized Protestant sensibilities’ of European scholars.


23. Reid, Law and Piety.

24. Le Gall describes a similar set of paradigms that have troubled studies of pre-modern and modern Sufism as well (A Culture of Sufism, p. 6).


27. Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 12–19. For a specific example, in this case al-Sulamī, see al-Sulamī, Early Sufi Women, pp. 37–41.

28. To cite one example from an otherwise excellent piece of scholarship, Khalidi argues that during the Ayyubid and Mamluk period, ‘one could speak of two
broad tendencies, a “high” Sufism represented by the great system-builders, thinkers like Ghazali or Ibn ʿArabi, and a “low” Sufism represented by popular brotherhoods, itinerant miracle workers, militant preachers and “holy men” who . . . managed to transmit their message of rededication and moral reform to the urban masses’ (Arabic Historical Thought, p. 211).


30. Shoshan, Popular Culture, p. 7. ‘As for popular culture, it is perhaps best defined initially in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the “subordinate classes” as Gramsci called them’ (Burke, Popular Culture, quotation from the unpaginated prologue).


32. Ibid., p. 10.

33. Ibid., p. 18.

34. Shoshan, ‘High Culture and Popular Culture’. On the escalator, see Hall, ‘Notes on Deconstructing the Popular’.

35. Shoshan, Popular Culture, p. 76.

36. Burke, Popular Culture, p. 58.

37. It is quite interesting that of all the intellectual projects of medieval Muslims, it was the articulation and operationalisation of legal texts that has come to loom so large in the Western academy’s imagination of what constitutes authentic or normative Islam. On this tendency to align ‘orthodox’ Islam with the jurists, see Wilson, ‘The Failure of Nomenclature’, p. 173.


39. I refer here to Ibn Taymiyya’s opposition to ziyāra, a practice that al-Subkī vigorously defended. On this point, see Taylor, In the Vicinity, pp. 168–218.


42. For example, see Ibn al-Ḥājj, al-Madkhal, 2:46, where he complains bitterly about the ʿulamāʾ’s participation in non-Islamic festivals and holidays.


44. Shoshan is well aware of the critiques of the model, and offers a response in ‘High Culture and Popular Culture’ and *Popular Culture*. Berkey discusses these issues at length in ‘Popular Culture’ and *Popular Preaching*, pp. 9–12.


46. For example Memon, *Ibn Taymiya’s Struggle*, p. 58; Shoshan, ‘High Culture and Popular Culture’, p. 83.

47. Hall, ‘Notes on Deconstructing the Popular’.


50. Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*.


54. The ‘collective and systematic manipulation of signs’ is Baudrillard’s definition of consumption in *The System of Objects*, p. 218. However, I should stress that what Baudrillard means by this phrase is different from what I am doing here; I do not intend to imply that Baudrillard’s postmodern consumer would be at home in medieval Cairo.


56. On what I mean by the ‘conservative’ or ‘traditional’ character of Islamicate society during this period, see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 2:374–85.


58. For a succinct overview of recent scholarship and trends, see Archer, *Structure, Agency*, pp. 1–16.

59. Clifford, ‘*Ubi Sumus*?’, p. 46. For a response to and update of Clifford’s critique, see Rapoport, ‘New Directions’.


61. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*.

64. Lowry (ibid.) highlights this confusion, noting that elements as disparate as *waqf*, the Caliphate, *madrasas* and *madhhabs* – all very different social phenomena – have been described as institutions in the academic literature.
65. On the history, development and usage of ‘social structure’, see Crothers, ‘History of Social Structure Analysis’.
66. Williams, ‘Structure’.
67. Lopez and Scott, *Social Structure*, p. 3
69. Ibid.
77. See Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, pp. 101–29, for an illuminating discussion of these issues.
80. Ibid., p. 69.
83. Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, pp. 427–42. Elster’s distinction is based on that of Claus Offe, ‘Political Institutions’. However, Elster’s citation on p. 442 of Offe’s article is inaccurate. See the bibliography here for the correct citation.
84. For an overview see Scott, *Organizations*, pp. 31–101.
85. Ibid., p. 20.
86. Ibid., p. 20.
87. In one case it was the coarse wool common among ancient Near Eastern ascetics and in another a fine white wool worn by Shi‘ite religious leaders in Nishapur. See Sviri, ‘Sufism’. See also Sviri, ‘The Early Mystical Schools’. Although on the Shi‘ite material in the latter, see Christopher Melchert’s remarks in ‘Khargūshī’, pp. 33–4.

89. Radtke, al-Hakim at-Tirmidi; Radtke and O’Kane, The Concept of Sainthood; Sviri, ‘Ḥakīm Tirmidhī’. ‘Alī ibn ʿUthmān al-Hujwirī claims there was a circle around al-Tirmidhī known as the ‘Ḥakīmis’ (The Kashf al-Mahjūb, p. 210), although Radtke notes that his legacy was primarily textual. See also Karamustafa, Sufism, p. 102.


92. I use the word ‘Ṣūfīya’ here to mark this group as distinct from subsequent claims of Sufi identity. See Karamustafa, Sufism, pp. 1–37; Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 43–67. While superseded to some extent by more recent scholarship, the sketch offered by Radtke, ‘Taṣawwuf’, is also still useful.

93. Silvers, A Soaring Minaret, pp. 35–43.

94. Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, p. 100. These remarks are echoed by Karamustafa, Sufism, pp. 56–82.


96. Al-Makkī does not actually use the words ṣūfī or taṣawwuf much in Qūt al-qulūb. When he does, it is typically to quote one of the Sufis in the third person, apparently as a separate movement from his own. That is, he often notes that ‘one of the masters of the Sufi folk (shuyūkh min ahl al-ṣawwuf) said to me . . . ’ Likewise, as Khalil notes (‘Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’, pp. 349–50), when al-Makkī refers to ‘our shaykh’ in Qūt he refers to Ibn Sālim the younger, and when he refers to ‘our leader’, the ‘shaykh of our shaykh’, or ‘one of the ʿulamā’’, he refers to al-Tustarī. So while later Sufi authors certainly counted al-Makkī among their ranks, and he was obviously engaged with early Sufi material, it is not clear that he actually considered himself a Sufi. On al-Makkī’s quotations, see Yazaki, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 43–5. On al-Makkī’s self-identification, see ibid. p. 93, where Yazaki’s conclusions differ from mine.


98. Melchert, ‘Early Renunciants’, pp. 411–15. Although, as Melchert cautions,
we must not exaggerate the enmity of Ḥadīth transmitters and renunciants’ (p. 414), even after this point.


104. The story is reported on the authority of Ibn al-ʿArābī, most likely from his now-lost *Ṭabaqāt al-mussāk*, in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a’lām*, 14:74. Melchert, ‘The Transition’, pp. 68–9, treats this anecdote as well.


106. For example, see Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, pp. 45–53.


109. Ohlander makes a similar argument about how ʿUmar al-Suhrawardi ‘attempted to secure, centralize, and maintain authority through the medium of institutions’ (*Sufism in an Age of Transition*, p. 27).

110. My thanks to Vincent Cornell, who originally suggested that I think about organising my study in this way.


PART ONE

STATE-SPONSORED SUFISM: THE SUFIS OF THE KHĀNQĀH SAʿĪD AL-SUʿADĀʾ
The Khānqāh

Introduction

Saladin founded his khānqāh – a hospice known as the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ or al-Ṣalāḥiya – in 569/1173 in order to house Sufis newly arrived in Cairo. He built it in the heart of the city and funded it with an endowment (waqf) to ensure that it would continue to provide a home for Sufis long after he had passed away. But the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ did not simply house itinerant Sufis. Saladin also created a stipendiary position (manṣib) at the top of the hierarchy of the khānqāh’s organisation, known as the shaykh al-shuyūkh (literally ‘the master of masters’, hereafter ‘Chief Sufi’). This office was a kind of Sufi counterpart to that of the Chief Judge (qāḍī al-quḍāt). The Chief Sufi was supposed to mentor the Sufis of the khānqāh and to act as a liaison between the ruling elite and local communities of Sufis in Egypt and Greater Syria. Theoretically, then, the authority of the Chief Sufi was geographically coterminous with Ayyubid rule itself. In reality it did not work so neatly. As for those Sufis who lived in the khānqāh, the endowment stipulated that they be given daily rations of food and sweets, small stipends, and even time away from the khānqāh to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Chief Sufi himself received a substantial stipend in addition to the power and prestige that accompanied such a prominent position. In 724/1325, however, the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad moved the centre of state-sponsored Sufism to his new khānqāh, located north of Cairo at Sīryāqūs. While the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ remained open, the office of the Chief Sufi moved to the new khānqāh and with it the prestige that had formerly belonged to the
Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. Nevertheless, during those 150 years of Ayyubid and early Mamluk rule, Saladin’s khānqāh was the centre of state-sponsored Sufism in Egypt and housed hundreds if not thousands of Sufis from all over the Muslim world.

Saladin’s patronage of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ raises a number of important questions about the history of Sufism in Egypt. What was the ostensible purpose of the khānqāh? Why was Saladin interested in housing and patronising Sufis at all? What kinds of Sufis did he support and where did they come from? Were these Sufis friendly, hostile or indifferent to other Sufi groups in Egypt? What happened at the khānqāh? Was the khānqāh different from other Sufi structures in Egypt like the ribāṭ and the zāwiya? Did it operate and function in the same way during Mamluk rule as it did under Ayyubid? Finally, how might the khānqāh and its Sufis have contributed to the popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egypt?

Ultimately, what set this khānqāh and its Sufis apart during this period were the facts that it was state sponsored and formally organised. There were other Sufi hospices in contemporary Egypt – typically called ribāṭ or zāwiya – but none were sponsored by the state in this way. Likewise, there were many other Sufi collectivities in Egypt but they were not formally organised. This latter point is a crucial distinction. Most historians tend to describe khānqāhs, ribāṭs and zāwiyas in general as ‘Sufi institutions’, a description that tends to elide a range of functions and relational structures that occurred within different Sufi buildings. Furthermore, it is often not clear what an author means by ‘institution’, with the result that the specifically organised features of some hospices are ignored or misunderstood. As I outlined in the Introduction, I theorise organisations as deliberate social activity that is emergent from highly institutionalised social fields and intended to support the collaborative pursuit of overlapping interests. Formal organisations are those in which offices are not tied to specific personalities but persist over time as different individuals hold them. This is precisely how the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ functioned. The offices of the khānqāh were formally instantiated, existed independently of any single personality and persisted over time. The legally stipulated activities of the khānqāh assured that the interests of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans who sponsored it overlapped with the interests of the Sufis who lived there. In order to understand the organisational form and
function of the *khānqāh*, then, we must recover the interests and goals that drew all these disparate actors together.

The interests of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans that emerge most clearly from the space of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ were primarily two-fold. First, they sought the political support of learned elites who could legitimise their rule. They did so by promoting and patronising scholarship in general, and Shāfiʿi-Ashʿarī scholarship in particular, within the framework of what Vincent Cornell has called ‘juridical Sufism’. Juridical Sufis are those trained in both jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), but whose primary epistemological orientation is to the law. The Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans patronised juridical Sufism to garner the support of the learned elite and to bolster their own credentials as the guardians and proponents of Sunni Islam. Second, the sultans sought the accumulation of blessing and merit for themselves, their families and the Muslim *umma* in general. Founding and funding the *khānqāh* was itself a pious act, one that could reap exponential blessings given that the Sufis who lived therein could then pray for the sultan and his family’s well-being – both in this world and the next. While there were other reasons the sultans might patronise a *khānqāh*, these are the two most salient and the ones that dovetailed most clearly with the interests of the Sufis who lived there. The latter’s interests included promoting Sunni ideology, disseminating a particular form of religious knowledge (juridical Sufism), advancing their individual *madhhab* (legal school), and perhaps most importantly, securing a living through state employment. The state-sponsored positions in *madrasas* and *khānqāhs* included generous salaries and there was fierce competition among scholars to obtain them; the *khānqāh* was no exception. It was the intersection of all these interests, organised at the physical site of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, that constituted state-sponsored Sufism in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt.

Of course, the sultans and the Sufis themselves did not explicitly formulate their goals in such stark fashion. Indeed, the explicit articulation of corporate ‘goals’ is one of the more problematic components of organisational analysis. Nevertheless, rather than despair of the absence of clearly articulated goals we can scour the medieval sources for traces or hints of intentional and/or ideological activity at the *khānqāh*. This activity, embedded in biographical and historical material, often obliquely indicates what the Sufis
and sultans hoped to accomplish at the khānqāh. But this focus on interests and goals stems not from any uncritical embrace of rational choice or game theory. Rather, the reconstruction of these disparate interests is in service to my larger theoretical concern to understand how this organisation emerged, what brought these particular individuals together, and how they contributed to the popularisation of Sufism in Egypt. I thus locate the interests of the individuals within the context of the Sufi institutions that constrained and enabled their associations. The Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ did not form a coherent collectivity until they came together within the organisational space of the khānqāh. And it was the doctrines and practices of Sufism that provided the institutional framework in which these associations were constituted. Furthermore, describing the khānqāh as a formal organisation will also function as a theoretical lens through which we might view and heuristically categorise the variegated phenomenon of Sufism in Egypt during this period. In other words, by shifting the analytical frame from the doctrinal to the social, the truly innovative and unique nature of the organisational space of the khānqāh comes into much sharper relief in comparison to other groups of contemporary Sufis.

In this chapter I begin with the first half of this organisational field: a description and analysis of the interests of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans who sponsored the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. Chapter 2 turns to the interests of those Sufis who lived at the khānqāh. Chapter 3 joins these fields together and analyses the role state-sponsored Sufism played in the production and popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egypt.

**Patronage, Scholarship and Legitimacy**

Saladin’s patronage of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was one component of his larger building project to change the religious topography of Cairo and Fustat. In the case of the khānqāh, he converted a Fatimid palace that had belonged to a eunuch with the curious nickname Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ (‘happiest of the happy’), who died in 544/1149. The palace was across the street from the Dār al-Wizāra (the vizier’s palace), and thus part of the large architectural complex that functioned as part of what Paula Sanders calls ‘the ritual city’, in which ceremony and architecture were combined to underscore the power and authority of the Fatimid caliphs. Later, Ruzzik ibn al-Šāliḥ Țalāʾī’s...
(d. 556/1161), vizier of the Fatimid caliphs al-Fāʾiz (r. 549–55/1154–60) and al-ʿĀḍid (r. 555–67/1160–71), moved in and built a tunnel to connect the two structures. According to Ibn Taghrībirdī, the purpose of the tunnel was to combine the palaces into one large residence for the vizier’s massive entourage.\footnote{13} Half of this complex became the home for Saladin’s khānqāh. His choice of location demonstrates a clear awareness on his part that the architecture of the city carried symbolic and ritual significance. Like many of the building projects he patronised, Saladin replaced Fatimid symbols of power and authority with those of his own, a carefully planned process that began even before his coup against the Fatimids.\footnote{14}

Saladin began eliminating signs of the Shiʿite polity immediately upon assuming the Fatimid vizierate in March of 564/1169. While the Fatimid Caliph al-ʿĀḍid was still the titular head of state, Saladin, like many of his vizier predecessors, was the de facto ruler. From the time of the vizierate of the Armenian convert Badr al-Jamālī (d. 487/1094), the power and influence of the Fatimid caliphs had steadily waned while that of their military viziers had waxed.\footnote{15} Saladin’s career followed this trajectory to its logical conclusion: the complete dissolution of Fatimid legitimacy and power in favour of rule by military elites. Not surprisingly, then, after he became vizier Saladin began implementing anti-Fatimid measures that advanced ‘the interests of Sunni Islam at the expense of the Shiite caliphate, especially since such a policy would improve his own position in Egypt’.\footnote{16} The majority of the local population was, after all, still Sunni. These anti-Fatimid measures included eliminating the Shiʿite call to prayer in favour of the Sunni formula, adding the names of the Sunni caliphs to the Friday sermon (khuṭba), denigrating the Fatimid caliph in those sermons, replacing the Ismāʿīlī judiciary with Sunni jurists, and many others.\footnote{17} After the arrival of his father, Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (d. 568/1173), in Egypt in the spring of 565/1170, Saladin increased these efforts and systematically began to dismantle the Fatimid state and its apparatuses. This project culminated in September 567/1171 with the pronouncement of the khūṭba in the name of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, al-Mustaḍīʿ (r. 566–75/1170–80).\footnote{18} Al-ʿĀḍid died shortly thereafter. Despite a handful of pro-Fatimid revolts early in his reign, Egypt was firmly in Saladin’s control.

Another critical component of Saladin’s ‘dismemberment of the Fatimid
state’ was his use of financial instruments such as the pious endowment and the land grant to seize control of much of the state’s wealth.\footnote{19} He then redistributed that wealth to his own soldiers and to scholars and scholarship. As Yaacov Lev writes, ‘For Saladin and the Ayyubid rulers, good relations with the ‘ulamā’ were both manifestation of piety and state interest.’\footnote{20} While Saladin is often remembered in the West for his vigorous prosecution of the jihād against the Crusaders, his most enduring legacy in Egypt is his promotion of Sunni Islam and support of Sunni scholars. It is in this wider context of patronage and state building that his interest in funding a khānqāh ought to be understood. In addition to his khānqāh, Saladin founded and endowed five Sunni madrasas in Egypt, an ideological project that his Ayyubid descendants and the Mamluks after them followed energetically.\footnote{21} The seventh-/thirteenth-century historian Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) explicitly credits Saladin with introducing the madrasa to Egypt and on this basis concludes, ‘I have thought to myself about the deeds of this man and I say that he is truly happy in this life and the next.’\footnote{22} The reputation of these madrasas spread rapidly across the Muslim world as they became important centres of Sunni education where Shāfiʿī jurisprudence and Ashʿarī theology predominated. This patronage of scholarship also architecturally marked the end of Fatimid rule in Egypt. For example, in September 565/1170 Saladin razed a Fatimid prison in Fustat and replaced it with the madrasa known as the Naṣirīya (from Saladin’s epithet al-Malik al-Nāṣir – ‘victorious king’).\footnote{23} As Ibn al-Athīr described it, ‘it was called the Dār al-Maʿūna [house of relief], wherein those in need of confinement could be imprisoned. Saladin destroyed it and built a madrasa for the Shāfiʿīs and erased the oppression that took place there’ (emphasis added).\footnote{24} Saladin’s building campaign visually marked the changing of ideological regimes. ‘The building that represented the coercive power of the Fatimid regime . . . was turned into an institution identified with Sunni Islam.’\footnote{25} The khānqāh, occupying the space of a former Fatimid palace, similarly marked the erasure of Shiʿite power and the emergence of a new Sunni regime.

Without entering into the debate about Saladin’s supposed psychological and religious motivations for his Sunni patronage, the historical antecedents of his patronage are quite clear.\footnote{26} Ayyubid and Mamluk rule, like most medieval Islamicate polities, was based upon a tripartite division of society: the
masses (al-ʿāmma), the military rulers and the learned elites and bureaucrats, who mediated between the first two. In Egypt, Saladin replicated what earlier Muslim rulers had done, namely patronising these learned elites in exchange for their political support. The influential Seljuk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) assiduously patronised Shāfiʿi scholarship in Khurāsān and Iraq and perfected the means whereby military rulers could guarantee (as much as possible) the cooperation of the elites by sponsoring their religious learning. While Niẓām al-Mulk did not invent the madrasa system, he almost certainly developed it as a political tool. In addition to building and endowing madrasas, Niẓām al-Mulk is also well known for his support of Sufi hospices (khānqāhs or ribāṭs). While the madrasas were state-sponsored organisations designed to spread the ideology of the state through the jurists, the hospices spread the ideology of the state through the Sufis. Niẓām al-Mulk’s sophisticated system of ideological state apparatuses was replicated in Damascus by the Zengid ruler of Syria, Nūr al-Dīn Zengī (r. 541–69/1146–74). Nūr al-Dīn sponsored a number of madrasas and a khānqāh in Damascus, where Saladin had held an official post prior to coming to Egypt. It is not surprising, then, that Saladin modelled his governance on that of his Zengid mentor and the Seljuks in general by sponsoring Sunni learning, specifically Shāfiʿi-Ashʿarī scholars. Saladin simply followed the political blueprint laid down by his predecessors, whereby ‘the spirit of Nizam ul-Mulk reached the land of Egypt’.

We can best understand Saladin’s promotion of juridical Sufism in the context of his public policy of patronising Sunni scholarship in exchange for political support. He funded and supported the scholars and their learning, and they in turn supported his legitimacy in their interactions with the populace. Importantly, the same holds true for the Mamluk sultans and amirs who ‘consciously sought to duplicate the precedent set by [Saladin] himself when he restored Egypt to Sunni Islam by endowing centers of higher learning to promote his grand design’. The khānqāh thus functioned as an ideological state apparatus in the sense that the Sufis who lived there participated in non-coercively promoting the ideology of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans. This ideology was rooted in the rulers’ claims to protect and promote Sunni Islam, as Anne Broadbridge has shown in detail. But how did the Sufis of the khānqāh participate? And what did Saladin and his successors expect of those Sufis whom they kept on the state’s payroll?
The Ideological Function of the Khānqāh

Medieval organisations like khānqāhs and madrasas were able to operate continuously over time and across political change and social upheaval because of their endowments (awqāf, singular waqf). Shafiʿī jurists defined the waqf as ‘the alienation of revenue-generating property with the principle remaining inalienable, while its revenues are disbursed for a pious purpose’. In other words, specific properties owned by the state could be set aside and the revenue from those properties then used to fund charitable operations. Such properties were typically farms, orchards or markets. The revenues of the waqf could be used to found and fund any number of projects, including mosques, madrasas, khānqāhs, fountains, feeding the poor, ransoming prisoners, etc. These waqfs were set up by means of a legal document known as a waqfiya, which stipulated the properties involved, how the revenues were to be spent, who would oversee the spending, and any other details the endower (wāqif) wished. Those waqfiyas that survive from the medieval period have proven to be invaluable resources for the reconstruction of charitable organisations and building projects in the medieval Islamicate world, particularly for the Mamluk period. For example, all of the waqfiyas for the Mamluk-era khānqāhs are archived in the Dār al-Wathāʾiq (National Archive) in Cairo, documents that allowed Leonor Fernandes and Muḥammad Amin to write extraordinarily detailed studies of Mamluk-era khānqāhs. Unfortunately, the waqfiya for the Saʿïd al-Suʿadā is no longer extant. All is not lost, however, and there are ways to recover at least some of the waqfiya’s contents.

In order to reconstruct the missing waqfiya we can draw on the information from the waqfiyas for other khānqāhs, from contemporary descriptions of the khānqāh itself, and from the testimony of medieval writers who had seen the original document. Many of these literary sources date from the late Mamluk period, which causes some difficulty because it was during that time that writers began to use the term khānqāh interchangeably with ribât, zāwiya and even madrasa. Furthermore, the functions of these structures began to change as well. Thus, for example, while the khānqāh during the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period was devoted exclusively to housing Sufis, later khānqāhs could and often did serve as centres of legal instruction in much the same way that madrasas did. Furthermore, there were often
regional variations in terminology for different kinds of Sufi structures. An early example is the travelogue of the Andalusian Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217). After visiting Damascus in 1184, he wrote, ‘There are many ribāṭs there, which they call khānqāhs.’ Ibn Jubayr was from the Maghrib, where the term ribāṭ was widespread and the word khānqāh was not used. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, also from the Maghrib and writing roughly 200 years later, used khānqāh and zāwiya almost interchangeably in his travelogue. While some scholars have attempted to untangle the precise meaning of these terms (khānqāh, zāwiya and ribāṭ) across time and space, this is ultimately an exercise in futility because their meanings were never stable. Terminology was geographically local and temporally protean. Jonathan Berkey’s caution in this respect is worth repeating:

It is important that we, as late twentieth-century historians, not reify terms such as madrasa, jāmi‘, masjid, or khānkāh, terms to which medieval Muslims might have attached more abstract meaning. To popular perception, they signified less a particular place, institution, or building than a function, and as such their meaning as applied to specific institutions might change over time.

It will thus be instructive to examine the function of the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā‘ in terms of the interests of the sultans and how this compared to the function of other locally based hospices in contemporary Egypt, regardless of what various authors called them. Furthermore, we have an extant waqfiya for another khānqāh from the same period: the Nāṣiriya khānqāh in Jerusalem, founded by Saladin in 585/1189. By comparing this waqfiya with these other sources a reasonably clear picture of Saladin’s plan for the khānqāh in Cairo emerges.

The Egyptian historians Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692/1293) and Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) had both seen the original waqfiya for the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā‘ and they reproduce many of its stipulations (shurūṭ) in their descriptions of the site. First, the khānqāh was built for the explicit purpose of housing 300 ‘poor Sufis arriving from abroad’. Second, a Chief Sufi was to be appointed to lead the Sufis of the khānqāh and oversee its operation. Third, the revenues of the endowment were to be used to pay the salary of the Chief Sufi and to provide ‘food, meat and bread’ (ta‘ām wa-lahm wa-khubz) for the Sufis every day, in addition to soap and some sweets. Fourth, if one of the
Sufis died with more than twenty dinars in his possession, that money should be distributed to the poor without any interference from the royal treasury. Finally, if a Sufi wanted to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, he should be given time and the funds to do so.\textsuperscript{50} This reveals a great deal about the enticements Saladin deployed to attract Sufis to his \textit{khānqāh} and the broad outlines of its organisational character. But it is not yet clear what Saladin’s interests in the \textit{khānqāh} actually were and why he specifically wanted Sufis from outside Egypt. The answers to these questions lie in the \textit{kinds} of Sufis he wished to attract. In addition to requiring that the Sufis come from outside Egypt, the \textit{waqfiya} seems to have specified that they be of a very particular type:

The inhabitants of the \textit{khānqāh} were known for religious knowledge and piety (\textit{al-}ˈ\textit{ilm wa-l-}ş\textit{alāh}) and their \textit{baraka} was sought after . . . The founder stipulated that the \textit{khānqāh} be endowed for the Sufis as a group (\textit{tā’ifā}), those coming from abroad and settling in Cairo and Fustat. If those could not be found, then it would be for the poor jurists (\textit{al-}f\textit{uqarā” min al-}\textit{fuqahā”}), either Shāfi’i or Mālikī, and Ashʿarī in their creed.\textsuperscript{51}

Saladin thus very clearly wanted non-Egyptians who were well educated in Shāfi’i or Mālikī fiqh, as well as Ashʿarī theology, to take up residence in the \textit{khānqāh}. While al-Maqrīzī does not say this explicitly, the fact that he mentions Shāfi’i and Mālikī jurists specifically is telling. In fact, nearly all the Sufis who stayed at the Saʿīd al-Suṣ̄ādāʾ were of these two \textit{madhhab}s (see Chapter 2). Thus, the \textit{khānqāh} was not simply a hospice where any Sufi who felt like it could take up residence. Saladin was supporting and promoting only certain kinds of Sufis, namely juridical Sufis from the East. The question of who ought to determine which Sufis qualified and how that should be done is an important one that clearly vexed many scholars. Kamāl al-Dīn al-Udfuwī (d. 748/1347) wrote a fascinating treatise on this subject in which he categorically denied the ability of anyone to determine who is a true Sufi, thereby rejecting the permissibility of paying out endowments to Sufis.\textsuperscript{52} Nevertheless, while we may not know what it was, there was a system in place at the Saʿīd al-Suṣ̄ādāʾ, for it brought in large numbers of Sufis from all over the Muslim world. In order to attract these foreign Sufis, Saladin endowed the \textit{khānqāh} with enticements to provide for their needs and to allow them time for their devotions. These trends were continued in precisely the same
way during the early years of Mamluk rule as well. But why? How did these Sufis fit into Ayyubid and Mamluk patterns of patronage? Here the waqfiya from the khānqāh in Jerusalem proves invaluable.

Like the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ in Cairo, Saladin converted an already existing building into his khānqāh in Jerusalem. In 585/1189 he renovated the former patriarch’s residence into a khānqāh he called the Naṣīrīya, including setting it up with a waqf. Among the many stipulations included in the waqfiya, there are three items of particular interest for our question about the purpose of these khānqāhs. First, the waqfiya stipulates that all the Sufis must ‘meet together in [the khānqāh] every day after the evening prayer in order to read the Qurʾān, to perform dhikr, and then to pray for the endower and grantor, as well as for all Muslims’. Second, the waqfiya charges that the Sufis ‘meet together with their shaykh – in this place or al-Aqsā mosque – after sunrise every Friday to read from [the Qurʾān] and following that to pray for the endower and the Muslims’. Finally, the Sufis ‘should study in the presence of their shaykh what is possible from the words of the Sufi masters every Friday. If this is impossible, then [they should do so] at least on some Fridays.’

These stipulations reveal that at least one of Saladin’s goals in the khānqāh was to have the Sufis publicly proclaim and promote his character and legitimacy. Requiring these Sufis to bless the sultan and the umma publicly at least twice a week was meant to bolster his claim to be the promoter and protector of Sunni Islam. That similar stipulations probably existed in the waqfiya for the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ is borne out by an anecdote that al-Maqrīzī relates in al-Khīṭāt. He describes how the Sufis used to ceremoniously parade from the khānqāh every Friday to the al-Ḥākim mosque, where they would publicly read the Qurʾān and then bless the sultan and all Muslims (see Chapter 3 below). Al-Maqrīzī’s description of the procession is nearly identical to that required by the Jerusalem waqfiya. It appears quite likely that one of the sultans’ objectives in sponsoring khānqāhs was to garner the support of these Sufis who could then publicly bolster the sultans’ claims to legitimacy. A critical component of this support is the fact that the sultans encouraged the participation of juridical Sufis in particular, those trained in both fiqh and taṣawwuf. This position is clear from the waqfiya’s stipulation that the Sufis be trained jurists in addition to the fact that they should study ‘what is possible from the words of the Sufi masters’ with the head of the khānqāh.
This aspect of the khānqāh’s function is fleshed out by another valuable documentary source. This document sheds more light on this issue of juridical Sufism at the khānqāh as well as on the notion of the sultans’ legitimacy. It was standard practice in the chancery to produce formal documents of investiture, known as taqlīds, for those individuals appointed to stipendiary positions. The earliest example of a taqlīd for the Chief Sufi at the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ has survived in two sources. Both Ibn al-Furāt and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir reproduce the taqlīd for Shams al-Dīn al-Aykī (d. 697/1298), who became the Chief Sufi in 684/1286. Here I am primarily interested in the way this official chancery document represents Sufism and the duties of the Chief Shaykh. The taqlīd enunciates the ideological vision of the Mamluk sultans and their project of scholarly patronage, of which supporting Sufis was an integral part. In the absence of a similar Ayyubid taqlīd for the chief, this Mamluk example will have to suffice. But the taqlīd’s details are so similar to our earlier waqfīya that it seems reasonable to conclude that they reflect a consistent ideological statement from both the Ayyubid and the Mamluk sultans.

The taqlīd reveals that Mamluk patronage of Sufism was embedded within the specific ideology of the state, which held that the sultans were the protectors of Sunni Islam:

From the time that God gave us [i.e. the Mamluks] dominion over the earth and granted us rule over the length and breadth of the earth, whether [our rule is] expanding or contracting, we have always considered it a religious obligation (al-wājib al-fard) to care for the various members of the flock (iḥsān ilā ʿawāʾif al-raʿīya) . . . We knit together the distinguished commanders, we entrust legal judgments to the scholars, we safeguard the learned and we raise the level of the pious. We support the jurists and care for the poor. We fulfill each his due and give each what he deserves. The Mamluk rulers clearly saw themselves as providing the necessary political and economic structure that allowed the uninhibited flourishing of the Muslim umma. One should not be surprised, then, to find that the taqlīd includes supporting the Sufis as part of the Mamluks’ charge, and it is replete with Sufi doctrine and terminology. The document declares that when God ceased sending prophets to communicate with humans, he replaced them.
with the Sufi saints (al-awliyāʾ). The saints became, in effect if not always in fact, divine guides on earth. The taqli'd also refers to individuals specially chosen by God in each generation, known as the ghawth, a common Sufi term for a master who ‘nourishes’ the world. As for the individual Sufis, they are in dire need of support:

They rely on [God] for they have no vocation nor do they own any goods. Their business is prayer. Their watering hole is [their] tears. Their capital is in the water [of ablutions] and the prayer niche. Their profit is their knowledge. Their homeland is what is above this soil.

Particularly striking here is the notion of an economy of Sufism that the Mamluk polity enables and regulates through the organisation of the khānqāh. They enact this regulation through the intermediary of the Chief Sufi:

[The Sufis of the khānqāh] should never cease following the command of one who is their shaykh, model and leader. They should be guided by him morning and night. If he is absent and performing spiritual exercises, they should be guided by his seclusion. If he speaks of reality or the path, they should pay close attention to his words. If he prays to his Lord in intimate conversations, they should share in those conversations. [If he prays for our success against the enemies of God and our enemies, they have faith in his supplications.]57

Finally, the taqli'd recounts what is expected of the Chief Sufi himself, the ideal representative of juridical Sufism:

He issues fatwas in both Sufism and law, he speaks of the root and the branch. He searches in the tafsīr and the ta’wil in order to make the secrets of the [Qurʾān] clear. He speaks of [al-Ghazāli’s] Iḥyā ‘ulūm al-dīn, and obtains from it the nourishment of hearts (qūt al-qulūb). He is guided by it in both law and piety. [The Sufis] should take from him Muḥammad’s sunna and what he legislated.58

This is a remarkable document for a number of reasons, not least its demonstration of how the Mamluk bureaucracy – comprised of scholars, after all – deployed Sufi terminology for the purposes of the state’s ideological programme. The state – in this case the Mamluks and their administrative
and religious officials, but this applies in equal measure to the Ayyubid’s self-conception as well – saw itself as the protector of Islam, and therefore viewed the promotion of scholarship as paramount to that duty. But it did not promote just any scholarship. As can be seen in the suggested curriculum, the Chief Sufi and those under his charge were meant to study and promote juridical Sufism of a Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī bent. This is clear from the fact that the taqlīd explicitly mentions both the Qūt al-qulūb of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and the Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). These are both characteristic of juridical Sufism, thoroughly grounded in the Qurʾān and sunna, and written by Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī authors.

That the taqlīd is replete with Sufi vocabulary is an indication of the extent to which Sufi institutions had spread by the seventh/thirteenth century and the kinds of associations they could authorise. As we have noted, Sufi terminology and praxis had already been institutionalised by the late fourth/tenth century, facilitating the rapid spread of Sufism across the Muslim world. This institutionalised discursive and practical field could thus be deployed in a variety of ways and to a variety of ends. As we would expect, then, the specific organisational contours of the khānqāh emerge from within this institutionalised milieu. That is, the institutionalised terminology and practice of early Sufism here constitutes the legitimising discourse that both authorises and constrains the voluntary association of several sets of actors. The sultans, via their chancery scribes, deployed and organised this terminology to support their ideological vision of themselves as the protectors and promoters of Sunni Islam. These same institutions then structured the ways in which the Sufis of the khānqāh interacted among themselves, with the sultans and with the public more broadly. How closely the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans actually monitored what was being taught within the khānqāh is not entirely clear. But there are cases in which the Chief Sufi was dismissed for ideological reasons (see Chapter 2). At any rate, what is crucial here is that the association of state and Sufi was structured, authorised and constrained by the institutions of Sufism.

Part of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans’ interests in sponsoring Sufism was the promotion of this particular vision of juridical Sufism as a means of spreading the state ideology and legitimising the sultans’ status as the guardians of Sunni Islam.⁵⁹ I should stress that the sultans sought to promote
their roles as protectors of Islam, and not necessarily to eliminate Shi‘ism in Egypt, as some have argued. While Saladin’s building campaign was designed to eradicate traces of the Fatimid-ritual city, it is not entirely clear that he intended to rid Egypt of Shi‘ites altogether. If the sultans explicitly sought to eradicate Shi‘ism, they would have built madrasas and khānqāhs in Upper Egypt, which was the centre of Shi‘ism in Egypt after the fall of the Fatimids (see Chapter 7). But they did not do this, something Gary Leiser has demonstrated at length in his study of Ayyubid madrasas. This is not to say that there were no madrasas in Upper Egypt during the Ayyubid period, but rather that the Ayyubid sultans did not build any. The Ayyubids were pragmatic about the Shi‘ites and Christians in Upper Egypt and left the region alone as long as it did not foment rebellion, which it did often. Likewise, the Mamluks were generally pragmatic about Shi‘ites, as evidenced by their attitude to Upper Egypt and their patronage of the Qatāda Shī‘ītes (Zaydīs to be precise), whom they supported as the governors of Mecca. Rather than some kind of campaign to rid the land of Shi‘ites, the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans’ sponsorship of organised scholarship was simply an effort to bolster their bona fides as the champions of Sunni Islam – thus legitimising their rule in the eyes of the Sunni elites – and perhaps exercise some degree of control over the scholars. As long as Shi‘ites did not cause problems in this respect, the sultans left them alone.

**Accruing Merit and Blessings**

Finally, there is one more salient reason the state sought to sponsor Sufism at the khānqāh: the sultans’ desire to accrue blessing and benefit to themselves by founding charitable institutions and having the Sufis pray for them and their families. (It is worth mentioning here that setting up a waqf had the additional real-world benefit of securing the fiscal interests of the founder’s families in an economic system that did not favour generational accumulation of wealth.) While medieval and modern historiography has portrayed Saladin as a pious Muslim, the Mamluks have not fared quite so well, with many historians depicting them as opportunistic and insincere. Carl Petry and others have put this notion to rest, arguing that ‘it would be inaccurate to claim that [the Mamluks] were moral cretins, devoid of any sensitivity or decency. Rather, the Mamluks seem to have been inordinately concerned
about their own futures in the afterlife. Indeed, both the Ayyubids and the Mamluks took great pains to ensure their eternal fate, and setting up pious endowments was one way to do just that. Furthermore, Emil Homerin has argued that one of the primary functions of the khānqāhs during the later Mamluk period was the daily performance of the ḥudūr, a public ritual of prayer, supplication and Qurʾān recitation on behalf of their patrons. He likens this aspect of the khānqāh to the medieval Christian chantries of Europe, which fulfilled much the same function. These daily performances were ‘directly linked to the founder’s desire to earn divine favor by supporting religious institutions and activities. But in addition to the blessings derived from these endowments, in general, the author received, in a focused and regularised fashion, benefits from the ḥudūr.’ Namely, the Sufis prayed specifically for the temporal and eternal well-being of the founder and his family, a phenomenon that took place at madrasas as well. Robert Hillenbrand has argued that the Mamluks’ primary concern in their architectural patronage was death and afterlife, and it was for this reason they invested so much in pious endowments. Thus, Homerin characterises the daily ḥudūr as one of the most important functions of Mamluk khānqāhs. As such, he argues that the khānqāhs were not ‘outposts of some state-sponsored “orthodox Sufism”’, because Sufi instruction was not a major component of khānqāh life. This was certainly the case for the later period, but it seems to me, based on the admittedly scant evidence available, that during this early period these dual interests were actually intertwined. The state was actively propagating and supporting a quite specific form of juridical Sufism while also accruing merit by having these Sufis bless them on a regular basis. Thus, in addition to promoting this juridical Sufism – a tactic that was surely designed, as Homerin argues elsewhere, ‘to create a religious establishment loyal to [the sultan]’ – the sultans asked the Sufis to bless them and their families, measures that would ensure their eternal fate.

Now, since we do not have the waqfiya for the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ and there is no clear mention of ḥudūr performance for this early period, we cannot be certain about whether there was something similar intended for our khānqāh. However, as I noted above, both the waqfiya for the Nāṣīriya khānqāh in Jerusalem and al-Maqrīzī describe a weekly procession that ended with the public pronouncement of blessings on Saladin as the founder (al-wāqif) of
the khānqāh. At the very least, then, we can confidently say that these processions functioned similarly to those late Mamluk ḥudūr sessions described by Homerin; they were vehicles for the production of blessing and merit that would accrue to the sultans. To venture further, we might speculate that these processions were only one form of such public performance. The Ayyubid and early Mamluk sultans may have stipulated ḥudūr sessions for the Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, stipulations that the later Mamluks continued to employ in their own foundations.

While the Mamluks before al-Nāṣir Muḥammad obviously did not directly fund the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ as Saladin had done, they did continue to support it (tacitly at least, by not confiscating its waqf properties!), to appoint its officers and to benefit from its operation. The dual interests of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk sultans organised at the site of the khānqāh were thus quite similar. They sought to patronise and promote the juridical Sufism of foreign-born Sufis trained in Shāfiʿī fiqh and Ashʿarī theology. By promoting these Sufis, they were able to promote their own ideology as the defenders and protectors of Islam, a practice that would legitimise their rule among the local Egyptian population. Furthermore, by setting up and supporting pious foundations like the khānqāh, the sultans could safeguard their place in the afterlife. But one final question remains: how did these organised interests compare with what was happening at other Sufi hospices in contemporary Egypt?

The Khānqāh in Egypt

The most substantive source of information on Sufi structures during this period is, again, al-Maqrīzī’s geography of Cairo-Fustat. In a long section on Sufi hospices, he describes all the khānqāhs, ribāṭs and zāwiyaṣ still standing at the time he was writing in the ninth/fifteenth century. While al-Maqrīzī’s terminology certainly reflects late Mamluk usage, we can nevertheless draw a few conclusions about these structures for our earlier period. In examining al-Khiṭat, I paid particular attention to the founder, function and nature of each structure rather than the terminology employed. In other words, by viewing these structures typologically first, and terminologically second, I sought to ascertain how they related to the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. In total, al-Maqrīzī discusses fifty-nine Sufi buildings: twenty-one khānqāhs, twelve ribāṭs, and
twenty-six zāwiyas. Of these fifty-nine structures, only five definitively pre-date the Mamluk period, and only one of these five is called a *khāqān* – the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. As for the four earlier ribāṭs and zāwiyas, these were all built by a Sufi himself or a close friend, for the purpose of living there and holding teaching sessions. In these cases, the Sufi was also typically buried in his ribāṭ or zāwīya. Other sources reveal more about these non-state-sponsored hospices. For example, Šafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr (d. 682/1283) built for himself a structure in the Qarāfa cemetery, which he calls a zāwīya in his *Risāla*, but which al-Maqrīzī calls a ribāṭ. Setting aside terminology, what functionally distinguishes Šafī al-Dīn’s zāwīya/ribāṭ from the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ is the fact that it was privately built and independently operated, not to mention the scale of its operation.

The same goes for other Ayyubid-era Sufi structures. To take the example of Upper Egypt, Ābd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʿī (d. 591/1195), Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī (d. 641/1244), Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mulaththam (d. 671/1273), Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (d. 708/1308) and many others all maintained local, small-scale ribāṭs. Not one of these was endowed by the state nor did the state attempt to co-opt them. Each ribāṭ was independently owned and operated, and each was paid for by the *shaykh* himself or a wealthy local patron. Likewise in Alexandria, Ābd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī (d. 592/1196) had a ribāṭ where several of his disciples lived communally. Some of the disciples even had their own zāwīya inside this ribāṭ. Ābd l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili (d. 656/1258) lived with several of his disciples in a tower at the edge of Alexandria. The governor of Alexandria gave al-Shādhili this structure when he arrived there in approximately 638/1240. However, when representatives of the sultan approached al-Shādhili’s disciple, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1286), and asked if he would allow them to endow the structure using state funds, he refused. During the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period these independent types of Sufi hospices were almost always called ribāṭs, reflecting the Maghribī origins of most of these Sufis in Alexandria and Upper Egypt. At some point after this, Mamluk sultans and *amīrs* also began to found smaller hospices, which they typically called zāwiyas, for specific individuals. Al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars (r. 658–76/1260–77), for example, founded a zāwīya in Cairo specifically for the notoriously unpredictable *shaykh* Khiḍr al-Mīhrānī (d. 676/1277), a Damascene Sufi who had clairvoyantly predicted Baybars’s rise to
the kha¯nqa¯h | 53

power.80 Baybars went on to build a number of zāwiyas for al-Mihrānī across the region before the latter embarrassed his patron and he disowned him.81

This latter type of zāwiya, involving the wealthy patronage of an individual Sufi, seems to have been a product of the Mamluk period and a popular way for Mamluk amīrs to compete with each other for status, legitimacy and spiritual benefit. This resulted in a proliferation of zāwiyas across Mamluk Egypt, especially in Cairo, as these amīrs built small structures for a number of local Sufis. Such competition is underscored by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. When he visited Egypt in the eighth/fourteenth century, he noticed the way the Mamluks used Sufi architecture as a mode of legitimation: ‘There are many zāwiyas in Egypt, which they call khānqāhs, and the amīrs compete with each other to build them. Each zāwiya in Egypt was appointed for a particular group of Sufis, most of whom are Persians (aʿājim).’82 I will return to this comment that the hospices were full of Persians in the next chapter, but these types of structures stand in stark contrast to the formally organised state-sponsored khānqāh. In all of these cases, the zāwiya was a small-scale structure founded for a specific Sufi master.

Functionally, then, there were three types of Sufi structures in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt. These types do not necessarily line up with terminological precision. First, some individual Sufi masters built structures to house themselves and some of their disciples. These were sites of local instruction and outreach on a small scale. The majority of them were modelled on the type of ribāt popularised in the Maghrib and reflect Maghribī immigration to Egypt during this period.83 Second, wealthy patrons – particularly senior Mamluk amīrs – built structures for the benefit of individual Sufis and their circles of disciples. These became more common in the later Mamluk period and were at least partially a product of political and social competition between military elites in Cairo. Finally, there were formally organised, large-scale, state-sponsored hospices. During the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period, the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was the only such structure in Egypt, although they would become increasingly common from the mid-eighth/fourteenth century onward. By this point, and in addition to its other functions, patronage of charitable organisations like these often served to mark and consolidate the ever-shifting balance of power among the Mamluk elite.

Baybars al-Jāshnakīr (r. 708–9/1308–9), for example, began building a
khānqāh in Cairo in 706/1306 (completed in 709/1309), which had room for 400 Sufis and a smaller structure for 100 soldiers. This was obviously intended to be a prestige project, marking Baybars’s rise to power. However, when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad relieved Baybars of control of Egypt that same year, he closed the khānqāh and had Baybars’s name removed from the tapestry hanging over the main window. He then built his own khānqāh at Siryāqūs and moved the office of the Chief Sufi there in 724/1325.

The Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was thus absolutely unique in constituting the sole locus of formally organised state-sponsored Sufism in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt. But what of the Sufis who lived and performed their devotions there? What brought them to the khānqāh? The extent to which their interests overlapped or complemented those of the state is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. For the names and history of the khānqāh throughout the pre-modern period, see Mubārak, al-Khitāt al-tawfīqiya, 4:102–7. The medieval historians agree that this khānqāh was the first in Egypt: Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aʿyān, 2:206; al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʿīz, 4:728; al-Qalqashandi, Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā, 3:368–79. However, while it was the first building in Egypt known as a khānqāh it was probably not the first state-sponsored Sufi hospice. As I hope to show in detail elsewhere, several of the Fatimid caliphs supported Sufis monetarily and al-ʿĀmir (r. 1101–30) actually funded a space for them in the Qarāfa cemetery in Cairo. See al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʿīz, 2:570–1. There is some discrepancy about the date of the founding of the khānqāh: see Rizq, Khānqāwāt al-ṣūfiyya, 1:128–9.


3. For example, al-Qalqashandi wrote in the late fourteenth century that the office of Chief Sufi ‘already existed [at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ] and its power had been great’ (Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā, 4:38) before al-Malik al-Nāṣir moved the office to his khānqāh at Siryāqūs. On the move see Abū Rās, Shaykh al-shuyūkh, pp. 63–70.

4. There was another Mamluk khānqāh during this period, the Rukniya of Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Ｊāshnakīr. He began construction of this khānqāh in 1306 while he was still an amīr and finished it in 1309 after he had become sultan.
However, his khānqāh was open only for a brief time because when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad became sultan for the third and final time in 1309 he closed the Rukniya, confiscated its waqf properties, removed Baybars’s name from the large tapestry over its main window, and began construction on his khānqāh at Siryāqūs. It was only then that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad allowed the Rukniya to reopen (Fernandes, The Evolution of a Sufi Institution, pp. 25–9; Fernandes, ‘The Foundation’; al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʾiz, 4:732–43).

5. There are important exceptions. Hodgson is careful to delineate the institutional from the organisational aspects of the spread of Sufism after the twelfth century (The Venture of Islam, 2:210–17). Likewise, Ohlander carefully differentiates between what he calls ‘institutions of place’ and ‘institutions of process’ (Sufism in an Age of Transition, pp. 28–9), which is somewhat similar to my distinction between organisations and institutions respectively.

6. On the concept of juridical Sufism, see Cornell, Realm of the Saint, p. 67.

7. Homerin, ‘Saving Muslim Souls’.

8. Chamberlain, Knowledge and Social Practice.

9. On the theoretical problems with goal-centred organisational analysis, see Scott, Organizations, pp. 284–301.

10. On Saladin’s building projects, see MacKenzie, Ayyubid Cairo.

11. Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, al-Rawḍa, p. 49; Ibn Muyassar, Choix de passages, p. 144; al-Maqrīzī, Ittiḥād al-hunafaʾi, 3:200; al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʾiz, 4:727 n. 1; al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffāʾ, 2:512. Some of the sources claim the eunuch was a servant of al-Mustanṣir (r. 427–87/1036–94) while others claim he served al-ʿĀḍid (r. 525–44/1131–49); the latter is surely correct.


17. See Ehrenkreutz, Saladin, pp. 87–9; Ehrenkreutz, ‘Saladin’s Coup d’Etat’, pp. 147–8. These ‘anti-Fatimid measures’ also included adding yahbātimu al-talbis ᵃlā l-Shīʿa (‘he brings confusion to the Shiʿites’) to al-ʿĀḍid’s name in the khuṭba, founding Shāfiʿi and Maliki madrasas in Cairo, appointing trust-
worthy individuals to important state posts, purging the Ismaʿili ‘theological and missionary sessions from al-Azhar’, and surveilling and arresting Fatimid loyalists.

18. The sources are in disagreement about who exactly was the first to proclaim the khutba in the name of the Abbasid caliphs. See the reconstruction of these events in Ehrenkreutz, Saladin, pp. 89–94; Ehrenkreutz, ‘Saladin’s Coup d’Etat’, pp. 150–1; Leiser, ‘The Restoration of Sunnism’, pp. 236–8.


21. While there did exist a few madrasas in Alexandria during the waning years of Fatimid rule, the Fatimids themselves did not build or patronise madrasas: see Walker, ‘Fatimid Institutions’. On the history of madrasas in late-Fatimid and Ayyubid Egypt, see Leiser, ‘The Restoration of Sunnism’; Salām, ‘al-Madāris al-islāmiyya’.


24. Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, 10:31–2. Ibn al-Athīr also notes that Saladin converted the Dār al-ʿAdl (the house of justice) into a Shāfiʿī madrasa as well as removing all the Shiʿite judges and replacing them with Shāfiʿī judges. Al-Maqrīzī records the same and directly links the founding of this madrasa with ‘the disappearance of the Shiʿites’ from Egypt (al-Mawāʿīz, 2:205). Al-Maqrīzī has an entry on the prison itself (ibid., 3:597–8), where he reports that the reason it was called ‘the house of relief’ was that it was originally built for ‘the relief of the Muslims and [as] a place for their rulers (wulāt) to live’. It was turned into a police station (shurṭa) in 223/837–8.


26. On the topic of motivation, see the summary of views in Ehrenkreutz, Saladin, pp. 20–2.


28. There are a number of theories about why Niẓām al-Mulk was particularly interested in Shāfiʿī scholarship despite the fact that the Seljuks were avowedly committed to the Ḥanafī madhhab. See Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur, pp. 72–5; Safi, The Politics of Knowledge, pp. 54–5, 93–5.
32. Azzam, Saladin, p. 91. See also Ephrat, A Learned Society, p. 57.
34. On this kind of patronage, see Humphreys, From Saladin to the Mongols, pp. 15–39; Mottahedeh, Loyalty and Leadership, pp. 95–127.
36. This distinction between coercive and non-coercive state apparatuses is Althusser’s and is used to great effect by Omid Safi in The Politics of Knowledge. What Althusser calls repressive state apparatuses are those that instil ideology by force, like the police force and prison system. By contrast the madrasa (and khānqāh) system discursively and non-coercively promoted the state’s ideology. The latter is, obviously, much more effective. See Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, esp. pp. 15–22.
37. Broadbridge, Kingship and Ideology.
38. Amin, Awqāf; Hennigan, The Birth of a Legal Institution; Hoexter, ‘Waqf Studies’; Lev, Charity; Petry, ‘A Geniza for Mamluk Studies?’; Rabie, The Financial System of Egypt; Sabra, Poverty and Charity, pp. 69–100. Petry has suggested that the Mamluk impulse to set up awqāf was at least partially motivated by a desire to pass on property to children and descendants who otherwise would have no way of laying claim to their father’s properties (‘A Paradox of Patronage’, p. 201).
44. On the *ribāţ* in the Maghrib, see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, pp. 32–54.
50. Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution*, pp. 23–4, discusses these stipulations in detail (including the amount of bread and meat given out).
52. Al-Udfuwī, *al-Mūfī*, esp. pp. 47–50, where he reviews earlier legal opinions from several different madhhab s on this question. He then goes on to outline al-Ghazālī’s position, which al-Udfuwī assumes was widely accepted by his time, before rejecting his premises and conclusions.
53. All quotations from al-ʿAṣālī, *Wathāʾiq*, p. 95.
57. Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *Tashrīf al-ayyām*, p. 234; Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 8:30. The last sentence is in brackets because it is missing from *Tashrīf al-ayyām*.
59. This held true for later periods as well. Fernandes notes that the Sultan Barsbāy was an ardent sponsor of what she calls ‘Sunni Sufism’ (‘Three Şūfī Foundations’), which is similar to Cornell’s ‘juridical Sufism’.
63. Little, ‘Religion under the Mamluks’, p. 171. In the same essay Little argues that the Mamluks did not support the ʿAbbāsid pretender caliphs out of respect for
them or the caliphate; instead, since ‘the Mamluks had no title to rule except force, they sought legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects by ritualistic displays of califhal support exacted from these puppets’ (ibid., p. 174). This is echoed by Berkey, ‘Mamluk Religious Policy’, p. 11.

64. Berkey, Popular Preaching, p. 56, makes this point explicitly.
66. Ibid., p. 194. Fernandes, ‘Three Šūfi Foundations’, p. 155, makes a similar point about Barsbây, who founded a complex of Suši hospices near his tomb: ‘Barsbây’s choice to build his mausoleum in the vicinity of three foundations for Sufis might . . . reflect his abiding concern for the “after life” and a deeper involvement in Suši rituals than his predecessors.’ But, she argues, this does not fully explain his intent.
68. Little, ‘Notes on Mamluk Madrasahs’, p. 18.
69. Hillenbrand, Islamic Architecture, p. 316.
70. Homerin, ‘Saving Muslim Souls’, p. 83.
72. My remarks here pertain solely to the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ. Later Mamluks of course sponsored khānqāhs with other affiliations.
75. Gril, La Risāla, pp. 7–9 (French section).
76. Al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʾiz, 4:798–800.
77. Ṣaḥī al-Dīn (Gril, La Risāla, p. 71) reports that Abū l-Nūr and Mūsā l-Maghribī, both disciples of al-Jazūlī, had their own zāwiya in the ribāṭ, which they seldom left. Neither of these figures are known from any other source.
79. Al-Iskandarī, Laṭāʿif al-minān, p. 137.
83. Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 32–54.
84. In a typically maddening use of terminology, al-Maqrīzī calls the larger structure
for Sufis a *kbângâb*, and the smaller structure, meant for soldiers and sons of Mamluks (*al-jund wa-ābnāʾ al-nâs*), a *ribâṭ*. In this case, the use of *ribâṭ* may reflect the older military connotations of the term.

The Sufis of the Khānqāh

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the Ayyubid and early Mamluk sultans’ interests in sponsoring Sufism at the Saʿîd al-Suʿadāʾ were primarily two-fold: to support juridical Sufis in order to legitimise their own authority, and to accrue blessing and merit for themselves and their families. While the interests of the Sufis who lived at the khānqāh were certainly not synonymous with those of the military elites who sponsored them, they were nevertheless complementary. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine the sultans supporting and subsidising Sufis who did not in some way promote the interests of the state. Conversely, it would be highly unlikely that Sufis would agree to participate in the ideological programme of the khānqāh if doing so did not further their own goals or align with their conception of Sufi authority and duty. In fact, there are quite salient examples of Sufis from this period who completely rejected state support for precisely these reasons. Those who chose to live at the khānqāh did so for their own reasons. While some came looking for temporary housing or a quiet place to perform their devotions, others came to study with famous scholars or establish themselves as instructors at madrasas. Whatever their reasons, those who lived at the khānqāh all contributed to its organisational form and ends. It was the pursuit of these interests, organised by the state and enabled and constrained by the institutions of Sufism, that brought them together, forming the collectivity I call state-sponsored Sufism. While the collectivity was never static – individuals moved in and out of the khānqāh quite regularly – the organisational structure of the khānqāh insured
the collectivity’s persistence over time. Perhaps most important for the purposes of this book, the organisation and its attendant relational structures facilitated the production of this form of Sufism on a mass scale. By performing Sufism in very public and visible ways, these Sufis directly contributed to the popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egyptian society.

Here I describe two ideal types of state-sponsored Sufis for whom the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was home. The first type I call professional Sufis. These were the Chief Sufis selected to oversee the running of the khānqāh and to direct the other Sufis who lived there. The office of the Chief Sufi was initially a high-profile position that entailed access to the sultan, a generous stipend, appointment to other lucrative state positions and, theoretically, the task of coordinating all the Sufis in Egypt. It was ‘theoretical’ because, while it seems clear from the title and contemporary descriptions that the Chief Sufi was intended to be ‘the master of the Sufis of the realms of Egypt’, in reality most local Sufis were quite ambivalent about the Chief Sufi. Contemporary Sufi authors have almost nothing to say about these professional shaykhs, and what they do have to say is not always complimentary. Nevertheless, the position of Chief Sufi was a politically prestigious one. During the Ayyubid period, the office remained within the purview of a single family who were quite close to the Ayyubid sultans. But after the Mamluk coup, the position of the Chief Sufi, while still prestigious, became the object of fierce political wrangling and internecine contestation. During this period, obtaining the office and remaining therein required a careful combination of the proper background, legal training and political skill. Like other positions in the Mamluk educational and bureaucratic apparatuses, those who made enemies in the political or scholarly realm did not remain long in office. The final blow to the prestige of the Chief Sufi at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ came in 724/1325 when, as I described in the previous chapter, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad moved the office and its prerogatives to his new flagship khānqāh at Siryāqūs.

Ultimately, however, the Chief Sufi was only one person out of the 300 who were supposed to have lived at the khānqāh at any given time. These others belonged to the type I will call the rank-and-file Sufi, those ‘poor and itinerant Sufis arriving from abroad’ stipulated in the waqfīya. Unfortunately, we know very little about the vast majority of these Sufis during this period. Unless he was a scholar of some reputation, Arabic historiography shows
almost no interest in the life of any member of the rank and file. By their very nature the biographical and historical sources, written by elites, tend primarily to reproduce the interests and lives of other elites. So while the sources do preserve bits and pieces of information on some of these Sufis, where they came from and how they came to live at the khānqāh, the picture I reconstruct here will undoubtedly be skewed in an elite direction. There were many hundreds of Sufis who lived at the khānqāh about whom we will never know anything. Information about them would almost certainly change the description I offer here. But as Roy Mottahedeh famously wrote, ‘Ulemalogy is a noble science – at least we have to think so, because it is almost all the Islamic social history we will ever have for this period.’ So while it is quite likely that there were Sufis who came to the khānqāh for reasons not detailed here, there is simply no record of them for us to analyse. Nonetheless, given the variety of data embedded in biographical and historical works I believe we can paint a relatively clear picture of the rank-and-file Sufi of the khānqāh.

Who, then, were these state-sponsored Sufis and why did they come to the khānqāh? How were their interests served at the organisational site of the khānqāh? For the professional Sufis, their primary interest seems to have been to obtain and maintain their position as the Chief Sufi of Egypt, and in so doing retain the status and numerous perks attendant upon that station. But while these civilian elites fulfilled a clear political function, and served at the pleasure of the sultan and his advisors, they were not simple political flunkies. In addition to facilitating exchange or mediating conflict between state officials and the Sufis of the khānqāh, many of them were clearly devoted to promoting their particular religious visions via their prominent position. Their interests in promoting their theological and juridical ideology and maintaining access to the sultan and his entourage, and the healthy stipend that accompanied the position, thus dovetailed quite well with the interests of those Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans who sought to curry favour with the ‘ulamā’. For the rank-and-file Sufis, while most of them were also jurists committed to the promulgation of their particular vision of Islam, their interests were somewhat different. In some cases their goals were utilitarian, such as using the khānqāh as a lodging node within wider networks of travel. The khānqāh in these cases served very much like a traditional hospice: in exchange for temporary room and board, these Sufis participated in the
rituals and spectacles that were designed to bolster the reputations of the ruling elites. Other rank-and-file Sufis came to the *khānqāh* with the desire to begin employment as professionals in the burgeoning educational market in Egypt. In these cases, the *khānqāh* served as a foot in the door, a springboard to launch their careers. Still others came to the *khānqāh* for a variety of other reasons; to hide out, to study a particular text, to seek a quiet place to retire. In all these cases, it was the organisation of the *khānqāh* that constituted the framework within which state and Sufi pursued their mutual or overlapping interests, producing a new form of Sufism in Egypt.

**The Office of Chief Sufi**

As I noted above, the office of Chief Sufi was held by a single family during the Ayyubid period. The first Chief Sufi was Śadr al-Dīn Ḥamüwayh (d. 617/1220), followed by his sons (the famous *awlād al-shaykh*, or ‘sons of the *shaykh*’) and grandsons. The family enjoyed privilege and status with the Ayyubid family and there was little to no contention surrounding the transfer of office during their tenure. This would change dramatically during the Mamluk period. I have already treated the history of the office of the Chief Sufi in Egypt elsewhere, and will not add much to that analysis here. Instead, I will discuss the nature of the office during the Mamluk era and its attendant instability and difficulties through the representative career of a Shāfi‘ī jurist named Shams al-Dīn al-Aykī (d. 697/1298). Al-Aykī was originally from Rayy, but moved west to further his education and launch his career as a professional scholar. Ibn Ḥabīb notes that al-Aykī spent his early professional years in Baghdad, where he became the overseer of endowments and an instructor at the famous Niżāmiya *madrasa*. He remained there for only a short time, setting out for Arabia and then Anatolia (*bilād al-rūm*) before settling in Damascus. There he established himself among the city’s elite and obtained an instructorship at the Ghazāliya *madrasa* and the directorate (*mashyakha*) of the Sumaysāṭiya *khānqāh*. These were high-profile posts and placed al-Aykī in an ideal position for future advancement in the Mamluk capital in Cairo. Indeed, he was precisely the kind of professional Sufi stipulated by the *waqfiya* for the Sa‘īd al-Su‘ādā’: he was a Shāfi‘ī jurist, partisan to Ash‘arī theology, well versed in and a proponent of juridical Sufism, and willing to work for the state.
The sources do not record the circumstances of the Mamluk rulers’ choice of al-Ayki to lead the khānqāh, simply noting that he took up the directorship of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ in 684/1286 when the previous Chief Sufi died. What is particularly intriguing about al-Ayki’s assumption of this post is that he was able to retain his other position (and presumably the accompanying stipend) at the Ghazālīya in Damascus by appointing a series of deputies (nāʾibs) to teach in his name during his absence. This turned out to be a shrewd move, for al-Ayki was not able to retain his position in Cairo for long and he soon returned to Damascus and the Ghazālīya.

The reasons for al-Ayki’s dismissal are not entirely clear. Apart from being mocked for his poor Arabic (presumably because he was Persian), al-Ayki’s first serious problem was an argument that erupted in 687/1288 with Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Bint al-Aʿazz (d. 695/1296). Taqī l-Dīn was the vizier of the Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90) and the son of the well-known Shāfiʿī Chief Judge Tāj al-Dīn b. Bint al-Aʿazz (d. 665/1267). The sources disagree about the nature of the dispute between al-Ayki and Taqī l-Dīn. Some argue it was a matter of al-Ayki’s inclination towards incarnationism (al-hulūl), revealed in his love for Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s (d. 632/1235) famous ‘Poem of the Sufi Way’. Others take a more mundane interpretation, arguing that the dispute revolved around a matter of political protocol. According to this interpretation, recorded by Ibn al-Furāt, al-Ayki disrespected Taqī l-Dīn in 687/1288 when the latter visited the khānqāh, where the vizier was supposed to enjoy a kind of symbolic co-leadership of the Sufis with the Chief Sufi. It was al-Ayki’s habit that if a reading from the Qurʾān had started, he would not stop for any reason. Thus it was unfortunate that when Taqī l-Dīn arrived at the khānqāh much later than planned, the reading had already started. While all the rank-and-file Sufis rose to greet him, al-Ayki continued reading the Qurʾān until he was finished. Only then did he stand to greet Taqī l-Dīn. This led to a confrontation in the course of which one of the Sufis of the khānqāh complained about al-Ayki to the vizier, accusing him of an unstated indiscretion and claiming that there were problems between al-Ayki and some of the Sufis. Al-Ayki denied there was any bad blood between them but Taqī l-Dīn would not listen. He instructed the Sufis to stand al-Ayki up and knock the turban from his head. Both al-Ayki and Taqī l-Dīn then took turns cursing each other publicly, leading to the removal
of al-Aykī from his post. In the aftermath of his dismissal, Taqī l-Dīn himself took up the office of Chief Sufi, which he added to his already impressive list of stipendiary positions. He held at least seventeen posts simultaneously at this time, including Chief Sufi, Chief Judge, the khatīb at al-Azhar, the overseer of the state’s endowments, administrator of the treasury and numerous Shāfi‘ī teaching positions.21

Al-Aykī’s problems at the khānqāh were not simply political, however. In addition to his friction with the vizier, he had issues with some of the local scholars. He attracted the ire of the Ḥanbalis in Cairo, for example, by questioning the status of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.22 Al-Aykī also drew criticism from several quarters for his friendship with the notorious monist Sufi ĄAffī al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291), a student of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274). The latter was, of course, the primary disciple and son-in-law of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).23 Al-Tilimsānī’s wife also happened to be the daughter of the infamous monist and hermeticist Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 669/1271).24 ĄAffī al-Dīn was born in Kufa and raised in Tlemcen, and stayed in Egypt for a short time, during which he lived at the khānqāh. He had a bad reputation among many scholars because of his association with the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Sabʿīn, and his friendship with al-Aykī harmed the latter’s reputation. Indeed, Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745/1344) mentions this in his tafsīr, al-Bahr al-muḥīt. In a discussion of those who belong to the madhhab al-hulūl (school of incarnationism), Abū Ḥayyān quotes a list of these monistic Sufis compiled by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 686/1287), the Shāfi‘ī jurist and Sufi who had a particular dislike for Ibn Sabʿīn and other monists.25 The list includes al-Tilimsānī, and Abū Ḥayyān reports that ‘al-Aykī, the [Chief Sufi] of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, used to mix with [al-Tilimsānī] a great deal, and he was accused of [being a member of] his school. Al-Tilimsānī fled from Cairo to Damascus, fearing he would be killed for heresy (al-zandaqa).26

Perhaps the most elaborate version of al-Aykī’s problematic relation with al-Tilimsānī and the scholars of Egypt involved an incident that took place in front of all the Sufis at the khānqāh. Our only source for the confrontation is Muḥammad Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438), who is careful to insist that this story was never told publicly until after al-Aykī had passed away.27 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn reports that when al-Aykī was the Chief Sufi, he
convened an audition session (samāʿ) at the khānqāh. In attendance that day was none other than ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī along with ‘a young beardless youth’ (shābb amrad). Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn claims that in the presence of al-Aykī and the other Sufis, al-Tilimsānī hugged and kissed the young man, saying to him, ‘You are . . .’ and then presumably calling him a divine epithet (Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn cannot bring himself to reproduce the scandalous utterance, insisting that God is above such nonsense). If accurate, this is clearly an example of shāhid bāzī, or ‘witness play’, in which gazing at the beauty of a young man is constitutes a meditation on the beauty of God’s creation (or even God himself).29 ‘[The Sufis] denounced al-Aykī for failing to denounce [al-Tilimsānī], and they rose against him and he was removed from the directorship [of the khānqāh] and went to Damascus.’30

Al-Aykī’s career is broadly representative of the office of the Chief Sufi during the early Mamluk period. He was a juridical Sufi, born and educated in the East as a Shāfīʿi-Ashʿarī jurist.31 He travelled west to make a career in scholarship, which brought him to teach in Baghdad and Damascus, and eventually to the office of the Chief Sufi in Cairo. At the khānqāh, al-Aykī had to negotiate the personalities of the individual Sufis who resided there, the jurists of Cairo more broadly, and the ruling politicians and bureaucrats. Whatever the cause of al-Aykī’s dismissal, narratives of his career reveal the political and social difficulties attendant upon holding his office. This was the case for all the Chief Sufis of this period. To cite only a few other examples: Shams al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 676/1277) lost the office when he was arrested for embezzling funds;32 Taqī l-Dīn ibn Bint al-Aʿazz was himself dismissed from the post when Ibn Salūs (d. 693/1294), the vizier of al-Malik al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689–93/1290–3), attempted to consolidate his power by appointing his own Chief Sufi;33 and Karīm al-Dīn al-Āmulī (d. 710/1311) was removed from office when the Sufis of the khānqāh complained that he had eliminated some of the paid positions there.34 In general, then, obtaining and retaining the office of Chief Sufi during the Mamluk period depended on negotiating and maintaining good relationships with everyone: the Sufis of the khānqāh, the ʿulamāʾ and the umarāʾ. This was a tall order and not surprisingly no single individual retained the office for any lengthy period of time.
Rank-and-file Sufis

While the Chief Sufi was an undeniably important figure in medieval Egyptian politics, what of the large numbers of Sufis who lived at the khānqāh under his ostensible direction? In collecting information on these rank-and-file Sufis I have located biographical material on thirty-five individuals who lived at the khānqāh between the years of its founding and the opening of the khānqāh at Siryāqūs. With one exception, which I highlight below, this list includes only those who actually lived at the khānqāh. There are a number of references in the literature to locals who visited the khānqāh in order to study a particular text or visit a particular scholar; but they did not live there. The Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was one of many spaces in which scholars disseminated the knowledge and books they were authorised to transmit. Locals would often turn up there to hear a book and obtain permission to transmit it in turn. For example, Erik Ohlander has found that the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was one node in the trans-regional network that transmitted al-Suhrawardi’s ʿAwārif al-maʿārif into the Maghrib. Likewise, the Egyptian scholar of hadith Zaki l-Din al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258) came to the khānqāh many times to study with visiting scholars. My primary focus here is those Sufis who travelled to Egypt to live at the khānqāh. These men came to the khānqāh for a wide variety of reasons and stayed for varying lengths of time. For the purposes of this survey I will heuristically classify their interests into five categories that constitute a composite image of state-sponsored Sufism. Establishing this collective framework is an important component of my larger argument about the popularisation of Sufism in Egypt, for as we will see in the next chapter, the Sufis often acted as a group in fulfilling their duties at the khānqāh. This collective action constituted the production and popularisation of a culture of Sufism on a large scale in Cairo.

First, most of the Sufis who stayed at the khānqāh did so while travelling in search of knowledge. They constitute that class of ʿulamāʾ whom Joan Gilbert calls ‘transient scholars’. That is, they only stayed in one place long enough to glean what knowledge the city had to offer. The khānqāh provided them with a space in Cairo in which to stay and study with others of like mind before moving on. Second, some used the khānqāh as a stepping stone to begin a career in the religio-juridical complex of Cairo-Fustat. In these
cases, the *khānqāh* provided them with the means to establish and nurture the contacts and connections required to procure a paid position at a *madrasa* or other location. Third, there were individuals who worked at the *khānqāh* in some service-oriented capacity. These included cooks, *qawwāls* (singers), janitors and so on. The biographies of these men describe them as being collectors of *hadith* as well. Fourth, there were some Sufis who came to the *khānqāh* strictly to practise their own devotions in peace and quiet at the end of their lives. In these cases, the *khānqāh* functioned as a kind of retirement home for scholars in their old age. Finally, in one fascinating case a local man went to the *khānqāh* to hide from the Mamluk authorities.

The interests of those rank-and-file Sufis who lived at the *khānqāh* were thus quite diverse. But they nevertheless overlapped with, or rather complemented, those of the ruling Ayyubids and Mamluks who continued to fund the *khānqāh*. If the rulers sought to bolster their legitimacy by supporting Sunni learning at the *khānqāh* and to gain blessing and merit from the Sufis themselves, the men who stayed at the *khānqāh* were happy to provide such in exchange for room, board, small stipends, access to other scholars and their own idiosyncratic needs.

Travel for the sake of knowledge (*al-riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm*) is a well-known phenomenon in the medieval Islamicate world.39 Not surprisingly, then, this was the most commonly reported reason individuals came to the Saʿīd al-Suṣadāʾ. As the waqfiya for the *khānqāh* had originally stipulated that it was meant to house ‘foreign Sufis arriving from abroad’, particularly those of the Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī persuasion, it is likewise not surprising that nearly all these Sufis were Shāfiʿīs from the East. This is important because it reveals that most of these Sufis were first and foremost traditional scholars and very clearly juridical Sufis. This should complicate notions that the *khānqāh* was a kind of isolated hermitage for the quiet devotions of reclusive Sufis. On the contrary, it seems actually to have been a quite active place, with much coming and going of scholars from around the world.40

A typical example of such a juridical Sufi using the *khānqāh* as a temporary hospice during his travels is the Shāfiʿī jurist Tāj al-Dīn al-Masʿūdī al-Banjadīhī (d. 584/1188).41 Born in 522/1128 in Banj Dīh in Khurāsān,42 al-Masʿūdī was known for his love of collecting *hadith* and travelling, ‘passing through many regions, including Egypt, Syria, the Jazīra, Khurāsān,
Iraq and Azerbaijan’ in search of knowledge. While most of the medieval sources call him a Sufi, the biographers and historians primarily remember him for his literary skill, evidenced in his commentary on the *Maqāmāt* of ‘Alī al-Ḥarīrī, which al-Qīṭī admiringly called ‘the most extensive (absat) of commentaries [on the *Maqāmāt*]’. Al-Mas‘ūdī also compiled a highly sought-after *muṣjam al-shuyūkh*, or dictionary of his teachers. The project was commissioned by Nūr al-Dīn Zengi, who charged al-Mas‘ūdī with the task of collecting *ḥadīth* as well as the *ijāzas* to transmit them from a large number of eminent scholars on his behalf. In exchange for the book, Nūr al-Dīn offered al-Mas‘ūdī whatever he wanted, which turned out to be letters of introduction to Saladin and the Shāfi‘ī jurist Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), an integral figure in early juridical Sufism in Alexandria. Nūr al-Dīn obliged and sent al-Mas‘ūdī to Egypt with a retinue and money. Thanks to these letters, al-Mas‘ūdī developed a close relationship with both Saladin and al-Silafī, who allowed al-Mas‘ūdī to stay in Alexandria at his madrasa. In the autumn of 581/1185, Saladin sent al-Mas‘ūdī to deliver a message to his nephew Taqi l-Dīn ʿUmar (d. 587/1191), the vice-regent of Egypt. It was during this diplomatic mission that al-Mas‘ūdī stayed at the *khānqāh* and studied *ḥadīth* with a number of people there before returning to Syria, where he spent the rest of his life. This was a fortuitous time at the *khānqāh*, where he was able to ‘develop influence with Saladin and the leaders of Egypt’. Indeed, he became the private tutor to Saladin’s son. Al-Mas‘ūdī is thus a very clear example of the overlapping interests at play in the *khānqāh*. Both Saladin and Nūr al-Dīn sought al-Mas‘ūdī’s learning and by extension his legitimacy among the scholars, and al-Mas‘ūdī received money and lodging during his scholarly travels in return. Ultimately, al-Mas‘ūdī used his connections to acquire a large collection of books from the congregational mosque in Aleppo, which collection he then bequeathed to the Sufis of the Sumaysāṭī *khānqāh* in Damascus when he died.

One of the things al-Mas‘ūdī did while at the *khānqāh* was hold a number of teaching sessions (*majālīs*). While we have no details, we might assume that a large number of local scholars would have come to the *khānqāh* to study and obtain an *ijāza* (licence to teach) from him. As I noted above, the *khānqāh* became a node through which a number of scholars transmitted their learning. We have a very similar report about another travelling
sufi of the khanqah | 71

scholar, Najm al-Din al-Ma‘mūnī (d. 603/1207).\(^{52}\) Al-Ma‘mūnī was born in Nishapur in 546/1151 and travelled widely, studying for a time in Baghdad, before ending up in Alexandria at the dawn of the Ayyubid era, where he studied with al-Silaﬁ and led prayers for the Ayyubid governors of the city. He spent the end of his life at the khanqāh, where al-Mundhirī reports that he studied with him a great deal. It seems then, that for al-Ma‘mūnī the khanqāh provided him with a place to retire and transmit his lifetime of learning to other scholars.

Ibn al-Banā al-Baghdādī (d. 612/1216) is another case in point.\(^{53}\) Born in Baghdad in 536/1142, he studied Sufism with none other than Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168).\(^{54}\) Ibn al-Dubaythī adds that he ‘was companions with the Sufis, lived in ribāṭs, mixed with the qawm, and was trained in their ādāb’\(^{55}\). After his studies in Baghdad, including hadith and fiqh, he travelled to Damascus with al-Suhrawardī and then ‘wandered in Mecca’ for a time.\(^{56}\) From there he returned to Damascus and continued on to Jerusalem and Egypt before returning to Baghdad by way of Mecca again.\(^{57}\) During these travels, in 607/1210 al-Mundhirī reports that al-Baghdādī ‘came to us in Egypt and stayed at the khanqāh Sa‘īdīya in Cairo where he taught hadith. I studied with him there.’\(^{58}\) He did not stay long, however, and soon returned to Damascus, where, according to al-Maqrīzī, he was put in charge of the Sumaysāṭi khanqāh, where he lived until he died.\(^{59}\)

There are other equally notable examples. Abū l-Majd al-Qazwīnī (d. 622/1225) is another juridical Sufi who travelled great distances studying and transmitting hadith.\(^{60}\) Born in 554/1159 in Qazwīn, he began his education there before travelling through most of Persia and the Middle East.\(^{61}\) He came to Egypt and stayed briefly at the khanqāh, where al-Mundhirī met and studied with him. Al-Maqrīzī claims that during this time al-Qazwīnī met al-Malik al-Kāmil, who was so taken with him that he ‘blessed him with copious funds’.\(^{62}\) He did not spend much time in Egypt, however, and he eventually died in Mosul after holding a series of teaching sessions in Irbil.\(^{63}\) Another juridical Sufi, Ibn Abī Ṭalib al-Irbili (d. 727/1327), stayed at both the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā and the Siryāqs khanqāhs during his travels in Egypt. Al-Irbili was born in Baghdad in 669/1270 and studied all over Iraq, Damascus and ‘the lands of Persia’ before settling in Egypt, where he moved between the khanqāhs for a time, eventually dying in Cairo.\(^{64}\)
As I noted above, some Sufis came to the *khānqāh* as a means of establishing themselves in Egypt in hopes of beginning a career with a stipendiary position. The best example of such ambition is the case of the famous Shāfiʿī jurist Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 596/1200). Shihāb al-Dīn was born in 522/1128 in Khurāsān, where he studied *fiqh* with the students of al-Ghazālī before coming to Baghdad, where he attempted to set himself up as the pre-eminent scholar of Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī Islam in the city. He did so by marrying the daughter of the Chief Judge, obtaining a position as a preacher (*wāʿiẓ*) at the Niẓāmiya, and performing an elaborate stunt. He paraded through Baghdad carrying a *ghāshiya*, or ornamented saddle cloth, one of the emblems of royalty used by the Seljuks in their investiture ceremonies. The display was clearly meant to portray him as the ‘sultan’ of the scholars in the city, but only served to get him expelled. Nevertheless, it did not deter his ambition. When al-Ṭūsī left Baghdad he travelled to Cairo, where he pulled the exact same stunt. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231) apparently saw this during his visit to Cairo and adds the interesting detail that while comporting himself thus, holding the *ghāshiya* in his upraised hands, he had someone accompany him calling out, ‘This is the king of the scholars!’ In al-Dhahabi’s telling, this used to anger the *amīrs* of Cairo, while in Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī’s more sympathetic version, the sultan enjoyed the display ‘and did not forbid it’. In either case, it is clear that al-Ṭūsī came to Cairo specifically to establish himself as a scholar of renown and obtain a post. He began his efforts by staying at the *khānqāh*.

Once installed at the *khānqāh*, Shihāb al-Dīn began to promote Ashʿarism vigorously in Cairo and garnered the reputation that he felt he so richly deserved. He also seems to have enjoyed sparring with the Ḥanbalī jurists in the city, particularly Ibn Nujayya (d. 599/1203), a rivalry that al-Dhahabī attributes to the fact that Ibn Nujayya ‘was a Ḥanbalī and Shihāb was an Ashʿarī, and both were preachers’. The combination of his bold personality and tireless efforts on behalf of the Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī creed struck a particular chord with Saladin’s nephew, Taqī l-Dīn ʿUmar. Saladin himself is said to have sought al-Ṭūsī’s advice after he swore he would kill a group of Christians ‘from the coast’ (i.e. those living within the Latin kingdoms) after conquering them, although a deputy had subsequently promised them safe passage. Al-Ṭūsī ruled that Saladin was not bound by his deputy’s promise and Saladin...
killed them all. This is not to say that al-Ṭūsī was in complete alignment with the ruling class. Rather, his alignment was strategic. For example, he had a series of confrontations with the influential Ayyubid vizier Ibn Shukr (d. 622/1225), generally a thoroughly dreadful character, and Ibn Kathīr says that al-Ṭūsī ‘paid no attention to rulers’ (ghayr muṭtafiḥ bi-ʿabnāʿ al-dunyā). Al-Maqrīzī reports that al-Ṭūsī’s students attempted to prevent some of the politicians from attending al-Ṭūsī’s funeral ‘because of a disagreement on a point of doctrine in the [Shāfiʿī] madhhab’. Nevertheless, al-Ṭūsī’s efforts to establish a high-profile reputation paid off when Taqī l-Dīn ʿUmar converted some of his properties in Fustat into a Shāfiʿī madrasa, known as the Manāzil al-ʿIzz. He endowed the madrasa with a very generous waqf, and then appointed al-Ṭūsī to the task of overseeing its operation and teaching fiqh there. The Manāzil al-ʿIzz was one of the first madrasas built in Egypt and, after Saladin’s madrasas, probably the most important in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Cairo. Most of his biographers agree that Shihāb al-Dīn was a master teacher, had many students in Egypt, and was a highly sought-after authority in legal matters. Thus, after finding no reception in Baghdad for his talents, he moved to Cairo, where his brief stay at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ was primarily a means of establishing himself in Egypt and beginning his illustrious career there.

While most of the men I have been able to find were jurists or hadith scholars, this was not the case for all who stayed at the khānqāh. While the only extant waqfīya for the other Ayyubid-era khānqāh (the Nāṣirīya in Jerusalem) does not specify the duties of the rank-and-file Sufis, later Mamluk-era waqfīyas do. Thus, for example, drawing on the waqfīyas from Mamluk khānqāhs, Leonor Fernandes provides detailed tables of the various posts, salaries and benefits attendant upon those duties. While the waqfīya for the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ may or may not have included such stipulations, it is certain that there were jobs requiring various forms of non-juridical expertise. For example, the khānqāh needed a cook to prepare the food that the waqfīya stipulated for daily distribution. We have, interestingly enough, two examples of cooks at the khānqāh. The first was a certain Ibn Abī Rūḥ (d. 681/1282), who was born in Cairo in 605/1208–9, and thus one of the very few instances of a local Sufi allowed to reside at the khānqāh. Al-Maqrīzī, the only source we have for Ibn Abī Rūḥ, reports simply that ‘he
was a Sufi and cook at the khānqāh Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. But Ibn Abī Rūḥ did not limit himself to cooking; he also learned hadīth from a member of the Ḥamūwayh family (the aforementioned awlād al-shaykh), and studied with Yūsuf b. Maḥmūd al-Sāwī (d. 647/1249–50). Al-Sāwī was from Damascus and a fellow khānqāh-dweller in Cairo, and it was there that Ibn Abī Rūḥ must have studied with him. The second example is Jalāl al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Qāhirī (d. 718/1318–19), whom al-Birzālī calls ‘the cook for the Sufis in Cairo . . . and the servant of the Sufis at the khānqāh’. Like Ibn Abī Rūḥ, he was also known to have studied and transmitted hadīth while living at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, in addition to his culinary duties.

Al-Maqrīzī reports that the khānqāh also employed a qawwāl, a singer. Ḥusām b. ʿAlī al-Qawwāl (d. sometime after 615/1219) came to Egypt, presumably from the East, traveling with a group of Sufis. When they arrived in the city of Būṣīr they held a samāʿ in which al-Qawwāl’s singing was so powerfully effective that it killed one of the Sufis. As far as al-Qawwāl’s connection to the khānqāh is concerned, al-Maqrīzī reports that a large prayer session (daʿwa) was held at the khānqāh. At the end of the session, they convened a samāʿ in which ‘al-Qawwāl sang and the group was delighted, but one of the faqīrs was not moving. At the end of the samāʿ al-Qawwāl sang [a few lines of poetry] and that young man shouted and dropped dead, may God have mercy on him.’ Unfortunately, we know nothing else about al-Qawwāl’s time at the khānqāh or how long he stayed there. In addition to cooks and singers, al-Birzālī also mentions a few professional ḍalāls, or juridical adjuncts, who lived at the khānqāh and were employed by the state. The khānqāh also employed shuhūd, or professional witnesses. It was the termination of these witnesses during the tenure of the Chief Sufi al-Āmulī (see above) that moved the Sufis of the khānqāh to protest and have him dismissed.

In addition to the scholars and those who worked at the khānqāh, there were also those who lived there strictly to practice their devotions in solitude. While one might imagine that this would have been the primary function of the khānqāh, given the evidence available it seems to have been common primarily among those at the end of their lives. Rūkn al-Dīn b. Ḥamūwayh (d. 641/1217) was one of these retirees. He had studied ḥadīth with al-Silafī and others in Alexandria, Fustat, Baghdad and Syria, and was, like many who have appeared here, one of al-Mundhirī’s teachers. Rūkn al-Dīn was from...
the same Ḥamuwayh family as the first Chief Sufi of the khānqāh, although it is unclear how exactly they were related. Al-Mundhirī reports simply that at some point Rukn al-Dīn ‘isolated himself in the khānqāh Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ in Cairo and passed his time well and in beautiful fashion’. Likewise, Abū l-Fatḥ al-Abīwardī (d. 677/1278) was a Shāfiʿī scholar from Kufa who made his way to Egypt, where he studied with the students of al-Silafī among many others. Ibn Nuqṭa and al-Maqrīzī both report that after a lifetime of tireless study he spent his final days isolated from people at the khānqāh. He never left its precincts except to pray, and he died at the khānqāh shortly after coming to live there. There is also a former Ḥanafi Chief Judge from Damascus, Shams al-Dīn al-Adhraʿī (d. 712/1312), who spent the end of his life at the khānqāh. Al-Adhraʿī had fallen ill in Damascus and decided to set out for Cairo. Upon arriving there he stayed at the khānqāh, where he died five days later.

Finally, we might mention a few Sufis who appear only briefly at the khānqāh and about whom we know very little. An interesting case is that of a certain Burhān al-Dīn al-Mawṣili, who was known for his Sufi tarbiya (training) and who claimed to have been a student of Abū Saʿīd Ibn Abī l-Khayr (d. 440/1049). Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī reports that at a majlis held at the khānqāh in which Burhān al-Dīn was recounting the virtues (manāqib) of Abū Saʿīd, he turned to one of the Sufis and beat him on the head. This upset the Sufis of the khānqāh, prompting the son of the Chief Sufi to ask him why he did it. Ibn Nūḥ eventually reveals that while Burhān al-Dīn was speaking, he read the mind of his disciple who was thinking his station was higher than Abū Saʿīd. When this happened, Abu Said’s head appeared from the wall and he said to Burhan al-Din: ‘Look at how your student disrespects me!’ The only other author to mention al-Mawṣili is Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī l-Manṣūr, who says nothing about the khānqāh, but does note that Burhān al-Dīn was known for guiding his disciples in khalwa (seclusion) and that he died in Damascus.

Finally, there is the interesting case of ʿUmar al-Aswānī (d. 686/1287), who, as his demonym indicates, was from Aswān, although his father was a famous scholar from Qazwīn. ʿUmar spent his time in devotions at the khānqāh and was apparently a highly sought-after teacher. When one of the mamluks of the sultan Manṣūr Qalāwūn, al-Shujāʿī (d. 693/1293–4), came to the khānqāh he asked to see the ‘most visited’ shaykh. When told it was
al-Aswānī, he demanded to see him but al-Aswānī locked the door to his room and would not come out. Only after the intervention of the Chief Sufi, al-Ḥasan al-Rūmī (d. 684/1285), did al-Aswānī open the door although he still refused to speak. Al-Shujāʿī then asked al-Aswānī to pray for him. Al-Aswānī replied, ‘This world is yours. As for the next world, it will not come because of my supplication. You oppress the people and do such-and-such, get away from me.’

There are a couple of points worth considering about al-Aswānī. First, the anecdote about his encounter with al-Shujāʿī, mediated by al-Ḥasan al-Rūmī, nicely outlines the contours of what state-sponsored Sufism looked like in early Mamluk Egypt. Al-Shujāʿī, as a high-ranking member of Qalāwūn’s entourage, obviously felt it was his right to demand access to and prayers from these Sufis on the payroll. Al-Ḥasan al-Rūmī, as the state-appointed ‘chief’ of the Sufis, could not refuse this request. His was a difficult position, caught between his Sufis and the representative of the state that paid their salaries. But importantly, al-Aswānī, while obliged to meet with al-Shujāʿī, was nevertheless able to insult him to his face. Thus, while the anecdote would suggest that the Sufis of the khānqāh were indeed like employees of the state, they were able to exercise discretion in how they discharged that duty. Second, al-Aswānī is a nice example of the growing integration of scholarly families from the East into the local Egyptian scene during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. His father was a scholar from Qazwīn who married into a well-known family from Aswān, a family originally from the Maghrib. Al-Aswānī thus embodies the coming together of several different important trends in this period: immigration to Egypt from East and West, the role marriage played in joining these together, and the state-sponsorship of juridical Sufis.

I would end this chapter with a final anecdote that shows one more interest of those who stayed at the khānqāh, albeit a highly idiosyncratic one. Kamāl al-Dīn b. Bashāʾir (d. 692/1293) was not a Sufi, but a scholar of ḥadīth from the Upper-Egyptian city of Qūṣ. In fact, he was so committed to this pursuit that he built ‘a place for prophetic ḥadīth in Ikhmīm, where he lived and served the amīr [Jalāl al-Dīn] al-Muḥammadī’. Al-Muḥammadī (d. 676/1277) had been a dutiful soldier for the Ayyubids and early Mamluks, but in 669/1271 he was implicated with several other amīrs in a plot to kill...
the sultan Baybars. Baybars had the conspirators arrested and imprisoned in the citadel.93 This political intrigue seems to have been the context behind al-Maqrizi’s account of Ibn Bashāʾir: ‘When [Baybars] became displeased with [al-Muḥammadī], Ibn Bashāʾir fled to Cairo and [hid] at the khānqāh Šalāḥiya Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ.’94 Ibn Bashāʾir apparently spent a day there reciting poetry for the Sufis, including the Chief Sufi al-’Aykī, who gave him a garment and 200 dirhams in exchange for his performance. Fortunately for Ibn Bashāʾir, that very same day his son came to him and said that the sultan had forgiven al-Muḥammadī and that it was safe for him to return home.95 Ibn Bashāʾir would eventually be implicated in another revolt from Upper Egypt, although that does not concern us here.96 The case of Ibn Bashāʾir is interesting for the purposes of this study in so far as it shows that not all those who came to the khānqāh were necessarily Sufis or from foreign lands. In this case, he just needed a place to cool his heels until the affair with his boss was worked out.

What can we say, then, about the Sufis who lived at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ? First, they were above all members of the ‘ulamāʾ. They were certainly Sufis, but of a particular type – juridical Sufis. In addition to studying Sufism, they were well versed in the collection of hadīth, and were experts in fiqh, particularly the Shāfiʿī madhhab as stipulated in Saladin’s waqfiya. This trend would continue through the early Mamluk period.

Second, with only a few notable exceptions, the Sufis who came to the khānqāh were from the East: primarily Syria, Iraq or Khūrāsān. They had come to Cairo for a variety of reasons and their stay at the khānqāh was typically only temporary. While they were bound to abide by the rules of the organisation when in residence, they were not there for the long term. Even those who did move to the khānqāh permanently did so apparently only at the end of their lives. They expected to spend their few remaining days or months isolated in devotions after a life of scholarly activity.

Third, the Sufis and the sultans enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. The Sufis were free to pursue their own interests while the sultans received the Sufis’ overt and public support. Despite the encounter of al-Shujāʿī and al-Qazwīnī, the Sufis and the state and its representatives seem to have got along well for the most part. The physical site of the khānqāh and its waqfiya made this all possible. Thus while some have argued that, unlike the ‘ulamāʾ, who were
dependent on the state’s largesse for their livelihood, ‘Sufi shaykhs were not economically dependent on the rulers, because they received gifts and contributions from the people’, this is not accurate in all cases.\textsuperscript{97} If anything, the evidence presented here shows that the Sufis of the Sa`īd al-Su`adāʾ, both the political and the rank-and-file Sufis, were no different from the other civilian elites who relied on the state for their livelihoods. While some might argue that the state had co-opted the Sufis for its own Machiavellian purposes, I hope to have shown here that there are good reasons to reject this argument. These Sufis acted of their own accord and for their own reasons.

Finally, this collectivity of state-sponsored Sufis were not associated with any of the Sufi initiatic lineages gaining in popularity at precisely this time. While a number of scholars have posited that communal life in \textit{khānqāhs} or \textit{ribāṭs} was a critical component in the development of organised brotherhoods, it is quite clear that the Sa`īd al-Su`adāʾ played no part in this process.\textsuperscript{98} These were juridical Sufis whose primary epistemological orientation was to legal concerns, and they spent most of their time with other jurists. While we have scattered references to local Sufis who were associated with initiatic lineages visiting the \textit{khānqāh} on occasion, the social worlds of the local Sufis and the state-sponsored Sufis were for the most part separate. This reinforces one of the critical arguments I would make about Sufism in medieval Egypt at this time. There were many different collectivities of Sufis, many of whom had quite different epistemological and social orientations.\textsuperscript{99} They made different kinds of claims about the nature of their authority, which often translated into a diversity of relationships to the state and its actors. But my purpose here is not to separate out the more ‘authentic’ Sufis from state-sponsored imposters. Rather, I seek to describe the contested terrain of Sufism and the several ways in which all these groups laid claim to the same traditions and institutions of Sufism. Obviously not everyone saw it this way.

Already in the sixth/twelfth century Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) complained that the Sufis of his day ‘are free from working for a living in the \textit{ribāṭs}, busying themselves with eating, drinking, singing and dancing. They seek worldly gain from every oppressor [i.e. ruler] . . . Most of the \textit{ribāṭs} are built by oppressors who endow them with filthy lucre.’\textsuperscript{100} As rulers emulated the example of Niẓām al-Mulk and began sponsoring Sufi hospices more frequently, we should not be surprised to find the same kinds of charges lev-
elled at later Sufis. A good witness for the situation in Cairo, although slightly later, is the Shafi‘i jurist Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370). Al-Subkī was quite sympathetic to Sufis, but not those who abused their positions at the khānqāh. In his Mu‘īd al-ni‘am, a handbook for employment, he differentiates between those he considers real Sufis and those who merely ‘resemble’ the real ones. In particular, he associates khānqāh life with crass opportunism: ‘Most [true] Sufis do not enjoy entering khānqāhs or have any connection to worldly pursuits (asbāb al-dunyā).’ Indeed, al-Subkī argues that the very act of living in a state-sponsored khānqāh is a contradiction in terms: ‘You know that the true Sufi is one who has turned away from worldly gain and toward devotions . . . so if you enter the [khānqāh], you have made it a job by which you obtain worldly gain.’ Logically, then, anyone found living at the khānqāh cannot actually be a Sufi. His judgement for these imposters is scathing: ‘Those people who live in khānqāhs do so as an excuse to cloth themselves in treachery, to eat hashish, and to be absorbed in the vanities of the world.’ While this is polemic, it nevertheless demonstrates the unease with which the state-sponsored Sufis were greeted in some quarters, including Ja‘far ibn Tha‘lab al-Udfuwī’s treatise mentioned earlier.

This is reminiscent of Ibn Taymiya’s three-fold typology of Sufis, in which the ‘Sufis of subsistence’ (ṣūfiyat al-arzāq) who live in khānqāhs are different from and it seems inferior to the ‘Sufis of true realities’ (ṣūfiyat al-hāqā‘iq). In this connection, it is worth coming back to al-Banjadīhī, whom I mentioned earlier. Al-Maqrīzī admiringly wrote of him that ‘he is one of the most distinguished in every art, in fiqh, hadith and adab . . . He was an elegant shaykh, one of the most elegant in form, and most lovely in dress.’ Surely this was the kind of ostentatious display that Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Udfuwī, al-Subkī, Ibn Taymiya and others had in mind when they critiqued the disconnect between the supposed ascetic ideal of Sufism and the worldly acclaim and wealth of many self-described Sufis. However, as we will see in Part Two, this kind of worldly display would become the hallmark of a quite popular Sufi collectivity, the early Shādhiliya.

Nevertheless, and despite complaints like these, the Sufis of the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā’ must have been a major demographic force in the streets of Cairo. There were 300 Sufis living there at any given time, and they were allowed to spend good portions of their day outside the khānqāh. They spent time
each day and each week publicly parading and blessing the sultan. Given their visible presence in the city they contributed in several ways to the production and popularisation of Sufism in Egypt, the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. One clear example is Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), the student of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258). When two state officials approached him and offered to endow his hospice in Alexandria he declined because of his mistrust of politicians (al-Ḥikandari, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 137). Another example is ʿAbd Allāh al-Minūfī (d. 749/1348), who rejected an invitation from the Chief Sufi, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 729/1329), to live at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. Al-Qūnawī insisted, to which al-Minūfī responded, ‘The endower stipulated that the residence be for Sufis, and by God I am not a Sufi at all (ana wa-llāhī lastu bi-ṣūfī)’ (al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 2:312–13; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durrīya*, 3:39–46). Al-Minūfī’s disavowal was probably a means of refusing al-Qūnawī’s request politely, for he certainly was a Sufi. Both al-ʿAsqalānī and al-Munāwī record that al-Minūfī studied with a Shādhilī shaykh, a certain Sulaymān al-Tanūkhī. Given the Shādhilī suspicion of state sponsorship, al-Minūfī’s reaction makes sense. When al-Minūfī says he is not a Sufi, he may be indicating that he is not that kind of Sufi, i.e. a Sufi who lives off the largesse of the state. This is an inverse corollary to the statement of Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), who argued that since a Sufi, by definition, is one who rejects worldly goods, and since one who lives at a *khānqāh*, by definition, is given worldly goods during his stay, those who live in *khānqāhs* cannot be Sufis (*Muʿīd al-niʿam*, p. 178). See also al-Udfuwī’s utterly formalistic (and sarcastic, I think) definition of a Sufi in *al-Mūfī*, pp. 46–7.

2. Without the original *waqfīya*, we cannot be sure whether or not this title was originally given to the Chief Sufi. However, beginning with the first Chief Sufi in Cairo, Ṣadr al-Dīn Hamuwayh (d. 617/1220), and continuing through those who held the position until 724/1325, the historians and biographers of this period typically included the phrase ‘and he took up the directorship of the Sufis of the realms of Egypt’ (*waliya mashyakhat al-ṣūfīya fī li-diyār al-miṣriya*), whenever describing the Chief Sufi taking office. This language has led many to argue that the Chief Sufi was the official representative of all Sufis, or a kind of liaison with the state. Thus, Lapidus describes the Chief Sufi as being ‘responsible for the over-all administration and discipline of the Sufis and for their liaison with the Sultan’ (*Muslim Cities*, pp. 105–6). Massignon made

3. For a parallel example of a highly contested position during this period, the Chief Judge, see Escovitz, The Office of Qâḍî al-Quḍât; Escovitz, ‘Patterns of Appointment’.


5. See also Geoffroy, Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie, pp. 167–72.


7. Mottahedeh, review of Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur, p. 495. Others have attributed the neologism ‘ulemalogy’ (spelled in various ways) to L. Carl Brown: see, for example, Cornell, Realm of the Saint, p. 295 n. 4.

8. Who actually selected and confirmed the holders of this office is not always clear. But it is clear that the decision typically always involved the Chief Judge, vizier and sultan in some way. On the Chief Sufi as a member of the civilian elite, see Petry, The Civilian Elite, pp. 221, 327–8, 356, 366, 374.

9. There are several examples of the ways in which the Chief Sufi found himself facilitating contact with and defusing conflict between Sufis of the khânqâh and high-ranking state officials. To cite only one example, one of the Chief Sufis, al-Ḥasan al-Rûmî (d. 684/1285), was caught between the amīr, al-Shujâ‘î (d. 693/1293–4), and one of the Sufis in the khânqâh who refused to pray for him (al-Udfuwî, al-Ṭâlî, pp. 457–8). I discuss this incident in more detail below.


12. The only information I have been able to locate about al-Aykî’s origins is from Ibn Qâḍî Shuhba, Ṭabaqât al-shâfi‘iyya, 2:246, where he begins the entry by noting that al-Aykî ‘taught in Rayy, then travelled to Baghdad and
taught at the Niẓāmiya’. If he was not from Rayy, he began his scholarly career there.


14. The Ghazālīya was actually a corner in the Umayyad mosque. It was so named because when Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī came to Damascus, he attempted to stay at the Sumaysāṭiyya. The Sufis there refused him entry, so he stayed at the mosque until the Sufis accepted him (see al-Nuṣaymī, *al-Dāris*, 1:313–14). The Sumaysāṭiyya was originally the palace of the Umayyad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān (d. 86/705). In the early fifth/eleventh century ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Sumaysāṭī (d. 453/1061) bought it and turned it into a hospice for Sufis (see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:363; al-Nuṣaymī, *al-Dāris*, 2:118–26).


16. The poor Arabic charge is from an anecdote that al-ʿAṣfādī reports in *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 4:352. ‘It is said that *shaykh* Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik was told about [al-ʿAykī] and his knowledge of *al-kashshāf* [of al-Zamakhšarī]. So [Badr al-Dīn] attended his *dars* one night to hear him speak. When [al-ʿAykī] finished speaking he said, “O *shaykh* Badr al-Dīn, I didn’t hear you speak [during the lesson].” [Badr al-Dīn replied], “How can I speak? From the time you started speaking until you stopped I counted 30 [grammatical] mistakes!”’

17. The sources for Taqī l-Dīn are extensive: see the list compiled by Tadmūrī in al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 52:261–2; on his father, Tāj al-Dīn, see the sources ibid., 49:199–200.


19. See Homerin’s summary and discussion of these issues in *From Arab Poet*, pp. 39–44.

20. Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 8:123–5. On co-rule, Ibn al-Furāt says that ‘it was customary that when a scholar became vizier in Egypt, a rug would be spread out for him at the Saʿīd al-Suṣādāʾ *khānqāh* and he would be Chief Sufi there in partnership with the [official] Chief Sufi’ (ibid., 8:124).


al-Tilimsānī’s son Muḥammad, in which he and al-Sakhāwī attended a lecture together with Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Īsfahānī, who asked the son who he was. He responded, ‘I am the son of your servant al-ʿAffī al-Tilimsānī.’ The shaykh smiled and said, ‘You are steeped in divinity (anta ʿariq fī l-ulūhīya)! Your mother is the daughter of Ibn Sabʿīn and your father is al-ʿAffī al-Tilimsānī.’ The joke here is that both Ibn Sabʿīn and al-Tilimsānī were monists who saw divinity in everything. Muḥammad was a famous poet in his own right; he died very young and was known as ‘the charming youth’ (al-shābb al-żarīf); see references in al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al--Islām, 51:340–4.

25. On al-Qasṣallānī, see the biography and references in al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh al-Islām, 51:277–9, and Ḫusayn, al-Adab al-ṣūfī, 116–18. The medieval sources are in agreement that al-Qaṣṭallānī opposed the monist school. Ḫusayn, however, argues that ‘after reading his poetry I found that he leans toward the [ideas] of the monists and incarnationists, in particular in his qaṣida in tā’’. See also Ohlander, Sufism in an Age of Transition, p. 319 n. 6, where he responds to Trimingham’s assertion (The Sufi Orders, p. 36) that al-Qaṣṭallānī could ‘hardly’ be called a Sufī.

28. On the beardless youth in the medieval Arabic context, see el-Rouayheb, Before Homosexuality, pp. 36–9, 95–110.
31. There were only two non-Shāfiʿī Chief Sufis at the khānqāh during this period, as far as I am aware, and both served during the transitional period between Ayyubid and Mamluk rule. The first was Sirāj al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥanafi (d. 672/1273), on whom see Ibn Shaddād, Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓahir, pp. 94–5. The second was Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥanbalī (d. 676/1277), on whom see Hofer, ‘The Origins and Development’, pp. 23–5.
35. For example, while Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 596/1200) stayed at the khānqāh,
‘students and jurists came to study with him there’ (al-Mundhirī, al-Takmila, 1:365).

39. See especially Touati, *Islam and Travel*.
40. Petry makes much the same point (*The Civilian Elite*, p. 270). However, he goes on to note that the ‘activities of the Şüfi communities were not open to the public’. In the case of the Saʾid al-Suʿadāʾ there is substantial evidence that non-residents came to the *khānqāh* quite frequently, as I noted above.
42. According to al-ʿ Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 1:498, Banj Dīh, which means ‘five villages’ in Persian, is actually a cluster of five villages near Marv and Rūdh. The demonym is often Arabised as al-Fanjadihi.
43. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, 6:47. Al-Maqrīzī actually provides a very long list of the cities al-Banjadīhī visited during his travels: ‘He also heard [ḥadīth] in his own country and in Murūrūdh al-Shāhijān, Herat, Sijistān, Balkh, Sirkhis, Nishapur, Kirmān, Yazd, Shirāz, Kāzarūn, Isfahan, Hamadhān, Zinjān, Tabrīz, Baghdad, Kufa, Mecca, Mosul, Diyar Bakr, Aqṣarā in the lands of Rūm and Damascus.’
47. The letter was a macabre one, in which Saladin commanded Taqī l-Dīn to exhume the corpse of Muḥammad al-Kīzānī, buried at the shrine of al-Shāfiʿī in the Qarāfa cemetery, and to throw it in the Nile. Al-Kīzānī was an Egyptian Şüfi who held the interesting theological position that the actions of pious devotees existed pre-eternally (afʿāl al-ʿubbād qadīma). He apparently had a sizeable following, as al-Maqrīzī writes of a ʿmāra kīzānīya (Kīzānī collectivity). When he died in 562/1167, he was buried next to al-Shāfiʿī’s shrine (al-Maqrīzī, *al-
The reason that Saladin ordered al-Kizānī’s corpse exhumed and thrown into the Nile seems to have been a rift that developed between al-Kizānī (or his students) and rival Egyptian Sufis led by the famous Najm al-Dīn al-Khabūshānī (d. 587/1191). Al-Khabūshānī was a strict Shāfiʿī and Ashʿarī partisan and would have found al-Kizānī’s position odious to say the least. Al-Dhahabi writes that ‘al-Khabūshānī took sides against [al-Kizānī] and had him exhumed, saying, “He is an anthropomorphist (ḥasbawi) and should not be buried next to al-Shāfiʿī”’ (Tārīkh al-Islām, 39:135). Al-Dhahabi does not say the body was thrown in the Nile, merely ‘buried elsewhere’. On this incident, see Lev, ‘Piety and Political Activism’, pp. 304–5.

49. Al-Qīfī, Inbāh al-ruwāt, 3:166.
51. Al-Dhahabī, Siyar aʿlām, 21:173; al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, 41:193; Ibn al-Dubaythī, Dhayl ṭārīkh madinat al-salām, 1:406–7. Both authors place these majālis in 575/1179, which was the year before al-Silafi died and six years before Saladin sent him to Egypt. It seems to me, then, that al-Masʿūdī probably stayed at the khānqāh on his first trip to Egypt, when Nūr al-Dīn had given him letters of introduction for Saladin and al-Silafi.
56. Ibid., 1:388. It is al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffā, 6:129, who says that he travelled with al-Suhrawardi to Damascus.
57. Al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffā, 6:129.
61. See al-Dhahabī’s list in Ṭārīkh al-Islām, 45:132.
63. Ibn al-Mustawfī, Ṭārīkh Irbil, 1:300.
64. Al-Maqṣūrī, al-Muqaffā, 7:108–9. I have not been able to locate any other information about al-Irbilī.
66. I am preparing on article on the ghāshiya and al-˝ūsī.
67. Al-Baghdādī recorded his visit to Egypt in the valuable Kitāb al-ifāda, but the anecdote is not in this account. It is al-Dhahabī who records the anecdote in al-˝Ibar, 3:116; Siyar aʾlmā, 21:388–9; Ṭārīkh al-Islām, 42:269.
68. Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiya al-kufrā, 6:397.
69. Al-Dhahabī, Ṭārīkh al-Islām, 42:400, records some amusing stories about their encounters, including one in which Ibn Nujayya was with a group of people in the Qarâfā mosque and the ceiling collapsed on them. Al-˝ūsī responded by writing a report (fasl) in which he mentioned the Qurʾānic verse speaking of the wicked, ‘and the roof collapsed on them from above’ (Q 16:26). In another incident, a dog came through the rows of people attending Ibn Nujayya’s majlis and the latter pointed at al-˝ūsī and said, ‘[The dog] is from over there.’
70. Al-Subkī, al-Ṭabaqāt al-wooṣtā (in the editor’s notes to Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiya al-kufrā, 6:397–8 n. 3), which is itself a report from al-Muqtafī, a now-lost work by the Alexandrian jurist Nāṣir al-Dīn b. al-Munir (d. 683/1284).
75. Al-Maqrizi, *al-Muqaffa*, 6:466–7. I have not been able to find any other information about this individual.
76. Ibid., 6:466.
79. According to al-`Oamawi, *Mu`jam al-buldan*, 1:509–10, this was the name of four different villages in Egypt. See also Wiet, `Busir or Abusir`, where he notes that this was the name given to villages that were specially known for worshiping Osiris, hence the name `Busir`.
86. Al-Qusi, *al-Wahid*, 1:81b. We learn here also that Jamal al-Din `Aynsah tells those present that Burhan al-Din had directed him in khalwa at the khangah at least three times. This is one of only a few references to khalwa taking place at the khangah I have come across, although `AlI Bashah Mubarak, *Khitat al-tawfiqiya*, 4:102, said the khangah still contained `a number of khalwa cells` in the nineteenth century. There is an interesting reference in al-Maqrizi, *Durar al-`uqud al-farida*, 1:281, in which a practitioner of khalwa at the khangah floats at the ceiling of his cell.
89. Al-Hasan al-Rumi, sometimes called al-Hasan al-Bukhari, is one of the more enigmatic figures to hold the office of Chief Sufi in Cairo. I have been able to find no biographical information about him, despite the fact that he is mentioned in multiple sources: al-`Ayni, *Iqad al-jum`an*, 2:344; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya*, 17:599; al-Maqrizi, *al-Suluk*, 1:730; al-Suyuti, *Husn al-muha`ada*, 2:260. He is also mentioned in the *taqlid* for al-Ayki, discussed above.
92. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muḥammadi’s epithet al-Ṣāliḥi means he belonged to the Ṣāliḥiyya, the corps of soldiers serving the sultan al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (r. 637–47/1240–9).
95. Ibid., 5:450. Clifford, *State Formation*, has argued that this kind of forgiveness and reintegration into the mamlūk ranks was one of the most salient means by which the sultans were able to establish and maintain constitutional order (*niẓām*).
96. In 651/1253 the Bedouin leader Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Taghlab al-Jaʿfarī (d. 658/1260) led a revolt against the Mamluks in an attempt to create an independent Upper Egypt. Al-Maqrīzī claims that when Taghlab revolted he made Ibn Bashāʾir his vizier (*al-Muqaffā*, 5:451). See Chapter 7 for more details on the revolt.
99. Homerin makes the same argument in ‘Sufis and Their Detractors’.
100. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, p. 254. The most curmudgeonly portion of Ibn al-Jawzī’s tirade here is when he incredulously notes that ‘it has reached me that a man recited the Qurān in a *ribaṭ* and they prevented him! And that a group recited some *ḥadīth* in a *ribaṭ* and [the residents] said, “This is not the place for that!”’
102. Ibid., p. 178.
103. Ibid., p. 179. See also Homerin’s comments on this passage (‘Sufis and Their Detractors’, pp. 241–2).
104. Al-Udfuwī, *al-Mūfī*.
105. Ibn Taymiya, *al-Ṣūfīya*, p. 34.
107. Al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 3:25, records the daily schedule for the last Chief Sufi at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 729/1329). From this schedule it is clear that he spent at least half of his day away from the *khānqāh* visiting friends and students in the city.
What is Popular about the Khānqāh?

Introduction

After Saladin opened the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ Cairo was infused with many hundreds of juridical Sufis from the East. This immigration had a profound impact on the social and religious fabric of the city. Upon their arrival these individuals lived and worked in the very heart of urban Cairo, the bayn al-qaṣrayn district. While the Sufis were obliged to spend portions of their day engaged in devotions within the walls of the khānqāh, they were not required to sequester themselves. They performed public rituals every evening, they paraded through the streets of Cairo every Friday, and they frequented the city’s many madrasas, mosques and teaching circles. Locals also came to the khānqāh to study with them on site. All these practices contributed to the popularisation of Sufism on a large scale in Cairo. But what exactly where these Sufis popularising? As I noted in the previous chapter, they were not representatives of any specific initiatic lineage or tariqa. Nor were they known for being miracle workers. Rather, if these Sufis promoted a particular type of Sufism it was a non-initiatic juridical Sufism that was explicitly oriented to a Shāfiʿī (and to a lesser extent Mālikī) and Ashʿarī worldview and epistemology. Their primary idiom of authority was that of scholarship and jurisprudence, with which they articulated their place in the world, their relationship to the state and their connection to Sufism. In order to understand how the Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ contributed to the popularisation of Sufism in Egypt, then, we must not only focus on the specific practical forms and modes of cultural production that characterised their per-
formances. We must also be attendant to how these were authorised by and contributed to the organisational aims of the politicised space of the khānqāh.

In the Introduction I argued that a theoretically useful exploration of the question of popularisation will dissolve categorical divisions of elite/popular, high/low, jurist/Sufi, and focus instead on the modes of production of a truly popular culture in which multiple members of society participated. In other words, to theorise the popularisation of Sufism through the site of the khānqāh is to determine in what ways multiple strata of society participated together in the production and consumption of a socially negotiated Sufi culture. In the case of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, the activities of the state-sponsored Sufis would not have been possible without the military elites who funded them, and would have been meaningless without the crowds who attended their performances. The production of this particular Sufi culture required all three groups. I would therefore describe the organisation of the khānqāh as a kind of social technology that mass-produced state-sponsored Sufism. This is not to say that either the sultans or the Sufis necessarily intended the khānqāh to function this way. Rather, drawing on Daniel Boyarin’s notion of a ‘virtual cultural conspiracy’, I would argue that the overlapping interests of the military and religious elites, as well as those non-elites who participated as the audience for these performances, collectively produced, albeit unintentionally perhaps, state-sponsored Sufism. As Roger Chartier has written, ‘cultural consumption, whether popular or not, is at the same time a form of production, which creates ways of using that cannot be limited to the intentions of those who produce’. The kind of production and popularisation I have in mind here was a social, religious and political phenomenon that did not separate, but rather integrated the city’s socio-economic strata: the military rulers, the unlettered masses and the learned elites who mediated between the two. Here I will describe and explore this dynamic in some detail by discussing three examples of the socio-economically integrated production and consumption of Sufi culture. While I argue that these examples are indicative of an integrated socio-economic production, this is not to say that they were always harmonious encounters. The third of my examples describes an encounter more fractious than integrative; but the larger point is nevertheless valid. The production and popularisation of Sufism required the participation of multiple sets of actors and collectivities.
One potential objection to the analysis here might be that these medieval descriptions of Sufi performances are not necessarily historically accurate or entirely representative of larger trends. While I would certainly not claim that these textualised Sufi performances reflect some kind of Rankean positivist historical reality – *wie es eigentlich gewesen* – they do nevertheless reveal a clear social logic about the collective negotiation of Sufi traditions. It is a logic that both organises and mediates these narratives, which reveal the particular ways in which medieval Muslim historians imagined a collective, socially integrated construction of Sufism. In these narratives, then, the historical details – while important – are less critical than the logic organising and informing the description of how these groups interacted. It is a social logic that articulates the production of Sufism at the intersecting and overlapping interests of military rulers, state-sponsored Sufis and spectating crowds. After all, the Ayyubid and Mamluk patronage of Sunni scholarship and Sufi devotions would mean very little if the populations over whom they ruled were not at least somewhat aware of it. Otherwise, what would be the point of these performances? That the Sufis were explicitly meant to constitute in some way a public spectacle is clear from the fact that they were required to engage in a number of public rituals, including the daily *huḍūr*, daily prayers, weekly processions through the streets of Cairo, and even in one case, confrontation with other Sufis.

The Sufis Distribute Water to the Crowd

The collective nature of cultural production at the *khāngāh* is clear from a narrative that al-Maqrīzī reports in his biography of the first Chief Sufi, Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Ḥamuyyah (d. 617/1220). As a good Muslim biographer, al-Maqrīzī rounds out his intellectual biography of Ṣadr al-Dīn with descriptions of his outstanding personal qualities, primarily his humility and reserve. He reports in particular that Ṣadr al-Dīn was ‘taciturn, not known to talk at all unless it was for a good reason’. He illustrates this quality with an anecdote that illuminates the preceding description:

One time, [Ṣadr al-Dīn] attended the daily ritual (*ważīfā*) at the *khāngāh* Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ. The crowd there was overflowing and the servants were going around giving water to the crowd, as was their custom. One of the
jurists in attendance said, ‘This is bid‘a (innovation)!’ To which Şadr al-Din replied, ‘Water is given to human beings, while animals are given to water.’ Those in attendance were well pleased with this response.6

There are a number of points worth considering here. First, the daily wazīfa involved more than just the Sufis who lived there. The performance includes not only the Sufis who perform the state-mandated ritual but the ‘overflowing’ crowd gathered to witness the spectacle. Although the text is not specific, I suspect this particular event was the evening recitation of the Qur‘ān and dhikr session in which the Sufis prayed for the sultan and all Muslims.7 The rulers intended these rituals to be public events performed for crowds who play the integral role of audience for the pronouncement of blessings that legitimize the rulers. In turn, the Sufis enjoy the prestige of a performance linking them to the ruling elite. The attendees glean the blessing of proximity to Sufi devotions. Second, the anecdote describes the negotiation of a ‘new’ Sufi practice. A jurist claims the custom of the servants (‘ādatuhum) who distribute water is innovation (bid‘a) because, presumably, there is no basis for it in the sunna. However, as Jonathan Berkey and others have argued, these categories of sunna and bid‘a are not essential or static, but rather dynamic expressions of the different social milieux and shifting historical contexts from which they emerge.8 In this case, al-Maqrīzī’s account frames the khānqāh as an organised social space in which the attendees collectively negotiate the status of a new Sufi praxis: the distribution of water to attendees during a ritual performance. It is only bid‘a if everyone agrees that it is. Third, the objection is raised by ‘one of the jurists’ and not the class of jurists as a whole. This is a critical distinction, for it highlights that not only were the jurists not in agreement on such matters, but that the elision of the categories ‘elite’ and ‘jurist’ here becomes totally incoherent. Şadr al-Dīn is nothing if not one of the elite ‘ulamā‘ and a prominent Shāfi‘ī jurist, one of the most important in Cairo.9 Indeed, the fact that ‘those in attendance were well pleased’ (fa-istahsana l-hādirūn) with Şadr al-Dīn’s witty rejoinder suggests a completely different alignment: elite Sufi jurists and the attendant crowd considered the custom unproblematic, while one (or perhaps a few) elite jurists deemed it otherwise. While the matter is not completely resolved in
this narrative (this is not the point of the anecdote), the resultant social and cultural dynamic is instructive.

The assembled group collectively negotiated the meaning and significance of the encounter. The elites – state-sponsored Sufis, jurists and rulers (albeit in absentia; they have mandated and funded the performance) – and the non-elite crowd all participate together in the ‘collective and systematic manipulation of signs’. The distinction between elite and popular culture breaks down here precisely because the production and consumption of this Sufi culture requires the participation of all these actors. The social technology of the khānqāh created an organisational space in which the performance of a specific Sufi institution (dhikr, for example) generates the very conditions that produce and reproduce these emergent Sufi cultures. The popularisation of Sufism in Cairo happened in single encounters like this, over and over again, daily and weekly, each performance constituting the ‘production in use’ of a Sufi culture that integrated urban Cairene society, however briefly. In the next example this production takes place on a much grander scale.

**The Friday Procession**

Al-Maqrīzī is, again, our primary source for the following anecdote, a weekly performance involving the Sufis of the khānqāh.10 The ritual begins with a public procession leading up to Friday prayer:

The Sufis of the Sāʾid al-Suʿāḍāʾ khānqāh used to go to the al-Ḥākim mosque11 for Friday prayers, and the people of Fustat would come to Cairo to gain blessing and benefit (al-baraka wa-l-khayr) by watching them. [The Sufis] had a dignified appearance on Friday: the Chief Sufi of the khānqāh would lead, while the most important of the servants carried the noble rabʿa12 on his head. They would walk in silence and restraint to the door of the al-Ḥākim mosque, near the minbar. They would enter . . . and the shaykh would make a prayer of greeting to the mosque from under a canopy (sabḥāba) that he always had with him and the people would pray [in turn]. Then everyone would sit, and they would distribute sections of the Qurʾān among them, reading from the Qurʾān until the call to prayer. Then they would collect the copies and busy themselves with prayer and listening to the sermon (khuṭba), all of them listening humbly. When it was time for
prayer and invocations, one of the readers from the khānqāh would get up and recite something appropriate from the Qurʾān and then bless the sultan Saladin, the endower of the khānqāh, and the rest of the Muslims. When he had finished, the shaykh would get up from his prayers and walk from the mosque to the khānqāh, the Sufis [walking] with him in the same way they had come to the mosque. This is one of the most beautiful customs of the people of Cairo.

This is an extraordinary rich description and deserves detailed attention, but in the interest of space I will limit my remarks to the topic at hand. As in the previous example, we see here the rulers, the scholars and the masses all engaged together in the production of Sufi culture. But it is also clear that each group participates in the spectacle for different reasons: the procession legitimates the rulers, it enhances the social capital of the Sufis, and the crowd is blessed. The efficacy of the procession for all these actors depends upon the integrated participation of multiple socio-economic groups. Again, in this moment of cultural production any distinction between high and low culture evaporates. For example, note in particular that al-Maqrīzī describes the people coming to glean baraka from the khānqāh Sufis. Where does this baraka come from? Who generates it? It certainly does not come from the state itself, although Saladin’s endowment made the procession possible. It does not simply emanate from the Sufis, who are not in themselves a source of sui generis power. Nor have the spectators simply invented it. The generation of baraka is dependent upon certain cultural expectations and social performances. It was the organisational space of the khānqāh that facilitated these expectations and created the performances in which all those present participated. The state did not simply produce baraka that the people then consumed. Rather, all the actors involved were engaged in the collective and systematic manipulation of the multivalent signs attendant upon the procession to produce baraka. Over time, the collective effect of these repeated performances must have had a powerful impact on the visibility and popularisation of Sufism more broadly among the populace.

The spectacle of the weekly procession was to become very popular indeed. Mamluks began to endow numerous khānqāhs that performed similar functions. That is, they provided space and mandated time for the
production of these kinds of Sufi culture. It was the weekly performance of these processions, taking place all over the city, year after year, that contributed to the popularisation of Sufism in Egypt. Again, one cannot explain this popularisation by some purported spiritual ‘lack’ among the people, or as a response to the ‘dry legalism’ of the scholars. Whether or not the procession happened exactly as al-Maqrīzī describes it, the social logic of the text is clear. These examples reveal that in pursuing their own interests, the state, the Sufis and the masses collectively produced and popularised Sufism. This is a much more documentable and convincing explanation for the spread and popularisation of Sufism than vague notions of spiritual longing, for which there exists no evidence but modern scholars’ own ideas about what constitutes religious fulfilment. However, while the previous two examples depict a rather harmonious social integration of Sufis, state and society, this was not always the case. In some circumstances, the local population saw these same state-sponsored Sufis as ineffectual agents of a bureaucratically impotent state.

The Chief Sufi and Ḥasan the Tall

This final example highlights the tension that sometimes obtained between local Sufis and these ḥānqāh Sufis who had come from the East. Nevertheless, the interaction of three socio-economic levels is still a defining characteristic of the encounter. The political rulers, the elite Sufis and the urban populace collectively produce and negotiate the contours of an emergent Sufism, albeit in this case through conflict. As Georg Simmel famously argued, conflict is one of the fundamental modes of sociation (Vergesellschaftung) and is thus an excellent site for us to locate the production of Sufi cultures. This account of social conflict and the contrast with the first two examples thus underscores a critical point in my theorisation of the popularisation of Sufism: namely that the production and popularisation of Sufism in medieval Egypt was not simple, monolithic, unidirectional or even bidirectional. It was multifaceted and constantly shifting, and involved complex negotiations between these three groups at multiple sites in what we might call (with great care) the public sphere.

In Rabīʿ II 610/ September 1213, the future sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 615–35/1218–38), the nephew of Saladin and son of the reigning sultan,
al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (r. 596–615/1200–18), was embroiled in a controversy. The outlines of this event are treated by the encyclopedist Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī and the Sufi Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī l-Manṣūr. It seems that some workers had discovered the traces of a mosque next to, or perhaps even inside, a Coptic church in Fustat. The local Muslims, led by an otherwise obscure local Sufi named Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl (‘the tall’), wanted to destroy the church and rebuild the mosque. The Christians, obviously, wanted to keep the church and leave the mosque as it was. Each side amassed on the spot and the disagreement grew quite intense until ‘the masses rioted with shaykh Ḥasan’, demanding permission to rebuild the mosque. The public disruption grew severe enough to attract the attention of al- Kāmil, who came to the church to examine it himself. Al- Kāmil sided with the Christians and forbade the rebuilding of the mosque, although al- Nuwayrī adds that he only did so at the personal request of a well-respected Christian physician named Abū Shākir, with whom he was friendly. Al- Kāmil personally examined the church and declared, ‘This was never a mosque at all!’ To which the mob responded by further rioting and throwing stones at al- Kāmil, who was forced to flee.

Ṣafī al-Dīn’s version of this event is illuminating for the topic at hand. While Ṣafī al-Dīn, himself a local Sufi, quite clearly embellishes the encounter to highlight Ḥasan the Tall’s Sufi authority, his account is nevertheless valuable for the way in which he describes the negotiation of a socially constructed Sufism. He writes that as al- Kāmil approached the church, the Muslims cried out ‘The mosque! The mosque!’ Al- Kāmil ‘feared the crowd would stone him, so he hid and sent for his vizier’, Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn Shukr (d. 621/1224), along with the Chief Sufi of the khānqāh, none other than the above-mentioned Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Ḥamūwayh. Al- Kāmil ordered his men to ‘go and discover the issue at this church and the provenance of the mosque’, and negotiate with the unruly mob:

So they went. And all the people gathered in the alleyways, on porches and on rooftops. They held bricks in their hands while the Chief Sufi and the vizier warily passed among them. When they arrived at the church they entered, although the Chief Sufi could do nothing but spread his prayer rug and proclaim the takbīr, indicating that it was a mosque. But as soon
as he exited, the entire church collapsed. If those two had not [exited], they
would have been resurrected from underneath the rubble.\(^{23}\)

Thus, according to Şafī al-Dīn, the future sultan’s intervention in this affair
ended in humiliation. The incident so angered and embarrassed al-Kāmil
that he banished Ḥasan the Tall from Egypt immediately, although he was
allowed to return some time later.\(^{24}\)

As in previous examples, we see in this incident the very clear conver-
gence of the rulers (al-Malik al-Kāmil and his vizier), the learned elite (Ṣadr
al-Dīn) and the masses (for my purposes I will bracket the Christian masses
and just focus on the Muslims led by Ḥasan the Tall). Furthermore, there
is a fascinating mix of Sufis. Ḥasan the Tall is a local charismatic Sufi, well
known to the crowd, and Ṣadr al-Dīn is an elite Persian Sufi funded by and
representing the interests of the state. What is particularly remarkable is that,
in the logic of Şafī al-Dīn’s text, al-Malik al-Kāmil finds it necessary to send
his Chief Sufi and his vizier Ibn Shukr to deal with Ḥasan’s mob. Indeed, Ibn
Shukr enjoyed a well-known reputation in biographical literature for being
sympathetic to the Sufis, as Zakī l-Dīn al-Mundhirī says of him that ‘he was
quite generous to the jurists and the Sufis and beloved by the people of piety
and integrity’.\(^{25}\) Al-Kāmil (or Şafī al-Dīn’s version of him) understood
the situation as a specifically Sufi problem, and who better to deal with a Sufi-
led mob than the state’s very own professional Sufi? Şafī al-Dīn’s narrative
reveals one Egyptian Sufi’s social imaginaire of the ways in which competing
visions of Sufi authority, as well as meanings of a communal past, present and
future, are all socially negotiated and constructed by a broad swathe of the
socio-economic spectrum.

Despite the generally negative outcome, the scene is a salient illustration
of the multivalent ways in which these three groups participated in the con-
struction of Sufi power and efficacy (or lack thereof). In the weekly proces-
sion described above, Ṣadr al-Dīn would have been a rich source of baraka for
the crowds who came to witness the Sufi parade. Here, however, Ṣadr al-Dīn
and the state’s patronage of Sufism have reached the limits of their efficacy. In
Şafī al-Dīn’s account, God himself has sided with Hasan and the Muslims by
destroying the church; it was all Ṣadr al-Dīn and Ibn Shukr could do to get
out of the way before being flattened by the falling debris. But the distinction
between the power and authority of Şadr al-Dīn and that of Ḥasan the Tall is not simply a given. The construction of their authority is a product of the complicated and charged negotiation among the different socio-economic groups involved in the events. Şadr al-Dīn may be a powerful or authoritative figure in some contexts, but not this one. It would be misleading therefore to describe Ḥasan as a figure of ‘popular culture’ and Şadr al-Dīn as a figure of ‘elite culture’ in any meaningful way. Not only are the reputations and social status of these figures dynamic, but the constitution of that status is inherently the product of different social forces in multiple contexts. Scenes like this, in which the populace – elite and non-elite – together determined the nature and extent of Sufi authority, occurred over and over again in Ayyubid and Mamluk Cairo. The collective result of these encounters was the increasing production and popularisation of the culture of state-sponsored juridical Sufism across the city.

To reiterate, I am not arguing that there were no socio-economic divisions or separate cultural arenas in medieval Islamicate society, for there certainly were. Rather, I want to argue that cordoning off a popular culture of Sufism from an elite juridical culture distorts the integrated social processes inherent in the production and popularisation of Sufism across the socio-economic spectrum. Elites and non-elites collectively produced and consumed Sufi cultures – like all ‘popular’ cultures – on a mass scale. Sufism certainly was extremely popular, but it was not an expression of non-elite, spiritually starved, illiterate masses. Sufism was popular among all strata of society precisely because these groups were actively and collectively producing a culture that cut across socio-economic divisions. Nor was the popularisation of Sufism in medieval urban Cairo a case of the populace adopting a radically different mode of piety or religiosity from that of the jurists and scholars. A concrete division between a normative elite Islam and a popular Sufi Islam, produced separately yet connected via discrete cultural encounters, simply did not exist. In this case, the organisational space of the khānqāh, which brought multiple social strata together, created the conditions in which these ranks collectively and systematically produced and reproduced Sufism on a wide scale. But this was only one site in medieval Egypt at which this production happened. In the next section I turn to a completely different type of Sufi collectivity, what I call state-sanctioned Sufism. I explore the ways in
which a nascent Sufi brotherhood, the Shādhiliyya, promoted and popularised their particular vision of Sufism in Alexandria, Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Notes

1. See Boyarin, *Border Lines*, p. 306 n. 99, where he argues: ‘This metaphor of conspiracy, as used by linguists in particular, refers to forces that converge in producing the same result even if they cannot be understood as being causally connected to each other.’


3. I do not mean to denigrate the non-elite inhabitants of Cairo by calling them ‘the masses’. Rather, this is a reflection of the fact that the medieval sources almost unanimously refer to the spectating crowds as *al-ḥāmma* (literally ‘the masses’) as opposed to *al-khāṣṣa* (lit. ‘the elites’). The tripartite model of Ayyubid/Mamluk society as one of military rulers and masses mediated by the civilian elite is described most clearly for the Mamluk context by Leder, ’Damaskus’; Martel-Thoumian, *Les Civils et l’administration*; Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*; and Petry, *The Civilian Elite*.


6. Ibid., 6:421.

7. Absent the original, see the *waqfīya* for the Nāṣirīya khānqāh in al-ʿAṣāli, *Wathāʾiq*, p. 94.


9. In addition to his role as Chief Sufi, Ṣadr al-Dīn also taught Shāfiʿī jurisprudence at the Shāfiʿī madrasa and at the shrine of al-Shāfiʿī. See Hofer, ’The Origins and Development’, pp. 15–19.

10. Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʾiz*, 4:729–30. Al-Maqrīzī relates this narrative on the authority of Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qaṣṣār (d. 800/1397), with whom he studied for a time. All I have been able to find about al-Qaṣṣār is from al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, 1:280–2, where we learn that he used to go to the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ to visit a certain Sufi master, Aḥmad al-Raqqām, about whom I have found no other information.

11. The al-Ḥākim mosque was the second Fatimid congregational mosque built after al-Azhar. Construction was begun in Ramaḍān 380/990 by the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz (r. 365–86/975–96) and was completed by his son al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021). The mosque was originally outside Cairo (near Bāb al-Futūḥ), but when Badr al-Jamālī enlarged the city...
precincts it was incorporated inside the new walls (al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʾiz, 4:107–8).

12. This was a leather-covered box used to carry perfume. It eventually came to be used to carry a copy of the Qurʾān in thirty volumes, one for each juzʾ, or division of the Qurʾān.

13. The phenomenon of baraka remains undertheorised in medieval Islamic studies. One of the few authors to treat this phenomenon at length is Josef Meri (The Cult of Saints, pp. 101–8). While Meri’s treatment is an excellent description of the phenomenon in a range of medieval sources, he does not theorise how, precisely, someone or something might become infused with baraka in the first place. I would argue that baraka is the residual product of the social processes of sanctification, which involve a certain grammar and rhetoric of power and authority. I thus follow Csordas’s theorisation of charisma as a specific type of rhetorical performance in his Language, Charisma, and Creativity. The best treatment of the social nature of medieval Islamic sainthood, and by extension the exchange of baraka, is still Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. xvii–xliv; and Safi, The Politics of Knowledge, pp. 25–157, treats the political exchange of baraka. Finally, in the modern context, Westermarck, Ritual and Belief, devotes much space to the concept of baraka in his ethnographic study of Morocco.

14. Writing of these kinds of processions in medieval Cairo, Shoshan, Popular Culture, p. 76, argues that ‘the elite – the producers of the events – and the people, their consumers, must have had different points of view. Yet they were participants in something which, for a moment, united the city of Cairo.’ I wholeheartedly agree that these processions united the populace. My only disagreement with Shoshan is that, in my view, he artificially distinguishes between elite and popular ‘subcultures’, connected here via an overly simplified supply-and-demand model of cultural production/consumption. Buehler makes a similar observation (Sufi Heirs of the Prophet, p. 53), arguing that the Turnerian communitas of Sufism created a space in which elites and non-elites came together. Again, his point is well argued but I think he draws too stark a line between elites and non-elites.

15. Simmel, ‘Conflict’.

16. Like popular culture, the public sphere is an idea so bound up with the projects of modernity that it should be used in the medieval context only with caution and careful theorising. I hope to return to this topic in the future. For now, on the notion of a ‘public sphere’ in the Islamicate world, both medieval and modern, see the thought-provoking essays in Hoexter et al, The Public Sphere.
Neither of these two sources is entirely clear or straightforward, nor is it apparent that they are describing the same event. While I cannot be absolutely certain on this last point, the overlapping details they provide are numerous and suggestive. Likewise, the actors described in each account could only have existed together within a narrow time frame that fits both accounts. Not surprisingly, al-Nuwayrí’s account is full of historical information: names, dates and places. Şafi al-Dīn’s Risāla, by contrast, contains almost none of these, but focuses solely on the role the Sufis played in the events. It is al-Nuwayrí (Nihāyat al-arab, 29:39) who dates this event to Jumāda I 610.

Şafi al-Dīn (Gril, La Risāla, p. 36) does not specify which church it was and says the mosque’s traces ‘were hidden inside the church’. Al-Nuwayrí says it was the Muʿallaqa, and that the mosque was ‘next to’ the church.


There were a few viziers from the Banū Shukr, this one is al-Aʿazz Abū l-ʿAbbās Ahmad, known as Fakhr al-Dīn Mīqdām b. Shukr. He was trained in Mālikī fiqh and was a very close friend of al-Kāmil. He entered the service of al-Kāmil in 604/1207–8 (al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk, 1:284). He then became vizier in 608/1212 (al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 29:37). His vizierate would only last until 613/1216–17, when al-ʿĀdil arrested him (ibid., 29:45). On Ibn Shukr more generally, see also al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-islām, 45:80; al-Mundhirī, al-Takmila, 3:125–6; al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 29:84.

According to Şafi al-Dīn, al-Kāmil later had a dream in which the zabāniyya (the angels who escort the damned into Hell) ‘surrounded him and said, “You had best return shaykh Ḥasan [to Egypt], otherwise we will destroy you.”’ So al-Kāmil sent his vizier after Ḥasan and brought him back to Damietta, where he died shortly thereafter.

Al-Mundhirī, al-Takmila, 3:126.
PART TWO

STATE-SANCTIONED SUFISM: THE NASCENT SHĀDHLĪYA
The Emergence of the Shādhilīya in Egypt

Introduction

The Sufi order known as the Shādhilīya was one of the most popular Sufi movements of the Islamic Middle Ages, counting adherents across north Africa, Egypt and Greater Syria.¹ The order’s eponymous ‘founder’, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili (d. 656/1258), was born in the Maghrib but eventually settled in Alexandria in the 1240s with the explicit sanction of the Ayyubid regime. While al-Shādhili and his cohort rejected overt state sponsorship, they did cultivate warm relations with Ayyubid and early Mamluk rulers, as well as many of Egypt’s most prominent ʿulamā’. These alliances permitted al-Shādhili to intercede on behalf of his disciples and clients and to travel freely across Egypt to teach his form of Sufism – advantages he did not enjoy in his previous home in Tunis. Al-Shādhili met with great success in Egypt, establishing a reputation as a powerful Sufi master and an ally of people across the socio-economic spectrum, attracting a large numbers of followers in the process. Indeed, within roughly fifty years of al-Shādhili’s death, a nascent social movement tied to his name had emerged that persists to the present day in multiple branches and sub-orders.² But how did this informal and localised teaching circle become a trans-regional voluntary association of Sufis who conceptualised themselves as a coherent social body tied together by the teachings of an eponymous master?

This question is not, of course, unique to the Shādhiliya. The historical development of all the so-called ‘Sufi orders’ (al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiya) is a perennial and notoriously difficult issue. Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence have written
that the ‘first and major point to make about Sufi orders is simple but perplexing: We don’t understand them, or at least we haven’t figured out how to understand them as historical developments’. This perplexity is fundamentally rooted in the fact that nearly all the textual source material on orders is teleological in nature. Most of the texts produced by members of Sufi orders postdate the emergence of the order and tend to back-project subsequent social formations onto the lives of the eponymous master and his disciples. These Sufi authors, like most hagiographers, legitimised these late-stage formations and discourses by mapping them onto authoritative figures from earlier periods. This literary strategy makes disentangling the nature and structure of earlier collectivities from later ones quite difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, our task as historians of Sufism is not necessarily to recover the foundational acts and intentions of the eponymous masters. Rather, we can locate and delineate the ways in which certain groups articulated their collective identity through the character and personality of those masters, and how these articulations changed over time. In this and the following two chapters I examine the earliest texts produced by and about the Shādhilīya in order to describe and analyse how certain groups articulated a collective identity in relation to Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili. I read these early texts through the lens of a heuristic model I develop here to theorise the emergence of Sufi orders. This model is particularly attentive to the role that these authors played in crafting and promoting a Shādhili identity which was then institutionalised over time. My efforts here thus differ substantively from some of the previous work on the development of Sufi orders.

The most widespread explanation for the emergence of Sufi orders in the Arabophone Islamic world has been what I call the ‘disaster’ theory, which finds explanatory force in the socio-political disruptions of the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries: the Crusades in Egypt and Greater Syria; the shrinking of al-Andalus in the face of the Christian ‘Reconquista’; the Almohad revolution in the Maghrib; and especially the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 656/1258 with the concomitant loss of the caliphate. This explanation posits that these socio-political disruptions led to a widespread social and religious anxiety among large segments of the Muslim population. As a result, the populace turned away from the rather disappointing reality of medieval Islamic life and towards the world-denying comfort of Sufism.
Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence that these two phenomena are related in any way. While the political events of the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries were certainly traumatic, and may have played some role in the growth of Sufism, I have found no substantive indication in the sources that they were a factor in the increasing popularity of Sufism in the following decades and centuries. This argument seems to be based primarily on a chronological coincidence and the assumption that interest in Sufism would largely occur in cases of personal distress or anxiety, an assumption that is unwarranted by the sources. For example, there is already indication in the ʿAdab al-murīdin of Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168) that many so-called lay persons were taking up Sufism in large numbers. The final section of that book is devoted to rukhaṣ (sing. rukhṣa), or ‘dispensations’, allowing individuals to opt out of the more difficult obligations of Sufi life. This indication of organised Sufi life clearly precedes the disasters noted above. However, these social and political disruptions did play an indirect role in the popularisation of Sufism through population displacement. The movement of large groups of people from unstable regions, both Eastern and Western, into Egypt certainly meant that there were more Sufis in Egypt to spread Sufi ideas and practices. But this does not mean that the embrace of those ideas and practices was a result of the disruptions.

The other common explanation for the emergence of the Sufi orders is what I call the ‘spirituality’ theory, which I touched on in the Introduction. In this case, scholars argue that the Muslim populace embraced organised Sufism as an attractive alternative to some other mode of religious life. This argument takes several forms. For some, the orders mark a turn away from the dry legalism of the jurists. For others, the Sufi orders filled ‘the gap left through the suppression of Shiʿī sectarianism’. Annemarie Schimmel combines these, arguing that the orders filled the spiritual needs of the populace and may have functioned ‘to counter the strong Ismāʿīlī-Bāṭinī influence Ghazzālī had fought so relentlessly’. Alternatively, Jamil Abun-Nasr has argued at great length that the emergence and popularity of Sufi brotherhoods was due primarily to the decline of legitimate institutionalised religious authority in Islam, by which he means the rise of politically sponsored ʿulamāʾ and the collapse of the caliphate. As I noted in the Introduction, these ‘spirituality’ arguments are extraordinarily problematic for many reasons. There is simply
no evidence in the sources for this explanation either. In both of these cases, the disaster explanation and the spirituality explanation, the theorisation of the development of the Sufi orders is fundamentally predicated on a reactionary paradigm. The popularity of Sufism and especially the rise of Sufi orders are understood to be a reaction to something else, rather than developments in their own right. In recent years, however, there has been a turn away from these reaction paradigms. More sophisticated work on the orders has emphasised the importance of the unique social, religious and political circumstances surrounding their emergence. Most important, the scholars engaged in this work emphasise the outreach of the Sufis themselves to bring their vision to the people, a turn that clearly owes much to Marshall Hodgson.12

In this section of the book I hope to continue this line of inquiry and examine the emergence and development of the Shādhilī order, not as a reaction to external conditions, but on its own terms, as the product of deliberate activity and outreach. Critically, I theorise the creation of an institutionalised Shādhilī identity as just one of the many products of the institutionalisation of Sufi thought and practice that we see beginning in the fourth/tenth century. It was these institutionalised doctrines and practices that gave certain charismatic individuals and their students the tools with which to construct viable social movements on a large scale. In other words, the history of the Sufi orders does not begin with their eponymous founders, but must be understood within the longue durée of the development of Sufi thought and praxis itself.13 It was the standardisation of Sufism in Baghdad and Khurāsān that produced the necessary conditions that allowed the creation of stable and replicable social identities rooted in the teachings of certain Sufi masters.14 However, as we would expect, institutionalisation did not produce a single vision or movement, but rather precipitated innovative adaptations of Sufi praxis and competing visions of legitimate Sufi authority. We see the first stages of this innovation and competition with the emergence of the shaykh al-tarbiya (‘training master’) in the fifth/eleventh century, and then discrete initiatic lineages in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, a development evinced in the proliferation of treatises devoted to the khirqa (the cloak of investiture).15 These initiatic lineages were only later organised more formally into hierarchical social associations. This organisational trend, which Spencer Trimingham memorably calls the tâ’ifat phase, arguably took
place in the mid- to late eighth/fourteenth century, at the earliest. It was thus the institutionalisation of Sufi thought and praxis that constituted the mechanism by which the Shādhilī order was created, by which it spread, and which constituted the social field from which a ʿtāʿīfa organisation emerged.

In this chapter I focus on the earliest stage in this process, the emergence of what I call the institutionalised identity of al-Shādhilī. In Chapter 5 I turn to the specific ways in which this identity was constructed by the primary spokesperson for the group in Egypt, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309). Finally, in Chapter 6 I explore the ways in which Shādhilī Sufism was produced and popularised on a large scale in medieval Egypt.

**The Creation of Institutionalised Identity**

Herbert Blumer argues that social worlds are comprised of ‘objects’, the meanings of which are generated through social interactions, a process he famously called symbolic interactionism.

The nature of an object – of any and every object – consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object . . . objects (in the sense of their meaning) must be seen as social creations – as being formed in and arising out of the process of definition and interpretation as this process takes place in the interaction of people.

These objective meanings can and do shift over time as successive generations conceptualise and reconceptualise that object. Following Blumer, then, one means of tracing the emergence and development of an eponymous figure, in this case Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili, is to track the evolving meanings assigned to him both as object of veneration and idealised model. To begin to see how these meanings change over time, one must conceptually differentiate between two distinct stages in the development of an organised Sufi collectivity. In medieval Sufi terminology, the distinct cluster of praxis and doctrine of a particular master was known as his ʿarīqa, or ‘method’.

The use of the term ʿarīqa to describe a Sufi master’s idiosyncratic method – the innovative deployment of a set of Sufi institutions with a group of students – is ubiquitous in the literature of this period. Once a master, or his students, have established an identifiable and reproducible method, one that
is normative for a group of disciples, the ṭariqa has become an institution in the strictly sociological sense that it both enables and constrains the praxis of the group. The ṭariqa also provides a legitimising framework of authority by linking individuals into an initiatic lineage that typically stretches back to the prophet Muḥammad, and is often symbolised in the bestowal of the khirqa.19 Indeed, as I noted above, the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries witnessed a proliferation of these initiatic lineages, which one could collect in multiples. Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 586/1287), for example, enumerates six different lineages he took up from different Sufi masters, although not all of them involved the bestowal of the khirqa.20

So, while the social formation of a nascent group is linked to and structured by the master’s ṭariqa, these individuals are not yet organised around the figure of that master in such a way that they can point to, let alone reproduce, a corporate communal identity. In order for this to happen, the identity of the eponymous figure itself must be institutionalised as the embodiment of communal identity.21 In other words, there is a dialectical social process at the heart of the formation of a formalised ṭariqa-lineage, in which the ṭariqa structures a social praxis that, as it is stabilised and institutionalised over time, enables subsequent generations to map it eponymously back onto a ‘founding’ figure. The symbolic identity of the master is thus institutionalised as the retroactive and metonymous idealisation of group identity.22 It is here that we may speak of an eponymous organisation known as a ṭāʾīfa (Personengruppe). However, unlike formal organisations such as the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ, nascent Sufi orders were informal in the sense that roles within the organisation were tied to specific personalities, the goals of the group were not formulated explicitly, and the community was not necessarily located in a specific brick-and-mortar site.23 Therefore, in order to understand the emergence and development of any particular order, we must conceptually differentiate between the institutionalised ṭariqa of an eponymous Sufi master, the social formation of a ṭāʾīfa organised by means of that institution, and the transitional social processes that mediate between them. To describe these processes as they relate to the early Shādhilīya, then, we must first determine the earliest point at which we might identify the existence of an associational ṭāʾīfa linked to the name of al-Shādhili and the ṭariqa upon which it is based.
Whence a Shādhilī Identity?

Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh al-Iskandari’s *Laṭā‘if al-minan* (‘The Subtle Blessings’, written after 698/1299) was the first hagiography devoted to al-Shādhili. Al-Iskandari does use the word ṭā‘īfa repeatedly throughout the *Laṭā‘if*, but only in the sense in which most Sufis used it up until the early eighth/fourteenth century – to designate the Sufis in general as a group distinct from other social entities. Likewise, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh al-Ḥīmyarī (d. 723/1323), the north African author of the second hagiography of al-Shādhili, *Durrat al-asrār* (‘The Pearl of Mysteries’, written after 715/1315), does not mention or allude to an identifiable Shādhilī ṭā‘īfa. A contemporary of al-Shādhili in Egypt, Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr (d. 682/1283), notes that al-Shādhili had many students but says nothing of a Shādhilī ṭā‘īfa or group. Likewise, the Upper-Egyptian Sufi Ibn Nūh al-Qūṣi (d. 708/1308) describes meeting with Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (al-Shādhili’s primary disciple) but makes no mention of a ṭā‘īfa or Shādhili community. In 1326, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Alexandria and met with Yāqūt al-Ḥabashi (d. 707/1307), who was, in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s words, ‘the student of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, the student of the famous saint Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili’. Thus by 1326, we have evidence of a proto-Shādhili lineage in Egypt, but without reference to a ṭā‘īfa. The Yemeni biographer ʿAbd Allāh al-Yāfī (d. 768/1367), who personally travelled to Egypt to collect information for his biographies, likewise makes no mention of a ṭā‘īfa in his biography of al-Shādhili, nor gives any indication that there was a group who traced their authority to al-Shādhili. It is only with the Syrian historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) that we finally see a corporate identity connected to al-Shādhili. In the necrologies in his *Tārīkh al-Islām*, al-Dhahabī refers to al-Shādhili as *shaykh al-ṭā‘īfa al-shādhilīya* – ‘the master of the Shādhili faction or group’. Al-Dhahabī finished writing *Tārīkh al-Islām* shortly after 700/1300, so the establishment of an early ṭā‘īfa identity cannot be later than this. Thus, it was not until the early eighth/fourteenth century, and even then it does not seem to have been widely recognised, that al-Shādhili’s personality had been institutionalised to the point that it had become descriptive of a group of Sufis who traced their authority to him and his *tarīqa*. While this method is by no means precise, it does indicate a gap of roughly fifty years between the death of al-Shādhili
and the discursive recognition of a communal identity connected to his name and authority.

What happened in the time between the death of al-Shādhilī and the appearance in the early eighth/fourteenth century of a collectivity known as al-tā’īfa al-shādhiliyya? How was al-Shādhilī’s identity institutionalised and connected to the eponymous tā’īfa? Given the nature of the sources available to us, the answer will lie in reconstructing the specific set of doctrines and practices that informed a nascent identity and how these spread in Egypt. It will also be critical to determine how the personality of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī became the symbolic object of this trend. In other words, how was the personality and life of al-Shādhilī, qua symbolic object, socially constructed at different moments? In the brief survey of sources above, al-Shādhilī – as a socially and discursively constructed object of inquiry – clearly evolved from a training shaykh with a unique ṭarīqa and many followers to the eponymous leader of a coherent tā’īfa. This transformation was achieved through the production of an authoritative narrative that shaped al-Shādhilī’s life into a coherent set of doctrines and practices that then constituted the referential core of a nascent collective identity.

The Hagiographical Image of al-Shādhilī

As I noted above, the first to produce such a narrative was the Mālikī jurist Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Isnādi (d. 709/1309).32 Al-Isnādi wrote Laṭāʾif al-minan – an account of al-Shādhilī and his favoured student Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) – at a chronological midpoint between the death of al-Shādhilī and the earliest indication in Arabic sources of a tā’īfa that bears his name. This hagiography marks a critical juncture in the institutionalisation of the eponymous master’s identity. This is clear from the fact that while al-Isnādi records many of the doctrines and practices and much of the rhetoric of authority that would become hallmarks of Shādhilī identity, in none of his writings does he refer to a community or group. For al-Isnādi, the ṭarīqa-lineage was still in embryonic form, a form he in fact constructed from the materials of al-Shādhilī’s life. Indeed, al-Isnādi’s hagiography represents a moment in the institutionalisation of Shādhilī identity in which the Shādhilī ṭarīqa is shaping nascent communal identity as much as the nascent community is shaping ideas about al-Shādhilī. In essence this hagiographical
narrative encodes the possible range of praxis and doctrine generated between the historical and rhetorical tariqa of al-Shādhilī. By providing his readers with a narrative model for their devotions and doctrines, al-Iskandarī formulated the contours of what it meant to follow al-Shādhilī and be a Shādhilī Sufi. Once a coherent model was in place, the subsequent formalisation of that model — what I call the ‘institutionalised identity’ of al-Shādhilī — became possible as Sufis began to narrate and embody the doctrines and practices implicit in the model. This institutionalised identity could then be reconceptualised and redeployed by subsequent Sufis in increasingly organised structures, as was the case, for example, with the Wafāʾīya sub-order of the Shādhiliya.33

How al-Iskandarī’s text was able to effect such a transition can be understood more clearly in light of Louis Althusser’s conception of ideology and social formations. Paraphrasing Marx, he writes, ‘Every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year.’34 This is to say that a social formation must both produce something (whether physical goods, social capital or culture) and reproduce the conditions that make that production possible. In the case of Sufi social formations this means that the group must continually reproduce the conditions that produce communal identity. Since the conditions that originally produced the Shādhili tariqa inhered in the charismatic authority of al-Shādhilī himself, al-Iskandarī needed, in a very real sense, to routinise that charisma into a replicable set of conditions. By inscribing the limits of the doctrinally and praxically possible into a hagiographical narrative that could be transmitted to others and which they could perform, al-Iskandarī was able to create a framework that would produce and reproduce those conditions over and over again.35

This is not to say that the physical text of Laṭāʾif al-minan itself constituted the ideational and practical impetus for the development of a collective identity. Rather, the nascent Shādhiliya constituted what Brian Stock describes as a textual community, in which a particular text or texts structure the community’s behaviour and sense of solidarity. ‘What was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilised it for reforming a group’s thought and action.’36 It was al-Iskandarī’s mastery
and dissemination – whether in writing or orally – of an idealised version of al-Shādhilī’s life, doctrine and praxis that constituted the grounds from which an institutionalised identity developed. But this begs the question, why did al-Iskandari write his hagiography and produce this idealised version of the Shādhilī ʿtariqa in the first place? First, al-Iskandari’s hagiography is actually devoted to his master al-Mursī and not to al-Shādhilī per se. The material on al-Shādhilī is there primarily to authorise the legitimacy of al-Mursī. This is important because, second, I believe al-Iskandari wrote Laṭāʾif al-minan in order to cement his claim to be the heir and spokesperson for the Shādhilī ʿtariqa after the death of al-Mursī. The following pages will provide a brief overview of this argument and how al-Iskandari’s image of the ʿtariqa became so dominant in Egypt.37

Abū l-Hasan al-Shādhilī was born around 593/1196 in Ghumāra, a region of the northwestern Maghrib, and the sources generally describe him as claiming ʿAlid-Ḥasanid descent through his father.38 As a young man, he began his training in the classical Islamic sciences (al-ʿulūm al-ẓāhira) before moving on to the more esoteric sciences of Sufism (al-ʿulūm al-bāṭina), although this detail of his biography is a typical literary trope. His interest in the Sufi path eventually compelled him to set out for the East to find the qutb – the axial saint of the age.39 This quest supposedly led him to Iraq, where he met Abū l-Fatḥ al-Wāṣiṭī, one of the representatives of another eponymous Sufi master, Ahmad al-Rifāʿī (d. 678/1182). But al-Wāṣiṭī directed al-Shādhilī to return to his home country if he wanted to find the qutb; so he returned to the West. This story is another common Sufi literary trope, and there is no evidence that al-Shādhilī made this journey. In fact, al-Wāṣiṭī was mostly likely living in Alexandria at the time and it is there that the two may have met, much later in al-Shādhilī’s life.40 Upon returning to the Maghrib, al-Shādhilī encountered ʿAbd al-Salām Ibn Mashīsh (d. circa 625/1228), a student of the Maghribī Sufi ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī.41 Ibn Mashīsh revealed to al-Shādhilī that he was indeed the qutb and authorised al-Shādhilī to teach in his name. Before his assassination at the hands of an ʿAlid rebel, Ibn Mashīsh sent al-Shādhilī to the village of Shādhila (hence his demonym) in Ifrīqīya, where he spent a period of time in devotional isolation on Mount Zaghwān. From Shādhila, he then moved to Tunis, where he ran foul of certain high-ranking members of the Ḥafṣid court, the most prominent
of whom was the Chief Judge (qāḍī al-jamāʿa) of that city, Ibn al-Barrāʾ (d. 676/1278).

Scholars have offered several theories about what exactly al-Shādhilī did to provoke Ḥafṣid censure. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd argues that he was a threat to the authority of Ibn al-Barrāʾ, while ʿAlī Ṣāfī Ḥusayn believes it was al-Shādhilī’s claim to have had prophetic visions. ʿAlī ʿAmmār argues, correctly I think, that the source of their conflict was the accusation that al-Shādhilī claimed to be the Fatimid mahdī. In this vein, Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn has gone so far as to argue that al-Shādhilī espoused an esoteric Ismāʿīlī cosmology as well.

The question of whether al-Shādhilī was ‘actually’ an Ismāʿīlī or claimed to be the mahdī is not important for my purposes, especially because al-Iskandarī makes no mention of it. But the result was unequivocal: al-Shādhilī was forced to leave Tunis for Alexandria. Al-Shādhilī had actually visited Alexandria once before on the ḥajj and was interrogated by the Ayyūbid authorities at the request of the Ḥafṣids. He impressed his interlocutor (probably al-Malik al-Kāmil) and when he returned there around 642/1244, he installed himself in Alexandria with the explicit permission of the sultan. Once in Egypt, he supposedly took the khirqa from the Upper-Egyptian Sufi Abū l-Ḥājjāj Yūṣuf al-Uqūrī (d. 642/1244), one of the two representatives of the tradition of Abū Madyan in Egypt, the other being ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī (d. 592/1196 or 595/1199) in Alexandria. Al-Shādhilī began teaching and met with great success in Alexandria, Cairo and even Upper Egypt. His sermons and teaching sessions were attended by many and he led a caravan of pilgrims to Mecca each year.

It was en route to Mecca that al-Shādhilī died in the desert near the Red Sea port of ʿAydhāb in October of 1258. He was buried in Ḥumaythrah and a shrine was constructed on the spot, still visited to this day. Before his death, al-Shādhilī publicly declared that his student Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī would be his successor. Al-Mursī was from Murcia in al-Andalus and while sailing in the Mediterranean with his family, a storm sank their ship. Only he and his brother survived, and eventually they made their way to Tunis, where they fell in with al-Shādhilī. Al-Mursī became particularly attached to al-Shādhilī and remained with him until death. All the sources agree that al-Mursī was al-Shādhilī’s favoured student; he married al-Shādhilī’s daughter.
and led his other students after his death without contestation. However, upon al-Mursī’s death in 1286, there was no clear leader of the nascent group. It is important to understand this power struggle because it sheds critical light on the character of al-Iskandarī’s hagiography. The fact that this leadership was contested does not mean that there was an institutionalised identity around the figure of al-Shādhilī. Rather, it was the contestation that produced this identity by spurring the writing of two hagiographies.

There were three factions that claimed legitimacy to speak with al-Shādhilī’s authority: an Egyptian group under the leadership of al-Iskandarī, a north African group under the leadership of Muḥammad ibn Sulṭān al-Masrūqī (d. after 701/1301) and his brother Māḍī ibn Sulṭān al-Masrūqī (d. 718/1318), and a second Egyptian group under the leadership of Yāqūt al-Ḥabashi or al-ʿArshī (d. 707/1307), a student of al-Mursī and contemporary of al-Iskandarī. Al-Ḥabashi’s status can be found in Ibn Baṭṭūta’s account of his visit to Egypt. He met personally with al-Ḥabashi in 1326 in Alexandria and says unequivocally that al-Ḥabashi was the student of al-Mursī while making no mention of al-Iskandarī at all. Al-Ḥabashi was clearly one of al-Mursī’s most favoured students and may have been meant to lead the group after al-Mursī’s death given that al-Mursī married one of his daughters to al-Ḥabashi. This daughter was also the granddaughter of al-Shādhilī (al-Mursī having married al-Shādhilī’s daughter), meaning that al-Ḥabashi was brought into the Shādhilī lineage both literally and figuratively. However, while some later Shādhilī sources place al-Ḥabashi (or al-ʿArshī) in the silsila (authoritative chain of transmission) between al-Mursī and al-Iskandarī, and some have him in a separate line, al-Iskandarī himself says nothing about al-Ḥabashi’s authority and cites him only once in Ḭāʾif al-minan. Likewise, al-Iskandarī makes almost no mention of the al-Masrūqī brothers, whereas Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh makes a concerted effort in the Durrat al-asrār to portray them, especially Muḥammad ibn Sulṭān, as the direct and authoritative link to al-Shādhilī in North Africa. It seems, then, that one of al-Iskandarī’s primary aims in Ḭāʾif al-minan was to write al-Ḥabashi and the al-Masrūqī brothers out of the narrative – or at the very least to marginalise them – in order to bolster his own claim to be the heir of the Shādhilī-Mursī legacy. Finally, al-Iskandarī also attempted to co-opt the legacy of Abū Madyan in Egypt by writing a commentary on one of Abū Madyan’s poems. This com-
mentary is basically a Shādhilisation of Abū Madyan’s teachings and would have further bolstered his claim to represent Shādhilī authority.

It thus would be a mistake to imagine that al-Iskandarī was the ‘third khalīfa’ of the Shādhiliya in any uncritical way. Subscribing to this claim is to fall prey to the teleological nature of the literature from the Sufi orders whereby late-stage social formations and rhetorics of legitimation are projected back to an earlier, less coherent social origin. In later literature there is a clear and linear Shādhili silsila in Egypt with al-Iskandarī squarely in the line. For example, the colophon of the Berlin manuscript of the ʿUyūn al-haqaʾiq of Ibn Bākhillā (or Mākhillā, d. circa 733/1332), one of al-Iskandarī’s students, records that Ibn Bākhillā was the khalīfa of al-Iskandarī, himself the khalīfa of al-Mursī. The manuscript was copied in Shaʿbān 1002 (1594), and, as Victor Danner notes, ‘the copyist would not have made such a remark unless it had been the commonly-accepted point of view’. True enough, but this was a later development and was by no means clear at al-Iskandarī’s death. None of the earliest biographical material on al-Iskandarī claims he was the khalīfa, nor does he himself make this claim explicitly anywhere. What is clear is that there were at least three ‘collateral lines’, as Jürgen Paul calls them, of groups tracing their authority to al-Shādhilī. The teleological reordering of these collateral lines is clearest in late works like al-Ḥasan al-Kūhin al-Fāsi’s (d. after 1928) Jāmiʿ al-karāmāt al-ʿalīya fī ṭabaqāt al-sādat al-shādhilīya, in which he combines all the Egyptian and north African groups into a coherent work of neatly organised ṭabaqāt.

Thus, by authoring a particular narrative construction about al-Mursī, and by extension al-Shādhilī, al-Iskandarī positioned himself, in effect if not in fact, as the authoritative centre of the nascent textual community. Al-Ḥabashi, despite being al-Mursī’s favoured student, authored no such narrative and is almost entirely absent from the tradition’s subsequent history. In this light, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s hagiography, Durrat al-asrār, should therefore be read as a North African answer to the version of events presented by al-Iskandarī, who is not surprisingly conspicuously absent from Durrat al-asrār. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s primary informants were al-Shadhilī’s sons and the aforementioned al-Masrūqī brothers; he wrote al-Iskandarī out of the narrative completely and positions Muḥammad al-Masrūqī as the authoritative link to al-Shādhilī’s legacy. This strategy of controlling the nascent
collectivity’s narrative of successive leadership is one of many deployed by al-Iskandarī and Ibn al-Šabbāgh in constructing their claims about al-Shādhili’s tariqa and its relationship to his successors and their circles of disciples. These hagiographical images thus encode two idiosyncratic visions of communal authority and legitimacy.

But how different are the hagiographical images of al-Iskandarī and Ibn al-Šabbāgh? This is a separate question from that of the historical accuracy of their accounts. I am less interested in the latter because empirical historicity is simply not related to the work of formulating an institutionalised identity. In this sense, the formation of Sufi brotherhoods like the Shādhiliya was very similar to the formation of the four schools of Sunni law. In no historical sense did Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal ‘found’ his eponymous madhhab. For both āʿifā and madhhab formations, subsequent institutionalised identities that had been crafted and performed by later generations were retroactively applied to an eponymous founder.66 While the historical figure of al-Shādhili does warrant attention, I am more interested in his hagiographical image because it contains these early strategies of legitimation and identity construction deployed after his death.67 In turn, these strategies will reveal a great deal about each author’s social milieu and the audiences for whom they were writing. It is therefore important to determine whether or not al-Iskandarī and Ibn al-Šabbāgh present the same hagiographical image of al-Shādhili. In fact, they do not.

There are enough variations between the two narratives to demonstrate that al-Iskandarī and Ibn al-Šabbāgh were writing for different audiences and constructing different kinds of claims.68 While both authors reproduce a similar corpus of sayings (aqāwīl), prayers (adʿiya) and litanies (abzāb), they appeal to the authority of different informants and narrate the lives and authority of al-Shādhili and al-Mursī in starkly different ways. Al-Iskandarī’s and Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s hagiographical images were constrained not only by the kinds of claims they wished to make about al-Shādhili and al-Mursī, but by the exigencies of their informants’ memories and political agendas, as well as the expectations of their respective Egyptian and north African audiences. The existence of ‘an integral written tradition of the Tunisian branch of the Shâdhiliya’ linked to Ibn al-Šabbāgh is further confirmed by an unpublished seventh-/thirteenth-century hagiography of al-Shādhili from Fez.69
This hagiography clearly reproduces the ideas and expectations of its specifically North African audience. Likewise, al-Iskandari attempted to shape all his material into a holistic and non-contradictory account of the Egyptian milieu of the ṭariqa. This internal consistency reveals a great deal about the decisions al-Iskandari made regarding what to include and where to place it in his account. Giuseppe Cecere has argued quite convincingly that Latvia’if al-minan can actually be read as a carefully crafted auto-hagiography in which al-Iskandari uses anecdotes about al-Shādhili and al-Mursī to articulate his own authority and spiritual narrative. The resultant hagiography eventually became the accepted version of their lives and teachings for the Shādhiliya in Egypt. Once a coherent and discernible methodological model (ṭariqa) was in place, the institutionalisation of that model followed as subsequent generations performed it over time, continuously reproducing the conditions of its production. In this way al-Iskandari’s idealised image of the Shādhili ṭariqa eventually became metonymic for those who performed the cluster of doctrines and practices that marked al-latā’if al-shādhiliya in Egypt.

A great deal of material could be amassed to demonstrate the strategies al-Iskandari deployed to construct the images of al-Shādhili and al-Mursī. These literary strategies reveal both al-Iskandari’s vision of the nascent Shādhiliya and the interests and expectations of his intended audience, an audience that was shaping and shaped by the Shādhili ṭariqa. There are four basic themes embedded within these literary strategies that recur throughout Latvia’if al-minan. The cumulative effect of these themes, which I treat in detail in the following chapter, served both to outline the contours of the ideal Shādhili Sufi and to differentiate the followers of al-Shādhili from other Egyptian Sufis: they defined who the followers of al-Shādhili were and who they were not. Thus, they had very real social consequences. But they are also very clearly the product of the nascent Shādhiliya’s own self-conception. The fact that so many of the early disciples of al-Shādhili were Mālikī and Shāfiʿī jurists burns through the text again and again, revealing their conceptions and anxieties about the Sufi path and al-Shādhili’s methods and his qualifications to speak authoritatively. Latvia’if al-minan thus represents this transitional moment when the group’s identity is both constrained by and recursively shaping the eponymous master’s ṭariqa.

The question then becomes why al-Iskandari’s narrative became so
authoritative for this early group. Given the nature of our sources, this is difficult if not ultimately impossible to answer. But I think a partial answer lies in the fact that al-Iṣkandarī was ideally positioned, both socially and politically, to accomplish just this. First, he was a well-respected Mālikī jurist who taught fiqh at the Manṣūrīya madrasa in Cairo. As such, he enjoyed an influential reputation in Egypt that allowed him to project his authority as a spokesperson for a normative praxis. Second, owing to this expertise, al-Iṣkandarī was a well-respected homiletical preacher (wāʿīz) in Cairo as well. It was from the preacher’s chair at al-Azhar that he spread the Shādhilī message, and in the process he authorised himself as the legitimate representative of the ṭariqa. Third, al-Iṣkandarī was already aligned with a number of the elite and local Sufis of early Mamluk Cairo. He led 500 Sufis in 707/1307 to the Citadel to protest the preaching of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who had just been released from one of his many imprisonments and was attacking the reputations of prominent Sufis in Cairo. I return to these events in Chapter 6. All these factors combined to make Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh a powerful figure in early Mamluk Cairo and it is not surprising that his narrative would carry such weight with the populace in Egypt. Indeed, al-Iṣkandarī’s standing among the Sufis of Cairo was such that Taqī l-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355, father of the Shāfiʿī biographer Tāj al-Dīn) wrote that he was ‘spokesperson of the Sufis according to the Shādhilī method’. Al-Iṣkandarī was thus able to leverage his social, religious and political capital to publicise his hagiographical construction of al-Shādhili, which was, after all, the image of the nascent Shādhiliya as well.

Notes

1. The bibliography on the Shādhiliya is quite extensive. For a general overview of the emergence and development of the order, see Abun-Nasr, Muslim Communities of Grace, pp. 96–112; ʿAmmār, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī; Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 144–54; Geoffroy, Une voie soufie, Parts I & II; Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, pp. 207–18; Lory, ‘al-Shādhili’; Lory, ‘Shādhiliya’; Mackeen, ‘The Rise of al-Shādhili’; Maḥmūd, Qaḍiyat al-taṣawwuf; Trimingham, The Sufi Orders, pp. 47–51, 84–90.

2. The Shādhiliya spread rapidly throughout North Africa and the Middle East, and from these initial movements a large number of sub-branches had emerged
by the modern period. On the contemporary Shādhiliya, see Geoffroy, ‘La Châdhiliyya’; Geoffroy, Une voie soufie, Parts III & IV. On the Shādhiliya in contemporary Egypt see Maḥmūd, al-Madrasa al-shādhiliya; Muṣṭafā, al-Binâʾ al-iḥtiimāʾi.

3. Ernst and Lawrence, Sufi Martyrs of Love, p. 11. Ohlander has echoed these methodological observations in Sufism in an Age of Transition, pp. 1–6.


5. This is certainly the case with the development of Islamic hagiography (manāqib or faḍāʾil) more broadly. See Afsaruddin, Excellence and Precedence.

6. Recent scholarship that cites these disruptions as key to the emergence of Sufi orders includes, but is certainly not limited to, Abū Rās, Shaykh al-shuyūkh, pp. 21–2; Abū Zayd, ‘al-Taṣawwuf; Geoffroy, ‘Ṭarīka; Ḥusayn, al-Adab al-ṣūfī, pp. 19–33; Kisaichi, ‘Institutionalized Sufism’; Najjār, al-Turuq al-ṣūfīya, pp. 88–101.


8. In a recent example, Knysh argues that the growth of Sufism during this period ‘was due perhaps in part to the popular dissatisfaction with the institutionalised religion of religious specialists whose recondite hair-splitting theological debates and constant jockeying for sinecures alienated them from the masses and rendered them irrelevant to their spiritual needs’ (Islamic Mysticism, p. 174).


10. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, p. 231.

11. See Abun-Nasr, Muslim Communities of Grace, p. 5, for a succinct overview of his thesis. Ephrat, ‘Sufism and Sanctity’, articulates a similar argument regarding saintly figures during the Mamluk period.

12. For more on this point, see Le Gall, ‘Recent Thinking.’


14. Green makes a similar point (Sufism, p. 43).

15. It was Fritz Meier in ‘Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism’ who first argued that the eleventh century saw the emergence of the shaykh al-tarbiya as distinct from the shaykh al-taʿlim (teaching master). However, I think Meier overstates the exclusivity of these training masters. The opposite case is clearly borne out in the khirqa literature in which students sought out multiple khirqas from different masters; see Gril, ‘De la khirqa à la ṭarīqa’.


17. Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, p. 11.
18. Geoffroy, ‘Ţarīka’. Much confusion on this front has stemmed from the fact that in Modern Standard Arabic, ِтарғ qa very clearly refers to an organised Sufi order. However, medieval usage was quite consistent in its differentiation between ِтарғqa and ِتارِفا. See Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 145–6.


20. Al-Qaṣṭallānī, ِینف۳ al-rutba. Gril, ‘De la khirqa à la ِتارِفا’, pp. 62–3, argues that al-Qaṣṭallānī represents an important stage in the development of Sufi orders in that he articulates many different initiatic lineages, only one of which would ultimately become an ‘order’ in the formal sense: the one attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, whom al-Qaṣṭallānī met in Mecca in 626. See Al-Qaṣṭallānī, ِینف۳ al-rutba, pp. 83–4. See also Ohlander, Sufism in an Age of Transition, pp. 315–20.

21. There is a critical question here about brotherhoods that developed around eponymous figures for whom there is no historical evidence – such as the Badawiya and the Dasūqiya in the Egyptian Delta. The social processes involved in these cases involved the assimilation of elements of an existent praxis (in these cases perhaps Coptic or even pre-Islamic) into an idealised figure with links to an already authorised Sufi tradition. Aḥmad al-Badawī, for example, was said to be the representative of the Rīfāʾiya in Egypt, a replacement for the previous representative, Abū l-Fath al-Wāsīṭ, who was also supposed to be Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī’s maternal grandfather. I am currently preparing a study of al-Wāsīṭ and his connection to these lineages.


23. However, there are certainly examples, particularly in early modern and modern Sufism, in which brotherhoods are formally organised with attendant offices and roles. The Khwājagān/Naqshbandiya, for example, was highly organised, with formal offices tied to specific locations, by the fifteenth century. See Paul, Doctrine and Organization.

24. The full title is ِینف۳ al-minan fi manâqib Abî l-‘Abbās al-Mursî wa-shaykhbihi Abî l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (‘The Subtle Blessings Concerning the Virtuous Traits of al-Mursî and his Master al-Shādhilî’). There are multiple printings of ِینف۳ al-minan, each of which has its own problems. There is still no critical edition of this important work. Here I use the Cairo edition edited by ِعبد al-Ḥalim Mahmūd. There is an English translation of the work by Nancy Roberts, The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abû al-‘Abbâs al-Mursî and His Master Abû

25. Geoffroy, ʿṬāʾīfa’. On al-Iskandari’s usage of ʿṬāʾīfa, see Maḥmūd’s comments in Latāʾīf al-mīnān, p. 28 n. 1.

26. The full title is Durrat al-asrār wa-tubḥat al-abnār fi aqwāl wa-afʿāl wa-ahwāl wa-maqāmāt wa-nasab wa-kārimāt wa-adhkār wa-daʿawāt sīdī Abī l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili (‘The Pearl of Mysteries and Treasure of the Righteous: On the Sayings, Actions, States, Stations, Lineage, Miracles, Exercises and Prayers of Our Master Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili’). Like Latāʾīf al-mīnān, Durrat al-asrār has not been properly edited. The best extant printed edition is that edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, who attempted to make a semi-critical edition by collating the Tunisian edition (1887), the Alexandrian edition (1935) and a private manuscript; there are still many typographical mistakes. As to when Ibn al-Šabbāgh wrote Durrat al-asrār, the only internal indication is the fact that he mentions visiting Alexandria and Cairo to collect material in 715/1315.

27. Gril, La Risāla, pp. 78–9. Ṣafī al-Dīn meticulously recorded all those Sufis whom he met in Egypt during his lifetime. Most valuable for our purposes, he includes in these biographical notices descriptions of these Sufis’ circles of disciples. Thus, the fact that he mentions al-Shādhili alone and without a circle of students indicates that, as far as Ṣafī al-Dīn knew, al-Shādhili had no significant circle of disciples. Significantly, Ṣafī al-Dīn does mention al-Mursī once in the Risāla. In his biography of ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, who visited the hospital, Abū l-ṣabbāgh visited him (see ibid., p. 73). Gril argues that this must be Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, given that al-Naqqād is mentioned in Latāʾīf al-mīnān, p. 90. The fact that Ṣafī al-Dīn mentions al-Mursī and al-Shādhili separately, without noting any connection between them, is telling.


29. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Ṣiḥāḥ, p. 25.


as a Shāfiʿī, but it is said he was a Mālikī (Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿīya al-kubrā, 9:23). Sherman Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis?,* p. 5 n. 5, argues that al-Subkī included al-Iskandārī in his *Ṭabaqāt* and considered him a Shāfiʿī because he was an Ashʿarī.

33. The Wafāʾiya have been treated at length by Richard McGregor in *Sanctity and Mysticism.* Muḥammad Wafāʾ, the eponym of this sub-order, deliberately formed an organisation based upon the pre-existing institutionalised identity of the Shādhiliyya. Both Muḥammad Wafāʾ and his son and successor ʿAlī reworked the Shādhili identity, allowing them to claim adherence to the Shādhili ṭariqa while simultaneously proposing their own presumably superior ṭāʿifā. On the Wafāʾī claim that they were superior to their teachers, see Geoffroy, ‘L’Election divine’; McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism,* p. 158. This is also the case with the sub-orders of other Sufi groups. Once an institutionalised identity had become an available social resource, sub-orders were often organised to take advantage of that resource. For the Chishtīya, see Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love,* pp. 18–21. For the Naqshbandīya, see Buehler, *Sufi Heirs,* pp. 66–81.


35. My thinking on this subject is also indebted to another Marxist, Pierre Bourdieu, and his theory of practice and the *habitus* articulated in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice.*


39. Perhaps the most succinct definition of the *quṭb* is that of al-Hifnī: ‘one man who is the locus of God’s presence in the world for all time’ (*Muʿjam,* p. 217).

40. There is a brief notice on al-Wāṣīṭī in ʿAmmār, *Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili,* 1:77–8. The character of al-Wāṣīṭī is a fascinating one, as he pops up in a large number of unexpected places in Egyptian Sufi literature. As I noted above, I am currently preparing a study of the literary history of his character.


43. Ḥusayn, *al-Adab al-ṣūfī*, p. 64.

44. ʿAmmār, *Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili*, 1:190–1. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s account has Ibn al-Barrā’ say explicitly to the Sultan of Tūnis, ‘A large group of people have gathered around [al-Shādhili], for he claims that he is the Fatimid (*al-fāṭimī*), which in this case must be a circumlocution for the mahdi. There is an interesting aside in Ibn Khaldūn’s autobiographical remarks in which he notes that many in the Maghrib were expecting a great person to appear in the fourteenth century and that the Sufis of the Maghrib were expecting ‘a Fatimid’. While this is a late witness, it does indicate the persistence of the idea. See Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*, p. 35–6.

45. Ḥusayn, ‘Bayna l-tashayyuʾ’, p. 67. The evidence here is quite thin and not at all convincing.

46. This is the date given by ʿAmmār and many others but the evidence is shaky. The first to assert this date was Ibn ʿAyyād (*al-Mafākhir al-ʿalīya*, p. 23), and is thus quite late. The assertion is most likely due to the fact that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh claimed that al-Shādhili inherited the station of Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī when the latter died in 642/1244.


48. On the tomb see Gril, ‘La Stèle funéraire’.


50. The only treatment of this aspect of the history of the Shādhiliya is in Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, pp. 150–4.

51. On the two brothers, see ibid., pp. 152–3.


56. My argument is based on the fact that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh structures *Durrat al-asrār* very carefully. The bulk of the book is devoted to al-Shādhilī and it is not until the end that he indicates that al-Mursī was the one who inherited al-Shādhilī’s status. This is immediately followed by a longer section devoted to the miraculous knowledge and power of Muḥammad Ibn Sulṭān, who lived in Tunis. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh repeatedly emphasises that Muḥammad Ibn Sulṭān was trained at the hands of al-Shādhilī and not al-Mursī. Muḥammad thus emerges in *Durrat al-asrār* as the direct link in North Africa to al-Shādhilī.

57. In an apparent attempt to reconcile this problem, al-Shaṭṭārī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 2:18–19, records a tradition that al-Iskandarī was actually al-Ḥabashi’s student after al-Mursī!

58. Al-Iskandarī, ‘*Unwān al-tawfiq fī ʿādāb al-ṭariq*.

59. To cite just one example, Maurice Gloton writes in the introduction to his translation of *al-Qaṣīd al-mujarrad* that ‘Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh, disciple à vingt ans à peine du cheick al-Murcî, le remplaça après sa mort et affirma être l’héritier non seulement des connaissances intérieures de son Maître, mais aussi de sa fonction’ (Al-Iskandarī, *Traité sur le nom Allāh*, p. 11).


62. Al-Fāsī, *Jāmiʿ al-karāmāt*. While al-Iskandarī’s work was critical for the early incarnation of the group in Egypt, at some point Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s hagiography became equally important. This may have been due in part to the work of Ibn ʿAbbād al-Rundī (d. 792/1390), who wrote a commentary on the Ḥikam of al-Iskandarī and popularised these aphorisms in the Maghrib. It was Ibn ʿAbbād, then, who seems to have been the primary link between the Egyptian and North African schools, on which see Honerkamp, ‘A Biography of Abû l-Hasan al-Shādhilī’, p. 86. However, Ibn ʿAbbād may not have actually been a Shādhilī Sufi himself; see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, p. 153. On Ibn ʿAbbād in general see Ibn ʿAbbād, *Letters on the Ṣūfī Path*; Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda*.

63. One of the few indications that al-Ḥabashi had other students is in Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 11:321, where it is recorded that al-Ḥabashi had a student named Ḥasan al-Khabbāz (d. 791/1389), a well-known preacher who married al-Ḥabashi’s daughter.

64. Al-Iskandarī turns up once in *Durrat al-asrār* (p. 175), but only because he records some lines of verse attributed to al-Mursī that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was not aware of from other sources.
65. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh notes in his introduction to *Durrat al-ḥār* (p. 26) that his primary informants were ‘the righteous shaykh and saint Abū Sūłṭān Mādı, student and servant of our master Abū l-Ḥāsan . . . and his son, our master, Abū Ḥād Allāh Muhammad . . . and our master the righteous shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashi’. It is intriguing that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh mined al-Ḥabashi for information and not al-Iskandari’s pupil Ibn Bākhillā. I would argue that this is further evidence of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s attempt to construct a version of Shādhili Sufism independent of al-Iskandari’s influence.


67. The problem with recovering the historical figure of al-Shādhili is that there are very few details about his life outside the hagiographical realm. This is a perennial problem facing biographers of Sufis, a problem summarised pithily by Elliot Wolfson in his study of the last Rebbe of the Lubavitcher Ḥasidim, Menahem Mendel Schneerson: ‘Simply put, without [the hagiography] there would be no framework within which to study the life of Menahem Mendel Schneerson, and this is as true for the scholar as it is for the partisan . . . The only truth that may be observed is truth garbed in the appearance of truth’ (Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 14).

68. Gril, ‘Le Miracle en Islam’, pp. 77–81, compares these authors on the topic of sanctity and miracles, noting on p. 79 that ‘on constate non pas une différence dans l’importance accordée aux miracles, mais une nuance de style et aussi d’intensité’.


70. Cecere, ‘Le Charme discret’.

71. On al-Iskandari’s oblique treatment of Mālikī concerns, as well as his equally oblique inclusion of Shāfi‘i jurists into his hagiography, see ibid., pp. 82–8.


73. Nearly all the sources on al-Iskandari take special note of his rhetorical skills and prestige as a public preacher, noting that he preached from a chair (kursī). Preaching from a chair was meant to differentiate this quite popular style of preaching from the official khutba, which was delivered standing up. See Jones,
The Power of Oratory, pp. 17–18, 162; Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges, pp. 217–18. For a problematising of some of these distinctions, see Berkey, Popular Preaching, pp. 13–17.

74. While al-Ṣafadi mentions only that al-Iskandarī preached at al-jāmiʿ (the congregational mosque) (al-Wāfi, 8:38–9), al-ʿAsqalānī is more specific, noting that he preached ‘from atop the chair at al-jāmiʿ al-azhar’ (al-Durar al-kāmina, 1:274). Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī says that al-Iskandarī ‘preached from the chair at the mosques’ plural (al-Manhal al-ṣāfi, 2:120).

Al-Iskandarī’s Image of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqa

Şeyh uçmaz, müridi uçurur*

In the previous chapter I argued that Ibn ʿAṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī’s hagiographical image of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī precipitated the institutionalisation of a collective Shādhilī identity linked to an eponymous method, or ṭarīqa. In order to bolster his credentials and cement his status as the authorised spokesperson for and representative of the Shādhilī ṭarīqa in Egypt, al-Iskandarī publicised in speech and writing a specific image of the masters that became authoritative for the emergent Shādhilī collectivity. Importantly, al-Iskandarī’s construction both reflected and shaped the doctrines and practices of the nascent community. By textually standardising the doctrines and practices of the Shādhilī masters in line with communal expectations about the ṭarīqa, al-Iskandarī discursively mapped the identity of the collectivity onto the biographies of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, who thus functioned metonymically as the communal ideal. In other words, the narratives in al-Iskandarī’s hagiography constituted an ideal mythical type of the ‘Shādhili Sufi’, which the group could embody by emulating that ideal.¹ Al-Iskandarī’s writings thus straddle a social dialectic between the textualisation of collective praxis and the idealisation of eponymous identity that recursively shaped communal identity. That is, the institutionalisation of a coherent Shādhili identity occurred through repeated performance of an ideal model within the social framework of a textual community. This institutionalisation created

* Turkish proverb: ‘The shaykh does not fly, his disciples make him fly.’
the requisite conditions for the (re)production of an emergent social formation that was increasingly organised over time. In this chapter, I explore this textualisation and idealisation of al-Shādhilī’s image in more detail, examining the literary strategies by which al-Iskandarī crafted and promoted a coherent identity linked to al-Shādhilī’s authority.

In order to flesh out this construction I draw primarily on al-Iskandarī’s hagiography Laṭāʾif al-minan. Not surprisingly, it is with and through the carefully constructed narrative lives of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī that al-Iskandarī portrays his ideal Shādhilī Sufi. Nevertheless, there are a number of other valuable texts in which al-Iskandarī performed similar work. In addition to Laṭāʾif al-minan, we have a manual of instruction entitled Kitāb al-tanwīr fī isqāṭ al-tadbīr (‘The Book of Illumination Concerning the Elimination of Self-reliance’), which details how to cultivate the Sufi virtue of al-tawakkul (reliance on God) while still maintaining a livelihood.2 Al-Iskandarī also wrote a commentary on a poem by Abū Madyan, entitled ʿUnwān al-tawfīq fī adab al-ṭariq (‘The Sign of Success Concerning the Comportment of the [Sufi] Path’).3 Perhaps most famous is his collection of aphorisms, Kitāb al-ḥikam, in which he presents many of the Shādhilī doctrines in concise and allusive form.4 A particularly valuable text is a collection of al-Iskandarī’s sermons, Tāj al-ʿarūs al-ṣāwī li-tahdhīb al-nufūs (‘The Bridegroom’s Crown: Containing Instructions on Refining the Self’).5 This collection reveals a great deal about the way al-Iskandarī presented his ideas for a mass audience. Similar to this text are the notes of al-Iskandarī’s student Rāfiʿ Ibn Shāfiʿ, in which he recorded some of al-Iskandarī’s final sermons.6 While I have not been able to examine the manuscript of this text, Denis Gril has written a detailed summary of its contents.7 Finally, we have two manuals of questionable attribution. The first, Miftāḥ al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ fī dhikr allāh al-karīm al-fattāḥ (‘The Key to Happiness and the Lamp of Souls Concerning the Mention of God, the Noble and Enlightening’), is a guide to the practices of dhikr and kbalwa.8 The second is a treatise on the power of invoking the name of God, al-Qaṣd al-mujarrad fī maʾrifat al-ism al-mufrad (‘The Singular Goal Concerning Knowledge of the Unique Name’).9 Neither of these two texts is consistent with al-Iskandarī’s style or the content of his other books. Al-Iskandarī makes constant reference to al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī in his writings, but such references are completely absent in the Miftāḥ
Al-Iskandarī’s Image of the Shādhilī tarīqa and the Qaṣd. The Miftāh in particular stands out for its detailed descriptions of a highly institutionalised khālwa, a practice almost entirely absent from al-Iskandarī’s other writings, and seems to me more likely to have originated in Upper-Egyptian Sufi circles. Finally, none of the eighth-/fourteenth- and ninth-/fifteenth-century biographies of al-Iskandarī mentions either of these texts, a particularly striking omission since they do mention his other writings. While I hope to return to this issue of authorship in the future, here I will not draw on the Miftāh or al-Qaṣd. While they were important in later Shādhili Sufism, they are not relevant to the early period.

Al-Iskandarī’s texts collectively paint a picture of the ideal Shādhili Sufi. What is particularly striking is the way in which he unfailingly defers to the authority of al-Shādhili and al-Mursī in his work. Al-Iskandarī consistently frames and authorises his subjects, despite different topics and emphases, with sayings attributed to the two Shādhili masters. He draws on the institutions of Sufism, fleshes them out and modifies them with sayings attributed to his masters, and then frames them within mainstream (Mālikī-Shāfiʿī) juridical notions of practice. His work thus presents a textualised and idealised version of a particular kind of Sufi that shaped practical concerns. His wide-ranging and accessible style rooted simultaneously in classical Sufi texts, the Shādhili masters and the juridically determined prophetic sunna must have been one of the reasons for the growing popularity of the Shādhili ūlūm. Tāj al-Dīn al-Fāriqī (d. 733/1333) saw al-Iskandarī preach in Alexandria and reports as much, writing that he ‘mixed the speech of the Sufis (kalām al-qawm) with examples of the pious ancestors (āthār al-salaf) and varieties of knowledge (funūn al-ʿilm), and thus his followers increased’. Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh’s entire corpus reflects this larger project to shape, disseminate and popularise the Shādhili ūlūm in Egypt.

The ideal Shādhili Sufi that al-Iskandarī constructs in his textual corpus comprises four broadly defined characteristics. First, in terms of spiritual authority, he constructs an image of al-Shādhili’s sainthood that is quite different from other Sufis of the time. Most Sufi conceptions of authority by the late seventh/thirteenth century were increasingly formulated in terms of a silsila along one or more initiatic lineages. But al-Iskandarī insists on the unique, sui generis sanctity (walāya) of al-Shādhili that requires no silsila nor any tangible proof of initiation like the khirqa. Second, in terms of legal
authority, he frames al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī (as well as himself) as squarely within the mainstream juridical discourse. In al-Iskandarī’s narratives the masters often interact with and impress influential Mālikī and Shāfiʿī jurists. As Giuseppe Cecere argues, these narratives seamlessly integrate the largely Maghrībī Mālikīs and the primarily Egyptian Shāfiʿīs within the unifying discourse of the Shādhilī ṯariqa. These accounts are meant to articulate the ways that the ideal Shādhilī Sufi conforms to the juridically derived sunna of their time. Third, in terms of political authority, al-Iskandarī advocates a wary political reciprocity with the state and state actors. He portrays al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī using the state to their advantage when necessary, while simultaneously keeping a respectable distance. The Shādhilī Sufi is clearly marked off from the Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ, who were aligned with the interests of the state, and the Sufis of Upper Egypt, who were not. Fourth, al-Iskandarī outlines a coherent body of praxis authorised by al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī. These practices are an interesting mix of common supererogatory Sufi devotions attenuated by an acknowledgement that most individuals must still live and work in the world. Without positing some kind of direct link between the Malāmatiya and the Shādhilīya, there is a clear Malāmatī-inflected ethos to the nascent Shādhilī praxis.

Together, these four characteristics constitute the ideal Shādhilī Sufi. They represent the textualisation of a nascent communal praxis and the idealisation of a coherent Shādhilī ṯariqa. It was this textualisation and idealisation that formed the core of the emerging textual community and precipitated the institutionalisation of the Shādhilī ṯariqa. This institutionalisation made possible the production and reproduction of a collective Shādhilī identity in Egypt, ultimately producing an eponymous ṭāʾifā authorised by the master’s name.

Saintly Authority

A critical component of the emergent Shādhilī identity was al-Iskandarī’s claim that Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī was uniquely authorised as a Sufi master. At the centre of Sufi piety is the institution of al-ṣuḥba, the master–disciple relationship. This institution is bound up with broader conceptions of authority in Islamicate societies, wherein authority is ultimately derived in several paradigmatic ways from a connection to the charismatic authority of
The Sufis are no exception and they developed a visible, material symbol of their link to prophetic authority quite early: the *khīrqa* or *muraqqaʿa*—a cloak or patched frock bestowed from master upon disciple to signify affiliation with the Sufis in general and the prophet Muḥammad in particular. By the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period, the *khīrqa* had become a widely acknowledged and visible sign that one’s chain of authorisation was complete and unbroken. As such, it was not unusual for an individual to collect multiple *khīrqa*as, much as one would collect multiple *ijāza* in the study of *fiqh*. In a certain sense, then, the doctrines, rituals and idiosyncrasies of a particular Sufi method or identity were epitomised in a piece of clothing that signified the nature and origins of one’s authority. The *khīrqa*, more than anything else, had come to signify Sufi authority and piety in a public and visible way and it was quite unusual to find individuals making claims of Sufi authority who were not connected to such garments.

As a prominent Sufi master in this period, then, we would expect al-Shādhilī to have inherited the *khīrqa* or, at the very least, to claim legitimacy via an initiatic lineage. In point of fact, the later Shādhilī tradition does claim that al-Shādhilī took the *khīrqa* several times. Ibn ʿAyyād, for example, records that al-Shādhilī took the *khīrqa* from two Maghribi Sufis, Muḥammad ibn Ḥarāzīm (d. 633/1236) and Ibn Mashīsh (d. circa 625/1228). The latter was al-Shādhilī’s foremost teacher of Sufism, and the former was the son of the famous Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ḥirzihim (d. 559/1164), or Sīdī Ḥarāzīm, a major Sufi personality in Fez. Likewise, there are traditions that al-Shādhilī inherited the *khīrqa* of Abū Madyan from the Upper-Egyptian saint Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqūrī (d. 642/1244), from whom he also supposedly inherited the rank of *quṭb*. However, Denis Gril has shown that there was not yet in the seventh/thirteenth century a *khīrqa madyaniya*. Furthermore, neither al-Iskandarī nor Ibn al-Šabbāgh actually claim that al-Shādhilī took the *khīrqa* from anyone. The *khīrqa* traditions are an innovation of later Shādhilī Sufis back-projecting and legitimising their initiatic traditions. Nevertheless, it is surprising that al-Shādhilī (or his early hagiographers) never claimed that he took the *khīrqa* or claimed direct initiatic authority. So how did the early hagiographers construct al-Shādhilī’s authority, and what does it reveal about their strategies of legitimisation?
Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh claimed that al-Shādhilī inherited the spiritual stations of Ibn Mashīsh and Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī. He reports that when al-Shādhilī met Ibn Mashīsh the latter was wearing a muraqqaʿ and qalansūwa – a Sufi cloak and cap – but that he did not pass these on to al-Shādhilī. Rather, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh contends that while ‘at that time [Ibn Mashīsh] was the quṭb’, he declared that al-Shādhilī would not inherit that rank until he arrived in Egypt. This tacit pre-investiture of authority constitutes Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s first claim about al-Shādhilī’s authority: he was authorised to teach in the name of Ibn Mashīsh, who predicted he would become the quṭb upon arriving in Egypt. According to Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Shādhilī’s formal investiture occurred in Egypt after the death of Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī. The account takes place within the context of a dream, in which one of al-Shādhilī’s disciples reports:

Last night I saw the prophet in a dream and he said to me, O Yūnus, shaykh Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī, who was the axis of the age in Egypt, died yesterday. God has made Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī his successor. So I came to [al-Shādhilī], swore the oath of allegiance to him, and [affirmed] that he was the quṭb. For Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Shādhilī was never initiated in the traditional, personal sense, although his authority was rooted in specific persons: Ibn Mashīsh and al-Uqṣūrī. Al-Iskandarī includes no such narrative in his accounts. Nor is there actually any contemporary source that claims al-Uqṣūrī was the quṭb or that there was any connection between al-Uqṣūrī and al-Shādhilī at all. So why did Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh supply this peculiar narrative of authority? Why did he connect al-Shādhilī to this Upper-Egyptian saint? Without a clear initiatory silsila, he needed to link al-Shādhilī into an impeccable spiritual lineage in such a way that rendered al-Shādhilī the most important Sufī in Egypt. And since Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was explicitly writing for a North African audience, he needed a Sufī with a connection to the saints of that region. Al-Uqṣūrī fitted that bill perfectly.

First, al-Uqṣūrī was one of the transmitters of the ūrāqa of Abū Madyan in Egypt. He was directly linked to the foremost Madyāni Sufis in Egypt at that time, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī (d. 592/1196 or 595/1199) in Alexandria and ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī (d. 592/1196) in Upper Egypt. Nevertheless,
there were many followers of Abū Madyan in Egypt at this time, so why does Ibn al-Šabbāgh insist that al-Shādhilī inherited al-Uqṣūrī’s station and not one of these others?28 It turns out that al-Uqṣūrī was one of the few local Egyptian Sufis who had gained widespread fame in the Maghrib. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Bādisi’s treatise on the ‘righteous men of northern Morocco’ (ṣulahāʾ al-rif’), composed in approximately 711/1311, mentions al-Uqṣūrī no fewer than ten times.29 So when Ibn al-Šabbāgh constructed al-Shādhilī’s authority he took advantage of the fact that al-Uqṣūrī was an Egyptian Sufi and a contemporary of al-Shādhilī, died at roughly the same time that al-Shādhilī arrived in Egypt, was directly connected to Abū Madyan, and was well known in North Africa. It made perfect sense for him to have al-Shādhilī inherit Abū Madyan’s legacy from al-Uqṣūrī, despite the fact that the two never met. Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s conception of al-Shādhilī’s authority is thus rooted squarely within the classical tradition of the Sufi silsila, albeit one lacking a personal investiture or khirqa.

This is entirely different from the account al-Iskandarī offers in Laṭāʾif al-minan. If Ibn al-Šabbāgh wanted to link al-Shādhilī to Abū Madyan by means of a traditional silsila, it may have been to counter al-Iskandarī’s claim that al-Shādhilī did not actually have or even need such a silsila.

Al-Iskandarī discusses this subject only once in Laṭāʾif al-minan, at the end of the second chapter. After mentioning several of al-Shādhilī’s students, he writes that al-Shādhilī’s

method (tarīqa) can be traced to shaykh ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh and [the latter’s shaykh] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Madānī. Then through one [master] after another to al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib [and thus to the prophet]. I heard our shaykh [al-Mursī] say, ‘This method (tarīqa) of ours is not connected to any from the East nor to any from the West. Rather, [we trace it] from one individual after another to al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who was the first qūṭb.’ But enumerating the shaykhs of one’s path (tariq) is required only for those whose method involves wearing the khirqa . . . [However,] God might bring the servant [directly] to him and he will not need a teacher. [In that case,] God will join [the Sufi] to the prophet and [the latter] will authorise [the former] . . . So if God wants to favour a servant, he will make it so that he does not need a teacher and he will have no precedent (salaf).30
Here al-Iskandarī argues that al-Shādhili learned how to be a Sufi from Ibn Mashīsh, but that his authority is derived directly from God via the prophetic intermediary Muḥammad. This is a fundamental aspect of the early Shādhili identity in Egypt. Al-Iskandarī downplayed the traditional reliance on silsilas and the external forms related to these silsilas such as the khirqa or muraqqaʿa. This can be seen quite clearly in his theorisation of sanctity (walāya) and the role he assigns it in constructing al-Shādhili’s authority.

Al-Iskandarī treats the subject of sainthood at great length in the Introduction of Laṭāʿif al-minan. In those pages he presents a model of sainthood indebted to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 295–300/905–10) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), two of the most important and influential theorists of sainthood in medieval Islam. Sainthood for al-Iskandarī is both a function of the saint’s proximity to God (walāya having the primary connotation of proximity to power) as well as of the saint’s inheritance of the prophet’s light or reality (al-nūr/al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiya). Al-Iskandarī argues that

the apparent light of the saints is nothing but the illumination of the lights of prophecy upon them. This can be likened [to saying] that the Muhammadan reality is like the sun, and the hearts of the saints are like the moon, because the light of the moon is a product of the light of the sun.

Importantly, al-Iskandarī also distinguishes between two different modalities of sanctity: those who draw near to God – the lesser walāya – and those whom God draws near to himself – the greater walāya. Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili is of the latter type.

This aspect of Laṭāʿif al-minan has been treated at length by Éric Geoffroy, who describes it as the foundational text of the Shādhiliyya in a double sense. On one hand, the text is a straightforward hagiography in presenting a model sainthood in the figures of al-Shādhili and al-Mursī. On the other hand, it is also a complex hagiology in its development of an explicit theory of sainthood. The primary purpose of this preliminary hagiological material is clearly to prepare the reader to understand and accept the sui generis authority of al-Shādhili. The text thus serves to ground Shādhiliyya identity both in physical persons who can be imitated and in a specific doctrine that can be learned. However, I think Geoffroy’s conclusions can be pushed...
further if we probe the specific historical and social context of al-Iskandari’s model. The authors of earlier monographic hagiographies had simply asserted the sanctity of particular individuals by describing their charismatic gifts (karāmāt) primarily as a function of lineage (whether genealogical or spiritual). Laṭāʾif al-minan is one of the first of its kind in Sufi literature in that it connects a specific saint to an explicit theory of sainthood in the context of a monographic hagiography. It is possible to read Laṭāʾif al-minan as an innovative justification for al-Shādhilī himself, who, at least for some, would appear to have lacked traditional Sufi credentials like the authorising sīlsila. Al-Iskandari therefore uses his Introduction to Laṭāʾif al-minan to describe a modality of sainthood that does not require physical initiation, but is rooted in an unmediated proximity to God and the Muḥammadan inheritance. As far as I am aware, this is the first time an initiatic lineage was founded on a sui generis sanctity without recourse to any predecessor. Al-Iskandari makes this explicit in a parable:

A king said to one of his courtiers, ‘I want to make you my vizier.’ [The courtier] responded, ‘But there are none who held the position before me [from whom to inherit the office].’ The king said, ‘I want to make you the precedent (al-salaf) for those who come after you.’ According to the logic of the parable, al-Shādhilī alone (authorised by God) constitutes the authoritative precedent (al-salaf) for his successors. Incidentally, the parable also reveals the preoccupation of uşūlī Sufis like al-Iskandari with the paradigmatic al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ (the authoritative generations closest to Muḥammad). Al-Iskandari is able to sidestep the entire question of a sīlsila, the very question that pushes Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh to include dubious claims of Sufi lineage in his hagiographical account.

Furthermore, because this sui generis authority is a purely spiritual concept, there is no need to transmit the khīrqa. Alī Ṣafī Ḥusayn has emphasised that the early Shādhiliya were well known for not using the khīrqa as part of their initiatory practices. They did not require the khīrqa because their authority was rooted not in a sīlsila, but in an unmediated form of walāya. This is not to say that the Shādhilī masters did not mandate teachers. In a letter to his companions in Alexandria al-Iskandari stresses the necessity of having a master teach the path to novices. While one needs a teacher to
learn the fundamentals of the path, the *silsila* in and of itself was not important. This state of affairs would eventually change and *silsilas* with clear links through the classical Sufi masters did become important for the Shādhiliyya. But that was a late development, similar to the early Naqshbandi Sufis who, contrary to later Naqshbandi ideals, valorised the Uwaysi initiation of their early masters over physical initiations.41

**Juridical Authority**

The accounts of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and al-Iskandarī are populated by the local men and women with whom al-Shādhili and al-Mursi were involved in various settings. Reading these stories one gets a sense of a small community of believers in both North Africa and Egypt who followed the charismatic al-Shādhili from place to place, or, upon learning that he was nearby, came to visit him. Not surprisingly, these two authors represent this collectivity in different ways. Al-Iskandarī is primarily interested in al-Shādhili’s Egyptian disciples, while Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh focuses on al-Shādhili’s North African followers. What is particularly striking about al-Iskandarī’s writings for our purpose here is the recurring cast of Mālikī and Shāfī jurists who function to legitimate the claims and cement the status of al-Shādhili. This is a deliberate strategy to construct a vision of Sufism that not only unifies disparate legal traditions, but portrays the Shādhili *tariqa* as conforming to a normative sunna propagated by those jurists. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh constructs not only the ideal Sufi but also the ideal community of juridically minded individuals. It is through the mouths of several prominent jurists that al-Iskandarī articulates the juridical *bona fides* of the nascent Shādhiliyya and their ideal relationship to the sunna.

There are three jurists who appear quite prominently in *Laṭāʾif al-minan*: the Mālikī Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar (d. 692/1293) and two Shāfīʿis, ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) and Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd al-Qushayrī (d. 702/1302). All three of these men were important jurists in their day, the latter two perhaps the most important jurists in Cairo.

The individual whom al-Iskandarī cites more than any other is Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar, a native of Alexandria and a well-known jurist and expert in Qurʾānic recitation.42 Al-Iskandarī portrays him as the primary eyewitness to much of al-Shādhili’s Egyptian career and a famous Sufi in his own right,
mentioning him many times in both *Laṭāʿif al-minan* and *Tāj al-ʿarūs*. These are not anecdotes about Makīn al-Dīn himself, but reports about al-Shādhilī on the authority of Makīn al-Dīn. Having a well-respected Mālikī jurist and Qurʾānic expert narrate the bulk of his reports about al-Shādhilī lent them weight for an Egyptian, especially Alexandrian, audience of jurists. This is also the reason why al-Iskandarī’s account includes a number of references to the Shāfiʿī jurist ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, who appears in *Laṭāʿif al-minan* three times in the section devoted to al-Shādhilī. While Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh portrays ʿIzz al-Dīn as a member of al-Shādhilī’s circle, there is no evidence that he actually was, nor that he was a Sufi. Nevertheless, whether or not ʿIzz al-Dīn was actually a Sufi who studied with al-Shādhilī is not as important as the fact that al-Iskandarī portrays him as such.

In the first instance, al-Iskandarī reports that al-Shādhilī was in al-Manṣūra, in the Nile Delta, studying Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla* with four individuals, including ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām. Al-Shādhilī is silent during their discussion, and the others prod him to speak. Al-Shādhilī demurs, saying, ‘You are the masters of the age and its greatest [men]. You have already spoken.’ They insist that he speak, and he eventually relents, holding forth about ‘amazing secrets and mighty sciences’, at which point ʿIzz al-Dīn walks away from the group and shouts, ‘Listen to this wondrous speech, granted by God!’ Two things are remarkable in this story. First, and most importantly, al-Iskandarī portrays this famous Shāfiʿī jurist giving a glowing recommendation for al-Shādhilī. Second, ʿIzz al-Dīn’s statement, ‘Listen to this wondrous speech, granted by God’, is nearly identical to something Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī records ʿIzz al-Dīn saying about Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī. There is an obvious conflation of stories, the untangling of which is not important here. Rather, what is critical is that al-Iskandarī deploys a theme about juridical authority and approval that would become commonly associated with the Shādhilī masters.

The second story involving ʿIzz al-Dīn is set shortly after the pilgrimage in an unspecified year. After returning from Mecca, and when the pilgrimage caravan stopped in Cairo, al-Shādhilī pays a visit to ʿIzz al-Dīn. Al-Shādhilī tells him that the prophet Muḥammad has asked him to convey greetings. This upsets ʿIzz al-Dīn, so al-Shādhilī invites him to ‘the khānqāh of the Sufis in Cairo’ to discuss the matter. They proceed to the khānqāh in the
company of the juridical Sufi Ibn Surâqa (who was one of the men from the previous story) and Abû l-ʿAlam Yâsîn, who, al-Iskandari informs the reader, was one of Ibn al-ʿArabî’s students. After hashing out the subject of prophetic greeting, Ibn Surâqa and Abû l-ʿAlam both convince ʿIzz al-Dîn that the greeting was legitimate and something to rejoice over. Al-Iskandari abruptly ends the story by saying, ‘So shaykh ʿIzz al-Dîn got up, [after having] spent an enjoyable time, and everyone got up with him.’51 Again, al-Iskandari is drawing on the reputation of ʿIzz al-Dîn to construct a picture of a socially integrated circle of Sufis and jurists.

Finally, al-Iskandari reports an anonymous tradition whereby somebody once said to al-Shâdhili:

There is not, on the face of the earth, a majlis of law more splendid than that of Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dîn ibn ʿAbd al-Salâm. And there is not, on the face of the earth, a majlis of hadith more splendid than that of Zakî al-Dîn ʿAbd al-ʿAzîm. And there is not, on the face of the earth, a majlis of the science of realities (ʿilm al-ḥaqâʾiq) more splendid than yours [i.e. al-Shâdhili].52

The three cornerstones of juridical Sufi authority – fiqh, hadith and al-ḥaqâʾiq – are here represented together with their most noteworthy practitioners, implying their linkage. This is similar to a report attributed to Ibn Daqîq al-ʿĪd, in which he proclaims that al-Shâdhili was ‘the greatest gnostic’ known to him.53

The cumulative effect of all these stories is a type of double-praise. ʿIzz al-Dîn praises al-Shâdhili and al-Shâdhili praises ʿIzz al-Dîn. Rhetorically this is a fascinating strategy as it gives the reader the impression that these two great men were moving in the same social circles and were in awe of each other’s respective abilities. For a Sufi in early Mamluk Egypt, ʿIzz al-Dîn and Ibn Daqîq al-ʿĪd represented prototypical juridically minded scholars who had no compunctions about following al-Shâdhili. For an eighth-/fourteenth-century jurist, these stories bring al-Shâdhili out of the shadows of mid-seventh-/thirteenth-century Sufism and into the majlis. In other words, he was a shaykh with impeccable Sunni credentials. There are other examples of al-Iskandari bolstering al-Shâdhili’s status by means of juridical interlocutors, but the point is clear. Al-Iskandari used Latâʾif al-minan to portray al-Shâdhili as an active member of the larger community of Sunni scholars.
By constructing an image of al-Shādhilī as a scholar and jurist, and not simply as a Sufi, al-Iskandarī framed an essential component of early Shādhilī identity. According to this model, the Shādhiliya espoused a Sufism that did not violate the bounds and dictates of the law or sunna.\(^{54}\) This was an extraordinarily effective strategy in the long term and it is not surprising that Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) held such a high opinion of the Shādhilī Sufis.\(^{55}\) After noting that both ʿIbn ʿAbd al-Salām and Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd were members of al-Shādhilī’s circle, al-Suyūṭī declares that if Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd ‘had seen one atom’s worth of [objectionable content] in al-Shādhilī’s speech, he would have been the first to reject him’.\(^ {56}\) This concern with the sharīʿa and the sunna runs throughout al-Iskandarī’s writings and betrays his effort to portray al-Shādhilī as well respected by and integrated into the juridical establishment in Egypt. While this was a rhetorical strategy, its social repercussions should not be underestimated in terms of their contribution to the institutionalisation of the Shādhili ṭarīqa.

**Wary Political Reciprocity**

Despite being on the government payroll himself, al-Iskandarī has very little to say explicitly about the relationship between the political and spiritual realms.\(^ {57}\) But his position can be found in his portrayal of the Shādhilī masters. Al-Shādhilī advocated a politically active position from which a Sufi shaykh could exploit political contacts for the benefit of the poor and needy. Al-Mursī, by contrast, advocated keeping one’s distance from political activity and seems to have avoided political figures at all costs. Al-Iskandarī harmonised these views into a position that I call a wary political reciprocity. A Sufi shaykh might exploit political connections for the good of the poor, but should remain outside the system of state-sponsored Sufism as much as possible. This was a social strategy as well as a political one. Warm political relations ensured that the Shādhiliya would be able to operate without state interference while maintaining a degree of political protection and patronage. This was surely a significant component of the success of the Shādhiliya and contributed to their long-term viability.

There is one particularly revealing passage in *Laṭāʿif al-minan* in which al-Iskandarī delves into the subject of politics. In his discussion about sainthood, he quotes al-Shādhilī as saying, ‘Every saint has a veil.’\(^ {58}\) He goes on to
explain that every saint has some aspect of his personality that obscures his true nature. Thus, some saints are seen as having ‘a cocky and forceful presence’, or having ‘great wealth and worldly joy’, both of which obscure their inner realities. Critically, then, not all saints will behave or look like saints; some of them may even appear to act inappropriately. It is worth mentioning in this context that Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī described al-Mursī’s veil as his inflexibility and temper. The veil of particular interest to al-Iskandarī is ‘the repeated frequenting of kings and amirs’ (kathrat al-tirdād ilā l-mulūk wa l-umarā”). Such visits may give the impression that a particular saint has sold out to the powerful elite, but the real purpose of this behaviour is the alleviation of suffering among devotees. ‘This was the way of the master of our master, the mighty qutb, Abū l-Hasan al-Shādhili.’ Al-Iskandarī provides no further details, but the implication is clear. Al-Shādhilī spent considerable time with the political rulers of his day in order to help the poor. In fact, it seems that other Sufis took umbrage at al-Shādhilī’s involvement with politicians, an issue familiar to historians of Sufism in the Delhi sultanate. Al-Iskandarī states explicitly that many Egyptians never really understood the spiritual power of al-Shādhilī because it was obscured by his constant visits to the royal court. ‘The people and politicians are ignorant of the power of shaykh Abū l-Hasan al-Shādhili because of his many visits to [rulers] for the purpose of intercession.’ Al-Iskandarī attributes this statement to Ibn Daqīq al-Īd, a brilliant rhetorical move in its own right. We have a high-ranking and powerful jurist both acknowledging al-Shādhilī’s power and articulating al-Iskandarī’s fundamental point. There is nothing inherently wrong in seeking political favours if it is on behalf of the Sufis.

In general, however, al-Iskandarī was largely reticent to engage al-Shādhilī’s politics directly. Ibn al-Šabbāgh is actually much more forthcoming about al-Shādhilī’s political philosophy, which is basically in accord with al-Iskandarī’s account. Al-Iskandarī’s reluctance was probably due to two reasons. First, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī’s politics were different from al-Shādhilī’s, at least as portrayed in Latāʾif al-minan, and al-Iskandarī would certainly not want to highlight this divergence. Second, and more importantly, al-Iskandarī himself was closely allied with the upper echelons of political power in Mamluk Cairo. He was the head instructor of Mālikī fiqh at the Manṣūriya madrasa, a preacher at al-Azhar, met often with other
high-powered jurists and functionaries, and had at least one meeting with the Mamluk sultan al-Manṣūr Lājīn. Al-Iskandarī received a stipend for his work and presumably saw no contradiction between his dual roles as Sufi šaykh and state employee. He makes his views quite clear in a statement he attributes to a heavenly voice speaking to al-Shādhili: ‘Were it not for the prophets, you would not have been rightly guided. Were it not for the scholars, you would have no one to emulate. Were it not for kings, you would not be safe.’

Al-Iskandarī saw no need to discuss the political views of al-Shādhili in detail because he took them for granted. That is, by the late seventh/thirteenth century the supposed gap between Sufi šaykh and state employee was narrowing in Egypt. Al-Iskandarī embodied this shift.

However, this does not necessarily mean that al-Iskandarī was a shill for his Mamluk bosses. Laṭāʾif al-minan also contains an implicit polemic against Sufis living in state-sponsored khānqāhs. Al-Mursī appears repeatedly in Laṭāʾif al-minan as stridently opposed to relationships with the ruling class. One salient example involves one of al-Mursī’s disciples coming to him saying, ‘Master, the governor (mutawallī) of Alexandria said that he would like to meet with you so that he might take your hand and you become his šaykh.’ This is precisely the kind of relationship that, by all indications, al-Shādhili would have embraced. By taking on the governor as a disciple, al-Mursī would be able to offer spiritual counsel to the governor and obtain political favours from him on behalf of his clients. This was not to be. Al-Mursī replied, ‘Zakī, I am not the kind of person who would play with him . . . He will never see me and I will never see him.’

In fact, al-Iskandarī reports that al-Mursī’s animus towards politicians was so great that ‘if he arrived in a place and was told the ruler would like to meet him the next day, he would leave that very night’. Furthermore, al-Iskandarī describes al-Mursī as ‘the most abstemious person in terms of political rulers’, by which he meant that he avoided asking them for favours or associating with them in any way.

Another example of al-Mursī’s desire to steer clear of governmental influence is his outright rejection of state sponsorship. In a telling account, al-Mursī is speaking to some of his companions and remarks that two men had come to see him that day. These men were the mushidd al-dawāwīn, a kind of right-hand man to the vizier, and the nāżir al-ahbās, a ‘high powered’
(‘āliyat al-miqdār) position, responsible for the endowments for ‘congregational mosques, local mosques, ribāts, zāwiyas and madrasas’, which is to say any government-controlled religious or educational organisation with an endowment.70 In other words, two government employees with control over state funds had come to see al-Mursī personally in order to make him an offer of state sponsorship: ‘This fortress (qal’ā) really needs mats, oil and lamps, and the Sufis need provisions. We are currently in a position to offer [you] something every month.’71 The visitors are offering, essentially, to turn al-Mursī’s hospice into a state-sponsored khānqāh. Given that those with salaried positions in the Mamluk khānqāh were required to teach assigned subjects and publicly bless the sultan, it is probable that there were similar strings attached to this offer. Al-Mursī would most likely have been subject to interference from state authorities if he accepted the money. Al-Mursī does not answer this request directly, but puts it to his students, who do not have an answer either. He then says, ‘O God, enrich us beyond the need of [these two men] but not by means of them, for you have power over all things.’ Al-Iskandarī concludes with the simple observation that ‘[al-Mursī] died, and there is [still] no stipend or endowment for the place’.72 This attitude is not restricted to al-Mursī. ʿAbd Allāh al-Minūfī (d. 749/1348), an early Shādhilī adherent, also refused an invitation to live at the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ for precisely this reason.73

I read al-Iskandarī’s treatment of the politics of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī as a very clever polemic in which he indirectly criticises those Sufis who live in state-sponsored khānqāhs. While al-Iskandarī saw nothing necessarily wrong with exploiting political contacts to help the poor or making a living as an instructor at a state-funded madrasa, he seems to draw the line at full state sponsorship for the Sufis themselves. It is one thing to perform a public good at governmental expense (as al-Iskandarī did), but quite another to participate in spreading the state ideology in exchange for food, lights and soft cushions. Al-Iskandarī has no explicit remarks on this subject, but a coherent view emerges in the way he gives voice to both al-Shādhilī’s and al-Mursī’s divergent views. Al-Shādhilī saw the potential for a beneficial relationship in which the ruling class could use its money to alleviate the hunger and suffering of the poor. Therefore, a Sufi shaykh should not interfere with their rule, and should give counsel when appropriate. Al-Mursī was uncomfortable with
political relationships and avoided them at all costs. Al-Iskandarī harmonises these two views into a coherent policy by insisting that each saint has a different veil that conceals his or her true nature. Al-Iskandarī embodied this harmonisation himself by walking a fine line between state sanction and state support.

**Authorising Practices**

The three components of al-Iskandarī’s textual construction examined so far – the articulation of saintly authority, the establishment of juridical legitimacy and the advocacy of a wary political reciprocity – are rhetorical strategies deployed by al-Iskandarī to craft his ideal image of the Shādhili ʿtarīqa. The fourth strategy deployed by al-Iskandarī is the description of a Sufi praxis that allowed adherents to belong to a Sufi group while also retaining their place in the world of normal social and economic intercourse. The emergence of a body of distinct and unique practices was a significant element in the institutionalisation of the ʿtarīqa, for it was these practices that authorised and facilitated the embodied performance of a Shādhili identity. The writings of al-Iskandarī contain references to a number of these practices that would become hallmarks of the Shādhiliya. I will not deal with everything that might be construed as a Sufi practice or as potentially performative here, but rather focus on three distinct themes that al-Iskandarī develops: clothing/appearance, vocation and devotions. These collectively constitute an embodied knowledge of the Shādhili ʿtarīqa. In other words, it was the embodied practice (in Bourdieu’s sense) of the Shādhili ʿtarīqa that produced and reproduced a stable institutionalised Shādhili identity.

To begin, the early Shādhili ʿtarīqa involved no special dress. Al-Shādhili shunned the wearing of coarse wool (ṣūf), the khirqa or any other type of exterior indication that might give the impression that the wearer was a Sufi. This Malāmatī-inflected practice at first glance might appear counterintuitive. Why would a Sufi not dress like a Sufi? Or, to put it differently, how might the absence of a distinctive Sufi appearance translate into an expression of Sufi identity? We have already seen that the Shādhiliya did not use the khirqa or muraqqaʿa to mark initiation into the lineage. Al-Iskandarī’s articulation of al-Shādhili’s direct and unmediated spiritual authority negated its necessity. But the Shādhiliya also rejected the wearing of wool or otherwise
coarse ‘Sufi’ clothing. Al-Iskandari addressed this rejection in an account of a conversation between the two Shadhili masters.\textsuperscript{74} Al-Mursi had come to al-Shadhili desiring ‘to eat coarse food and wear coarse clothing’. This is a typical request; al-Mursi wanted to perform Sufi identity in the traditional fashion by eating cheap food and wearing poor clothing. But al-Shadhili inverts these typically Sufi expectations: ‘Abū l-ʿAbbās, just know God and be however you like.’ Unlike much of the prior Sufi tradition that emphasised a direct link between inner states (al-bāṭin) and outer appearances (al-ẓāhir), al-Shadhili takes a completely different tack by severing the outer from the inner.\textsuperscript{75} The only comportment that truly matters is the bāṭin.

Al-Iskandari puts this notion into even sharper focus in the following account. A man wearing a hair shirt (libāś min shaʿr) came to visit al-Shadhili, who was known for wearing fine clothing. Once al-Shadhili had finished speaking, the man approached him, grabbed his clothing, and said, ‘Master, there is no servant of God who would wear such clothes as these!’ Al-Shadhili reciprocated by grabbing the man’s clothing and replying, ‘And no true servant of God would wear clothes like these! My clothing says, “I have no need of your [charity] so do not give me anything.” Your clothing says, “I am poor and in need of you. Give to me!”’ Al-Shadhili’s position on clothing is an extreme form of tawakkul, or reliance on God. By dressing in fine clothing, al-Shadhili would attract no charity and ensured that only God would provide for him. Al-Iskandari deduces a general rule from these stories: ‘This is the way (ṭariqa) of the master [al-Mursi] and his master [al-Shadhili], and the method (ṭariqa) of their companions: the rejection of wearing any clothing (ziyy) that calls attention to the inner meaning of dress (sīr al-libāś) by publicising it.’\textsuperscript{76} For the early Shadhiliya, as for all Sufis, clothing was important. However, in this case the valence is reversed. By wearing fine clothing they demonstrated their rejection of charity or mendicancy. This differentiated them from other Sufi groups who dressed in coarse materials and accepted handouts – including those from the state – and became a clear identifying characteristic of the Shadhili ṭariqa in Egypt.\textsuperscript{77}

In this same section al-Iskandari discusses the etymology of the word ʿūfī, a subject of debate in the earliest treatises on Sufism.\textsuperscript{78} Citing al-Mursi as his authority, al-Iskandari rejects the common etymology that the word ʿūfī is an adjective derived from the word ʿūf (wool) because the Sufis wear coarse
woollen garments. He argues instead that the word *ṣūfī* refers ‘to what God does to [the Sufi]. That is, God sincerely loves him (*ṣāfāhu*) and he becomes thereby purified (*ṣūfiya*).’ While he is not the only author to make this argument, al-Iskandarī nevertheless overturns a prominent Sufi tradition in order to substantiate the Shādhilī position on clothing. The purpose of this entire discussion is, in a sense, to demonstrate that it is actually *more* Sufi to dress in fine clothing than it is to dress like a Sufi. In other words, clothes do not make the Sufi, God does.

In addition to their position on clothing and appearance, the early Shādhilī masters also encouraged their adepts to be gainfully employed. I have already pointed out that al-Iskandarī’s attitude towards working for the state was one of cautious acceptance; one may work for the state but should not be beholden to its ideological agenda. However, such a position would really only apply to an elite minority who actually had the option of working for the state. What about the classes of people who were not scholars, bureaucrats or military rulers? What about the butchers and bakers and merchants and so on? Sufi thought often emphasises the rejection of the material world (*al-dunyā*) and the concomitant embrace of the next world (*al-ākhira*). The practical consequence of this doctrine was embodied in the renunciation of worldly goods (*al-zuhd fi l-dunyā*) or the practice of voluntary poverty (*al-faqr*). While Sufis were by no means the only pious group who practised such renunciation, and not all Sufis practised forms of deprivation, they were well known for their abstention. This renunciation could take many material forms: including clothing, food, shelter and social intercourse. However, renunciant and devotional practices like these would obviously not mesh well with the exigencies of family life or holding a job. The need to put food on the table for the family would constitute a major stumbling block to the popularisation of Sufism beyond small groups of devoted renunciants. While al-Iskandarī does make a few references in *Tāj al-ʿarūs* to the practice of *khalwa*, these seem primarily to be calls not for isolation but to avoid excessive sociality and embrace quiet meditative devotion. In general, al-Iskandarī articulates a way of being a Sufi that makes room for the breadwinner.

In a number of statements in *Laṭāʿif al-minan*, the masters insist that Sufis should keep their day jobs: ‘If a merchant joins us, we do not say “Leave
your merchandise and come [with us]”. Or if a craftsman joins us, we do not say “Leave your work” . . . Rather, we confirm that God has given every individual a means to support himself. This acknowledgement that even a Sufi needs to work for a living runs throughout these early texts. Al-Mursī went so far as to insist that all Sufis must have a job. Al-Iskandarī even notes that al-Mursī ‘did not like the novice who did not have a means of livelihood (lā sababa lahu)’. There was therefore no reason that one could not have a profession and be a good Sufi. Indeed, when al-Iskandarī initially approached al-Mursī he wanted to abandon his career and isolate himself from other people. Al-Mursī pre-emptively rejected his request. However, this embrace of work was not uncritical. The Shādhili Sufi must negotiate a fine line between the pursuit of material goods and making a living. Ibn ʿAbd Allāh treats this subject in both Laṭāʾif al-minan and Tāj al-ʿarūs. But he addresses the issue at greatest length in his treatise Kitāb al-tanwīr fī isqāt al-tadbīr (‘The Book of Illumination Concerning the Elimination of Self-reliance’). The work is divided into two parts. The first deals with elucidating the meaning of isqāt al-tadbīr, ‘the elimination of self-reliance’, which for al-Iskandarī means ceasing to worry about asbāb (making a living) and allowing God take care of his servants. Al-Iskandarī argues that those who want to draw near to God while still working must ‘leave, abandon and be purified of self-reliance and any struggle against their fate (munāzaʿat al-maqādīr)’. ‘This is accomplished by ‘obeying [God’s] every command and submitting to His power’. In a typically Sufi turn of phrase, al-Iskandarī cites al-Shādhili’s statement that ‘if you must plan [i.e. exercise self-reliance], plan not to plan . . . [likewise] do not choose anything for yourself but choose not to choose’. By ‘choosing not to choose’, the adept makes the self-conscious decision that whatever God has in store will be sufficient. There is no need to agonise over decisions. The first half of the book therefore lays out a number of strategies and ways of conceptualising the decision ‘to plan not to plan’.

The second half of the book takes a more practical stance. The message here is that once one has left the future to God, one is still obliged to put an effort into living life. Al-Iskandarī insists that ‘eliminating self-reliance is not the abandonment of earning a living, for this would make a person useless and exhausting for others [who would have to take care of him]’. Here, he cites a hadith in which Muḥammad said, ‘The merchant who is a faithful
and truthful Muslim will be with the martyrs on the day of resurrection.’ Al-Iskandarī exclaims, ‘So how could anyone blame working for a living after [hearing] this? What is blameworthy is whatever distracts you from God.’ For al-Iskandarī, then, the ideal is to work at making a living without becoming distracted from the goal. He explains how to do this in the remaining portions of *Kitāb al-tanwīr*.

In addition to their stance on earning a living, the early Shādhilī masters advocated a unique set of devotional rituals that also set their group apart from others. *Laṭāʾif al-minan* contains a large number of devotional invocations (*adhkār*, singular *dhikr*), litanies (*ahzāb*, singular *hizb*, or *awrād*, singular *wird*), and supplications (*adʿiya*, singular *duʿāʾ*). Al-Iskandarī ascribes authorship of these to al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, and they are said to be extremely efficacious for those adepts who chant them. The texts are original compositions of varying length (*aḥzāb* may be only one sentence while a *hizb* can run for dozens of pages) and are specific to the Shādhilī method. Al-Iskandarī provides a model for how these are to be used when he describes one of the *ahzāb* of al-Mursī:

[This *hizb*] was an exercise given to him by his master and was meant to be recited after the final night prayer. The *hizb* [entitled] ‘And If He Comes to You’ [was meant to be recited] after the morning prayer. The *Ḥizb al-babr* (‘Litany of the Sea’) [was meant to be recited] after the afternoon prayer. This is how the master al-Mursī ordered them.

We learn from this that al-Shādhilī gave al-Mursī specific exercises (*awrād*) to be performed at particular times of day and night and that these exercises included various litanies and invocations. Al-Mursī then passed these on to al-Iskandarī, who then passed them on to his disciples, and so on. These were eventually put into short collections for use by the novice. One of the distinctive characteristics of the early Shādhiliya, then, was the recitation of these compositions at particular times.

While al-Iskandarī does not go into detail about how they should be performed, it is almost certain that at least some of these recitations were done communally. An indication of this is the report that a certain Sufi, while visiting the Maghrib, saw a circle (*dāʿira*) of men, with al-Mursī in the middle, everyone in the circle facing him. Rituals like this constituted the practical...
grounds for the social enactment of group identity and were repeated at regular intervals. The repetition of prayers, invocations and litanies unique to the Shādhilī name, prescribed in specific ways at specific times, constitutes the grounds from which the Shādhilī identity was produced and institutionalised over time. These supererogatory prayers were quite popular and spread across Egypt. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa reports that during his visit to the Upper-Egyptian city of Huw, he found a madrasa in which those present, ‘each day after the morning prayer, would recite a ḥizb from the Qurʾān, then recite the awrād of the shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, as well as the ḥizb al-baby’.98 Reports like this indicate the extent to which the tariqa was being performed and institutionalised in locations across Egypt by the mid-eighth/-fourteenth century. Indeed, later Shādhilī masters like ʿAlī Wafāʾ (d. 807/1405) composed and disseminated new ahzāb in order to articulate and establish their own unique authority.99

Thus, one of the ways in which al-Iskandarī facilitated the institutionalisation of the Shādhilī identity was to write down these devotions for ease of transmission. He states very plainly that they are meant to be given from master to disciple and reports that their use had already spread all over Egypt. It was quite important for al-Iskandarī that these recitations be performed precisely and correctly. Indeed, in a letter to his students appended to Laṭāʾif al-minan, he cautions, ‘Do not forsake your awrād for wāridāt.’100 This is a clever wordplay meaning that a student should not give up his prescribed exercises (awrād) in favour of fleeting and infrequent onrushes of divine feeling (wāridāt). This is reminiscent of al-Mursī’s teaching that if students came to him with their own, unauthorised awrād, he would expel them from the group.101 However, this should not be construed to mean that the Shādhilī masters were exclusive. Elsewhere, al-Iskandarī reports that al-Mursī had no problem with his students having multiple guides along the path.102 Such openness to multiple masters fits well with what we know of these early initiatic lineages.

All of the foregoing indicates that the institutional formation of the Shādhilī tariqa involved a clear devotional element and a performative framework. Ultimately, it was the combination of all these elements that must have been highly attractive to the greater population of Egypt. One might dress well, have a day job, and still participate with other like-minded individuals...
to recite prayers, litanies and supplications around the figure of the master. Al-Iskandari’s textual image of the Shadhiliya is an enticing vision that facilitates a near-seamless transition between the worlds of asbāb and aḥzāb, making a living during the day and chanting communally in the evening. Note in particular that it was the institutionalisation of earlier Sufi thought and practice that constituted the practical and discursive grounds from which the Shadhili masters articulated these elements of their unique tarīqa.

One final question remains. How did the early Shadhili masters produce and popularise their tarīqa to the extent that it became such a prominent social presence in Egypt? It is to this question that I turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1. I describe this notion of an ideal mythical type in more detail in Hofer, ‘Mythical Identity Construction’, pp. 393–7.
5. There are a number of printings of Ṭāj al-ʿarūs, none of them completely satisfactory. The edition I have used here is the Aleppo edition. The translation of the title is Sherman Jackson’s, whose excellent English translation can be found in Sufism for Non-Sufis? See his introduction for a detailed discussion of the various editions of the text.
10. Al-Iskandari mentions khalwa several times in Ṭāj al-ʿarūs (pp. 31, 39, 49, and 67), but in none of these instances is it clear that he refers to the institutionalised practice of khalwa advocated in the Miftāḥ. Rather, khalwa in Ṭāj al-ʿarūs seems to be a more general notion of meditation away from other people.
11. Trimingham, The Sufi Orders, p. 198 n. 4, has already noted this problem of attribution, but dismissed it. Likewise, Chodkiewicz, ‘Quelques aspects’,

pp. 75–6 n. 24, notes that the attribution of these texts to al-Iskandari is suspect, primarily because of parallel passages in Najm al-Din Kubra’s *Fawāʾib al-ğamāl*. On these parallel passages, see Meier, *Die fawāʾib al-ğamāl*, pp. 249–50. I would add to Meier’s analysis that I have found that the *Miftāḥ* contains lengthy unattributed quotations from Ibn al-ʿArabi’s *al-Khatwa al-mutlaqa*. The issue clearly deserves more attention.


16. While outdated in some respects in light of recent work on early Islam, I still find Hamid Dabashi’s conceptual and theoretical framework in *Authority in Islam* quite useful for thinking through many of these issues.


18. Gril is careful to note that the collection of multiple *khīrqa*s functioned quite differently from the collection of multiple *ijāza*s in this period (‘De la *khīrqa* à la ṭariqa’, p. 64). While the *ijāza* is simply a licence to transmit a certain work or teach a subject, the *khīrqa* also entails the collection of ‘l’influence spirituelle de toute une lignée de saints et de maîtres et par eux celle du Prophète’.

19. Al-Udfuwī, *al-Mūfī*, p. 47, emphasises distinct clothing as one of the fundamental markers of Sufi identity in fourteenth-century Cairo. An interesting case is the *Risāla* of Ṣafī al-Dīn, in which he does not claim to have taken the *khīrqa*, but rather speaks of his initiatic lineages in terms of *nisba*. Nevertheless, as we would expect for this period, he details several different *nisbas* that he had collected. For example, he had one *nisba* that connected him to ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (Gril, *La Risāla*, p. 29), and two that connected him to the Andalusian master Muhammad al-Qurashi (d. 599/1202–3), one from his father and one from his master al-Ḥarrār (ibid., p. 27).

be a problem in later periods when disciples were expected to have only one master. Al-Fāsi, Jāmiʿ al-karāmāt, p. 54, for example, ‘solves’ this problem by claiming that al-Shādhilī took the khirqa al-tabarruk (a gesture of blessing from a master to an outsider) from Ibn Ḥarāzīm, and the khirqa al-irāda (i.e. Sufi initiation) from Ibn Mashīsh.

21. Al-Tādīlī, al-Tashawwuf, pp. 95–6, 168–73. On this family and their role in the dissemination of ṣūṭī Sufism (i.e. Sufism grounded in Sunnī legal discourse) in Morocco, see Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 24–8.


23. Gril, ‘De la khirqa à la tariqa’, p. 63. This argument is based on the fact that al-Qaṣṭallānī, Irtifāʿ al-rutba, pp. 88–90, describes initiatic lineages of ‘companionship independent of the khirqa’ (al-ṣuḥba al-munfarida an al-khirqa), including one connected to Abū Madyan.


25. Ibid. p. 29.

26. Ibid. p. 41.

27. In fact, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s claim that al-Uqsūrī was the quṭb is the only such reference from this period, and seems to be the source for the claim picked up by later writers about al-Uqsūrī. But the claim is not completely without context. Both Saḥī al-Dīn and Ibn Nūḥ held that al-Uqsūrī’s teacher, Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, was the quṭb, and this tradition may be behind the claim in Durrat al-asrār. See Gril, La Risāla, pp. 44; al-Qūṣī, al-Waṣīd, 1:103a. Al-Qūṣī also notes that ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Manfalūṭī, one of Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s students, claimed to be the quṭb after Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (ibid., 1:105b). Al-Ṣaḥṭanūfī, Bahjat al-asrār, pp. 413–42, includes a laudatory section on Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, but never claims he was the quṭb. Al-Munāwī, al-Kawākib al-durrīya, 2:365, citing Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493), does claim that al-Uqsūrī was the quṭb. The source of this claim is almost certainly Durrat al-asrār, as Zarrūq was from the North African branch of the Shādhilīya.

28. By my count, Saḥī al-Dīn lists eight Sufis with direct links to Abū Madyan who lived and taught in Egypt.


32. On sainthood in al-Tirmidhī see Radtke and O’Kane, The Concept of Sainthood. On sainthood in Ibn al-ʿArābī see Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints.
It is quite clear that al-Tirmidhī was important to the early Shādhilīya because al-Iskandarī mentions his work, *Khatm al-awliyā* ('The Seal of Saints'), many times, referring both to its contents and to the fact that al-Shadhili was fond of reading it. See *Latā‘if al-minan*, pp. 103, 127, 223; and Gobillot, ‘Présence d’al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî’. On al-Iskandari’s use of Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAtā’ Allāh*, pp. 25–6. McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism*, pp. 31–47, explores the use of al-Tirmidhī and Ibn al-ʿArabī by the Shadhiliya in detail – from al-Shadhili himself to the Wafā‘iya and everyone in between.

34. Ibid. p. 52. On this typology in the later Shadhiliya, see McGregor, ‘The Concept of Sainthood’.
39. Ḥusayn, *al-Adab al-sūfi*, p. 36. It is worth quoting Ḥusayn here in full: ‘[Al-Shadhili and al-Mursī] did not speak of inheriting the station of the qutb, nor did they recognise [the legitimacy] of passing along the khirqa. The shaykh [for them] was not a necessary condition for arriving at God or achieving the rank of qutb . . . the initiate might enter [the path] by divine openings, or divine inspiration, without any human intermediary.’
44. Al-Iskandarī, *Latā‘if al-minan*, pp. 88, 89, 93. For the voluminous sources on
Izz al-Dīn, see Tadmuri’s notes in al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, 48:416–19, as well as Chaumont, ‘Al-Sulami’.

45. While the earliest sources on Izz al-Dīn’s life do not associate him with the Sufis, there is a gradual accumulation of material over the centuries that increasingly portray him as a Sufi. The earliest biographical notices are Abū Shāma, al-Dhayl, p. 216, and al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 30:40–7, neither of which mentions him being a Sufi. Al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-Islām, 48:419, only claims that ‘he used to attend samā‘ and dance and go into ecstasy’. Al-Yāfi‘i, Mir‘at al-janān, 4:153–8, quotes both al-Nuwayrī and al-Dhahabī but adds that Izz al-Dīn knew al-Shādhilī. Al-Subkī, Šabaqāt al-shāfi‘īya al-kubrā, 8:214, claims he took the khirqa from al-Suhrawardī. This literary trajectory continues into the sixteenth century, when al-Suyūṭī, Husn al-muḥādara, 1:314–16 combines all these biographical bits together. Finally, the apex of this trajectory is reached when al-Sha‘rānī claims that ‘after Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Salām met with al-Shādhilī and was converted to Sufism, [the former] proclaimed, “The strongest indication that the Sufis stand on the firmest pillars of religion is the fact that miracles are performed by their hands. Nothing like this happens at all for jurists unless they walk the path [of the Sufis]” (al-Šabaqāt al-kubrā, 1:12).

The accounts of al-Suyūṭī and al-Sha‘rānī are certainly late inventions but they indicate the power of the project of legitimation begun by al-Iskandarī. Knysh, Ibn ‘Arabī, pp. 63–85, discusses Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām and Sufism, as well as the way in which al-Iskandarī deploys his reputation in Lāṭā‘if al-minan as it impinges on the legacy of Ibn al-‘Arabī. This discussion should be tempered somewhat by the fact that Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s authorship of Hall al-rumūz, which Knysh holds to be key evidence of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s embrace of Sufism, is mistaken. The author of Hall al-rumūz was Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Ahmad al-Maqdisī al-Wā‘iz (d. 678/1279–80), a fact confirmed by multiple manuscript copies. On this fact, see the very valuable study by al-Wahībī in Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, pp. 161–2.

46. The other three individuals were Majd al-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-Ḥīd al-Qushayrī, Majd al-Dīn al-Ikhmīmī and Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn Surāqa. All three of these men were well-known juridical Sufis. The first two were from Upper Egypt. Ibn Surāqa (d. 662/1264) was a jurist and Sufi who held the Shaykhīship of the Kāmilīya madrasa in Cairo. See al-Dhahabī, Tārīkh al-islām, 49:112–14.

47. Al-Iskandarī, Lāṭā‘if al-minan, p. 88.

48. Al-Subkī’s version of the story (Šabaqāt al-shāfi‘īya al-kubrā, 8:214–5) has al-Mursī going to visit Izz al-Dīn at his majlis. The latter seems suspicious of him
and so asks him to discuss a particular passage from the Qurʾān as a test. He is astounded by al-Mursī’s insights and exclaims, ‘Listen to these words, they are speech granted by his Lord!’

49. There is a similar story in Ibn al-Šabbāgh, *Durrat al-asrār*, pp. 42–3. In this narrative (the only time Ibn al-Šabbāgh mentions ʿIzz al-Dīn), the two do not know each other. According to Ibn al-Šabbāgh, ʿIzz al-Dīn had declared the pilgrimage unlawful this particular year because the risk to life was too great due to the threat of the Mongols. Al-Shādhilī defies his ruling and leads the pilgrims safely. ʿIzz al-Dīn is chastened.

50. This must be the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ because the second khāqāh was not built in Cairo until 1274 (after the death of al-Shādhilī), by the Mamlūk sultan al-Bunduqdārī.


52. Ibid. p. 93. This Zakī al-Dīn is none other than the famous al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258), author of *al-Takmila*, an esteemed Shāfiʿī jurist and master of hadīth.


54. This would be an enduring component of the group’s identity and it is no coincidence, then, that ʿAbd al-Ḥalim Maḥmūd (d. 1978) was both a Shādhili Sufi and the rector of al-Azhar between 1973 and 1978.


57. In general, Egyptian Sufis of this period did not write much about the ruling class directly. Much later, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī penned a fascinating treatise on the proper way a Sufi should behave towards politicians. See al-Shaʿrānī, *Kitāb irshād*, available in Adam Sabra’s English translation as *Guidebook for Gullible Jurists*.


63. Ibn al-Šabbāgh, claims, for instance, that al-Shādhilī easily won the support of the sultan of Tunis, who was quite upset when al-Shādhilī left (*Durrat al-asrār*, pp. 35–8); that the Ayyubids endowed a tower in Alexandria for al-Shādhilī’s housing (ibid. p. 42); and that al-Shādhilī had a vision in which the prophet promised him that as long as the Sufis and the sultans...
were doing what they ought, all would be right with the world (ibid., pp. 168–9).

65. Al-Iskandarī, Ḭuṭṭāʿif al-minan, p. 100.
66. Ibid. p. 134.
67. Ibid. p. 134.
68. Ibid. p. 149. Nancy Roberts (al-Iskandarī, The Subtle Blessings, p. 181) translates the phrase as ‘He was, of all people, the least willing to seek favors from those in positions of worldly power and influence’.
70. Ibid. 4:38.
71. Al-Iskandarī, Ḭuṭṭāʿif al-minan, p. 137. The use of the word qalʿa here might seem puzzling, as it is typically associated with fortresses and citadels used for the defence of cities. The terminology arises from the fact that when al-Shādhilī first arrived in Alexandria he was given a tower (burj) in the city wall in which to live with his disciples. It apparently had some type of endowment, because al-Iskandarī records (ibid., p. 135) that al-Mursī forbade a disciple from driving a stake into the wall because it was impermissible to alter inalienable property (al-hubs). See also Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 42, where he describes the property in some detail.
72. Al-Iskandarī, Ḭuṭṭāʿif al-minan, p. 137.
74. Al-Iskandarī, Ḭuṭṭāʿif al-minan, p. 207.
75. I have written about this ḥābir–bāḥīn linkage as it is formulated in the discourse of adab in Hofer, ‘Training the Prophetic Self’.
76. Al-Iskandarī, Ḭuṭṭāʿif al-minan, p. 207.
77. Yāqūt al-ḥabashī was also known for wearing fine clothing, a point of contention in an anecdote related by al-Nabhānī (Jāmiʿ kāramāt, 2:518).
78. For example, al-Kalābādhī, al-Taʿāruf, pp. 13–16; al- Sarrāj, Kitāb al-lumaʾ, pp. 20–2.
80. On non-Sufi ascetic and pious groups in this period, see Reid, Law and Piety. See also the still valuable study by Kinberg, ‘What Is Meant by Zuhd’, and Omid Safi’s comments on the Sufis’ embrace of the social in ‘Bargaining with baraka’.
81. A lovely illustration of this is the letter from the Cairo Genizah in which a
woman writes to R. David II Maimonides (fl. 1335–1415) complaining that her husband is spending all of his time with the Sufis and there is therefore no food for her children (Goitein, ‘A Jewish Addict’). The fact that such a situation existed among the Jewish community would strongly suggest that there were similar problems in the Muslim community.

82. Al-Iskandari, Tāj al-‘arūs, pp. 49, 67.
84. Ibid. p. 149.
86. Al-Iskandari, Tāj al-‘arūs, pp. 82, 88, 89.
88. In his translation, Kugle translates tadbīr as ‘selfish calculation’, which I find carries too negative a connotation. It is true that al-Iskandari argues for the elimination of tadbīr as much as possible, but as the second half of the book makes clear, work is a necessary fact of life and the most one can do is eliminate ‘self-reliance’, which is how I would translate tadbīr, while nevertheless working to make a living.
89. Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 8. Compare al-Sulamī (himself a proponent of Malāmatī ideas), Jawāmi‘ al-ādāb al-ūfīya, p. 36: ‘One of the rules [of the Sufis] is to abandon self-reliance (al-tadbīr) and attempts to seek sustenance, and to find satisfaction in every state according to the decree of fate and the assurance of the Real.’
90. Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, pp. 9–10.
91. Ibid. p. 9.
92. Ibid. p. 62.
93. Ibid. p. 63. This hadīth can be found in the Jāmi‘ of al-Tirmidhī and the Sunan of Ibn Māja.
94. Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 63.
95. Al-Iskandari, Laṭṣ‘if al-minan, pp. 243–58. See also Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, pp. 66–113. On this genre, including information about the Shādhili compositions, see McGregor, ‘Notes’.
96. These collections are still widely available in inexpensive paperback printings all over Egypt.

97. Al-Iskandarī, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 123. The portion of this narrative identifying al-Mursī as the man in the middle of the circle is missing from this edition of *Laṭāʾif*, but it is in other editions and is included in both Roberts’s translation (*The Subtle Blessings*, p. 137) and Geoffroy’s translation (*La Sagesse des maîtres soufis*, p. 133).


100. Al-Iskandarī, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 266.

101. Ibid. p. 149.

102. Ibid. p. 149.
The Popularisation of Shādhilī Sufism

Practice and Proselytisation

In the previous two chapters I characterised the early Shādhilī collectivity as a textual community that traced its unique Sufi identity to the ṭariqa of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. After the deaths of al-Shādhilī and Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī this ṭariqa was disseminated in Egypt primarily through Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī’s discursive construction across several different texts, especially Laṭāʿif al-minan, and through his public preaching. It was the subsequent repetition and collective performance of that ṭariqa that institutionalised the eponymous identity of al-Shādhilī and constituted the institutionalised social field from which the Shādhilī ṭāʾifā developed. In Chapter 3 I argued that it was largely the efforts of the state – the rulers and the Sufis of the khānqāh – which brought their form of Sufism to the urban populace of Cairo. It was principally in public spaces that they collectively produced and popularised a culture of Sufism accessible across multiple strata of society. Key to my understanding of the processes of popularisation is this notion of mass or large-scale cultural production, which is necessarily collective and happens at multiple social sites. Therefore, given the widespread popularity of the Shādhilī ṭariqa and subsequent ṭāʾifā, we must ask a similar question. How did the Shādhiliya collectively produce this particular culture of state-sanctioned ṭariqa-based Sufism across the socio-economic spectrum? At what social sites did individuals come together to negotiate and contest the meanings of Shādhilī Sufism? What social and political conditions lent themselves to such production?
Since the early Shādhili masters were only tacitly sanctioned by the state and its Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers, they could not and did not perform Sufism in the way that Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ did, at least not in the beginning. Later Shādhili-affiliated Sufis like the Wafāʾīya did parade publicly in ways similar to those who lived at the khānqāh, but not in these early years. And while the Sufis of the khānqāh were obliged to perform their state sponsorship in quite specific ways, the early Shādhiliya were free to promote their ṭariqa in multiple ways as they saw fit. Likewise, the Shādhili masters’ formulation of their authority was quite different from other groups. Al-Iskandarī predicated al-Shādhilī’s authority on his sui generis sanctity and not on his learning, traditional silsila, initiatic investiture or genealogical descent. Thus, the production and popularisation of the Shādhilī ṭariqa and its subsequent institutionalisation occurred in ways very different from those of other contemporary Sufis. Here I focus on a few of the strategies employed by the Shādhili masters to spread their vision of the Sufi path and the specific contexts in which they did so.

The early Shādhili masters popularised the ṭariqa via two interrelated methods, which I will call the practical and the proselytical. In terms of the practical, the most important aspect of the ṭariqa was surely the Shādhili emphasis on what I have been calling their Malāmatī-inflected Sufi ethos. While many Sufis advocated visibly ascetic practices as a means of combating and purifying the self, the Shādhili masters insisted that such manifest renunciation drew too much attention to the individual. They urged their followers instead to hold a job, to dress in normal clothing, and to eat regularly but in moderation. This eminently practical aspect of the popularisation of Shādhili Sufism in Egypt should not be underestimated. It created a social space for large numbers of people to participate in the performance and production of Sufism themselves without radically altering their daily existence. Since I examined this aspect of the Shādhiliya in some depth in the previous chapter, I will not go into more detail here. It is nevertheless worth pointing out that this practical position was surely part of the reason that so many in Cairo, Alexandria and Upper Egypt were drawn to the Shādhili ṭariqa.

But the specificity of praxis, no matter how attractive, would not in and of itself account for the popularity of the Shādhili ṭariqa. After all, the people must first actually learn of the practice before they can choose to embrace
or ignore it. Therefore, important though these practical aspects must have been, it was the proselytical factor that was critical in bringing these ideas and practices to the people. Proselytisation is an inherently social process involving the agency not only of the proselytiser but also of the proselyte, as they mutually negotiate the meaning, significance and validity of the message. Not surprisingly, the Shādhilī masters all made a concerted effort to perform and disseminate the tariqa of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī across Egypt. Fortunately, we have quite a bit of evidence for this kind of outreach. Al-Shādhilī, al-Mursī and al-Iskandari were all well known for their skill and efficacy as preachers. Each of them is portrayed in the biographical literature as being able to instil in the populace a fervent belief in their abilities through public preaching.3

By this period non-canonical preaching, that is preaching outside the context of the Friday khuṭba, had become widespread. It constituted one of the primary ways in which the populace learned of new ideas, listened to stories of the prophets and recitations of hadīth, heard calls to jihād, and so on.4 Rhetorically adept preachers could attract very many people. Not surprisingly then, the Shādhilī masters used their oratorical skills to reach substantial audiences. Al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī both preached regularly in Alexandria at the ʿArīn mosque, where they exhorted large crowds to follow them.5 Al-Iskandari was himself a popular preacher at al-Azhar, where he is said to have dazzled and inspired the people with his emotional sermons. In fact, it seems that the Shādhilī Sufis in general enjoyed reputations as preachers. For example, one of the students of Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Labbān (d. 749/1349), was the khaṭib in Fustat, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī describes him as ‘speaking to the people according to the Shādhilī style, for which he gained widespread fame’.6

While Alexandria was the home and base of operations for al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, they did not restrict their public outreach to that city. Both masters travelled extensively across Egypt, north and south, preaching their message and attracting students. Perhaps most interestingly, it appears that al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī spent a portion of each year at a popular vacation spot in Cairo from where they spread the tariqa. Every year they temporarily installed themselves at al-Maqs, an ancient village originally situated on the east bank of the Nile. By al-Shādhilī’s time, the Nile’s course had shifted and al-Maqs was no longer directly on the bank, but was located on the strip of
land between the Nile and the western canal (al-khalij al-gharbī). Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad further bounded it on the eastern side when he built a canal (al-khalij al-nāṣiri) to divert water to Sīryāqūs. For a time the area thrived; it was full of markets and housed a mix of people from all parts. A number of mosques were built there during this time and it is perhaps at one of these that al-Shādhili spent his days teaching the populace. Al-Maqrizī is our sole source for the invaluable information on this subject:

When al-Shādhili died, Abū l-ʿAbbās took his place since [al-Shādhili] had deputised him when he died. He lived where [al-Shādhili] lived in Alexandria and he used to come to Cairo every year during the time of the Nile [flood]. He stayed at al-Maqs, just like al-Shādhili used to do, and the poor Sufis (al-fuqarāʾ) used to come to him there, just like they used to come to Abū l-Ḥasan [al-Shādhili]. They studied with him and gleaned baraka from him. Many miracles are related about this.

Just as al-Shādhili spent part of his year teaching the fuqarāʾ of Cairo-Fustat at al-Maqs, so also did al-Mursī. Note in particular that people came every year to study with and glean baraka from them. Through these yearly visits, al-Maqs became the site of the predictable and regular production of Shādhili Sufism. These autumn sessions in which individuals came to al-Shādhili and al-Mursī were thus one of the many mechanisms by which Sufism was popularised in Cairo.

Al-Shādhili also led a group of Maghribīs on the pilgrimage to Mecca each year. However, during this period the Crusader states in Palestine and later Mongol incursions into Syria had made the northern pilgrimage route through the Sinai quite dangerous, if not impossible. Indeed, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh records an anecdote in which al-Shādhili is warned by the Chief Judge Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām not to lead the caravan that year because it was too dangerous (he went anyway). Thus, most pilgrims and merchants began making the journey to Mecca via Upper Egypt. This southern route seems to have been one of the primary ways in which the Shādhili ṭariqa was brought to Upper Egypt, and is the reason al-Shādhili’s tomb is at Ḥumaythirā, where he died en route to Mecca. After al-Shādhili’s death al-Mursī continued to visit and teach in Upper Egypt. Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (d. 708/1308) actually met with al-Mursī in the city of Qūṣ on one occasion and has left us with one of the few
non-Shādhilī texts about al-Mursī’s personality and growing fame, Ibn Nūḥ was apparently reluctant to meet with him, probably because al-Mursī had a reputation for having a difficult personality, noting that al-Mursī was quite short-tempered and that this short-temperedness (al-ḥidda) ‘veiled him from the people’. Nevertheless, Ibn Nūḥ was persuaded to meet with him at an acquaintance’s house, a visit he recorded in detail. It is clear from Ibn Nūḥ’s report that al-Mursī had already developed a saintly reputation in Upper Egypt over the course of the late seventh/thirteenth century. He notes on one occasion that al-Mursī ‘came to the city of Qūṣ and stayed at al-madrasa al-gharbīya . . . a large crowd met with him there. The fuqarāʾ came and benefited from him, and he trained a number of Maghribī Sufis as well as many others.’ Ibn Nūḥ even notes that his own father believed al-Mursī to be one of the abdāl (‘substitutes’ – a member of the saintly hierarchy). Stories of the spiritual abilities and miracles of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī circulated all over the region.

Al-Mursī may also have sought disciples in other social arenas as well. Jamāl al-Dīn Shayyāl has argued that al-Mursī’s outreach extended to drawing young men away from the futuwwa clubs that were then growing in popularity in Egypt. For example, al-Iskandarī records an incident in which al-Mursī was introduced to a fatā (‘youth’, that is, a member of a futuwwa club). Al-Mursī declared that true futuwwa ‘is not in water and salt’, and that the prophet Abraham was called a fatā in the Qurʾān only after he had destroyed the idols of his people (Q 21:60). The mention of water and salt is a clear reference to the initiation rituals of futuwwa, and the futuwwa guilds considered Abraham their patron saint. Al-Mursī urged the young man to destroy his own idols and thereby become a true youth, just like Abraham:

When you destroy them, you will be a fatā. The five idols are the self, passion, Satan, desire and the world. Understand this: there is no sword but ḏū l-fiqār [the name of ʿAlī’s sword] and there is no fatā but ʿAlī. Futuwwa is not in water and salt, but rather futuwwa is faith and guidance.

This is a fascinating account, as besides the reference to the initiation ritual, it also alludes to the clubs’ well-known slogan about ʿAlī and his sword, ḏū l-fiqār. There is likewise a later tradition recorded by al-Maqrṣī wherein al-Mursī declares that ‘[true] futuwwa is faith, as God said, “They were youths
who believed in their Lord and we increased their guidance” (Q 18:13)’. 19 While the evidence is thin, it is not unreasonable to assume that many Sufis, including al-Mursī, sought to corral these young men away from futuwwa clubs and into their own ranks. It is worth noting that in Ramaḍān 659/July 1261, the newly installed ‘Abbāsid Caliph in Cairo, al-Mustanṣir (d. 661/1262), invested Baybars with the futuwwa trousers, thereby making him the head of organised futuwwa. 20 This investiture continued a royal ceremony that dates back to the reign of al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 575–622/1180–1225), who reorganised the guilds in Baghdad and made himself their head. 21 The social cachet of futuwwa at this time must have been a powerful one, and al-Mursī’s remarks may be indicative of a strategy to draw young men away from these clubs and into the folds of Sufism.

There can be no doubt, then, that the first two Shādhilī masters expended great effort to bring their message to the people of Egypt. They travelled a great deal and preached the Shādhilī ṭarīqa wherever they were: Alexandria, Cairo-Fustat and Upper Egypt. Al-Iskandarī goes so far as to argue that it was al-Mursī who did the lion’s share of this proselytising. ‘[Al-Mursī] is the one who spread the knowledge of shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan, publicised his lights and revealed his secrets.’ 22 However, as I argued in Chapter 4, an organised ṭāʾifā (whether formal or informal) connected to al-Shādhilī’s name did not exist until the mid-eighth/fourteenth century at the earliest. Thus, it would be premature here to speak of individuals ‘joining’ the Shādhilī brotherhood as a result of this outreach. Rather, the Shādhilī ṭarīqa was one of many Sufi methods in the process of institutionalisation and popularisation at that time. Al-Mursī is said to have told his followers to ‘be my companion and I will not prevent you from being companions with someone else; if you find a spring sweeter than this one, go to it’. 23 Not surprisingly, there is no reference to individuals joining an association from this period, rather affiliation to the Shādhilī ṭarīqa was a more informal attachment to certain masters who collectively authorised their form of Sufism via links to the personality of al-Shādhilī.

While both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī did much to publicise their message and bring it to the people, it was surely al-Iskandarī who mass-produced that message and thereby precipitated the institutionalisation of the Shādhilī ṭarīqa. After his authorship of the many texts he wrote on the ṭarīqa, al-
Iskandarī is perhaps best known for his preaching in Cairo. While he was originally from Alexandria, at some point after his conversion to the Sufi path he moved to Cairo to begin teaching Mālikī fiqh at the Manṣūriya madrasa. In addition to his teaching post, al-Iskandarī also preached to enthralled crowds at al-Azhar. These preaching sessions almost certainly served to spread the fame and ideas of the Shādhilī masters. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī tells us that these sermons were so popular that al-Iskandarī’s students collected the texts of his remarks and published them. While al-Subkī does not provide a title, it is very likely that Tāj al-ʿarūs is this collection, or a version of it. The book reads like a collection of sermons and the content is quite obviously meant for a wide audience not necessarily familiar with Sufism. The language is clear and straightforward; it contains little to no legal jargon or complicated exegesis; it is replete with engaging metaphors drawn from daily life; and the message is quite simple: repentance and turning to the Sufi way, including companionship with the Sufi saints, are the keys to happiness. In these exhortations al-Iskandarī embodied the model of the qāriʾ al-kursī (one who preaches sitting down) described by al-Subkī in his Muʿīd al-niʿam. Furthermore, Tāj al-ʿarūs is chock full of references to al-Shādhili, al-Mursī and Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar – all early Shādhilī masters. There are no references to any other contemporary Sufi in the text. There are, in fact, no overt references to anything or anyone except the Qurʾān, prophetic ḥadīth, al-Shādhilī, al-Mursī and al-Asmar. The text is also replete with exhortations about the reality and presence of the awliyāʾ, those saints who can aid the average devotees in their quest for God. It is quite clear, then, that in addition to introducing the listeners to Sufi ideas, Tāj al-ʿarūs frames these ideas explicitly in terms of the Qurʾān and sunna, and according to the authority of the Shādhilī masters. The rhetorical effect is clear and must have been quite engaging for al-Iskandarī’s audience. Assuming that the text of Tāj al-ʿarūs is in fact some version of the sermons al-Iskandarī used to preach at al-Azhar, and that the medieval biographers do not exaggerate when they claim that al-Iskandarī had a profound effect on his listeners, it would not be a stretch to argue that al-Iskandarī vigorously disseminated the Shādhilī tariqa from the chair at al-Azhar. This is confirmed by the Zinat al-nawāʾir of al-Iskandarī’s student Ibn Shāfiʾ. These are notes from al-Iskandarī’s sermons at al-Azhar and are likewise full of references to al-Shādhilī, al-Mursī and al-Asmar.
Nevertheless, not everyone found the Shādhili ṭariqa so enchanting. In the pages that remain I examine one of the more intriguing incidents in the history of Sufism in Mamluk Cairo: al-Iskandari’s public confrontation with the professional troublemaker and Ḥanbali genius Taqī l-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328). This incident is relevant to our discussion here as it demonstrates the extent to which al-Iskandari had garnered a reputation as a Sufi spokesperson and the degree to which he had popularised certain ideas about Sufism. Furthermore, it highlights again the way in which Sufi cultures need not necessarily be produced in the majlis al-dhikr or the khānqāh. Rather, as Georg Simmel would remind us, Sufi cultures could be, and often were, produced in the breach, at sites of social conflict.30

**Al-Iskandari and Ibn Taymiya**

Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh’s conflict with Ibn Taymiya occurred in Cairo in 707/1308 and is one of several public confrontations known as the ‘trials’ (miḥan) of Ibn Taymiya. A number of scholars, both medieval and modern, have treated these trials and there is no need to rehash the details of all of them here except in so far as they impinge on the issue at hand.31 Suffice it to say that Ibn Taymiya’s open confrontation with Sufis began in Damascus in 705/1305, when he had a public disputation with a number of Rifāʿī Sufis. Ibn Taymiya was dubious about their miraculous claims and, much to their humiliation, exposed the clever legerdemain they used to achieve the appearance of the miraculous.32 This was not the source of his trouble in Cairo. After a number of public disturbances and trials concerning his theological positions, the Mamluk authorities sent a letter to Damascus requesting that he appear in the city for examination. In the spring of 1306, Ibn Taymiya arrived in Cairo, where he was deposed and promptly placed in prison. The ostensible reason for his trial and imprisonment was that many jurists had complained that he was promoting unsound theological views in public. Despite several attempts by his friends to free him, which would have required his assent to certain restrictive conditions, Ibn Taymiya remained in prison for over a year. Ibn Taymiya was finally released in late summer 707/1307 on condition that he should not preach in public any more. He was unable to adhere to this stipulation and several more councils were convened in which he was called upon to defend his views.33 In Shawwāl 707 (March 1308), months after
Ibn Taymiya’s release from prison and several disputations later, al-Iskandari teamed up with Karim al-Din al-Amuli (d. 710/1311), the Chief Sufi of the Sa‘id al-Su‘adā’, to lead a boisterous demonstration against Ibn Taymiya at the Citadel. According to al-Nuwayri, the crowd included ‘shaykhs, about 500 Sufis and a huge mass of people following them’. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hadi, Ibn Taymiya’s biographer, writes that the crowd included ‘a huge group of people from the khānqāhs, ribāts and zāwiyas’. And al-Maqrizi recorded that the crowd included ‘over 500 men’ and ‘the masses’ (al-‘āmma) following after them. The crowd converged on the Citadel demanding an audience with the vice-regent of Egypt, Sayf al-Din Salar (d. 710/1310), in order to lodge a complaint against Ibn Taymiya. Rather than deal with the problem himself, Salar, who had previously defended and acted on behalf of Ibn Taymiya, deferred the matter to the Shafi‘i Chief Judge, Badr al-Din Ibn Jamâ’a (d. 733/1333), for adjudication. Ibn Jamâ’a convened yet another majlis in which Ibn Taymiya and al-Iskandari could square off face to face. Ultimately, nothing conclusive came of the majlis, although shortly thereafter Ibn Taymiya was given the choice of additional imprisonment in Cairo or exile in Alexandria or Damascus; he chose imprisonment.

So what, exactly, was the issue? Why did al-Iskandari, the Chief Sufi of the khānqāh, 500 Sufis and such a large mass of people get so riled up about Ibn Taymiya? The confrontation revolved around two primary issues. First was Ibn Taymiya’s insistent and vehement critique of the so-called ittiha‘i Sufis, those like Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Sab‘in, whom he accused of embracing outright monist and blatantly incarnationist doctrines. This doctrinal attack began while he was still in Damascus, but would have important repercussions for our story in Cairo. In 703/1303, some of Ibn Taymiya’s students brought him a copy of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, in which, in Ibn al-Dawadari’s elegant understatement, ‘he found . . . matters that diverged from his own creed’. Ibn Taymiya’s disagreement with Ibn al-‘Arabī is well known. What is perhaps less well known is that he turned his righteous indignation against two very powerful and politically connected Sufis in Cairo: the Chief Sufi Karim al-Din al-Amuli, and Nasr al-Manbiji (d. 719/1319). The latter was a personal friend and influential advisor to Baybars al-Jâshnakîr. After hearing that both al-Amuli and al-Manbiji were sympathetic to the ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ibn Taymiya wrote both of them unsolicited let-
ters outlining the dangers of ittiḥādī Sufism and urging them to leave it alone.43

After receiving the letter, al-Manbijī urged Baybars al-Jāshnakīr to bring Ibn Taymīya to Cairo so the jurists could examine his creed. Now, during this period Baybars was the ustādār (majordomo) to the still quite young sultan, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and Sayf al-Dīn Salār was the vice-regent of Egypt. Thus, given the age of the sultan, Baybars and Salār were the de facto rulers of Egypt during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s second reign.44 Al-Manbijī took advantage of his influence with Baybars and pressed him to have Ibn Taymīya brought to Egypt, which he did in Ramaḍān 705/March 1306.45 Indeed, all the historians of the Syrian school point to al-Manbijī as the primary cause of Ibn Taymīya’s troubles in Egypt.46 Ibn Kathīr, a fan of Ibn Taymīya in general, is particularly vitriolic in his dislike for al-Manbijī, blaming him for all of Ibn Taymīya’s problems and noting in his obituary for Baybars that ‘he was buried in the Qarāfa cemetery; neither his shaykh al-Manbijī nor his money did him any good’.47 It seems quite clear, then, that at least one of the reasons the Sufis of Cairo were so upset with Ibn Taymīya was his vocal critique of ittiḥādī Sufis, especially those in Cairo. As al-Bīrzdālī says about the Sufis’ demonstration at the Citadel, they complained about ‘Ibn Taymīya speaking about Ibn ʿArabī and others’.48 Likewise, according to Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī, the protesters complained that Ibn Taymīya was ‘insulting their shaykhs and humiliating them in public’.49 These other shaykhs must have been well known and well respected Cairene Sufis like al-Āmulī, al-Manbijī, Ibn al-Fārīḍ and ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, whom Ibn Taymīya described as ‘steeped in kufr’ in his letter to al-Manbijī.50 I should stress that the issue was not that Ibn Taymīya was opposed to Sufism per se; that notion has been put to rest.51 Rather, it was that he spoke out publicly and loudly against quite popular Sufis of a particular school. It is no wonder that the state-sponsored Sufis under al-Āmulī’s direction rose up to protest Ibn Taymīya’s speech. But what was at stake for al-Iskandarī? And how did ‘the masses’ get involved?

For al-Iskandarī, the battle with Ibn Taymīya was personal and not necessarily connected to the debate about Ibn al-ʿArabī.52 Neither was he particularly concerned about Ibn Taymīya’s ‘threat to the over-all Islamic tradition as inherited by Mamlūk times’, as Victor Danner argues.53 No, his complaint was very specific. While Ibn Taymīya was clearly denigrating
a number of Sufi shaykhs in Cairo, he focused some of his rhetorical energies on refuting the teachings of none other than Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. In a lengthy treatise, commonly known by its unofficial title al-Radd ʿalā l-Shādhilī (The Refutation of al-Shādhilī), Ibn Taymiya systematically dismantles what he sees as the theological problems of the Shādhilī tariqa and two of al-Shādhilī’s devotional compositions, the hizb al-bahr (Litany of the Sea) and the hizb al-barr (Litany of the Earth). Ibn Taymiya accuses al-Shādhilī of, among many other things, theological incorrectness, polytheism, covert Shiʿism, misinterpreting the Qurʾān – all the classics. The only connection to the ītīḥādī debate here has nothing to do with Ibn al-ʿArabī, but is rather that Ibn Taymiya accuses al-Shādhilī of embracing monism (al-ītīḥād or al-wahda) and Christian incarnationism (al-ḥulūl). Ibn Taymiya probably wrote this lengthy treatise after his arrival in Egypt, where he would have become familiar with al-Shādhilī’s ideas and litanies. Given his propensity to send unsolicited advice and critique to other scholars, Ibn Taymiya most likely sent a copy, a précis or a draft of the text to al-Iskandarī as the primary Shādhilī spokesperson of the time. Likewise, a student of Ibn Taymiya and contemporary of al-Iskandarī, ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311) had written against Shādhilī ideas. Al-Wāsiṭī had lived in Alexandria and trained with Shādhilī-affiliated Sufis before taking up with Ibn Taymiya and he includes some material critical of his former companions in his treatise, al-Sulūk wa-l-sayr ilā llāh, although the critique is not nearly so severe as that of Ibn Taymiya. We do not know whether al-Iskandarī was aware of this latter treatise. But it is not unreasonable to assume that he was well aware of both critiques.

Finally, we also have the testimony of the Syrian historian al-Birzālī, who preserved a snippet of the proceedings of the majlis in which Ibn Taymiya and al-Iskandarī traded barbs:

[In the majlis] Ibn ʿAtāʾ made a number of claims about [Ibn Taymiya]. None of these were found to have any merit, except that [Ibn Taymiya] had said that ‘only God may be asked for help; the prophet may not be asked for help by means of istighātha – if by istighātha one means a type of devotion (al-ʿibāda). Rather, one may plead to him (yutawassalu bihi) [and ask for his intercession with God (yutashaffūʿu bihi ilā llāh)].’
of those present said, ‘There is nothing to this.’ But the judge Badr al-Din Ibn Jamā‘a argued that it showed disrespect [for the prophet]. The judge received a note that he should do with [Ibn Taymiya] what the shari‘a demanded and the judge said, ‘I have already said to him what one ought to say to someone like him.’

So we know that al-Iskandari’s formal complaint against Ibn Taymiya had to do with the latter’s rejection of istighātha, seeking prophetic or saintly aid, a topic Ibn Taymiya had written about many times before. And while I have not found al-Iskandari advocating istighātha by that name in his writings, he does write of the power of the saints to aid those in need in several places.

Therefore, I would argue that after having publicly preached the evils of local Cairene Sufis, spoken against the practice of istighātha and attacked al-Shādhilī himself, Ibn Taymiya had driven al-Iskandari to the end of his tether. Al-Iskandari joined forces with the Sufis of the khānqāh, led by Karīm al-Dīn al-Āmulī, and marched to the Citadel in an attempt to censure Ibn Taymiya. So why was a large group of the ‘the masses’ protesting against Ibn Taymiya along with al-Iskandari and the Sufis? They surely could not have particularly cared about the minutiae of Ibn Taymiya’s Ḥanbalī-inflected theology that angered the jurists, nor about the specific doctrines of monism that had infuriated the local Sufis. While the sources are opaque on this subject, I suggest that it was al-Iskandari himself who incited the people to march on the Citadel. We know that both al-Iskandari and Ibn Taymiya were publicly preaching their views in Cairo in the months leading up to their confrontation. We also know that a recurring theme in al-Iskandari’s sermons was the power, authority and efficacy of the saints, especially al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī. Meanwhile Ibn Taymiya was publicly denouncing many of the popular Sufi masters of Cairo, including al-Shādhilī, and denying the legitimacy of istighātha, which was, according to the testimony of al-Birzālī, a devotional practice (al-‘ibāda). Al-Iskandari may have used his position as a popular preacher at al-Azhar to stir up the populace around the efficacy and utility of the saints and encouraged as many people as possible to march on the Citadel against Ibn Taymiya’s attacks. While nothing came of the confrontation in terms of punishing Ibn Taymiya, the event is indicative of the kind of cultural work that happens in a space of social conflict.
I read this conflict as one episode in the longer history of the large-scale public production of Sufi culture in medieval Egypt. Just as the production and consumption of a massively popular Sufi culture at the khānqāh required the participation of several different socio-economic strata together, so too here the production of Sufism involves an array of social agents. On one hand, we have the Sufis of the khānqāh, the Chief Sufi, al-Iskandarī and the people of Cairo parading up to the Citadel. Such processions were a deliberate performance, a mirror image of royal Mamluk processions that began at the Citadel and led into Cairo. In this case the route is reversed and the crowd parades from Cairo to the Citadel. On the other hand, we have the sultan and the functionaries of the Mamluk state ensconced at the Citadel, who constitute the critical audience for this display. And finally, we have Ibn Taymīya in the middle, caught between a state that would like nothing more than to be rid of him, and the crowd who demands his punishment. It all comes to a head in the disputation in front of Ibn Jamāʿa, who attempts to mediate the entire affair in such a way that will be acceptable to all. This complex performance could be read in many ways, but for our purposes it represents a moment in which the meaning of what it means to be a Sufi, who decides what the acceptable bounds of Sufism are, and who has authority to speak on the subject are publicly contested and constructed along multiple axes and involving several social groups. This is not to say that all these actors had the same interests at stake, even on the Sufi side. Each had his or her own reasons for protesting against Ibn Taymīya, but their motivations matter less than the fact that they all came together at this moment to contest Ibn Taymīya’s critique. For al-Iskandarī what was at stake was the viability of the Shādhilī ṭariqa, which he had been promoting and Ibn Taymīya had been denigrating. We might even say that the socially constructed memory and power of al-Shādhili himself was at stake here.

Ultimately, the collective response embodied in the demonstration contributed to the power, viability and efficacy of the Shādhili ṭariqa. If we imagine this encounter as a single (albeit very prominent) node in the larger web of social negotiations surrounding the authority of certain Sufis and the production of Sufi cultures, al-Iskandarī emerges as one of many web masters orchestrating the mass production of Sufi culture. In this sense, he played a key role not only in the production and popularisation of the Shādhili ṭariqa,
but in the public negotiation of the meaning and efficacy of Sufism more broadly. Al-Iskandarī himself makes precisely this point about the necessarily mutual social construction of the efficacy of Sufi masters in ʿUnwān al-tawfīq: ‘And you, brother, even if you met with the axial saint of the age, but did not model your own behaviour on his (wa-lām tataʾaddab), that encounter would not benefit you; it would actually be more harmful than useful.’

Notes

1. McGregor, ‘Sufis and Soldiers’.
2. A similar conclusion has been drawn by Knysh (Islamic Mysticism, p. 215) and Jackson (Sufism for Non-Sufis?, pp. 6–12).
3. Al-Dhahabī, for example, notes of al-Shādhilī that ‘the people had great faith in him’ (li-l-khalq fihi iʿtiqād kabīr) (Tārīkh al-Īslām, 48:274). Likewise, al-Ṣafadī writes that ‘the people of Cairo and Alexandria had great faith in [al-Mursī]’ (fihi ʿaqīda kabīra) (al-Wāfī bi-l-ʿawāfī, 7:173). It was al-Iskandarī’s skill as a preacher that al-ʿAsqalānī credited with increasing the number of Shādhili Sufis (al-Durar al-kāmina, 1:274).
10. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, pp. 42–3. Here Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh blames ‘the movement of the Tatars against the people of Egypt’ for the danger. In this case the danger is that the Egyptian army had gone to fight the Mongols, thus leaving the caravan defenceless.
12. Ibid., 1:99a–99b.
15. Ibn Nūḥ collects a number of anecdotes involving al-Shādhili and al-Mursī that take place in villages all over Upper Egypt (ibid., 1:101b–1:102a).
20. On the investiture of Baybars, see al-Dawādārī, Kanz al-durar, 8:80–1, where he includes the nasab linking Baybars to ʿAlī through the Caliph al-Nāṣir. See also al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulāk, 1:535.
23. Ibid. p. 149.
27. There is one exception, and that is a reference at the very end of the work to a story about the caliph ʿUthmān transmitted on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAṭiya (al-Iskandari, Tāj al-ʿarūs, p. 92).
28. To note only a few of these references, see ibid., pp. 12, 25, 29, 45, 49, 50, 63, 74, 79.
30. Simmel, ‘Conflict’.

38. Danner speculates (‘Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh’, p. 237), correctly I think, that Salâr backed Ibn Taymîya because Salâr’s formerly close relationship with Baybars al-Jâshnakîr had soured as they struggled for supremacy during the second reign of al-Nâṣir Muḥammad. Because Baybars was a close friend of the Taymiyan antagonist, the Sufi Naṣr al-Manbijî (on whom see below), Salâr aligned himself with Ibn Taymiya to distance himself from Baybars and his Sufi client. See also Little, ‘The Historical and Historiographical Significance’, p. 325.


43. The letter to al-ʿAmûlî is no longer extant, but it could not have been substantively different from the letter Ibn Taymîya sent to al-Manbijî, which is extant and quite interesting. See Ibn Taymîya, *Majmûʿat al-rasâʾîl wa-l-masâʾîl*, 1:161–83.

44. On the political power and roles of Baybars and Salâr during the second reign of al-Nâṣir Muḥammad, see Clifford, *State Formation*, pp. 170–8; Eychenne, *Liens personnels*, pp. 376–89.

45. The question of why the Mamluk authorities should care what Ibn Taymîya said is still open to debate. Little, for example, argues that from the perspective of the Mamluk rulers, Ibn Taymîya ‘jeopardized the salvation of individual Muslims and the stability of the state, so that the sultan, as defender of the state, took appropriate action’ (‘The Historical and Historiographical Significance’, p. 321). Caterina Bori has recently suggested an intriguing question (‘Theology, Politics, Society’, pp. 71–2): is it possible that Ibn Taymîya’s opposition to ittîhâdî monism ‘threatened a potential theological claim to political power?’ Might a theology of immanent monism have provided a theological underpinning to any and all temporal power? And might this have pushed the Mamluk rulers to censure Ibn Taymîya’s critique? Given the evidence I would tend to agree with Little’s position, but Bori’s question is provocative.


50. Ibn Taymiya, Majmûʿat al-rasâʾil wa-l-masâʾil, 1:177.

51. On Ibn Taymiya’s relationship to Sufism, see Makdisi’s still useful article, ‘Ibn Taimîya’. More recently, see Assef, ‘Le Soufisme et les soufis’. We have clear evidence from Ibn Taymiya’s own pen that he had no problem with Sufism per se, only with what he felt were incarnationist versions of Sufism. See, for example, his al-Šûfiya, and Homerin’s English translation, ‘Ibn Taimîya’s al-Šûfiyah’.

52. Jackson, Sufism for Non-Sufis?, pp. 7–8, argues that al-Iskandarî’s affinity for Ibn al-ʿArabî explains ‘in part at least’ his conflict with Ibn Taymiya. However, while it is undeniable that al-Iskandarî drew on Ibn al-ʿArabî in his own writings, particularly on the subject of sainthood (Nwyia, Ibn ʿAtâʾ Allâh, pp. 25–6; McGregor, Sanctity and Mysticism, pp. 30–1), he was not particularly partisan to the Ibn al-ʿArabî school in any other way. See Knysh’s discussion in Ibn ʿArabî, pp. 79–81.


54. Ibn Taymiya, al-Radd ʿalâ l-Shâdhilî. There is little doubt that the treatise is authentic. See al-ʿImrân’s extensive treatment of the attribution in his introduction to the text (ibid., pp. 11–14).

55. Ibid. pp. 119ff.

56. Unfortunately, unless a second copy of the manuscript is discovered we will not know for sure to whom the text was originally directed because the first twenty pages or so of the single surviving manuscript are missing. The manuscript in its current form begins in media res with the dismantling of the first ḥizb, under the heading al-faṣl al-thânî (the second chapter). What was in the first faṣl would prove invaluable in situating the treatise in its historical context. It was obviously not directed at either al-Shâdhilî or al-Mursî personally, who were both dead by this point.


58. Al-Birzâlî, al-Muqtafî, 3:379. The matter in brackets is not in al-Birzâlî, but is in the versions quoted by Ibn Kathîr, al-Bidâya, 18:74–5, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Hâdî, al-ʿUqûd, p. 211. These distinctions between istighâtha, tawassul and shifâʿa are all made by Ibn Taymiya in his treatise on istighâtha, cited below.

59. Ibn Taymiya, ‘al-Istighâtha’, treatise 12 in Majmûʿat al-rasâʾil al-kubrâ, 1:481–6. See also Ibn Taymiya’s treatise on intercession (al-shifâʿa) in Majmûʿat al-
rasāʾil wa-l-masāʾil, 1:10–24. In a remarkable passage in his treatise on the awliyāʾ, Ibn Taymiya writes that the problem with istighātha is that it happens that ‘someone will seek aid (yastaghīth) from some created being – alive or dead – who might be a Muslim, Christian or polytheist. Then Satan will appear [to that person] in the form of the one from whom aid is sought and provide something of what the supplicant seeks’ (al-Furqān, p. 237). He likens this to the way that devils will possess inanimate idols (aṣnām), making it appear as though they can talk.

60. This is particularly clear in Tāj al-ʿarūs, p. 25, in lines such as ‘Beware of believing that there is no mediation (lā yatawassal) from the prophets, saints and pious. For they are a means (wasīla) that God has made to Him.’ Tāj al-ʿarūs is actually full of talk of the saints and their efficacy; see, for example, pp. 12, 25, 29, 45, 49, 50, 63, 74, 79. See also Gril, ‘L’Enseignement d’Ibn ʿAtâ Allâh al-Iskandari’, p. 100; al-Iskandari, ʿUnwān al-tawfiq, p. 205; and Gril’s remarks in ‘Le Miracle en Islam’, p. 78.


PART THREE

UNRULY SUFISM: THE SUFIS OF UPPER EGYPT
The Regional Context of Upper-Egyptian Sufism

Introduction

The first Sufis in Upper Egypt appear in the historical record at the end of the Fatimid period. By the early Mamluk era the region’s towns and villages boasted some of the most famous and enduring personalities of medieval Egyptian Sufism. But despite their prominence in medieval Arabic sources, these Sufis have received almost no attention in studies of Sufism or in Mamluk studies more broadly. There is no monograph in a European language on Upper-Egyptian Sufism. Apart from a few studies in Arabic there are only a handful of articles on the subject. This state of affairs is regrettable, although perhaps not surprising given that these Sufis left very little in the way of literature or enduring social formations. The most important source for Sufism in Upper Egypt during this period is Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī’s (d. 708/1308) al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd (‘The Unique Guide Concerning the Comportment of the People of Unity’). This text is a large compendium of diverse biographical and doctrinal material, the publication of which is a major desideratum for the study of medieval Sufism. And as far as I know the existence of Sufi-related manuscripts at the shrines and mosques of Upper Egypt has not been explored. Thus, other than Denis Gril’s preliminary studies, without which my work here would have been impossible, the subject of Upper-Egyptian Sufism is mostly terra incognita. The following three chapters therefore represent a tentative and preliminary exploration of and statement about Upper-Egyptian Sufism in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period. My focus is these Sufis’ unique origins, social formations, relational
structures and strategies of legitimation. In particular, I stress the ways in which these unique characteristics were to a great extent the product of the specific geographic, demographic and political contexts of the region. In addition to filling out the larger picture of Ayyubid and early Mamluk Sufism in Egypt, then, these chapters will also contribute to an emerging discourse that is attentive to the distinction between rural and urban Sufis and the role environment plays in social formation.4

Here I want to argue that the Sufis of Ayyubid and early Mamluk Upper Egypt constituted a coherent collectivity despite the lack of any institutionalised identity. Critically, this collectivity was not the domain of a single socio-economic class or linked to one particular place. The Sufi masters of Qūṣ, Luxor, Qinā, Isnā, Manfalūṭ and others, counted elites and non-elites alike among their disciples; all were linked by a shared set of concerns. Unlike the men of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ or the early Shādhilīya, the Sufis of Upper Egypt were indifferent at best and antagonistic at worst to the representatives of the Ayyubid and Mamluk states. This is not to say that they actively sought the destruction of the state or the interruption of its operations. There were groups in Upper Egypt working towards these ends, but they were typically either Arab tribesmen resisting ‘foreign’ (i.e. Kurdish or Turkish) rule or small Shiʿite factions seeking a return to Fatimid supremacy.5 Rather, the Sufis of Upper Egypt were critics of the state and its inability to regulate Upper Egypt properly. In the absence of a strong state presence, their critique took the form of a programme to implement and enforce their own normative vision of Sunni Islam.6 Their aggressive activism was rooted in the Wertrational of their particular form of Sufism and inextricably bound up with a robust conception of their own saintly authority over and against the state’s claim to protect the sunna. While they were not revolutionaries, they did occasionally employ violent means to pursue their normative vision. Their use of violence shatters the near-ubiquitous stereotype in modern literature of the quietist and gentle Sufi, more comfortable meditating in his cell than in mixing it up in the streets.

In addition to their activist stance, the Sufis of medieval Upper Egypt also differed from other groups of contemporary Sufis by virtue of their fluid relational structure. While the Sufis of the khāngāh were formally organised hierarchically and the nascent Shādhilīya were informally organised around
the ṭariqa of al-Shādhilī, the Sufis of Upper Egypt were embedded within several overlapping regional networks. This relational structure was geographically diffuse, which meant that Sufis cultivated master–disciple relationships with a number of different individuals across a large area. This ‘network of networks’, as Denis Gril has described it, would have important consequences for the subsequent social development of Upper-Egyptian Sufism. Lacking specific and stable centres of authority, whether that authority inhered in a single person or in a textual community, none of these networks developed reproducible social formations. In other words, none of the ṭariqas of these Sufi masters was institutionalised and organised into ṭa’īfas. At first glance this is quite surprising. There were many well-known Sufi masters in the region, each with a sizeable number of disciples and a reputation for training others. To offer only one example, Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūri (d. 642/1244) was a popular Sufi master with students all over Upper Egypt. Yet an identifiable ṭariqa linked to al-Uqṣūri’s name and authority never developed. His charismatic authority was instead routinised at the physical site of his interred body and a cultic praxis developed around his tomb complex at Luxor. The same phenomenon happened with most other Upper-Egyptian Sufis. None of their disciples was able to institutionalise a specific and reproducible identity linked to the master.

I make three overlapping arguments in the following chapters. First, the Sufis of Upper Egypt constituted a distinct collectivity with a unique character. Second, their mutual attempts to enact and enforce a normative sunna, pursued through the ‘network of networks’ of regional Sufism, popularised Sufism across Upper Egypt. Third, these networks never developed into ṭa’īfas because the authority of these Sufi masters was never institutionalised around a practical ṭariqa or lineage, but rather at the site of their tombs. Critical to this account is my argument that the unique political, geographic and demographic context of Upper Egypt was the crucible in which these Sufi networks were created. The focus in this chapter is therefore the articulation of the contours of these networks and their formation within the context of Ayyubid and early Mamluk Upper Egypt. This will set the stage for the more detailed analyses in the following chapters. In Chapter 8 I describe the activity of these Sufis and what they sought to accomplish through their associations, while in Chapter 9 I detail the rhetoric and performance of miracles.
that underpinned these Sufis’ claim to authority. It was the performance of miraculous authority in pursuit of a normative praxis that constituted one of the primary mechanisms through which they produced and popularised Sufism across the region. Ultimately, however, it was the very performance of that authority that militated against the development of any viable and long-term social formation.

The Context of Upper Egypt

Upper Egypt is a narrow strip of land that extends from Giza to Aswān along both sides of the river Nile. Medieval Arabic sources refer to the region variously as al-ṣaʿīd (‘the elevated plain’), al-wajh al-qiblī (the half of Egypt facing Mecca), or mistr al-aʿlā (‘Upper Egypt’). Kamāl al-Dīn al-Udfuwī (d. 748/1347), a native of the region who composed a remarkable biographical dictionary of the area’s notables, describes it as long and narrow, requiring twelve days to travel its length by camel, but only three hours to travel its width. The city of Aswān, which both Ibn Jubayr and al-Maqrizī call ‘the end of the Ṣaʿīd’, was thus at least a twelve-day ride from Cairo, although the trip usually took much longer, especially when sailing up the Nile. In the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods (and continuing to the present day) this large geographical area had a distinctive character that set it apart from the Delta and the urban centres of Alexandria and Cairo-Fustat. This unique character was due primarily to three interrelated factors.

First, the demographics of Upper Egypt were much more variegated than in the rest of Egypt. This was due to the relatively large numbers of Christian, Jewish and Shiʿite inhabitants across the region. Egypt as a whole did not attain a majority Muslim population until roughly the eighth/fourteenth century and Upper Egypt contained a quite sizeable Coptic minority even after this date. While there are no absolute figures on the issue, it is safe to say that a large number of the towns and villages of the Ṣaʿīd retained a majority Christian population and character until at least the sixth/twelfth century, and probably even later. In the seventh/thirteenth century, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī described Qūṣ, the largest town in the region and its provincial capital, as still being largely Christian (wa-hiya qibṭiya). There were obviously large numbers of churches across Upper Egypt and there continued to be serious and often violent communal tensions between the local Muslim
and Christian populations throughout the Mamluk period. There was also a substantial Jewish presence in Upper Egypt. While they were less numerous than Christians, Jews lived in most towns of the area, with the largest population in Qūṣ. When Benjamin of Tudela visited Upper Egypt in the last quarter of the sixth/twelfth century, he noted that many towns had populations of between 200 and 300 Jews each.

Shiʿism had taken especially strong root in Upper Egypt during the Fatimid period, and a substantial Shiʿite presence could still be found there long after the end of Fatimid rule. This presence was due to several factors, including early ʿAlid immigration to the region, an initial focus on the Ṣāʿīd at the beginning of the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa, and substantive links between this area and the Ismāʿīlī community in Yemen. Furthermore, the Fatimids took great care to cultivate a stable and loyal Upper Egypt. They wanted to control the trade and pilgrimage routes that led east through the Red Sea ports of ʿAydhāb and Quṣayr, in addition to the rich mineral and agricultural resources of the region, especially sugar production. It was the Fatimid military vizier Badr al-Jamālī who, in 470/1078, divided Egypt into the six administrative districts (wilāyāt) that would persist under the Ayyubids and Mamluks, and who made Qūṣ the administrative seat of the district of Upper Egypt. This move transformed Qūṣ into a large and important city. Ibn al-Athīr claimed that the governor of Qūṣ was almost as powerful as the vizier himself and that Qūṣ was the third most important city in Egypt. However, this important city had no madrasa until 607/1210. Garcin attributes this delay to the Shiʿite and Christian character of the city; Ayyubid rulers had no interest in building a madrasa there. As we will see, it was the Sufis who would take this task upon themselves.

Shiʿism maintained a notable presence in Upper Egypt until at least the eighth/fourteenth century. In the immediate aftermath of the Ayyubid coup, there were a number of Shiʿite revolts that originated in Upper Egypt. For example, after Kanz al-Dawla’s first revolt against Saladin failed in 567/1171 he fled to Aswān, where he instituted a new daʿwa and attracted a large number of followers; a second revolt also failed in 570/1174. These revolts became relatively common, with pro-Fatimid movements originating in Upper Egypt several times over the next decade. A substantial Shiʿite presence in Upper Egypt is clear from al-Udfuwī’s comments about many of
these cities, especially Aswān, which he says ‘was overtaken by Shiʿism during the time of the Fatimids (al-ʿubaydīyīn)’.

He also notes that there was still a significant Shiʿite presence in the towns of Edfu (having both Ismāʿīlī and Imāmī populations), Isnā, Usfūn and Armant. Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, writing in the early eighth/fourteenth century, claimed that the entire west bank of the Nile was Shiʿite in character. Al-Isnawī (d. 772/1370) wrote of his home town of Isnā that the many Shiʿites there ‘had not converted from the belief of the Fatimids (al-Miṣrīyyīn) because of the great distance between their region and Cairo and Fustāṭ’.

Scholars outside Egypt also knew that Upper Egypt was a Shiʿite centre. The Shiʿites of Aleppo, for example, recognised its character in the late seventh/thirteenth century. Even ostensibly Sunni scholars connected to the region were suspected of being Shiʿite; the qāḍī of Qūṣ was dismissed and forced to leave the city during the Ayyubid period because of accusations of Shiʿism. And it was the Shiʿite reputation of Upper Egypt that led some scholars to assume that Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316) was a crypto-Shiʿite, because of his ideas as well as his association with Qūṣ.

The second factor that made Upper Egypt unique during this period was its increasing prominence in travel and trade. Before the fifth/eleventh century, pilgrims and merchants coming from the West (Ifriqiya, the Maghrib or al-Andalus) and travelling to the East typically sailed to the port of Alexandria, before travelling on to Cairo, across the Sinai, and down the west coast of the Arabian peninsula. However, for approximately 200 years during the height of Crusader activity (i.e. the mid-eleventh to the mid-thirteenth century), these northern routes and waterways became increasingly dangerous. Thus, an alternative route through the ʿAṣid and across the Red Sea to Arabia became a viable and attractive option. Al-Maqrīzī writes that

for more than 200 years, pilgrims from Egypt and the Maghrib only travelled to Mecca via the desert of ʿAydhāb. They would embark on the Nile from the shore at Fustat and sail to Qūṣ. From there they would ride camels, passing through the desert, to reach ʿAydhāb. [From ʿAydhāb] they would sail in trading ships (jallāb) to Jadda.

While a much safer option, this could be a long and often gruelling trip, particularly in the desert region between Qūṣ and the ports of ʿAydhāb or
Quṣayr. Al-Maqrīzī described life in ʿAydhāb as ‘the life of animals – the manners of [the residents] there are closer to those of wild beasts than those of humans’. Nor did Ibn Jubayr find the place particularly charming and complained about how miserable he was there, writing that ‘we stayed there [twenty-three days] in air that melts the skin and water that causes one to forget about wanting food. Indeed, no man is oppressed who avoids this city.’ These routes were used not only by pilgrims but by merchants as well. Al-Maqrīzī notes that traders from India and Yemen used the same route in reverse: Jadda–ʿAydhāb–Quṣr–Fustat–Cairo.

For roughly 200 years, then, Upper Egypt was at the centre of ‘three spatial networks: the Indian Ocean trade, trans-African pilgrimage routes, and an intra-Egyptian network of commerce and exchange’. The Ṣaʿīd in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries was a geographical space in which people from north and sub-Saharan Africa, India, the Maghrib and the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria all came together to create a thriving commercial and emerging Sunni culture. When Ibn Jubayr passed through Quṣr in the sixth/twelfth century, he described this beautifully:

> It is a city overflowing with markets, amenities and people thanks to the coming and going of pilgrims and Yemenite, Indian and Abyssinian merchants. It is a gathering place for everyone and a way-station for travelers. It is a meeting place for friends and a gathering place for pilgrims from the Maghrib, Egypt and Alexandria.

The most important consequence of these developments for the present work is that the region was infused with new people and ideas, particularly Sufis from the Maghrib. Qinā in particular was home to a large number of Maghrībī transplants fleeing unstable political conditions in the West, and they brought their Mālikī-inflected Sufism with them. It is thus not surprising that when ʿAlī al-Shaṭṭānūfī (d. 713/1314) compiled his work on the merits of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, his sources for the Maghribī traditions of Sufism were nearly all from Upper Egypt. Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī also wrote of many itinerant Sufis from the West whom he met while they were visiting Upper Egypt.

The third and final reason Upper Egypt was unique was its distance from the political centre of Cairo. This distance made the Ṣaʿīd an ideal place to
To cite a few of the more famous examples: the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II (d. 132/750), fled to Upper Egypt before his Abbasid pursuers found him hiding in a church and killed him. The Sudanese troops who survived the rebellion against Saladin fled to Upper Egypt to plot their second unsuccessful insurrection. Fatimid royals escaping Saladin’s purge of the capital in 567/1171 hid in Upper Egypt. In 570/1174, Saladin put down yet another pro-Fatimid coup. He executed the primary conspirators, seized all their money and property, and exiled the remaining troops involved in the intrigue ‘to the farthest reaches of the ʿaʿīd’. In 651/1254, al-Malik al-Muʿizz Aybak (r. 648–55/1250–7) had his troops assassinate the powerful amir Fāris al-Dīn Aqtāy, head of the ʿAlīiya regiment. The regiment then fragmented and one of its leaders, ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Afrām (d. 695/1295), led a group to Upper Egypt to hide out. In 737/1336, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad found his puppet caliph to be a nuisance, so he exiled him and his family to Qūṣ. In 742/1341, the Sultan al-Malik al-Maṃṣūr Abū Bakr was deposed and exiled to Upper Egypt along with seven of his brothers.

Distance from the capital also made the region difficult to control. Since the Fatimid period the rulers in Cairo had appointed a governor (wālī) to attempt to keep the region in check. The wālī, headquartered in Qūṣ, was directly responsible for all of Upper Egypt, which primarily meant collecting taxes and putting down rebellions. He appointed his own advisors, scribes, functionaries, bureaucrats and so on. This ‘decentralised system’, as al-Ḥajjājī calls it, meant that Upper Egypt often existed politically almost in a world of its own, beyond the surveillance and reach of the central government. While nominally under the power of whatever polity ruled in Cairo, Upper Egypt was mostly left to its own devices and the tribal politics of the Arab clans that lived there. In this sense, it was akin to the American ‘Wild West’, a frontier region full of unruly elements only loosely under state control. This frontier quality was heightened by the fact that the first cataract of the Nile, just past Aswān, was functionally the border between the Egyptian and Nubian polities. This remained the case despite several attempts to extend territorial control further south. For example, Saladīn’s brother Tūrānshāh went into Nubia briefly in 568/1172 and occupied a fortress there, but after a short time he was forced to abandon it. The early Mamluks attempted
several times to collect tribute from Nubia, but were typically unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{53} The region remained outside the grasp of the Mamluk rulers, only partially (i.e. Lower Nubia) coming under Ottoman control in the tenth/sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{54}

The clearest indication of the difficulty the state had in controlling the ʿAṣāʾid can be seen in the number and intensity of Upper-Egyptian revolts during the Ayyubid and Mamluk eras.\textsuperscript{55} These revolts were mostly the work of the ʿurbān, a religio-genealogical identity that, according to Yossef Rapoport, was adopted by Muslim peasants claiming Arab descent.\textsuperscript{56} We see such peasant revolts as early as 566/1171, when Tūrānshāh had to send an army to Qūṣ to put down a rebellion that had made tax collection there almost impossible.\textsuperscript{57} Emblematic of this trend is the revolt of 651/1253.\textsuperscript{58} In this case, the tribal leader Ḥiṣn al-Dīn Taghlab al-Jaʿfarī (d. 658/1260) led a massive coalition to cut off all the roads into Upper Egypt.\textsuperscript{59} This was a deliberate anti-state move, and Ḥiṣn al-Dīn rallied his men with the slogan ‘We are the lords of these lands’ (nahnu aṣḥāb al-bilād). He was also reported to have said, ‘I am more deserving of power than the mamlūk and we have had enough of serving the Banū Ayyūb.’\textsuperscript{60} Crucially, al-Maqrīzī records that as long as the ʿurbān controlled the roads, no merchants were allowed to pass through, and the state was unable to collect any of the land tax (kharāj) for that year. Al-Malik al-Muʿizz Aybak eventually quelled the revolt; the leaders were all hanged, and Ḥiṣn al-Dīn was arrested and imprisoned in Alexandria. Furthermore, the tribesmen were subsequently singled out from the population for a much higher tax rate and were required to give yearly gifts (al-qawd) to the rulers. The result, in al-Maqrīzī’s telling, was that ‘they were despised and decreased [in number] until their situation became as we know it today’.\textsuperscript{61} The ʿurbān revolted again in 701/1302. Again, they succeeded in creating a quasi-state in Upper Egypt. Ibn Duqmāq claims that they were able to close off all access to Upper Egypt, took control of the means of commerce, began collecting the jizya, and even took the names of Mamluk amīrs like Baybars and Salār.\textsuperscript{62}

While the state was able to quell the revolts of 651/1253 and 701/1302, they were not the first, nor would they be the last.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, Upper Egyptians have continued this proud tradition of resistance to imperial control. Zeinab Abul-Magd has written a fascinating history of political resistance in Qinā that extends as far as the 2011 Egyptian revolution.\textsuperscript{64}
The inability to collect taxes and the stoppage of commerce indicate very clearly the difficulty the Ayyubid and Mamluk governments had in controlling the region. This was a problem even in periods of calm. For example, Ibn Jubayr was incensed after his trip through the Ṣaʿīd because he found men fraudulently posing as tax collectors. They routinely searched the possessions of pilgrims and merchants for the nefarious purpose of collecting zakāt that then ended up in their own pockets. ‘There is no doubt’, he assures his reader, ‘that Saladin does not know about this matter. If he knew about it, he would put an immediate stop to it.’

Upper Egypt’s distance from the imperial centre, the state’s inability to oversee and control the region, its prominence as a centre of pilgrimage and trade, and its unique demography all had significant consequences for the social formation of Upper-Egyptian Sufism. The demographic context produced a group of Sufis who were particularly committed to establishing and promoting a normative vision of the sunna because of the large numbers of Jews, Christians and Shiʿites in the region. But given the weak state presence, particularly in terms of the absence of state-sponsored organisations of Sunni learning like khānqāhs and madrasas, the Sufis took this ideological task upon themselves. The Sufis’ authority, articulated primarily through miraculous claims, was thus staked on their ability to promote the prophetic sunna. Finally, the particular form of Sufism these Sufis embraced owed much to Maghribī immigration and the prominence of Maghribī and Andalusī pilgrims and traders travelling through the region.

The Sufis of Upper Egypt

Before turning to the details of this argument in the next chapters it will be useful first to introduce the major figures of Upper-Egyptian Sufism. Perhaps the most important of these masters was the Maghribī émigré ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī (d. 592/1195), who was born in Sabta (Ceuta). After his father’s death, al-Qināʾī moved to Fez, where he began training with the famous Berber Sufi Abū Yiʿẓāz (d. 572/1177), the master of Abū Madyan. Muḥammad al-Ḥajjājī argues that al-Qināʾī was the student of Abū Madyan himself. While the medieval sources provide no direct evidence concerning the relationship between the two, Abū Madyan was the mugaddam of Abū Yiʿẓāz’s zāwiya in Fez, and ʿAbd al-Raḥīm may have been in close contact
with him during his time there. After his training in Fez, al-Qināʾī returned to Sabta, but the political conditions stemming from the Almohad revolution forced him to move to Mecca. He lived there for seven years before moving to Upper Egypt permanently in 551/1157, settling in the town of Qināʾ, whence his demonym. Al-Qināʾī is a crucial figure for our account because he introduced the Maghribī-inflected Sufism and model of the ribāṭ that would become so widespread throughout the area. After moving to Qināʾ, al-Qināʾī quickly gained a reputation for his Sunni activism and his students were the most influential Sufis in Upper Egypt. He was a merchant by trade, and when he retired he financed and built his own ribāṭ – the first in Upper Egypt – on the east side of the city. He was buried there when he died at the age of seventy-one.

Al-Qināʾī thus embodied a direct link between Sufism in Egypt and the Maghrib. For example, al-Shaṭṭānūfī records an anecdote that when al-Qināʾī passed away, a Sufi in the Maghrib became extraordinarily agitated with the knowledge that ‘a man has died in the East who is unique in his land’. If there was a single figure whose identity was most likely to become the symbolic object of institutionalisation, it was al-Qināʾī. But this was ultimately not to be, as I detail in Chapter 9.

ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī had two influential students, the first of whom was Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 612/1215). Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was born and raised in Qūṣ, where he was apprenticed to his father as a cloth dyer. His father hoped he would join the family business, but Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh knew from an early age that he wanted to be a Sufi. After training with al-Qināʾī, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was clearly the latter’s chosen successor: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh married the daughter of al-Qināʾī and inherited his ribāṭ when he died. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh became the central Sufi figure in Upper Egypt and attracted large numbers of students. Al-Udfuwī says that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s disciples ‘were as numerous as seeds’, and Ṣafī al-Dīn lists fifteen of his disciples whom he had met personally. The latter’s account is particularly noteworthy because these students are an equal mix of native Upper Egyptians and immigrants from the Maghrib and al-Andalus. This is an early indication not only of the popularity of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, but also of the large number of Maghribi and Andalusī Sufis present in Upper Egypt at this time. Before his death and burial in the ribāṭ, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh may have designated as his successor...
Abū Yahyā Ibn Shāfiʿ (d. 647/1249), another Sufi from Qinā. However, this ‘proto-lineage’ that connects al-Qināʾī, Ibn al-Šabbāgh and Ibn Shāfiʿ would not persist beyond this point. Abū l-Qāsim al-Marrāghī (d. 683/1284), a student of both Ibn al-Šabbāgh and Ibn Shāfiʿ, was the last of this group. Ṣafī al-Dīn notes only that ‘the circle of Abū l-Ḥasan [Ibn al-Šabbāgh] died out until nobody was left but [al-Marrāghī]’.

Al-Qināʾī’s other important student was Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī (d. 642/1244). Al-Uqṣūrī’s origins are obscure. While medieval sources are silent about his birthplace and upbringing, there was an oral tradition in Luxor that he was a successful merchant and Sufi from Baghdad before he immigrated there. While al-Ḥajjājī and others take the tradition at face value, the story contradicts the few details found in medieval sources. Al-Uqṣūrī was almost certainly a native of Upper Egypt. The information concerning his later life in Luxor is more straightforward. He was the overseer of a government bureau (mushārif al-dīwān) in Upper Egypt but abandoned his post to become a Sufi. He was something of an ecstatic, fond of locking himself in his house alone for long periods of time, speaking to jinn, and attending sessions of samāʿ in which he would often go into a deep trance. In addition to ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī he also studied with ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī, the representative of the school of Abū Madyan in Alexandria. Like his contemporary and fellow disciple Ibn al-Šabbāgh, al-Uqṣūrī attracted a large following all over Upper Egypt. After his death al-Uqṣūrī became the patron saint of Luxor and his shrine complex emerged as the object of a yearly pilgrimage and festival. Already in the time of al-Udfuwī (mid-eighth/fourteenth century) the celebrations there had got wild enough to offend his sober sensibilities and he promises his readers that al-Uqṣūrī himself would not approve.

While all the Upper-Egyptian Sufis were known for their miraculous abilities, perhaps none was more miraculous than Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī (d. 648/1250). Originally from Abyssinia, he spent the first years of his life in Damāmin as the slave of a Ṣaʿīdī merchant. At some point during his servitude, he lost all sense of himself in ‘a mighty spell’ (akhdha ʿazīma) that lasted for six months. During this time he did not eat or drink anything. He reanimated the fried birds given him for food. He was placed in chains in locked rooms but always managed to escape miraculously. Fame of his spell spread and eventually Ibn al-Šabbāgh paid him a visit and declared that God
had chosen and purified him for the Sufi path. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh took him under his care, declared him a majdhūb (holy fool) and healed him of his afflictions. From that point on, Mufarrij lived the rest of his days as a Sufi, taking up with al-Uqṣūrī among many others. He was based in Damāmīn but wandered all over Egypt, gaining a reputation as a muwallah or majdhūb. The popularity of Mufarrij spread quickly, and he gained a reputation for clairvoyance and miracles. His name was even used in the production of magical amulets. His fame was apparently so great that it reached Cairo; Ṣāfī al-Dīn records his experience with Mufarrij in the Qarāfa cemetery:

He was sitting on the edge of a platform and all around him were the greatest of elites and masses of people. They were crowding in around him and reaching for his hand from under the bench like the crush of people at the black stone during the Hajj – his hand being yanked from one hand to another.

Mufarrij left behind no students that we know of, and did not have a ribāṭ or a zāwiya, although al-Udfuwī testifies that he and many others visited the grave of Mufarrij in Damāmīn and made supplications there.

One of the more mysterious yet influential Sufis of the region was Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mulaththam (d. 672/1273). Al-Mulaththam (‘the veiled’) was supposedly from ‘the East’, the son of a king, and was said to be over 600 years old. At some point he settled in Qūṣ, where he built a ribāṭ outside the city. It is unclear who his masters in Sufism were and I would be inclined to doubt his historicity if not for the fact that Ibn Nūḥ knew him personally and records many stories about his conversations with al-Mulaththam. In addition to his seriously advanced age he was also well known for performing miracles, especially his ability to be in two places at once or to appear instantly if a Sufi thought of him. He apparently had a sense of humour. When Ibn Nūḥ asked whether he actually had prayed behind Imām al-Shāfiʿī in the ninth century he replied in the affirmative. He then laughed and said, ‘In my sleep!’ Al-Udfuwī records the curious information that al-Mulaththam was originally buried in Luxor, but his body was later exhumed and reburied in his ribāṭ in Qūṣ.

Finally, I will draw extensively on the life and writings of Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (d. 708/1308). Ibn Nūḥ was a student of al-Mulaththam and ʿAbd
al-ʿAzīz al-Minūfī (d. 703/1303), a Sufi from the Delta and a student of al-Uqṣurī and Abū l-Fatḥ al-Wāṣiṭī. In the aforementioned al-Wahīd, Ibn Nūḥ discusses every Sufi whom he either knew personally or by reputation, or had been known to his father. While the work is not as well organised or polished as Ṣafī al-Dīn’s Risāla, it is nevertheless invaluable for what it reveals of the social climate and topography of seventh-/thirteenth-century Sufism in Upper Egypt. In addition to authoring his treatise on the Sufis of the Ṣaʿīd, Ibn Nūḥ is also famous for his role in inciting an anti-Christian riot in Qūṣ in 707/1307. He maintained his innocence, but to no avail. He was arrested and forced to live under house arrest in Fustat, where he died in 708/1308.

These were by no means all of the Sufis of Upper Egypt. Between the works of Ibn Nūḥ and al-Udfuwī alone, one can count dozens of Upper-Egyptian Sufis. However, the six men I focus on here are representative of larger trends I see in the literature and will serve as exemplars and provide sufficient context for the arguments in the following chapters. In the next chapter I expand on the information presented here and detail the specific vision these Sufis tried to implement in Upper Egypt. In particular I focus on their claim to represent and arbitrate a normative praxis rooted in the prophetic sunna, which they manifested in a vigorous public activism.

Notes

1. Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859) was, of course, from Ikhmīm. But his story is too early to concern us here.
2. Chih, ‘Abu-l-Hajjaj al-Uqṣuri’; el- Leithy, ‘Sufis, Copts’; Garcin, Un centre musulman (scattered references); Gril, ‘Une émeute antichrétienne’; Gril, ‘Le Soufisme en Égypte’; Gril, ‘Une source inédite’; Ḥusayn, al-Adab al-ṣūfī, pp. 162–3. There are a few monographs in Arabic devoted to these Sufis, but they are primarily recapitulations of medieval sources. See, for example, al-Ḥajjājī’s books Shakhṣiyāt ṣūfīya, al-ʿĀrif bi-llāh Abū l-Hajjāj and Sayyidi ʿAbd al-Rahīm.
3. This two-volume work exists in a number of manuscripts in Paris, Cairo, Brussels and Berlin. For details see Gril, ‘Une source inédite’, pp. 447–8. The manuscript I use and reference here, the existence of which Gril was not aware of when he wrote his article, was copied in 1078/1667, and is housed in the collection of Islamic manuscripts at the Sayyida Zaynab mosque in Cairo.

5. There are several examples of activity by revolutionary groups from this region. One of the earliest occurred in 569/1173, when a band of Sudanese soldiers based in Upper Egypt and loyal to the Fatimid family attempted a coup in Cairo. Their plot was discovered and Saladin had the co-conspirators hanged. See Abū Shāma, ‘Uyun al-rawdatayn, 2:282–7; Ibn Wāsil, Mufarrīj, 1:243–51.

6. As such, they should be understood within the larger tradition of ‘commanding good and forbidding evil’ (al-amr bi-l-ma’ruf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar) in Islam. See Cook, Commanding Right.


8. See the overviews in Wiet, ‘al-Ša‘īd’; and Garcin, ‘al-Ša‘īd’. I will not include the Fayyūm in my remarks here, but see the ongoing project directed by Yossef Rapoport, ‘Rural Society in Medieval Islam’, http://www2.history.qmul.ac.uk/ruralsocietyislam/project/index.html (accessed 12 January 2015).


10. Ibn Jubayr, Rihlat, p. 58; al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawā‘iz, 1:536. Twelve days is the figure given by al-Udifuwī for caravan travel. The trip could also be undertaken by boat using the Nile, which could take as long as forty-five days upstream if the weather and currents were not favourable. On this figure, see Goitein’s review of Garcin, Un centre musulman, in Speculum 53 (1978), p. 363. Ibn Jubayr, travelling upstream by boat in favourable conditions, reached Qūṣ from Fustat in eighteen days (Rihlat, pp. 64–5).

11. On the regional identity of Upper Egypt, see now especially Abul-Magd, Imagined Empires. There is still no comprehensive treatment of the history of medieval Upper Egypt in any European language, although there are a few focused treatments in Arabic, to which I will refer in the notes that follow. The best alternatives to a comprehensive regional history are still Garcin, Un centre musulman and al-Ḥajjājī, Qūṣ. Dandarāwī, Tārīkh turāth is a useful encyclopaedia of Muslim scholars from Upper Egypt through the ninth century AH.

12. On the conversion of Egypt in wider context, see Anawati, ‘Factors and Effects’; Bulliet, Conversion to Islam. On the wave of eighth-/fourteenth-century conversions, see Friedmann, ‘A Note’; el-Leithy, ‘Coptic Culture’, pp. 13–28. Their work is a response to earlier scholarship that posited a Muslim majority already by the third/ninth century; see Bloom, ‘The Mosque of the Qarafa’; Lapidus, ‘The Conversion’; Wiet, L’Égypte arabe; Wiet, ‘Ḳibṭ’. More recently, O’Sullivan,
‘Coptic Conversion’ has argued that the earlier date is correct and that the evidence for the Friedmann/el-Leithy position is inconclusive.

13. On the specificity of Coptic conversion in Egypt, with much detail on Upper Egypt, see el-Leithy, ‘Coptic Culture’.

14. Al-Ḥamawī, Mu’jam al-buldān, 4:413. See also Garcin, Un centre musulman, pp. 120–1.

15. See especially el-Leithy, ‘Sufis, Copts’.


17. Goitein and Friedman, India Traders, p. 221.


23. Garcin, ‘Ḳūṣ’. The Fatimids did not build madrasas as we have come to understand the term; see Walker, ‘Fatimid Institutions’.


27. Al-Udfuwī, al-Tālī, p. 34. See also al-Ḥajjājī, Sayyidi ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, p. 36, who notes that Aswān became ‘a centre for their propaganda’.


33. Demiri, Muslim Exegesis, p. 11; Stewart, Islamic Legal Orthodoxy, pp. 70–2.

35. Al-Maqrızî writes that the journey from Qūṣ to ʿAydhāb took at least seventeen days and one could go as long as three or four days without finding any water (ibid., 1:550). It took Ibn Jubayr nineteen days to make the journey (*Rihlat*, pp. 65–9). The Genizah letters collected by Goitein also portray a journey fraught with peril; see Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, pp. 157–64. Um, ‘Pilgrims’, argues that ʿAydhāb was probably the larger and more popular port but given the fact that no excavations have been undertaken there (as opposed to Quşayar, which has been excavated several times), it is impossible to tell exactly what the relationship was between these two towns.


38. See Margariti, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade* for a description of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes and how they connected with Egypt.

39. Um, ‘Pilgrims and Spice’, p. 16.


42. Al-Qūṣî, *al-Waḥīd*, 1:142a–144b.

43. See Garcin, *Un centre musulman*, pp. 200–2; Um, ‘Pilgrims and Spice’, p. 15.


51. Nubia had traditionally paid tribute to the rulers in Egypt in exchange for autonomy. On several occasions, when tribute was not forthcoming, Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers attempted to occupy the region. But these were only short-lived interventions. Yusoff, ‘Reflections’, argues that the Mamluks were not interested in ruling Nubia, they were only interested in the steady flow of slaves
and precious metals, and access to sea ports. As long as these were available, the Mamluks left Nubia alone.

52. The sources generally attribute this push into Nubia to Saladin’s fear that Nūr al-Dīn would attempt to take Egypt for himself by attacking from the south. When Tūrānshāh was unable (or unwilling, according to some sources) to take Nubia, Saladin adjusted the threat level and claimed that Nūr al-Dīn would actually attack from Yemen. See the accounts in Abū Shāma, ʿUyūn al-rawdatayn, 1:325; Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil, 10:45–6; Ibn Wāsil, Mufarrij, 1:228–9, 1:237–43.


55. See for example Garcin, Un centre musulman, pp. 183–90; Irwin, The Middle East, pp. 27, 137, 140. While less severe, the Fatimids also had trouble with the tribesmen as well; see Garcin, Un centre musulman, pp. 73–6, 90–6. On the Arab tribes of the ʿAid, see al-Maqrīzī, Kitāb al-bayān, pp. 17ff.


60. Al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk, 1:479.

61. Ibid, 1:479.


63. There were revolts in 638/1240 (al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk, 1:405), 698/1298–9 (Rapoport, ‘Invisible Peasants’, p. 1) and 749/1349 (Garcin, Un centre musulman, pp. 381–4; Levanoni, A Turning Point, pp. 181–3; Rapoport, ‘Invisible Peasants’, pp. 1–2). See especially al-Maqrīzī’s fascinating account (al-Sulūk, 4:191–6) of the bloody uprising of the tribal leader al-Aḥḍab, who declared himself sultan in Upper Egypt. Rapoport, ‘Invisible Peasants’ surveys the scholarship on the nature and function of these revolts. For the Ottoman period, see Winter, Society and Religion, p. 15.

64. Abul-Magd, Imagined Empires.
67. On Abū Yīʿẓāz, see al-ʿAzafī, Diʾāmat al-yaqīn; Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 67–79.
68. Al-Hajjājī, Sayyidi ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, p. 52.
70. Al-Hajjājī, Shakhṣiyāt ṣūfīya, pp. 27–8; al-Hajjājī, Sayyidi ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, p. 56.
75. Gril, La Risāla, p. 54.

77. Al-Ḥajjājī, *Al-ʿĀrif bi-llāh*, p. 46. The earliest recorded source on al-Uqṣūrī’s life is Ṣafi al-Din (Gril, *Risāla*, p. 60), who mentions only that ‘once, when [al-Uqṣūrī] was a young man and at the beginning of his Sufi career, he was with ʿAbd al-Raḥīm’. Al-Udfuwī likewise says nothing about al-Uqṣūrī’s youth, but asserts that after his apprenticeship in Alexandria with al-Jazūlī, ‘he returned to his native land’, i.e. Upper Egypt. The Baghdad legend was first recorded in a work by the French archaeologist Georges Legrain, who was working in Luxor in the early twentieth century. His *Louqsor sans les Pharaons* records a number of local legends, including those about the patron saint of the city (see pp. 47–91). The Baghdad story seems to me to be a later hagiographical invention that arose to fill in the details of the life of the city’s most famous (post-Pharaonic) inhabitant. Garcin, *Un centre musulman*, p. 166, argues that over time the legends of al-Uqṣūrī were confused with another great Egyptian saint, Aḥmad al-Badawī. This may be the case, but the origin stories of al-Badawī have him travelling from Fez to Iraq to Mecca to Ṭanṭa in the Nile delta.

78. The festival takes place on the fourteenth of Sha‘bān, and commemorates the saint’s visionary ascent into heaven (*mi’rāj*), according to al-Udfuwī, or to commemorate his arrival in Luxor from Baghdad, according to al-Ḥajjājī. Al-Udfuwī, *al-Ṭali*’, p. 417, describes the scene at the festival, saying that people would get dressed up and bring flutes and tambourines, ‘the men and women intermingle and the youth and the rebellious would come together. This is one of those revolting matters and abominable innovations. But the *shaykh* was far from all of this and should be excepted from it.’


80. Damāmīn was located on the east bank of the Nile between Qūṣ and Luxor; see al-Udfuwī, *al-Ṭali*’, p. 16 n. 4, for references in the medieval geographical literature.

81. A *majdhūb*, literally ‘attracted’ or ‘possessed’, refers to an individual whom God has drawn so near that his or her mind no longer functions in expected ways.
The issue of primary importance for medieval Sufi discussions of the majdhūb, however, is not how well the intellect functions but the means of enlightenment. Most Sufis follow the path deliberately, performing their devotions for the sake of knowing and loving God. The majdhūb, by contrast, is ‘attracted’ by God without effort. In a sense, the majdhūb has done nothing to warrant his or her state. Al-Suhrawardī wrote of the implications of having a majdhūb for a spiritual master, arguing that it is not a good idea because the majdhūb has not actually travelled the path and therefore cannot tell someone else how it is to be done (‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif, pp. 80–7). See also Dols, Majnūn; Geoffroy, Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie, pp. 309–33.


83. Gril, La Risāla, p. 61.

84. Ibid. p. 61.

85. Al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭālī, p. 656.


Introduction

The Sufis of Upper Egypt had a troubled relationship with the state and its representatives. As we have seen, Ayyubid and Mamluk military elites typically sought the support of the ‘ulamā’ – including Sufis – as part of a broader strategy of legitimation and rule. This was true as much as of the Sufis at the Sa‘īd al-Su‘adāʾ as of the nascent Shādhilīya, although the latter were less amenable to outright sponsorship. However, these state-funded efforts seem to have been restricted primarily to the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria. Upper Egypt lacked state-sponsored organisations such as madrasas and khānqāhs during this period, and the Sufis and their allies in the region filled the ideological vacuum. Both Jean-Claude Garcin and Linda Northrup have pointed to the relative independence from the state of pious movements in Upper Egypt. It was this independence that allowed them to take on ‘the role of critics of [the state’s] moral behavior’. Indeed, part of what seems to have drawn the Sufis of Upper Egypt together and precipitated their particular articulation of Sufi authority was their dissatisfaction with and critique of the state’s inability to regulate the moral economy of the Sa‘īd. The resultant collectivity of Upper-Egyptian Sufis shared five interrelated qualities that clearly set them apart from other contemporary Sufi groups.

First, the Sufis of Upper Egypt enjoyed no support or sanction from the state. They did not live in state-endowed khānqāhs or ribāts; they did not take jobs subsidised by the state, whether in madrasas or the local bureaucracy; and they did not lend their support to legitimise state actors in the region.
Second, in the absence of local state-sponsored religious organisations, these Sufis propagated and enforced their own normative vision of the prophetic *sunna*. On one hand, they prescriptively promoted this vision through a programme of educational outreach that took place at independently financed *ribāṭs* and *madrasas*. On the other hand, they proscriptively enforced that vision through the public regulation of morality. Third, the Sufis of Upper Egypt made a concerted effort to combat Shiʿites and Shiʿite influence in the ʿAṣṣid. Again, this project took place primarily within the context of local *ribāṭs* and *madrasas*. The latter in particular were important in this project and it was the Sufis who were largely responsible for building the first *madrasa* in Upper Egypt. Fourth, these Sufis policed the communal boundaries between Christians and Muslims. Such monitoring took place in a range of settings, from literary polemic, to debate, to the destruction of churches. This anti-Christian polemic and activism was fundamentally related to the Sufis’ critique of the state, which they accused of promoting and colluding with Christians. The state’s perceived aggrandisement of Christians, the Sufis argued, was an affront to Islam and the primacy of the *sharīʿa*. It flew in the face of the divinely sanctioned conquest that had resulted in the subjugation of the Christians of Egypt and thus violated the terms of the Pact of ʿUmar.

Finally, while the Sufis of Upper Egypt performed their authority in these four arenas, they articulated and legitimised that authority in the language of the miraculous. In other words, it was their self-promoted reputation as miracle workers that substantiated their claim and qualifications to represent and enforce a normative praxis. The hagiographies and biographies of these Sufis consistently portray them as wonder-working saints who travel from place to place, amazing crowds with their miracles (*karāmāt*) and clairvoyance (*mukāshafāt*). The Upper Egyptians downplayed traditional Sufi claims of authority rooted in *silsilas*, initiatic *tarīqas*, juridical proficiency or explicit theorisations of sainthood – although these were all significant components of their authority to some extent. In their place, these Sufis valorised and embodied an utterly miraculous authority rooted in their inheritance of prophetic authority and an unmediated access to the world of the unseen (*al-ghayb*). Again, this emphasis on miraculous authority was inextricably linked to their critique of the state. For many Sufis, Upper Egyptians included, the authority of the state and the authority of the Sufi were reciprocally
implicated in the promotion and protection of the *sunna.* However, in the case of Upper Egypt, where they thought the authority of the state was weak, the Sufis articulated an alternative that relied solely on their own proximity and access to divine power. The Sufis’ fantastic displays of their own sanctity were the primary mode in which they demonstrated their legitimacy in the face of the state’s ineptitude in promoting and protecting Islam.

These five characteristics represent a broad composite of Ayyubid and early Mamluk Sufism in Upper Egypt. Perhaps most importantly, it was the institutionalised doctrines and practices of Sufism that provided these Sufis with the discursive and practical material with which they performed and articulated their authority. That is to say that if their concomitant critique of the state and promulgation of a normative vision brought them together, it was through the discursive and institutional traditions of Sufism that they articulated their authority, formed collectivities and enacted their response. It was through the performance of their miraculous authority and activism that these Sufis produced and popularised Sufism on a wide scale across Upper Egypt. In this chapter I explore this normative project in more detail before turning in Chapter 9 to the miraculous ways in which they legitimised their authority to enforce these norms.

**State and Sufi in Upper Egypt**

Whereas the Sufis of the *khānqāh* in Cairo relied on the state for their room and board, and some Sufis like al-Iskandarī relied on the state for their salaries, the Sufis of Upper Egypt had no fiscal connection to the state. Nevertheless, as we would expect, the Sufis of Upper Egypt spent a great deal of their time in the *ribāṭs* they built across the region. Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mulaththam, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī, Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī and Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī all maintained *ribāṭs* where they taught their students and hosted large numbers of visitors. Not one of these was funded or supported by the state. Nor is there any evidence that state actors attempted to co-opt them, as they did with the Shādhilī hospice in Alexandria. Each Upper-Egyptian *ribāṭ* was independently founded and financed. That is, the *shaykh* himself or a wealthy local patron paid for the physical construction of the building and its endowment. Ibn Nūḥ’s *ribāṭ* on the outskirts of Qūṣ was built with help from a friend who collected the *jawālī* taxes (*jizya*) in Upper Egypt.
Ibn Nūḥ then set up his own endowment for the building, about which he records the following interesting information. ‘I stipulated in the waqf for the ribāṭ that beardless youths should not live there, because their presence stirs up debauchery.’ Before Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh took over al-Qināʾī’s ribāṭ in Qīnā, Ibn Nūḥ claims that one of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s students built a khānqāh for him – ‘the first one built in Qūṣ’. The use of the word khānqāh in this context is puzzling, as Upper Egyptians always used the common Maghribī terminology of ribāṭ. Ibn Nūḥ does not explain his meaning here and I have found no other references to such a khānqāh. One of the disciples of Abū Yaḥyā Ibn Shāfīʻ had a ribāṭ outside Qūṣ that he built with his own students and in which he was buried. In one interesting case, a wealthy benefactor, whom Ibn Nūḥ describes as ‘one of those who loved the Sufis and was truly altruistic (al-īthār al-ʿāmīm) with those of the Ṣaʿīd’, supplied all the ribāṭs in the region with the food they needed during the month of Ramadan. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa notes in passing that in the city of Qūṣ ‘wandering Sufis meet at the zāwiyat al-afram in Ramadan every year’. It is clear that this kind of independent ribāṭ became quite widespread in Upper Egypt over the course of the seventh/thirteenth century.

The first ribāṭ in Upper Egypt, and the model upon which all the others were based, was almost certainly that of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qīnāʾī in the city of Qīnā. As a Maghribī transplant, and having been trained by Abū Yūsūf himself, al-Qīnāʾī brought the Maghribī model of the ribāṭ to Upper Egypt. Vincent Cornell describes this model as follows:

Most Moroccan ribāṭs of the tenth through the thirteenth centuries CE were privately built and locally maintained. . . . the ribāṭs of Morocco were primarily centers of instruction in Islamic dogma (iʿtīqādāt) and practice (muʿāmalāt). Ribāṭs also served an important secondary role as communication hubs, facilitating interaction between economic and political networks in rural areas.

The ribāṭs of Upper Egypt functioned in precisely this way. They were non-state-sponsored centres of education and rural outreach. They were places in which people from all over the region came together to connect, communicate and learn. And in all these cases, it was the Sufis themselves or their wealthy benefactors who financed these activities.
Another indication of the disconnect, if not outright tension, between state and Sufi in Upper Egypt is the common trope in Upper-Egyptian sources about Sufis who abandon governmental positions in order to take up the Sufi path. While there may not have been a strong state presence in the Saʿīd – this depended on how well those in the region were behaving – there was always some governmental oversight. This oversight was primarily fiscal in nature, collecting taxes and *iqṭāʿ* revenue, but included military supervision in the form of governors and troops stationed to keep the peace. Qūṣ in particular had more state actors than most of the other towns and villages of the Saʿīd, since it was the administrative capital of the district and, as such, was home to the regional governor (*wāli*). The presence of these government employees was often an irritant to the Sufis and it is clear that they viewed them with suspicion. Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī worked in the fiscal bureau (*dīwān*) in Luxor before becoming a Sufi. But once he decided to take up the Sufi path, he immediately abandoned his post and never worked for the state again. Ibn Nūḥ describes an occasion in which the governor of Qūṣ embraced Sufism and then abandoned his post. He placed a bridle around his neck and walked through the marketplace asking for his former subjects’ forgiveness. Al-Mulaththam, that mysterious man from the East, claimed that before he became a Sufi and travelled west he predicted that the king would die in seven days. The king responded, ‘If I live, I will have you cut into little pieces. If I die, you will be king after me.’ The king of course died and al-Mulaththam ruled for seven years, ‘until one day I told my wife that I wanted to become a renunciant and abandon the world. She asked me not to do it, but I disagreed and left my reign; I do not know what happened [to her] after that’. While the royal heir who abandons his power for Sufism is a well-known topos in Sufi literature, Ibn Nūḥ deploys it here to bolster his master’s reputation and highlight the incompatibility of politics and Sufism.

Ibn Nūḥ recounts another interesting story on precisely this topic. Like al-Mulaththam’s narrative, this is clearly another literary topos, but it is nevertheless revealing about these Sufis’ attitudes. The account concerns an anonymous Maghribī *shaykh* who had a famous (also anonymous) vizier for a student. As the vizier progressed in his Sufi training, the *shaykh* demanded he leave his post and sell everything he possessed if he wanted to achieve enlightenment (*al-fath*). But even after the vizier abandoned his post, the
master still refused to help him achieve his goal. After wandering far and wide in vain, the vizier returned to the Maghrib and his shaykh. His master told him that the final veil separating him from the divine was his love for the shaykh. The vizier abandons his master and thus rends this final veil. The story then takes an unexpected turn: the sultan himself comes to see the shaykh, demanding that his vizier be allowed to resume his duties. The shaykh agrees and offers two justifications for his reversal. First, now that the vizier had achieved enlightenment, no level of worldly power would distract him from his devotions. Second, in the absence of other qualified individuals to run the affairs of state, it was the vizier’s duty to help the sultan. This narrative neatly encapsulates the ambivalence of Upper-Egyptian Sufis’ attitude to the state and their own authority. The authority of Sufi and state are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the ideal ruler is one that embodies walāya in both the sense of sanctity and the sense of political authority. Only after severing all his mundane connections did the vizier embody this ideal, which Ibn Nūḥ likens to the prophet Yūsuf in the Qurʾān: ‘Place me over the storehouses of the land, for I am a knowledgeable guardian’ (Q 12:55).

In addition to the preceding types of narratives, there are a number of more general accounts and attitudes stemming from Upper-Egyptian Sufi circles that I would describe as anti-politician. Ibn Nūḥ records a story about a group of rulers who had heard that Ibn al-Šabbāgh used to put on lavish dinner parties for his students. The politicians wonder if he might do the same for them, given their status, so they set out to visit him. Of course Ibn al-Šabbāgh knew they were coming and had prepared a truly remarkable spread in advance of their arrival. After the meal, one of these amīrs asked Ibn al-Šabbāgh, ‘Master, what have you bequeathed to the people of this world (abnāʾ al-dunyā)?’ Ibn al-Šabbāgh replied simply, ‘Fatigue and work (al-tāʿab wa-l-naṣab).’ The politicians have no share in the Sufis’ allotment. Ibn Nūḥ anticipates some anxiety from his readers about the fact that Ibn al-Šabbāgh had the means with which to throw these lavish banquets. But he explains that ‘if the heart is free of desires (al-āmāl), then there is no harm in having a hand full of money (al-māl).’

In another story, Ibn al-Šabbāgh asks the governor of Qūṣ to dismiss the ruler of Qinā for an unspecified reason. The governor refuses. Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s companion Rifāʿa then tells him that the moment the governor
refused the master’s request he was dismissed from his post. The other disciples ‘marked the time and, sure enough, a replacement arrived to take his place and the date of the official decree (al-marsūm) was for that very day [i.e. the day he had refused the request]’. Ibn Nūḥ’s gloss on this narrative sums up the Sufis’ attitude perfectly: ‘This is proof of axial power (al-taṣrif al-quṭbiya), for it is the quṭb who in actual reality appoints and dismisses those who appoint and dismiss only apparently (ẓāhiran).’ At one point Ibn Nūḥ actually describes the death of the quṭb in Syria in 693/1293 as the end of a dawla, a term with clear political implications. Indeed, 693/1293 also happens to be the year that marks the end of the dawla of al-Malik al-Ashraf, the son of Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90), and the beginning of the first dawla of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. It is thus possible that Ibn Nūḥ is making here a subtle allusion to a kind of simultaneous dawla or perhaps a link between the sultan and the quṭb.

One of the more interesting of these political stories is a short account recorded by ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Bādisī (d. after 722/1322), the hagiographer of the saints of the Rif mountains in the Maghrib. In Chapter 5 I mentioned that a number of these Upper-Egyptian Sufis were well known in the Maghrib. This was due both to the number of Maghribī immigrants in Upper Egypt and to the fact that most Maghribīs and Andalusīs travelled through the ʿAlīd to reach Mecca during this period. Al-Bādisī’s treatise records a number of instances in which Maghribī Sufis came into contact with ʿAlīdīs during the pilgrimage. Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī in particular seems to have gained widespread fame in the Maghrib, and he became the object of several mini-pilgrimages by Maghribī Sufis who wanted to meet him on their way to Mecca. In a similar vein, al-Bādisī relates an anecdote from his uncle Yahyā, who, returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca, had stopped in Damāmīn to visit the grave of Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī. When Yahyā visited the grave, the people of Damāmīn proudly told him stories about their local saint. They said that Mufarrij was one-eyed (aʿwar) and related the events that led to the loss of his eye. An unnamed ‘commander of the valley’ (amīr al-wādī, he is also called a wālī in the next line) travelling through the city came to visit Mufarrij at his ribāṭ and Mufarrij treated him to his finest food. Once the amīr was sated he resumed his journey. Then a group of Sufis returning from the pilgrimage came seeking the same treatment. But having given everything to the
politician, Mufarrij was only able to offer them bread. The Sufis were furious. They beat him and threw him into a well; this is how he lost his eye. While in the well, the Sufis yelled at Mufarrij, ‘Hey, pimp (yā qawwād)! You treat the governor with respect but short-change the Sufis? You will not leave that well until you treat us with hospitality.’ While one can read this account as an example of Mufarrij’s generosity with a local ruler (and this is certainly how al-Bādisī reads it), the more telling aspect of the account is the behaviour of the Sufis and their role in the narrative. For the Upper Egyptians who related this incident to Yahyā, the Sufis – as a group – represent a dangerous band of rogues who will not tolerate preferential treatment based upon political status. This attitude is characteristic of Upper-Egyptian Sufism and may even be related to the Maghribī tradition of al-mushāṭara (the sharing of goods) advocated by Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Sabtī (d. 601/1204).

An interesting corollary to this account is a story recounted in most biographies of Mufarrij. The details of the story are murky, but it seems that Mufarrij and some of his companions made a trip to Cairo to intercede with the sultan on behalf of a fellow Ṣaʿīdī. In the aftermath of the political struggle between al-Malik al-ʿĀdil II (r. 635–7/1238–40) and al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (r. 637–47/1240–9), the latter turned his attention to whipping Egypt into shape after a prolonged absence. Part of his plan involved sending ‘an army to fight the Arabs in the Ṣaʿīd and to go after those who had helped al-ʿĀdil seize power’. This project included rounding up everyone he felt was a threat to his rule, including many from the Ashrafīya corps, giving their posts and iqṭāʾ income to his own mamlūks. As part of the house cleaning, he apparently arrested and held for ransom a certain individual from the powerful Upper-Egyptian clan of the Banū Faqīh Naṣr. It was on behalf of this captive that Mufarrij travelled to Cairo and attempted to secure his release. The outcome of his mission is not clear. Sources sympathetic to Mufarrij insist that he was able to secure the release of the prisoner. Ibn Nūḥ, for example, reports that Mufarrij succeeded through a kind of mind control over al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ. While advocating for the prisoner, ‘[Mufarrij] said to [al-Ṣāliḥ], “You have nothing to do with him,” and the sultan said, “Master, I have nothing to do with him, I have nothing to do with him.”’ However, other sources less partisan to Mufarrij report that Ibn Faqīh Naṣr was put on trial. ‘He was seized and given over to someone for punishment who beat
him until he died on 2 Jumādā II 638 [19 December 1240]. Al-Ḥajjājī argues that this incident demonstrates that Mufarrij was well respected by the political establishment. But there is no evidence to support such a conclusion. I would argue that, at best (if the story reflects actual events), Mufarrij was granted an audience with the sultan because of his widespread popularity among the masses of Upper Egyptians, whom Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb struggled to keep under control. More importantly, the Sufis’ version of the narrative clearly casts Mufarrij as a representative of Upper Egyptians more broadly and in a clearly adversarial role vis-à-vis the ruler in Cairo.

Establishing a Normative Praxis

Given that the Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers paid little to no attention to the intellectual scene in Upper Egypt, it is not surprising that the local Sufis took it upon themselves to establish a normative praxis in the Ṣaʿīd. In this sense the Sufis of Upper Egypt performed a social and religious function akin to that of rural Sufis in medieval Anatolia described by Resul Ay. These Anatolian Sufis ‘served almost as a counterweight to local government officials or notables. They were responsive to conditions and grievances of the people, suffering ill-treatment at the hand of notables or officials.’ The available sources from the Ayyubid and early Mamluk period likewise suggest that the Sufis of Upper Egypt played a critical role in providing the region with centres of instruction, outreach and political recourse. Ultimately, they were at least partially responsible for giving the region a Sunni and especially a Mālikī character. The sources portray them as instrumental in converting Shiʿites to Sunnism. As I noted in the previous chapter there were many Shiʿites in the region, a demographic situation that only intensified after Fatimid sympathisers fled to the Ṣaʿīd following Saladin’s coup. It is noteworthy, then, that after founding a number of madrasas in Cairo, Fustat and Alexandria, Saladin and his successors invested nothing in Upper Egypt. Saladin supposedly built a madrasa in the Fayyūm, and his nephew, Taqī l-Dīn ʿUmar (d. 587/1191), built two there as well (one Shāfīʿī and one Mālikī), but nothing further south. As I discussed in the first chapter, these state-sponsored organisations served several purposes. They were originally part of Saladin’s strategy to curry the favour of the ʿulamā’, to convert Fatimid and Christian property into properties of the state, and to create a
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class of loyal Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī scholars in Egypt. Given the large numbers of Christians and Shi‘ites in Upper Egypt, then, the region would seem to have been prime real estate for this kind of imperial social and fiscal engineering. But Saladin and his successors basically ignored Upper Egypt. Within this vacuum, the Sufis played a critical role in promoting a normative sunna among the populace.

The centre of what Jean-Claude Garcin calls the ‘contre-Réforme sunnite’ in Upper Egypt at this time was the city of Qinā. The important role played by Qinā in this respect seems to have been due to a historical accident of immigration. The geographer al-Ya`qūbī (d. 284/897–8) wrote of Qinā in the third/ninth century that ‘its architecture had been destroyed and reduced to very little because of frequent attacks of the Arabs and Khārijites, and roadside ambushes. So the people left for places more developed.’ Qinā was only sparsely populated from that time on until an influx of Maghribī émigrés to the city in the sixth/twelfth century. These Maghribīs repopulated the mostly abandoned city and formed the vanguard of a larger movement towards Sunni Islam in the region. Maghribīs would retain a reputation for strict Sunnism for quite some time in Upper Egypt. For example, when Ibn Nūh mentions the Fatimid founders of Cairo, who had come to Egypt from the Maghrib, he notes that ‘the Maghribīs are quite strong in the law of God’. Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī is emblematic of this development. Al-Qināʾī left his home because of ‘the events and crises’ caused by the Almohad revolution, led by ʿAbd al-Muʿmin al-Gūmī (d. 558/1163). It was al-Qināʾī and his students who pushed the Sunni ‘counter-reformation’ forward. His students included Abū l-Óasan Ibn al-Íabbāgh and Abū l-Óajāj al-Uqṣurī, who were the two principal masters of most of the other Sufis in the Šāʾīd and played critical roles in promoting Sunnism. Al-Qināʾī garnered a profound reputation across Egypt. He is one of the very few non-Shādhili Sufis whom al-Iskandarī mentions in Laṭāʾif al-minan. And al-Shaṭṭānūfī not only includes a section in the Bahjat al-asrār on al-Qināʾī’s fame and abilities, he also includes this telling description of Qinā: ‘It is now known for its Sufi masters, whose baraka protects the city from all manner of bidʿa and forbidden activity.’ This is a reference to the reputation of these Sufis for regulating the moral economy of the Šaʿīd. Another, more concrete, example of the mark al-Qināʾī and his students left on the region is the very
first *madrasa* ever built in Qūṣ, and probably all of Upper Egypt, the *madrasa* known as al-Najībīya.⁴⁰

Al-Najībīya was built by a native of Qūṣ, Najīb b. Hibat Allāh (d. 622/1225), in 607/1210.⁴¹ We know almost nothing about this individual except that he built and endowed the *madrasa*, named it after himself, and appointed Majd al-Dīn al-Qushayrī (d. 667/1268) to oversee its operation. Most important for our purposes, it was al-Qināʾī’s student Ibn al-Šabbāgh, and his student Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī, who worked together to convince Najib to appoint Majd al-Dīn as professor at the *madrasa*.⁴² Majd al-Dīn, who taught both Mālikī and Shāfiʿī *fiqh* at the *madrasa*, was the father of the more famous Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd, whom we met in connection with the Shādhilīya.⁴³ Majd al-Dīn was from the city of Manfalūt but lived in Qūṣ, where he taught law and spent his time with the Sufis.⁴⁴ He is an interesting character who shows up in a variety of places: he was supposedly present at the battle against Louis IX at al-Manṣūra in 1250, where he is said to have studied Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla* with Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhili;⁴⁵ he travelled with Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī to Cairo on his mission of intercession with the sultan;⁴⁶ and al-Udfuwī has him single-handedly eliminating Shiʿism from Upper Egypt: ‘The Shiʿite school (*madhhab al-shīʿa*) was widespread in that region and [it was Majd al-Dīn who] introduced the Sunni school (*madhhab al-sunna*) in a wise manner so that rejection of the prophet’s companions (*al-raft*) [i.e. Shiʿism] was wiped out and disappeared.’⁴⁷ This is surely an exaggeration, but it indicates his widespread reputation for the propagation of Sunnism among the people of Upper Egypt.⁴⁸ Majd al-Dīn undertook this project with the help of many of the most famous Sufis of his time, especially the students of al-Qināʾī. Another student of Majd al-Dīn, Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-Qifī (d. 697/1298), studied at the Najībīya for a time before moving to Isnā, where al-Isnawī has him basically eliminating the Shiʿites of that city single-handedly as well.⁴⁹ Likewise, the Jalāla mosque of Qūṣ was famous for its weekly public *dhikr* ceremonies that attracted many visitors. These *dhikr* ceremonies were led by Ibn ʿAbd al-Żāhir (d. 701/1301), another student of Majd al-Dīn al-Qushayrī, who eventually went on to build a *ribāṭ* in Ikhmīm.⁵⁰ It was through the mosque, *madrasa* and many *ribāṭs* that the Sufis of Upper Egypt participated in a concerted programme of outreach and instruction to imbue the region with a Sunni identity. Much
like the Anatolian dervish lodges described by Ethel Wolper, these buildings functioned as centres of communal identity formation and transformed the religious landscape of Upper Egypt in the process.51

While the outreach that took place at these centres was primarily educational, the Sufis of Upper Egypt supplemented their pedagogical efforts with a more hands-on approach. A central component of their outreach was displays of righteous indignation directed against those who did not conform to their normative vision of the sunna. A couple of anecdotes bear this out. Ibn Nūḥ reports one example second hand via an eyewitness. The witness relates that he was with Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī and his companions when al-Uqṣūrī said, ‘I have been told that at this very instant, in the house of so-and-so, there are such-and-such forbidden things happening with certain women. They are all there meeting together and up to no good (ʿalā ḥāla ghayr jayyida). Come, Sufis! Let us go to them!’52

What happened next is a classic scene of mob violence. The Sufis, thoroughly riled up, went to the house of disrepute and began beating on the door. When the inhabitants refused to answer, the mob went around the outside wall and broke down the doors. The inhabitants fled in terror, while the Sufis destroyed everything they could get their hands on – including a cache of wine, which may have been the source of the original accusation. Al-Uqṣūrī was apparently well known for these kinds of public outburst of righteous indignation, and Ibn Nūḥ ends his account with a simple comment about him: ‘This was always his habit.’ Ibn Nūḥ treats the incident as paradigmatic of the phenomenon of Sufis regulating public morality. Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s students were also known for such outbursts. When a peasant publicly disparaged Ibn Shāfiʿ – Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s student and successor – one of his disciples took a staff and beat him mercilessly.53

Another narrative involves Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mulatham, who was, in the words of Garcin, ‘très attaché à la Sunna’.54 This anecdote, involving al-Mulatham and the governor of Qūṣ, ʿIzz al-Dīn Aybak al-Afram (d. 695/1295), highlights the Sufis’ moral regulation as well as their political critique.55 Ibn Nūḥ reports that al-Afram found himself tired and hungry one afternoon after having spent the day attending to affairs of state. Upon returning home he stripped down to nothing and wrapped a towel around his waist, ‘owing to the intense heat’. In this state of what Ibn Nūḥ calls
‘nakedness’, al-Afram caught a glimpse of one of his slave girls (jāriya) wearing nothing but a loose-fitting robe. He was overcome with desire and, in his own words, ‘I placed my hands around her neck’. The woman insisted that before they proceed further, he eat some lunch: ‘So I ate with one hand and held her neck with my other hand.’ As if the scene could not get any stranger, at this precise moment al-Mulaththam burst into the governor’s private chamber after having given the slip to the guards. He threw a covering over the woman and whisked her out. He then chatted up al-Afram for a moment before slipping back out, leaving the governor completely confused and incensed. Ibn Nūḥ argues that the encounter is an example of ‘proper behaviour and hidden sainthood’. It demonstrated ‘proper behaviour’ in the sense that al-Mulaththam had prevented the governor from sexually disgracing himself. The account also demonstrates extraordinary ‘hidden sanctity’ since al-Mulaththam was able to enter and leave the governor’s chambers secretly and without harm. This account is fascinating for what it reveals of Ibn Nūḥ’s contempt for the governor and, by extension, the ruling class. One senses an almost gleeful tone in the humiliation of the governor at the hands of the powerful shaykh. Ibn Nūḥ thus combines several of the most common themes in accounts of Upper-Egyptian Sufis. Al-Mulaththam brazenly and miraculously intervenes to critique the behaviour of a politician and to enforce the Sufis’ rigorous conception of the moral norm.

Regulating Intercommunal Boundaries

Gary Leiser has argued that in addition to training jurists and combating bidʿa, one purpose of the Ayyubid and early Mamluk madrasa in Egypt was to offer a counterbalance to Christian dominance in many towns and in the central bureaucracy. In so far as this may have been the case, the fact that the state built no madrasas in Upper Egypt despite a substantive Christian presence may have been another reason these Sufis agitated to establish centres of learning. In this connection, Ibn Nūḥ often depicts the Sufis of Upper Egypt debating with, confounding and converting Christians. In one anecdote he records the story of a trip he took along the Nile where he met an agreeable Christian priest (qissīs). Their conversation soon turned to the differences between Muslims and Christians. Ibn Nūḥ humiliates and silences the priest by declaring, ‘I am the Muslim, you are the Christian. I will not call you an
unbeliever because you are already an unbeliever. To declare something that is already that thing is a logical absurdity." In another account, Ibn Nūḥ boasts that a powerful Christian bureaucrat converted to Islam because of the miracles of the Sufis. One Christian who converted to Islam and became a Sufi then converted his entire family and built a zaʿwīya where he was buried.

This apparent enmity towards Christians among the Sufis of Upper Egypt could sometimes erupt into intercommunal violence. Given their self-appointed roles as moral regulators, the Sufis often found themselves at the forefront of intercommunal tensions, although Robert Irwin’s contention that ‘on one thing Sufis and Islamic fundamentalists were united . . . their hostility to Christians’ is perhaps exaggerated. The most violent and telling case of Sufi involvement with Christians in Upper Egypt was the anti-Christian riot of 707/1307 in Qūṣ. Both Denis Gril and Tamer el-Leithy have examined this incident in great detail and I will not add substantially to their astute analyses. Rather, here I want to suggest the Sufis’ pointed critique of the state as another possible context for this violent episode.

The two primary sources for the events of 1307 are Ibn Nūḥ’s extended narrative in his al-Waḥīd and al-Udfuwī’s remarks in his biography of Ibn Nūḥ. Other accounts are primarily from official Mamluk sources in Cairo and do not add anything new to these sources except to implicate Ibn Nūḥ as the instigator. The most relevant socio-political precursor to this incident, which Ibn Nūḥ mentions only obliquely, was the official state decree of 700/1301 that all churches and synagogues in Egypt be closed and their doors locked. Al-Udfuwī thus begins his account of the events of 1307 by saying that the Christians of Qūṣ had written a petition (marsūm) to have their churches reopened and had been given a favourable reply. As el-Leithy notes, it may have been the reopened churches, ringing their bells on Sunday morning, that first drew the attention of the Muslim crowd. At any rate, on that Sunday in 1307, a man – the authorities insisted it was Ibn Nūḥ – stood up in the communal mosque in Qūṣ to preach. After reciting a Qurʾānic verse, he declared that destroying churches constituted a form of prayer (al-ṣalāt fī hadm al-kanāʾis). This riled up the crowd, who, led by the Sufis, went out straightaway and in less than two hours destroyed thirteen churches. In the aftermath, a number of Sufis were arrested, including Ibn Nūḥ, and many others were beaten. The authorities placed Ibn Nūḥ under
In his detailed analysis of this incident, el-Leithy situates the riot within the larger context of a crisis in social relations: perceived displays of Coptic wealth and influence, suspicion about Coptic conversion and apostasy, other instances of church destruction in contemporary Egypt, the regional politics of the Ṣāfīd, the role of literate Sufis who served as a link between anti-
ḥāmillī polemics and non-reading Muslims, and most importantly, the Sufis’ role as moral regulators in Upper Egypt, a point I have stressed here. These are all critical for our understanding of the event. However, I would like to focus on two other aspects of the violence. First, el-Leithy is less concerned with whether or not the rioters were actually Sufis. This is because for most Mamluk historians of the event the term ‘Sufi’ ‘was a useful social category to sanitise and sanctify popular acts . . . By joining sufi regulation, participants effectively became “sufis” in the eyes of the beholders.’71 While this is surely correct in terms of the way the chroniclers framed these events, I do think the legitimately Sufi identity of the rioters is also important. As we have seen, the Sufis of Upper Egypt, particularly the circles of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and al-Uqṣūrī, were very concerned to establish Sunni norms and monitor intercommunal boundaries. I would argue that the attacks were indeed the work of Ibn Nūḥ and his cohort, despite his protestations to the contrary. The church destruction was undertaken by a group whom Ibn Nūḥ describes as having ‘zealous pride for Islam’ (ghayrat al-dīn), a phrase he also uses to describe the prophets in general.72 Even more tellingly, and in another context completely, Ibn Nūḥ writes of the permissibility of violently attacking someone who insults a saint, because when ‘divine zealous pride’ (al-ghayra ilāhīya) overtakes a person, ‘it renders him incapable of examining the permissibility of an exoteric command’.73 Despite al-Udfuwī’s claim that ‘a man close to [Ibn Nūḥ] incited the riot’, it is obvious from the frequency and intensity of Ibn Nūḥ’s denials that he was indeed that man, clearly seized by ghayra ilāhiya.74 He even goes so far as to discredit his accusers with an ad hominem smokescreen, claiming that the individual who turned him in to the authorities was unreliable, ‘a dancer whose wife sells ḥashish in front of the government palace (dār al-walāya).’75 Ibn Nūḥ was at the centre of Sunni-Sufi activism in Upper Egypt and it is difficult to believe that both he and his
circle were not involved in the violence of 1307. Promoting and enforcing
the prophetic sunna, often violently, was one of the primary ways that the
Sufis of Upper Egypt performed their authority.

Whether their opponents were Shi‘ites, badly behaving rulers, sinful
Sunnis or haughty Christians, the Sufis of Upper Egypt felt they were the
ones most fit to deal with the problem. This is not to say that the riot of
1307 was merely a chance for Sufis to demonstrate their zealous authority. As
el-Leithy has shown, there was much more at stake here than public displays
of righteous indignation. One of the ways we might also read this incident,
then, is as an indirect and violently performative critique of the state itself.
An analogous situation is the Shepherd’s Crusade of 1320, in which a large
group of French peasants who had failed to convince the king to lead them
on a crusade of their own ended up killing and forcibly converting many
Jews during their return journey through Languedoc. David Nirenberg
has argued that the anti-Jewish violence of the Shepherd’s Crusade was not
simply the product of a general anti-Jewish sentiment. Rather, we ought to
understand this violence from ‘within the framework of a revolt against the
monarchy’. The Jews’ role as fiscal agents of the state rendered them easy
targets of the indigent Christian shepherds, who could not directly attack
the crown that oppressed them. But they could attack the king’s agents.
Similarly, the Sufis of Upper Egypt, dissatisfied with the state’s inability to
enforce and control Upper Egypt properly, could not attack the Mamluk
rulers without incurring fatal retribution – we have seen how brutally the
state responded to the many peasant revolts. However, they could attack the
Christians whom they saw as the agents of the state. Ibn Nūḥ’s account of the
riot is actually replete with criticism of the actions of state actors, mamlūks,
governors and bureaucrats. These critiques are all rooted in his perception
that Coptic Christians were infiltrating government positions and weakening
the Islamic character – and hence the moral legitimacy – of the state.
Ibn Nūḥ’s account reveals that he was concerned not only with Coptic
expansion (both outwardly in terms of church construction and secretly in the
form of insincere conversion), but also with the possibility that the state itself
was coming loose from its foundations. He begins his account by noting that
the permissive attitude of the state towards Christians under the rule of al-
Manṣūr Lājīn (r. 696–8/1296–9) led directly to his death and the destruction
of his dawla. He recounts the dream of a Sufi who saw a vision in which the Mamluk state was ‘like a tree planted but uprooted’, and that ‘the state was destroyed following the dream’. Ibn Nūḥ’s entire narrative of the riot is thus framed as a critique of the state. Ibn Nūḥ has high praise for al-dawla al-nāṣirīya, the second reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, during which time the churches and synagogues were shuttered and locked. But he is disdainful of al-dawla al-manṣūriya, the reign of al-Manṣūr Lājin, during which time the Christians had exceeded their mandate, necessitating the anti-dhimmī measures of 1301. The anti-state nature of the riot of 1307 becomes even clearer in Ibn Nūḥ’s and al-Udfuwī’s descriptions of the aftermath. Believing the Sufis responsible, the local rulers and their soldiers rounded up the Sufis of Qūṣ and beat them with 470 lashes, in addition to decreeing the death penalty for seventeen of them. Ibn Nūḥ is positively livid in his text, claiming that in punishing these men, the governor and his men sided with the Christians and against the Sufis by not allowing them to enact and enforce the stipulations of the Pact of ʿUmar. He very clearly sets up an opposition here between state actors and Sufis. His primary concern throughout the text is that Christians are influencing state actors, who are willing (or unwitting) participants in a Christian takeover that will result in the loss of Muslim property and, eventually, the Islamic state itself. This was surely connected to the anxieties fuelled by Coptic conversion and the prominent roles of Copts in government, particularly as tax collectors. As el-Leithy argues, ‘much of the unpopularity of Coptic bureaucrats derived from their carrying out direct Mamlûk extortionist policies’. As was the case with the anti-Jewish violence in Provence, then, the anti-Christian violence in Upper Egypt was surely linked to the Sufis’ critique of and dissatisfaction with the state.

In general, Ibn Nūḥ’s framing and treatment of the entire affair is thus indicative of the broader trends I have described in this chapter. When the state protects the interests, status and practices of its Muslim subjects, Ibn Nūḥ has no serious qualms about its legitimacy, as when he praises al-dawla al-nāṣirīya for ‘renewing the stipulations of the Pact of ʿUmar’. But when the state does not fulfil its function, as in his indictment of al-dawla al-manṣūriya, the Muslims must take it upon themselves to enforce communal boundaries, maintain the social status of the ahl al-dhimma, and establish and regulate a normative praxis. Again, the Sufis did not see themselves and
their authority as necessarily in conflict or competition with that of the state; both were understood as a function of proximity to power and the protection and promotion of a normative praxis. It was when the state was unable or unwilling to protect and promote that praxis that the Sufis felt compelled to act. This included building and funding centres of outreach and instruction, combating Shi‘ism, publicly regulating moral behaviour, and patrolling the communal boundary between Muslims and Christians.

One fundamental question remains. It is clear that the Sufis’ activism in Upper Egypt was tied to their self-conception as authoritative spokespersons for and guardians of the prophetic sunna. But how did they actually articulate that authority? This is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

2. Northrup, From Slave to Sultan, pp. 87.
7. Ibid. 1:110a.
8. Ibid. 1:153a–b.
9. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Rihlat, p. 52. I have been unable to find any other information about this zāwiyat al-afram. It is possible that its name derives from the early Mamluk governor of Qūṣ ʿIzz al-Dīn Aybak al-Afram (d. 695/1295), who also built and endowed a ribāṭ for Sufis outside Cairo; see al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawā‘īz, 4:804. If this is the case, it constitutes an important exception to my argument that Ayyubid and early Mamluk amīrs did not sponsor hospices in Upper Egypt.
13. Ibid., 1:61b.
15. Ibid., 1:75b.
16. Ibid., 1:103b.
17. Ibid., 1:106b.
18. Ibid., 1:106b.
19. Ibid., 1:78a.
20. On al-Bādisī, see Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 67, 100.
22. Mufarrij appears in al-Ṣafādi’s dictionary of blind men, Nikīt al-ḥimyān, pp. 295–6, although this story does not appear there.
23. Al-Bādisī, al-Maqsīd al-sharīf, p. 84.
26. Al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk, 1:405. See also the account of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ’s rise to power in al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 29:167–75. The notice concerning the expedition into the Şaʿīd is ibid., 29:175.
28. Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-shāfīʿīya al-kubrā, 8:125; see also al-Ṣafādi, al-Wāfi, 6:98.
30. See also Garcin, Un centre musulman, pp. 149–50, who, citing the History of the Patriarchs, argues that Mufarrij may actually have gone to Cairo to dissuade al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb from attacking the city of Qūṣ to put down a rebellion of Turkish soldiers.
34. Al-Yaʿqūbī, Kitāb al-buldān, p. 120.
37. Al-Ḥajjājī, Sayyidi ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, p. 53.
40. Salām argues that there was an earlier Shāfiʿī madrasa in Aswān (ʿal-Madāris al-islāmiyya’, p. 96), based on the fact that both al-Udfuwī (al-Ṭālīʿ, pp. 165–6) and al-Suyūṭī (Ḥusn al-muhādara, 1:408) record brief biographies of the Shāfiʿī jurist Iṣmāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-Aswānī (d. 599/1203), whom they describe as
‘the mudarris at the madrasa [in Aswān]’. However, other than these references, I have found no indication that there was a madrasa in Aswān during this period.


42. Al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭālibī, p. 425. The printed text here reads ‘Ibn al-Šabbāgh and al-shaykh al-muqtarāb’. The editor argues that this refers to al-Muqtarāb Taqi l-Dīn al-Muẓaffar, who died in 612/1215–16. However, al-Muqtaraš was a Shāfi’ī who taught in Alexandria, Mecca and Cairo; I find no connection to Upper Egypt. See al-Dhahābi, Tārīkh al-islām, 44:128; al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi’īya al-kubrā, 8:372. The editor also notes that in two MSS the reading is m-f-r-b. I would argue, then, that it is not al-shaykh al-muqtarāb (or al-mufarrij, etc.), but rather al-shaykh al-Mufarrij, which makes much more sense given the context.

43. Salām, ‘al-Madāris al-islāmiyya’, p. 104, argues that the madrasa was meant only for Mālikīs ‘given that the names of those who appear [in al-Udfuwī’s entry] are all Mālikī jurists’. However, al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭālibī, pp. 425 and 432, takes note in a number of places that Majd al-Dīn was expert in both Mālikī and Shāfi’ī jurisprudence, although he does not appear in al-Subkī’s Ṭabaqāt.


48. Al-Udfuwī takes great pains to highlight how much the people of Upper Egypt loved and respected Majd al-Dīn, and notes at the end of his biography that he was one of the awliyāʾ; see al-Ṭālibī, p. 435.


50. Al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭālibī, pp. 392–9, esp. 393. Al-Zāhir was a juridical Sufi who taught Shāfi’ī law and may have been only tangentially connected to the Sufis I discuss here. Although al-Munāwī, al-Kawākib al-durrīya, 2:483, claims he was a student of al-Uqṣūrī, he was actually a member of the circle of Sufis led by the mysterious ʿAlī al-Kurdi (d. 622/1225), of whom Ṣafī al-Dīn writes (Gril, La
He appeared to be crazy (kāna ẓāhiruḥu al-walah). Al-Kurdi was from Damascus but spent some time in Qūṣ, which is where Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and others took up with him. It is clear from Ibn Kathīr’s account in al-Bidāya, 17:139–40, that the people of Damascus were not sure what to make of him either.

51. Wolper, Cities and Saints.
53. Ibid., 2:54a.
56. Al-Qūṣī, al-Wahdī, 1:64b.
57. This despite the fact that al-Afram did support Sufis in Cairo; see al-Maqrīzī, al-Mawāʾiz, 4:804. It seems that for Ibn Nūḥ and the Sufis of Upper Egypt not even sponsorship of Sufis in other locales could erase the flaws of the state and its corrupt representatives.
61. Ibid., 1:41a.
62. Irwin, The Middle East, p. 98.
64. Al-Qūṣī, al-Wahdī, 2:212b–222b; al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭāliʿ, pp. 325–6. Gril published the portion of al-Wahdī pertaining to the riot (‘Une émeute antichrétienne’) based upon the Paris version of the manuscript. The manuscript I consulted differs from the published version only in very slight ways and since Gril’s edition is widely available I will refer to it throughout this section.
66. Ibn al-Dawādārī, Kanz al-durar, 9:47–50; Ibn Taghibirdī, al-Nujūm al-zāhira, 8:107–9; al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk, 2:337–9; al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, 31:259–64. The decree to close churches and synagogues was precipitated by a visit from a Maghribī vizier who supposedly could not believe that the aḥl al-dhimma were not being forced to live according to the stipulations of the Pact of ʿUmar.
68. El-Leithy, ‘Sufis, Copts’, p. 79 n. 20.
70. This is the reason he included a detailed account of the riot in al-Waḥīd. He wanted to demonstrate that he had nothing to do with the violence. It is worth adding that several government officials responsible for Ibn Nūḥ’s arrest died shortly thereafter. Al-Udfuwi, clearly reflecting his partisanship for Upper-Egyptians, notes that these deaths were a direct result of their involvement in Ibn Nūḥ’s imprisonment (al-Ṭāli’, pp. 326–7).
71. El-Leithy, ‘Sufis, Copts’, pp. 112. The sources also mention the ḥarāfīsh as possible culprits. On this group, see Brinner, ‘Ḥarūfīsh’; Brinner, ‘The Significance of the Ḥarāfīsh’; and Sabra, Poverty and Charity, pp. 14–16.
72. For the rioters, see Gril, ‘Une émeute antichrétienne’, p. 246. For the prophets, see al-Qūṣī, al-Waḥīd, 2:4b.
73. Al-Qūṣī, al-Waḥīd, 2:54a.
74. Al-Udfuwi, al-Ṭāli’, p. 325.
76. Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, pp. 43–6.
77. Ibid., p. 48.
78. Not only did the French monarchy enforce the collection of debts owed to Jewish money lenders, but in the wake of the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306, the state itself took on the task of collecting (and keeping) the debts owed to the exiled Jewish lenders. After allowing the Jews to return to France in 1315, the state resumed its role as enforcer of debt collections. See ibid., pp. 48–51.
79. This is in addition to Ibn Nūḥ’s position that every single Christian and Jewish structure in all of Egypt was already illegal according to the Pact of ʿUmar. He argues counterfactually and anachronistically that because the Fatimids were zealous Maghrībis(!), they would have destroyed all the churches and synagogues in Egypt when they took power. So how, he asks, can anyone not see that all the churches and synagogues in his time were ‘new’ and therefore illegal according to the Pact? In his legal reasoning Ibn Nūḥ is very close to the position of Ibn Taymiya; see Gril, ‘Une émeute antichrétienne’, p. 242.
80. Ibid., p. 246.
81. Ibid., p. 249.
82. Ibid., p. 250.
83. Ibid., p. 250.
84. El-Leithy, ‘Sufis, Copts’, pp. 91–2; Gril, ‘Une émeute antichrétienne’, p. 244; Al-Ḥajjājī, Qūṣ, p. 67.

Introduction

One of the more puzzling historical questions of this study is why no organised order linked to an Upper-Egyptian tariqa developed during this period. Given the facts – that Sufism was well established there by the Mamluk period, that there were numerous Sufi masters who maintained ribats across the landscape, and that these masters enjoyed widespread fame and recognition – it is surprising that not a single initiatic lineage was institutionalised and organised around one of these masters. Some of the early circles in Qina would seem to have been ripe for such a development, but in each case the collectivity of Sufis around a particular master ceased to exist in the first or second generation after his death. We find instead that the master’s charismatic authority was itself institutionalised rather than any socially reproducible doctrine or praxis (i.e. a tariqa). In terms of Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, we might say that these Sufi masters became the objects of veneration and not emulation. Thus, instead of organised (informally or otherwise) collectivities linked to an eponymous tariqa, localised shrine cults emerged at the physical site of interment. The fact that a Sufi’s tomb would become the object of regular veneration and visitation was certainly not unusual or unique to Upper Egypt; this happened with most Sufi masters across Egypt during this period. But the specific form of Upper-Egyptian Sufism in this period seems to have completely displaced or foreclosed the possibility of other potential social formations. The answer to why this should be the case is inextricably linked to the way in which the Sufis of Upper Egypt produced...
and popularised Sufism in the Ṣaʿīd. This production was in turn rooted in how these Sufis understood and articulated their authority. In short, they conceptualised and legitimised their authority almost entirely in terms of a prophetically inherited access to the world of the unseen (al-ghayb), which access invested them with miraculous power.

In reading through the biographies of Upper-Egyptian Sufis in the seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries, one is immediately struck by the frequency, variety and audacity of the miracles (karāmāt) they are reported to have performed in comparison to other contemporary Sufis. Ābd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī travelled instantaneously from Egypt to Jerusalem in order to attend the funeral of one of the abdāl (the forty members of the saintly hierarchy). He then travelled back to Egypt to retrieve the badal’s replacement from a ship on the Nile – which he reached by walking on the water – bringing him back to Jerusalem that same day. During the period of his life in which he was ‘taken’ by God, Mufarrij al-Damāminī was repeatedly chained to a wall and locked in a room, only to appear shortly thereafter miraculously walking free outdoors. When Mufarrij was brought a plate of roasted birds for lunch, he reanimated them by throwing them in the air and they flew away. He reanimated his dead donkey while travelling to Qūṣ. He once prayed so fervently in front of the prayer niche that he completely disappeared into it. A man once witnessed Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s body grow to the size of a huge house (al-bayt al-ʿašīm), then shrink to the size of a chick (al-farkh), before returning to its normal size. As an apprentice working in his father’s dye business, Ibn al-Šabbāgh once put all the customers’ cloth into a single vat of dye. When he pulled them out each was dyed to the different and precise specifications of its owner. Ibn al-Šabbāgh was well known as an expert in guiding his disciples in the practice of seclusion (khalwa), and many had unbelievably miraculous experiences in those cells. Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī was able to walk on the waters of the Nile as though they were a road. He kept company and conversed regularly with jinn inside his home. He once cursed an amīr who had insulted him by predicting his outlandish death – that he would die dancing – a prediction that came true. Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mulaththam was said to be 600 years old, had the ability to be in two places at the same time, and his disciples had only to think of the shaykh in their minds and he would immediately appear in the flesh.
als who participated in the identification, arrest and imprisonment of Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣî all died mysterious and suspicious deaths as a direct result of their involvement in his incarceration.13

The Sufis of Upper Egypt were known above all else for their miraculous abilities. If we turn to a specifically Upper-Egyptian text like Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣî’s al-Wahīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd, we find that any biographical material therein consists almost exclusively of lists of miracles. For example, the notice for his own teacher, al-Mulaththam, reveals almost no biographical detail at all. Instead, Ibn Nūḥ records a long series of anecdotes detailing al-Mulaththam’s many miracles.14 The same holds true for the other Sufis whom Ibn Nuḥ treats. These anecdotes serve a double rhetorical purpose for Ibn Nūḥ’s larger project in al-Wahīd. On one hand, he deploys these miracle stories to legitimate each Sufi’s authority to act and intervene in various social and political settings. On the other hand, Ibn Nūḥ writes repeatedly that one of the reasons he is composing al-Wahīd is to offer proof that it was not only the saints of bygone ages who could perform miracles.15 The awliyāʾ allāh are alive and well in Upper Egypt, Ibn Nūḥ argues, and they perform miracles all the time. But this focus on miraculous authority is not limited to Ibn Nūḥ’s treatise. The trope of the miracle-working Sufi of the Ǧaʿīd can be found through almost all the historical and biographical literature from the seventh/thirteenth century on. Al-Udfuwī is an instructive case in point. As a good biographer he records all the information known to him about these Sufis, including the often unbelievable miracles they performed. But he seems to have been so dismayed at the sheer number and audacity of some of these miracles that on two separate occasions he interrupts his narrative to justify what he is recording.

In the first instance, al-Udfuwī reports the claim that al-Mulaththam could be in two places at once. He then pauses to interject that after a conversation on the subject with Karīm al-Dīn al-Āmulī (the Chief Sufi in Cairo), the jurist Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-ʿId ruled that claims like this are ‘crazy’ (majnūn). Al-Udfuwī writes, ‘Among the Sufis there is a group who affirm that which normal intellects reject and believe in things that normal customs (ʿādāt) deny. For me, belief in such things is innovation and error, leading to gross ignorance (farṣ al-jāhāla).’ Nevertheless, he does acknowledge that some miracles are possible ‘for those whom God has selected with his
providence (‘ināya’), but that the veracity of these miracles must be verified by witnesses.16 He classifies miracles into three types: those that have been verified; those that are patently absurd and are therefore false; and those about which judgment is reserved.17 As a good biographer, al-Udfuwī records what his informants relay to him. But he is careful to modulate these miraculous reports with a healthy dose of scepticism.

In another instance, al-Udfuwī interrupts his report of the miracles of Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī to comment again. He expands on his earlier comments and brings proof texts from the Qurʾān, hadīth and juridical discourse against these miraculous claims. In short, he argues that in the case of some miracles – while they may be theoretically possible and there is no strictly legal reason to deny their possibility – ‘established custom and legal rulings dictate that [these kinds of things] do not happen’. So, for instance, while there is no legal reason that an individual might not fly through the air, we all know from our own experience that this simply does not happen (except in the case of the Prophet Muḥammad’s night journey).18 Even a sympathetic Sufi like Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī l-Manṣūr baulked at the audacity of some of these stories. In his entry for Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī, he writes that al-Uqṣūrī was gifted with clairvoyance and on one occasion was able to tell ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī the precise location – down to the village and the house – of a missing slave girl. Ṣafī al-Dīn does not deny the miracle, but he qualifies the account by saying that this type of behaviour is the ‘lowest level of unveiling’. Al-Uqṣūrī performed it when he was young and immature in his Sufi development. Al-Qināʾī only allowed him to perform it as a kind of teaching moment. In other words, these kinds of miracles are possible, but they betray an undeveloped and unrefined progression along the Sufi path.19

Taken as a whole, especially in the context of Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt more broadly, the sheer volume of Upper-Egyptian Sufi miracle stories dwarfs those of other Sufi groups. One can see this schematically by consulting the long list of Egyptian Sufis in the Husn al-muḥādara of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). In the section devoted to Sufis and other pious individuals al-Suyūṭī records the names and short biographies of all those known to him from the conquest until his own time.20 He lists ninety-one individuals in total, of whom twenty are from Upper Egypt. Some 85 per cent of those Upper Egyptians were known explicitly for their miracles
(karāmāt), while only 10 per cent of non-Upper Egyptians had miraculous reputations. While not scientific by any means, al-Suyūtī’s list reveals that in late Mamluk Egypt, the Sufis of Upper Egypt still enjoyed a noticeably prominent reputation for their miraculous power. Together with the evidence from Ibn Nūḥ, al-Udfuwī and other biographers, it is quite clear, then, that the primary idiom through which the Sufis of Upper Egypt articulated their authority and legitimacy was the miraculous. But why should this be the case for Upper Egypt more than for other groups of contemporary Sufis? And how did these kinds of claims affect the subsequent social formation of Upper-Egyptian Sufism?

**Miraculous Authority**

These miraculous accounts are not altogether surprising. After all, miraculous claims and extraordinary tales are a stock feature of medieval Sufi texts. Hagiographies are full of them, medieval Sufi writers took great pains to articulate their function and purpose, and some individuals took equal pains to refute or restrict their validity. One of the first Muslim thinkers to deal systematically with the theoretical possibility of miracles outside the context of prophecy was al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. circa 300/910), who made a functional distinction between the āyāt of the prophets and the karāmāt of the saints. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) had made a similar distinction, although his treatment is not as systematic or innovative as al-Tirmidhī’s. While Bernd Radtke has argued that early Sufis like Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī relied (without attribution) on al-Tirmidhī for their treatment and theorisation of miracles, Denis Gril has shown that they were also deeply indebted to Ashʿarī theologians who systematised and popularised a similar theoretical distinction between prophetic muʿjizāt and saintly karāmāt. In fact, the first to use rational argumentation to defend non-prophetic miracles was probably Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013). For these Ashʿarī theologians, both muʿjizāt and karāmāt are types of miracles. They are, as ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) wrote, ‘the same thing in terms of being an abrogation of the norm (nāqiḍa li-l-ʿādāt).’ But they insist that the two types differ substantively in their cause and purpose. Prophets intentionally perform muʿjizāt to demonstrate the veracity of their prophetic claim. Saints are vouchsafed karāmāt as a product of their sanctity, which they are not
always aware of or must keep hidden. Sanctity is an epiphenomenon of, but not identical to, prophecy. The saints’ karāmāt are therefore related to and derive their power from, but are not identical to, the prophetic muʿjizāt. This Ashʿarī treatment of miracles was so dominant among the Sufis that even Ḥanafi Sufis like al-Hujwīrī embraced it almost wholesale. This is not to say, however, that all saints will or must evince miracles as a sign of their sanctity.

Both Denis Gril and Éric Geoffroy have noted the inherent paradox at the heart of Sufi hagiography. The discursive tradition insists on the ‘private’ or hidden nature of karāmāt. At the same time, the hagiographical impulse is to construct sainthood through detailed miraculous performance. Thus, many Sufi authors insist that while muʿjizāt are the sine qua non of the proofs of prophecy, a saint has no such requirement to ‘prove’ his or her sainthood with karāmāt. Indeed, early Sufis typically believed that in the event, saints ought to hide their miracles lest they become enamoured with their own power. This doctrinal position mitigated the need to bolster a saint’s reputation by the inclusion of miracles in any given hagiographical account. At the same time, other Sufi authors did not shy away from describing these miracles in great detail in order to prove the sanctity of a particular individual. Because sainthood is fundamentally a social construct, each discursive construction will reflect the specific time and place in which it originates. Erik Ohlander has written that hagiography is ‘a historiographical mechanism which in encoding memory in culturally relevant terms preserves the traces of actors who were of enough consequence at a particular moment in time and space to be remembered in the first place’. Thus, the forms, types or even necessity of miracles are not stable components of hagiography. There are a number of Sufi treatments of saints that include no mention of miracles at all; they are an attractive but non-essential component of the saintly vita. For example, none of the Sufis who stayed at the Saʿīd al-Suʿaddā were known for their miracles, even though they constituted a clear source of saintly baraka for the crowds who came to them. This non-miraculous form of power is surely connected to the fact that their primary claims of authority were articulated in the realm of scholarship and not as a function of their access to the unseen realms. Likewise, while Abū ʿl-Ḥasan al-Ṣḥādhili and Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās al-Mursī were both known for miracles, these were of a very specific type. As we will
see below, al-Iskandarī was quite careful to differentiate between epistemo-
logical and evidentiary miracles, and to insist that al-Šādhili’s and al-Mursi’s
miracles were primarily of the former kind.37 This position stands in stark
contrast to that of Ibn Nūḥ and the Sufis of Upper Egypt.

The project to articulate and legitimate Sufi authority through miracu-
loous performance is brought into sharp focus in the first portion of Ibn Nūḥ’s
treatise. Al-Waḥīd is loosely structured on the model of earlier Sufi treatises
that contained both hagiographic exempla and apophthegmata, as well as
systematic expositions of Sufi doctrine and praxis. In his Risāla, for example,
Abū 1-Qāsim al-Qushayrī begins with a brief introduction to Sufism, fol-
lowed by a biographical section devoted to the most famous Sufis of previous
generations, and ends with a description of the states and stations of the
Sufis. Ibn Nūḥ undertakes something similar in al-Waḥīd. He begins with
a systematic description of the states and stations, each of which is inter-
spersed and fleshed out with biographical information of Sufis who exhibit
that particular state or station.38 He eventually abandons that structure and
the organisation of the book becomes more diffuse and difficult to discern.
But what is particularly revealing about Ibn Nūḥ’s exposition is the way in
which he orders his discussion of the stations at the beginning. While Sufi
authors typically arrange the stations in different ways, almost every treatise
begins with tawba (repentance).39 Not surprisingly, then, Ibn Nūḥ begins his
enumeration of the path with a description of tawba. However, in between
tawba and waraʿ (pious caution), Ibn Nūḥ inserts a long section concerning
‘belief in the miracles of this group’ (al-īmān bi-kārāmāt hādhihī l-tāʾifa),
which he holds to be a critical component of a Sufi’s initial formation. Now,
since miracles are a byproduct of sanctity, which is cultivated by traversing
the Sufi path via the states and stations, Sufi authors typically discuss mira-
cles outside the framework of the states and stations. Ibn Nūḥ’s treatment
of miracles within his exposition of the first stations thus not only disrupts
the expected organisation of such works, but also makes belief in the Sufis’
miracles one of the elementary fundaments of the Sufi path.40

The primary thread Ibn Nūḥ weaves throughout this discussion is that
belief in miracles is critical because they are proof of a connection to the
realm of the unseen (al-ghayb). He writes, ‘As for belief in the miracles of this
group, it entails belief in the unseen; this [belief] is mandatory (wājib).’ He
then adduces a number of examples from the Qurʾān and hadīth literature in which belief in the unseen is lauded. Ibn Nūḥ includes all manner of ideas and practices under this rubric of knowledge from the unseen realm: the number of prostrations required for daily prayer, the number of times to circumambulate the Kaʿba, and the laws of inheritance. These are all linked to al-ghayb because their ultimate origin is the unseen decrees of God legislated by the prophet. Ibn Nūḥ thus subsumes the entirety of Islamic thought and praxis under the umbrella of al-ghayb since all aspects of Islam ultimately depend upon believing in this unseen realm of legislation. He then focuses and connects this broader argument to the Sufis by arguing that because the saint (al-walī) has a share of the prophetic inheritance (biṣṣātuhu min mīrāth rasūl allāh) he is able to tap directly into this realm. This power is not from the saints themselves but from God, mediated through the prophetic inheritance.41

Ibn Nūḥ pushes this saintly authority even further. He argues that because of their access to the unseen realm, the Sufis have more authority than traditional scholars and jurists (the ʿulamāʾ). Ibn Nūḥ cites the well-known hadīth that ‘the scholars are the heirs of the prophets’ (al-ʿulamāʾ warathat al-anbiyāʾ). He then argues that only ‘those who fear God’ merit the appellation of ʿulamāʾ, based on Qurʾān 35:28: ‘Those among [God’s] servants who fear God are the ʿulamāʾ.’ This notion he then contrasts with those who seek to get ahead of their peers, raise themselves up in learned assemblies, jostle for status and undeserved scraps, and fight for worldly positions, striving for high rank at learned assemblies and spreading rumours about those who speak the truth about some matter for fear they will get the better of them.42

This kind of behaviour, an obvious description of those employed in state-funded stipendiary positions, ‘erases fear [of God] and, indeed, true knowledge (al-ʿilm) is opposed to this’. The purpose of Ibn Nūḥ’s discussion in these pages is two-fold. First, the Sufi saint is one of those who inherit prophetic access to al-ghayb, the realm from which normative praxis is legislated. This access is the source of the saint’s authority and his ability to perform miracles. Second, Ibn Nūḥ explicitly argues that the ordinary class of ʿulamāʾ – those who make a living from their learning – have no share in this pro-
phetic inheritance because they do not fear God. It is the Sufis who fear God, which they cultivate through their practice of Sufism. In a few lines, then, Ibn Nūḥ manages to turn the traditional meaning of the *hadith* completely around and argues that the scholars are not, in fact, prophetic inheritors. It is the Sufis, whose practices inculcate a fear of God, granting them access to the prophetic inheritance, who are the true scholars. This is further evidence of the tension the Sufis of Upper Egypt felt towards the state and its professional religious employees.43

In the course of his discussion on miracles Ibn Nūḥ relates a number of truly marvellous stories. These include accounts of time travel, a speaking foetus, a man who could read the entire Qurʾān 7,000 times in a day, and many more. He argues that all this is possible because of the power of God made manifest in the saint through the prophetic inheritance. He observes, ‘God is able to do [these things], and nothing prevents him from doing [them]. It is required to believe in this, and one who does not believe in this is an unbeliever (*kāfir*).’44 Ultimately, then, by mandating belief in the *karāmāt* of the saints and coupling it to this notion of *al-ghayb* as the source of normative praxis, Ibn Nūḥ places belief in miracles on the same epistemological level as belief in the five daily prayers and other normative practices. He thereby crafts a brilliant vision of Sufi authority in which the performance of miracles is proof that those Sufis promoting a normative praxis in Upper Egypt have the prophetic authority to do so. He has legitimised the outreach and activism of the Sufis of Upper Egypt by linking their normative vision to the divine source of prophetic legislation.

The importance of Ibn Nūḥ’s position on miracles can be highlighted further by comparing it to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī’s discussion of the same topic. Al-Iskandarī and Ibn Nūḥ were exact contemporaries, although living in very different contexts, and the comparison is illuminating. Al-Iskandarī devotes a short excursus (*faṣl*) at the beginning of *Laṭāʾif al-minan* to the topic of miracles.45 For al-Iskandarī, miracles are of two types. The first type includes things like walking on water, flying in the air and clairvoyance; these are ‘external, sensory miracles’ (*karāmāt zāhira hissiya*), by which he means they are clearly observable by others.46 The second class of miracles, and those that are more highly prized (*afdal wa-ajall*) by the Sufis (according to al-Iskandarī), are ‘epistemological miracles’ (*karāmāt maʾnawiya*). These
include knowledge of God, quick obedience to divine commands and constant vigilance over the self.\(^{47}\) Already, it should be clear that al-Iskandari’s schema is indebted to Ibn al-\(^{c}\)Arabī and that he valorises a completely different conception of miracles from that of Ibn Nūḥ.\(^{48}\) Ibn Nūḥ insists that the primary way in which Sufis demonstrate their prophetic inheritance is through the clearly visible performance of miraculous authority. For Ibn Nūḥ, then, what al-Iskandari would call sensory miracles are the *sine qua non* of the saintly life. By contrast, al-Iskandari, while not denying the possibility or existence of such miracles, inverts their importance. Yes, he says, one may walk on water or be in two places at once, but how much greater is it to be able to know God intimately and obey him instantly?

Furthermore, Ibn Nūḥ insists that miracles are not necessarily in the control of the saint. He once asked Abū l-\(^{c}\)Abbās al-Mulaththam what purpose his remarkable miracles served. In response, al-Mulaththam ‘fell on his back, laughing, and said: By my life and your life, young man, it is not my choice at all!’\(^{49}\) That is to say that al-Mulaththam had no control over his charismatic gifts. Compare this with Ibn \(^{c}\)Āṭā’ Allāh, who ends his discussion of miracles with the observation that ‘sometimes miracles appear for the sake of the saint himself, and sometimes for the sake of another’.\(^{50}\) Miracles for the sake of the saint are meant to demonstrate the power (*qudra*) of God in an individual’s life, while miracles for the sake of others demonstrate that a particular saint’s spiritual methods are sound (*sihbat tariq al-wali*). In both cases, miracles are instrumental; they are a means to an end. For Ibn Nūḥ, however, miracles are not instrumental. They are an unintentional byproduct of the fact that a particular individual has access to the unseen realm. Al-Iskandari is very clear that a saint may or may not evince a miracle: ‘The Sufis (*al-tā’ifā*) are in agreement about the fact that a saint can be a saint without rending the state of established custom [a euphemism for miracles].’\(^{51}\) But Ibn Nūḥ is adamant that miracles are fundamental proofs of sanctity. After recounting how Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī reanimated a dead donkey, for example, he writes that ‘all of this is legitimate, because it manifests God’s miraculous gift to the saints (*ikrām allāh li-awliyāʾ ihi*)’.\(^{52}\)

Finally, it is worth noting that both authors highlight the relationship between *karāmāt* and the unseen. Al-Iskandari argues that some miracles entail ‘access to the unseen’ (*iṭṭilā’\(^{c}\) alā ghayb min al-ghuyūb*), which is similar
to Ibn Nūḥ’s definition. Both authors are clearly drawing on similar traditions and on the same stock of institutionalised vocabulary and doctrine. But each author circumscribes his discussion in very distinct ways and for very different ends. Ibn Nūḥ uses the rhetoric of miracles and the unseen as a way of legitimising the Upper-Egyptian Sufis’ claim to represent a normative praxis. Al-Iskandarī instrumentalises miracles; they are only one of several tools used by Sufis to bring individuals closer to God. The claim of miraculous access to the unseen world is by no means unique to the Sufis of the Ṣaʿīd. What is unique is the way in which the Sufis of Upper Egypt foregrounded this claim so prominently in the articulation of their own authority.

Again, Ibn Nūḥ’s exposition of miracles is best understood within the context of these Sufis’ criticisms of the state. In light of the state’s inability to regulate Upper Egypt properly, the Sufis of Upper Egypt promoted and enforced a normative praxis in the region. But it was their reputation for miraculous power, developed through the performance and production of Sufism, that legitimised their activism. Ibn Nūḥ did not invent this discourse. His theoretical work in al-Waḥīd reflects the fact that for Upper-Egyptian Sufis the miraculous was the primary way in which they demonstrated their authority to intervene in the absence of the state. A similar situation developed in medieval Maghribī Sufism. In the absence of strong state control in the southern Maghrib, the Māgirīya Sufis and their pilgrimage society known as the Ḥujjājīya ‘had become so fully integrated into the social life of rural southern Morocco that the Āsāfī ribāṭ became the defacto capital of this region’. While the Almohad rulers saw these Sufis as rivals, they were unable to prevent their influence. Again, this is not to say that the sanctity of the Sufis in general was in open or direct conflict with the authority of the state. The ideal relationship was actually one of reciprocity or complementarity. To cite one example from Alexandria, Ṣafī al-Dīn records an anecdote in which his own teacher Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Ḥarrār (d. 616/1219) saw the governor of Fustat pass by his mosque and heard a voice say to him, ‘That one is like you in the exoteric world, and you are like him in the esoteric world.’ Gril argues that this is indicative of the widespread Sufi notion that the temporal power of the state was ultimately dependent on the spiritual power of the Sufis. They are not in conflict. This is also clear in the statement al-Iskandarī includes in Laṭāʿif al-minan, quoted above: ‘Were it not
for the prophets, you would not have been rightly guided. Were it not for the scholars, you would have no one to emulate. Were it not for kings, you would not be safe.\textsuperscript{57} However, in Upper Egypt, where temporal power often broke down or was non-existent, the Sufis articulated and practised a clear alternative, which was legitimised through miraculous performance.

This emphasis on miracles brings up a larger point about the Sufis of Upper Egypt. To many observers they would not appear to be persons of power. They lived in a primarily rural milieu, far removed from the agents of the state, and there was little to no opportunity for them to make a living with their learning, as was the case with the other Sufis in this study. Their options for legitimation were thus quite limited. On one hand, they could claim access to chains of Sufi authority through a traditional silsila. Most of them did this by affiliating with Maghribī Sufis immigrating to Upper Egypt. On the other hand, they were able to bolster these claims by pointing to the charismatic, wonder-working personalities of their local Sufi masters. While other Sufis in other regions may have been unconcerned if a particular saint evinced no miracles, such a view was unthinkable in Upper Egypt, where the Sufis’ most visible stock in trade was performing amazing feats. In other words, miracles were the very means by which Upper-Egyptian Sufis articulated their unique identity in the context of numerous competing claims for power and authority. Vincent Cornell has written of the formative period of Moroccan Sufism that in urban contexts ‘it was more important for a saint to be a person of knowledge than a person of power’.\textsuperscript{58} However, in rural areas this valence was reversed, and the ‘great shaykhs’ of rural Moroccan Sufism were overwhelmingly known for their evidentiary miracles. We see something very similar in Egypt. In the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria, the Sufis’ primary mode of legitimation was by means of their learning and knowledge. In Laṭāʾif al-minan the miracles of al-Šādhilī and al-Mursī are overwhelmingly epistemological. In the context of Upper Egypt it was more important for a saint to be a person of power than a person of knowledge. Saints do not exist in a social vacuum and it was the collective manipulation and negotiation of miraculous reputations that produced these Sufi cultures across medieval Upper Egypt. Not surprisingly, then, the production and popularisation of Sufism in the Šā`īd proceeded quite differently from other regions in Egypt.
The Popularisation of Sufism in Upper Egypt

The Sufis of Upper Egypt drew on and utilised the same institutionalised doctrines, vocabularies and practices that the other Sufis of medieval Egypt inherited. These institutions included, among many others, the master–disciple relationship (ṣubḥa), the ritual chanting of the names of God (dhikr), musical sessions (samāʿ), seclusion (khalwa), the use of localised centres (ribāṭ) in which they conducted these sessions, and the language of the Sufi path (ṭariq) as comprised of states and stations. Some of these Sufis, in contrast with the early Shādhilīya, may also have transmitted the khirqa, although it is difficult to assess to what extent this practice was common in Upper Egypt at the time. Ibn Nūḥ mentions the khirqa several times in al-Waḥīd, but almost always as a stock feature of Sufi stories, that is as a simple marker of Sufi identity and not initiatic lineage. The one exception is when he notes that Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī wore the khirqa of al-Suhrawardī, a fact confirmed by al-Qaṣṭallānī himself. Șafī al-Dīn notes that Muḥammad al-Shāṭibī (d. circa 640/1240) inherited the khirqa from Ibn al-Šabbāgh but adds that ‘no other Sufi wore [the khirqa] from him’. Likewise, al-Qaṣṭallānī mentions a number of Upper-Egyptian Sufis initiated by Ibn al-Šabbāgh, linking them to Abū Madyan, it seems, but they did not take the khirqa from him either. Again it was not initiatory lineage, but the performance of miracles that the Sufis of Upper Egypt used to articulate their legitimacy. This emphasis would have profound consequences for the subsequent development and social formation of Upper-Egyptian Sufism.

ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qīnāʾī, Ibn al-Šabbāgh, Mufarrij al-Damāmīnī, Abū l-Ḥajjāj al-Uqṣūrī and Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī were all popular, charismatic leaders with large numbers of followers. Why were their identities never eponymously institutionalised within a reproducible social formation? This state of affairs is particularly surprising for the case of al-Qīnāʾī. According to al-Udfuwī, his contemporaries already recognised al-Qīnāʾī as the qūṭb. He was also well known for his training regimen (tarbiyat al-murīdīn), which implies he had a distinctive method. This method seems to have emphasised khalwa, and al-Qīnāʾī was celebrated for his skill in guiding his disciples through that rigorous practice. Al-Udfuwī writes that ‘the lights of the hearts [of Upper Egyptians] shone brightly when they entered his khalwa [cells]’.
Al-Qināʾī’s student Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was likewise extraordinarily well known as an accomplished guide in khalwa, even outside Upper Egypt. We would expect, then, that a lineage stemming from al-Qināʾī and extending through Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh would have developed. In a tantalising reference al-Udfuwī writes that ‘the innermost secret (sirr) of the shaykh [al-Qināʾī] appeared in [Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh], who spoke of esoteric matters. [Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh] was full of [al-Qināʾī’s] knowledge and revealed the innermost secret that he had kept hidden.’ Further indication of a tradition of succession in this case is evidence of a social conflict over that succession. After the death of al-Qināʾī, it seems that there were some who attempted to cause a rift (waḥsha) between Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and al-Qināʾī’s son Ḥasan (d. 655/1257). This may have been an attempt to promote Ḥasan’s succession to his father’s position. Ḥasan responded to those who doubted Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s authority with a couple of lines of poetry in which he portrays Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh as a source of blessedness and the link between generations:

You purified yourself, so purify us with the excellence of your purity.

You are beatific, so beatify us with whiff of your benevolence.

We have inherited your great fealty from our ancestors.

So if we die, we will bequeath it to our progeny.

This kind of reputation maintenance and generational linkage is crucial in the development of an initiatic lineage.

There is even more evidence for the existence of a proto-lineage continuing to Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s disciple Abū Yāḥyā Ibn Shāfī. Ibn Nūḥ writes that Ibn Shāfī used to work in the marketplace in Qinā. It was there that a certain Ibn al-Daqqāq saw him and boldly proclaimed, ‘This young man will become a sultan and marry the daughter of the caliph.’ The prediction did indeed come true. Because Ibn Shāfī ‘was the companion of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, the khalīfa of Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī, and married Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s daughter’, he had married the daughter of a caliph. And since he had inherited Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s position of leadership, he was indeed the sultan. This kind of language betrays an obvious notion of authoritative succession linking al-Qināʾī to Ibn Shāfī. Furthermore, after the death of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, his disciples came to his son, Zayn al-Dīn, asking him to take his father’s place. This may be because Zayn al-Dīn was also al-Qināʾī’s grandson on his mother’s side.
But he refused and pledged devotion to Ibn Shāfi (bāya‘ahu) by entering khalwa under his direction.\footnote{Khalwa, again, seems to have been a critical component of a kind of embryonic ṭariqa linked to al-Qinā‘ī. But it was not to be. Ṣafī al-Dīn notes that Abū l-Qāsim al-Marāghī (d. 683/1284), who also studied with Ibn Shāfi, was Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s last living student: ‘The circle of Abū l-Hasan died out until nobody was left but [al-Marāghī].’ By the time of al-Suyūṭī in the late Mamluk period, Ibn Shāfi was no longer considered to be the representative of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and al-Qinā‘ī, but had simply become ‘the shaykh of his age.’\footnote{What happened? There were several factors that prevented a ṭariqa linked to an institutionalised eponymous identity from developing in Upper Egypt. First, and most fundamentally, none of the disciples of these masters wrote monographic hagiographies of the type that seem to have been so critical to the development of other orders. Without an authoritative discursive framework, one that could be mimetically institutionalised through repeated telling/performance, an institutionalised identity never developed around any of these figures or their methods. In Weberian terms, we might say that the discursive work of al-Iskandarī routinised the charismatic gifts and pedagogical methods of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī within the social body itself. This routinisation produced a textual community linked to those who could legitimately claim successive connection to al-Mursī and al-Shādhili. In the case of the Upper-Egyptian Sufis, however, this did not happen. The Upper-Egyptian Sufis had no such person to articulate their narrative. Ibn Nūh al-Qūṣī was the only Upper-Egyptian Sufi to produce a substantial literary product (that we know of) that might have articulated the collective vision of this group. However, rather than recording the saintly authority of a particular master or lineage, al-Wahīd directly mirrors the relational structure of the collectivity it describes: networks of overlapping entries detailing isolated vignettes illustrating the miraculous authority of each individual. If al-Iskandarī’s literary projects discursively mapped the identity of the nascent collectivity onto the literary figures of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, Ibn Nūh’s writing maps a complicated network of individual actors linked together by several overlapping initiatic paths. Without a clear discursive framework and axis of authority around which to develop, a textual community of Sufis linked to an eponymous authority never emerged in Upper Egypt.}
Second, this complicated relational structure itself resisted institutionalisation. With other institutionalised initiatic lineages, such as the Shādhiliya, Qâdiriyya, Rifâʿiyya and so on, the nascent collectivity revolved around a particular axis of authority – the eponymous master. While not hierarchically structured (yet), these nascent collectivities were often oriented around one or two powerful personalities. But in Upper Egypt the Sufi ‘network of networks’ was decentralised and de-emphasised any one master over another; they were all linked together by a variety of means and relations. Reading the biographies in al-Wâhid and al-Ṭâliʿ, it is clear that these Sufi networks were widely distributed and densely interconnected. While the eponymous masters of the nascent Shādhiliyya or Qâdiriyya were certainly embedded within several networks, they did not have to compete – so to speak – with other similarly constituted networks of authoritative masters, all of whom shared initiatic privileges. Thus I think it accurate to describe the Upper-Egyptian relational structure as simply not conducive to the processes of institutionalisation around a single eponymous figure or ṭariqa.

Finally, and this is perhaps the most important, the very nature of the Upper-Egyptian Sufis’ miraculous claims militated against any potential for the institutionalisation of a particular ṭariqa. This is because the master’s ṭariqa was primarily inscribed within and legitimised by the performance and recounting of miracles. While al-Shādhilī and other eponymous masters did perform miracles, the institutionalisation of their ṭariqa did not depend upon miraculous emulation. But in this case, in which the Sufis’ primary articulation of power and authority was in the idiom of the miraculous, it was simply impossible to produce mimetically the conditions of their own collective reproduction. How does one produce and reproduce the miraculous conditions of a particular Sufi master? Indeed, there is an inherent limit to the long-term social viability of miraculous authority. The more successfully the Sufis of Upper Egypt cultivated reputations for miraculous authority, the more difficult it became to reproduce that authority in a coherent social body. This decentralised form of authority has been a perennial issue in Upper Egypt, where uniquely Upper-Egyptian Sufi movements have been the norm. For example, both ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʾrānī and ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī describe a group of Sufis in late medieval Upper Egypt known collectively as the Muṭāwīʾa, whose devotions Khaled el-Rouayheb
describes as centring around ‘the charismatic miracle-working saint, visiting shrines and experiencing states of mystic ecstasy. The order also included some “holy fools”’.77 While there may be no direct link between this group of Muṭāwīʾa and the Sufis described here, they do seem to have been similar products of the unique environment of the Ṣaʿid. This perhaps explains why the embryonic tariqa beginning with al-Qināʾī fell apart by the time of Ibn Shāfiʿ. It became harder for each subsequent generation to continue to reproduce the miraculous authority of the previous master.

Nevertheless, the charisma of these Upper-Egyptian masters did not vanish at death. Rather, it was routinised at the physical location of their tombs. Instead of performatively embodying the tariqa of the Upper-Egyptian masters, thereby producing a collective identity, their disciples concentrated their devotional energies at the shrines, tombs and physical effects of their teachers. They collectively constructed and remembered these masters as symbolic objects of veneration and not emulation. We can see this in the reports that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s students flocked to his prayer rug after his death to obtain some of its baraka.78 When Ibn Nūḥ died in Fustat, ‘the clothes in which he died were sold for fifty dinars and the people of the zāwiya divided them up’.79 In general, each of the burial sites of the Upper-Egyptian Sufis became centres of baraka and objects of pilgrimage. This development is not in and of itself unique. The phenomenon of saint veneration is common throughout the Islamicate world, becoming increasingly popular after the sixth/twelfth century.80 The tomb of Abū l-ʿAbd al-Shādhili, located in the desert near ʿAydhāb, has been the object of continual veneration since his death in 1258. But the specific form that al-Shādhili’s authority and legacy took, as it was articulated by his students, opened up a space for the development of multiple devotional forms, including both an institutionalised tariqa and tomb veneration. By contrast, I would argue that the Upper-Egyptian Sufis’ miraculous claims, socially produced and collectively negotiated, were so powerfully sui generis that they could not but be institutionalised at the site of the saint’s body, foreclosing the development of eponymous initiatic lineages. This collective construction and negotiation of the deceased Sufis’ power and efficacy resulted in the production of localised cults of veneration at the saints’ tombs.

ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī’s ribāṭ in Qinā became so famous that it
became the primary reason visitors travelled to Qinā. Al-Udfuwī’s description of al-Qināʾī’s grave is particularly intriguing. He wrote that the site was always full of visitors from all over the world who had come to visit the grave such that ‘the people are congested’ (tazdaḥim al-nās) around the grave in an attempt to obtain some of the shaykh’s ‘support’ (rifd). He also wrote in detail of the popular devotion that was performed there regularly, which is worth quoting in full:

The people of [Qinā] are agreed about the experience of praying at his grave on Wednesday. A person walks barefoot, with head uncovered, at the time of the afternoon prayer and makes a prayer that I will mention shortly. They claim that whatever might afflict a person, saying this [prayer] will result in God releasing that person from it . . .

[To pray], one should perform two prostrations, read something from the Qurʾān and say, ‘O God, I beseech you by the grace of your prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, and by our father Adam and our mother Eve, and by all those prophets and messengers between them, and by your servant ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, to answer my need.’ Then [the person] should mention his need.82

Al-Udfuwī then mentions that large numbers of people have had their requests answered in miraculous fashion by performing this ritual. Ibn al-Šabbāgh was buried next to his master at the former’s ribāṭ in Qinā. His tomb, like his master’s, became famous for the fact that a supplicant’s prayers would be answered there.83 Both tombs were said to radiate a light brighter than the corona of the sun, and a voice could be heard coming from the ground, ‘God is the light of the heavens and the earth’ (Q 24:35).84 Likewise, the grave of al-Damāmīnī became an object of veneration and a site for the celebration of the saint’s mawlid.85 Finally, the cult around al-Uqṣūrī’s tomb in Luxor became so popular that it became synonymous with the city itself, being mentioned by everyone who passed through, including Ibn Baṭṭūta, from whom we gather that it was well known as a place of miracles.86 It has continued to be the site of a major mawlid up to the present time.87

By the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century, the Upper-Egyptian landscape was full of the tombs of saints that had become the objects of cultic worship and pilgrimage. While this was undoubtedly so for the Qarāfa cem-
tery in Cairo as well, in that case the tombs of the saints were not necessarily connected via geographical and initiatic lineages. All these saints’ tombs in Upper Egypt were connected both by their unique geography and by the fact that they all knew and studied with each other. This unique situation was not conducive to the institutionalisation of any one particular Sufi master or his ṭariqa. But the tireless outreach, teaching and miraculous claims of these Sufis did produce an utterly unique culture of Sufism in Upper Egypt on a wide scale. These ‘networks of networks’ – while not productive of organised social forms – were exceptionally well suited to spreading the reputations and ideas of the Sufis. In this respect Ibn Nūḥ’s treatise offers an embarrassment of riches concerning the ways in which these Sufis travelled from town to town. Most of his stories take place in the context of travelling between villages, visiting a shaykh in his home or ribāṭ, sailing the Nile, or at large communal meals. It is quite clear that these Sufis produced and popularised their Sufism on a mass scale during these travels and in the context of their Sunni activism. Indeed, it is unimaginable that they could have cultivated and maintained their reputations for miraculous sanctity without the participation of the people who sought them out. In a region that had suffered from political exploitation, lack of organised learning and skirmishing between Ayyubids and the ʿurbān, followed by skirmishing between Mamluks and the ʿurbān, the Sufis of Upper Egypt offered something completely new and extraordinarily compelling. They articulated, implemented and enforced a normative praxis rooted in the prophetic sunna. They legitimised that normative claim through the rhetorical and performative use of miracles that quite literally connected them to the realm of the unseen from which the original prophetic legislation emerged. It was through these performances, through the collective and systematic manipulation of sanctity at multiple sites across the region, that these Sufis produced and popularised Sufism in the towns and villages of Upper Egypt on a mass scale.

Notes

2. Gril, La Risāla, p. 61.
15. The first of several such references is ibid. 1:9a.
17. Ibid., pp. 133–4.
18. Ibid., pp. 650–3. For a wide-ranging look at the ways in which Muslims have taken up the prophet’s night journey, see the essays in Gruber and Colby, *The Prophet’s Ascension*.
19. Gril, *La Risāla*, p. 60. This echoes al-Suhrawardī’s notion ‘that being favoured with saintly marvels is actually a sign of spiritual immaturity’. See Ohlander, ‘Karāma’.
21. I calculated this figure by noting for each entry whether or not al-Suyūṭī explicitly attributed karāmāt to the individual in question: wa-karāmātubu kathira, or wa-lahu karāmāt, or ṣāḥib al-karāmāt, etc.
22. The standard text on this subject is still Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes*, in which he collected, catalogued, organised by type and translated a remarkable number of these stories.
23. Ibn al-Jawzī, for example, devoted the eleventh chapter of *Talbis Iblīs*, pp. 509–20, to a discussion of ‘Satan’s deception of those who are edified by what appear to be miracles’. Likewise, Ibn Taymiya did not deny the existence of karāmāt, but was careful to delineate between legitimate miracles and what he calls ‘satanic states’. See his remarkable list of diabolical miracles in *al-Furqān*, pp. 236–40. See also the very useful surveys on this topic in Amanullah, ‘Debate’ and Brown, ‘Faithful Dissenters’.
29. See the general overviews in Gardet, ‘Karāma’; Ohlander, ‘Karāma’; and Wensinck, ‘Muʿṣījīza’.
33. Al-Qushayrī, for example, writes that ‘not every miracle (*karāma*) of a saint (*wali*) must be exactly the same as those of other saints. Indeed, even if there is no miracle attesting to a saint in this world, the absence [of such a miracle] does not detract from his being a saint. This contrasts with the prophets, for whom it is required (*yajib*) for them to perform miracles (*muʾjizāt*) (*al-Risāla*, p. 520).
34. These discussions are, again, indebted to Ashʿarī theologians such as al-Baghdādī, who writes that ‘one who performs a *muʾjiza* does not hide his miracle, but rather shows it and challenges his enemies with it . . . One who performs a *karāma* works to hide it and does not claim it’ (*Uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 174). Not surprisingly, then, al-Qushayrī, in *al-Risāla*, p. 519, quotes his own teacher Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), one of the early Ashʿarī systematisers, that the prophets are commanded to reveal their miracles, while the saints are obliged to hide them.
36. Al-Sulamī, for example, did not use miracles as constitutive of or proof for sanc-

37. On this distinction between epistemological and evidentiary miracles, see Cornell, Realm of the Saint, pp. 115–16.

38. Thus, he treats repentance (1:3b–5b), miracles (5b–8a), caution (8a–9a, 14a–15b), gnosis (10a–13a), renunciation (15b–17a), reliance (17a–22b) and so on.

39. For example, al-Sarrāj, Kitāb al-lumaʾ begins with al-tawba (pp. 41–2), as do al-Kalābādhī, al-Taʾarruf (pp. 64–5); al-Qushayrī, al-Risāla (pp. 179–88); and al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif (p. 428). Even an odd Ḥanbali-Sufi text like al-Īsfahānī’s Kitāb nahj al-ḥaḍāṣ begins with al-tawba (p. 48). An interesting exception to the trend is al-Anṣārī, who places al-yaqūn (awareness) before al-tawba in his list of ‘preliminary matters’ (al-bidāyāt) (Manāzil al-sāʾirīn, pp. 11–15). On the primacy of al-tawba in the Sufi maqāmāt, see Böwering, ‘Early Sufism’, pp. 45–53.

40. But this is not to say that Ibn Nūḥ was not critical about miraculous claims. He was careful to differentiate between legitimate saintly miracles and the powers of the jinn or other non-saintly forces. See Gril, ‘Le Soufisme en Égypte’, pp. 70–1.


42. Ibid., 1:6b.

43. Again, this is a strategy common with and likely indebted to the Maghribi traditions of Sufism. See Cornell, ‘Faqīh versus Faqīr’.

44. Al-Qūṣī, al-Wabhīd, 1:7b.

45. Al-Īskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, pp. 75–84.

46. Ibid, p. 76.

47. Ibid, p. 76.


49. Al-Qūṣī, al-Wabhīd, 1:59b.


51. Ibid, p. 76.

52. Al-Qūṣī, al-Wabhīd, 1:110b.

53. Al-Īskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, p. 78.


55. Gril, La Risāla, p. 12 (French section).

56. Ibid., pp. 12–13. See also Geoffroy, Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie, pp. 135–43.

57. Al-Īskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, p. 100.

63. Despite several authors describing a ‘madrasa qināʾīya’ (a Qināʾī school) existing in Upper Egypt, there is no evidence of any coherent collectivity after his death. The appellation is a projection of contemporary expectations onto this early period. See, for example, ʿAzzām, *Aqṭāb al-taṣawwuf*, pp. 87–106; Qāsim, *al-Madhāhib al-ṣāfiyya*, pp. 172–4.
64. Al-Udfuwī, *al-Ṭālīʾ*, p. 298.
66. This is, incidentally, one of the reasons I believe the attribution of *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* to al-Iskandarī to be erroneous. In addition to citing al-Qināʾī by name, the text reflects an Upper-Egyptian milieu and praxis much more than a Shādhīlī one.
68. For example, in his list of the students of Ibn al-Šabbāgh, Ṣaḥī al-Dīn includes a large number of reports about Ibn al-Šabbāgh’s skills in guiding disciples in *khalwa* (Gril, *La Risāla*, p. 44–57).
70. Ibid. p. 204.
75. This aspect of *al-Waḥīd* deserves more consideration. Unlike other Sufi biographical dictionaries or works of hagiography, Ibn Nūḥ does not seem to have employed any organisational rubric for generating biographical entries. Rather, it seems to be a product of his own stream of consciousness. While the first two biographies are of his own teachers, I have been unable to determine any rhyme or reason to the order of the entries after that point. Each entry is not even particularly self-contained. Bits of information can be gleaned about individuals from all over the work and some mini-entries of lesser-known Sufis are embedded within larger entries about well-known saints. I have been able only
to determine that entries about disciples are generally found near those of their teachers.

76. It is interesting to note here that while none of these masters ever became the eponym of an organised tāʿifā, a unique regional identity of Upper-Egyptian Sufism exists even today. See Sedgwick, ‘Upper Egypt’s Regional Identity’, who argues that this identity is closely linked to various Sufi orders. However, these orders, such as the Idrīsī-Shādhilī, developed much later than the period I consider here.


78. Grīl, La Risāla, p. 50.


80. Karamustafa, Sufism, pp. 143–51. The practice of visiting the graves of exceptional humans for the purpose of personal edification or the gleaning of merit obviously predates the appearance of Islam and seems to have been an issue of contention from very early on. Al-Ḥāsān al-Ǧaṣrī (d. 110/728) supposedly wrote about concerns he had regarding improper conduct during such visitations. Ḥanbalī theologians such as Ibn ʿAqīl and Ibn Taymiya were especially vocal in their opposition to the practice of visiting tombs (ziyārat al-qubūr), which they saw as nothing more than pagan practice. In the wake of such controversies, pro-ziyāra literature arose both to defend the practice and to offer practical guides for those who wished to undertake such visits. Early examples include al-Ḥarawī (d. 611/1215), Kitāb al-irshārāt, a guide to the graves of the Arabian Peninsula, and Ibn ʿUthmān (d. 615/1218), Murshid al-ziwwār, a guide for the graves of Egypt. After the seventh/thirteenth century the genre became very popular and there are dozens of medieval guides to the tombs of the saints. See Goldziher, ‘Veneration of Saints’; Meri, The Cult of Saints; Meri, ‘Ziyāra’; Taylor, In the Vicinity.


82. Al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭālīʾ, pp. 300–1. Al-Ḥajjājī, Shakhṣiyāt šuṭfiya, p. 44, notes that the tradition of visiting the grave on Wednesday continued for quite some time during the Middle Ages. It is no longer practised at the still extant shrine of al-Qināʾī, which was rebuilt and re-endowed by the Ottomans in 1757.

83. Al-Nabhānī, Jāmiʿ karāmāt, 2:324.

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding pages I hope to have offered an alternative, however modest, to what I call the reactionary paradigm concerning the growing popularity of Sufism in medieval Egypt. According to this paradigm, the widespread popularity of Sufism after the sixth/twelfth century occurred as a reaction to the socio-political upheavals of the time and/or because of the inadequacy of certain forms of Islam to meet the religious needs of the populace. The latter explanation relies on anachronistic assumptions about religion and is simply untenable. If the former events played any role in the spread and popularisation of Sufism, they were not the cause per se, but rather they facilitated the spread and diffusion of several different populations into Egypt: Persian-speaking Sufis seeking a better living, Maghribi Sufis escaping the instability of the Almoravid–Almohad struggle for power, Andalusians fleeing the Reconquista, and the movement of Iraqi Sufis after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad. In none of these cases is there evidence that the disruptions drove the population to Sufism. Rather, we might say somewhat anthropomorphically that these events conspired to produce a situation in which Sufis from East and West came to Egypt in large numbers and at roughly the same time. In addition, the Ayyubid and Mamluk states were able to provide a measure of stability and security that allowed multiple groups of Sufis not only to exist but to flourish within their territory. In this perfect storm of socio-political conditions, the prior institutionalisation of Sufism enabled and facilitated the mass production and organisation of multiple cultures of Sufism. It was through the creative and regular performance of these institutions that Sufis continually reproduced the means of cultural production on a wide scale.
across the Egyptian landscape. To put this another way, it was the Sufis who brought Sufism to the populace, and not the populace who sought it out. It was in individual quotidian social interactions, within what Anthony Giddens calls ‘the flow of day-to-day conduct’, that the Sufis themselves popularised Sufism in Egypt.

On a regular basis the populace engaged with the increasing numbers of individuals in Egypt claiming some kind of saintly authority. Of course, such claims were not in and of themselves enough to qualify one as a saint. As Vincent Cornell has shown, the determination of sanctity is an inherently social process involving multiple negotiations of claims and the often post facto construction of reputations. In the course of these negotiations in Egypt, certain cultural forms of Sufism were performed, produced and popularised over and over again on a large scale. There is thus a social dialectic at the heart of my argument here about popularisation. Individuals claiming authority by means of the discursive and practical traditions of Sufism were met and checked by others who rejected, modified or accepted those claims. Once verified, authoritative claims became powerful and meaningful for new audiences, and so on. It was thus the social negotiation of multiple kinds of claims made by different Sufis that produced Sufi cultures on such a large scale. Furthermore, it was the ways these claims of legitimacy interfaced with those of the state that, in addition to the other factors mentioned here, constrained and enabled certain forms of Sufi agency, cultural production and social formation.

There are several benefits to this account. First, it treats Sufism as an integral component of the discursive and practical traditions of Islam and not as a separate or alternative phenomenon to the ‘orthodoxy’ of juridical discourse. Second, it thereby allows us to describe more accurately the truly popular phenomenon of Sufism in which multiple socio-economic strata participated in the negotiation and production of cultures of Sufism on a wide scale. Third, my emphasis on the performance of recursively constituted Sufi institutions links what Ahmet Karamustafa calls ‘the construction of Sufism as a tradition’ to later social formations in a coherent way. That is to say that it allows us to trace in more precise detail how the institutionalisation of Sufism and its construction as a tradition in the formative period enabled and constrained subsequent social activity. This study also highlights
the sheer variety of activity that Sufis authorised through recourse to the classical discursive tradition. And fourth, by highlighting this creativity I hope to have offered a rebuttal to those who see the roots of stagnation and ‘decline’ of Sufism in this period. More broadly, I hope that my work here will offer historians and scholars of Sufism one possible framework in which to think about popularisation for other cases and in other times and places.

To take but one example, Karamustafa has described the ‘new renunciation’ of Sufi groups such as the Qalandariya as the collective rejection of society in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. As he quite skilfully shows, however, the rejection of society is rhetorically most effective when it is performed from within society itself. Thus it is not surprising to find Qalandarīs performing their renunciation in major urban centres such as Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta in the early Mamluk period. Where I would offer a potential modification to Karamustafa’s argument is in his conceptualisation of the relationship of the new renunciation to the increasing popularity of Sufism at precisely this time. Karamustafa characterises these renunciant groups as the offspring of ṭariqa-based Sufism. That is, they were a reaction to the increasing institutionalisation of Sufi thought and praxis in the seventh and eighth centuries AH. But if we mark the institutionalisation of Sufism in a much earlier period, my work here suggests that rather than constituting a parent–offspring relationship, ṭariqa and Qalandari Sufism are actually siblings, born of the institutionalisation of Sufism that occurred much earlier. The new renunciants seem to me to have articulated and performed their particular vision of Sufism by drawing on – and rejecting – much of the same stock of institutionalised vocabulary and praxis and at precisely the same time as those of the nascent Shādhiliya, Rifāʿiyya, Qādiriyya and the like. This redescription bolsters Karamustafa’s broader objective in God’s Unruly Friends to dissolve overly reified divisions between high (elite Sufis) and low (Qalandari) cultures as well as to write a more inclusive history of Sufism. Such a history will include other marginalised groups within the paradigms of Sufi cultural production.

In this vein, the so-called Jewish Sufis can and should be integrated into the history of Egyptian Sufism more substantively. While I had planned to include this group in the present study, space did not permit it. Nevertheless,
I think it worth saying something about how I conceptualise the Jewish Sufis in terms of this study. This group did not actually call themselves ‘Jewish Sufis’, but rather *hasidim* (Hebrew, ‘pietists’) and their specific method the *derekh ha-hasidut* (the way of piety). The Egyptian Pietists quoted from Sufi manuals, transposed Sufi texts into Judeo-Arabic (that is, Arabic written in Hebrew characters), compared themselves to Sufis, and practised Sufi-inspired devotions, all of which were anchored by the institution of the master–disciple relationship. These were not Jews merely interested in a few Sufi ideas and texts for vaguely syncretic reasons. The Pietists deliberately adopted and adapted Sufism for quite specific political and eschatological goals. Furthermore, it was the increasing production and visibility of Sufi cultures at precisely this time that led to the emergence of an organised Pietist movement. Situating the movement within the social processes involved in the popularisation of Sufism allows us to highlight the agency of the Pietists as social and political actors in their own right. In that vein, the organisational vision and goals of the Pietist movement provide us with another socio-political configuration of medieval Egyptian Sufism that I would call subaltern Sufism.

By labelling the movement ‘subaltern’ we can write a more integrated history of Jewish and Muslim engagement with Sufism. The Subaltern Studies Collective, drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, sought to shift the focus and methods of south Asian historiography from elites to subalterns, both as historical agents and as participants in national history. It is the original impulse of the collective – to write an agentival and inclusive national history, albeit transposed into a pre-modern, non-nationalist socio-political context – that interests me here. Examining the Pietists through such a theoretical lens pushes us to reconceptualise how some medieval Jews exercised political agency within a *dhimmi* context and to explore what ends they hoped to achieve by doing so. Writing the Pietists as subaltern is not simply descriptive of their social status, but like Homi Bhabha’s notion of cultural difference, it is a means of giving voice to their production of a unique culture of Sufism ‘as “knowledgeable”, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification’. It is from within this theoretical space of cultural difference – their unique contestation of the history and meaning of Sufism – that the truly subversive nature of the Pietist project emerges. This
contestation itself constitutes the instrument of their subaltern agency, which Bhabha describes elsewhere as the ‘relocation and reinscription’ of dominant signs, the ‘contestation of the given symbols of authority’. I am thus particularly interested in the ways in which the Pietists took up the institutions of Sufism as a means to disseminate and inculcate new communal structures that were a form of resistance to the conditions of exile and thus ultimately redemptive.

The redemptive form this resistance took was the cultivation (or mimicry, as Bhabha might have it) of a hybridised Sufi practice that would revivify prophecy in anticipation of the messianic age. This was an inherently political stance since most Jews expected that the messianic era, by definition, would return them to a state of political sovereignty. In other words, the Sufi-inflected organisation that Jewish Pietists like Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237) developed was ultimately an attempt to put an end to exile (golah) and usher in the messianic redemption (ge’ulah). In this sense we can read the Pietists’ practices and literary output as what James Scott calls a ‘hidden transcript’, a form of resistance that invisibly (to the dominant culture) seeks to subvert the political and social order. Scott contends that ‘every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant’. This hidden transcript is a ‘negation’ of the so-called ‘public transcript’ through which domination and subordination are performed. In the case of the Pietists, their hidden transcript lies in Bhabha’s space of ‘cultural difference’ and constitutes a politics that is neither openly defiant nor hegemonically compliant, but exists ‘in the vast territory between these two polar opposites’. The texts of the Pietist movement are extraordinarily well suited for such an analysis. They articulate political resistance in the idiom of the dominant culture (in this case Sufism) but in languages (Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew) and in spaces (the synagogue and study hall) that were inaccessible or invisible to most Muslims.

So while I have strived to offer a broad cross-section of Sufi cultural production in Ayyubid and early Mamluk Egypt, there is obviously much more to be done. While the study of Sufism in the Mamluk era is a vigorous enterprise, the Ayyubid period still demands more attention. There are still large numbers of unpublished manuscripts that ought to yield significant
data that will contribute to a more robust picture of the diversity of Sufism at this time. And there are many other Sufi collectivities I did not explore in any detail here. I have not dealt with the emergent collectivities of Qādirī and Rifāʿī Sufis in Egypt during this period. It was also during this time that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 622/1225) came to Egypt from the East, gaining a substantial following and leaving us a number of still unpublished texts. Likewise, the Damascene muwallah ʿAlī al-Kurdī (d. 622/1225) stayed in Qūṣ for a short time, where he apparently trained a large number of Sufis. There were also a number of Sufi women active in Egypt during this time, a subject that demands more attention. I could have written another section alone on those Sufis we might call political consultants, such as Khīḍr al-Mihrānī (d. 676/1277) or Naṣr al-Manbijī (d. 719/1319), Sufis whom the sultans often turned to for advice and blessing. In this connection there is still much to be done on the relationship between Sufis and the Ayyubid and Mamluk states more generally. One of the truly innovative pieces of scholarship in this regard is Ovamir Anjum’s study of Sufi hierarchies and governmentality. Anjum explores the potential role that Sufi social stratification may have played in producing governable subjects in post-Abbasid polities with little political legitimacy. While I think he overstates the weakness of post-Abbasid military patronage states in articulating and promoting their legitimacy, it is a thought-provoking essay that offers intriguing avenues for future research. It is quite clear that the social trend of Sufism in this period was towards increasing organisation, hierarchicalisation and even in some instances bureaucratisation. But how did these trends contribute to, aid, hinder or preclude particular forms of governance and governmentality within the Ayyubid and Mamluk realms? This is part of a larger set of questions that deserves careful attention in the study of pre-modern Sufism, namely, the extent to which overlapping and often competing claims of authority were mediated by the social structures and institutions of Sufism at the local level. The answers, as I hope to have shown to some small extent here, are not simple or straightforward. We must examine each Sufi collectivity within the very specific social, institutional and political contexts in which they articulated their specific vision of the Muslim community and their unique role therein.
Notes

1. For references see Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, p. 2.
4. Ibid, p. 94.
5. My dissertation did have a preliminary exploration of this issue. See Hofer, ‘Sufism, State and Society’, pp. 215–84. I am reworking that material into an article that expands on the issues I raise here.
7. One example of a syncretic ‘mystical’ interpretation of the movement is Block, ‘Abraham Maimonides’.
8. My thanks to Vincent Cornell for initially suggesting I think about subalternity as a possible theoretical lens for this material and to Peter Valdina for directing me to some valuable resources on the subject.
9. See Gramsci, ‘Notes on Italian History’, esp. pp. 52–5, where he outlines an agenda for the study of subaltern classes as agents of social change.
12. Scott, *Domination*, p. xii. Some critics of Scott’s work have wondered how, exactly, the historian is to gain access to hidden texts that are, by definition, invisible to the dominant modes of literary production. Reading Judeo-Arabic literature as texts of resistance is one possible response to this methodological problem.
13. Ibid., p. 108.
15. For the state of the art in Mamluk Sufi studies, see Homerin, ‘Sufism in Mamluk Studies’.

18. Anjum, ‘Mystical Authority’.


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