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The Debate Over Mystical Monism in the 17th Century: The "Unity of Existence" and Non-Muslims in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires

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The Debate over Mystical Monism in the 17th Century: the "Unity of Existence" and
Non-Muslims in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires


A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy

in

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by

Adam Tyson


March 2024


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I am indebted to Dr. Singh's seminars which opened up a window into Sikhism and the religious landscape of early modern South Asia which this dissertation draws heavily from. Also because of Dr. Singh, it has been my honor to help organize and be a part of the Jasbir Singh Saini Sikh Studies Conference three years in a row here at UCR and to gain experience and learn from the distinguished and brilliant community of scholars drawn to this conference each year. Dr. Singh's principled scholarship in the face of adversity is an example that I will continue to draw inspiration from.

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DEDICATION


To Richard Tyson and Dayle Mandelson,


Two educators and lifelong learners who taught me that "the more you know, the more you

know you don't know," and without whose support none of my academic achievements would

have been possible.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Debate over Mystical Monism in the 17th Century: the "Unity of Existence" and
Non-Muslims in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires

by

Adam Tyson

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Religious Studies
University of California, Riverside, March 2024
Dr. Muhamad Ali, Chairperson

This dissertation focuses on the Sufi philosophy known as the "Unity of Being"(*waḥdat al-wujūd*) in the early modern Ottoman and Mughal Empires. Following the death of its supposed founder, Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240 c.e.), this philosophy flourished and spread to all corners of the Islamicate world while gaining followers and critics alike. Especially in the 17th century, debates surrounding this system of thought can tell us much about Sufism as well as the history of empire, changing religious demographics, and contests over political and religious authority. Proponents and detractors of this philosophy have been quick to point out that the boundaries between religions become complicated by the universalizing claims of this worldview. Adherents to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* like Şeyh Bedreddin (d.1421 c.e.) led Muslims and Christians alike in a revolution, the Mughal prince Dārā Shikūh (d. 1659 c.e.) used this philosophy to justify his pluralistic religious project, and 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī (d.1731 c.e.) rigorously defended this ideology against a puritanical faction known as the Ḳāḍīzādelis while maintaining cordial relations with non-Muslims. This study not only looks at the anti-Sufi opponents of this philosophy but also examines Aḥmad Sirhindī 's (d. 1624 c.e.)

rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and challenges the primacy of his intervention in the Naqshbandi Sufi order. By exploring case studies where mystical monism was debated, it becomes apparent that anxieties over the demarcation between Islam and non-Muslim religions are at the crux of what makes this philosophy so controversial, and that its defenders attempt to navigate a course between the particulars of Islam and the universalizing worldview of mystical monism.

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# Introduction

The Sufi philosophy known as the "Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) was arguably

one of the farthest-reaching philosophical systems in the world by the close of the early modern

period.[1] From the death of its supposed founder, Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240 c.e.),[2] to the turbulent

polemics against this philosophy in the long 17th century, the history of this system of thought

can not only tell us about the history of Sufism, but it tells a history of empire, changing religious

demographics, and the struggle over the centralization versus decentralization of political and

religious authority. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* fits under the umbrella of what may be more generally

termed "mystical monism" in Islam.[3] Born out of the impulse to declare God's Oneness

(*tawḥīd*), proponents declare that "all that exists is God"(*la mawjūd ila Allah*) in Arabic and

"All is He"(*hama ūst*) in Persian. Although this is an Islamic philosophy, put into practice by

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[1] The concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* emerges from the commentarial tradition on the writings of the Spanish Muslim, Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1240 c.e.). Proponents of this system of thought could be found from Morocco to the Sultanate of Aceh in Island South East Asia in the 17th century. For an overview of this transmission to the Sultanate of Aceh see Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World Transmission and Responses*, (University of Hawaii Press: 2001) and the work of Oman Fathurahman including his "*Itḥāf al-dhakī* by Ibrahim al-Kurani: A Commentary of *waḥdat al-wujūd* for Jawi Audiences", *Archipel*, Vol 81, (January 2011).

[2] Ibn al-'Arabī never used the exact phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd* in his works, even the main propagator of his philosophy only gets close to using this phrase in the following passage—though it is pithily stated: "Know that God (al-ḥaqq) is pure Being (al-wujūd al-maḥḍ), wherein there is no difference, and that He is One according to a true unity (waḥda ḥaqīqīya) which is not to be conceived of in relation to the many; for neither the reality of this unity as it is in itself, nor the conception thereof [on the part of created beings] imply any opposite (or correlative)." Todd, Richard. *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunawi's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Brill: 2014), 49

[3] This is following the example of Khaled El-Rouayheb in using "mystical monism" in order to expand the conversation beyond just *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For the application of this term and an excellent survey of the early modern intellectual flowering it describes, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, (Oxford: OUP, 2015), especially ch 7. An added benefit of considering "mystical monism" instead of just "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" is that it expands the conversation beyond Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought and Arabic language Sufi philosophy to embrace parallel, Islamic monisms like the Persian-language ideological school of "All is He"(*hama ūst*) as well as the mystical epistemology of "verification" (*taḥqīq*).

self-proclaimed Muslims, both proponents and detractors of mystical monism throughout history have been quick to point out that the boundaries between religions become complicated by the universalizing vision of this worldview. The Ottoman and Mughal Empires proved to have some of the most fertile ground for the intellectual flowering of mystical monism in the early modern period, but these historical contexts also saw rebuttals to mystical monism, not in an ideological vacuum, but played out on the stage of two rapidly shifting empires with large non-Muslim populations. By exploring case studies where mystical monism was debated within these two empires, it becomes apparent that anxieties over a clear demarcation between Islam and non-Muslim religions are at the crux of what makes mystical monism so controversial, and that its proponents navigate between the particulars of Islam — that is, its scripture, law, and prophet — and the universalizing worldview of mystical monism.

This dissertation strives to produce a type of intellectual history that, as Richard Rorty puts it, can "relate the meaning of texts to the context in which they were elaborated and to their conditions of possibility."[4] Specifically, by looking at Ottoman and Mughal debates over mystical monism this study seeks to outline exactly how the "conditions of possibility" permitted this ideology to flourish as well as how those conditions changed over time. In each case study, the debate surrounding mystical monism is precisely a debate over where the boundary line lies between "faith"(*imān*) and "infidelity"(*kufr*), between the Muslim and the non-Muslim, and it amounts to no less than a debate over what exactly is or isn't "Islamic." Ever since Marshall

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[4] Richard Rorty describes three types of intellectual history: "First, *Geistesgeschichte*, defined as the history of strictly 'philosophical' questions and of the constitution of the canon of the 'philosophers' who formulated them; second, 'intellectual history,' understood as a history of the very preconditions of philosophical activity; third, historical reconstructions that relate the meaning of texts to the context in which they were elaborated and to their conditions of possibility" Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (The Johns Hopkins U Press: 1997), 6.

Hodgson's *Venture of Islam* introduced the term "Islamicate,"[5] a lively debate has taken place

in Islamic Studies over how to define the boundaries of Islam the religion and Islamic(ate)

culture, and how to understand cosmopolitan contexts with diverse populations under, within,

and next to Islamic rule in what is termed the "islamicate." Shahab Ahmed devotes no shortage

of pages to an animated attack on what he sees as Hodgson's reductive division between

"Islam" and the religious sphere and the "Islamicate" in the cultural sphere, all to stake a claim

for the "importance of being *Islamic*."


**Sufism and the "Islamic(ate)"**

As Shahab Ahmed's frequent recourse to Sufism in *What is Islam* indicates, Sufism

unsettles tidy definitions of what exactly is and isn't "Islamic." In fact, he uses the example of the

"Hafizian discourse" and Persian *rind* ("libertine") literature as an example that disproves what

he terms the "Islam-as-law" definition of the "Islamic;"[6] Hafiz Shirāzī (d. 1390), as his name

indicates, memorized the Qur'an and this is not in contradistinction to his poetry about love and

wine-drinking — even if its not purely as spiritual allegory[7] — but rather, both are part of

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[5] Hodgson's famous words justifying the shift away from "Islamic" towards something that "We will require a different term for the cultural traditions of the civilization at large, when we are not restricting our reference to religion. The various peoples among whom Islam has been predominant and which have shared in the cultural traditions distinctively associated with it may be called collectively (Islamdom, as forming a vast interrelated social nexus. The distinctive civilization of Islamdom, then, may be called 'Islamicate'" Vol 1, 95.

[6] See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam* 2015, 32, 38 and 166. Against Hodgson's preference for "Islamicate" over "Islamic" Ahmed writes: "it is crucial to (try to) conceptualize the literature of Muslims on its own terms of engagement, Hodgson's distinction between 'Islam=religion' and 'Islamicate=culture=secular' diverts and restrains us from the possibility of conceiving of Ḥafiẓian literature as symptomatic and constitutive of Islam, rather than as 'secular' or Islamicate 'wine song'" (167).

[7] For a useful analysis of the role of allegory in Sufi poetry, see Omaima Abu Bakr, "The Symbolic Function of Metaphor in Medieval Sufi Poetry: The Case of Shushtari," *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 12, Metaphor and Allegory in the Middle Ages, 40-57. Abu'l-Hasan al-Shushtarī's (d.1269 c.e.) poetry blossomed after he became a student of the controversial mystical monist, Ibn Sab'īn (d. 1271 c.e.). Abu Bakr suggests that wine should neither be read as pure allegory nor as purely literal, but rather: "The

Hafiz's worldview. Bruce Lawrence cites the example of Istanbul to illustrate what he calls a "Muslim Cosmopolitanism,"[8] and more recently, has published a manifesto on what he terms the "Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit."[9] The great scholar of Islamic intellectual history, Fazlur Rahman, wrote of a "religion not only within religion but above religion," and this seems to be what Shahab Ahmed has in mind when he discusses "the *Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam*"[10] in the "Balkans to Bengal complex."[11] This "amalgam" of religious particulars with the universality of philosophy is at the core of debates surrounding

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unitive, mediatory power of the wine symbol (suggesting the ultimate Unicity of Being) extends to another aspect in the poem: the persona — or rather the multi-personae of the poet. The second strophe establishes the poet as a wanton drunk (khalīʿ) pursuing jugs and cups, then as a worshiper/ascetic in meditative seclusion in the Azhar mosque, and finally as a "lover" who composes zajal (popular Arabic poem in strophic form). These three dimensions of the author's personality — material man of the world, Sufi, and poet — represent manifestations of a unity." (48). Shushtarī was, however, careful to describe his as a "spiritual wine"(48).

[8] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Muslim Cosmopolitanism," in The Bruce B. Lawrence Reader, ed. Ali Altaf Mian, (Duke UP: 2021). Ottomanist social historian and scholar of Istanbul, Fariba Zarinebaf, points out that the term "cosmopolite" was first used to describe "the *Republic of Turks* in 1529," Fariba Zarinebaf, *Mediterranean Encounters: Trade and Pluralism in Early Modern Galata*, (Oakland: UC Press, 2018), 271. See also Edhem Eldem, "(A Quest for) the Bourgeoisie of Istanbul: Identities, Roles, and Conflicts," in Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict, ed. Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi (London: Routledge, 2014. Zarinebaf is careful to point out that the pre-Tanzimat "pluralism" of Ottoman cosmopolitanism — even in a religiously diverse area like Galata — did not mean "legal equality" or an anachronistic "multiculturalism" but rather, the "millet system that recognized the legal status of Ottoman non-Muslim communities was contingent on the second-class status of non-Muslims," and that a "cosmopolitan and pluralistic consciousness did NOT develop among the vast majority of the population." (272).
[9] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit*, (Wiley-Blackwell: 2021).
[10] Ahmed writes that Fazlur Raḥman's "fundamental, and insufficiently recognized, historical point is that the Sufi and philosophical claim to a Real-Truth (ḥaqīqah) that lay above and beyond the truth of the Revealed law (sharīʿa) was not a bit of intellectual or esotericist social marginalia, but was effectively the manifesto of a wide-ranging social and cultural phenomenon that Raḥman has called "a religion not only within religion but above religion. We might profitably characterize this "religion not only within religion but above religion" as the Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam" Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam* 2015, 31.
[11] Shahab Ahmed suggests Balkans to Bengal Complex for moving beyond Marshall Hodgson's "Nile to Oxus" region. Both are attempts to describe a geographical zone where Islam or "Islamicate" cultures are predominant.

Sufism where it is either situated entirely within Islam or beyond Islam by practitioners and detractors alike.

In his *Venture of Islam*, Hodgson frequently describes what he terms "*sharī'ah*-mindedness" to describe a valence in the history of Islamic thought that emphasizes strict adherence to religious law derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Conversely, William Chittick, has suggested "*ḥaqīqah*-mindedness" as a way to name the effort by Sufis to appeal to a Truth gleaned through extra-scriptural sources like mystical unveiling (*kashf*).[12] Although both polarities indeed exist, it's important not to reify what Ahmed calls "Hodgson's 'pious fundamentalist' sliding-scale."[13] At times an "antinomian" Sufism is emphasized or used to exemplify Sufism and Sharī'ah-adherence as somehow being polar opposites. Shahab Ahmed, his studies well-informed by Sufism throughout what he terms the "Balkans to Bengal complex,"[14] suggests "supra-nomian" or "para-nomian."[15] Especially in Persianate Sufism, this antinomianism has even served as a countercultural critique of the orthodox-minded ulema in several eras. Ultimately, the scale of "*sharī'ah*-mindedness" and "*ḥaqīqah*-mindedness" depends on whether one considers knowledge gleaned from mystical experience to be valid, and Sufis occupy, not one, but multiple points of view across this spectrum.

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[12] See Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, (Albany: SUNY, 1999), 39. William Chittick suggests this term to Alexander Knysh via personal correspondence ft. 96, pg. 295.

[13] Ahmed, 171. Ahmed does concede that Hodgson himself noted the complexities of what he termed "sharī'ah-minded Sufism (Ahmed, 30).

[14] This is Ahmed's amendment to Hodgeson's description of "Islamdom" as the "Nile to Oxus" zone. Ahmed, 32-33.

[15] Ahmed writes "This attitude is usually characterized as "anti-nomianism"— I prefer the terms "para-nomian" and "supranominian" so as to emphasize that this stance does not necessarily place itself so much against the law as it does beside, beyond and above law." Shahab Ahmed *What is Islam,* 454 and also 97. Arthur Beuhler, who studies Sufism in South Asia and Aḥmad Sirhindī in particular, has even suggested "*post*-rational" or "*supra*-rational" to describe the Sufi "contemplative"'s relationship to rational discourse. See his *Recognizing Sufism: Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition* ( London and NY: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

A tug of war has often played out where this "philosophical-Sufi amalgam" is defined as a rational science, or as something supra-rational.[16] There has even been resistance to "mysticism" on the grounds that it opposes rationality and modernization.[17] The debate is one over where "reality" (*Ḥaqq*) lies and who has privileged access to it. Whether it is *Ḥaqq* experienced through "tasting"(*dhawq*), "unveiling" (*kashf*), "verification"(*taḥqīq*), or mystical exegesis (*ta'wīl*), the Sufis of the Medieval and early modern periods offer alternate avenues for epistemology and hermeneutics that go beyond discursive logic. Derrida and Spivak have suggested that the Western academy suffers from "logocentrism," and perhaps this is why hermeneutics or epistemologies labeled "mystical" are so often eschewed in favor of empirical and rational modes of knowing that fit neatly into the discursive categories of "philosophy" and "theology." Khaled El-Rouayheb addresses the false narrative of intellectual decline in the early modern era as well as "the myth of the triumph of fanaticism" that results from making more of

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[16] Dr. Javad Nurbaksh, speaking for the Ni'matullāhī order provides a forward to the second volume of the Heritage of Sufism, in which he identifies "Sufism" as "principally a school of the Unity of Being (*Waḥdat-i wujūd*) "We, however, do not consider this a 'philosophy.' A philosophy is something invented by the mind and, hence, subject to change. The awareness of the Unity of Being, though, is a perception of the heart, so that it is everlasting and unchanging" xv-xvi. Here we see the opposition to categorization as "philosophy."

[17] In the journal "New Era" of July 1917, Iqbal contributed an article on "Islam and Mysticism" in which he decries the "mystification" and "Nihilism" in the Sufism of his day: "The present day Muslim prefers to roam about aimlessly in the dusky valleys of Hellenic-Persian mysticism which teaches us to shut our eyes to the hard Reality around, and to fix our gaze on what is described as 'illuminations', blue, red and yellow, reality springing up from the cells of an overworked brain. To me this self-mystification, this Nihilism, i.e. *seeking Reality in quarters where it does not exist* [my emphasis] is a physiological symptom which gives us a clue to the decadence of the Muslim world. The intellectual history of the ancient world will reveal to you this most significant fact that the decadent in all ages have tried to seek shelter behind self mystification and Nihilism. Having lost the vitality to grapple with the temporal, these prophets of decay apply themselves to the quest of a supposed eternal; and gradually complete the spiritual impoverishment and physical degeneration of their society by evolving a seemingly charming ideal of life which seduces even the healthy and powerful to death." Eds. of Ravi Magazine, 29th September 2017.
<https://www.ravimagazine.com/iqbal-sufism-detailed-study/>, Last Accessed 4 May 2023.

the "fundamentalist" Ottoman movement known as the Ḳāḍīzādelis than it deserves.[18] This study rejects the typical assumption that an intellectual "dark age" exists between the classical and Medieval Islamic periods and the Arab Enlightenment of the *Nahḍah*; the flowering of mystical monism in poetry and philosophy, as well as its rejection, during the 15th - 17th centuries is indicative of a rigorous philosophical and theological debate in a vast intellectual network.

There is a need for more studies that complicate the simplified binary scale of "Salafi" on one end of the spectrum and "Sufi" on the other, and one way to achieve this is to explore the diversity of thought within Sufism. Sufis were just as capable of placing importance on the particulars of Islam like the rigorous adherence to Shariʻa, and of stressing confessional difference. Fazlur Raḥman coined the term "Neo-Sufism"[19] to describe brands of Sufism that complicate the false "Salafi-Sufi" binary. In the modern Indonesian context, Julia Day Howell has coined the term "Salafi Sufis"[20] to describe the phenomenon of Shariʻah-minded Sufis in the

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[18] Khaled El-Rouayheb, "The Myth of 'The Triumph of Fanaticism' in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Die Welt des Islams*, 48 (2008), 196-221. Specifically, he highlights that Mehmed Birgivi — often cited as the intellectual founder of the Ḳāḍīzādeli movement — "explicitly condoned the study of logic, dialectic, rational theology (kalam), mathematics and astronomy" (200) and had no problem with "the science of astronomy" (202). This latter point is in contrast to the demolition of the Ottoman observatory in 1580 that has often been used as evidence for a "decline." An excellent study of empirical science in the Ottoman Empire can be found in Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Science among the Ottomans: The Cultural Creation and Exchange of Knowledge,* (University of Texas Press: 1992).

[19] This term was first coined by Fazlur Raḥman, but has been "reconsidered" multiple times. See R. S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered" *Der Islam*, Vol.70 (1), 1993, 52-87, and also John O. Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Engaging with a Legacy: Nehemia Levtzion (1935-2003) Vol. 42 (2), 2008, 314-330. This term has been of keen interest to scholars of Sufism in South Asia and Island Southeast Asia in recent decades and works well with the *Mujaddidi* and later *Khalidi* Naqshbandī orders in Ottoman lands of the 17th century to present. For the South Asian use of "Neo-Sufism" see Pnina Werbner "Reform Sufism in South Asia," in Caroline and Filippo Osella (eds.) Islamic Reform in South Asia. Cambridge University Press, pp. 51-78. 2013. Bruce Lawrence gives a useful breakdown of what are often considered the Neo-Sufi movements of Asia and Africa, Bruce B. Lawrence, "Sufism and Neo-Sufism 2010" in *The Bruce B. Lawrence Reader* ed. Ali Altaf Mian, (Duke UP, 2021), 191-217.

[20] Julia Day Howell, "Indonesia's Salafist Sufis" *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, 5, 2010.

past and present. Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624 c.e.) will be interrogated in chapter five as one such example of "Neo-Sufi" who, although a consummate mystic, held the primacy of servanthood and worship (*'abdiyya*) over *waḥdat al-wujūd* bound up with an exclusionary and aggressive attitude toward the Mughal Empire's non-Muslim populations. There is also a problematic binary where Salafism is associated with politically motivated violence and Sufism is equated with quietism, though Salafis can just as easily be pacifist and quietist while Sufis have proven more than capable of taking up arms as the colonial encounter has demonstrated.[21] Pakistani nationalist I. H. Qureshi sums up why they think the "moral consequences" of the debate over mystical monism in Islam "cannot be ignored" since "[m]onism results in quietism; the emphasis upon a separate existence leads to the opposite. [...] Monism tends to ignore the differences between religious philosophies and codes of behaviour; it is fatal for a community which believes in its uniqueness and must maintain its separate identity or perish."[22] While it is true that the stakes of a seemingly esoteric debate can indeed have significant social and political ramifications, this is taking a rather problematic "either/or" approach to monist universalism and particularism, where the reality is more often than not a complicated negotiation between these two valences.

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[21] For example, 'Abd al-Qādir Jaza'irī's resistance against the French in Algeria and Imam Shamil and the Khalidiyya-Naqshbandī yya in Chechnya and Daghestan. For a survey of these and similar Sufis see Bruce B. Lawrence, "Sufism and Neo-Sufism." For a study of *Jihad* in its non-martial and martial senses, see Harry S. Neale, *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Writings*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Neale observes: "while early Sufi writers did develop a spiritual, or inner, interpretation of jihad—an interpretation that does not appear to have existed before the historical advent of Sufism—they also embraced and encouraged the communal duty of fulfilling the martial jihad in accordance with the Islamic scriptural and legal traditions"(Neale, 133).

[22] Cited in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. (Agra: 1965), 312. c.f. I.H. Qureshi *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent,* (Mouton: 1962) p. 156.

The reader will notice that this study often engages with the Naqshbandī tradition, both for the shari'ah-mindedness and Sunni orthodoxy characteristic of the order, and for the skill of many of its members in studying works of the Akbari school and its mystical monism. A Central Asian order, the Naqshbandīyya flourished under 'Ubaydallâh Ahrār (d.1490 c.e.), who epitomizes a shift toward political involvement.[23] When discussing Naqshbandī scholars of Ibn al-'Arabī, none matches Aḥrar's student, 'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 1492 c.e.) in his enthusiasm for Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy, and skill in disseminating Akbari philosophy through poetry.[24]

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[23] A "this-worldly" asceticism to use the typology of Max Weber, is in accord with the Naqshbandī principles of "solitude in the crowd" (Per. *khalvat dar anjuman*) and travelling one's homeland (*safar dar waṭan*). For the Eleven Naqshbandī Principles, or "Sacred Words" (*al-kalimāt al-qudsiyya*), see Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition,* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 27.
Ubaydallah Ahrar not only was one of the largest landholders in Central Asia, but he also was active politically as he not only advocated for abolishing the Turkic Yamgha tax but also interceded on behalf of the people of Samarqand with the Timurid ruler Abu Sa'īd. See J. M. Rogers, "Aḥrār, Ḵvāja 'Obaydallah," Encyclopædia Iranica, I/6, pp. 667-670. Last Edited 28 July, 2011.
<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahrar-kaja-obaydallah-b> accessed 15 March, 2021.
Jāmī did not shy away from dealing with political rulers or advising them—most notably in his *Salman wa Absal* as an allegorical tale advising the Aqquyunlu shah Ya'qub to give up drinking. See Chad Lingwood *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran* (Brill: 2013). The terms "this-worldly" and "other-worldly" asceticism are ideal types put forward by sociologist of Religions Max Weber.

[24] Jāmī takes as a model Fakhr al-Dīn 'Iraqi, the first poet to narrate Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy:(d.1289). Hamid Algar describes just how important Jāmī is in this regard: "he was among the principal Sufis to popularize the concepts of Ibn 'Arabi – notably waḥdat al-wujūd – among the Ottoman Turks". Hamid Algar, "Reflections of Ibn 'Arabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition," Journal of the Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi Society, 10 (1991), p. 47. A dissertation spells out Jāmī's twin roles as Shaykh and Poet; see Farah Fatima Golparvaran Shadchehr "Jāmī Naqshbandī Sufi, Persian Poet. Ph.D. diss., (The Ohio State University: 2008). *al-Durrat al-Fakhira* represents Jāmī's key philosophical work and is a support of *wujūdī* Sufism and Akbari thought written specifically for Mehmed II. *The Precious Pearl al-Jāmī's al-Durrah al-Fakhira*. Trans. Nicholas Heer (SUNY, Albany: 1979). Jāmī also wrote quatrains and offered commentary on them in his *Sharh al-Ruba'iyyat,* mimicking Ibn al-'Arabī's *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*, where both detail their philosophical systems.see Eve Feuillebois, "Jāmī's Sharh-i rubâ'iyyât dar vaḥdat-i vujûd: Merging Akbarian doctrine, Naqshbandī practice, and Persian mystical quatrain", in Th. D'Hubert and A. Papas (dir.), *A Worldwide Literature: Jāmī (1414-1492) in the Dâr al-Islam and Beyond,* to be published by Brill. 2017).
For a demonstration of Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of the Perfect Man (Insan al-Kamil) in Jāmī's work, see Iraj Bashiri "Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī's Perfect Man"
<https://www.academia.edu/10968331/Abd_al_Raḥman_Jāmīs_Perfect_Man>. Last Accessed 23 October, 2023.

The Naqshbandī Tariqa is a prime example of just how multi-faceted a single order can be. Dina LeGall gives details about a certain Osman Bosnevī, who was both a Naqshbandī Sufi and a puritanical Ḳāḍīzādeli opposed to the excesses of Sufi praxis. Madeline Zilfi's study of the Ḳāḍīzādelis and the Ottoman *ilmiye* establishment, *The Politics of Piety,* remains an essential text in engaging with the Ḳāḍīzādeli reaction to Sufism, yet this study attributes pluralism to Ibn al-'Arabī without diving deeply enough into his thought[25] and ascribes boundaries between "orthodox" and "heterodox" that account little for the paradox of "neo-Sufism."[26] LeGall notes that "what propelled Sultan Mehmed II to build the first Naqshbandī tekke of the capital for Isḥaq Bukhārī-i Hindī was precisely the association of the Naqshbandī shaykhs and their Central Asian mentors with expertise in the *waḥdat al-wujūd*."[27]

The Mujaddidi-Naqshbandīs of the 17th century represent what Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 c.e.) coined as "neo-Sufism;" that is, a variety of Sufism that emphasizes the particulars of Islam such as Muḥammad's prophetic status and Sunnah along with the Shariʿah. An accurate intellectual history of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and religious pluralism must take into account opponents of the doctrine as well in the Ottoman Empire. Not only could the Ḳāḍīzādelis count Naqshbandīs like Osman Bosnevī among their ranks in the 17th century, but the last Ḳāḍīzādeli Sheikh al-Islam, Feyzullah Efendi, was initiated into the Naqshbandīyya by a Sheikh Murād al-Bukhārī (d. 1720 c.e.) of the Mujaddidi-Naqshbandīs. It is important to study the debate

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[25] See, for example, Zilfi's use of the famous poem in Ibn al-'Arabī's *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq* as evidence for his "principle of the unity of all religious creeds" — a reading which Gregory Lipton has rightfully contested using Ibn al-'Arabī's own interpretation of his lines 37-38, also mention of Ibn al-'Arabī on 136-7

[26] Although Zilfi does brilliantly capture the paradox of the Ottoman Sultan's relationship to Sufis "The ferocity with which Ottoman sultans met Sufi - linked threats to their power, and the indulgence, by some of the same sultans, of the intellectual sources of such revolts are especially revealing of the paradox " Zilfi, 38

[27] Dina LeGall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*. (Albany: SUNY, 2005), 125.

over mystical monism itself rather than picking only the side of the debate that resonates most with a secular Western academic worldview that celebrates "pluralism."[28] That said, much of the present study is engaged with case studies where *waḥdat al-wujūd* forms one part of an inclusive religious worldview that blurs confessional lines between Islam and non-Muslim religions.

Alan Race, though writing about Christianity and from a theological perspective, touches on similar debates taking place over mystical monism in Islam, namely the push and pull between the universal and the particular. Race divides Christian theological attitudes towards non-Christian religions in terms of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism and further breaks these down into attitudes he labels exclusivist-repudiation, inclusivist-toleration and pluralist-acceptance and particularist-refusal.[29] There are also great similarities to be found in Jewish intellectual history which Aaron Hughes characterizes as the "confrontation of the universal and the particular" where concepts that are exclusively Jewish like "chosenness" or Jewish Law (*halakhah*) represent the "particular"[30] while the universal comes out of cultural encounters where the attempt to integrate Judaism with the philosophical systems — Greek, Islamic, Continental — and leads to a universalizing project for some Jewish scholars. As his

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[28] A work of the same title as Zilfi's study, *Politics of Piety*, by Saba Mahmood takes up Susan Harding's observation that "despite the increase in the study of 'culturally marginal' groups within a range of academic disciplines, there is a marked absence of studies that focus on groups considered the 'cultural and political Others' from the perspective of progressive, liberal scholars." Saba Mahmood *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (PUP: 2012). 34.

[29] For his latest, see Alan Race *Thinking about Religious Pluralism: Shaping Theology of Religions for Our Times*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Dharam Singh finds Alan Race's categorization useful in his own project with Sikh theology, see Dharam Singh, *Sikhism and Religious Pluralism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2010).

[30] Aaron Hughes, *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy: Beyond Particularism and Universalism*, (Oxford: OUP 2014), 28.

title suggests, Hughes concludes that it is necessary to go beyond the binary of particularism and universalism; it "cannot simply be the matter of 'either/or,' but the actual identity of each of the two terms — the way each moves to occupy the other — when they inhabit the same intellectual or ontological space."[31] The continual negotiation around the "intersection of the particular and the universal"[32] could easily describe Islamic intellectual history as well, where Hellenic or Persian intellectual forms are conditioned into the shape of Islam in ways that show a similar polyvalency toward the universal and the particular.[33] It is precisely this push and pull between the "particular" and the "universal" that is at the crux of debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the medieval to early modern periods.

**Challenges to Orientalist Scholarship on "Universalism" and "Pluralism"**

There has been a push in the academic study of religion to challenge a language of "pluralism" and "universalism" when it actually aligns with one tradition or "spirituality"[34]— often Enlightenment-era secularism and Christian fideism — that ignores particulars belonging to a specific religion or subsumes them into its framework, often through the act of translation.[35] Translating Sufi texts can often bear the imprint of the translator, the classic case being the

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[31] Hughes, 29.

[32] Hughes, 29.

[33] For example, Neo-Platonic philosophy and Sufism around the Mediterranean or concepts of divine kingship in the Shahnameh worked into an Islamic context.

[34] Omid Safi discussed "New Age 'translations'" of Rūmī in a New Yorker article in 2017. He states: "I see a type of 'spiritual colonialism' at work here: bypassing, erasing, and occupying a spiritual landscape that has been lived and breathed and internalized by Muslims from Bosnia and Istanbul to Konya and Iran to Central and South Asia." in Rozina 'Ali, "The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rūmī," The New Yorker, January 5, 2017.

[35] For a key example of this line of inquiry see: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism,* University of Chicago Press: 2005. Especially her chapter on Otto Pfleiderer and Sufism.

poetry of Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī removed from his cultural and religious context of the 13th century.[36] In the Western academic study of Sufism, a genealogy of its orientalist legacy needs to be taken into account, especially in the tendency of orientalists to favor Sufi traditions that create distance from a "semitic," Islam in favor of a Persianate, "Aryan" form of Islam in the 19th century especially.[37] Most recently, Gregory Lipton has highlighted the work of Frithjof Schuon as particularly problematic in this regard. One also needs to be mindful of the reverberating echoes of the Protestant Reformation and of Christocentrism in Western religious scholarship that is often biased against legal-minded traditions of "works,"in favor of religious movements that prioritize "faith."

Sufism is not a morally neutral set of beliefs and practices, rather, it carries with it an ethical framework, and in the study of Sufism an issue arises where scholars advocate for the moral vision found in the works they study. Bruce Lincoln, on the other hand, holds that scholarship on religion should differ from that of a "cheerleader, voyeur, retailer of imported

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[36] For example, Coleman Barks's controversial renditions of Rūmī — not from the original Persian but adaptations of R.A. Nicholson and A.J. Arberry's English translations — have come under fire for divorcing Rūmī from his religious and social context. When faced with the concerns of the scholar of Persian literature, Franklin Lewis voiced concern about Rūmī "being divorced from his own culture" Barks gave a telling reply in an interview: "Oh, I think Franklin needs to loosen up a little bit. This exclusivity bit that this was the last prophet, and that the Jews are the chosen people, and that Jesus is the only begotten son of God, that exclusivity and each of those religions is dangerous to the health of the planet. I am more in favor of the health of the planet than I am of placing Rūmī back in the thirteenth century." in Omid Azadibougar and Simon Patton, "Coleman Barks' Versions of Rūmī in the USA," *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 24, 2 (Summer 2015), 178. This comment from Barks is no less than an admission that the particulars of culture and religion are eschewed in favor of a universalizing — or perhaps a 20th century American — version of Rūmī's poetry in his translations.

[37] On this point Masuzawa highlights the 19th century German orientalist Otto Pfleiderer (1839-1908) as a chief offender, while Gregory Lipton points to Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) as continuing the same search for "Aryan" Islam. See Gregory Lipton, "De-Semitizing Ibn 'Arabī: Aryanism and the Schuonian Discourse of Religious Authenticity," *Numen*, Vol. 64, 2017, 258–93. Also Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*, esp. 120-151. This distinction existed in a milder form through Bernard Lewis's discussion of a unique Persianate Islam.

goods."[38] Lincoln's purpose for this is that one does not fail to "distinguish between 'truths', 'truth-claims', and 'regimes of truth'" as a scholar should.[39] Lincoln may have a kindred spirit in Aaron Hughes who advocates a similar standard of scholarship that may apply to studies of Ibn al-'Arabī that attempt to extract a moral message for today's audience:

> there is certainly nothing inherently wrong with either a monograph devoted to pluralism, gender, social justice, or to showing how a medieval thinker can cure the ills of modern Islam. Indeed, such works, given the current historical moment, are probably necessary. However, *the problem occurs when such apologetic works either portray themselves or are portrayed by others as objective works of scholarship.* It is such cross purposes that lead to an unwillingness on the part of those within the discipline to interrogate a tradition using the apparatus supplied by critical discourses outside of their field.[40]

For Hughes, the problem arises when scholarship is portrayed as objective when it is "devoted" to advocating social justice or pluralism in the present. Warning of the dangers of universalisms, Lipton marshalls the likes of Slavoj Žižek, Russell McCutcheon, and Ulrich Beck, and this latter writes that: "the moment you embrace universality and the idea of truth you are entangled in a struggle with the partisans of particularity and of alternative versions of universal truth."[41] This issue is compounded by Western scholars and writers who cherry-pick the universalist and pluralist messages found in Sufism in order to advance a form of Sufism that blends seamlessly with their own values of religious ecumenism, while ignoring the thoroughly Islamic branches these fruits grew on or the many Sufis, past and present, who firmly emphasize the particulars of Islam in their beliefs and practices. As a result, engaging with the "universal" carries with it the risk of becoming an advocate of one universal truth claim over others and also locating the

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[38] Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2005): 10.
[39] Lincoln, 10.
[40] Aaron Hughes, *Situating Islam The Past and Future of an Academic Discipline* (Oakville, Conn: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 71. Italics mine.
[41] Cited in Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*, 3.

center of that "universe" in one's own values. Thankfully, there is no such requirement of "buying-in" to universal truths when doing intellectual history; the often-competing, universalizing truth claims are of interest for the present study, not because some are to be proven correct and others false, but because they connect the reader to the religious worldviews of the past.

Debates over "pluralism" and "universalism" in the early modern period are so interesting because they offer alternate visions of what "pluralism" or "universalism" might mean in Islamic(ate) contexts in emic terms. In *Western Sufism* (2017), Mark Sedgwick defines "universalism" as "the idea that truth can be found in all religions" and he dates this no earlier than the "early Enlightenment."[42] While this late start date for "universalism" perhaps makes sense in the context of Western Europe, the present study argues that the universalisms present in several forms of Islamic mysticism predate the Enlightenment. Take, for example, the laissez-faire attitude toward religion encapsulated in the Persianate concept of the "well-being of all" (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) in medieval Central and South Asia, or the label "unitarian"(*muwaḥḥid*) to describe Sufis and Hindus alike in the 17th century *Dabistān-i maẕāhib*. This may be a universalism that doesn't necessarily require one to declare all religions are equal, but that nonetheless recognizes God manifests everywhere, even in a "temple for idols" (*butkhānah*) as found in mystical monist Persian poetry. There are multiple "universalisms" to contend with, past and present, so this study will favor of the gerund "universalizing"— instead of the static noun "universalism"— to signify a direction toward crossing confessional boundaries or obliterating

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[42] Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism,* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 6. Sedgwick considers both universalism and "anti-exotericism" to originate "in the early Enlightenment," but Lewisohn, on the other hand, has demonstrated the shared theme of anti-clericalism in Medieval Persian Sufism and in Early Modern English poets, both categories which predate the Enlightenment.

them altogether, and to avoid positing that there is one singular "universalism" at play in the modern or early modern period.

The debate over the universal and the particular in Islam needs to be contextualized within the early modern imperial projects of "confessionalization" occurring across Afro-Eurasia beginning in the late-medieval period and carrying on into several flashpoints of the 17th century.[43] *Waḥdat al-wujūd* was a central part of the religious worldviews of Bedreddin and Nābulusī, writing in the Interregnum of the early Beylik period and up to the end of the Tulip Era respectively, and this ideology goes hand-in-hand with their positive valuations of non-Muslims. Not just contestants for the throne, Aurangzeb and Dārā Shikūh represent different visions for the role of Islam in the state and held quite different views on the status of non-Muslims in the Mughal Empire with the latter's views on mystical monism forming a significant part of his universalizing worldview that incorporated Indic religious thought into Islam.[44] As will be seen in

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[43] According to Yıldırım Confessionalization: was coined simultaneously by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard (Yıldırım, 14), but Tijana Krstic has argued that "we should regard general religious trends in the early modern Ottoman and Safavid empires as part of greater Mediterranean-wide confessionalisation"(cited in Yıldırım, 17). Yıldırım identifies "the confessionalisation paradigm" as consisting "of the following elements: (1) rapprochement of the state and the church; (2) shaping and disciplining of society at large through education; (3) rationalisation of religion and routinisation of the leadership (charisma); (4) instalment of state authority upon the church and the bureaucratisation of religious institutions and clergy; (5) the rise of confessional blocs as religious, political, territorial and cultural units; and (6) the individualisation and spiritualisation of religion"(Yıldırım, 17). Rıza Yıldırım's body of work on the Qizilbash-Alevi identity is also useful for the 16th century persecutions that rose along with the prominence of the Şeyhulislam, a topic covered in useful detail by Nabil al-Tikriti. Nabil Al-Tikriti. "Ibn-i Kemal's Confessionalism and the Construction of an Ottoman Islam," in Living in the Ottoman Realm: Empire and Identity, 13th to 20th Centuries, Ed. Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent F. Schull, Indiana University Press: 2016.For confessionalism in comparative early modern empires, see Yasir Yılmaz, "Confessionalisation or a Quest for Order? A Comparative Look at Religion and State in the Seventeenth-century Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg Empires" and Rıza Yıldırım "The Rise of the 'Religion and State' Order: Re-confessionalisation of State and Society in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire" in Vefa Erginbaş *Ottoman Sunnism: New Perspectives* (Edinburgh University Press: 2019).

[44] As explored below, this culminates in Dara's thought with his translation and commentary on the Upanishads "The Greatest Secret"(*Sirr al-akbar*) which he considered to be the "hidden book" discussed

the fourth chapter, Sunni confessionalism in the Ottoman Empire developed in parallel with the

establishment of the Safavid state and its partisans within Ottoman borders known as the

Qizilbash.

The debate over mystical monism carries with it competing discourses over

"heterodoxy" and "orthodoxy." An early modern philosopher of 17th century Netherlands,

Baruch Spinoza (d.1677 c.e.), reflects a central axiom of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as he writes in *De*

*Intellectus Emendatione* that everyone has an idea of a being that is "unique and infinite, that

is, it is all being (*esse*), and besides it there is nothing. [....] Whatever is, is in God, and without

God can neither be nor be conceived."[45] Similar to the monist Sufis examined in this study,

Spinoza here arrives at a controversial realization that all that is, "is in God," which contains the

potential to obliterate the particulars of religious difference in favor of a universalist monism. It is

also worth noting that, just as many mystical monist Sufis were persecuted and executed for

professing this "Oneness of Being" that blurs distinction between faith and infidelity, the Jewish

Spinoza was himself excommunicated by his Amsterdam synagogue who pronounced a *ḥērem*

on him.

Talal Asad, draws on Foucauldian "discipline" to explain "orthodoxy" as the "discourses

in which the teaching is done, in which the correct performance of the practice is defined and

learned," and this is "intrinsic to all Islamic practices."[46] This is important as Asad is applying the

term "orthodoxy," not to "the programmatic discourses of 'modernist' and 'fundamentalist'

Islamic movements, but to the established practices of unlettered Muslims" as well, stating a:

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in the Qur'an and effectively locates Vedantic thought within Islam. By contrast, Aurgzeb imposed the *jizya*
tax along with other restrictions on non-Muslims.
[45] cited in William Charlton, "Spinoza's Monism," The Philosophical Review, XC, No. 4 (October 1981), 504.
[46] Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,* Qui Parle, Vol. 17, No. 2 (SPRING/SUMMER 2009), 15.

practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims-whether by an *'alim*, a *khatib*, a Sufi *shaykh*, or an untutored parent. (It may be worth recalling here that etymologically "doctrine" means teaching, and that orthodox doctrine therefore denotes the correct process of teaching, as well as the correct statement of what is to be learned.) Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions.[47]

Here, Asad describes "orthodoxy" in a way that centralizes formal and informal institutions of learning as they exert control over discourse. It should not be lost on the reader that Asad includes both the establishment *ulema* of the madrasa as well as Sufi shaykhs in the "discursive traditions" of Islam. Asad is channeling Foucault who said "[f]ar from preventing knowledge, power produces it"[48] and "orthodoxy" can be likened to his "regime of truth" where "truth" refers to "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" and is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it."[49] It is worth noting that these debates over Sufi "heterodoxy" were — and in some cases still are — matters of life and death,[50] making it all the more important to carry out a rigorous interrogation of regimes of truth, including a genealogy of debates over orthodoxy such as this controversy over *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

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[47] Asad, 15.

[48] Michel Foucault, and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 59.

[49] Foucault, Power/Knowledge, 133.

[50] I have in mind the destruction of Sufi shrines globally by militant jihadist groups, but also the 2017 attack on the al-Rawda Mosque in Egypt's Sinai peninsula that killed over 300 and wounded a further 128 people because of the mosque's connection with Sufi orders. Declan Walsh and Nour Youssef, "Militants Kill 305 at Sufi Mosque in Egypt's Deadliest Terrorist Attack," *The New York Times.* (24 November 2017), accessed May 4, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html>

**Summary of Chapters**

The first task of this project is to produce a genealogy of the concept *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself and evaluate other forms of Islamic monism that have run parallel to, or even been conflated with this ideology. Chapter One sets out to do precisely this and perform a brief excavation of mystical monism, not just that of Ibn al-ʿArabī, but also Ibn Sabʾīn, who uses the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* before Ibn al-ʿArabī's followers coalesced around the term as a doctrine. In this chapter, it is apparent that Ibn al-ʾArabī shares the spotlight with prominent philosophers and theologians wrote on "existence"(*wujūd*) in similar ways prior to Ibn al-ʾArabī like Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazālī, and Arabic language scholarship often leaves out the ideology of "All is He"(*hama ūst*) in the Persian poetic tradition. In keeping with the overall goal of the study, the first chapter will evaluate the views of non-Muslims and religions other than Islam held by mystical monists to paint a preliminary picture of the complicated push and pull between a tendency toward universalism and the need to reaffirm the particulars of Islam with a notable difference between Ibn al-ʾArabī and Ibn Sabʾīn as the latter pulls closer towards a universalism informed by Hermeticism and Neo-Platonic philosophy.

Chapter two examines the opposition to mystical monism to lay out the history of polemics against philosophies like *waḥdat al-wujūd* from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 c.e.)and ʿAlā al-Dawla Simnānī (d.1336 c.e.) as both set the stage for later debates in the early modern period. While Ibn Taymiyya was involved in Sufism and even belonged to a Sufi order — contrary to most portrayals of him as a thorough "anti-Sufi" — his opposition is worth contrasting with Simnānī's "intra-sufi" criticism which engages with the technical vocabulary of

mystical monists more closely. Comparison is then made between Simnānī and the Chishtī Sufi, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsu Dārāz (d.1422 c.e.) who may have been the first to posit *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as a contrapuntal doctrine against *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In these first two chapters it will become apparent that the rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* and mystical monism generally, coincides with an attitude towards non-Muslims and other religions that clearly favors the particulars of Islam over the universalism that those who profess *waḥdat al-wujūd* often espouse.

Chapter Three begins an examination of mystical monism in the Ottoman Empire, including Ibn al-ʾArabī's followers in the Ottoman religious establishment and the close political relationship between Ottoman sultans and Sufis. This is all to set the stage for the rebellion of Şeyh Bedreddin (d.1421 c.e.) which is often described as an Islamo-Christian syncretic movement anchored in the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and presents a case study to evaluate the possibility of this philosophy to cross religious boundaries. This chapter mines Bedreddin's most controversial text, known as the *Wāridāt*, within which he does indeed expound the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and may be located in a larger intellectual network[51] of philosophers, sufis, and poets[52] who are characterized by their deep connection to Akbari

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[51] İlker Evrim Binbaş has explored Bedreddin and his Shaykh, Husayn Akhlatī (d.1368 c.e.), from a Timurid perspective. *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters.* (Cambridge UP: 2016). Here Binbaş suggests an intellectual network spanned vast territory and communicated under the name "the Brethren of Purity"(*Ikhwān al-Safa*) which was modeled after the 10th century cadre of Neoplatonic Muslim philosophers of the same name who contributed to the "Treatises"(*rasāʾil*).

[52] A Good example of a poet influenced by Bedreddin over two centuries after his death is Niyāzī Miṣrī (d. 1694 ) who titled a poem "Wāridāt" in his honor, and whom Zilfi describes as the "most controversial mystic of the day." She describes his "writings, for which he was famous and, in orthodox eyes, condemnable, were enigmatic at best. Some verses seemed to imply Niyazi's identification of himself with Jesus. Others unabashedly extolled the most controversial of Ibn al-Arabi's philosophies. Niyazi was exiled three times, although more for his anti establishment politics than for his unorthodox religiosity. When not in disgrace,

Sufism. Although he perhaps excludes certain particulars found in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, like the *Haqīqah Muhammadiyya*, there is no evidence in the *Wāridāt* of a synthesis between Christianity and Islam. His grandson's hagiography, the *Menāqebnāme*, is also evaluated in this chapter, and finds Bedreddin appealing to Christians and bearing Christ-like traits, although this appears to be for the sake of conversion to Islam. Finally, Bedreddin's legacy is evaluated, as an expert in Hanafi Law, as a heretic, or as a mystic put to death for proclaiming mystical monism — depending on which sources one consults — all to find that he negotiated the dual valences of Shari'ah-minded and Haqiqah-minded intellectual pursuits so characteristic of the Ottoman religious establishment and was ultimately put to death as a rebel of the state, not as a heretic. This last point reveals the nature of the early Ottoman state which ruled over a religiously heterodox milieu and a religious establishment that was enmeshed with Ibn al-'Arabī's brand of Sufism.

Chapter Four is twinned with Chapter Three as it explores one of the earliest commentaries on Bedreddin's *Wāridāt* at the hands of 'Abd Allah al-Ilāhī Rūmī al-Simawi (d.1491 c.e.) also known as "Molla Ilāhī." Molla Ilāhī's commentary is far longer than the *Wāridāt* itself and he puts a characteristic Naqshbandī twist on the text, agreeing with the celebration of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the original text, but tying in the Qur'an and Hadith far more frequently while emphasizing Ibn al-'Arabī's "Muhammadan Reality" (*Ḥaqīqah Muḥammadiyya*) as a universal intellectual principle which plays between the universal and particular in a way that ultimately asserts the centrality of the Prophet of Islam. This chapter will

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he was invited by the Sultan to confer blessings upon the armies bound for Europe." Madeline Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800). (Biblioteca Islamica: 1988). 159.

attempt to situate this text in its historical context with the arrival of Naqshbandīs like Ilāhī to Ottoman lands and the increasing role of the state in regulating orthodoxy through the increased power of the Shaykh al-Islam and the growing unease over "heterodox" Sufism from their Safavid neighbors and their Qizilbash allies within Ottoman borders.

Chapter 5 begins the case study in *waḥdat al-wujūd* within the Northern Mughal Empire and Punjab. This chapter explores the criticism of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by Aḥmad Sirhindī at the turn of the 17th century and the religious and political landscape he was situated in. The porousness of religious boundaries in the Punjab will be evaluated through the figures of Kabir and the first Sikh Guru, Nanak in order to understand the religious environment which Sirhind responds to in his writings alongside his rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd.* Sirhindī's view of non-Muslims will be explored deeper in his attitudes toward Akbar's pluralistic reign and toward the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan (d. 1606 c.e.), before diving into his refutation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as the ultimate stage of Sufi experience and realization. Sirhindī's brand of strict Naqshbandī Sufism truly went global as pilgrims and political exiles on Hajj interacted with the intellectual circles of Mecca and Medina; this may be gleaned from the fatwa-seeking (*istifta'*) efforts attacking Sirhindī and defending *waḥdat al-wujūd* against the contrapuntal doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.[53] What this chapter concludes is that, far from an esoteric debate removed

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[53] SAA Rizvi *A History of Sufism in India,* Vol II, 339-340. Rizvi points out that a follower of one of Sirhindī's successors, named Adam Banuri,"preached the teachings of the Mujadid to the 'ulama' of Mecca and Medina" and "in 1067/1636 made Hijaz an active centre of the controversies surrounding the Mujaddid's mystical claims." This led Ultimately to a "request for a *fatwa*" (*istiftā'*) against the Mujaddid and his claims; this "*istiftā'* was written to the 'ulama' of Mecca and Medina containing their charges." The opposition was led by the famous promoter of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Hijaz, Ibrahim al-Kurani (d.1699). Yohannon Friedmann noted that Sirhindī's title as a "Mujadid" along with several other controversial ideas in his Writings (*Maktūbāt*) were met with criticism rather than widespread acceptance for roughly the first century after his work was published.

from any lived social or political reality, Sirhindī's rejection of mystical monism was tied to his attitude toward non-Muslims and bound with the socio-political context of his time.

Chapter six explores Mughal prince and Qadiri Sufi Shaykh,[54] Dārā Shikūh's mystical monism in connection with his view on non-Muslim religions, offering a contrasting 17th century religious worldview to Sirhindī 's. Exploring Dārā's work confirms that his was indeed a pluralist vision with the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* at the center. This study will explore his works such as the "Compass of Truth" (*Risāla-yi Haqq Numa*)*,* which was a treatise and manual for religious practice explicating the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Universalist in tone, this work reflects Dārā's voracious appetite for non-Muslim thought which crescendoed with his The Meeting of the Two Seas" (*Majma' al-Baḥrayn*) in which he states the purpose of the work is to marry the sea of Sufic knowledge with the truths uncovered by the great "monotheists" (*Muwaḥḥidān*) of India. Finally, the "The Greatest Secret" (*Sirr-i Akbar*)*,* Dārā Shikūh's Persian translation and commentary on the Upanishads which he considered to be the "hidden book" discussed in the Qur'an and as a result, part of Islamic scripture. After examining the mystical monism in Dārā's works, his fruitful intellectual relationships with non-Muslims will be explored, revealing a religious worldview with a remarkably universal vision where non-Dualist thought of Indian religions goes hand-in-hand with the mystical monism of his Sufi tradition.

The aim of the seventh chapter is to fill in the gap between Ottoman and Mughal contexts by examining the fluorescence of mystical monism in Safavid Iran in order to ultimately assess the embattled position that adherents to the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* found

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[54] Even though he was initiated into the Naqshbandīyya first, Dārā identifies with the Qadiriyya order in his *Safinat al-Awliya'* and the name he uses in his poetry collection (*dīwān*), he adopts the nickname (*takhallus*) of *Qādirī*.

themselves in during the 17th century. In order to set the stage for the Shi'i clerics who attacked *waḥdat al-wujūd*, two figures are necessary to paint the broad strokes of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Iran, namely, the reception of Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy via Persian poetry in Maḥmūd Shabistarī's (d. 1340 c.e.) *Gulshān-i rāz,* and Ḥaydar Āmulī's (d. 1385 c.e.) synthesis between Akbari philosophy and Shi'ism. The bulk of this chapter is occupied with mystical monism at the School Iṣfahān as epitomized by its luminary, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1640 c.e.), and the Shi'i clerical backlash against the twin "innovations" Sufism and philosophy with *waḥdat al-wujūd* coming under fire because it occupies the confluence of the two.

The eighth chapter returns to the Ottoman Empire, this time in 17th century Istanbul when a cadre of orthodox ulema and preachers in Istanbul's Friday mosques known as the Ḳāḍīzādelis targeted Sufi institutions as a whole; they planned to pull down all the Sufi lodges, to kill all the dervishes who refused to renounce Sufism, and finally to get the sultan to forbid all "Innovations."[55] The chapter's case study, 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī' (d. 1731 c.e.), was a Sufi author and "spiritual son of Ibn al-'Arabī"[56] who wrote in defense of nearly everything the Ḳāḍīzādelis despised, from coffee, tobacco-smoking, musical audition (Ar. *sama'* Tr. *sema*), to sacred dance (*devran* and *raks*). He also wrote a defense of Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy, and

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[55] The Madeline C. Zilfi's book on the Ḳāḍīzādelis *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)*. (Biblioteca Islamica: 1988). Katherine Ivanyi suggests the Ḳāḍīzādelis were only part of a broader movement of "Hanafi Pietism" as inspired by the work of Mehmed Birgivi (d. 1573), and Derin Terzioglu points to "chatecistic" literature known as *'ilm-i hal* tasked with defining Ottoman Sunni orthodoxy. See below on "confessionalization". Nir Shafir has argued that the "Ḳāḍīzādelis" are an invented category used by the "haters" of the movement. See "The Road from Damascus: Circulation and the Redefinition of Islam in the Ottoman Empire 1620-1720", (Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA: 2016), 31-39.

[56] Sirriye, Elizabeth. Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: "Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī' 1641-1731, (Routledge Curzon: 2005), 18 where this phrase even features as the title of Sirriye's second chapter. Nābulusī relates a dream vision wherein his mother was married to Ibn al-'Arabī, and he even declared himself to have been metaphorically breastfed by the latter. Barbara Von Schlegel's dissertation addresses Nābulusī's spiritual — uwaysi — initiation at the hands of the spirit (ruhaniyya) of Ibn al-'Arabī.

this chapter will dive into his works that form an *apologia* for the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*,[57] For his adherence to this philosophy and defense of Sufi practices, Nābulusī was attacked by the people of Damascus and withdrew from public life for seven years.[58] Since Ibn al-'Arabī's writings first spread in the 13th century, his philosophy has been the focus of heated debate — both within Sufi circles and from without — by religious scholars, the *'ulema*.[59] Opponents of ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy level the accusation that he violates God's ultimate transcendence (Ar. *tanzīh*) especially where the Divine is perceived as in "union" (*ittihād*), or "indwelling" (*ḥulūl*) within man; along with the "Unity of Being", these critiques are leveled at Ibn al-'Arabī's attendant doctrine of the "perfect man" (*insān al-kāmil*).[60] The debates surrounding *wujūdī* philosophy[61] often center around the potential for religious pluralism[62] and

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[57] Namely the two works in question are: *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd min waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Clarifying What is Meant by the Unity of Being"); and *Kitāb al-wujūd*

[58] Bakri Aladdin "''Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī', the Doctrine of the Unity of Being and the Beginnings of the Arab Renaissance," in Demiri, Lejla, and Pagani, Samuela, eds. *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology : ''Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī' and His Network of Scholarship (Studies and Texts)*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 33.

[59] The earliest inter-Sufi critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* comes from the Qubrawi shaykh 'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī (d.1336 c.e.) but perhaps the most notable criticism comes from the Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 c.e.). Hamid Algar describes Simnānī "to whom is often attributed the origin of the alternative theory, Waḥdat al-shuhūd (unity of witnessing). Simnānī had taken exception to Ibn 'Arabī's designation of God as "absolute being" (wujūd muṭlaq), going so far as to call it "the most disgraceful utterance ever to have emerged among all religions and sects" and to denounce Ibn 'Arabī as "an incorrigible antinomian."in Hamid Algar, Jāmī and Ibn 'Arabī: Khātam al-Shu'arā' and Khātam Al-Awliyā' 147.

[60] It must be noted that although *waḥdat al-wujūd* was never exactly termed by Ibn al-'Arabī, the "Perfect Man" (*insān al-kāmil*) appears throughout his work.

[61] Those professing *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the early modern Ottoman and adjacent lands were sometimes branded as "wujūdīyān" at least among the Zayniyya dervish order which debated Ibn 'Arabi in the 15th century, see Cankat Kaplan M.A. Thesis Istanbul Sehir University: 2017), 190. Nābulusī's *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd* refers to "*ahl al-Tawḥīd*", and *muwaḥiddun* "Unitarians." Ibn Khaldun defines adherents of the latter as "people of absolute unity" (aṣḥab al waḥda al-muṭlaqa) and followers of Ibn al-'Arabī as "people of theophany" (ashab al-tajalli).see Sirriyeh, 10. cf. Yumna Ozer's introduction to Ibn Khaldun's Shifa' "His critique and objections focused on two groups, the first that believed in [Self] disclosure (aṣḥab al-tajalli) and the second in Oneness (aṣḥab al-waḥda)" (Ozer, XXXIV).

[62] Here especially the salvific efficacy of non-Muslims was debated, phrased as their ability to attain "happiness"(*sa'ada*) in the afterlife. The most controversial argument by Ibn al-'Arabī centered on the faith

antinomian belief and / or praxis—versus adherence to religious law and normative Islam—as defined by the emerging Sunni orthodoxy of the early modern period.

There has been a flowering of study on the Naqshbandī shaykh[63] and Hanafi jurist ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731 c.e.) in the late 20th and early 21st century.[64] With the notable exception of Bakri Aladdin, these studies often do not go into the topic of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in sufficient depth, and chapter seven explores Nābulusī's defense of this doctrine in Ottoman lands that had changed significantly since Bedreddin's time. Nābulusī wrote a number of texts which deal with *waḥdat al-wujūd* in order to explicate the doctrine and attempt to defend it from critics.[65] Nābulusī's defense of Niyazī Misrī has now been published by Samuela Pagani[66] and much of his defense centers on *wujūdī* doctrine and a related defense of ecstatic sayings (Ar. *shaṭaḥāt*). Samuela Pagani has also produced a study of a letter Nābulusī penned responding to the ideas of Aḥmad Sirhindī titled "The Ends of the Sciences and Advice to the

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of the Pharaoh (*firʿawn*)—often considered as the height of unbelief for his claim to divinity (Qur'an, Surat An-nazi'at / 79)—at the time of his death. On weighing this argument in 17th century Istanbul, see the 9th chapter in Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth,* Trans. G.L. Lewis, Tinling: 1957, pp. 75-79, which immediately precedes his chapter on Ibn al-'Arabī.

[63] Like Dārā Shikūh, Nābulusī was initiated into both the Naqshbandī and Qādirī orders.

[64] Two prominent studies of Nābulusī are Samer Akkach's *ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī': Islam and the Enlightenment*, and Elizabeth Sirriyeh's Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus and Barbara von Schlegell's influential 1997 dissertation is cited liberally by both. A conference and the subsequent publication of a volume hints at the rapidly increasing interest in Nābulusī, for its product, see Demiri, Lejla, and Pagani, Samuela, eds. *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology: 'ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī' and His Network of Scholarship (Studies and Texts).* (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen: 2019).

[65] Walīd Jabbar Isma'īl al'Abīdī and Ra'id Salim Sharīf al-Ta'ī, *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd min waḥdat al-wujūd* (Clarifying What is Meant by the Unity of Being); *Jawāhir al-nuṣūs fī hāl kalimát al-Fuṣūṣ,* a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam Denis Gril, "*Jawāhir al-nuṣūṣ fī hall kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*: ʿʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam" in Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Mohr Siebeck: 2019); and *Al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa'l-khiṭāb al-ṣidq* (On the True Being and Truthful Discourse). Bakri Aladdin, *Wujud al-Haqq wa Khitab al-Sidq* (French Scientific Institute for the Study of Arabic, Damascus:1995).

[66] Nābulusī, and Samuela Pagani, " Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Treatise in Defence of Niyâzî-i Mısrî" in Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Mohr Siebeck: 2019), 317-362

Officious Ulema" (*Natijat al-'ulum wa nasihat 'ulama' al-rusum*).[67] Remarkably, Nābulusī

shows nothing but support for Aḥmad Sirhindī in response to a *fatwa* against, defending the

latter's claims to have risen to the station of Abu Bakr al-Sadiq and about the reality of the

Ka'ba (*ḥaqiqat-i ka'ba*).[68]

Nābulusī also wrote on the Sufi Shaykh Mehmed Birgivi's *Tariqat Muhammadiyya*

which will be of enormous value as this author and his book were considered foundational to the

Ḳāḍīzādeli movement itself.[69] The above texts illustrate Nābulusī's defense of the doctrine of

*waḥdat al-wujūd* against its detractors — both Sufis and anti-Sufis — and demonstrate the

connection between Dārā and 'Abd al-Ghanī as they responded to anti-monistic criticism in the

17th century. Finally, Nābulusī's cordial relationship with Christians during his travels and his

correspondence with a Melkite patriarch where they discuss *waḥdat al-wujūd* give a

remarkable example of cross-religious dialogue facilitated by a shared interest in this philosophy.

By exploring these case studies in *waḥdat al-wujūd* the story of this philosophy in the

early modern period comes into view. It is a story of a multi-valent philosophy with

universalizing ambitions across religious boundaries on the one hand, but with strong

commitments toward the religious tradition out of which it was born. Although Bedreddin's

movement had Christian followers, there is little indication that his mystical monism also came

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[67] Samuela Pagani, *Il Rinnovamento Mistico Dell'Islam: Un commento di 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī a Aḥmad Sirhindī.* (Universita Degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale: 2003). The author helpfully includes the Arabic text in this critical edition.

[68] Nābulusī does not appear to have been familiar with Sirhindī's rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

[69] "Reading Mehmed Birgivi with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī" by Jonathan Parkes Allen, and Katherine Ivanyi's "'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Commentary on Birgivî Mehmed Efendi's al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya" both concern this text, in Demiri, Lejla, and Pagani, Samuela, eds. Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and His Network of Scholarship (Studies and Texts). ( Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen: 2019).

with a program of Islamo-Christian syncretism, in spite of the frequency with which this is alleged among scholars. By contrast, in the case of Dārā Shikūh's religious project, one finds a monotheism capable of embracing Indic and Abrahamic traditions while anchored in monistic Sufism. Bedreddin, Ilāhī, and Nābulusī each represent a contradiction where they are capable of epitomizing the "shar'ī-minded" scripturalism and orthopraxy of neo-Sufism on the one hand, and yet embrace the heresy-adjacent *wujūdī* doctrine as well as practices like *sema'* on the other.[70] Finally, a critic of Ibn al-'Arabī and of *waḥdat al-wujūd* like Aḥmad Sirhindī can magnify exactly what the debate over mystical monism in the 17th century was about, namely what Shahab Ahmed identifies as "the question in conceptualizing Islam" itself, which is "that of how to reconcile the relationship between "universal" and "local," between "unity" and "diversity.""[71] The proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* explored in this dissertation reflect a worldview where the non-Muslim is not a religious "other," but is encompassed within God's Unity (*tawḥīd*). Conversely, opponents of mystical monism draw a dualistic line in the sand dividing the world into Muslims and "infidels." Bedreddin, Ilāhī, Nābulusī, and Dārā Shkh represent an, at times, radically inclusive attitude where God's infinite unfolding (*tajallī*) means that He is manifest in myriad forms, whether in Islam or in non-Muslim religions.

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[70] Barbara Von Schlegel argues that Nābulusī doesn't fit the mold "neo-Sufism" at all due to his liberality and mystical leanings, but I would contend Nābulusī, along with all three thinkers explored in this study, embody what Shihab Ahmed describes as the "logic of internal contradiction"; there is a need to understand how legalism and mystical antinomianism can coexist within an Islamic society and within an individual in order to understand the complex intellectual lives of pre-Modern Muslims. Ahmed, whose study takes many case studies from antinomian Sufism writes "the goal and touchstone of a successful conceptualization of Islam as theoretical object and analytical category must be to locate and explain, to the fullest degree possible, the logic of internal contradiction that allows contradictory statements and actions to cohere meaningfully to their putative object— whether this coherence lies in idea, imagination, practice, substance or process. Such a conceptualization should enable us to use the term "Islam Islamic" in a manner that comprehends the integrity and identity of the complex historical and human phenomenon at play and at stake, rather than distorting or fracturing it." in Ahmed, 303.

[71] Ahmed, 156.

**Chapter 1: A Genealogy of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd:* Monism and the question of "Universalism" in Islamic Mystical Philosophy**

The ultimate goal of this and all following chapters is to evaluate whether or not Sufis espousing mystical monism are in fact universalist in their religious outlook, or if this branch of philosophical Sufism is first and foremost, "Islamic." It will be necessary to attempt an archaeology on the term *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in order to outline a major branch of mystical monism among Sufis that emerged in the middle ages and flowered in the 17th century. One goal of this chapter is to complicate the received wisdom that Ibn al-'Arabī "created" the doctrine known as *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. First it is necessary to recognize that this term only became a part of the technical vocabulary of the Akbari school[72] a century following the death of Ibn al-'Arabī, and second, it is important to establish that Ibn al-'Arabī was not alone in developing mystical monism in the 13th centuries. Not only was it Ibn Sab'īn who first used the term *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* itself, but the latter's doctrine of "Absolute Oneness"(*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*) presents a parallel assertion of mystical monism which is often conflated with *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. This chapter will also demonstrate that the vocabulary of mystical monism preceded Ibn al-'Arabī and the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in the Persian phrase "All is He" (*Hama Ūst*) which describes a similar monistic concept of God as the singular Existence. After establishing a genealogy of this branch of philosophical Sufism, the attitudes of these Sufis toward non-Muslims will be evaluated, revealing that they navigate a universalizing vision of religion and humanity while maintaining the centrality of Islam.

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[72] Named after Ibn al-'Arabī's epithet among his proponents, the "Shaykh al-Akbar," or the "greatest shaykh."

The strict division between "theology" and "philosophy" in the early modern and medieval periods is often an anachronistic imposition of these modern categories that make less sense in the pre-modern era. Nonetheless, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 c.e.) lamented in his own time that "[t]he problems of theology have been confused with those of philosophy. This has gone so far that the one discipline is no longer distinguishable from the other."[73] Ibn Khaldūn's complaint can be understood in the light of the formation of theology and philosophy—to be more accurate the school of "discursive theology" (*kalām*) and the systems of knowledge in the first centuries of Islam. What is often referred to as the "translation movement" not only saw the translation of Classical texts into the emerging *lingua franca*, Arabic, but resulted in the synthesis and novel formulation of philosophical theology by these Arabic-speaking polymaths.[74] One of the challenging tasks for scholars of Sufism is navigating simultaneously expressions that may belong to categories of literature like philosophy, theology, poetry and sometimes all of these combined. It is difficult to know where to place Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) whose doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* ("The unity of Being") is at once philosophical and theological and expressed through prose and poetry both.[75]

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[73] Cited in Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, (PUP: 2016), 14

[74] Though, Adamson and Taylor note "philosophy" should be considered in an expansive sense:" "There is much of philosophical interest not only in the obviously "philosophical" writings of authors like Avicenna, and in the complex tradition of *kalam*, but also in works on the principles of jurisprudence ('*usul al-fiqh*), Qur'ānic commentary, the natural sciences, certain literary (*adab*) works that are relevant to ethics, contemporary political philosophy, and so on." in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, (New York: CUP, 2005), 2.

[75] Richard Todd summarizes Ibn 'Arabī's most notable poetry: "the Kitāb al-isrāʾ ilā al-maqām al-asrā (*The Book of the Night Journey to the Most Noble Station)*, a poetic account of the spiritual ascent through the seven heavens, and the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq (The Interpreter of Ardent Desires)*, an esoteric love poem inspired by his meeting with the saintly Niẓām ʿAyn al-Shams. Poetry plays an integral part in the *Futūhāt* too, all 560 chapters being preceded by introductory poems, the doctrinal importance of which has been expressly highlighted by the author himself." In Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 50 footnote 22. I would hasten to add to this

Born in Murcia in Islamic Spain and died in Damascus, Abu 'Abdallah Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī's life consisted of 20 years in the "West" and 20 years in the "East" with a couple years in Makkah and Madinah comprising the middle.[76] Although often characterized as more theologian than philosopher, William Chittick points out that:

> Ibn al-'Arabī took over most of the vocabulary connected to the discussion of *wujūd* from the Muslim philosophers. The term *wujūd* is not mentioned in the Koran, and the identification between it and God or the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujūd*) seems to have been made originally in philosophical texts, not in the sources of the tradition or by the theologians and Sufis.[77]

As schools of *Kalām* and *Falsafa* developed over the first few centuries of Islam, scholars like the polymath, Bu 'Alī Ibn Sina (d. 1037 c.e.), came to describe God as the "necessary existence" (*wajīb al-wujūd*). Ibn Sina held that God's essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wujūd*) were one, weighing in on a fundamental debate over the primacy of "essence" or "existence." The school of thought that came to be known by the phrase w*aḥdat al-wujūd*, including Ibn al-'Arabī, also held the primacy of existence over essence. Not only is existence prior to essence in the doctrine of w*aḥdat al-wujūd*, but God is equated with Existence itself and is the only Being that truly can be said to exist in and of itself since He alone depends on nothing for His existence.

The early Islamic philosopher and theologian al-Fārābī (d. 950 c.e.) provides an early source for several of the concepts that would later comprise fundamental tenets of *Waḥdat*

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list Ibn 'Arabī's *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds* trans. Angela Jaffray (Anqa, Oxford: 2006), a poetic allegory for spiritual flight that resembles 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* in several respects.

[76] William Chittick, "Ibn Arabi", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/ibn-arabi/>. Last Accessed October 8, 2022.

[77] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 80.

*al-Wujūd*, merging philosophy and religious monotheism in the process. In his *Perfect City*, a-Fārābī asserts that "The first being [*mawjûd*] is the first cause of existence [*wujûd*] to all other beings [*mawjûdât*]"[78] expanding Aristotle's notion of God (Gr. *Theos*) as prime-mover to explain the transmission of "existence" (*wujūd*), rather than simply explaining movement in the universe. Everything has existence insofar as it exists, but all existent things — except for God — rely on something for their own existence; things that exist are divided into those that exist by cause of another, and these are called accidental or contingent beings. God, on the other hand, is not a contingent or accidental being, but rather is the cause of Existence itself. To this end, Al-Fārābī explains that the causal chain of existence leads to God who is "more deserving to be called 'being'" as he is the "first cause of existence."[79]

In what is likely one of the earliest mentions of *Wujūd* used in mystical philosophy in the Islamicate world, Abu Rayhan al-Birūnī (d. 1051 c.e.) describes a philosophy shared between the "Greek philosophers" and the Sufis:

> Some of them held that only the First Cause possesses true wujūd , since the First Cause is independent in its *wujūd* by its very Essence, while everything else has need of it. Moreover, the *wujūd* of that which is utterly in need of something else in order to possess *wujūd* is like imagination [*khayāl*]; it is not real [*ḥaqq*]. The Real is only the One, the First. This is also the opinion of the Sufis.[80]

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[78] Stephen Menn, "al-Fārābī's Metaphysics", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/al-Fārābī-metaphysics/>. Last Accessed 13 April 2023.
[79] Menn, "al-Fārābī's Metaphysics."
[80] William Chitiick, ed. Mohammad Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought,* (Albany: SUNY, 2012), 342 footnote 4, see also Al-Biruni, *Kitāb fī taḥqīq mā li-l-hind*, (Indian Ministry of Higher Education: 1907), 24.

Al-Biruni's passage is not only fascinating for the description of a philosophy that asserts the "true" existence lies with God centuries before *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* became a doctrinal position, but it is also fascinating for the ideological agreement between Sufis and Greek philosophers that al-Birūnī claims.

**The Etymology of *Wujūd***

Chittick notes that *wujūd* can be variously translated as "finding," "being," or "existence" and "God as He is in Himself."[81] Sufi philosophers have played with this multivalent meaning of the term, and while it makes sense to occasionally translate *wujūd* as finding, the present study will follow the model set by Chittick and others and translate the term *wujūd* as "being" or "existence."[82] The related term *mawjūd*, is translated by William Chittick as "existent or existent thing" and an "existent thing is an entity which exists on any level or in any world which is envisaged; occasionally the term is also employed to refer to God Himself as He who possesses true existence or Being."[83] Chittick writes at length about what he translates as "existence/finding," which leaves intentional ambiguity between the two meanings of *wujūd*. He translates portions of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt* where *wujūd* is "Finding (*wijdān*) the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) in ecstasy."[84] It is important to note that another word sharing the root *waw jim dal* is "ecstasy" (*wajd*), associated in Sufi circles with a state that seizes a mystic during musical

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[81] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 6

[82] With al-wujūd capitalized as "Existence" or "Being" to denote the definite article serves as an epithet for God Himself.

[83] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 81

[84] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 212.

audition.[85] Ibn al-'Arabī connects these three terms together in a discussion of this near-ubiquitous Sufi ritual of mystical audition, known as *samā'*. He states "there is no possessor of sound ecstasy — whoever may experience it — unless God is found (*Wujūd*) in that ecstasy in a mode known to those who are gnostics through God."[86] There is unmistakable play between "ecstasy" (*wajd*) and "finding" (*Wujūd*) in this consideration of *samā'*.

As will be explored below, the phrase *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* — translated as the "Unity of Being," "Unity of Existence," or "Unity of Finding" as Chittick contends may sometimes be appropriate as a translation — came to define an entire mode of philosophical Sufism in the Middle Ages and this carried on into the early modern period. The phrase became so commonplace in debates over the limits of mystical monism that the faction adhering to *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* were sometimes referred to simply as *wujūdī*.[87] Bakri 'Aladdin notes that Jurjānī (d. 816/1413 c.e.) follows 'Adūd al-Dīn al-Ijī (d. 756/1355) in referring to "followers of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*" as "*wujūdīyya*" and that this term is taken up by the polemicist, and student of Taftāzānī, 'Ala al-Dīn al-Bukhari (d. 841/1438 c.e.) although another scholar, Jurjanī refers to them simply as "unitarian sufis" (*Sufiyya muwahidūn*).[88] Writing in the 17th century, Nābulusī

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[85] Indeed Sufi manuals like 'Alī al-Hujwirī's (d.1072 c.e.) *Kashf al-Mahjūb* and Shihab al-Dīn Suhrawardī's *'Awarif al-Ma'arif* offer detailed etiquette for the experience of ecstasy (*wajd*) during *samā'* and even "affecting" ecstasy (*tawajjud*).

[86] Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge, 213. Citing Futūhāt al-Makkiyya (II 538.1,21)

[87] Those professing Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the early modern Ottoman and adjacent lands were sometimes branded as "wujūdīyān" at least among the Zayniyya dervish order which debated Ibn 'Arabī in the 15th century, see Cankat Kaplan M.A. Thesis Istanbul Sehir University: 2017), 190. Nābulusī's *Idah al maqsud* instead refers to the pro Waḥdat al-Wujūd faction simply as "ahl al-Tawhid" or the Muwahiddun "Unitarians." Ibn Khaldūn defines adherents of the latter as "people of absolute unity" (ashab al wahda al-muṭlaqa) and followers of Ibn al-'Arabī as "people of theophany" (ashab al-tajalli).see Sirriyeh, 10. See also Yumna Ozer's introduction to Ibn Khaldūn's Shifa' "His critique and objections focused on two groups, the first that believed in [Self] disclosure (ashab al-tajalli) and the second in Oneness (ashab al-wanda)." (Ozer, XXXIV).

[88] 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, Al Wujūd al-Haqq wa'l Khitab al-sidq ed, Bakri Aladdin. (Damascus: Institut Francais de Arab 1995), 32 and 58-59.

acknowledged that the "party of existence' (*al-firqa al-wujūdīyya*), was sometimes applied disparagingly to mystical monists" by those like 'Ala al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, and it is against this al-Bukhari that Nābulusī shoots back by declaring critics of his ilk belong to "the party of imagining and conceptualization" as they were worshiping their own mental constructs of God.[89]

## Al-Ghazālī and *Wujūd*

In his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn,* al-Ghazālī discusses four ranks of *tawhīd* (God's Oneness). At the fourth — and highest — of these ranks, "the gnostic sees nothing in existence except One, and it is the Witnessing of the Truthful, and the Sufis call it 'annihilation in God's Oneness' (*fanā' fī'l-tawhīd*), because he — with regard to not seeing other than One — doesn't see himself either."[90] It is as a result of this state that famous mystic utterances (*shaṭḥihāt*) have been produced, like Manṣūr al-Hallāj's "I am God (*anā al-haqq*) or Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's "Glory be to me, how great is my station!"(*subḥanī, mā 'azima sha'nī*).[91] To appreciate al-Ghazālī's position on the state of annihilation in Sufism, it is worth examining Abū Yazīd (A.K.A. Bāyezīd) Bisṭāmī's articulation of the experience of God's unity and the annihilation of the self.

Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's account of "Unity" — found in Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār Nishapūrī's *Tazkīrat al-awliyā'* — was laden with some of the foundational language of "annihilation"(*fana'*) in Sufism:

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[89] Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 336. See also 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Wujūd al-Haqq*, 63.

[90] Abu Hamid Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn,* (Cairo: Markaz al-ihram, 1977), 357.

"و الرابعة أن لا يرى في الوجود إلا واحدا, وهو مشاهدة الصديقين, وتسميه الصوفية: الفناء في التوحيد, لأنه من حيث لا يرىإلا واحدا, فلا يرى نفسه أيضا, وإذا لم رى نفسه لكونه مستغرقا بالتوحيد كان فانيا عن نفسه في توحيده, بمعنى أنه فنى عن رؤية نفسه و الخلق"

[91] Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights: a Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. David Buchman (Brigham Young UP: 1998), 18.

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He laid the crown of munificence on my head, and opened unto me the door of the palace of Unity. When He perceived that my attributes were annihilated in His attributes, He bestowed on me a name of His own presence and addressed me with His own Selfhood. Singleness became manifest; duality vanished.[92]

The experience of 'unity' or 'singleness' here entails the annihilation of the mystic's self (*nafs*) where only God's self remains. The compiler of Bāyazīd's account, Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār Nishapūrī wrote of seven valleys in his epic poem and allegory for spiritual wayfaring, *The Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*). He writes on the Valley of Unity: "If there is an 'I,' there is no unity. / Get rid of it and unity becomes possible. / Lose yourself in the Beloved—that is unity. / Lose even the losing—that is oneness […] Not an iota. I have become without attributes. I have attained knowledge, and yet I know nothing. I do not know if you are me or I am you, for I have become lost in you, and you in me."[93]

Al-Ghazālī is perhaps one of the first Sufis — or at least the most prominent — to connect this experience of unity to God's existence (*wujūd*). In a passage of Ghazālī's esoteric text, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, he describes the gnostic's experience of the "reality of realities" (*haqīqat al-haqa'iq*) as they "perfect their ascent" and "see—witnessing with their own eyes—that there is none in existence save God (*laysa fī'l-wujūd ila Allah*) and that 'Everything is perishing except His face'"(Q28:88).[94] That God is the sole Real Existent is found in the *The Niche of Lights* as well as in his magnum opus, The revival of the religious sciences, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. William Chittick's translation of this passage regarding *Wujūd* goes as follows:

[92] Farid al-Dīn 'Attar, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' (Memorial of the Saints) by Farid al-Dīn Attar*, trans. AJ. Arberry, (Omphaloskepsis: 2000), 129-130.
[93] Sholeh Wolpe, *The Conference of the Birds,* (W.W. Norton & Co: 2017), 295.
[94] Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, 16.

"There is nothing in wujūd but God. [...] wujūd belongs only to the Real One."[95] Ghazālī

examines the emanation of Wujūd in *The Niche of Lights* using light as metaphor:

> Existence can be classified into the existence that a thing possesses in itself and that
> which it possesses from another. When a thing has existence from another, its existence
> is borrowed and has no support in itself. When the thing is viewed in itself and with
> respect to itself, it is pure nonexistence. It only exists inasmuch as it is ascribed to
> another. This is not a true existence, just as you came to know in the example of the
> borrowing of clothing and wealth. Hence the Real Existent is God, just as the Real Light
> is He.[96]

Ghazālī is building upon Avicenna's "necessary existent" (*wajib al-Wujūd*) and asserting that

God is the sole, Real Existent from which all things borrow their own existence, a central tenet

of the school later known as *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. As with much of Mishkat al-Anwār, Ghazālī

favors the metaphor of light emanating forth from the sun, and explains God as Real Existence

and the source of all existence. Ghazālī writes that "there is no he but He, because 'he' is an

expression for whatever may be pointed to, and there is no pointing to anything but Him. Or,

rather whenever you point to something, in reality you are pointing to Him. [...] In the obvious

sense of this example, everything in existence is related to God just as light is related to the

sun."[97]

Ibn al-'Arabī uses a similar analogy to explain how things come into existence, but with shadow

(*zill*) as metaphor for non-existence to explain how God's Existence mingles with non-existence

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[95] Chittick, Search for the Lost Heart, 72. Frank Griffel, also citing the *Ihya'*, explains that for Ghazālī "annihilation of the self" leads to "the realization that there is nothing in existence other than God (*laysa fī l-wujūd ghayruhu*). It is false to assume that there exists something that is not God. All that exists (*al-wujūd*) is He." Frank Griffel, Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology, 254.

[96] Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, 16.

[97] Ghazālī, Niche of Lights, trans. Buchman, 20.

(*'adam*) to produce multiplicity out of his Unity.[98] Finally, Mulla Ṣadrā takes up the spiritual light (*nūr*) of the Illuminationist school of thought and merges it with the emphasis on Wujūd found in the Akbari school where God is both Light of Lights (*nūr al-anwār*) and Existence (*wujūd*).

### *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in Ibn al-'Arabī and the Akbari School

It is worth emphasizing that one of the keystone philosophical formulas associated with Ibn al-'Arabī, the "Unity of Being" (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), was never actually stated by the shaykh himself. Bakri Aladdin asserts that the formula "*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*" can be found for the first time in Suhrawardī Maqtūl's (d. 1191.ce.) *Talwīhat*, and the same term can be found in the *Adab al-Sulūk* of an Andalusian named 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Jilyani who ended his life in Damascus like Ibn al-'Arabī.[99] As shall be explored below, Ibn Sab'īn was one of the first philosophers to use this formula as a statement of mystical monism. It is still not uncommon to see the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī in spite of the fact that Ibn al-'Arabī never used this phrase in any of his works. Even Ibn al-'Arabī's son in law, and main propagator of his philosophical system, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī, never used *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* more than once. To be sure, Qunawī expresses the pith of what will become *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in the following passage without using the exact phrase:

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[98] Chittick writes of this process in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought as divine Self-disclosure: Self-disclosure is illumination: The nonexistent possible thing is illuminated by the light of existence" and cites Ibn al-'Arabī writing in God's voice to His servant "The light which you have derives from that in your essence which is turned toward Me." Incidentally, Ibn al-'Arabī uses this metaphor to emphasize the difference between God, who is pure light and His servant, who is light mixed with shadow. God admonishes the servant to "look not upon Me with a gaze that will annihilate (*ifnā'*) you from your shadow. Then you would claim that you are I and fall into ignorance." Likewise, God is Existence, and humanity borrows from His Existence, but it would be false to say that contingent beings like mankind are identical to God. Futūhāt II 303.28 cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 93-4.

[99] Bakri Aladdin, *Wujūd al-Haqq*, 70.

> Know that God (*al-ḥaqq*) is pure Being  (*al-wujūd al-maḥḍ*), wherein there is no
> difference, and that He is One according to a true unity (*waḥda ḥaqīqīya*) which is not
> to be conceived of in relation to the many; for neither the reality of this unity as it is in
> itself, nor the conception thereof [on the part of created beings] imply any opposite (or
> correlative).[100]

Claude Addas, remarks that "not only did Ṣadr al-Dīn give Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine a precise form

and outline but he also gave it a name: *waḥdat al-wujūd*".[101] However, as Richard Todd points

out in his monograph on Sadr al-Dīn Qunawī, the actual phrase itself occurs only once in

Qūnawī's works and — far from being introduced as a "name for Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine" — it

"appears quite innocuously in passing."[102]This is in line with Chittick's claim that Waḥdat

al-Wujūd was not a doctrinal term in Qunawī's time.

    With his discussion of *wujūd*, Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses much of what will in coming

centuries be signified by the phrase "*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*"; the fact that he and his immediate

followers never used this exact phrase becomes a less important matter when it is quite clear

that he did indeed lay the foundations of this doctrine for his later adherents.  For example, Ibn

al-ʿArabī states: "[f]or the Verifiers it has been established that there is nothing in

Being/existence but God. As for us [creatures], though we exist, our existence is through

Him."[103] As with al-Ghazālī, nothing truly exists except for God. As for creation's existence, "He

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[100] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Brill: 2014), 49.

[101] In Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man,* 47.

[102] Todd, 47, for the text itself, see his Appendix 3 on 206: "Now, for his part, man's perception is due, not to his being One according to a true oneness like the unity of Being (*ka-waḥdati-l-wujūd*), but rather to his being a particular essence (ḥaqīqa) attributed with existence, life, knowledge, and some commensurability between itself and the desired object of perception, not to mention the absence of the various obstacles capable of impeding perception."

[103] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya,* (I, 279, 5) cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 94. See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. Ahmed Shams al-Dīn, Dar al-Kutub ʿIlmiyya, Beirut: 1999) Vol 1 chapter 54 p. 421

is their existence and from Him they acquire existence. And existence/Being is nothing other than the Real, nor is it something outside of Him from which He gives to them."[104] That is to say, Existence or Being belongs to the True Existence and flows to creation; to continue the above metaphor, just as light waves are of the Sun and of the Earth they shine on simultaneously. Unlike al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides a scheme for how plurality comes into existence from unity, and how God's Existence provides for discrete existents through the creation of entities, or "entification" (*taʿayyun*). He explains, "the existent things become distinct and plural through the plurality of the entities and their distinction in themselves" and yet it remains that "there is nothing in Being / existence except God."[105] Thus, it becomes apparent that the ideological foundation of the "Unity of Being" is found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's work, in spite of the absence of the phrase *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*.

The emerging school of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, named the "Akbari School" after the "Great Shaykh" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) himself, and it owes much to Ibn al-ʿArabī's son in law Sadr al-Dīn Qunawī for his systematization of his father-in-law's massive corpus of work. In his *Risālat al-Nuṣūṣ fī tahqīq al-tawr al-makhṣūṣ*, Qunawī writes:

> Know that the Real is Sheer *Wujūd* without any diversity within Him. He is one with a true oneness that is not intellected as the contrary of manyness; its realization in itself and its conception in sound, realized knowledge does not depend upon conceiving of an opposite. [...] We say "oneness" to assert incomparability, to make understood, {and to add emphasis}, not to denote the notion of oneness as it is conceptualized by the minds of the veiled.[106]

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[104] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, (I, 406, 14) cf. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany:SUNY, 1989), 94.

[105] Ibn al-ʿArabī, Futūhāt al-Makkiyya , (II, 160,1) cf. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 95.

[106] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī "The Keys to the Fuṣūṣ," trans. William Chittick, 32. <https://www.williammcchittick.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Sadr_al-Din_Qunawi_The_Texts_al-Nusus. pdf>. Last Accessed 7 March, 2024.

Here it is apparent — as it was with Ibn al-'Arabī — that Qunawī is expounding the fundamental principles behind what becomes recognized as "*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*" a century later, even without using this exact term. Sa'd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 1300 c.e.), himself a student of Qunawī and student of Akbari thought, used the phrase *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* and yet, as Chittick points out, "[i]n Farghānī's writings, *waḥdat al-wujūd* has still not been established as an independent technical term, and certainly not as a designation for a specific school of thought."[107] Instead, one of the first of Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought to not only employ *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a "technical term to refer to a whole doctrine, not part of a doctrine" and the first to "divide the people of oneness into different groups according to their differing formulations of *waḥdat al-wujūd*" was 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. before 1300 c.e.).[108] In a conversation with his teacher Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥammūya (d. 1252 c.e.) — who had met with Ibn al-'Arabī and Qunawī in Damascus — Nasafī records Ḥammūya responding to the question "what is God?" with "The existent [al-mawjūd] is God" and "What is the cosmos?" with "There is no existent but God."[109]

Finally, there is a clear problem when scholars consider Ibn al-'Arabī as the "founder" of the Unity of Being. As evidenced by al-Ghazālī's Niche of Lights, Ibn al-'Arabī is merely one

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[107] Chittick, Search for the Lost Heart, 80. Chittick examines Farghānī's words: "Both *waḥdat al-wujūd and kathrat al-'ilm* [...] are attributes of the Essence. [...] Once Farghānī begins to employ the term repeatedly, it refers to a relatively low station of spiritual realization since the adept who witnesses *waḥdat al-wujūd* still has to ascend to *kathrat al-'ilm* and beyond. Only the greatest of the prophets and friends of God attain to the station of combining the two perspectives, and at this point the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* plays no significant role."

[108] Chittick, "Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: the heritage of Rūmī*. ed. Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 84.

[109] Chittick, 84.

point in a greater field of philosophers who considered God's "existence" in these philosophical and theological terms. Chittick summarizes the issue:

> In fact, *waḥdat al-wudjūd* was more an emblem than a doctrine, and if Ibn al-ʿArabī was considered its founder, this simply indicates that his writings mark Ṣūfism's massive entry into the theoretical discussions of *wudjūd* that before him had been the almost exclusive preserve of the philosophers and the mutakallimūn.[110]

To put it another way, Ibn al-ʿArabī's gravitational field became so massive that the concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* was pulled into his orbit, though it originated elsewhere and was developed by other Sufi philosopher-theologians expressing a philosophy of mystical monism. As explored above, the fact that Ibn al-ʿArabī never used the phrase is not as troubling as it seems at first glance; much of what *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* expresses was already present in Ibn al-ʿArabī's work and  in that of his first generation of students. Nonetheless, it remains a worthwhile task to shine a light on those who shared the stage in professing mystical monism alongside Ibn al-ʿArabī albeit receiving far less of the spotlight like Ibn Sabʿīn .

## Ibn Sabʿīn and Waḥdat al-Wujūd

Hailing from Murcia in Islamic Spain, just like Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn Sab'īn (d. 1271 c.e.) was a key Sufi with a monistic philosophy. Chittick points out that "[w]hat might be considered the earliest instances in which the term *waḥdat al-wudjūd* designates a distinct position are found in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī's fellow-Murcian Ibn Sabʿīn."[111] It was Ibn Sabʿīn, not Ibn

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[110] William Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhud", EI 2nd ed. Brill, 2012.
[111] Chittick "Waḥdat al-Shuhud."  Cf.  Vincent J. Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle (al-*Ihāta*): Soul, Intellect, and the Oneness of Existence  in the Doctrine of Ibn Sab'īn" in *Sufism and Theology,* (Edinburgh UP: 2007), 34.

al-ʿArabī, who was the first to use *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as a technical term in a philosophical system. Vincent Cornell clarifies Ibn Sabʿīn's use of the phrase *Waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> In several of his writings, Ibn Sabʿīn uses the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* to characterise his doctrine. For example, at the end of *Rislat al-nūriyya* he uses the term as a synonym for the 'Reality of Absolute Oneness' (*wujūd al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa aʿnī waḥdat al-wujūd*). In another treatise, he equates *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the Unification of Existence (*ittiḥād al-wujūd*) [...] However, even Ibn Sabʿīn more commonly used other terms to speak about the Oneness of Existence, such as al-waḥda al-maḥḍa (Unadulterated Oneness), *al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa* (Absolute Oneness) or *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (Absolute Existence). In a few texts, he also uses the exclamatory phrase *Allah faqaṭ* (God Alone).[112]

So it is possibly Ibn Sabʿīn who first uses *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as a technical term, and this in conjunction with a starker monism than Ibn al-ʿArabī's through synonymous usage of terms like "absolute unity" (*al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa*) and "God Alone"(*Allah faqaṭ*) to express God's Existence.

There is some question of whether or not Ibn Sab'īn was versed in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī. Although Chittick would be the first to remind the reader of the difficulty of proving "influence" from one Sufi to another in the 13th century,[113] he does confess that "[o]ne has to agree with Michel Chodkiewicz that Ibn Sabʿīn was thoroughly influenced by the perspective of Ibn al-ʿArabī, even if he does not acknowledge this fact in his works."[114] There certainly are differences between Ibn ʿArabī and Sab'īn. Not only was Ibn Sab'īn much more well-versed in philosophy, but his monistic view of reality went a step further than Ibn al-ʿArabī's. Birgül Bozkurt writes poetically that, for Ibn ʿArabī, "God is the Being of everything that is" and "is the

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[112] Cornell, 34.

[113] See for example, his tongue-in-cheek chapter on "Ibn al-ʿArabī's 'influence' on Rūmī" in In Search of the Lost Heart, 89-101.

[114] Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 81.

Lamp of the heavens and the earth"(Qur'an 24:35), while, for Ibn Sab'īn "God *is everything that is*" and is "a sun without rays whose incandescence is in Itself Its own end."[115] While Ibn al-'Arabī asserts that God is Existence, he leaves more theoretical space between "creator" and "creation" through the process of "entification" (*ta'ayyun*) by which God brings things into existence, but Ibn Sab'īn has no such compunctions about declaring God's unity in a more radical way.

> The Intimate believes that whatever he attains comes to him from beyond the Spheres, and that when the Intimate attains the realization of union, his state is higher and finer than what the philosopher imagines, for he is distinguished by [his concern with] the universal [alone]. For this reason, the Intimate is satisfied with nothing but Absolute Existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). [...] Do not let the *tawḥīd* that you hear others discuss betray you; for the knower, knowledge, and what is known are all One. So know that what is necessary is Existence itself and that nothing issues from it but the One.[116]

Ibn Sab'īn's profound statement that "the knower, knowledge, and what is known are all One" is the highest realization in his system of thought. Although he places his ideas above "the philosopher," he holds that real *tawḥīd* means realizing that all "issues from" the "One," employing the Neoplatonic monad instead of "Allah."

Vincent J. Cornell writes: "[f]ar more than Ibn al-'Arabī, who in his writings always felt the need to Islamise transcendent truths by grounding them in Qur'anic epistemology, Ibn Sab'īn goes out on a doctrinal limb by taking the concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* literally."[117] For

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[115] Birgül Bozkurt, "Muhyiddin İbn Arabi ve Abdulhak İbn Seb'in'in Vahdet Anlayişlarinin Mukayesesi" *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İslam Tetkikleri Merkezi Dergisi*, Yıl 6, Cilt 6, Sayı 2, 2020, 356. Bozkurt writes: *İbn Arabî'de Allah var olan her şeyin varlığıdır. İbn Seb'în'de ise var olan her şeydir. İbn Arabî'nin Allah'ı 'Göklerin ve yerin nurudur'[Q 24:35]. İbn Seb'în'inki ise kendisinin akkor haline gelmesi ebediliğine uygun bir biçimde olup ışınları olmayan bir güneştir ve bu durumu.*"

[116] Vincent J. Cornell, "The Way of the Axial Intellect: The Islamic Hermeticism of Ibn Sab'in," *JMIAS*, (Vol 22, 1997), 72-3.

[117] Vincent J. Cornell. "The All-Comprehensive Circle," 43-44.

Cornell, then, Ibn al-ʿArabī was not just on safer ground theologically but also doesn't take God's unicity as far. Chittick explains the use of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* found in Ibn Sabʿīn's *Risālat al-naṣīḥa* ("The Treatise of Good Counsel") noting that "in several passages Ibn Sabʿīn employs the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, not in passing, but as a specific designation for the fundamental nature of things._In him we find what we did not find in Qūnawī and his followers, namely, instances in which the term appears to have become a technical expression referring to the worldview of the sages and the friends of God."[118] The passage from Ibn Sabʿīn's *Risālat al-naṣīḥa* using *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is as follows:

> The common people and the ignorant are dominated by the accidental, which is manyness and plurality, while the elect—the men of knowledge—are dominated by the root, which is *waḥdat al-wujūd*. He who remains with the root does not undergo transferal or transformation; he remains fixed in his knowledge and his realization. But he who stays with the branch undergoes transformation and transferal; things become many in his eyes, so he forgets and becomes negligent and ignorant.[119]

Here Ibn Sabʿīn suggests a spiritual elect are capable of participating less in the conditional or accidental realities, and instead turn toward the "root" that is the Necessary Existent: God. Not an uncommon theme in Neoplatonic texts, Ibn Sabʿīn describes a mystical, ontological flight from the accidental or contingent toward the most real "root," that is the "Unity of Being" (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*).

**Mystical Monism in Persian: "All is He" (*Hama Ūst*)**

Arabic language scholarship tends to focus on *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as the primary expression of mystical monism in Sufism, but to limit the scope to this one phrase would risk

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[118] Chittick In Search of the Lost Heart, 81.
[119] Chittick, In Search of the Lost Heart, 81-82. See also Abdurrahman Badawi, *Rasa'il Ibn Sab'īn*, (1965), 194.

ignoring centuries of literary production by Persian-speaking mystics. The phrase "All is He" (*hama ūʾst*) is one example of a Persian expression that conveys a message of God's radical oneness in the same vein as *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. This phrase may be first traced to 'Abdallah Anṣārī, the great Central Asian Sufi who uses this phrase in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Sufiyya* in a chapter on "Questions on Tawḥīd" in a meditation on how plurality originates from oneness.[120] As noted previously, al-Ghazālī declared in his Ihya 'ulūm al-dīn that "There is nothing in *wujūd* but God. [...] *wujūd* belongs only to the Real One".[121] When he wrote his *Kimiya-yi Saʿādat* (Chemistry of Happiness) — which is the Persian version of his Arabic magnum opus, the previously mentioned *Ihyāʾ* — he used the phrase "All is He." In his section on Ibadat under a section titled "the truth of dhikr," al-Ghazālī writes of the mystic:

> this person also should not see anything except the Almighty and say that "All is He" (*Hama ūst*) and there is no self except Him, and this is the place of separation. From between him and the truth (*haqq*), unity (*yaganegī*) will be achieved, and this will be the first world of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and unity (*vahdāniyat*), [...] so that he will not be far from God Almighty, and he will not be aware that separation is known to someone who knows two things: himself, God, and this person. At the same time, he is unaware of himself and knows only one.[122]

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[120] 'Abdallah Anṣārī, *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya* (47:20) "Questions on Tawḥīd," <https://ganjoor.net/abdullah/tabaghat/sh47> Last Accessed October 8, 2022.

[121] See above, footnote 22.

[122] Al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-yi Saʾadat*, https://ganjoor.net/ghazzali/kimia/arkan/a1/sh72. The relevant section is found in the First Pillar, part 72, verse 7.

این کس نیز هیچ چیز را نبیند جز حق تعالی و گوید همه اوست و جز وی خود نیست و بدین جایگاه جدایی از میان وی و حق برخیزد و یگانگی حاصل آید. و این اول عالم توحید و وحدانیت باشد، یعنی که خبر جدایی برخیزد که وی را از خدای تعالی دوری و آگاهی نباشد که جدایی کسی داند که دو چیز را بداند، خود را و خدا را. و این کس در این حال از خود بی خبر است و جز یک نمی شناسد، جدایی چون داند.

As with *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, the theme of God's unity is expressed through the process of

annihilation (*fāna*) such that "there is no self" remaining "except Him."

In the work of 'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 1492c.e.) both the Arabic *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*

and Persian *hama ūst* can both be found. In his *Durrat al-Fakhīra*, Jāmī explores the debates

of the Sufis, including the question of existence (*Wujūd*), and — as Eve Feuillebois has

demonstrated — he explicitly touches on this philosophical topic in his commentary on his own

mystical quatrains titled, *Sharḥ-i rubā'iyyāt dar vaḥdat-i vujūd*.[123] Annemarie Schimmel

translates one of Jāmī's poems using "All is He:"

Neighbor and associate and companion — everything is He.
In the beggar's coarse frock and in the king's silk —
everything is He.
In the crowd of separation and in the loneliness of
collectedness
By God! everything is He, and by God! everything is He.[124]

Here Jāmī brilliantly plays with the coincidence of opposites to emphasize that they do not

actually exist, but rather, "All is He." The poignant phrase *Hama ūst* ("All is He") can also be

found earlier in the work of great mystical poets writing in Persian, such as 'Aṭṭār Nishapūrī in

his *Musībatname*,[125] and earlier in Hakim Sana'ī's work as the latter writes "All that is in all the

universe (*kul-e kawn*) is old and new /  He is the recipient of action (*maf'ūl*) and actor (*fā'l*)

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[123] Eve Feuillebois, "Jāmī's Sharh-i rubâ'iyyât dar vahdat-i vujûd: Merging Akbarian doctrine,  Naqshbandi practice, and Persian mystical quatrain", in Th. D'Hubert et A. Papas (dir.), A Worldwide Literature: Jāmī (1414-1492) in the Dâr al-Islam and Beyond, à paraître chez Brill en 2016.

[124] Cited in Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1975) 283

[125] Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nishapūrī, *Mūṣībatnāme*, <https://ganjoor.net/attar/mosibatname>. Last accessed 18 March 2024.

All is He (*Hama ūst*)."[126] Again this phrase is used in dismantling opposites — including the self and God — in the face of God's Unity.

Another striking parallel between these two philosophical phrases is that they became a locus of debate among Sufis; just as *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* would come to face it's counter-position, *Waḥdat al-shuhūd* ("Unity of Witnessing"), the phrase "All is He"(*Hama* ūst) was countered with "All is *from* Him" (*hama az ūst*) in the hope of preserving God's transcendence (*tanzīh*). In Naqshbandi circles, this debate emerged at least as early as Zayn al-Dīn Khwafi (d. 1435) whose "intense antipathy toward Ibn al-'Arabī was based on considering the notion of 'unity of being' [...] among the most reprehensible intellectual movements in Islamic history" and explains why his companions were known for saying "All is from Him" (*hama az ū ast*).[127] Aḥmad Sirhindī and subsequent members of the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya preferred "All is from Him" rather than the radical monism of claiming "All is He."[128]


**Mystical Monism and the Question of Religious Pluralism**

Ibn Sab'īn 's Sicilian Questions were in response to the Christian ruler of Sicily, Frederick II,[129] who was himself a remarkably cosmopolitan ruler — sometimes referred to as

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[126] Hakim Sana'i "Tariq al-Tahqiq", part 4, "fi wahdaniyat Allah ta'ala" (on the Oneness of God Almighty) https://ganjoor.net/sanaee/tariq/sh4. Or alternately, "it is that the doer and the done-to all are He".

[127] Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, *religion and society in medieval islam*, (Columbia University Press: 2011), 99.

[128] For an assessment of Aḥmad Sirhindī's position as anti-monistic, see S.A.A. Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, Vol II, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), 209-210, and for Khwaja Mir Dard's (d. 1721) similar preference for "all is from Him" and anti-wujūdī tendencies, see Ibid. 245.

[129] Anna Ayşe Akasoy, "Ibn Sab'īn 's Sicilian Questions: The Text, its Sources, and their Historical Context," *Al-Qantara*, XXIX 1, enero-junio 2008, 120-1

the "baptized Sultan"[130] — of an island that was then composed of Arabs, Greek Orthodox Christians and Italian or Norman Catholics. That Ibn Sab'īn is often described as a hermeticist is also significant. The figure of Hermes Trismegistos, or Hermes "thrice-greatest," is a hybrid of the Egyptian god of writing and wisdom, Thoth, and the Greek messenger-god Hermes that emerged from Hellenic Egypt and came to be associated with the Biblical figure known as Enoch and Idrīs in Arabic literature. Hermes Trismegistus represents a unique hybrid of wisdom literature with a foot in each Abrahamic religion as well as the Egyptian and Greek religious traditions. Regarding the spread of Hermeticism to Arabic, Kevin van Bladel notes that "[t]here are probably more works attributed to Hermes surviving in Arabic than in any other language, and the majority of them are still unknown and unpublished."[131] This geographic spread of Hermeticism ranged from Sassanian Persia to Islamic Spain where Ibn Sab'īn was introduced to this body of wisdom literature. Ibn Sab'īn establishes his Hermetic leanings at the beginning of his *Budd al-'Ārif*:

> I petitioned God (*astakhartu li'llāh*) to propagate [through me] the wisdom (*ḥikma*) which Hermes Trismegistus (*al-harāmisa*) revealed in the earliest times (*al-duhūr al-'awwaliyya*), the realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) that prophetic guidance has made beneficial [for mankind], the happiness (*sa'd*) that is sought by every person of guidance, the light (*nūr*) by which every Fully-Actualized Seeker (*mujtahid muḥaqqaq*) wishes to be illuminated, the knowledge (*'ilm*) that will no longer be broadcast or disseminated from [Hermes] in future ages, and the secret (*sirr*) from which and through which and for the sake of which the prophets were sent.[132]

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[130] W. Montgomery Watt, The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe, (Edinburgh, 1972), 5.

[131] Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, (OUP: 2009), 10

[132] cited in Vincent J. Cornell, "The Way of the Axial Intellect: the Islamic Hermetism of Ibn Sab'īn ," JMIAS 1997, Vol. 22, 54

Though this is just a flavor of his oeuvre, from the vocabulary he selects, it is clear that Ibn Sab'īn's blend of Hermeticism is thoroughly Islamized and Sufised; praying *istikhāra* to seek God's aid through guidance of a prophet while sprinkling his language with esoteric goals of "light" (*nūr*), the secret (*sirr*), and the realities (*ḥaqā'iq*). Yet his type of medieval Hermeticism also owes a debt to Neoplatonic philosophy and Ibn Sab'īn uses the name "Hermes" (*haramisa*) instead of the Qur'anic Idrīs, leaving plenty for the detractors of Greek philosophy to criticize in his work.

Just as his orthodox ulema detractors attacked his reliance on classical philosophy, so too did his interest in Hermeticism draw their ire. Vincent Cornell writes of the interconfessional nature of the Hermetic Corpus and the label "syncretism:"

> The accusation of syncretism (or of hybridity as its variant) is a polemic that is as ancient as Hermetism itself. The concept of syncretism denies legitimacy to hybrid doctrines by positing a purity of 'original' doctrines that is seldom borne out (if ever) in real life. In modern colonial and post-colonial Islam, the charge of syncretism has often been used as a way of silencing both Islamic mysticism and religious vernaculars such as Indonesian Islam, and even the 'historical' Jesus has been accused of borrowing ideas from India. The contemporary scholar should be wary of allowing the concept of syncretism to obscure the coherence that may lie behind hybrid doctrines.[133]

Ibn Sab'īn was — and still is — a controversial figure because of his eclectic and cosmopolitan intellectual interests. It is not difficult to surmise that Ibn Sab'īn's openness to philosophy and cross-confessional Hermetic literature is due to his uncompromisingly monistic stance of Absolute Unity (*al-Waḥda al-muṭlaqa*). Finally, it will be necessary to compare the question of religious pluralism in Ibn Sab'īn with Ibn al-'Arabī.

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[133] Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle," 33.

A passage from Ibn al-'Arabī's *Interpreter of Desires* (*Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*) is often

cited as an example of how passionate love (*'ishq*) may obliterate confessional boundaries:

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a
> pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
> And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaʿba and the
> Tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.
> I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's
> camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[134]

Michael Sells reckons that this passage is the most often-quoted of any written by Ibn

al-'Arabī,[135] but it is also probably his most misunderstood passage. First, it is worth cautioning

that Ibn 'Arabī's poetry should not be read as if it were purely a theological statement. The

passage could also be read as an example of the distinct genre of Sufi poetry labeled *kufriyāt*

for its apparent transgression of the binaries, faith (*imān*) and unbelief (*kufr*). In this genre, the

poet makes shocking statements that play with God's presence appearing in the least expected

— or seemingly paradoxical — places. 10th century Persian Sufi Abū Bakr al-Shiblī provides

an early verse of the *kufriyāt* mode as he declares "In mosques and taverns, in pagan and

Muslim only God I saw!"[136] The vast majority of Sufis do not claim that all religions are equal; to

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[134] Muhyi'ddin Ibn al-'Arabī, *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* trans. R.A. Nicholson, (London: Royal Asiatic Society,1911), iii. Ibn al-'Arabī also describes the object of his affection, a young woman, in terms that draw from Judaism Christianity and Islam freely. "When she kills with her glances, her speech restores to life, as tho' she, in giving life thereby, were Jesus. The smooth surface of her legs is (like) the Tora in brightness, and I follow it and tread in its footsteps as tho' I were Moses. She is a bishopess, one of the daughters of Rome, un-adorned: thou seest in her a radiant Goodness. [...] She has baffled everyone who is learned in our religion, every student of the Psalms of David, every Jewish doctor, and every Christian priest. If with a gesture she demands the Gospel, thou wouldst deem us to be priests and patriarchs and deacons" *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* 49. The trope of the Sheikh in love with a non-Muslim, often Christian woman is not uncommon. Another famous example can be found in 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* in the figure of Sheikh Sam'an. For Shaykh Sarmad, the Armenian Jewish convert to Islam, student of Mulla Ṣadrā, and *mazjūb* (divinely attracted mystic), it was a Hindu boy named Abhay Chand.
[135] Cited in Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī*, Oxford UP: 2018, 24.
[136] Annemarie Schimmel *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 147.

assert this would at best be a backwards projection of modern notions surrounding religious pluralism, and at worst deny the Islamic belief and praxis at the heart of Sufi life for centuries.

Gregory Lipton has recently offered a much-needed corrective regarding the topic of Ibn al-ʿArabī's supposed "religious pluralism." Lipton marshalls evidence in three veins to counter this notion: *taḥrīf*, or the assertion that Christians and Jews misinterpreted their texts; *naskh*, the "abrogation" of other religions with the perfection of religion in Islam; and the supremacy of Muhammad's prophethood.  Regarding the first, Ibn ʿArabī himself discusses *taḥrīf* which refers to the allegation that Jews and Christians distorted the revelations which they were sent, either in meaning (*taḥrīf al-maʿānī),* or distortion of the physical text itself (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*).[137] Lipton is able to assert that Ibn al-ʿArabī is a "staunch supersessionist"[138] because he embraces the Qur'anic concept of "abrogation" (*Naskh*). The Quranic basis for this concept relates to the revelation of the Qur'an specifically[139] but came to refer also to the status of Jewish and Christian revelation in relation to Muhammad's revelatory mission and its law. Western scholars have often taken Ibn ʿArabī to uphold the validity of religions other than Islam, citing chapter 339 of *The Meccan Openings* where he writes: "All the revealed religions [sharāʾiʿ] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars.[140]

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[137] Qur'an, 2:75; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41.

[138] Lipton, 9.

[139] "Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything? (Qur'an 2:106 tr. Abdel Haleem)
When We substitute one revelation for another, – and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages),– they say, "Thou art but a forger": but most of them understand not. (Qur'an 16:101).

[140] Lipton, 67.

Finally, Lipton cites a "famous letter" where Ibn al-'Arabī "rebukes" the new Seljuk Sultan for his leniency toward the Jewish and Christian population, the "Protected People" or "*ahl al-dhimma,* which included the "raising of Church bells, the display of disbelief (*kufr*) and the proclamation of associationism (*shirk*).[141] Ibn al-'Arabī is referring to the Pact of 'Umar (*Shurūṭ 'Umar*) which stipulated limitations on the religious buildings and open practice of Christianity or Judaism in Muslim cities. This was deemed important enough to include in ibn al-'Arabī's celebrated *Meccan Openings* (*Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*).[142] The Qur'anic basis which Ibn 'Arabī cites is 9:29 which commands Muhammad to "fight the Jews and Christians until they submit to his law and consent to pay the *jizya* "in a state of humiliation."[143] This is echoed by a passage in the introduction of The Meccan Openings, Ibn 'Arabī cites a *hadith* stating that if the People of the Book do not submit:

> then the sword of the *sharī'a* is the most repellent and cutting! 'I have been commanded to fight people until they say there is no god but God and until they believe in me and what I have brought.' This is the Prophet's statement, may God bless him and grant him peace. He did not oblige us to argue with them when they are present; rather, (our recourse) is to struggle (*jihād*) and the sword if they resist what has been declared to them.[144]

Not only does this language assert the supremacy of Islam, its Prophet, and its law, but it espouses the subjugation of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). Ibn al-'Arabī even holds that the very salvation of these people is dependent on their payment of the *jizya* tax as per Qur'an 9:29; "rather than supporting the efficacy of Judaism and Christianity in terms of scriptural truth or experiential 'gnosis,' the spiritual efficacy that Ibn 'Arabī granted the People

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[141] Lipton, 55.
[142] Lipton, 57.
[143] Lipton, 82.
[144] Lipton, 108.

of the Book was predicated purely on their ability to obey the Qur'an and thus enter through the back door, so to speak, of the Muhammadan sharia."[145] The emphasis here on the particulars of Islamic Law demonstrate a very real side of Ibn al-'Arabī that locates the prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an and the *Sharī'ah* at the center of his "universalist" worldview. Just because the particulars of Islam are his central axis does not mean, however, that Ibn al'Arabī does not speak of universals or complicate the boundaries between faith and infidelity.

While Lipton's study should rightly give pause to any who would make Ibn al-'Arabī into a paragon of modern religious pluralism or interfaith dialogue, it does not "cancel out" his statements that do nonetheless complicate the border between different religions. Ibn al-'Arabī can still make universalizing claims, even if the center of his universe is undoubtedly the prophet Muhammad. Far more than the fleeting verses in his *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*, Ibn al-'Arabī's writings contain profound statements that challenge notions of difference in religion in the face of God's Unity. Take, for example, Ibn al-'Arabī's interpretation of the Golden Calf idol constructed by the Jews at Sinai found in his chapter on Hārūn in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Moses refuses to condemn his brother and fellow prophet, Hārūn, for allowing the Jews to worship the Calf, and Ibn al-'Arabī provides an explanation for why this is, as Musa:

> [K]new the One the people of the Calf worshipped since Allah decreed that only He would be worshipped. When Allah decrees something, it must occur. [...] This is a wisdom from Allah which is manifest in existence that He should be worshipped *in every form*. When the form departed after that, it only departed after it had been clad with divinity by its worshipper. For this reason, there is no species but that it is worshipped, either by the worship of making divine or by the worship of subjugation. That must be so for the one who has intellect. Nothing is worshipped in the universe except after it is clad in elevation for the worshipper and its rank is manifest in his heart. For that reason, Allah called Himself for us, "the Exalter of ranks," and He did not say

[145] Lipton, 116.

the "Exalter of rank," for ranks are many in the same source. He decreed that we worship only Him in many ranks. Each rank accords a divine locus of tajalli [...] *The complete gnostic is the one who sees that every idol is a locus of Allah's tajalli in which He is worshipped.* For that reason, they are all called "god" in spite of having a particular name of a stone, tree, animal, man, star, or angel. This is the nature of the personality in it. Divinity is a rank which the worshipper imagines it to have, and it is the rank of his idol. In reality, it is a locus for the tajalli of Allah belonging to the sight of this particular worshipper devoted to this idol in this particular locus of tajalli.[146]

This remarkable reevaluation of idol-worship is based on God's manifestation (*tajalli*) reaching everywhere, even idols since He "decreed that only He would be worshiped;" instead of viewing idol-worship as the polar opposite of a proper Islamic monotheism, Ibn al-'Arabī is asserting that God is manifesting according to the "rank" of the particular believer and that even the idol-worshiper — though he is of a far lower rank for misconceiving God — is still worshiping a manifestation of God. Moses, who is a perfect gnostic here as well as in other Sufi literature "sees Allah in everything" and does not chastise his brother for the idol-worship that takes place.

Unsurprisingly, the increasingly strict ulema of the early modern period took issue with Ibn al-'Arabī's interpretation of the Calf, although Ibn al-'Arabī's assertion that Pharaoh died a Muslim was more commonly criticized than his view on idolatry.[147] In his commentary on the

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[146] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, trans. Aisha Bewley, (Diwan Press: 1980), 111-112. *Emphasis mine*. Cf. Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam: An Annotated Translation of 'The Bezels of Wisdom,"* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015),153-4.

[147] The most controversial argument by Ibn al-'Arabī centered on the faith of the Pharaoh (*firʿaun*)—often considered as the height of unbelief for his claim to divinity (Qurʾan, Surat *An-naziʿat*, 79)—at the time of his death. On weighing this argument in 17th century Istanbul, see the 9th chapter in Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, Trans. G.L. Lewis, Tinling: 1957, pp. 75-79, which immediately precedes his chapter on Ibn al-'Arabī.

Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī expands on this passage on Hārūn and the People

of the Calf:

> Al-Nābulusī qualifies this argument by suggesting that the worshippers' knowledge of
> the object of their devotion determines the status of their worship. If they know that they
> are worshipping God as a manifestation in an idol, then their worship is licit because
> they know that God is not the same as the idol. On the other hand, if they are ignorant
> of this distinction and maintain their worship of the idol, not knowing that God is
> manifest in it, then their worship is illicit: they believe that God is the same as the idol.[148]

Al-Nābulusī upholds Ibn al-ʿArabī's stance and goes as far as to pass judgment on the legality

of certain idol veneration, clarifying that it all depends on whether the believer identifies God

with the idol or not. For Sufis espousing mystical monism — be it through *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* or

*hama ūst* — God's ultimate oneness and manifestation in all of existence is the reason why it

makes little sense to persecute those engaged in "idol worship" variously defined. This approach

to idolatry is worlds apart from both, ʿAbd al-Wahhab's campaign against the idolatry that he

claimed was inherent in Sufi practices and beliefs, and also apart from the anti-Hindu sentiment

of the Mujadidi Naqshbandi order in India under Aḥmad Sirhindī and his immediate successors.

**Love and Mystical Monism**

Finally, it is worth considering the role that love plays in monistic Sufism and the literary

play with crossing confessional boundaries, specifically in the work of the Persian poets Jalāl

ad-Din Rūmī and Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī. Rūmī's profound verses are essential for considering the

possible ways in which Sufism might transcend confessional identity. For Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī,

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[148] Andrew Lane, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's (1641-1731) Commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. an
Analysis and Interpretation," PhD diss. (St Catherine's College: 2001), 11.

poetic expression was an essential way to convey a reality that went beyond discursive intellect toward a divine unity, and "love" serves as a vehicle along this path throughout their poetry. One passage from his *Masnāvī* sees God say "I have given everyone a character / I have given each a terminology (M2:1754) [ ... ] Hindus praise me in the terms of India / and the Sindis praise in terms from Sind / I am not made pure and precious / We do not look to language or to words / We look inside to find intent and rapture(M2:1757-9)[. ... ] Love's folk live beyond religious borders / the community and creed of lovers: God" (M2:1770).[149] These verses form what has come to be known as the "religion of love" found in Rūmī's thought. As with Ibn al-'Arabī's lines from the *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*, it is "love" that serves as a crux around which confessional boundaries are blurred, at least in poetic verse.

Religious tolerance was arguably not just in the message Rūmī preached, but in the company he kept. Perhaps the most telling example is from a biographical account of his funeral, which included "Christians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, Turks" who "marched ahead, each holding their sacred books and reading from the Psalms, Torah, and Gospel. When the Christians were asked why they came to Rūmī's funeral, they replied, 'In seeing him we have comprehended the true nature of Jesus, of Moses, and of all the prophets.'"[150] Rūmī even writes the following

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[149] In Franklin D. Lewis, *Rūmī Past and Present East and West,* (Oneworld: 2008), 406.

[150] Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, (Penn State UP: 2003), 78. Cf. Aflākī's account: "all the religious communities with their men of religion and worldly power were present, including the Christians and the Jews, the Greeks, the Arabs and the Turks, and others as well. All of them, in accordance with their customary practice, walked in procession while holding up their books. And they recited verses from the Psalms of David, the Torah and the Gospels, and made lamentation. Meanwhile, the Muslims were unable to beat them off with sticks and blows and swords. This group would not be kept away and a great disturbance arose. News of this reached the sultan of Islam[. ...] The prominent monks and priests were summoned and told: 'What does this event have to do with you? This king of religion is our chief, imam and guide.' They answered: 'We came to understand the truth of Moses and the truth of Jesus and of all the prophets because of his clear explanation, and we beheld in him the behavior of the perfect prophets we read about in our [sacred] books. If you Muslims call Mowlana the Mohammad of your time, we recognize him to be the Moses of the era and the Jesus of the age. [...] 'Seventy-two religions heard their secret from us. We're like a

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couplet: "You drew me from Khorasan to mix among the Greeks / So that I would produce a good religious path."[151] While the presence of other religions undoubtedly also serves a hagiographic function of having Rūmī's saintliness recognized by Jews and Christians as well, the religiously mixed milieu of medieval Anatolia deserves consideration alongside his verses that express a God known to all humanity, albeit in variable form.

Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d.1289) was a poet who should also be understood as a philosopher in the tradition of Ibn al-'Arabī.[152] His master was the personally-groomed successor and son-in-law of Ibn al-'Arabī mentioned above: Sadr ad-Din Qūnawī. In their personal correspondence, 'Irāqī addresses Qūnawī in terms that recognize his spiritual leadership and their bond in the philosophical language of Akbarian sufism.[153] His poetry, especially the *Lama'at* is "Philosophical" in the sense that it mirrors work that typically is labeled so; it is—after all—modeled after Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al Ḥikam*.[154] Like Ahmad

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flute whose mode fits two hundred creeds.' 'Thus Mowlana's essence is a sun of higher truths which has shone on mankind and bestowed favor, and all houses have been illuminated by him.'" in Aflākī, *Manāqeb al-'Ārefīn*, Trans. John O'Kane, (Brill: 2002), 405-6.

[151] Aflākī, 144.

[152] He was "buried him in the Salihiyyah cemetery, beside the tomb of Ibn al-'Arabī" in 1289 and "[t]ravelers have reported that when the Damascenes visit the tomb they say of Ibn al-'Arabī, 'This is the ocean of the Arabs'; and of 'Irāqī, 'This is the ocean of the Persians' in Fakhruddin Iraqi, Divine Flashes (Classics of Western Spirituality), Translation by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (Paulist: 1982), 62

[153] In their personal correspondence, 'Irāqī addresses Konavi in terms that recognize his spiritual leadership and their bond in the philosophical language of Akbarian sufism. "In the heart of your sincere servant Iraqi, love—which incites unrest and is mixed with pain, and which constantly rattles the chain of desire and strife and ignites the flame of longing and rapture [...] and the muddied course of my life can be purified only with the water of the visage of our lord, the Manifest Guide and Great Conjunction, the Leader (*sadr*) of the Shari'ah and the Tariqah, the Locus-of-Theophany for God and the Truth—may he remain forever a refuge for the people of the Way and an authority for the masters of Verification May you continue to dwell in the station of perfecting the imperfect and elevating the words of the perfect. I ask for you the best, and that within you the Whole may become manifest—that Whole within which there is no whole and no part. 48-49.

[154] Iraqi, 46.

Ghazālī[155] 'Irāqī elevates Love to a divine principle.[156] He even inspired the famous Hafiz Shirazī (d.1390 c.e.). so much that 'Irāqī is one of the few poets — other than Hafiz himself — mentioned by name.[157] Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, mirroring al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* uses this Hadith Qudsi and explains that the "Hidden Treasure" is "an allusion to the infinite ontological perfections of God […] summarized as the Names and Attributes".[158]

Hadith of the "hidden treasure", a *hadith qudsī*, or hadith wherein Allah Himself is speaking is often cited by Neoplatonizing Islamic philosophers as it regards the purpose of all creation, "I was a hidden treasure, and I wished/loved (*ahbabto*) to be known. I therefore created creation in order to be known."[159] Hamid Algar points out the importance for Sufis as

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[155] (d. 1126 c.e.) younger brother of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī, and — like his older brother — head of the Nizamiyya Shafi'ī madrasa in Baghdad.

[156] 'Irāqī "in his introduction explicitly states his intention of writing [the *Lama'āt*]" he "says that he wants to write a book in the tradition of A[ḥmad] Ghazālī. In other words, he wants to bridge the gap between Ibn 'Arabī and Ghazzali by expressing the semi-philosophical teachings of the *Fuṣūṣ* according to the poetic non-philosophical Sufism of the Sewanih" in Aḥmad Ghazālī *Sawāniḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love,* trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London: Routledge, 1986), 9.

[157] "O minstrel, turn the key and strike the Hejaz mode / For by this route the friend went and did not remember us. / The ghazals of 'Irāqī are the song of Hafiz- /Who has heard this heart-kindling mode and not cried out?" "Poem CXXXVIII" in Ḥāfiẓ Shirāzī, *The Selected Poems of Hafiz of Shiraz,* trans. Peter Avery, (Archetype: 2007), 188. Avery confirms it is Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289) "in every beautiful face or object, a reflection, as in a mirror; of the Eternal Beauty' may be seen" Ftnt. on p. 189.

[158] Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, *Lama'at,* trans. Chittick and Wilson, 18.

[159] Hamid Algar, "Hadith in Sufism" *Encyclopedia Iranica.* December 15, 2002. Accessed 9 March, 2019. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hadith-iv > Last Accessed October 8, 2022. It's crucial to note that this hadith qudsi is left out of Ibn al-'Arabī's own collection of Hadith Qudsi titled *Mishkāt al-anwār.* Stephen Hirtenstein an Martin Notcutt explain why this is in an appendix for their translation: It is true that in other works he quotes some ḥadīth and ḥadīth qudsī which have been disputed by scholars on the grounds that their historical chains of transmission are inadequate. An obvious example is the saying, "I was like a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known; so I created the world that I might be known." Ibn 'Arabī states that he knew this to be sound by spiritual unveiling. However, he did not confuse one kind of knowledge with another and ḥadīth qudsī of that kind are not included in this book." So Ibn al-'Arabī was capable of compartmentalizing the traditional corpus of hadith literature transmitted from muhadith to student on the one hand, and, on the other, hadith transmitted through mystical unveiling without contradiction.

Ibn al-'Arabī, *Divine Sayings 101 Hadith Qudsi,* trans. Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt, (Anqa Publishing, Oxford: 2004), 99.

"love" is the motivating factor for an unfolding existence,[160] and is no doubt why Ibn al-'Arabī

begins his influential *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* based on this hadith[161] while an Aristotelian philosophy

explains the "how" the Neoplatonic framework of love and desire to know explains the "why"

of existence. In his *Maṣnāvī*, Rūmī uses this Hadith to answer a fundamental and very relatable

question, where Moses "asks the Almighty, 'Why hast Thou made men to destroy

them?'(M4:309-311), analogizing that as we discern wheat from chaff, butter from milk, bodies

are destroyed that they may know the infinity of their souls.[162] Because God willed existence

into being out of love and a desire to be known, the totality of the human experience becomes

grounded in love and the pursuit of knowledge for the Sufi and renders even the worst hardships

meaningful.

The openness toward other faiths is arguably a consequence of the multivalent "Truth"

espoused in Rūmī's poetry and in Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy. While it does make sense to avoid

terms like "universal" and "pluralist" due to their problematic history in the study of religion and

the anachronism of applying such terms to the Medieval and Early Modern periods, scholarship

in the study of Sufism must not shy away from analyzing the universalizing claims where they are

found in philosophy and theology. That said, the rhetoric employed by Sufis that praises the

prophet Muhammad or sets the particulars of Islam at the center of their universalizing vision

must not be ignored. In monistic Sufism, it is not simply a zero-sum game between the "Islamic"

and the "universal," but can instead be seen as a continual negotiation between an Islamic center

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[160] Algar

[161] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam,* trans. R.W.J. Austin, (Paulist Press: 1980), 50.

[162] c.f. Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī *Maṣnāvī-i Manavi* trans. E.H. Whinfield (Omphaloskepsis: 2001), 309-311.

and an expansive periphery that emphasizes God's presence everywhere and His unity with humankind.

There has been a push in the academic study of religion to challenge a language of "pluralism" and "universalism" when it actually aligns with one tradition or "spirituality"[163] — often Enlightenment-era Protestant Christianity — that ignores particulars belonging to a specific religion or subsumes them into its framework, often through the act of translation.[164] Yet it would be remiss not to take seriously the universalizing claims of mystical monists in the form of "The Unity of Being" (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*) or "All is He"(*Hama* ūst) and — most importantly — the real world impact these ideologies have had for interconfessional relations. The following chapter will analyze the opponents of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* along with their attitudes toward non-Muslims, before turning to a case study in the Ottoman Empire (chapters 3 and 4) and in Mughal North India (chapters 5 and 6), where mystical monism has a political impact.

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[163] Omid Safi discussed "New Age 'translations'" of Rūmī in a New Yorker article in 2017. He states: "I see a type of 'spiritual colonialism' at work here: bypassing, erasing, and occupying a spiritual landscape that has been lived and breathed and internalized by Muslims from Bosnia and Istanbul to Konya and Iran to Central and South Asia." in Rozina 'Ali, "The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rūmī," *The New Yorker*, January 5, 2017.

[164] For a key example of this line of inquiry see: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See especially her chapter on Otto Pfleiderer and Sufism.

**Chapter 2: A critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd*: The origins of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* and Other Counterpoints to Mystical Monism from Ibn Taymiyya (d. Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328 c.e.) and 'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī (d.1336 c.e.)**

The early 17th century Sufi, Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624 c.e.), wrote warily of Ibn al-'Arabī and w*aḥdat al-wujūd* in his *Maktūbāt*: "Take note! In the matter of *waḥdat-i wujūd*, a large group in this sufi community concurs with the Shaykh. Although the Shaykh has his unique style here, still they are unanimous in the gist of the matter."[165] By Sirhindī's time, then, *waḥdat al-wujūd* had become thoroughly associated with Ibn al-'Arabī, however — as seen in the previous chapter — the term was never employed by Ibn al-'Arabī and took centuries to become associated with his school. Nonetheless, in order to align with the emerging Sunni orthodox ulema, Sirhindī used an oppositional term, *waḥdat al-shuhūd,* as a counterpoint to the monistic claim found in *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Yet, Sirhindī was not the first to apply *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as an oppositional philosophy to *waḥdat al-wujūd*, credit goes to Chīshtī shaykh Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsu Darāz. There is a history of opposition to waḥdat al-wujūd and even the Persian sibling of this philosophy known by the phrase "All is He" (*hama ūst*). The first objective of this chapter is to delineate the arguments against *waḥdat al-wujūd* and mystical monism, and in so doing, to note how polemics against *waḥdat al-wujūd* actually established this philosophy as a doctrinal position. Following this objective, the aim of this chapter is to chart the course of opposition to *waḥdat al-wujūd,* from both "anti-Sufi" and "intra Sufi"

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[165] Irshad Alam, *Faith Practice Piety: An Excerpt from the Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*, (Sufi Peace: 2010), 138.

polemicists, and establish a strong correlation between support for mystical monism and

attitudes toward non-Muslims and "heterodox" Sufis.


**Ibn Khaldūn on Mystical Monists**

It makes sense to again begin setting the stage of the debate with the contemporary

historian, Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406 c.e.). In her translation of *Shifā' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhī'b al-Masāil*

("Remedy for the Questioner in Search of Answers"), Yumna Özer writes that Khaldūn was "an

advocate of some aspects of Sufism, and [...] a historian of Sufism" as well as "a Sufi

'sympathizer.'"[166] While he was willing to criticize the beliefs he thought heretical, he also offered

a nuanced distinction between the different Sufi-philosophical schools of his time. Özer explains

that "[h]is critique and objections focused on two groups, the first that  believed in [Self]

disclosure (*asḥāb al-tajallī*) and the second in Oneness (*asḥāb al-waḥda*)" and adds that

"[n]onetheless, in other instances, he actually defends Sufism against the attacks of the

legists."[167] Ibn Khaldūn writes that the school of "first opinion" which "believes in

Self-disclosure and loci of manifestation [...] in Divine Names (*asmā'*) and presences

(*ḥaḍarāt*)" and whose members include "Ibn al-Fārīd, Ibn Barrajān, Ibn Qasī, Būnī, Ḥātimī and

Ibn Sawdakīn."[168] From the description Ibn Khaldūn gives, this group appears in line with the

Akbari philosophy illustrated by Qunawī and other followers of Ibn al-'Arabī, though curiously,

no mention is made of the Akbari philosophers or Ibn al-'Arabī. Technical terms like the

existence of "presences" (*ḥaḍarāt*) and an emphasis on manifestation (*tajallī*) strongly suggest

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[166] Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibn Khaldūn on Sufism: Remedy for the Questioner in Search of Answers Shifā' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhī'b al-Masāil*, trans. Yumna Özer, (Islamic Texts Society: 2017), xli.
[167] Ibn Khaldūn, xxxiv.
[168] Ibn Khaldūn, 60

an Akbari influence. Further evidence that Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophical Sufism is signified by this first category can be found in Khaldūn's ascription of Ibn al-ʾArabī's concept of "the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyya*)" to this group.[169]

The "second opinion," Khaldūn writes, belongs to those who believe in "Oneness" (*waḥda*) and has its "most famous advocates" in "Ibn Daḥḥāq, Ibn Sabʿin," and the latter's student "Shushtarī."[170] Khaldūn declares that this group's opinion "is even stranger than the first group's" and clarifies that "[t]hese Sufis went astray as they meddled with the Law and its ambiguous aspects."[171] It is Ibn Sabʾīn's willingness to use philosophy rather than the Qurʾan and Sunna that often earns him more ire than Ibn al-ʾArabī from critics. Ibn Khaldūn described Ibn Sabʿīn as a "radical monist whose ideas constituted 'overt heresy and unwarranted innovations, and to justify them, the most extravagant and detestable interpretations of the literal meaning of orthodox doctrine.'"[172] As shall be explored below, critics like Ibn Taymiyya often fail to make any nuanced distinction between the types of mystical monists and simply list them all in one category.

### Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of *waḥdat al-wujūd*

Ironically, the person most responsible for establishing waḥdat al-wujūd as a doctrinal position is one of its biggest critics, the Damascene Hanbali jurist, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 c.e.). As Bakri Aladdin points out, "the term only acquired a doctrinal meaning with Ibn Taymiyya in

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[169] Ibn Khaldūn, 61
[170] Ibn Khaldūn, 62
[171] Ibn Khaldūn, 62-3
[172] Vincent J. Cornell "The All-Comprehensive Circle (*al-Iḥāṭa*): Soul, Intellect, and the Oneness of Existence in the Doctrine of Ibn Sabʿīn," in *Sufism and Theology* ed. Ayman Shihadeh, (Edinburgh University Press: 2007), 31

the early 14th century, more than 60 years after the death of Ibn ʿArabī."[173] As discussed

above, Ibn Sabʿīn was likely the first monistically-minded Sufi to use the phrase itself, but it was

through the polemical works of Ibn Taymiyya that made *waḥdat al-wujūd* a clearly — albeit

antagonistically — defined concept.

Opponents of ibn al-ʾArabī's philosophy level the accusation that he violates God's

ultimate transcendence (Ar. *tanzīh*) especially where the Divine is perceived as in "union"

(*ittiḥād*), or "indwelling" (*ḥulūl*) within man; along with the "Unity of Being", these critiques are

leveled at Ibn al-ʾArabī's attendant doctrine of the "perfect man" (*insān al-kāmil*).[174] The

anxieties over *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl* found in polemics against Sufism overlap with the use of these

terms to describe the incarnation of God in man or "unity" between the two in Christianity and in

heterodox Shiʾa belief where Imam ʿAli is divinized.[175] Thus, the most potent polemics against

waḥdat al-wujūd are intrinsically tied with anti-Christian polemics, and the boundary between

Islam and other religions is at stake within debates over mystical monism.

Before diving into his polemics, it should first be noted that Ibn Taymiyya was not

opposed to Sufism in all its forms, and he in fact belonged to a Sufi order himself.[176] Ibn

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[173] Bakri Aladdin, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī the Doctrine of the Unity of Being and the Beginnings of the Arab Renaissance," in Demiri, Lejla, and Pagani, Samuela, eds. Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology: 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and His Network of Scholarship, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 35-36.

[174] It must be noted again that *waḥdat al-wujūd* was never exactly termed by Ibn al-ʾArabī, however, the "Perfect Man" (*insān al-kāmil*) appears throughout his work.

[175] Louis Massignon and G.C. Anawati,"Ḥulūl," *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 2nd ed. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2944>. Last Accessed 11 March 2024. Kathryn Babayan examines early modern polemics against Sufis that find *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl* to be the common heretical threads among Sufis professing "*wahdat-i wujūd*," Christians and Shiʾa who "exaggerate" Imam ʿAlī as divine (*ghulāt*). see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 422-4.

[176] See George Makdisi, "Ibn Taimiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriyah Order", American Journal of Arabic Studies, vol. I (1973), 118-122.

Taymiyya even accepted the annihilation of the self (*fanā'*) so essential to Sufis who claim experiential knowledge of the divine through it.[177] As a result, the Taymiyyan rejection of waḥdat al-wujūd should not be seen as a critique coming completely from outside of Sufism.  While he was a strict critic of Sufis who spoke openly of their experiences of oneness with God, Ibn Taymiyya — like Al-Ghazālī — holds that mystics should not be punished due to their loss of reason within mystical states. Ibn Taymiyya's student  Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya (d. 1350 c.e.), went on to produce works like *The Devil's Deceptions* (*Talbīs iblīs*), a polemical work with a massive chapter devoted to the "Devil's Deception of the Sufis,"[178] and yet also produced the mystical work *Madārij al-Sālikīn*.[179] Whether called by the name "sufism" or not, there is a thread of Hanbali mysticism in Ibn Taymiyya's circle that traces back to the famous Hanbali Sufi from Central Asia, 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī al-Harawi (d. 1089 c.e.). Rather than Sufism as a whole, Ibn Taymiyya's problems were the various beliefs and practices that he deemed excessive or heretical, and it will become apparent that *waḥdat al-wujūd* belongs to the category of "heretical" beliefs.

First, with regard to practice, or matters of worship (*'ibādah*) the usual suspects like grave-visitation (*ziyārah*) or the veneration of saints (*awliyā'*) were targeted by Ibn Taymiyya

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[177] M. Abdul Haq Ansari, "Ibn Taymiyya and Sufism," Islamic Studies, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), 6.

[178] For an English translation see Ibn al-Jawzi, The Devil's Deceptions. (Dar as-Sunnah, Birmingham: 2014). The chapter condemning the Sufis spans 238 of the total 540 pages.

[179] Ovamir Anjum, "Sufism Without Mysticism? Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyyah's Objectives in Madāriǧ al-Sālikīn," Oriente Moderno, 90:1 (2010): 161-188. Arjan Post notes that scholars have vacillated over whether or not Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya was a "sufi" or not. For example, Gino Schallenbergh "hypothesized that Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya 'professed possibly a Sufism that […] aimed foremost at a spiritualization of the šarīʿa.' In a later article, however, he adjusted this conclusion, stating instead that Ibn al-Qayyim in all likelihood 'saw it as his task to offer an alternative spirituality to Sufism.' in Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of 'Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsitī (d.711/1311)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020),13

and other critics of the sufis alongside their perennial critique of musical audition (*samāʾ*). Ibn Taymiyya defined "heretical" *ziyārah* as one in which "the visitor intends that his supplication be fulfilled at the tomb or that he would supplicate the deceased, supplicate for rain through him, and make a request of him or take an oath (*abjure*) by God in requesting a need."[180] Kātib Çelebi, in his 17th century *Balance of Truth* (*Mizān al-Haqq*), scoffs at Ibn Taymiyya, who he points out "went so far as to forbid visiting even the tomb of the most noble Prophet himself."[181] Kātib Çelebi further makes reference to a hadith where the prophet Muhammad states: "I had forbidden you to visit tombs, but now you may visit them."[182] Here Kātib Çelebi acknowledges some basis for the opinions of those against grave visitation, while asserting that the prophet's stance on the issue evolved over time, defending this widespread practice in Ottoman lands.

With regard to belief (*ʿaqidah*), however, *waḥdat al-wujūd* was often the polo ball batted back and forth between Sufis and their non-Sufi critics from the mid 14th century to the 19th. Two of Ibn Taymiyya's polemical texts use the phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd* in their titles: his *Ibṭāl waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Showing the falsity of waḥdat al-wujūd") and his *Risāla ilā man saʾalahu ʿan ḥaqīqat madhhab al-ittiḥādiyyīn, ay al-qāʾilīn bi-waḥdat al-wujūd* ("A treatise written to the one who asked about the reality of the position of the unificationists, that is, those who support *waḥdat al-wujūd*").[183] There are two specific heresies that Ibn Taymiyya frequently describes *waḥdat al-wujūd* as being in league with ideologically, unificationism (*ittiḥād*) and indwelling (*ḥulūl*). The former describes unification between man and God during

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[180] James Howard-Johnston, and Paul Antony Hayward, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, (Oxford University Press: 1999), 276.

[181] Katib Çelebi, Balance of Truth, 93. See also Howard-Johnston and Hayward, 277.

[182] Çelebi Balance of Truth, 92, This reference is to Sahih Muslim vol. III, 65. See also Sunan Ibn Majah Vol. 1, 114 for prophetic approval for *ziyarah*.

[183] English translations for the titles are borrowed from Chittick, *The Search for the Lost Heart*, 83.

the mystical experience, what al-Ghazālī above refers to as metaphorical *ittiḥād*. Here the problem is particularly that God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) is violated. Indwelling (*ḥulūl*) similarly violates God's transcendence and is also applied to Christian views of Jesus as God in human form, which also would commit the sin of "resemblance" (*tashbīh*) where God is made to resemble a mere creature. William Chittick notes that "[i]t is particularly significant that in the second of these titles Ibn Taymiyya identifies waḥdat al-wujūd with 'unificationism' (*ittiḥād*). He repeats this identification in many passages of his works, often adding the term 'incarnationism' (*ḥulūl*) as a second near synonym."[184]

In the beginning of his *Ibtal*, Ibn Taymiyya makes clear that *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl* are associated with the saying *waḥdat* al-*wujūd*, and then lists the main offenders such as: Ibn al-'Arabī and his son-in-law Qunawi, 'Afif al-Dīn Tilimsānī, Sa'īd al-Farghānī, Ibn al-Farīd, and both Ibn Sab'īn and his student al-Shushtarī.[185] Setting aside the significant differences between Ibn al-'Arabī's school and that of Ibn Sab'īn, Ibn Taymiyya declares in disgust that they "say the existence of the created beings is the existence of the creator!"(*yaqūl: fa'l-wujūd al-makhlūq huwa al-wujūd al-khāliq!*) without specifying which author or text he is referring to to.[186] After touching on the concept of "absolute existence" (*al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq*), Ibn Taymiyya describes these sayings as "absolute indwelling" (*al-ḥulūl al-muṭlaq*) and "absolute unificationism" (*al-ittiḥād al-muṭlaq*) before going on to liken these sufis to the Christians and the exaggerators from the Shi'a who say 'Ali is divine (*ka'al-Nusara wa'l-ghaliyah min*

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[184] Chittick, *The Search for the Lost Heart*, 83.
[185] Ibn Taymiyya, *Ibtal waḥdat al-wujūd wa'l-radd 'ala al-Qā'ilin bihā*, ed. Muḥammad bin Ḥamd al-ḥamud al-Najdi, (Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage, Kuwait: 1992), 35.
[186] Ibn Taymiyya, 37.

*al-shi'a aladhina yaqulun bi'l-Ilāhīyat 'Ali*).[187] He even declares that "they permit polytheism and the worship of idols"(*yajawwizūn al-shirk wa 'ibādat al-aṣnām*).[188] As indicated already in the title, Ibn Taymiyya's *Ḥaqīqat madhhab al-ittiḥādiyīn aw waḥdat al-wujūd* ("the truth of the school of unificationists, or the unity of existence") equates waḥdat al-wujūd with those who heretically unite man and God. In this text, he continues the heresiological tone calling those in this school of thought "hypocritical atheists" (*al-mulāhidah al-munāfiqīn*), "anthropomorphizing heretics" (*al-zanādiqah al-mutashabihīn*), and declares them of the "genre of hypocritical unbeliever apostates" (*min jins al-kuffār al-munāfiqīn al-murtadīn*) that began with pharaoh (fir'awn) and the "esoteric Qaramitah" (*al-qarāmiṭah al-bāṭiniyīn*).[189]

In his survey of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of Sufism, Abdul Haq Anṣārī summarizes Ibn Taymiyya's view on *waḥdat al-wujūd* as follows:

> Ibn Taymiyya criticises Ibn 'Arabī for believing that *wujūd* (being/ existence) is one, that the *wujūd* of the world is same as the *wujūd* of God, and that the objects are God's determinations. He thinks that Ibn 'Arabī cannot explain the difference between God and the world with reference to the essence of things which have no footing in existence.[190]

Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya misunderstands a fundamental point in the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*; rather than asserting "the *wujūd* of the world is the same as the *wujūd* of God", the advocates of *waḥdat al-wujūd* hold that the only true *wujūd* is God and that all things receive their existence insofar as God wills them into existence through ever diluting combinations of existence and non-existence. One of the most frequent arguments made by critics of this

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[187] Ibn Taymiyya, 40.
[188] Ibn Taymiyya, 40.
[189] Ibn Taymiyya, *haqīqat madhhab al-ittiḥādiyīn,* (Manar Press, Egypt: 1349/1930), 2. The Qarāmita (Qarmatians) were a 10th century Isma'īlī Shī'a movement that once sacked Mecca.
[190] Anṣārī, "Ibn Taymiyya and Sufism,"3.

philosophy is to inquire whether or not the mystic holds that even the most impure or base things have the same existence (*wujūd*) as God in order to trap the mystic into asserting that God's existence is present in feces or other such impurities. This is the argument Ibn Taymiyya employs in his *haqiqat madhhab al-ittiḥād* as he accuses mystical monists of claiming that the Lord's Existence (*wujūd al-rabb*) is the same existence as ''creatures and created beings" (*al-makhlūqāt wa'l-maṣnū'āt*) such as the "jinn, devils, unbelievers, immoral people, dogs, pigs, uncleanness, blasphemy, immorality and disobedience."[191] Taymiyya is employing a *reductio ad-absurdum* argument to ridicule the position that God is the only existent by contrasting God with any number of things that instinctively appear contradictory to his fellow Muslims. On this point, Akbari Sufis would be quick to point out that Ibn Taymiyya glosses over the complicated process of "entification" (*ta'ayyun*) whereby God withdraws his own Existence — not to be eqiated with any one of the "existents" Taymiyya lists above — to create ontological distance for an extensive hierarchy of created things which do, eventually, include impurities.


## Intra-Sufi Debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd*

The debate between Sufis over mystical monism often saw the term "Unity of Witnessing" (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*) employed to counter the philosophy of the "Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). It must be admitted that not every Sufi employing the term waḥdat al-shuhūd is doing so in order to replace or eliminate the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Bakri

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[191] Ibn Taymiyya, *haqīqat madhhab al-ittiḥādiyīn,* (Manar Press, Egypt: 1349/1930), 5.

و لما كان اصلهم الذي بنوا عليه ان وجود المخلوقات المصنوعات حتى وجود الجن و الشياطين و الكافرين و الفاسقين و الكلاب و الخنازير و النجاسات و الكفر و الفسوق و العصيان عين وجود الرب

Aladdin writes of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as "unicity of onto-consciousness" and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as "unicity of onto-vision,"[192] preferring to see these terms, not necessarily as oppositional, but as describing two forms of directly experiencing the divine. Bakri's reason for doing so can be found in the *Nafāhat al-uns* where ʿAbd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 1492 c.e.) explains that the great Naqshbandī Shaykh, ʿUbaydallah Ahrār (d. 1490 c.e.) considered both waḥdat al-wujūd and waḥdat al-shuhūd to be synonymous expressions for the theophany of the Divine Essence.[193] Indeed, even Aḥmad Sirhindī didn't outright reject *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but found it to be a lower station on the way toward *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.

For a foundation in the term "witnessing' (*mushāhada*) as it is frequently understood in Sufi-philosophical circles, one may look to al-Ghazālī's influential *Iḥyaʿ ulūm al-Dīn*. Alexander Treiger provides a summary of "witnessing" according to Ghazālī:

> witnessing (*mushāhada*) is (1) the clear, effortless, immediate, and non-discursive intellectual vision of intelligible realities. (2) It is sure and certain (*yaqīnīya*), i.e. free from the possibility of error. (3) It is obtained through the "light of certainty" – a particular (unspecified) type of divine illumination. (4) It is the perfection (*istikmāl*) of intellection, the way physical vision is the perfection of imagination. (5) The difference between witnessing and intellection lies only in the degree of clarity and unveiling. (6) Due to the soul's attachment to the body it is difficult for it to attain *mushāhada* in this life. (7) It is only after death that the soul will attain perfect witnessing of intelligible realities (but only of those realities that it had cognized during life, because witnessing is the perfection of those same cognitions that it had acquired before death). (8) This is the meaning of the vision of God in the afterlife (*ruʾya*). (9) [...] Consequently, the vision of

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[192] Nābulusī, *Wujūd al-ḥaqq waʾl-khiṭāb al-ṣidq*, ed. Bakri Aladdin, 69. In his French: "unicité de l'onto-conscience" and "unicité de l'onto-vision."

[193] Bakri Aladdin, *Wujūd al-Haqq*, 69, cf. Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-ʾuns*, 264. "rather let your soul not stop in your presence, may you associate with people so that their hearts are immersed in the remembrance of God and freed from self. Some express this meaning as *witnessing* (*shuhūd*), some to *existence* (*vujūd*), and some to the manifestation of God's essence (*zāt*) and some to remembrance (*yād dasht*)"

" بلكه نفس ترا وقوفى بر حضور تو نشود، بر تو بادكه همنشينى ب يا مردم كنيكه دل ايشان در ذكر ذات مستغرق شده باشد و از خود رهايى

يافته. تعبير از اين معنى بعضى به شهود وبعضى به وجودكردهاند، و بعضى به تجلى ذات و بعضى به يادداشتكردهاند "

God will only be conferred on those who had achieved cognition of God (*maʿrifat Allāh*) during their lifetime.[194]

Here al-Ghazālī integrates philosophy and Qurʾanic terminology to explain a state of intellection perfected enough to be capable of witnessing God and uses the crucial Sufi term, *Maʿrifa* which may be translated as "gnosis" or "esoteric knowledge." Although al-Ghazālī's "errors of the philosophers" (*tahāfut al-falāsifa*) is often cited as evidence for al-Ghazālī's supposed anti-philosophy stance, Treiger points out that [b]oth al-Ghazālī's analysis of [...] *mushāhada* rest[s] on a firm Avicennan foundation."[195] Although al-Ghazālī has written that there is no existence (*wujūd*) but God,[196] his emphasis on the witnessing (*shuhūd*) of God by gnostics also informs Sufi philosophy after him. In a way, al-Ghazālī prefigures the debate between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, hinting strongly at the former position by saying there "is no existence (*wujūd*) but God," but the latter by emphasizing the highest mystical state as one of "witnessing"(*shuhūd*) for the individual Sufi.

Ghazālī describes three levels of belief in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, reserving the most profound experience of "witnessing" for the third and highest group of believers. He writes that "the third level is the belief of those who cognize (*ʿārifīn*), witnessed through the light of certainty (*al-mushāhad bi-nūr al-yaqīn*). This is real cognition and sure and certain witnessing (*al-maʿrifa l-ḥaqīqīya wa-l-mushāhada l-yaqīnīya*)."[197] In his *Niche of Lights,* Al-Ghazālī is careful not to equate this apparently unitive state with a literal unity between human and divine

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[194] Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought. Al-Ghazālī's theory of mystical cognition and its Avicennian foundation,* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 60.

[195] Treiger, 60.

[196] See above Ch 1 ftnt 22.

[197] Treiger, 55.

(*ittiḥād*); "this state is called 'unification,' according to the language of metaphor (*bi'l-lisān al-majāz ittiḥād<sup>an</sup>*)," or, he adds, it "is called 'declaring God's unity,' according to the language of reality (*bi'l-lisān al-haqīqah tawhīd<sup>an</sup>*)."[198] Here Ghazālī is careful to state that unification (*ittiḥād*) is a metaphor but not the actual nature of what is happening between the mystic and God, preserving the latter's transcendence (*tanzīh*). The language of "witnessing" serves to place the mystic at a remove. As mentioned above, al-Ghazālī touches on the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭiḥāt*) of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and Manṣūr al-Ḥallaj wherein they identify themselves with God. As is typical of sufis, al-Ghazālī dissuades those having such experiences from explaining them, for "delving into the flood of divine mysteries is dangerous,"[199] and he even recounts a saying of an unspecified gnostic, "To divulge the mystery of Lordship is unbelief."[200]

Sufi shaykh and companion of Ibn Taymiyya, ʿImād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsitī, identifies a sect of "monists" (*ittiḥādiyya*) during his time in the convents of Mamluk Egypt and rails against their view of God's supposed "indwelling" (*ḥulūl*) in man:

> When they go to see a king or someone with public authority (*ṣāḥib walāya*), they address him and implore him as if they are imploring God. That is because, in their view, he is a manifestation of [God's] being (*maẓhar wujūdīhi*), so they are in fact addressing the 'divine being' (*al-wujūd*) inside of him. Hence, one of their shaykhs would say to al-Shujāʿī, who was a vice-regent known for tyranny and aggression: "You are the supreme name of God (*anta ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*)," and other such things![201]

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[198] al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights,* trans. Frank Griffel, 18.
[199] al-Ghazālī, 53.
[200] al-Ghazālī, 2. Griffel's footnote simply states this is a "sufi maxim" Grffel, 62.
[201] Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of ʿImād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsitī* (d.711/1311), (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 121.

In this excerpt from Arjan Post's study of al-Wāsitī and his *Rihla*, the language includes terms that resemble that of the Akbari school. For al-Wāsitī, the "manifestation" of God's "being" and seeing "*al-wujūd*"or God's "divine being" in an individual crosses the line. Here, al-Wāsitī — whether accurately observing a practice of his time or exaggerating — is expressing a critique of the potential pitfalls of *wujūdī* doctrine. Al-Wāsitī, more so than Ibn Taymiyya, demonstrates a knowledge of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as described by proponents themselves. For example, Al-Wāsitī describes the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as he understands it in a passage provided by Post:

> While living in the convents (*al-rubuṭ*) I was confronted by a group (*ṭāʾifa*) who talk about divine love (*maḥabba*) and divine unity (*tawḥīd*), to which they refer by saying: "This one is a monotheist (*muwaḥḥid*), but that one understands nothing of [God's] unity." They magnify their level of *tawḥīd* and ask who is able to reach it, then name their own shaykhs, such as Ibn ʿArabī and al-Ṣadr al-Qūnawī. I stayed for some time to examine this *tawḥīd* that they allude to. I concluded that the gist of it is that they believe the Real (T) to be nondelimited existence, permeating all created things (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq al-sārī fī Jāmī al-akwān*), and that He constitutes the true essence of all concrete things (*ḥaqīqat al-aʿyān*), whether living or inanimate beings. …. The reality of their creed (*muʿtaqad*) is that the Creator (T) is not something separate from the creation, above the Throne. Rather, in their view the Real manifests in the heavens and the earth, and He manifests in all things with His very essence (*bi-dhātihi*)[202]

Al-Wāsitī is able to identify al-Qunawī in addition to Ibn al-'Arabī, that is to say, the Akbarian school of thought, and is more nuanced than Ibn Taymiyya when he notes the Akbari position that God "manifests" in all things. He is right in assessing the Akbari view of God as *"al-wujūd al-muṭlaq"* since Ibn al-'Arabī himself writes that "God possesses Nondelimited Being,"[203] that is, He is Absolute (*muṭlaq*). That said, he makes sure to mention that they do not see the

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[202] Post, 125. (T) is the author's abbreviation for the honorific phrase "*Allah Subḥanu wa ta'ala.*"
[203] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt Makkiyya*, III 162.23. Cited in Chittick *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 109.

"Creator" as something separate from "creation" which is a simplified way of attacking the *wujūdī* position.

## 'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī's Intra-Sufi Critique of Mystical Monism

One of the earliest inter-Sufi critiques of *waḥdat al-wujūd* comes from the Qubrawi shaykh 'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī (d.1336 c.e.)  Hamid Algar describes Simnānī "to whom is often attributed the origin of the alternative theory, "unity of witnessing"(*waḥdat al-shuhūd*)[204] however — as Chittick points out — Simnānī never actually employed this term himself.[205] Nonetheless, Simnānī was an early Sufi opponent of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought and is often regarded as the ideological predecessor to Aḥmad Sirhindī's oppositional "waḥdat al-shuhūd."[206] Simnānī takes exception to Ibn al-'Arabī's designation of God as "Absolute Being" (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), going so far as to call it "the most disgraceful utterance ever to have emerged among all religions and sects" and to denounce Ibn al-'Arabī as "an incorrigible antinomian."[207] 'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī, in his *Nafaḥāt al-'uns*, cites Simnānī's distaste for Ibn al-'Arabī's supposedly heretical saying in the latter's *futuhāt*, that "God is Absolute Existence" as he told one of his dervishes "I don't want these kinds of words on my tongue, I wish you wouldn't say them either".[208] Jāmī clarifies that Simnānī "wanted to prove that the plurality of creatures does not add to the unity of God".[209] In the *Nafāḥat al-'uns* under the section for

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[204] William Chittick, "waḥdat al-shuhūd", EI 2nd ed. Brill.

[205] Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 346.

[206] See S.A.A. Rizvi *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol I, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), 248-250.

[207] Hamid Algar, "Jāmī and Ibn 'Arabī: Khātam al-Shu'arā' and Khātam Al-Awliyā'," 147.

[208]'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-'uns min ḥaḍarat al-quds*, 555. Ed. Mehdī Tawḥīdīpūr (Kitab furūshī Mahmūdī: 1337/1919).(شیخ محیی الدین العربی که حق را وجود مطلق گفته است، [...] من از این نوع سخنان را قطعاً نمی خواهم که

"بر زبان رانم، کاشکی ایشان نیز نگفتندی

[209] Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-'uns*, 555.  "او خواست که ثابت کند که کثرت مخلوقات در وحدت حق هیچ زیادت نکند"

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Shaykh Kamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, Jāmī explains that there were debates and

discussions surrounding the saying "Unity of Being" (*vaḥdat-i vujūd*), but then goes on to

describe an exchange where a student of Kāshānī questions a student of Simnānī's regarding Ibn

al-ʿArabī wherein the latter says his shaykh considers Ibn al-ʿArabī a great man of knowledge,

but considered the saying "absolute existence" (*vujūd-i muṭlaq*) to be false.[210]

A correspondence between one of the great commentators on Ibn al-ʿArabī, known as

Abdurrazzâq-i Kāshānī, debated ʿAlā al-Dawla Simnānī through their correspondence as

translated and commented upon by Hermann Landolt.[211] Although Jāmī hints that *vaḥdat-i*

*vujūd* is a point of disagreement, nowhere in their correspondence is the phrase waḥdat

al-wujūd mentioned. Rather, in *Nafāhat al-uns,* Jāmī describes Simnānī's critique of Ibn

al-ʿArabī in terms of the former's rejection of "*wujūd muṭlaq*."[212] This term, "absolute

existence," is perhaps associated with Ibn Sabʿin more than Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school. This

reflects a trend in associating the former's philosophy with the latter, either out of ignorance or

to make a polemical point against mystical monism by lumping the more-controversial Ibn

Sab'īn together with Ibn al-'Arabī.

As seen with Ibn Taymiyya, critique of Ibn al-ʿArabī himself tends to be ambivalent, and

Simnānī too, was torn between respect and criticism. Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, who offers little

evidence of a close reading of Ibn al-'Arabī's works, Landoldt demonstrates that Simnānī had a

copy of the *Futūhāt* with some telling margin notes.[213] Rizvi points out that "Shaikh

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[210] Jāmī, *Nafāhat al-uns*, 472.

[211] Hermann Landolt, "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Kāšānī und Simnānī über waḥdat al-Wuǧūd" Hathi Trust
Library, pp 245-300.

[212] Jāmī, *Nafāhat al-uns*, 555.

[213] Landolt, "Simnānī on waḥdat al-wujūd". Landoldt describes one such "reaction to" Ibn al-'Arabī's
"praise of the divine Being in Ibn 'Arabī's Futūhāt al-Makkîya" which reads: 'Praise be to the One who

'Ala'u'd-Daula Simnānī bitterly criticized Ibn 'Arabī, while calling him a great spiritualist and praising him lavishly in other ways in his writings."[214] When it came to individual sufis who adhered to a philosophy of mystical monism, however, Simnānī occasionally expressed utter outrage. This is best evidenced by his reaction to a traveling companion while on Hajj: "when his companion revealed his mystical creed, which consisted in a kind of ontological *tawḥīd* similar to that of Ebn ʿArabī, ʿAlāʾ-al-dawla reacted violently and even tried to have him killed by a Turk, to whom he described him as an infidel."[215] Simnānī didn't just accuse his travel companion of *kufr* (infidelity), but he even saw fit to carry out a death sentence right then and there, and this mystic was only saved by declaring his repentance and fleeing.

Simnānī's attitude toward non-Muslims seems to vacillate during his life, as he entered and later left the service of the Il-Khāns. Van Ess summarizes Simnānī's change in circumstance and attitude:

> he had to practice religious compromise; the Il-khans had not yet been converted to Islam, and Buddhist monks (baḵšī, i.e. bhikṣu) had a strong position at the court. This seems to have driven him into a religious crisis; at the age of twenty-four, when accompanying Arḡūn in a campaign against one of his uncles in 683/1284, he experienced near Qazvīn a vision of the other world. Stricken by a serious disease

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made things appear and who at the same time is the things!' ( Subhâna man azhara al-ashyâ wa-huwa 'aynuhâ!), which Simnānī commented up on by writing the following into the margin of his own copy of the Futūhāt - a copy which, incidentally, seems to be lost unfortunately, but which was still extant in Jāmī's and even Mullâ Ṣadrā's time: "O Shaykh ! If you heard someone saying that the excrement of the Shaykh is identical with the existence of the shaykh, you certainly would not accept this from him; no, you would be angry. How, then, is it possible for a reasonable being to apply such nonsense to God, the King and Judge? Return to God by sincere repentance, so that you may get out of this dangerous intricacy."  It is worth noting here that *'aynuha* could mean "same" or "essence of", where *'ayn* is a frequently used technical term for Akbari Sufis. The two possible meanings are radically different: "the One who manifested the things and is the same as them", versus "the One who manifested the things and is their essence"

[214] S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol 2, 222.

[215] J. van Ess,"'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī' Encyclopedia Iranica I/7, pp. 774-777.

which held him in Tabrīz for two years, he turned more and more toward mainstream Sunnism and a moderate kind of Sufism.[216]

Johann Elverskog observes a pluralistic view held at one time by Simnānī who lived in "a world where Mongol khans and the Persian and Turkic elite rubbed shoulders with Tibetan lamas and Sufi sheikhs, a world in which Sufi masters like 'Ala' ad-Dawla as-Simnānī could declare the Dharma as being the same as Islam."[217] On the other hand, Landoldt ponders Marjan Molé's suggestion that Simnānī's "later negative attitude towards Ibn 'Arabī" resulted from the fact that "he sensed something of a common nature in the Buddhist doctrines which he knew and *waḥdat al-wujûd.* […] Simnānī rejected not only Buddhism, but Christianity as well, since it represented for him the danger of ḥulūl or incarnationism."[218] As with Ibn Taymiyya, his avoidance of incarnationism (*ḥulūl*) was tied to the desire to maintain the ideological distinctness of Islam from other religions.

Simnānī's impact in South Asia seems relatively minimal until Aḥmad Sirhindī, with one exception, the Chishtī Sufi, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsu Darāz also known as Khwāja Banda Nawāz, who S.A.A. Rizvi claims was the "most enthusiastic convert to 'Ala'ud-Dawla Simnānī's ideology."[219] This possible connection comes, not from 'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī himself but through his companion Ashraf Jahangir Simnānī (d. 1386 c.e.), and the question of direct influence lacks evidence.[220] Nonetheless, Gīsu Darāz was in agreement with 'Ala'ud-Dawla

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[216] J. van Ess,"'Ala al-Dawla Simnānī" Encyclopedia Iranica I/7, pp. 774-777.

[217] Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 173.

[218] Hermann Landolt "Simnānī on waḥdat al-wujūd" Public Lecture, given at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Tehran Branch, on March 17, 1970.

[219] S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol 1, 250.

[220] N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Sufis: South Asia,* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2000), 112. Ashraf Jahangir Simnānī came to Gīsu Darāz's *khanaqa* twice, but unlike Rizvi, N. Hanif concludes with Khusro

Simnānī' in rejecting the identification of God as "Absolute Existence"(*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*).[221]

Gīsu Darāz condemned the works of Ibn al-'Arabī and the poets Farid ad-Din 'Attar and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī in his writings (*maktūbāt*), calling them "the enemies of Islam."[222] Gīsu Darāz penned a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* though it is unfortunately no longer extant. Richard Eaton shares an anecdote about Gīsu Darāz teaching this text and causing the shaykh to fall under the investigation of a wary secretary of the Sultan only to find this secretary become one of the shaykh's disciples.[223] Of course, if the reading of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* was a critical one — as all the evidence points to — then this would have been enough to placate the secretary's suspicions.

Eaton is confident that Gīsu Darāz professed the doctrine of *waḥdat-e shuhūd* as opposed to what he viewed as Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al wujūd*.[224] If this is indeed the case, then it would seem Gīsu Darāz was the first to use *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as a counterpoint to *waḥdat al wujūd*, as there is no evidence Simnānī did before him, and he

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Hussaini that there is no such influence. Hanif is right to conclude that it's entirely plausible that both Gīsu Darāz and Simnānī came up with refutations of The Unity of Being independently since the philosophy was incredibly popular in their time.

[221] Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, *Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī-i Gīsūdirāz (721/1321-825/1422) on Sufism*, (MA Thesis McGill: 1976), 74.

[222] S.A.A. Rizvi, 253. See Also Richard Maxwell Eaton, The Sufis of Bijapur, Princeton: PUP, 1978): 52. Here Eaton connects Gīsu Darāz's opinion of the supremacy of *sharī'a* over Sufism: "Unlike the Chishtis of Delhi, however, Gisudaraz aligned himself squarely with the *'ulama* by declaring the supremacy of Islamic Law (*shari'at*) over all Sufi stages and by launching a tirade not only against Ibn 'Arabī but also against the liberal Persian Sufis Farid al-Dīn 'Attar and Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī, all of whom he denounced as enemies of Islam"

[223] Eaton writes: "Gisudaraz had been teaching lessons on a highly controversial text, the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, authored by Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1240). The sultan sent a secretary to the shaikh's khanaqah to investigate and report on how Gisudaraz was using the text. But upon attending the discourses, the secretary became spellbound himself and enrolled as one of the shaikh's disciples, much to the court's dismay" Richard Maxwell Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age*, (Penguin: 2019), 144. See also Eaton, *A social history of the Deccan, 1300-1761: eight Indian lives,* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005): 53-4.

[224] Richard M. Eaton, "GĪSU-DARĀZ," Encyclopaedia Iranica, XI/1, 2012, pp. 1-3, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gisu-daraz>. Last Accessed 11 December, 2022.

precedes Sirhindī on this count by several centuries.[225] Rizvi notes that Gīsu Darāz learned

Sanskrit and Hindu epics in order to debate the Brahmins in order to convert them to Islam, and

— while he claims to have defeated many of them — it "is interesting to note that the arguments

of the Brahmans who discussed Hindu mysticism with Gīsu Darāz were based on the theory of

the Unity of Being[; they asserted that creation was not outside the Divine Being."[226]This is

telling, whether or not the Brahmins in question were actually basing their arguments on the

Unity of Being or whether Gīsu Darāz just perceived it to be so; he is predicting a connection

between *waḥdat al wujūd* and non-dualist schools of Hindustani thought that will later be made

in Mughal prince Dārā Shikūh's decidedly pluralist philosophical project.

In the case of ʿAla al-Dawla Simnānī and Gīsū Darāz, opposition to Ibn al-ʾArabī and

mystical monism goes hand-in-hand with anxieties over the religious "other" and a need for clear

confessional boundaries. As outlined above, the coherence and reification of *waḥdat al-wujūd*

into a singular doctrine owes much to its critics like Ibn Taymiyya. As will be explored in

chapter 5, Aḥmad Sirhindī is an even more potent example of anti-monism joined with animosity

towards non-Muslims and who he deems to be "heterodox" Muslims. In chapter 6, Dārā

Shikūh's embrace of the Unity of Being as well as non-Muslim religious traditions will provide a

stark contrast. The worldviews of Shikūh and Sirhindī also show how attitudes towards monism

have real-world effects and political ramifications.

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[225] N. Hanif agrees that "long before Shaykh Aḥmad Sarhindi, [shuhud etc] Gesudaraz had already laid a foundation for this doctrine." in N. Hanif, 112

[226] S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol 1, 254.

# Chapter 3 Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophy and charismatic Sufi movements: The case of Bedreddin's Rebellion and his *Wāridāt*

When covering the period of the interregnum in Ottoman history (1402-1413 c.e.), mention is often made of the revolution led by Bedreddin of Simavna. This jurist, Sufi shaykh, and Prince Musa's Kazasker, led a rebellion against Mehmed I following his succession. Taking, for example, Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference*, Caroline Finkel's *Osman's Dream*, and Heath Lowry's *Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, one learns that Bedreddin preached an "Islamochristian" syncretism and that this was founded upon the ideology of the "Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This "universalist" reading of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* that is to say, a reading of this ideology as necessarily leading to an all-inclusive attitude toward religion has come under increasing critique recently.[227] Indeed the Sufis writing about this philosophy describe themselves as Muslims and make use of the Quran and traditions of the prophet Muhammad. This chapter seeks to critically evaluate the claim that Bedreddin held a view of religious syncretism by analyzing the most controversial text of the rebellious shaykh, the *Wāridāt* in order to see what exactly it was that Bedreddin preached. A careful examination of the sources reveals that Bedreddin did indeed navigate a space between Christian and Muslim worlds in the Ottoman Beylik, but his ideas — although heterodox — are informed primarily by Islamic sources and that there is no hard evidence for Islamochristian syncretism in his thought.

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[227] Gregory Lipton, for example, has recently shown that a reading of Ibn al-ʿArabī as a religious universalist does not align with his writings, especially the vast *Meccan Revelations* in his *Rethinking Ibn ʿArabi* (Oxford: OUP, 2019).

To start, the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* , in the "Balkans to Bengal complex,"[228] may be characterized as a form of "popular religion" in the expanded sense used by Nathan Hofer. Writing of Mamluk Egypt he observes that "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."[229] Likewise, it may be  proposed that elements of Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophy such as the "Unity of Being" and the "Perfect Man" (*insān al-Kāmil*) were part of the popular religion among both urban elites and the semi-nomadic Turkmen dervishes alike in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire proved to be fertile ground for Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophical brand of Sufism and, in particular, for the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*  as will be explored below. With the philosophical Sufism of Ibn al-ʿArabī's school so ubiquitous in the Ottoman Empire, from religious elites down to heterodox dervishes, one would expect far more instances of religious syncretism and rebellion from Sufis if indeed this doctrine was responsible for Bedreddin's rebellion. Although this chapter will conclude that the *Wāridāt* is a thoroughly Islamic document — albeit one with some controversial claims — there is some evidence that Bedreddin's teachings downplay the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad, possibly to appeal to non-Muslims or recent converts. Before diving into Bedreddin's rebellion and his *Wāridāt* it is prudent to explore the place of Sufism and of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his thought in the Ottoman Empire.

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[228] A term proposed by Shahab Ahmed in his *What is Islam?* (Princeton: PUP: 2015) which seeks to improve on Marshall Hodgson's "Nile to Oxus region" in his three volume *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: UC Press, 1974). The benefit for the present study is the inclusion of the Balkans as the "Islamic" space that it was for centuries under the Ottomans.

[229] Nathan Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt: 1173-1325, (Edinburgh: EUP, 2015), 6.

**Ibn 'Arabi in the Ottoman Context**

Several scholars have made the point that Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophical Sufism comprises an important part of what might be termed an "Ottoman Islam." In his *Second Formation of Islamic Law*, Guy Burak describes an "Ottoman Islam" that consists of the following elements:

> Abū Ayyub al-Anṣārī embodies the Ottoman dynasty's ideal of holy war against the infidels; Ibn al-ʿArabī was one of the most prominent figures in the Ottoman pantheon of Sufi masters; and Abu Ḥanīfa was the founder of the school of law (madhhab) that the Ottoman dynasty adopted as its official school. In other words, the discovery-reconstruction of their tombs was an act of appropriation.[230]

Locating Ibn al-'Arabī among a pantheon of Ottoman Sufi masters, as shall be explored below, is an accurate assessment. Nabil Al-Tikriti, also writing about "Ottoman Islam," agrees with the centrality of the Hanafi madhhab, and adds "an Ibn 'Arabī–influenced philosophy, certain approved Sufi orders, and limited celebratory ritual practices," but also notes that at "the same time, practices deemed by Ibn-i Kemāl and others to signify apostasy were aggressively prosecuted, leading to the gradual shaping of a distinctly Ottoman religious identity that has been tentatively identified as Ottoman Sunnism."[231] Indeed, it is Ibn-i Kemāl (A.K.A. Kemālpaşazade) who writes a very positive and influential fatwa in favor of Ibn al-'Arabī and his works, while also beginning a process of persecuting heterodox dervishes. This process of defending Ibn al-'Arabī and persecuting heterodox Sufis continued in the 16th century under Ebu Su'ud Efendi. The fatwas of both these Shaykh al-Islams will be examined below. First,

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[230] Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire,* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 2.

[231] Nabil Al-Tikriti, "Ibn-i Kemāl's Confessionalism and the Construction of an Ottoman Islam," in *Living in the Ottoman Realm: Empire and Identity, 13th to 20th Centuries,* Ed. Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent F. Schull, (Indiana University Press, 2016), 106.

however, it is worth establishing the role of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire with respect to the political as well as the religious establishment.

## Sultanic Authority and Sufism

Prominent Sufi shaykhs were important in the early Ottoman Beylik, and had the power to imbue the Sultan with a God-given spiritual authority through their support. Omid Safi, albeit in a study of Seljuk-era Sufism, offers a useful tool for considering the role of Sufi shaykh and Sultan in terms of spiritual "charisma" or "*baraka*" (Ar. blessing). He describes what he terms "baraka-legitimizing narratives" wherein "the *baraka* of the saint legitimizes the military conquest of the warlord in exchange for promises of justice for the people."[232] The concept of the Perfect Man[233] is one of Ibn al-'Arabī's central teachings[234] and finds its most concrete expression in

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[232] Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009), 133-4. One such example Safi provides is seen in a hagiographic exchange between Baba Tahir and the Seljuk Sultan Tughril Beg: "Bābā Ṭāhir, the enthralled soul, said to the Sultan: 'O Turk! What will you do with God's people?' The Sultan replied: 'Whatever you state.' Bābā said: '[Rather,] do that which God orders: '*Verily God commands justice and spiritual excellence*'[Qur'ān 16:90] The Sultan wept, and said: 'I will do so.'" Baba Tahir then gives a talismanic ring to the Sultan and states: "'Thus, I have handed to you dominion of the world. Stand firm on justice.' The Sultan kept that ring among his charms (*ta'widh-ha*).Whenever he would go on battle, he would put on this ring."

[233] Marshall Hodgson has a useful description of Ibn 'Arabi's "perfect man:" "This sort of expectation was expressed most clearly in Ibn-al-'Arabī's teachings about the perfect man', the quṭb saint. The divine oneness was most especially realized in the oneness of the perfected saint with God-of the saint who fulfilled God's purpose of self-knowledge, since in him also all cosmic complexity-the reality of all God's names-was itself fulfilled. Every prophet was such a 'perfect man', as were the quṭb saints when there was no prophet; the type of the 'perfect man' was Muhammad. And every individual should strive for that same goal. Through the oneness achieved by the 'perfect man', the oneness of God himself was to be understood, and the illusoriness of all multiplicity so far as it seemed not to participate in this oneness." though he refers to it as "perhaps more aesthetic than moral in tone, which does little to explain the presence of this philosophy in revolutions throughout the late-middle and early modern periods." in Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* Vol. II, (Chicago: UC Press, 1974), 241.

[234] Unlike "The Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd),* the "Perfect Man" is a concept that Ibn al-'Arabī explicitly states in his work.

the thought of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d.1410).[235] Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy could be downright revolutionary as he envisioned a "pole" or "axis" (*quṭb*) as a "true spiritual caliph, the immediate representative of God, who bore a far more basic sway than any outward caliph."[236] Hüseyin Yilmaz describes the political implications: "kings who come and go are but the servants of such a saint, as many beloved anecdotes make clear; no Caliph had such power over his governors as the Sufi shaykhs, and especially the supreme shaykh, the *quṭb* of any given time, had over the earth's rulers."[237] In the Ottoman Empire, as in South Asian Sufism, when a saint is recognized as a *qutb*, they become a lightning rod of charismatic authority with the power to either challenge or lend legitimacy to a worldly sultan.

The connection between Sufism and the Ottoman dynasty goes back to its founder, Osman. The Ottoman historian Aşıkpaşazade relates Osman's dream at the house of a renowned spiritual master, Sheikh Edebali, wherein the expansion of the dynasty is metaphorically predicted in a many-branched tree growing from his navel and the prophecy was sealed with Osman's marriage, becoming Edebali's son-in-law.[238] Edebali was himself a shaykh

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[235] 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, a student of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings defined the Perfect Man: "The Perfect Man is the Pole on which the spheres of existence revolve from first to last … He has various guises and appears in diverse bodily tabernacles […] His original name is Muhammad […] In every age he bears a name suitable to his guide in that age […] I mean that the Prophet is able to assume whatever form he wishes [The Perfect Man's] heart is identified with the Throne of God, his mind with the Pen, his soul with the Well Guarded Tablet[.…] You must known that the Perfect Man is a copy of God […] as a mirror in which a person sees the form of himself and cannot see it without the mirror, such is the relation of God to the Perfect Man. Cited in Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 75. As Riddell's study demonstrates, the "Perfect Man" and "waḥdat al-wujūd " were influential in Island Southeast Asia as well via South Asian scholarly networks.

[236] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*. (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 14. The postulation of a saintly "pole" or "axis," *Quṭb*, as the highest rung on a ladder of saints dates at least as far back as Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in the 9th century c.e.

[237] "being in the hands of the shaykh as a corpse is in the hands of the corpsewasher" cited in Arthur Beuhler, *Recognizing Sufism: Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition,* (New York: IB Tauris, 2016), 159.

[238] Aşıkpaşazade, "The Reign of Osman Ghazi," in *Die altosmanische Chronik des 'Aşıkpaşazade*, ed. F. Giese, (Leipzig: 1929), 7-35, Translated by Robert Dankoff, 2. Cf. Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story*

of the "Vefa'i-Baba'i mystical order"[239] Edebali's decision to marry his daughter to Osman was surprising given the tendency for Shaykhs to marry their daughters to their khalifa, the spiritual successor of their order. This marriage could, possibly, speak to a spiritual authorization for the very founder of the Ottoman state.  That the "earliest extant document of the Ottoman state" is a *vakf* in Orhan's name for a dervish lodge east of Iznik[240] is quite telling of the sultan-Sufi relationship.

Aşıkpaşazade's "The Reign of Osman Ghazi," offers an idealized vision of the Ottoman sultan as a "holy warrior" (*ghāzī*).  Also known as Dervish Ahmed, this historian wrote in the genre of an "advice letter" (*nasīḥat nama*), and effectively uses the eponymous founder of the Empire, Osman, to illustrate an ideal type for his own ruler in the last quarter of the 15th century. The ideal ruler had respect for the dervishes and saints (*awliyā'*) and—in return—they supported the ruler. Yilmaz draws a comparison to *Rumūzü'l-Künūz* (Secrets of Treasuries)" composed by Ibn Isa, claiming "the text resembles Aşıkpaşazade's chronicle in its critique of the Ottomans for breaching the etiological pact between the dervishes and the House of Osman."**[241]**

*of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923,* (Basic Books 2007), 2. For trees as a symbol in Turkic shamanic practice, see Thierry Zarcone and Angela Hobart eds., *Shamanism and Islam: Sufism, Healing Rituals and Spirits in the Muslim World,* (London: IB Tauris, 2017), XXI and XXVIII.

[239] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (UC Press:1995), 128-129. For more on Shaykh Edebali see Jonathan Brack, "Was Ede Bali a Wafāʾī Shaykh? Sufis, Sayyids and genealogical creativity in the early Ottoman world," in *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia,* ed. A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (Würzburg: Orient-Istitut Istanbul, 2016).

[240] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire*, (Basic Books 2007), 9.

[241] Huseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Politcal Thought*, (Princeton: PUP, 2018), 270.

## Sufism and the Ottoman Religious Hierarchy

Not only were the early Ottoman sultans respectful of their Sufi constituents but to the legal authorities as well, and — as we shall see — the role of Sufi and jurist was often combined into one in the early Beylik. Sultans "first established the authority of the Seyhulislamate. In so doing, the sultans had expressed a willingness to subject themselves to [...] religious authority."[242] As we shall see, the early Ottoman jurists were particularly fond of Ibn al-'Arabī and his school of thought. The late 14th century represents a period of expanding intellectual networks for the Akbari school and its ideas. According to Yılmaz, Ibn al-'Arabī enjoyed a vibrant life in "the learning revolution in the post-Timurid Rum" which:

> turned Ibn Arabi's corpus from an aristocratic stock of elite spirituality into fashion items for rank and file dervishes, intellectuals, and even illiterate folks. Ibn Arabi's mysticism was already a shared spirituality between Sufis and scholars, as exemplified by Rūmī, Davud-i Kayseri, and Molla Fenari who operated with the conviction that discursive and intuitive forms of knowledge stand for the same truth.[243]

David-Qaysari was both an important figure in the Akbari school and was appointed by Sultan Orhan (d.1360 c.e.) to oversee the first Ottoman medrese.[244] Molla Fenari, the "first Ottoman

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[242]Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*. (SUNY: 2005), 195-6.

[243] Yılmaz, 132. Caution should be exercised, however, in stating any direct influence by Ibn al-'Arabī on Rūmī; there simply is insufficient evidence for this. See, for example, Omid Safi, "Did the Two Oceans Meet?" *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society,* Volume XXVI, *1999*. Safi points out that there "are no direct references in the vast writings of Mawlānā to Ibn al-'Arabī himself."(69). Safi does conclude however that Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī studied with Ibn al-'Arabī in Damascus (77-85). See also the figure of "Shaykh Muhammad" in Shams al-Tabrizi's *Maqālāt*; he describes a "Shaykh Muhammad" once as "Ibn Arabi in Damascus" and calls him "a mountain" which Chittick concludes would support this as the Shaykh al-Akbār himself, but still does not see enough evidence in the *Maqālāt* to "judge one way or the other." in William Chittick, *Me and Rūmī*, (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2004): XVIII.

[244] Mukhtar H. Ali, *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qaysari*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 5. *Q*aysari's influential introduction or, *Muqaddimat*, with its lucid and pedagogical style, proved instrumental in teaching Ibn al-'Arabī's thought in the Ottoman Empire and beyond.

Sheikh of Islam, was deeply influenced by Ibn 'Arabi" and "his influence in Ottoman Turkish thought, whether in medrese or tekke, was pervasive.[245] In fact, Yılmaz traces what he terms "the mystical turn" in the Ottoman Empire to Molla Fenari:

> But jurists, *per se*, ceased to be the sole authorities on juristic knowledge, best exemplified in the rise of a new type of juristically trained Sufis giving fatwas on legal matters, a function that had been the conventional reserve of jurists. The mystical turn was an epistemic movement that involved all branches of knowledge from theology to philosophy as well as arts and literature. [Molla] Fenari's enchantment in Sufism as a jurist was no less deep than [Jalāl ad-Dīn] Rūmī's immersion in jurisprudence as a Sufi. Mysticism, in its endlessly varying articulations, permeated into all scholarly, literary, and artistic explorations that profoundly altered the way political leadership is envisioned and manifested.[246]

Yılmaz rightly highlights the, often simultaneous, dual vocations of jurist and Sufi in the late Medieval and early modern periods. Certainly, the earliest figures in Ottoman jurisprudence, Qaysari and Fenari, exhibit this joint study of the *Batin* and *Zahir*. Though this is by no means purely an Ottoman phenomena — and an argument in later chapters will be made along similar lines for South Asian Sufism — the early Ottoman Beylik represented a remarkable fusion of Sufism in all aspects of religious and even political life.

Ibn Kemāl (a.k.a. Kemālpaşazade) provides an early fatwa on Ibn al-'Arabī that remained authoritative enough for 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731) to repeat it. Kemālpaşazade issued a *fatwa* "exonerating" Ibn 'Arabi and is possibly the reason why Sultan Selim "ordered the rebuilding of the mystic's tomb in Salihiyya."[247] Among the highlights in this fatwa, Ahmed Zildžić notes that the "fatwa unequivocally upholds Ibn 'Arabi's authority in the

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[245] Victoria Holbrook, "Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order," http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/Melāmī2.html.

[246] Yılmaz, 277.

[247] Le Gall, 124.

realm of Sharīʿa" as "*al-mujtahid al-kāmil*)," and "in the realm of Sufism" as a "pole" of all

gnostics (*quṭb al-ʿārifin*); this makes Ibn al-ʾArabī "a symbol of perfect synthesis between two

aspects of Islam: legal (*sharīʿa*) and spiritual (*tTārīqa*)."[248] It is worth emphasizing the high

regard in which Ibn Kemāl holds Ibn al-ʿArabī, not only as one who perfectly exercises judicial

reasoning (*ijtihād*), but also as a *quṭb* which is the highest rank for a saint in Sufism dating at

least as far back as the 9th century c.e. with al-Hākim al-Tirmīdhī's hagiology. The blending of

*sharīʿa* with *Tārīqa* perfectly summarizes the marriage between spiritual and legal pursuits in the

early modern Ottoman Empire. Ebu Suʾud Efendi followed Ibn Kemāl's precedent and upheld

the legality of studying Ibn al-ʿArabī, although he admits that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* contains

"some words that are not congruent with the Noble Sharīʿa."[249] Ebu Suʾud exhibits far more

caution than Kemālpaşazade with regard to the Great Shaykh's works as is expected in the time

period following the Ottoman Empire's annexation of the Haramayn and the increasing

Sharīʿa-mindedness of his time.

The Ottoman Sultans reached out to Sufis, especially those who could teach the works

of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school. The Naqshbandiyya rose to prominence for their expertise in

the teachings of Ibn ʿArabi, whose controversial doctrine was decried as heretical on many

occasions for blurring the distinction between "Creator" and "created" (*Haqq wa Khalq*). Dina

Le Gall points out that "what propelled Sultan Mehmed II to build the first Naqshbandi tekke of

the capital for Ishāq Bukharī-i Hindī was precisely the association of the Naqshbandi shaykhs

and their Central Asian mentors with expertise in the *waḥdat al-wujūd*."[250] The following

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[248] Ahmed Zildžić, "Friend and foe: the Early Ottoman reception of Ibn ʿArabī," Ph.D. Dissertation UC Berkeley, 137-8.

[249] Zildzic, 157. See pp. 151-161 for more of Ebu Suʾud's writings on Ibn al- ʿArabī.

[250] Le Gall, 125.

chapter on Molla Ilāhī will explore the dual role of early modern Naqshbandis as experts in Ibn al-'Arabī while maintaining a reputation as orthodox Sunnis.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Ibn al-'Arabī was thoroughly cemented in the "pantheon" of Sufi saints of the Ottoman empire is the importance of his shrine in Damascus. His tomb lay dormant in the Mamluk era, but was "rediscovered" by Selim I. A work of "Ottoman prognostic literature"[251] claims that Ibn al-'Arabī predicted Selim I's conquest of the Mamluks and the discovery of his tomb. In his Ph.D. dissertation, Zildzic lists several Fetva's regarding Ibn 'Arabi in the Ottoman empire, but he also highlights a manuscript known as the *Shajarah al-nu'maniyya fi dawla al-Uthmāniyya* attributed to Ibn 'Arabi but extant only in commentaries purportedly written by Ṣadr al-Dīn Qunawī and Ṣafadī, the former being Ibn al-'Arabī's son in law and successor while the latter is the student of one of Ibn al-'Arabī's most outspoken opponents, Ibn Taymiyya. In this work, "divine support for the victorious house of the Ottomans, and their suitability to earn it, configures the core message the author strives to convey."[252] This work contains a supposed prophecy by Ibn al-'Arabī, that "when the *sīn* enters the *shīn*, then will emerge the tomb of Muhy al-Dīn;"[253] where Selim I is equivalent to the letter *sīn* and the region of the *sham* is represented by the letter *shīn*.[254]

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[251] Zildzic, 89.

[252] Zildzic, 90.

[253] Zildzic, 92.

[254] Torsun Bayrak's introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's *Journey to the Lord of Power* contains several hagiographic anecdotes surrounding the Shaykh: "One of his many enigmatic statements was "*Idha dakhala al-sin ila al-shin / yazhara qabru Muhyiddin,*" which means: When S will enter SH (the letters sin and shin in Arabic], the tomb of Muhyiddin will be discovered." When the ninth Ottoman sultan, Selim I. conquered Damascus in 1516, he learned of this statement from a contemporary scholar named- Zembilli Ali Efendi, who interpreted it as a prophecy which meant:"When Selim [whose name starts with the letter sin) enters the city of Sham [the Arabic name of Damascus, which begins with the letter shin], he will discover Ibn ' Arabi's tomb." So Sultan Selim found out from the theologians of the city the place where the saint had made the declaration "The god which you worship is under my feet," and had it excavated. In Ibn Arabi *Journey to the Lord of Power:" A Sufi Manual on Retreat,* trans. Rabia Terri Harris, 10-11

When the Ottomans conquered Syria in 1516, a "revival of the cult of saints" was encouraged by Sultan Selim I's own visit to Ibn al-'Arabī's shrine in the district of Saliḥiyya.[255] Josef Meri points out that for "the Ottoman Sultan it was a means of celebrating his victory against the Mamluks in Palestine, and obtaining blessings for a campaign against the Mamluks in Egypt, and also an occasion to publicize his piety to the people of Damascus. In visiting the shrine, he revived the custom of venerating the Andalusian saint."[256] Ibn Tūlūn, in his *Mufākaha*, records that it was the custom of the Ottomans (*arwām*) visit to Ibn al-'Arabī's shrine[257] and records Sultan Selim I's construction project:

> On Saturday, the 24th of Ramaḍān in 923/1517, the Chief Qadi Walī al-Dīn b. Furfūr came to al-Ṣāliḥīya of Damascus to the renowned turba of Shaykh Muḥyi al-Dīn which was previously the turba of Ibn al-Zaki. Accompanying him were the Sultan's master artisan and a group. By decree of the Sultan [Selim I…], they planned the turba in order to build a Friday prayer mosque (*Jāmī bi-khuṭba*). He ordered that a dome be built over Ibn al-'Arabī's mausoleum, a congregational mosque beside it, and a takīya across from it. The Sultan charged the…Chief Qadi with these tasks. He built it as the aforementioned building. It turned out to be the most splendid and most perfect construction. All of this was made possible by our master the Shaykh Ibn al-Arabī, may the clouds of Mercy rain over him.[258]

Notable in this entry is the way in which the already sacred topography of the Salihiyya district is described as being reshaped by the Ottomans. Not only was a shrine, or "turba," constructed,[259] but a congregational mosque was founded as well. The physical layout is

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[255] Josef Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria,* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 171.
[256] Meri, 171
[257] Meri, 173
[258] Meri, 172-3.
[259] The grave-site was known by the name of the Damascene qadi and patron of Ibn al-'Arabī, Ibn al-Zaki. Perhaps the popularity of Ibn al-Zaki over Ibn al-'Arabī is due to the former's role in leading a delegation to negotiate with Hulagu during the Mongol invasion of Syria and siege of Damascus in 1260 on behalf of the city and sparing its inhabitants the typical degree of slaughter. Knysh provides this information along with other contemporary accounts of these two figures and their common burial site on Mt. Qasiyun, in Damascus. see Knysh (1999), 30-34.

reorganized to reflect the spiritual power Ibn al-'Arabī is believed to possess, and Ibn Tūlūn even credits the Shaykh al-Akbar — not the Ottoman Sultan — with making the construction possible. It is worth reiterating that Selim I didn't just restore Ibn al-'Arabī's tomb, but discovered it echoing the discovery of Ayyūb Anṣārī's tomb prior to victory in the siege of Constantinople. Though, unlike Anṣārī's tomb, it is the Sultan himself who discovers the sacred site rather than a shaykh.

## Heterodox Sufism in the Ottoman Beylik

The medieval to early modern period saw the rise of institutional, or *Tārīqa* Sufism which Ahmet Karamustafa defines by these constitutive elements: a formal institution with a shaykh as a leader; a method or "path" (*Tārīqa*); and often — but not always — a physical location or lodge.[260] Another component is the shaykh, who has significant power over the members of his *Tārīqa*; Hujwīrī writes that "the shaykh in his congregation is like the Prophet in his community;"[261] and another popular saying is that the seeker (*murid*) "'being in the hands of the shaykh as a corpse is in the hands of the corpse washer."[262] As a result, the charismatic authority held by Sufi shaykhs led them to wield significant authority over their followers; when the shaykh encourages quietism, the state would leave them to their affairs, but when political

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[260] Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). Trimingham differentiates between the "silsila-founders" and their *khanaqahs*, *ribats*, and *zawiya*s—differentiating these Shaykhs of "instruction" (*tarbiya*) from the "vagrant dervishes (*malamatis* and *qalandaris*) Trimingham, J.S. The Sufi Orders in Islam (Oxford, Clarendon: 1971), 16-18
[261] Ovamir Anjum, 77.
[262] Arthur Buehler, *Recognizing Sufism: Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition* ( London and NY: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 158-9.

action was encouraged — as happened with the Bābā'ī revolt in 1240 under the Seljuks — then the full weight of a Sufi leader's charismatic authority could be marshaled against the state.

The institutionalization of *Tārīqa* Sufism brought with it a rebuttal in the form of anti-institutional Sufism beginning with the "People of Blame"(Ar. *Malāmatiyya*).[263] Working with Abdulbaki Gölpinarli's analysis that the Melāmī's were not a *tarikat* but a "reaction" to the movement of dervishes into institutional Sufism,[264] Victoria Holbrook, provides a useful framework by considering the Malamis a "supra-order" in "so far as they did not employ the material and disciplinary accoutrement."[265] Put simply, Melāmīs tend to either shun all "outward" appearances of piety — they even go so far as to court blame by behaving in a socially unacceptable manner. As religious orders like the Khalwatī (Helveti) and Mawlawī (Mevlevi) solidified into formal Sufi networks and courted Ottoman notables, heterodox dervish groups came under fire from the office of the Şeyhulislamfrom above while a quiet revolution against institutional Sufism carried on among rank and file dervishes.

Huseyin Yilmaz points out that Bayram's successor (Ar. *Khālifah*;Tr. *halife*), "Akşemseddin (d. 1459)," developed "Ibn Arabi's teachings into a code of conduct in textbook clarity for their dervish followers."[266] It's interesting to note that Akşemseddin was not just

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[263] Ahmet Karamustafa offers an explanation of the *Melāmatiyya* as follows: "They argued that the only effective methods of harnessing the appetitive self to the cause of *Ikhlas* [sincerity] were (1) to narrow the lower self's sphere of operation by shunning all public display of piety as well as omission of praiseworthy acts, and (2) better yet, to subject the nafs to constant blame, malama , through self-censure." in Karamustafa, 48.

[264] Shahzad Bashir puts the inherent social dimension of asceticism "While described internally as a matter of personal religious motivation, ascetic practices always derive from existing social practices by offering contrast with established norms. No practice can be termed ascetic in the abstract since all things deemed extraordinary presume the existence of an ordinary." in Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam,* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011), 64-5.

[265] Victoria Holbrook, "Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order" http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/Melāmī1.html.

[266] Yilmaz, 133.

interested in Akbari Sufism like Bedreddin but he studied Quranic interpretation (*tafsīr*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with Bedreddin in his younger days.[267] Akşemseddin also illustrates the difference between institutional Sufism and the Melāmī way in the Ottoman Empire as he was one of two competing successors to Haci Bayram Veli's order. The famous Akşemseddin became successor while the lesser-known contender, Emir Sikkini, relinquished the outer symbols of the Bayrami order, effectively splitting the *Tārīqa* in two.[268] Mehmed II's "spiritual guide"(*murshid*) Akşemseddin not only "revealed the impending conquest" of Constantinople but "is portrayed in all of these traditions as more powerful than the Sultan himself."[269]

## Bedreddin's Rebellion

According to Cemal Kafadar, Şeyh Bedreddin (d. 1420) was a revolutionary Sufi leader during the Ottoman Interregnum (1402-1413) advocating the abolition of private property and attracting: "booty seekers, metadox dervishes, leaders of nomadic tribes (defined as inclusive entities), recently converted ex-Christians, all of them perceiving and legitimizing their struggle with reference to a higher cause whenever appropriate."[270] This supposed

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[267] H. J. Kissling, "Das Menāqybnāme Scheich Bedr ed-Dīn's, des Sohnes des Richters von Samāvnā," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft,* Vol. 100 (n.F. 25), No. 1 (1950), 118.

[268] In the path of Bayramiyya it was Emir Dede Sultan who first relinquished the taj and the khirka. The reason for this was that on the night Sultan Haji Bayram passed away, some of his successors offended Emir Dede (zevkine degmisler). He said "if being a dervish is about the taj and the khirka, we do not want them anymore" and exhibited a miracle. He approached the cooks who were cooking four rams on a single fire. Murmuring "In the Name of God, O secret of Haji Bayram (bismillahi ya sirra Haji Bayram)," he entered the fire and sat in it. The fire caught on his clothes and then his whole body… After some time when he emerged from the fire, his t"j and khirka were burnt and he was left with a white felt (çuha) which was given to him by Haji Bayram… After that Emir Dede's admirers and successors did not wear the Bayrami tāj. It is the same even today" in Betul Yavuz, "The Making of a Sufi Order between Heresy and Legitimacy: Bayrami-Melmis in the Ottoman Empire," (PhD Diss. Rice University, 2013), 79.

[269] Halil Inalcik, "Istanbul, an Islamic City," Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 1 (1990), 251.

[270] Kafadar, 144-5.

abolition of private property has drawn interest toward Bedreddin, especially that of Marxist poet Nazim Hikmet in his epic poem *Simavne Kadısı oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı* published originally in 1936. As we shall see below, it was actually Bedreddin's disciple Börklüce Mustafa who advocated abolition of private property among his followers, and the question of just how connected Bedreddin's rebellion was to Mustafa's is by no means a settled matter given the differing reports. Hikmet, writing his poem while himself in prison due to his ideology, contributed to the legendary and mythical character of Bedreddin in no small part. Complicating matters, the main source for Bedreddin's life prior to his rebellion is his Grandson's rhymed hagiography, the *Menāqebnāme*, which never asserts any rebellion even took place.[271] This source is of course questionable where it demonstrates a clear bias, though Michel Balivet and Erdem Çıpa treat it as a "source of the first order,"[272] and use it to reconstruct Bedreddin's life. What can be constructed from the Ottoman historians is that Bedreddin served as Prince Musa's Kazasker and was supported by a broad section of Rumelia's peasants and elites following Musa's defeat.

Yilmaz points out that the "Ottoman chroniclers almost unanimously report that the enigmatic shaykh was executed in 1420 as a rebel (*bāğī*), not a heretic"(*zindiq*).[273] At least three Ottoman historians record a *fatwah* declaring his "[b]lood is permissible but his property

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[271] Instead, Bedreddin is portrayed as fleeing his house arrest in Iznik, following Mehmed I's victory over prince Musa, and is only put on trial after bringing his latest work to present to Mehmed I. For a summary, see Kastritsis, 235.

[272] Dimitris Kastritsis, "The Seyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413" in A Anastasopoulos (ed.), Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII, A symposium held in Rethymo 9-11 January 2009, (Crete University Press), 222.

[273] Yilmaz, 128.

is not" (*Kanı halal malı haram*)[274] which Recep Çiğdem suggests could actually indicate a charge of apostasy (*irtāḍ*) since he was charged with the death sentence while allowing property to carry over to family members.[275] If Bedreddin's grandson Ḥafız Ḥalīl and Ibn Arabshah are to be believed, Bedreddin actually wrote the fatwa himself.[276] As will be explored below, the debate over Bedreddin's "heresy" is the result, not his subscription to the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* but rather, his radical ideas about eschatology and the afterlife that were seen to go against the Quran and Sunna. Before discussing the role of *wujūdī* doctrine in his thought, it is necessary to explore, first, the historical circumstances, and second, the ideological foundations for Bedreddin's revolt.

Bedreddin grew up in the Deliorman ("Crazy Forest") province of Rumelia which Nicolay Antov has characterized it as "the Ottoman Wild West,"[277] but at the time of Bedreddin, much of Ottoman Rumelia was such a frontier zone occupied by Sufi warriors known as *ghazis.* Cemal Kafadar describes the importance of Bedreddin's frontier background:

> Sheikh Bedreddin, the son of a gazi and the daughter of the Byzantine commander whose fortress he had captured, did not advocate forced conversion or brutal repression of the Christians but a utopian synthesis of different faiths, among other things, and he and his lieutenants managed to gather thousands of Muslims and Christians willing to fight against the Ottoman army. Bedreddin's message lacked

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[274] Altınok Baki Yaşa, *Şeyh Bedreddın ve Varıdat: İnceleme ve sadeleştıren*, (OBA Kitabevi: 2004), 58, 66-7. Arabşah, Aşıkpaşazade, and Mehmed Neşri all record Mevlana Haydar issuing a fatwa to this effect. See also Balivet, 85-88, and Franz Babinger, *Schejch Bedr ed-Din, der Sohn des Richters von Simäw; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sektenwesens im altosmanischen Reich*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1921), 40.

[275] Recep Çiğdem, "A Life in Banishment in Iznik: Sheikh Badraddin Simawni," *Uluslararası İznik Sempozyumu* (2005), 460-1. see also the relevant *ahadith* discussing the death penalty and apostasy in Sahih Bukhari 6922 and 6484; Sahih Muslim 1676.

[276] For the *Menāqebnāme* see Hans Joachim Kissling, "Das Menaqybnäme Scheich Bedr ed-Dīn's, des Sohnes des Richters von Samāvnā," Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft , 1950, Vol. 100 (n.F.25), No. 1 (1950), 173. For Ibn Arabshah's account see Balivet, 87.

[277] Nicolay Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West:" The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

single-minded, adversarial proselytizing zeal not despite but because he came from a gazi milieu.[278]

Here, Kafadar provides a useful reminder that the Ottoman Beylik — especially in its frontiers — occupied a space between Christianity and Islam, and converts to Bedreddin's movement were drawn from both populations. Bedreddin's Christian mother undoubtedly was responsible for a foundational knowledge of Christianity and open-mindedness toward Christians. Following Halil Inalcik, Fariba Zarinebaf points out that Bedreddin's revolution didn't just draw from "Christian peasants" in the Balkans, but also involved "dispossessed *gazis* (warriors for Islam, low ranking *sipahis* (cavalry)," and "medrese students."[279]

Trained in the prominent Anatolian medreses at Bursa and Konya as well as the Berkukiyya in Mamluk Egypt, Bedreddin epitomizes the burgeoning Ottoman religious establishment as a Hanafi faqih with strong commitments to Islamic mysticism. He had a "conversion" to Sufism under Shaykh Husayn Akhlātī (d. 1397 c.e.) while tutoring for the Mamluk Sultan's son in Egypt. After a falling out with his shaykh, Bedreddin returned to his Rumelian homeland and was appointed head military judge (*kazasker*) under Prince Musa Çelebi in 1411, ostensibly due to his juristic expertise.[280] Indeed, his *Jāmī' al-Fusulayn* remains an authoritative work of Hanafi jurisprudence. At some point before the *Wāridāt*, Bedreddin took up the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī and began to subscribe to the ideology of

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[278] Kafadar, 143. Cemal Kafadar credits Orhan Saik Gökyay's "masterful demonstration" for having demonstrated that Bedreddin "was the son of not the kadi but the gazi of Simavna"(143).

[279] Fariba Zarinebaf, Qizilbash "Heresy" and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia During the Sixteenth Century. *Anatolia Moderna*, Volume 7, 1997.

[280] Dimitris Kastritsis, "The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413," in A. Anastasopoulos (ed.), Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII. A symposium held in Rethymo 9-11 January 2009. (Crete University Press), 223

*waḥdat al-wujūd*. Not only did Bedreddin write a commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, but he even encountered the great shaykh in a dream.[281]

Bedreddin attracted a following of heterodox Dervishes and illiterate Rumelian peasants — many of them Christian — during his career as a shaykh and leader of a movement. In his magnum opus known as the *Wāridāt,* a wealth of hadith and Qurʾanic passages are cited alongside his unorthodox allegorical interpretation of the afterlife. He represents the charismatic — and at times militant — tradition of Sufi Shaykhs that remained popular throughout the Balkans to Bengal complex. Karen Barkey notes that Bedreddin "represents a moment when the Ottomans were maneuvering out of unrestrained mystical diversity and syncretism to a more controlled order of state-policed orthodoxy."[282] If, however, one reads Bedreddin's religious activity purely in terms of his heterodoxy, then one is faced with a paradox where his charismatic and "metadox"[283] Sufism exists alongside the orthodox Hanafi jurisprudence he exhibits in his *Jāmīʿ al-Fusalayn* written during his time as Musa Çelebi's *Kazasker*.

One of the few areas of complete agreement among scholars regarding Şeyh Bedreddin's failed Balkan uprising in 1416, is that he was highly influenced by the philosophy of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). Ibn al-ʿArabī and the philosophy of his "Akbari" school — especially its doctrine of the "Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd* ) — were as controversial as they were

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[281] Michel Balivet recounts this: "one night in the year 1407/810, Ibn Arabî appeared to him: At the beginning of the month of Cemaziyelâhir, on Thursday night, towards morning, I saw Ibn Arabî. He said to me: "I wanted to expel Satan to another world and I succeeded. There are only a few things left in this world ". I understood later what he meant and I explained it to some of my friends: Satan is estrangement from God. Sheikh Ibn Arabî represents the closeness of God. I have spent a lot of time exploring the Al-Ḥikam Fuṣūṣ on this point." in Michel Balivet, *Islam Mystique et Révolution Armée dans les Balkans Ottomans: Vie du Cheikh Bedreddîm Le 'Hallaj des Turcs' (1358/59-1416),* (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2011), 106.
[282] Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: CUP: 2008), 171.
[283]Cemal Kafadar's term, see *Between Two Worlds*, 76.

popular in the Ottoman Empire.[284] Followers of Bedreddin included a wide range of heterodox dervishes, which Victoria Holbrook describes as "extremists in 'the oneness of being.'"[285] Bedreddin's mission to wipe out evil in the world, given to him by Ibn al-'Arabī himself in a dream-vision,[286] is perhaps a powerful example of how *waḥdat al-wujūd* could translate to ethical and politically involved action in the world.[287]

Caroline Finkel is convinced that Bedreddin's subscription to the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* contributed not just to the religious syncretism of his movement, but also its subversive power:

> The doctrine of 'oneness of being' sought to eliminate the oppositions which framed life on earth – such as those between religions, and between the privileged and the powerless – which were considered to inhibit the oneness of the individual with God. The struggle for 'oneness' gave the mystic an important role for it was he, rather than the orthodox cleric, who had the wisdom, and therefore the task, to guide man to union with God. This doctrine was potentially highly subversive of evolving Ottoman efforts to

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[284] Katib Çelebi's *The Balance of Truth* (Mizan al-Haqq) devotes an entire section to discussing 'Arabi's philosophy as a key point of debate during the 17th century. He points to Ibn al-'Arabī's extreme proponents who repeat a controversial claim from his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* that "he is the Seal of the Saints and heir to the caliphate of Muhammad." In contrast, the 14th century Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya palpably despised Ibn al-'Arabī, calling his philosophy a worse plague than the Mongol hordes. Çelebi holds back, declaring that those who "suspend judgement about [Ibn al-'Arabī…] have acted rightly". See Katib Celebi, *The Balance of Truth*. trans. G.L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 80-82. For a summary of legal judgements in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere on Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy see Alfonso Carmona González *El Sufismo y las normas del Islam: trabajos del IV Congreso Internacional de Estudios Juridicos Islamicos, Derecho y Sufismo*. Editora Regional de Murcia (7-10 May: 2006).

[285] Holbrook, Victoria. "Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order part 1" <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/Melāmī1.html> accessed: 12 March, 2019.

[286] For this dream encounter between Ibn al-'Arabī and Bedreddin see Michel Balivet, Islam Mystique et Révolution Armée dans les Balkans Ottomans: Vie du Cheikh Bedreddîm Le 'Hallaj des Turcs' (1358/59-1416), (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2011, pp. 93 and 106;

[287] Bedreddin says nothing in his *Wāridāt* to give the reader any clues to his politics or bid for power (Tr. *huruc*) which contemporary Ottoman historians ascribe to him, and the only indication of his fall from political favor comes from a note in his final work, *Teshīl*, lamenting his state of house arrest in Iznik. Bedreddin writes: "At this very moment when I finish this book, I am far from my hometown; I am in sorrow and in misfortune. The fire which burns in my heart increases day by day. O Master of hidden goodnesses, keep us from those of whom we are afraid" cited in Balivet 69.

establish through conquest a state with Sunni Islam as its religion and their eponymous dynasty at its pinnacle.[288]

Karen Barkey asserts that Bedreddin preached a "syncretic understanding of religion"[289] and as a result "he was converting people to his creed as fast as the Ottoman armies were executing them as rebels. The number of state executions was high: from 6,000 to 8,000 were executed among the three rebels – Şeyh Bedreddīn, Börklüce Mustafa,̈ and Torlak Kemāl – and their followers."[290] In order to evaluate the claim that Bedredin preached a "syncretic understanding of religion" as Barkey states, or the claim that *waḥdat al-wujūd* was the principle that allowed for this "elimination" of the oppositions "between religions" as Finkel puts it, it is necessary to go to the text that actually contains Bedreddin's teachings, the *Wāridāt*.

### Bedreddin's *Wāridāt*

The last line of what Bilal Dindar considers the "cardinal text" of the Wāridāt in Suleymaniye Library ends in the third person, indicating that Bedreddin did not compose the text himself: "Finally I wrote these passages from the *Wāridāt* of Shayh Bedreddin Simavī, may God be merciful to him!"[291] Though not written by his own hand, the text of the *Wāridāt* could be a remarkably faithful recording of Bedreddin's teachings. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı is of the

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[288] Finkel, 34.

[289] Barkey, 173.

[290] Barkey, 173.

[291] Bilal Dindar, *Šayh Badr al-Dīn Mahmūd et ses Wāridāt*, (Ankara: Ministre de Culture. 1990), 111. Dindar's translation is as follows: "Enfin j'ai écrit ces passages des Wāridāt de Shayh Badr al din Simavï que Dieu lui soit miséricordieux!" see also his attendant footnote: "Le manuscrit (a) que nous avons choisi parmi des autres comme le texte cardinal se termine ici. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons arrêté le traduire." The author's phrase "God be merciful to him" (Ar. Allah yarḥamuhu) indicates both that Bedreddin is deceased at the time of writing and also suggests a sympathetic attitude from the compiler..

opinion that the text was written by someone who engaged Bedreddin in dialogue, posing questions and recording his answers.[292] If this is the case, then the *Wāridāt* might fit within the genre of *malfūẓat* literature in Persian-language Sufi circles where someone sitting in "companionship" (Per. *sohbet*; Ar. *Suhbah*) with a shaykh records what was said in a given session. This would explain why there is little organization in the text, and why certain passages repeat, or nearly repeat; the structure and flow is organic as if the lesson of the day was dutifully written down by a student, even if it was a repeat instruction. Gölpınarlı points out another reason why Bedreddin could not have authored the text, namely, the manuscript lacks a prologue in the where the rest of Bedreddin's extant works — not to mention the writings of most educated ulema of the period — include a preamble detailing blessings on God and on the Prophet in the beginning of their treatises without fail. Michel Balivet contends that the *Wāridāt* had a following among the Ottoman ulema, though some shaykhs disdained the work so much that they banned their disciples from reading it.[293] Whether this ban was due to Bedreddin's condemnation as a rebel or to the material within the *Wāridāt*, one can only speculate, though his works on *fiqh* remained influential in spite of his "bid for power" (Tr. *huruc*) against Mehmed I.

The author of the *Wāridāt* records several discourses of Bedreddin that are in line with the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* . In one particular discourse, Bedreddin instructs:

> Know that the Existing One is the Truth (Haqq), nothing else, and thus the goal to be reached is the Truth, nothing else. Their words (of the Mashayikh) "O Goal, O

[292] Dindar, 47.
[293] Balivet, 103.

Existence" (Yā maqsūd, ya mawǧūd) testify to this. He (God) includes all things even if they are incompatible, contradictory, since they all come into existence.[294]

Here, God, or Truth, is described as all-encompassing since everything that comes into existence does so by way of the Existing One. Bedreddin gives fewer qualifications separating God's *wujūd* from other existents (*mawjūdāt*) and is, in the Wāridāt, perhaps more fully monist than Ibn al-'Arabī. For example, Bedreddin asserts that "from the point of view of truth, all things are 'one,'" and continues in the same discourse:

> The Whole is One [...] He is the that which provides for everything (al-Razzâq) and that he is the creator. It is the same for other names, such as "servant" (àbd) and Truth (Haqq). There is no plurality according to what is true: The essence differs only in conceptions and according to considerations. However, there is no grasp of the reality of essence by means of considerations. What belongs to plurality is only a matter of imagination. This is what is alluded to by: "God existed, nothing else existed with Him," and: "He is now as he was," and the verse: "All things perish except his Face.'[295]

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[294] Dindar, 69. "Sache que l'Existant, c'est la Vérité Créatrice, rien d'autre, et ainsi le but à atteindre c'est la Vérité , rien d'autre. Leurs paroles (des Mashaih) "O but, ô existence" (*Yâ maqsûd, ya mawjūd*) en témoignent. Il (Dieu) englobe toutes les choses même si elles sont incompatibles, contradictoires, puisqu'elles entrent toutes dans l'existence. L'incompatibilité est relative aux degrés hiérarchiques, et Lui (Dieu) est au-dessus de cela." Bilal Dindar opts for translating God's name, "Truth" (Ar. Haqq), as "la Vérité Créatrice" or "Creative Truth" following the great French language scholar of Sufism and Shi'i philosophy, Henry Corbin.

[295] Dindar, 79. His translation reads:
Mais, du point de vue de la vérité, toutes les choses sont "unique". Si chaque unité absolument parlant, parce que l'existence sans aucune condition se nomme Vérité Créatrice, qu'il en émane le tout ou la partie ou qu'il n'en émane aucune chose, qu'elle se qualifie de telle ou telle manière ou non c'est tout à fait pareil. Il est possible de dire que chaque unité des mazàhir est autre que Dieu, le Très Haut, en tenant compte du fait que si on considère la forme, le tout n'en émane pas. Le Tout est Unique à parler vrai, c'est-à-dire qu'à parler vrai à son propos. Il est celui qui pourvoit à tout (al-Razzâq) et qu'Il est créateur. Il en est de même pour d'autres noms, tels "serviteur" (àbd) et Vérité Créatrice (Haqq). Il n'y a pas de pluralité d'après ce qui est vrai: L'essence ne diffère que dans les conceptions et d'après les considérations. Or, il n'y a pas saisie de la réalité de l'essence par le moyen des considérations. Ce qui appartient à la pluralité ne relève que des imaginations. C'est à quoi fait allusion: "Dieu existait, rien d'autre n'existait avec Lui," et: "Il est actuellement tel qu'il était," et le verset: "Toute chose périt sauf sa Face."

Here Bedreddin employs passages from the Qur'an and hadith perennially popular among Sufis who subscribe to mystical monism to illustrate that the believer is a part of God's singular existence, though he lacks some of the technical vocabulary that the Akbari school typically uses to qualify this profound claim.

Throughout his *Wāridāt,* Bedreddin describes existence as a "whole" that is in each "particle" and vice-versa. Bedreddin stresses in the Wāridāt that even the smallest particle in existence participates in "the All" as he states:

> The All is in the Whole, that is to say that all the beings that exist are in all things, even in all atoms. I mean that (the whole of the tree) is in each of its parts, since it is, in its totality, in the fruit (which is a part of the tree). Therefore, in each part of the tree there is a seed. So in this part, there is the whole tree,  that is why the whole is manifested in it. Likewise, the whole of the worlds worlds is verified in its principle, and the principle in the totality of this all in each of the worlds. So the reality of each of the worlds is verified in every atom. In all this is revealed the secret of unveiling for men of truth: it is that the whole is in every man and that insofar as this veil is lifted, the whole is discovered in the soul (*nafs*) of the man.[296]

Bedreddin, working his way up from the imagery of a tree and its seed, is striking a metaphor for how something miniscule can participate in — or paradoxically — can even contain a larger totality. While the idea of entire worlds being "verified" in a single atom almost invites the reader toward a mystical perplexity (Ar. *hayra*), the Sufi reader would be reminded with the last line

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[296] Dindar, 65. "Le Tout est dans le tout, c'est-à-dire que tous les étres qui existent sont en toute chose, voire en tout atome. Je veux dire que (le tout de l'arbre) est dans chacune de ses parties, puisqu'il est, en sa totalité, dans le fruit (qui est une partie de l'arbre). Par conséquent, dans chacune des parties de l'arbre, il y a une graine. Donc dans cette partie, il y a l'arbre tout entier  c'est pourquoi le tout se manifeste en lui. De même, le tout des mondes se vérifie dans son principe, et le principe dans la totalité de ce tout en chacun des mondes. Donc la réalité de chacun des mondes se vérifie en tout atome. Dans tout cela se dévoile le secret du dévoilement pour les hommes de vérité: c'est que le tout est en tout homme et que dans la mesure où ce voile se soulève, le tout se découvre en l'âme (Nafs) de l'homme."

that "he who knows his soul (*nafs*), knows his Lord."[297] The conclusion of this passage, seemingly, is that the soul of an individual is capable of encompassing the All, or God. The very next line cites a hadīth qudsī favored by mystical monists as if to explain how and why man is capable of knowing God: "I was a hidden treasure and I wanted [*ahbabtu*] to be known. I created creation to be known."[298]

Bedreddin was above all an ascetically-minded Sufi and the *Menāqebnāme* is replete with accounts of his extreme asceticism. His philosophy was tied to his physical practice of *mujahidah* (spiritual striving) and *riyaza* (askesis), which he explains in his description of the Sufi maxim that one should "Die before you die." The purpose in denying the body, for Bedreddin is

> so that you live eternally, because he who dies to the world, to its pleasures, as well as to worldly passions, lives in the true existence which has no beginning (*al-azali*) nor of end (*al-abadi*). […H]e who "died before he dies" is imbued with divine character and his memory endures forever; the one, whose memory endures eternally, lives eternally. [...H]e who sheds metaphorical partial existence, who knows that he is one of the sources of living water of divine existence, and who joins it far from any [duality], this one is certainly alive eternally, since there is only Existence.[299]

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[297] The saying common among Sufis in the Arabic is: "Man 'arafa nafsihi 'arafa Rabbihi."

[298] Dindar, 65. "J'étais un trésor caché et J'ai désiré être connu. Jai créé les créatures pour être connu.'" The original Arabic: "Kuntu kanizan makhfian fa-ahbabtu an 'uaraifa fa-khalaqtu al-khalq liakai ua'raifa."

[299] Dindar, 100. "'Meurs avant que tu ne meures' afin que tu vives éternellement, parce que celui qui meurt au monde, à ses plaisirs, ainsi qu'aux passions mondaines, vit dans la vraie existence qui n'a ni de commencement (al-azali) ni de fin (al-abadi). Alors, la mort ne se présentera pas subitement à une telle vie, et on vivra éternellement. Mais ceux qui désirent la vie de ce bas monde, ne trouveront pas bon ce genre de vie. En d'autres termes, "celui qui est mort avant qu'il ne meure" s'imprègne de caractère divins et son souvenir subsiste éternellement; celui, dont le souvenir subsiste éternellement, vit éternellement Le troisième aspect est que celui qui se dépouille de l'existence partielle métaphorique, qui sait qu'il est une des sources d'eau vive de l'existence divine, et qui se joint à elle loin de tout dualisme, celui là est certes vivant éternellement, puisqu'il ne reste que l'Existence"

The emphasis on dying to all things temporal and material in favor of living eternally in "divine existence," not in the next life, but here and now through ascetic praxis demonstrates that Bedreddin's philosophy is tied to physical activity. It is through "dying before you die," or to use an attendant Sufi idea, "annihilation" (*fanā'*) that is what Gavin Flood calls the "I will" of "ascetic intention" that "ironically seeks to erase itself."[300] Bedreddin continues the theme of experiencing timelessness in the here and now in a vivid description of a mystical state that he himself likely experienced.

Bedreddin describes "the most distant goal" of the spiritual wayfarer (*salik*) which he describes as a state of experiential — literally "tasted" — unity (*al-tawhīd al-hâli al dhawqi*)."[301]

The *Wāsil*, or "one who reaches his goal" while awake:

> loses consciousness, he experiences that his body unfolds and expands until it fills the whole universe. And he himself is a spectator of mountains, trees, rivers and gardens as well as everything that exists in the world. He sees in himself that he is the whole himself. And he professes. Whatever he sees, he says it's Me; and he sees nothing but his own person. Whatever object he looks at, he sees that he is himself. Likewise, he sees in himself the atom and the sun, and each of them is the other himself. He does not differentiate between them. He sees time as a unique reality where there is no beginning or end, or post-eternity or pre-eternity. Then, he is astonished by what one says: "This is the time of Adam and this is the time of Muhammad (SAAWS)," given that he saw the negation of the anteriority and posteriority, and that time does not change. He sees (time as) just as if it is a unique moment. After, (at that moment wherein) he moves away from this vision of things and of plurality and passes to another state, he leans sometimes on the existence of the universe, sometimes on its non-existence. And he sees there that all things, including the observer himself, [remain] disoriented (Hayrân).[302]

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[300] Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2004),14.
[301] Dindar 87.
[302] Dindar, 87. "[...]sans être dans le sommeil, perd connaissance, il fait l'expérience que son corps se déploie et s'élargit jusqu'à ce qu'il remplisse tout l'univers. Et il est en lui-même spectateur de montagnes, d'arbres, rivières et de jardins ainsi que tout ce qui existe dans le monde. Il voit en lui-même qu'il est le tout lui-même.

This passage carries past the "annihilation" of the self to what appears to be a profound experience of *coincidentia oppositorum* while the former self melts into union with all in existence. In Bedreddin's vivid description of infinite timelessness, both "before" (*azāl*) and "after" (*abād*) are negated, and this leads to a perception of prophecy as one single continuum. As a result, the finality of the "seal of the prophets" (*khātim al-anbiya'*) is implicitly challenged, or at the very least, reconsidered.

A portion of Sufis have described the prophet Muhammad — or the " Light of Muhammad" (*Nūr Muhammad*) — as God's first creation going at least as far back as the mystic and exegete of the Qur'an, Sahal 'Abd Allah al-Tustarī (d. 896 c.e.).[303] Remarkably, it's asserted in the above passage that the spiritual wayfarer (*sālik*) is confused by the statement "[t]his is the time of Adam and this is the time of Muhammad (SAAWS)." While this could be an expression of "perplexity" (*ḥayra*) where the Sufi experiencing a state of total undifferentiation, there is undeniably also the possibility that this experience entails the realization that all of the prophets exist simultaneously, in a singular Existence (*wujūd*). Even if such a

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Et il de professe. Quoi qu'il voie, il dit c'est Moi; et il ne voit rien d'autre que sa propre personne. Quel que soit l'objet vers lequel il porte ses regards, il voit qu'il est lui-même. De même, il voit en lui-même l'atome et le soleil, et chacun d'eux est l'autre lui-même. Il ne fait pas de différences entre eux. Il voit le temps comme une réalité unique où n'existent ni début ni fin, ni post éternité ni prééternité. Alors, il s'étonne de ce qu'on dit: 'Cela est le temps d'Adam et cela est le temps de Muhammad (le salut soit sur eux),' étant donné qu'il a vu la négation dé l'antériorité et de la postériorité, et que le temps ne change pas. Il voit (le temps en tant que) tout comme s'il est un moment unique. Après, (au moment où) il s'éloigne de cette vision des choses et de la pluralité et passe à un autre état, il s'y penche tantôt sur l'existence de l'univers, tantôt sur son inexistence. Et il y voit que toutes les choses, y compris l'observateur lui-même, restant désorientées (Hayrân)."
[303] Rubin, U., "Nūr Muḥammadī," in: Encyclopédie de l'Islam. Last Accessed, 02 March, 2023, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004206106_eifo_SIM_5985>. An excellent study of the chronological development of Nur Muhammad and Haqīqah Muhammad is found in Khalil Andani, "The Metaphysics of Muhammad: The Nur Muhammad from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq to Nasir al-Dīn al-Tusi" in *Journal of Sufi Studies,* (8:2019), 99-175.

leveling of all of the prophets would be an exaggeration of what this passage expresses, it is still remarkable that Bedreddin would leave out of his Wāridāt entirely a discussion of either the *Nur Muhammad*, or the "Muhammadan Truth" (*Haqīqah Muhammadiyya*) that Ibn al-ʿArabī popularized. Bedreddin was very likely familiar with such an important concept in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, but he left it out of his Wāridāt entirely.[304] Two of the three extant commentaries on the Wāridāt include the concept of "Muhammadan Truth" (*Haqīqah Muhammadiyya*), and the latter commentator even goes so far as to add an entire chapter on this concept to the text of the Wāridāt[305] as if to correct the sparse mention of the Muslim prophet in the *Wāridāt*.

It comes as no surprise to the reader of the Wāridāt that Bedreddin shows himself to be firmly on the side of those who say, as Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922 c.e.) did in his divisive declaration, "I am God" (*Ana al-Haqq*). Bedreddin uses the Qurʾanic — and Biblical — example of Moses speaking to God through the burning bush on Mt. Sinai in order to illustrate his attitude toward such a statement. He writes that the speech of the burning bush saying, "Certainly, I am God" to Moses indicates that when a man says the same, he is not far off the mark, for "when the Universe becomes his image, anyone who says: 'I am Him' is right in his words, because that alludes to the owner of the image of the universe."[306] Again we find in the Wāridāt the language of the "all" found in the "particle," or "Existence" in the individual "man"

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[304] It is also possible that Bedreddin was only familiar with Ibn al-ʿArabī through the latter's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and not the *Meccan Revelations*.

[305] For example, Molla Ilāhī's (d. 1491 c.e.) *Kashf al-Wāridāt* and Nur al-Dīn al-ʾArabī's (d. 1887 c.e.) edit and commentary on the Wāridāt translated in Tosun Bayrak, *Inspirations on the Path of Blame: Steps on the Path of Blame*, (Threshold Books: 1993).

[306] Dindar, 98. "La parole de l'arbre qui est" certainement, moi, je suis Allah est un avertissement sur le fait que si l'Homme dit cela, il ne se tient pas à distance, au contraire il répond de première voie. Lorsque l'univers devient Son image, toute personne qui dit: "Je Le suis" est juste dans ses paroles, parce que cela fait allusion au possesseur de l'image de l'univers."

which allows for ecstatic utterances (*shatahat*) like Hallaj's famous "Ana al-Haqq." Caroline Finkel describes the heterodox Sufi executed in the 16th century, Ismail Maşuki, and his connection to waḥdat al-wujūd: "the mystical doctrine of the 'oneness of being', that man was God, the doctrine espoused by Sheikh Bedreddin during the years of civil war a century earlier. It had been considered highly subversive by Sultan Mehmed I, and Sultan Süleyman's religious authorities found it equally unsettling."[307] Equating *waḥdat al-wujūd* with "man [is] God" is perhaps oversimplifying the matter, but Finkel is correct that this philosophy could be "highly subversive" for exactly the reason that "Ana al-Haqq" appears on the surface to assert no difference between humanity and divinity, between man and God. However, the wide popularity of Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought among Ottoman ulema attests to the fact that there was also plenty of support for those who aligned with the Akbari school and its insistence that all *wujūd* is one, albeit with caveats.

The *Wāridāt* is without a doubt the most controversial of Bedreddin's writings, yet it is very telling, however, that none of the charges of heretical belief and practice against Bedreddin had to do with mystical monism; many of the Ottoman ulema, as seen above, shared an appreciation for Ibn al-'Arabī's esoteric philosophical theology and the concept of *waḥdat al-Wujūd*. Rather, it was the views expressed in the Wāridāt regarding Angels, Demons, the afterlife and eschatology that earned it the ire of the orthodoxy-minded Ulema. That the *Wāridāt* gained such a reputation as a heterodox text is evidenced in the *Menāqebnāme* of Ḥafiz Ḥalīl, where he offers a legitimizing narrative for the Wāridāt. He writes that the night

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[307] Finkel, 143.

before the execution, the Prophet and Abu Hanîfa appear in a dream to Bedreddin and bless his Wāridāt, lending the text legitimacy and its author an air of orthodoxy.[308]

In the Wāridāt, Bedreddin opts for an allegorical reading of heaven and hell as well as angels and demons. The very first lines of the *Wāridāt* lend primacy of place to the message that heaven and all of its attendant concepts are not to be taken literally:

> Know that the realities of the Beyond are not as the ignorant (juhhāl) claim, they are of the world of the divine imperative (al-'amr), of mystery and the Realm of Dominion (Malakūt) and not of the visible world as assumed by the vulgar ('awwamm). The prophets and the elect have said the reality, but the important thing is to understand their words. Know and do not doubt that the paradise, the palaces, the trees, the paradisiacal creatures (hūrī), the clothes, the rivers, the fruits, the suffering, the fire and all that is similar, which have been mentioned in the narrations (akhbār) and in the documents transmitted (āthār), should not be taken exclusively according to their appearance, because they have other meanings known to the elect of the friends of God.[309]

Bedreddin, from the outset, is stating that all of the vivid descriptions of the torments of Hell and the delights of Paradise found in the Qur'an and Hadith — the "*akhbār* and *āthār*" he mentions — are merely allegorical. He explains that "the pleasures of hûri, palaces, as well as paradises" are "used metaphorically to make imperfect minds understand" better the higher meaning of reward and punishment that they symbolize.[310] Almost akin to the "skillful means" employed in

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[308] Balivet, 87

[309] Dindar, 62-63. His translation: Sache que les réalités de l'Au-Delà ne sont pas telles que le prétendent les ignorants (Juhhâl), elles sont du monde de l'impératif divin (Al-amr), du mystère et de la royauté (Malakut) et non pas du monde visible comme le suppose le vulgaire (dépourvu de connaissance religieuse) (A wamm). Les prophètes et les élus ont dit la réalité, mais l'important est de comprendre leur propos. Sache et ne doute pas que le paradis, les palais, les arbres, les créatures paradisiaques (hûri), les habits, les fleuves, les fruits, la souffrance, le feu et tout ce qui est semblable, qui ont été mentionnés dans les récits traditionnels (Ahbâr) et dans les documents transmis (âtâr), ne doivent pas être exclusivement pris selon leur apparence, parce qu'ils possèdent d'autres significations que connaissent les élus des amis de Dieu.

[310] Dindar, 99. "On compara les plaisirs des perfections qui se réalisent pour le Tout aux plaisirs des hûri, des palais, ainsi que des paradis dont les noms sont employés métaphoriquement pour faire comprendre les premiers aux esprits imparfaits, ignorants et incapables d'en saisir le sens."

the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Bedreddin explains that the delights and terrors of the hereafter are a means to an end. For Bedreddin there are no literal angels — fallen or otherwise — as he states: "whatever pushes you towards the Truth is angel and Raḥman [The Merciful], while whatever pulls you towards what is not God is Iblis."[311] Thus, the descriptions of Heaven and Hell serve as a carrot and stick to impel the unlearned public (*'awāmm*) toward Truth, that is, God and away from "what is not God" in this life.

Undoubtedly, the most controversial opinion found in the *Wāridāt* is the denial of bodily resurrection. Against bodily resurrection, Bedreddin writes:

> This body does not have unlimited sustenance (*baqâ*), and its parts will not be recomposed after annihilation (*fanâ*) as they were. What is designated by the resurrection of the dead is not that. Where are you carefree! You are preoccupied with this lower world; therefore your will (*himma*) has become incapable of perceiving these things.[312]

Here, the phrasing is couched in Sufi terminology: *fanā* literally means "'annihilation," but can refer to the temporary annihilation of the self in mystical ecstasy; "subsidence" or *baqā*' refers to what remains of the mystic after this annihilation, often termed *baqā*' *bi-llah* or "subsiding in God;" and *himma* refers to one's aptitude or ability for mystical wayfaring and how far one is able to go. Elsewhere in his *Wāridāt* he is more blunt and says simply that the "resurrection of bodies as the vulgar conceive it is almost indefensible."[313] Recep Çiğdem even claims that there

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[311] Dindar, 67 "tout ce qui te pousse vers la Vérité Créatrice est ange et rahman, tandis que tout ce qui te traîne vers ce qui n'est pas Dieu, est iblis. "

[312] Dindar, 63. "Ce corps ne possède pas de subsistance illimitée ( baqâ ) , et ses parties ne seront pas recomposées après l'anéantissement ( fanâ ) telles qu'elles l'ont été. Ce qui est désigné par la résurrection des morts n'est pas cela. Où es-tu insouciant! Tu es préoccupé par ce bas monde; aussi ta vo lonté ( himma ) [6] est-elle devenue incapable de percevoir ces choses."

[313] Dindar, 74.

are four views in the *Wāridāt* that were "sufficient" to put Bedreddin to "trial for apostasy" including the disbelief in bodily resurrection.[314]

Finally, the notion that Bedreddin led a "syncretic" or Islamo-Christian movement requires a critical eye, for the sake of examining whether or not "the doctrine of 'oneness of being'" that "sought to eliminate oppositions" including "those between religions" as Finkel wrote. In short, the question of whether or not the theology of waḥdat al-wujūd was an essential part of Bedreddin's revolutionary ideology needs an answer. It must be stated at the outset that the extent of Bedreddin's involvement in the revolution waged in his name is not entirely clear.[315] For example, the frequent assertion that Bedreddin's followers held property in common — an assertion celebrated by the Marxist poet Nazim Hikmet in his *Şeyh Bedreddin Destani* — is derived from a movement led by Bedreddin's closest disciple and secretary (*kethüda*), Börklüca Mustafa as related, not by any of the Ottoman historians, but by Michael Doukas alone.

Doukas records the teachings of Börklüca Mustafa the disciple of Bedreddin who implemented an egalitarian ethic and preached radical equality between Muslims and Christians:

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[314] Çiğdem, 459. Three of the four views are indeed present in the *Wāridāt*: including disbelief in bodily resurrection, declaring there is nothing wrong with saying "I am God," and there is no "paradise or hell (in the orthodox understanding." The view that alcohol is not forbidden does not appear in Bilal Dindar's translation based on the four "synoptic" copies of the *Wāridāt* in the Suleymaniye library.

[315] Karataş writes: "There are questions about his actual role in the rebellion of 819/1416. His hagiographer and grandson Khalīl asserts his complete innocence, while some Ottoman historians, such as the dervish chronicler ʿĀşıqpāşāzāde (d. c. 907–8/1502), portray him as the mastermind of the rebellion. An alternative approach is also offered by modern historians, which argues that Badr al-Dīn is one of many actors in a larger and decentralised rebellion in 819/1416" in Hasan Karatas, "Badr al-Dīn b. Qāḍī Samāwnā" Brill, *EI* 3.https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/badr-al-Dīn-b-qadi-samawna-COM _24496?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=bedreddin Accessed: 12 February, 2019.

In those days there appeared near the mountain situated at the entrance of the bay of Ionia commonly called Stylarion, and to the east opposite Chios, a simple-minded Turkish peasant. He taught the Turks that they must own no property and decreed that, with the exception of women, everything must be shared in common—provisions, clothing, yokes of beasts, and fields. 'I shall have access to your house as though it were mine and you shall have access to my house as though it were yours, with the exception of the female members.' After he had duped the peasants with this doctrine, he guilefully sought to win the friendship of the Christians. He expounded the doctrine that anyone among the Turks who contended that the Christians are not God-fearing, is himself ungodly [316]

Not only was property to be held in common by all but he viewed Christians and Muslims as equally "god-fearing"—a claim which would go against the position in Islamic scholarship that Muhammad's revelation superseded the Christian one. Tempting as it may be to claim Börklüca Mustafa based his community on Bedreddin's thought, there is no evidence that this necessarily is the case.

In the *Menāqebnāme*, Ḥafiz Ḥalīl dissociates Bedreddin from the revolts by Börklüca Mustafa in the Stylarion and Torlak Kemāl in Kutahya,[317] and three, but not all, Ottoman historians connect Bedreddin's movement with Börklüce's. Idrīs Bitlīsī in his *Hasht Behesht* claims that Bedreddin ordered Mustafa and Torlak Kemāl to "convert the people," presumably both to his political cause and taking disciples.[318] Neṣrî and Oruc Bey offer nearly identical accounts. The latter two point out that Börklüce was both a steward (*kethüda*) and disciple to Bedreddin and go as far as to claim that "there was complete union" between the two.[319] The two historians not only claim Bedreddin thought of himself as a prophet, and describe his

[316] Harry J. Magoulias, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks: An Annotated Translation of "Historia Turco-Byzantina" 1341-1462*,(Wayne State UP: 1975), 119-120.
[317] Balivet, 86. Ḥafiz Ḥalīl describes Torlak Kemāl and Börklüce as having "lied and deceived the people."
[318] Balivet, 72. See also H.J. Kissling 161-2. Balivet contends that Idris writes of Bedreddin almost as a Shi'i *da'i* serving as "both a missionary and a political agitator."
[319] Balivet, 71.

disciple Torlak Hu Kemāl and his followers as behaving like "hypocrites" and "atheists," while Börklüce invited "people to join his sect of outlaws (*ibāhat mezhebi*)."[320] The historians Şukrullâh and Ibn Arabşah do not connect master to disciple at all.[321]

## Bedreddin and Non-Muslims

Before diving deeper into the cross-religious appeal of Bedreddin's movement, some words on the religious make-up of the early Ottoman Beylik are in order. Territories in Anatolia, and especially the Balkans, had significant Christian populations which a small Muslim minority ruled over. Karen Barkey notes that the "Ottomans who first conquered the Christian populations of the Balkans had balanced a hybrid empire and had worn their religion rather lightly."[322] Indeed, all indications are that the early Ottomans did not pressure their Christian populations to convert during Bedreddin's time, but that larger waves of conversion only came about much later in the 15th century. Describing the earliest records of conversion Ottoman Empire Tijana Kristić writes that:

> Studies based on Ottoman population censuses (*tahrīr defterleri*), the earliest of which date to Ottoman Rumeli in the 1430s, indicate that the process of conversion in this region varied greatly depending on the strategic importance of the area, was only in its inception at the time, and did not significantly impact Rumeli's overwhelmingly Christian demographic character until the following century.[323]

This "overwhelmingly Christian" demography of Rumelia may be understood, at least in part, as a result of long-standing precedents in Islamic governance known as the "Pact of Umar" that

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[320] Balivet, 71.
[321] Balivet 70.
[322] Barkey, 86.
[323] Tijana Kristić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011), 52.

guarantee the right to worship for religious minorities in exchange for their payment of the *jizya* tax. Ottoman converts from Christianity like Köse Mihal[324] and Evrenos Beğ[325] served as warriors on the moving frontiers of the early Ottoman Beylik and produced important dynasties in the Ottoman Beylik. Many of those fighting for the Ottoman Beylik did not convert however, and were major land-holders. Kristić notes that "the percentage of Christian tımār holders in Rumeli in the fifteenth century varied from 3.5 percent to 50 percent of the overall number of tımār holders, depending on the region" and that the "majority of these Christians became Muslims in the course of one or two generations, even though they were not compelled to convert."[326] The result of the quick expansion into lands with Christian populations coupled with the propensity of the early Ottomans to have Christians fight alongside them[327] all indicates that the earliest Ottoman state was a confederation of Muslim and Christian marcher lords rather than a purely Muslim polity.

Bedreddin's own father, a *gazi* named İsrail,[328] was "among the first conquerors of Rumelia" and the woman who would become Bedreddin's mother was "an important Christian

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[324] Köse Mihal is featured in Aşıkpaşazade's account of Osman's reign, from his alliance with Osman to his ultimate conversion. See "Die altosmanische Chronik des 'Aşıkpaşazade." Ed. F. Giese (Leipzig, 1929) pp. 7-35. Trans. Robert Dankoff. For a survey of the dynasty attributed to him, see Fahameddin Başar, "MIHALOĞULLARI," *TDV Islam Ansiklopidesi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mihalogullari>. Last Accessed, 22 February, 2024.

[325] For a study on Evrenos and his descendants (*evrenosoğlular*) see Heath W. Lowry, *Fourteenth Century Ottoman Realities: In Search of Hâci-Gâzi Evrenos*, (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir University Press, 2012), especially his section on "The Ethnic Origins of the Evrenosoğlu Dynasty" 3-16.

[326] Kristić, 55.

[327] Challenging the "Gazi Thesis" of Paul Wittek and 20th century historians that considered "holy war" between Muslims and Christians as the organizing principle in the Early Ottoman state, Heath Lowry notes that "Balkan Christians were not only serving as sipahis or timar-holders in this period, but in some areas even made up the majority of the auxiliary forces known as the akıncıs/gazis" Lowry, 92.

[328] Kastritsis, 223. The *Menāqebnāme* asserts a political and jurisprudential lineage for Isra'īl going all the way back to the Seljuks, but this could very well be a legitimizing narrative and the author of this work is hardly unbiased as he is Bedreddin's own grandson.

woman" and the "daughter of the viceroy of Samavna" who "had chosen to convert with 100 of her closest relatives before she got married in the old church that had been transformed into the residence of the conqueror of the region."[329] Not only was Bedreddin's own mother a Christian but so too was shaykh Akhlātī's wife who had a formative influence on Bedreddin's spiritual life, and both of these women were named Maria (*Maryam*). The *Menāqebnāme* tells us that Bedreddin discussed spiritual matters at length with Maryam who was the catalyst for his first experience of "divine attraction" (*jazba*) that set him on his spiritual path.[330]Maryam occupies a special place in Islam as she is the only named woman in the Qur'an and her name appears even more frequently than Isa (Jesus) or even the Prophet Muhammad. Since she is spoken to by God via the angel Gabriel,[331] and as a result, Muslims have argued that she is not only a saint (*walī*), but "well-known and much-cited scholars held that Mary was a prophet"(*nābī*) as well.[332] This tremendous respect Muslims hold for Jesus and Mary, as well as Mehmed II's attitude toward all of the "People of the Book"(*ahl al-kitāb*)[333] goes a long way toward explaining why the Aya Sofya (Hagia Sophia) mosque retains a mural of Maria holding the infant Christ from its time as a church.[334]

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[329] Barley, 171.

[330] H.J. Kissling, 150. It's possible that Maria is reflecting the literary trope in Persian Sufism where a beautiful Christian Youth (*tarsā bachchā*) sends a learned Shaykh down an impious path in his romantic delirium before arriving at a deeper spiritual truth. 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* has a prime example of this in the story of Shaykh Sam'ān. However, Maria transcends the trope since she is not merely an object of desire, but someone knowledgeable in spiritual matters with whom Bedreddin can learn from.

[331] Qur'an 19:16-21; 3:42-3.

[332] Younus Y. Mirza, "The Islamic Mary: Between Prophecy and Orthodoxy," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies,* 23(3), 2021, 70.

[333] Constantinople's Christian clergy were allowed to return and continue their ministries after the city's conquest in 1453.

[334] I am extremely grateful to Fariba Zarinebaf for calling my attention to the presence of this mural in the then-museum, Aya Sofya, in Istanbul.

It is estimated with good reason that there was an appeal across religious affiliations within Bedreddin's movement, particularly the Christian population under Ottoman rule where it may be argued that a common idiom of ascetic practice and mystical belief helped him gain the support of Christians. Borklüce Mustafa — Bedreddin's secretary (*kethüda*) and spiritual successor (*khalīfa*) — was a former Cretan monk. Doukas observes the practice among Mustafa's followers of going bareheaded with a single garment, a description which could just as easily describe Qalandar dervishes of Anatolia and the Near East as it could Christian monks. Doukas makes it quite explicit that Mustafa, though designated as "Turkish" and therefore Muslim, appealed to a Christian monk by saying "I am a fellow ascetic who adores the same God you worship" and also was known to have declared that "anyone among the Turks who says that the Christians do not worship God is himself an unbeliever."[335]

Bedreddin seems to have had success with an inclusive message, as evidenced by his "mission" to Chios in the *Menāqebnāme* where he debated and discussed religious matters with Monks at a local monastery, winning converts in the process. The monks of Chios — literate in Arabic and having heard of his miracles — invite Bedreddin to their island where he preached the "secrets of the Messiah" (*sirr-i Mesih*) referring to Jesus as the "Spirit of God (*Ruhollah*)"[336] and conversed with monks before leading a *zikr* ceremony focused on the "unity of light (*tevhidun nuri*)."[337] The *Menāqebnāme* also describes a miraculous event lifted right out of the Christian gospels. As Bedreddin journeyed to Chios, a "heavy storm arose and the occupants of the ship were afraid of drowning" but "the sheikh said: 'Don't be afraid, Bedr

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[335] Cited in Kastritsis, 233.

[336] This is in line with the Qur'anic description of Jesus, not only as Messiah (*mesīḥ*) as a "spirit from Him [God]" (*Rūḥ*un *minhu*) Q 4:171.

[337] Balivet, 58-9.

ed-Dīn is with you!' And he raised his hand and prayed" whereupon "Immediately the storm abated and the clouds dispersed."[338] This miracle clearly parallels Jesus's "calming of the storm," a miracle found in all three of the synoptic Gospels where Jesus commands the wind and waves to be calm, thus saving his companions.[339] Ḥafiz Ḥalīl goes on to say that the people of Chios "said that the Sheikh was the second Messiah, whose breath could raise the dead"[340] and after he preached to the monks of Chios "two important priests [...] even converted to Islam, although only secretly, and with them five Chiot monks."[341] The "mission" to Chios is, on the one hand, an example of finding a common ground based in a shared interest in Jesus and perhaps also a shared participation in practices like *zikr*, and yet, on the other hand, the episode ends with conversion to Islam rather than "Islamo-Christian syncretism."

"Christic" tendencies of a more radical nature could be found in other Ottoman Sufis. In the 16th century, Molla Kabız was sentenced to death for having taught Jesus's spiritual superiority to Muhammad, though he made this argument from the Quran and hadith.[342] Heath Lowry not only challenges the idea of Islam as the religion of the early Ottoman state but claims that the Sufi lodge established by Orhan in Mekece in 1324 was "nothing more than an attempt

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[338] H.J. Kissling, 161-162.

[339] See Mark 4:35–41, Matthew 8:23–27,and Luke 8:22–25.

[340] Here again, the parallel with Jesus is the ability to raise the dead, for example, raising Lazarus in the Gospel of John 11:1-46, and the girl raised from the dead in Mark 5:35-43. There is mention in the *Menāqebnāme* of Bedreddin miraculously raising a moth back to life. Michel Balivet recounts this: I was, he says, sitting at night, when all of a sudden a butterfly entered my room and began to fly around the candle. Many times he struck the flame and burned himself. Unable to resist the shock, he fell to the ground and remained motionless. For a while I pondered the fate of this butterfly and found no traces of life. My heart was convinced that it was no longer alive; and it is at this moment that it occurred to me the story of Abû Yazîd, who revived the ant after having breathed on it. In good faith, I took this butterfly and breathed on it with the conviction that it would come back to life. Immediately it was brought back to life thanks to my breath, and it resumed flying as before. It looked like this butterfly had never been burned. Do not deny that God, the Most High, has all the capacity necessary to do anything." in Balivet, 105.

[341] H.J. Kissling, 162.

[342] Finkel, 142.

actually to unite the two faiths as one" in what he terms "Islamo-Christian syncretism."[343] It

seems more than likely that a preacher in the early Ottoman capital of Bursa belonged to a

similarly syncretist lodge when he claimed "that Jesus and Mohammed were equal in their

prophethoods appears as nothing more than a logical synthesis for a developing society in which

Muslims and Christians were both free to practice their beliefs.[344] The weight of evidence leads

Lowry to view Bedreddin's revolution as nothing less than an "attempt to create a new

Islamochristian confederation as the socioreligious underpinning of the Ottoman polity".[345] Like

the shared *pir* of the Ottoman guilds or the *shaykh* of a Sufi order, Bedreddin served as a focal

point for economically, politically, and religiously diverse followers. To this final point regarding a

"pole" (*qutb*)—an *axis mundi* present on earth—Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy could be

downright revolutionary as he envisioned such a pole as a "true spiritual caliph, the immediate

representative of God, who bore a far more basic sway than any outward caliph."[346] Ḥafiz Ḥalīl

claims that Bedreddin's shaykh, Hüseyin-i Ahlatī, was the *qutb-i zamān* (the Axis of the

Age),[347] and Bedreddin was named his successor. Emphasizing his spiritual power over the

sultan, Halīl writes that Bedreddin appeared to Mehemed I after his execution and afflicted the

latter with a debilitating illness that eventually led to his death.[348] Given just how elevated

Bedreddin is in the eyes of his grandson's hagiography, cursing the Sultan to death, it is no

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[343] Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, (Albany: SUNY, 2003), 138.

[344] Lowry, 137-8

[345] Lowry, 139.

[346] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*. Oxford UP: 2018. 14.

[347] Kastritsis, 237.

[348] Kastritis, 237. See also H.J. Kissling, 174.

wonder that the manuscript received little circulation as it was held by a Qadiri lodge in Serres and kept close to the point of secrecy according to Kissling.[349]

Mustafa's death takes on a Christic character as he is tortured and crucified while his followers who refused to renounce him and said in Turkish, "*Dede Sultan eriş*" — which Balivet translates to "come, Lord Father" — before being executed themselves.[350] Between the disciple and the master, it is the disciple who exhibits an "Islamo-Christian" syncretism, and it remains unclear whether Bedreddin shared in this at all given that the *Wāridāt* is by all accounts a thoroughly Muslim, albeit a heterodox, document. It is not even clear from the *Wāridāt* that Bedreddin shared Mustafa's revolutionary socio-economic views. Though he does advocate asceticism and renunciation for his audience, it is at the level of spiritual growth along the Sufi path, as a means to attain union with God, rather than the level of social reform. In this respect, Mustafa's program for communal living resembles the radical philosophy of Georgios Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355-1452 c.e.).[351]

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[349] H.J. Kissling, 125.

[350] Balivet, 35. In a footnote, Balivet questions whether or not the phrase "come Lord Father" might be based in the Aramaic phrase "Marana tha" (Lord come) in 1 Corinthians 16:22. This phrase comes at the end of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come!" In the Oxford Annotated Bible, the editor notes that this Aramaic phrase can also be read "Maran atha" which would mean "Our Lord has come." The editor annotates this phrase further, noting that this is an "early Christian prayer, in Aramaic, expressing hope in an imminent Second Coming of Christ" and can be contrasted with Revelations 22:20. This penultimate verse in revelations has the character of a prayer for the second coming: The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" If this is what Mustafa's followers were indeed saying in Turkish, it would indicate he was associated with the second coming of Christ, perhaps even that he was the second coming. Michael D. Coogan ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha.* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

[351] Georgios Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355-1452 c.e.) was a philosopher who "studied the Neoplatonic and Arab Aristotelian philosophies in Turkish Adrianople [Edirne] under the direction of Elissaius, a member of the Sultan's literary circle." N. Patrick Peritore, "The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer," *Polity*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1977): 168. This enigmatic Elissaius is described by Georgios Gennadios Scholarios as "an Aristotelian Jew of Zoroastrian background and polytheist inclinations." Niketas Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*,

Ḥafiz Ḥalīl reads his grandfather's death as a voluntary sacrifice; Bedreddin goes to present himself to Mehmed I where he is held and put on trial rather than as a captured leader of a rebellion. Balivet juxtaposes Bedreddin's death with the Ottoman historical accounts, writing that "in his desire to present his grandfather as a victim of circumstances and not as the leader of an armed insurrection which is the official version of the Ottoman chronography, Ḥafiz Ḥalīl describes the final phase of Bedreddîn's career as a quasi-voluntary immolation of the sheikh, without violence occurring at any time."[352] Not only is Bedreddin seen as non-violent in the *Menāqebnāme*, but his death is framed as a voluntary sacrifice. While it's tempting to compare the end of Bedreddin's life with the model of the "suffering servant" Messiah found in the synoptic Gospels, Bedreddin is highly critical of those who are awaiting the antichrist (Ar. *dajjāl*) or the *Mahdi*, and takes a skeptical approach to such eschatological figures like a returning Messiah.[353]

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(Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 7-8. He argued for the world adopting one single, philosophically oriented religion to break the Christian - Muslim rivalry, (Siniossoglou, 396) and his brand of Platonism led him to propose an extreme restructuring of society, with land being confiscated and redistributed to the peasantry. It is on the basis of their radical politics and religious formulations that Niketas Siniossoglou likens Bedreeddin to Gemistos Plethon. (Siniossoglou, 396-7). It is also interesting to note that both appear to have studied in Edirne at the end of the 14th century. See also Kastritsis's footnote 18, p. 226.

[352] Balivet, 85.

[353] Dindar 109. This passage ties the Mahdi and Antichrist in with a list of other eschatological matters that the author of the *Wāridāt* is skeptical of, again including doubt in bodily resurrection: "A l'époque du Prophète, il y avait une partie des gens qui croyaient (attendaient) à l'Antéchrist (dajjal), la fin du monde prévisible, dàbbat al-ard et choses semblables. L'arrivée (la réalisation) de cet événement à leur époque, ainsi que leurs attributs, sont connus et soulignés dans le livre. Leurs prédécesseurs l'ont attendu également à leur époque, ils ont écrit des livres. Une partie de ces gens ont prévu la réalisation de cet événement en huit cent [800 après J.C., soit 1397] [Tandis que] une autre partie d'entre eux l'a fixée à l'apparition de Mahdi et la fin de la sainteté ( walâya ) entre sept cent et huit cent (après J.C.) Huit cents ans se sont écoulés depuis l'époque du Prophète, que le salut soit sur lui, sans qu'aucune apparition n'ait eu lieu. Tout cela ne provient que de l'imagination du vulgaire. Désormais, des années s'écouleront sur cette superstition et rien n'arrivera de ce qu'ils ont prétendu, et la résurrection des corps ne se réalisera pas comme ils l'ont cru."

In sum, the idea that Bedreddin preached an "Islamo-Christian" or "syncretic" message is not well-supported by the text of the Wāridāt — the sole source for Bedreddin's doctrinal beliefs — as it makes no more of Jesus than any "orthodox" Sunni writing. While the hagiography of Bedreddin, the Menāqebnāme,[354] does present Christic parallels, this could simply be an understanding of Bedreddin as a saint (*wali*) of a "Christ-like"(*Isawī*), nature.[355] His miracles and his rigorous asceticism are all trademarks of Sufi hagiography no matter how tempting it is to read Bedreddin's extreme asceticism or dualism as a characteristic trait of the Bogomil Christianity found in the Balkans,[356] and that his Christian mother might have subscribed to.Bedreddin's Christ-like nature helps him win converts and may partially account for the Rumelian Christians who flocked to his cause following Prince Musa's defeat.

Bedreddin came to be memorialized by some Sufis — as his grandson Ḥafiz Ḥalīl puts it — as the "Manṣūr of Rūm"(*Manṣūr-i Rūm*).[357] In the *Menāqebnāme*, Bedreddin is the archetypal Sufi who is persecuted for his esoteric teachings that appear at least heterodox, if not altogether heretical, and is put to death.[358] It bears repeating, however, that Bedreddin was put to death as a "rebel" and not as a heretic or apostate, so perhaps he resembles Hallāj less than

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[354] H.J. Kissling is certain this text can be dated to 1455-1460. H.J. Kissling, 122

[355] Ibn al-'Arabī also regarded himself as a *wali* of "Isawi" nature. One of the trademarks of this "Jesus-like" type of saint is extreme asceticism, which most certainly characterizes Bedreddin in addition to his "calming of the waters" and ability to bring a moth back to life.

[356] Stoyanov concludes that the "claims for socio-religious continuity between Christian dualist Bogomilism and Sheikh Bedreddin's movement in the Balkans49 still lack any theological and doctrinal data which could support conjectures of Christian dualist (Bogomil and/or Paulician) participation in his insurrection and support for his broader agendas and goals" Stoyanov, 453-4.

[357] Balivet, 83. The title of Balivet's monograph is drawn from the Hallajian scholar Louis Massignon's description of Bedreddin as "Le Hallaj des Turcs."

[358] Although, it should be noted that Ḥafiz Ḥalīl has his Grandfather debate and win against his accusers among the orthodox ulema in the Menāqebnāme. In the end they settle for calling him a "rebel" because they are forced to concede his ideas are perfectly orthodox. This is, of course, a legitimizing narrative from Halil and does not match the Ottoman historians writing during the century after his death.

he does the Sufi theologian 'Ayn al Quzat Hamadani (d. 1131 c.e.) who was put to death by a rival in the Seljuk realm for his politics rather than on account of his ecstatic sayings that so bothered the strict ulema of his time.[359] Again, it is telling that at this nascent stage of religious identity in the Ottoman Beylik, it wasn't heterodox ideology that got Bedreddin killed, but his political allegiance to the losing side of the Ottoman interregnum.

While it is tempting — especially from the vantage point of a 21st century painfully fractured with religious divisions — to see Bedreddin's rebellion as a movement of Islamo-Christian syncretism fueled by the universalizing philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the present study simply cannot conclude from the evidence that this is the case. While it is certainly true that Bedreddin had intimate contacts with Christians and he rallied them to his cause, there is no indication in his most controversial theological work, the *Wāridāt*, that he was advocating a new syncretic religion any more so than the Islamic tradition already is, retaining figures of Jesus, Mary and the Jewish Patriarchs from Abrahamic siblings. Although one can find *waḥdat al-wujūd* mobilized in the syncretic religious project of one such as Mughal Prince Dārā Shikūh (d. 1659 c.e.), the *Wāridāt* appears far more concerned with allegorical interpretations of Heaven and Hell, and none of Bedreddin's other extant works concretely suggest a religious pluralism above or beyond that already found in the Qur'an.

That said, from Bedreddin's *Wāridāt* and in the biographical details gleaned from between the lines of his hagiographic *Menāqebnāme* as well as the ambivalent biographies of Ottoman historians, one is provided with a remarkable vignette of a proponent of *waḥdat*

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[359] See Safi, especially chapter six "An Oppositional Sufi 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani". Although 'Ayn al Quzat was infamous for "unorthodox" sayings, Safi is careful to point out that the *mahzar*, "the court which convicted Ayn al-Quḍāt was not a sharīa court and was therefore not designed to decide matters of theology or law" Safi, 198.

*al-wujūd* in an Ottoman Beylik that was itself still charting a course for its religious identity as a nascent Muslim state with a predominantly Christian population. It seems entirely plausible that, for Bedreddin, *waḥdat al-wujūd* represented an expression of mystical Islam that embraced his own multifaceted belonging as a Muslim with intimate ties to Christianity, just as the early Ottoman Beylik was a Muslim state closely tied with its majority Christian population. Given that that *waḥdat al-wujūd* contains a religious worldview that emphasizes God's Oneness in the face of apparent multiplicity and difference, it is little surprise to find this philosophy thriving in the hands of Muslims like Bedreddin or other theologians in the early Ottoman Empire.

**Chapter 4: ‘Abd Allah Ilāhī's commentary on the *Wāridāt* and its Historical Context**

‘Abd Allah al-Ilāhī Rūmī al-Simawi (d.1491 c.e.) also known as "Molla Ilāhī" is one of a few pivotal Naqshbandī Sufis who began the process of spreading the order in Ottoman lands. Like several Naqshbandis before him, he was well-versed in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as well as in mystical monism — both from Persian Sufi poetry and from Ibn al-‘Arabī's school of thought. Ilāhī came from the same town as the great jurist and mystical leader, Badr al-Dīn of Simawna A.K.A. Bedreddin (d. 1420 c.e.), and the focus of this chapter is the former's commentary on the latter's enigmatic *Wāridāt,* titled the *Kashf al-Wāridāt*. This chapter will take up Dina Le Gall's call, in *A Culture of Sufism,* to pay more attention to non-Mujaddidī Naqshbandis[360] within Ottoman lands, especially since Molla Ilāhī's commentary provides an example of how the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* was interpreted and debated by incoming Naqshbandi Sufis in Ottoman lands during a pivotal time of empire-building. An additional benefit from studying Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt* is that it allows for a deeper dive into a rarely-explored aspect of Bedreddin's interpretive community after his death. From comparing the commentary to the original text, it may be reasonably concluded that Molla Ilāhī sought to push the *Wāridāt* away from heterodox claims and assert the centrality of the Prophet Muhammad, distancing the *Wāridāt* from a religiously syncretic, or "universalist" reading of the text.

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[360] That is to say, Naqshbandis of Aḥmad Sirhindī's (d. 1624) influential branch named after his epithet — by some — as the "renewer of the second millennium" (*mujaddid-i ‘alf-i sānī*).

Molla Ilāhī is widely regarded as one of the founding figures of Naqshbandi Sufism in Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire.[361] According to Hamid Algar, "he was among the principal Sufis to popularize the concepts of Ibn 'Arabi – notably *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* – among the Ottoman Turks."[362] He was from the very same town as Bedreddin, Simavne (Simawna), but went to study at the feet of one of the greatest Transoxanian Naqshbandi Shaykhs: 'Ubayd Allah Ahrār (d.1490).[363] 'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 1492) was a contemporary of Mollah Ilāhī and also studied under shaykh Ahrār. Few scholars or poets match Jāmī's enthusiasm for Ibn al-'Arabī and especially the concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, and if Itzchak Weismann is to be believed, it was Molla Ilāhī who "converted him to Ibn 'Arabi's teachings.[364] The teacher of Jāmī and Ilāhī, Ahrar also epitomizes a shift toward political involvement,[365] according to the Naqshbandi principles of "solitude in the crowd" (*khalwat dar anjuman*) and "travelling one's homeland" (*safar dar watan*) both of which outline a path for a "this-worldly" asceticism and political action rather than an "other-worldly" asceticism.[366]

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[361] See Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*. (SUNY: 2005), especially 35-38 on 'Abd Allah Ilāhī.

[362] Hamid Algar, "Reflections of Ibn 'Arabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition," Journal of the Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi Society, 10 (1991), p. 47.

[363] and also gaining an 'Uwaysi initiation through the Naqshbandi founder Bahā' al-Dīn from practicing seclusion (*khalwa*) at the latter's grave. Ahmet Karamustafa and Hamid Algar, "Abdullah-i Ilāhī," TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi, and Tashkoprüzade *shaqa'iq al-nu'maniyya* German Trans.Oskar Rescher, (Biblio Verlag, Osnabrück 1978), 162-3

[364] Itzchak Weismann,*The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition,* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 46.

[365] Ubaydallah Ahrar not only was one of the largest landholders in Central Asia, but he also was active politically as he not only advocated for abolishing the Turkic Yamgha tax but also interceded on behalf of the people of Samarqand with the Timurid ruler Abu Sa'id. See J. M. Rogers, "AḤRĀR, ḴᵛĀJA ʿOBAYDALLĀH," Encyclopædia Iranica, I/6, pp. 667-670. Last Edited 28 July, 2011 <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahrar-kaja-obaydallah-b> accessed 15 March, 2021.

[366] Jāmī did not shy away from dealing with political rulers or advising them— most notably in his *Salman wa Absal* as an allegorical tale advising the Aqquyunlu Shah Ya'qūb to give up drinking. See Chad Lingwood *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran,* (Brill: 2013).

Dina Le Gall points out that "what propelled Sultan Mehmed II to build the first Naqshbandi *tekke* in the capital" for a certain Isḥaq Bukhārī-i Hindī "was precisely the association of the Naqshbandi shaykhs and their Central Asian mentors with expertise in the *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*."[367] Unlike Jāmī, who maintained cordial correspondence with the Ottoman sultan but declined Mehmed II's invitation to travel to Istanbul, 'Abdullah Ilāhī returned to his Anatolian homeland as a deputy (*khalīfa*) of 'Ubaydullah Ahrar and translated Persianate Naqshbandi thought into Turkish.[368] 'Abdullah Ilāhī was invited by Mehmed II to Istanbul following his conquest of the city from the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) in 1453 c.e. Ilāhī moved from Samarkand where he had studied, like Jāmī, under the Naqshbandi shaykh 'Ubaydallah Ahrar.[369] Molla Ilāhī is certainly less well-known today than his contemporary, Jāmī, whose philosophical and poetic contributions thoroughly align him with Ibn al-'Arabī and the wujūdīyya,[370] although most known Jāmī for his famous works of epic poetry as his title

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[367] Le Gall, 125. As his name indicates, he came from India by way of Bukhara, demonstrating the geographically wide spread of the Naqshbandi networks in the 15th century.

[368] Molla Ilāhī wrote in Turkish specifically for readers who did not understand Persian and Arabic, bringing Sufi literature and thought across this language divide, and his student Lami'ī Çelebi even translated Jāmī's *Nafahat al-Uns*, thereby bringing a world of Persianate Sufis into Turkish Sufi parlance.

[369] Ahmet Karamustafa and Hamid Algar, "Abdullah-i Ilāhī" TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/abdullah-i-Ilāhī accessed 3 January, 2021.

[370] Jāmī's mystical poetry includes a work with the same title of Fakhr al-Dīn 'Iraqi's *Lama'at* ("flashes"), as well as *Lavami'* ("gleams"), and Ashi'at al-Lama'āt ("Rays from the flashes"). Jāmī wrote quatrains and offered commentary on them in his *Sharh al-Ruba'iyyat,* mimicking Ibn al-'Arabī's *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq*, where both detail their philosophical systems.see Eve Feuillebois, "Jāmī's Sharh-i rubâ'iyyât dar vaḥdat-i vujûd: Merging Akbarian doctrine, Naqshbandi practice, and Persian mystical quatrain", in Th. D'Hubert and A. Papas (dir.), *A Worldwide Literature: Jāmī (1414-1492) in the Dâr al-Islam and Beyond,* to be published by Brill: 2017. An examination of Jāmī's contributions as a Naqshbandi Shaykh — albeit one that preferred writing to teaching — exists in Farah Fatima Golparvaran Shadchehr, Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī: Naqshbandi Sufi, Persian Poet" Ph.D. diss., (The Ohio State University: 2008). Jāmī offered a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* titled *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī šarḥ naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*. In *Durrat al-Fakhīra*, written at the request of the Ottoman Sultan, Jāmī weighs the philosophical positions of the Sufis of his day and aligns himself with the Akbari school of thought. For a demonstration of Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of the Perfect Man (Insan al-Kamil) in Jāmī's work, see Iraj Bashiri "Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī's Perfect Man," <https://www.academia.edu/10968331/Abd_al_Raḥman_Jāmīs_Perfect_Man>, Last Accessed 6 April, 2023.

"Seal of the poets (*Khātim al-Shuʿarāʾ*)" attests.[371] Nonetheless, Ilāhī was a staunch advocate of Akbari philosophy, as Hamid Algar notes that Ilāhī's *Treatise on Oneness* "*Risâla-yi Ahadiya*" offers a "brief discussion of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* together with the 'five presences' (al-hadarāt al-khams), while a work in Turkish, Zâd al-Mushtâqin, provides definitions for more than one hundred items of Sufi terminology, almost all of them drawn from Ibn ʿArabi."[372] Indeed Ilāhī's commentary on the *Wāridāt* discusses Akbari concepts like the "Five Presences" and the "Oneness of Existence"(*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*) with fluency.

Like Bedreddin, Ilāhī's career as a shaykh took him to Rumelia and the Balkans. Dina Le Gall writes that ʿAbdullah Ilāhī:

> and some of his disciples disseminated the tariqa also in parts of the Balkans. Ilahi spent the end of his life writing and training disciples in Yenice-i Vardar (in modern Greece) at the invitation of a provincial governor, Evrenoszade Ahmed Beg. His khalifa: Bedreddin Baba (or at least this is how Bedreddin is described by a later source) settled and became a shaykh in Edirne.[373]

As was the case with several other Naqshbandis, Ilāhī was invited by the political elite to Ottoman lands. Specifically, he ended his days in Yenice-i Vardar[374] the domain of the famed commander of the early Beylik and former Greek Christian, Evrenos Bey (d. 1417 c.e.). It was there in Yenice-i Vardar that Ilāhī died and was "buried in the mosque" which "soon became a popular place of visitation and part of a complex containing also a madrasa and a tekke."[375]  Le

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[371] Hamid Algar, "Jāmī and Ibn ʿArabī: Khātam al-shuʾarāʾ and khātam al-awliyāʾ," *Ishraq* 3 (2012), pp. 138–58.

[372] Hamid Algar, Reflections of Ibn ʿArabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition," 47.

[373] Dina Le Gall, 18.

[374] This corresponds to the city of Giannitsa in modern day Greece.

[375] Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism,* 67.

Gall notes that Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682 c.e.) visited this complex and "found the memory and impact of Ilāhī still strong:"

> Not only did the tomb, inside the mosque complex, continue to draw pilgrims, but, as Evliya put it, the whole town was colored by the "spiritual presence" (*ruhaniyet*, Ar. *ruhaniyya*) of Ilāhī. Many of the inhabitants were ehI-i tarik (Sufis, or perhaps Naqshbandis), and local women were 'all Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya' (in reference to the eighth-century female Basran mystic): pious, virtuous, and reluctant to venture into the public space.[376]

Evliya's "thick" description of Ilāhī's complex attests to the success this early Naqshbandi pioneer had in Ottoman Rumelia. Ilāhī's legacy in Yenice Vardar was a site for esoteric and exoteric religious study, as befits his typical Naqshbandi interest in both "inner"(*bāṭin*) and "outer"(*ẓāhir*) religious sciences; not only was this a site of pilgrimage or *ziyārah* for those wishing to visit Ilāhī's tomb and a place for Naqshbandi dervishes to gather, but as Le Gall points out, it contained a *medrese* as well. This is the brand of Sufism that Ilāhī brought, but what Ilāhī made of the Sufism he found in Ottoman Rumelia when he arrived remains in question. This is where a study of Ilāhī's commentary on the heterodox work that is Bedreddin's *Wāridāt* can reveal what the former agreed with and what he felt needed to be amended and added.

## Molla Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt*

Molla Ilāhī produced an Arabic language commentary on Bedreddin's Wāridāt, known as the *Kashf al-Wāridāt li'Tālib al-kamālāt wa ghāyat al-darajāt*,[377] which may be

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[376] Le Gall, 67.

[377] The version used by this essay is  Aḥmad Farid al-Mazidi, *Kashf al-Wāridāt li'Tālib al-kamālāt wa ghāyat al-darajāt* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2010).

translated as "*The Unveiling of The Wāridāt* (lit. "Inspirations") *for the Seeker of Perfections and the Goal of the Stages* [of spiritual attainment]." This is one of only a few extant commentaries on the *Wāridāt*,[378] and is, according to Kātib Çelebi, the first commentary on the *Wāridāt* ever produced.[379] While it is a commentary and, as such, deals with some of the exact language of the *Wāridāt*, it is far lengthier than the relatively short Wāridāt. The bulk of the work deals with the major themes of the *Wāridāt*: the afterlife; angelology; and of course, mystical monism of the Akbari variety.

Although neither Molla Ilāhī nor Bedreddin use the phrase "*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*," both the Wāridāt and Ilāhī's commentary make mystical monism a primary focus and discuss "existence" (*wujūd*) frequently. Like other mystical monists,[380] Ilāhī employs the term Absolute Existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). Ilāhī agrees with the *wujūdī* position that "the Absolute Existence is none other than the Necessary Existent."[381] In the beginning of his commentary, he covers three types of worship, including: the financial (*malī*), such as giving zakat; the physical (*badanī*); and finally, the spiritual (*rūḥānī*) where the goal is the attraction of the heart to the

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[378] Aside from Ilāhī's, at least one other commentary on the Wāridāt was penned by Shaykh Nur al-'Arabi (d. 1887-8 c.e. / 1305 h.) and used as the basis for Tosun Bayrak's English translation of the Wāridāt in his *Inspirations on the Path of Blame* which comprises an attempt to situate Bedreddin within the larger Bayrami-Melami tradition. Unlike the five "synoptic" manuscripts of the Wāridāt which Bilal Dindar translated into French and Turkish, Shaykh Nur includes a section on the "Muhammadan Reality" (al-Haqīqah al-Muhammadiyya) using a concept found in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings which emphasizes the Islamic particularity of Bedreddin's thought over — and perhaps against — the potential universality beyond Islam. see Bayrak Inspirations, see Chapter VI on "The Reality of Muhammad" 111-127. The original text of the Wāridāt never employs this term. Ilāhī, in his commentary, does come tantalizingly close with the phrase "Truth of Muhammad" (*ḥaqīqat Muḥammad*) (*Kashf*, 79)

[379] "Molla Ilāhī" TDV Islam Ansiklopidesi

[380] Ibn Sab'in as well as Ibn al-'Arabī and his tudent and son-in-law Sadr al-Dīn Qunawi equate "Absolute Existence" with God and describe it as *the* single, true Existant. This is essentially what becomes encapsulated in the phrase *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. See Chapter One for a genealogy of this concept.

[381] 'Abdullah al-Ilāhī Rūmī al-Simawi, *Kashf al-Wāridāt li Ṭalib al-kamālāt wa ghāyat al-darajāt* Ed. Aḥmad Farid al-Mazidi. (Kitāb Nāshirun, Beirut: 2013),103.

Greatest Individual (*al-fard al-a'aẓam*) which is the Absolute Existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*).[382] It is worth noting that Ilāhī begins his commentary with a link between proper worship in Islam and the esoteric aims of philosophical Sufism. In a switch to second-person Ilāhī has the soul (*al-Rūh*) speak to God, identifying him with Absolute Existence:

> My Lord, I have heard you, I have known you, and I have followed you, because you provide the Absolute Existence in considering the manifestation of actions (*af'āl*) and it is characterized by having all the perfections, that is called "Allah" or: the Absolute Existence in considering the manifestation of all the verities (*Jāmī' al-haqa'iq*) and issuance of all the actions (*sudūr Jāmī' al-af'al*) from the Absolute Being, and in considering His characterization as all the existential, essential, perfected attributes (*bi-Jāmī' al-sifāt al-kamāliyya al-wujūdīyya al-dhatiyya*) He is called God.[383]

Since the Absolute Existence is also the Necessary Existent, it becomes clear that this can be none other than God Himself, since "there is none other than Him in existence, for: 'Everything is perishable except His face'"(Q:28:88), citing one of the most popular Quranic verses for mystical monists.[384]

　　To make the matter explicit, Ilāhī affirms that this Absolute Existence is none other than the Truth (al-haqq) — that is to say: God, and he instructs the reader to "know that the Truth is the Pure Existence (*al-wujud al-maḥḍ*) which has no differentiation in it."[385] Here Ilāhī repeats the *wujūdī* position which 'Ala al-Dawla al-Simnānī (d. 1336 c.e.) and Muhammad Gīsū Darāz (d.1422 c.e.) found so untenable in the 13th and 14th centuries. Because the Absolute Existence "pervades all things,"[386] it complicates the boundary between Creator and created,

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[382] Ilāhī, 18.
[383] Ilāhī, 82-3. This type of intimate discussion with God, in second-person, is often classified in Sufi literature as *munājat*.
[384] Ilāhī, 97.
[385] Ilāhī, 51.
[386] Ilāhī, 52.

between God and the worshiper. Ilāhī writes a line paralleling the *Wardiat*: "another expression" of "Absolute Existence" is that "He is the Creator with respect to action and causing effect" but also the "Absolute Existence is the created servant (*al-'abd al-makhlūq*) with regard to reception of action and effect."[387] Ilāhī prefers to use "Absolute Existence" instead of "Truth" (al-Haqq) as the author of the *Wāridāt* does, but otherwise agrees with the *wujūdī* position that there is really only one actor in existence; the cause of an action and the recipient of its effect are both "Absolute Existence."

Like Bedreddin, Ilāhī cites the Hadith al-Nawāfil for support wherein the servant draws nearer to God through supererogatory acts of worship until He becomes the "seeing," the "hearing," the "hand with which He grasps with," the "foot with which He steps with," and the "tongue which He speaks with."[388] Ilāhī uses this hadith again, writing that: "the Truth is the one who hears, sees, hands, feet and all faculties like that which is received in the Sahih Hadith: 'I was his hearing, his sight, his hand, and his leg, and all his faculties(*sā'ir quwāhu*),'[389] and it is for this reason that Ilāhī is able to conclude: "there is no speaker, no hearer, no mover, except for Him."[390] This hadīth qudsī witnesses God employ intimate language where the servant is

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[387] Ilāhī, 98. Cf. Dindar, 70: "The Truth (al- Haqq) in relation to the exercise of efficiency (ta'thīr) is Ilāh (Divinity) and in relation to the reception of the mark of efficiency (ta'aththur) he is 'abd (slave), creature, subject of obligations, constraint, therefore all actions are [the emanation] of the Creative Truth (God) and the forms are instruments [for it]. But in the form [or: the image] of the slave, there is no other thing than the Creative Truth but the slave is not aware of it."

[388] Ilāhī, 203. "Know that the Truth is the hearing of every person, and his sight, and his tongue, his hand, and all his inner [al-bāṭinah] and outer [al-kharijah] powers" and this is heard in God's saying: "I am the hearing with which he hears." The reference here is to the Hadith nawāfil, a hadīth qudsī narrated by Abu Hurayrah where God describes his servant drawing closer through supererogatory prayers (*nawāfil*) until he becomes " his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks."

[389] Ilāhī 50-51.

[390] Ilāhī, 164.

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"drawing near" (*taqarrub*) through "supererogatory acts (*bi'l-nawāfil*) until I *love* him."[391] It is

for this reason that this section mentioning the *hadīth nawāfil* falls under Ilāhī's meditation on

"Love (*maḥabbah*)" which he describes as "an expression of this tendency called the

movement of Divine Unicity (*al-harika al-'Ilāhīyya al-'ahadiyya*)."[392]

As found in the Wāridāt, another hadīth qudsī helps express the purpose of God's

creation in the first place as motivated by love; this is known as the Hadith of the Hidden

treasure.[393] Ilāhī describes this "movement of Divine Unicity" as a "tendency (*al-mayl*):" firstly,

expressed in God's saying "I was a hidden treasure" which he likens to God's non-entified and

unmanifested state; then "I desired (or loved) that I might be known" comes as an "expression

of his inclination to manifest (*i'tibār mayl ẓuhūruhu*);" and followed by the conclusion "so I

created creation that I may be known."[394]  It is this latter section of the hadith Ilāhī interprets as

the "perfection of going forth (*al-jilā'*) and elucidation (*al-istijlā'*)" that "manifested the decrees

of oneness in maniness and maniness in oneness."[395] This Hadith serves Ilāhī — as it does the

many other Akbari Sufis who employ it — as a proof of God's divine plan for the world.  As

Ilāhī says elsewhere, "God brought the entirety of the world into existence for receiving the

continuous emanating fayd (*al-fayḍ al tajallī*)."[396] As it was love that brought all into existence,

it is through love that "the heart" is "attracted toward the greatest individual who is the Absolute

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[391] Narrated by al-Bukhari, in "Collection of the 40 hadīth qudsī" https://sunnah.com/qudsi40. Accessed 11 March, 2023. *Emphasis mine.*

[392] Ilāhī, 50.

[393] "I was a hidden treasure and I loved (*aḥbabtu*) to be known, so I created creation to be known." In Arabic: *Kuntu kaniz^an makhfi^an fa-aḥbabtu an 'arifa fa-khalaqtu al-khalq laka a'rifa.*

[394] Ilāhī, 50.

[395] Ilāhī, 50.

[396] Ilāhī, 164.

Existence."[397] The result of Ilāhī's discussion at this point in his commentary is that God's

manifestation from Oneness to plurality — and from the highest ontological realities into physical

bodies — is on a continuum motivated by love where the individual Sufi is participating in a

"return" to the source through ascetic praxis and turning away from the material to the spiritual.

While Bedreddin uses this Hadith once in order to illustrate the same esoteric oneness between

worshiper and worshiped, Ilāhī returns back to this language of worship again and again, as if to

emphasize the joining of exoteric practice with esoteric reality.

Ilāhī appears, at first glance, to accept Bedreddin's view that "paradise, the palaces, the

trees, the paradisiacal creatures (*hūrī*), the clothes, the rivers, the fruits, the suffering, the fire

and the like, which have been mentioned in the narrations (*akhbār*) and in the documents

transmitted (*āthār*), should not be taken" by their apparent meanings, but rather, "they have

other meanings known to the elect of the friends of God."[398] Ilāhī goes through the descriptions

of heaven in order to elucidate these hidden meanings that Bedreddin alludes to. Ilāhī reasons

that man "is unable to accept meanings that are abstract" from materiality, and the one who

"wants nothing but God almighty alone" sees:

> knowledge in the form of milk or honey like wine and pearls, and he sees Islam in the
> form of candles and honey, and he sees the Qur'an in the form of butter and honey, and
> he sees religion in the form of candy [*qand* / Per. honey or sugar], and he sees the truth
> in the form of a human being, and in the form of light, and he is wide and narrow, and
> God is infinitely vast and all-knowing of what God Almighty has created: He knows the
> strength of imagination, and its weakness so if this is known, then the Houris are pure
> light from the manifestations of the Beautiful [*tajalliyāt al-Jamāl*] And the virtues of

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[397] Ilāhī, 18.

[398] Dindar, 62-3. "le paradis, les palais, les arbres, les créatures paradisiaques (*hûri*), les habits, les fleuves, les fruits, la souffrance, le feu et tout ce qui est semblable, qui ont été mentionnés dans les récits traditionnels (Ahbâr) et dans les documents transmis (âtâr), ne doivent pas être exclusivement pris selon leur apparence, parce qu'ils possèdent d'autres significations que connaissent les élus des amis de Dieu."

the attributes of perfection are confined to the presence of the Names [*haḍrat al-ismā'*], and the rivers [in Paradise] are the knowledge of the oneness of the Essence[*tawḥīd al-dhāt*], and the oneness of the Attributes[*tawḥīd al-ṣifāt*], [...] and the trees are about witnessing the lights, and the manifestations of the Beautiful in the station of the spirit, and the fruits [*thamār*] are the expression of the station of the union [*maqām al-jam'*] , and the paradise of the essence, i.e. the essential witnessing of pure annihilation in which there is no place in which you are fed, but rather the pure pleasure [al-ludhah al-ṣarrifah] and the likes of it are from your view the intimacy with a continuous secret [*sirr mutawāsilah*].[399]

Here Ilāhī describes the esoteric meaning behind a litany of things associated with paradise; knowledge (*'ilm*), Islam, religion (*dīn*), and the Qur'an are likened to milk, honey, butter, sugar, in short, all of the paradisiacal delights that also serve a nourishing function. Even the houris, the virginal "dark-eyed beauties,"(Q 56:8) are described as "pure light" manifesting from "Beauty" or God's attribute and divine name, "The Beautiful"(*al-Jamāl*), eschewing ideas of sexual pleasure that the "vulgar"(*'awāmm*) might interpret, for the "pure pleasure" of witnessing God's divine manifestation. Yet, it has to be noted that Ilāhī is emphasizing the religion "*dīn*," and the Qur'an, again anchoring his language in the particulars of Islamic belief and practice.

In order to explain where and how paradise actually exists, Ilāhī demonstrates his familiarity with Akbari ontology as he locates all of this within the "presence" of the "world of imagination" (*'ālam al-khayyāl*) rather than in the "world of sensation" (*'alam al-ḥiss*). A "presence"(*Ar. ḥaḍra*), in Akbari thought is "a particular manner in which the One Being of God manifests Itself, or a mode in which God displays His own Reality."[400] Regarding the world in which the hereafter occurs, Ilāhī writes:

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[399] Ilāhī, 36.
[400] William Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: from al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari." *The Muslim World*, 62 (1988): 108. Ibn al-'Arabī's student and son-in-law Sadr al-Dīn Qunāwī articulated five "presences:" the Divine, the Spiritual, the Imaginal, the sensory, and the "all-comprehensive, human levels"(Chittick, 115).

And it is known that all of that [mentioned above] is not verified in the world of sensation, but rather, exists in the world of illuminated manifestation [*al-tajalliī al-nūrī* ] called the world of imagination [*ʿālam al-khayyāl*] which is the subsisting [*al-baqāʾ*] after the annihilation [*al-fanāʾ*], and these essential, esoteric, unseen, eschatological meanings [*al-maʾāni al-ghaybī al-akhruwī al-bāṭinī al-dhutī*] are purer [*ʾasaf*], and are brighter than what was in the lower, dark, physical, sensory realm, and the difference is apparent for those who turn to the better of the two directions, who do not conceal the attributes from the Essence, nor the Essence from the Attributes, and as for those who do not conceal the Truth from creation, nor creation from the Truth in the state of survival after annihilation, and the bestowed, righteous existence [*al-wujūd al-mawhūb al-haqqanī*], which is named the secret [*sirr*] with God tends to the human paradise by returning from the truth to the creation, so they see the Huris, the palaces, the veil, and other than that in the realm of sense and imagination according to the first and the last inception, and as for the veiled ones who are dominated by physical bodies, and vice, ignorance the compound, and the entrenchment of corrupt beliefs or practical vices such as excessive eagerness, severity, miserliness, greed, and committing abominations and sins, such as lust and anger, and other psychological characteristics, so they do not see the Huris and palaces and fruits, and other than that, so they lost their senses.[401]

In short, all the delights of Paradise will not be sensed but imagined because, again, this is "purer" and both Bedreddin and Ilāhī agree upon a dualistic framework where bodily pleasures are base or dirty and have no place in such proximity to God or the divine realm, whereas the pleasures of a spiritual nature, or what might be termed a beatific vision of God's manifestation, are said to occur in the realm of imagination. Bedreddin and Ilāhī both use the term "*kathif*" to describe the base realm of bodies and sensation, whereas the ʿālam al-khayyāl is characterized by its "subtlety" (*latīfah*). Both the original author and the commentator are in agreement here that a simple reading of the afterlife as a physical space is untenable, but Ilāhī feels the need to correct Bedreddin's heterodox denial of the resurrection of the body.

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[401] Ilāhī, 36.

Before turning to the major points of difference, one more similarity is worth exploring and that is the agreement between Bedreddin and Ilāhī on an allegorical, this-worldly interpretation of angels and demons. Bedreddin's view is that, firstly, Angels and Shayatin are from the "realm of spirits" (*al-'ālam al-arwāh*) rather than the "realm of bodies" (*al-'ālam al-ajsām*),[402] and that "whatever pushes you towards the Truth is [an] angel and Raḥman [The Merciful], while whatever pulls you towards what is not God is Iblis."[403] Simply put, Bedreddin's angels are like the proverbial "better angels" of human nature that draw one toward God and the spiritual, while the "fallen" angel Iblis, or Shaytān, is whatever draws one away from God and into material. Bedreddin's discussion of "devils" (*al-shayātīn*) further illustrates the dualistic message of his demonology:

> As for the satans [*al-shayātīn*] which circulate in man like blood, they certainly consist of forces which are established in Man and which designate the "animal soul" (acting) in accordance with their passions [*shahwāt*]. They therefore contradict the divine Law [*sharī'a*] and the [...] Truth [*haqq*]. This is what is alluded to by a saying of the Prophet, salvation be upon him, "(the satan) circulates like blood".[404]

Here one can see the heritage of the Aristotelian and Platonic tripartite soul — where the baser part of the soul, the "animal soul," is the appetitive portion of the soul that conflicts so often with the rational part of the soul — and this is here identified with the *shayātīn*. This is also one of the rare mentions of the Law (*sharī'a*) in the *Wāridāt*.

Ilāhī agrees that "every power which invites you to the Truth" by "merciful thoughts (*bi'l-khawātir al-rahmānīyya*) are the heavenly angels (*al-malā'ikah samāwīyya*) [...] and

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[402] Dindar, 105.
[403] Dindar, 67 "tout ce qui te pousse vers la Vérité Créatrice est ange et rahman, tandis que tout ce qui te traîne vers ce qui n'est pas Dieu, est iblis "
[404] Dindar, 95.

all that points toward what is other than Him is Iblis and Satan (*Shaytān*)."[405] He especially

associates the "physical lustful pleasures" (*al-ladhāt al-shahwāniyya al-jusmāniyya*) with the

*shayātīn* "because bodily pleasures are a veil for the soul's proximity to the Truth."[406] Ilāhī also

discusses angels with regard to a discourse on "the Good (*al-khayr*)," which may be called

"angels" if one intends by "angels" the "good deeds, pure intentions, and sincere orientation

(*tawajjuhan ṣādiḍan*)."[407]

In his commentary, Molla Ilāhī aligns himself with the Sunni orthodoxy that characterizes

the Naqshbandi position of his time, and as a result, cannot accept the denial of bodily

resurrection found in the Wāridāt. As noted above, the Wāridāt takes a skeptical view of the

afterlife, asserting that heaven and hell are not as the "ignorant" perceive it; the author takes an

allegorical rather than literal interpretation of the afterlife.[408] While he Ilāhī avoids criticizing

Bedreddin directly,[409] preferring to direct his counterpoints toward the "deniers" of the

afterlife.[410] This appears to indicate that Bedreddin's allegorical, skeptical interpretation of

heaven and hell was a step too far outside of orthodox thought for Ilāhī. Ilāhī displays his talents

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[405] Ilāhī, 47.

[406] Ilāhī, 47.

[407] Ilāhī, 76.

[408] Dindar, *Šayh Badr al-Dīn Mahmūd et ses Wāridāt*, (Ankara: Ministre de Culture, 1990), 62-63. The Author of the Wāridāt begins: "Know that the realities of the Beyond are not as the ignorant (juhhāl) claim, they are of the world of the divine imperative (al-'amr), of mystery and the Realm of Dominion (Malakut) and not of the visible world as assumed by the vulgar (*'awamm*). The prophets and the elect have said the reality, but the important thing is to understand their words. Know and do not doubt that the paradise, the palaces, the trees, the paradisiacal creatures (hūrī), the clothes, the rivers, the fruits, the suffering, the fire and all that is similar, which have been mentioned in the narrations (*akhbār*) and in the documents transmitted (*āthār*), should not be taken exclusively according to their appearance, because they have other meanings known to the elect of the friends of God."

[409] In fact Ilāhī heaps high praise on Bedreddin as a mystic of the first degree: conferring titles like "Pole of the arrivers" (*Qutb al-wasilin*), Sultan of the Verifiers (*Sultan al-Muhaqqiqin*), and proof of the Unitarians (*burhan al-muwahidin*) in his introduction. 'Abdullah al-Ilāhī Rūmī al-Simawi (d. 896h). *Kashf al-Wāridāt li'Tālib al-kamālāt wa ghāyat al-darajāt* Ed. Aḥmad farid al-Mazidi. (Kitaab Naashirun, Beirut: 2013), 9

[410] Ilāhī, 22. Where the Arabic is *munkarī al-ba'th* (deniers of the Resurrection)

in the "exoteric" religious sciences by frequently citing hadith in addition to the Qur'an in his treatment of eschatological matters. He uses both sources to establish the resurrection of the body, the Day of Judgment, and the coming of the Mahdī. As is to be expected from a shaykh in the Naqshbandi Tariqa, Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt* rejects Bedreddin's departure from Quranic literalism by attacking the "deniers of the Resurrection" ( *munkirī al-ba'th*).[411] Against bodily resurrection, Bedreddin writes:

> This body does not have unlimited sustenance (*baqâ*), and its parts will not be recomposed after annihilation (*fanâ*) as they were. What is designated by the resurrection of the dead is not that.[412]

Here there is an apparent departure from the Qur'an and Hadith where the literal resurrection of the body is asserted. Instead, Ilāhī affirms Muhammadan Law (*shar' Muhammadī*) and the resurrection of the dead (*qiyāma*) in a single sentence, linking belief in one with belief in the other.[413]

Ilāhī refers to the Qur'an on bodily resurrection from a Meccan Surah warning of the Day of Judgment (*Sura an-Nāzī'āt*): "They will say, "Are we to be restored as we were before? What! When we have become decayed bones? This, then would be a ruinous return!"(Q 79:10-12).[414] Ilāhī goes on to give three arguments against resurrection deniers, and appears to address Bedreddin's exact language about the body's "subsidence"(*baqā'*) when he writes: "God Almighty assigned to [these bodies] subsistence" and "the person is in existence"

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[411] Ilāhī, 22

[412] Dindar, 63. "Ce corps ne possède pas de subsistance illimitée (*baqâ*), et ses parties ne seront pas recomposées après l'anéantissement (*fanâ*) telles qu'elles l'ont été. Ce qui est désigné par la résurrection des morts n'est pas cela."

[413] Ilāhī, *Kashf*, 72

[414] Cited in Sayyid Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Qur'an* (Harper One: 2015) cf. Q17:49; and Q17:98.

from "first condition" to "it's last age"[415] More than other sections of the Wāridāt, Ilāhī writes in a simple point, counterpoint manner to rebut the denial of resurrection. Ilāhī cites the Wāridāt's claim "the nonexistent doesn't resurrect (*al-ma'dūm la yu'ād*),"[416] which prompts Ilāhī to cite Ibn al-'Arabī's *Futūhāt* "the souls emerging from nothingness do not cease to exist after their existence" as a rebuttal.[417] Finally, Molla Ilāhī martials an age-old discussion from the early days of debate in Islamic discursive theology, or *kalam*, when he reiterates the dominant view that "the Creator of the world is aware of all the particles (*ajzā'*), and is capable of all the possibilities (*qādir al-mumkināt*)," therefore, "it is valid that He collect them with their entifications (*bi-a'yānuha*) and restore life to them."[418]

Unlike Bedreddin, Molla Ilāhī employs the term *ḥaqiqat Muḥammad* in his commentary on the former's Wāridāt.[419] It may be that Bedreddin was less familiar with Ibn al-'Arabī's *Futūhāt*, where this concept originates. While it is known that Bedreddin read and commentated on the former's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, he shows less familiarity with the massive *Futūhāt* in his *Wāridāt* than he does with the Fuṣūṣ. Like many Sufis of the early modern period, Muhammad is elevated to a spiritual principle — expressed sometimes as "Muḥammadan Light" (*Nūr Muḥammadī*) or with the Akbari school, Muḥammadan Truth (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*)" Early on, Ilāhī cites the *hadīth qudsī* where God tells Muḥammad: "I wouldn't have created the heavens if not for you" in order to support what he calls "the station of the holy and isthmic Muḥammadan Universal"(*maqām al-qadissiyya al-barzakhiyya*

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[415] Ilāhī, 22.
[416] Ilāhī, 23.
[417] Ilāhī 24.
[418] Ilāhī, 23.
[419] Ilāhī, 79

*al-Jāmī'ah al-Muḥammadiyya).*[420] It is from this "station" that all of the stages of existence

(*jāmī' marātib al-wujūd*) manifest from.

In another passage, Ilāhī further illustrates the Prophet's proximity to God in the order

of creation:

> Allah almighty first created a substance (*jawhara*), then from it, the world (*al-'ālam*);
> because what God almighty desired was the existence of the world (*wujud al-'ālam*)
> upon a limit unknown by knowledge […] a truth called *al-hibā'*, and this is the first
> existent ('*awal mawjūd*) in the world then He almighty manifested (*tajalla*) in his light
> this dust so that none was accepted closer to Him in this dust (*hibā'*) except the Truth
> of Muḥammad (*ḥaqīqat Muḥammad*) called the Intellect so he was the Noble of the
> World (*sayyid al-'ālam*) in his captivity (*bi-'asrihi*) and First Manifestation in Existence
> so it was his existence from that Divine Light (*al-nur al-Ilāhī*) and from the dust and
> from the Universal Truth (*al-ḥaqīqah al-kulliyya*) which is with the Truth and the world
> not described as the Existence and neither as non-existence (*al-'adam*).[421]

Here Ilāhī elevates the prophet Muhammad to the philosophical concept of the "First Existent"

which Neoplatonic philosophers identify as the "First Intellect;" the hypostasis of reason itself,

prior to all creation. This is a long-standing tradition in esoteric philosophy, largely among

neoplatonizing Shi'a and Sufi philosophers,[422] though not many connect the primordial "Light of

Muhammad'"(*Nūr Muḥammadī*) with the divine Intellect (*al-'aql*) as Ilāhī does.[423]

Muḥammad is not only the First Existent, but is the Universal Truth (*al-ḥaqīqah al-kulliyya*)

itself, only one step ontologically from God (al-Ḥaqq). This discussion of the Muhammadan

Truth occurs twice, almost word-for-word in Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt*. Both passages are

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[420] Ilāhī, 10.

[421] Ilāhī, 78-9. See also 57.

[422] For an excellent history of this, see Khalil Andani's "The Metaphysics of Muhammad: The Nur
Muhammad from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq to Nasir al-Dīn al-Tusi" in *Journal of Sufi Studies,* 8, (2019): 99-175.

[423] In fact, Ibn al-'Arabī "elevates the Muḥammadan Reality to the ontological level of the All-Merciful
Breath or the Reality of Realities" which is "superior to the First Intellect" instead of equivalent to it as Ilāhī
states. Andani, *Metaphysics of Muhammad*, 171.

identical in that they recite surat Nūr (Q 24:35) "The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp" so "His light resembles a lamp which there is none accepted closer to Him in this dust except *ḥaqīqat Muḥammad* (PBUH)."[424] Ilāhī, indicates later on that he is drawing from Ibn al-'Arabī's *Futūhāt*, as he cites the Shaykh al-Akbar's revelation that "God sealed […] the Muhammadan Sainthood (a*l-Wilaya al-Muhammadiyya*).[425]

Finally, Ilāhī elaborates on another major concept in Akbari thought, that of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as relates to Muhammad. Ilāhī writes that "the form of Truth (*surat al-Haqq*) is our Sayyid Muhammad (PBUH) in his verification of the Singular Truth and Unity (*al-Haqīqah al-aḥadiyya wa'l-waḥidiyya*),"[426] making the Prophet Muhammad the very image of Truth. Ilāhī then explains that "the image of God" is "the perfect human being, to fulfill it with the truths of the divine names (*li-tahaqquqihi bi-haqā'iq al-asmā' al-Ilāhiyya*)" and that this is why God said: "Adam was created in His image" — as "it is likewise in the Torah," and all of this means that the Most High created Adam in His universal image."[427] The result of this is that the Prophet Muhammad and the Perfect Man are both images of God, though Ilāhī stops short of equating the two with one another as is found in a later commentary explored below.

It is perhaps telling that the use of Muhammadan Truth only expands in the last of the commentaries on the Wāridāt. Another saintly figure from the Balkans, Nūr al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1887c.e.), devoted an entire chapter of his commentary on the Wāridāt to the Muhammadan Truth.[428] Nūr al-Dīn introduces this chapter with a famous quote from Ibn

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[424] Ilāhī, 57.
[425] Ilāhī, 161.
[426] Ilāhī, 108.
[427] Ilāhī, 108-9.
[428] This is the sixth chapter in Tosun Bayrak, *Inspirations on the Path of Blame: Steps on the Path of Blame* (Threshold Books: 1993), 111-127.

al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* on God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence, where "if you say your Lord is unlike anything, you limit Him to His creation," but "you restrict" if you only "liken Him to Him;" the correct solution is to "see Him both unlike and like His creation," whereupon "you will see the truth."**429** It is with this realization of God's simultaneous transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*) that Nūr al-Dīn writes "you may be lifted to the state of inspiration which is the level of the truth of Muhammad."[430] The chapter itself contains references back to the original text of the *Wāridāt* but with the added centrality of Muhammad, and reflects Ilāhī's commentary where the Reality of Muhammad is elevated to a "first created … causal existence" called "the Light of Muhammad."[431] "Nur Muhammad" is a Sufi concept going as far back as Sahl Tustari (d. 896 c.e.), but Ilāhī and Nūr al-Dīn both employ the "Truth of Muhammad" as an image of Truth itself with the latter going as far as saying the "only being is the Reality of Muhammad."[432] He cites a hadith to this effect, where the Prophet Muhammad says "Whoever sees me certainly has seen the Truth."[433] Not only does Nūr al-Dīn claim that *ḥaqīqat Muḥammad* is the only being, but the Perfect Man is "exemplified in the Prophet Muhammad."[434] Ilāhī does not specifically equate the Perfect Man with Muhammad, but he does link the Perfect Man to Muhammad's mission narrated in a hadith: "I was sent to complete the noble traits of morality"(*ba'athtu li-atmam mukārim al-akhlāq*).[435]

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[429] Tosun Bayrak, *Inspirations on the Path of Blame,* 113.
[430] Bayrak, 113.
[431] Bayrak, 116
[432] Bayrak, 116
[433] Bayrak, 116.
[434] Bayrak, 114
[435] Ilāhī, 144.

By comparing the *Wāridāt* to its later commentaries like Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt*, one major difference is the central role of the Prophet Muhammad in the commentarial tradition relative to the original text, with the next greatest difference being the affirmation of bodily resurrection that the *Wāridāt* so vehemently rejects. Ilāhī is most succinct about these two points when he connects Muhammadan Law (*shar' Muhammadī*) with the resurrection of the dead (*qiyāma*),[436] as if to insinuate these two points rely on one another. This is understandable as the rejection of bodily resurrection is undoubtedly the most controversial claim in the *Wāridāt*. The addition of the Truth of Muhammad as a cosmic principle and first existent from God, even before creation, is near identical to the *Haqīqah Muhammadiyya* discussed by Ibn al-'Arabī in his *Futūhāt*, and this addition serves to reiterate Muhammad's supremacy and leave little doubt that the particulars of Islam matter as much as the universalism expressed in the doctrine of Oneness of Being found throughout the original text and its commentaries. It is important to take a look at the historical circumstances of Ilāhī's commentary and the changes taking place in the fabric of Ottoman Sufism from Bedreddin's time through to the next century.

## 15th -16th centuries in the Ottoman Empire and Heterodox Sufism

From the decentralized chaos of the interregnum period to the conquests and centralizing efforts of Mehmed II and Selim I, the Ottoman religious landscape witnessed significant changes. Alongside the growing power and centralization of the state, the *Ilmiye* establishment grew and centralized under the *Şeyhulislam*. Karen Barkey writes that:

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[436] Ilāhī, *Kashf*, 72

Bedreddin perceived that the Ottoman system was consolidating toward a more urban and Sunnī Islamic culture, to the detriment of other prior elements that had been part of the early Ottoman mix. He was the most significant syncretic force when a popular Islamo-Christian syncretism was starting to clash with an urban high Islamic Sunnī system. The kind of life that he led, as well as the type of learning and cultural blend that he represented, were becoming marginalized in favor of a more rigid and legible social order [...] Şeyh Bedreddīn might have represented the key moment of transition between the unbounded order of multiple forms of worship to the austere world of institutionalized religion.[437]

No doubt drawing lessons from the masses of dervishes flocking to the popular revolutions of Bedreddin, Borkluce Mustafa, and Torlak Kemal, the *ilmiye* served the Ottoman state in identifying heterodoxy and anti-state dervish orders, while the political elite including the Sultan himself supported Sufi orders — like the Naqshbandiyya — that worked with rather than against political rulers and conformed to the Sharī'ah.

One significant catalyst that led the Ottoman political and religious establishment to crack down on heterodox beliefs and practices — especially among heterodox dervish groups — was the rise of the Safavid religious order and dynasty. Founded by Sufi Shaykh Ṣāfī ad-Dīn Ardabilī (1334 c.e.), this hereditary Sufi order eventually militarized and led to the rise of the Safavid state in 1501 under Shah Ismail I. "Safavi Islam", as Kathryn Babayan describes it, "may have been a mixture of many different currents and tendencies in Islamdom, but *ghuluww*, Alid loyalty, and sufism (mysticism) are its predominant features".[438] *Ghuluww* (Per.

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[437] Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: CUP: 2008), 174. While Barkey identifies Bedreddin's ideology as "Islamo-Christian syncretism" there is little evidence from his extant writings for this ideology, even in his most controversial writing, the *Wāridāt*. It is true that he brought Christians to his movement, and in this chapter it is apparent that his *Wāridāt* emphasized the prophet Muhammad less than its commentators, but that does not mean he practiced or advocated religious syncretism. Indeed his *Wāridāt* cites the Quran and Hadith amply. See the previous chapter for an analysis of the Christian elements in Bedreddin's hagiography.

[438] Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxiv.

*ghulat*) is a polemical term meaning "exaggeration" — namely of the role of the prophet's son-in-law 'Alī — is often used by Sunnis to describe Shia beliefs, but it was also used to describe Christians[439] and Sufis.[440] Concerning the latter, Babayan puts it succinctly when she writes: "A thread that ties the *ghulat* together with the sufis was their common belief in unitive fusion (*ittiḥād*) and incarnation of part or all of the divine in humans (*ḥulūl*)."[441] It is worth noting that a constant complaint against believers in *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is that they hold beliefs in the "unity" between human and divine (*ittiḥād*) and "incarnationism"(*ḥulūl*), a charge that gained momentum with Ibn Taymiyya(d. 1328 c.e.).

The Qizilbash were "the Anatolian supporters of the Safavid Sufi order in Ardabil and were largely composed of Turkmen tribes. Known as Alevis in contemporary Turkey, the Qizilbash believed in an extremist expression (*gholat*) of Shiʻism."[442] Specialist on the topic of the Qizilbash, Rıza Yıldırım prefers the term "Qizilbash-Alevis" as it indicates "that the Qizilbash and the Alevis are the same community of faith" and referring to this community only as "Alevi" is the result of the late-nineteenth-century policies of "Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909) toward the

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[439] "*Ghuluww* symbolizes one worldview against which Islam came to define itself, as well as one among many interpretations and adaptations of Islam. The verb ghala (to exceed or overdo) appears twice in the Qur'an (3:171, 4:71) in the context of condemning those "People of the Book" (Christians) who raise the station of Jesus above that of the human being, deifying him." (Babayan, xxv).

[440] Amelia Gallagher, "The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismāʻīl Revisited," *Iranian Studies*, 51:3, (2018): 380.

[441] Babayan, xliv. For an early example of *ghulat* see William Tucker on the *Kufan Ghulat* continuation of prophecy (beyond Muḥammad), allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān and religious norms, the magical use of esoteric (bāṭinī) knowledge (Greatest Name of God e.g.), religious elitism, violence against opponents, transmigration of souls ( tanāsukh ), and successive incarnations or manifestation of God." in William F. Tucker" The Kūfan Ghulāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Türkmen Iran" *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* , ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov.(Brill: 2013), 180.

[442] Fariba Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Porous Frontiers and Hybrid Identities," 83.

Qizilbash.[443] In 1511 a Qizilbash uprising led by Şahkulu ("Slave of the Shah") ravaged the lands of Western Anatolia in the name of Shah Ismail,[444] and a few years later, Selim I set out on a campaign against the Safavids that would ultimately end in the battle of Çaldıran in 1514. With ideological hardening on both sides, measures were taken early in the 16th century to homogenize the Ottoman populations through conversion[445] or even genocide.[446]

Holding the highest position of religious authority the Seyhulislams Kemalpaşazade and Ebu Su'ud increased the abilities of the highest religious office in the empire in order to combat the Qizilbash and level charges against them. During his time in office, his mission was to bring the "dynastic law" of Suleyman (*kanun*), "into conformity" with "shari'a."[447] Part of the impetus behind this project was the annexation of Mamluk lands in 1516-1517, which brought the holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina — as well as a massive and predominantly Sunnī Muslim population — under the aegis of the Sultanate. Fatwas were issued ascribing language like "*ilḥād*" and "*zandaqa*" to the Safavids, meaning they were both "infidels" and "heretics" and could therefore not only be killed, but such action was "incumbent on every Muslim."[448] During the Qizilbash panic, "heresy" (*ilḥād*) within the Ottoman Empire came to be treated as "act of rebellion (*serr u fasad*)."[449] While Bedreddin was put to death as a "rebel" in the early Beylik, a century later his *Wāridāt* would likely have put him at far greater risk of being accused of

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[443] Rıza Yıldırım, *The Safavid-Qizilbash Ecumene and the Formation of the Qizilbash-Alevi Community in the Ottoman Empire, c.1500 – c.1700, Iranian Studies*, 52:3-4, (2019), 450.

[444] Finkel, 98.

[445] Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades," 92-3.

[446] Fariba Zarinebaf, Qizilbash "Heresy" and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia During the Sixteenth Century. *Anatolia Moderna*, Volume 7, 4.

[447] Finkel, 145.

[448] Zarinebaf, "Qizilbash 'Heresy,'" 5.

[449] Zarinebaf, "Qizilbash 'Heresy,'" 10.

heresy. Molla Ilāhī's commentary attempts to push the *Wāridāt* closer to an "orthodox"

position, reflecting both the increased scrutiny applied to heterodox belief in the late 15th

century.

Fariba Zarinebaf points out that "a level of accommodation was eventually reached with

the Ottoman state in 1555 during the peace negotiations" at the treaty of Amasya "that made the

survival of these communities possible in the long run" but, "Ottoman officials viewed the

Qizilbash as a *fifth column* and *monitored* their activities and ties to Iran."[450] Though the

Qizilbash are legally permitted to exist, their perception as a fifth column remains and the state

takes on the role of surveilling and shaping confessional boundaries as a matter of loyalty to the

state. Several dervishes with 'Alid expressions of piety sought umbrage in heterodox orders like

the Bektashis,[451] which the Janissary class belonged to and, as such, was afforded the privilege

of heterodoxy as the latter both belonged to the Sultan and was often placated by him to quell

revolt among their ranks. Whereas it was easier to conceive of 'Alid piety and Ottoman loyalty

when the Safavids were merely one *tariqa* out of many, now that the Safavids were a rival

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[450] Zarinebaf, "Azerbaijan between Two Empires: A Contested Borderland in the Early Modern Period (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)," *Iranian Studies*, 2019 Vol. 52, Nos. 3–4, 332. *Emphasis mine.*

[451] Bektashis had several practices in common with Christians according to Sarah Ethel-Wolper: "1) Baptism, as a sign of cleansing and abolition of all sins previously contracted, closely resembles the rite of *abdest*, or ablution. (2) Chrism, or anointing with ointment, is equivalent to the Western sacrament of confirmation. (3) Holy Eucharist: the use of wine and bread as symbols of Christ's body is like the use of both in Bektāshī *aynicem*; in both cases only the confirmed or initiated are allowed to participate in the rite. (4) The priesthood corresponds to the celibate Bābās. The spiritual authority of the priest and especially of the monastic head of the monks is like the spiritual authority of the Bābā acting as *murshid*. (5) Penitence resembles the service of *Baş okutmak*. Excommunication as practiced in the Christian church also finds its parallel in *duskunluk* in Bektāshīism." Finally, she notes the "trinity of the Bektāshīs," is "made up of Allah, Muhammad, and 'Alī." cited in Sarah Ethel Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 79.

polity, the emerging Ottoman "leviathan"[452] could no longer tolerate this confessional identity comfortably within its borders.

Ahmet Karamustafa's study of antinomian dervish groups from 1200-1550 illustrates the "socially deviant" dervish groups toward which the Ottoman Empire "exerted increasing pressure" toward the end of this period.[453] Undoubtedly the Safavids and their Qizilbash-Alevi sympathizers within the borders of the Ottoman Empire played a significant role in motivating the state to police, monitor, and ultimately eradicate heterodox Sufi communities. An example of this rationalizing — and Sunnitizing — of Ottoman Islam may be seen in the Seyyid Gazi Tekke, where a Madrasah was founded to ensure reeducation in addition to the expulsion of "recalcitrant heretics."[454] Enveri Dede, a Naqshbandi from Bursa "was made its shaykh" and oversaw the "purge of Seyyid Gazi and its Kalenderi (Per. *qalandar*) inhabitants."[455] Aşik Çelebi gives an account of the former inhabitants, known as Abdals, to Sultan Suleyman,[456] and by the time" Evliya Çelebi visited the foundation around 1058/1648, he was entertained in a thoroughly Bektasi institution."[457] It is notable that it was a Naqshbandi was brought in to set the

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[452] To borrow a term describing the state from the early-modern political theorist, Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes's term is of course borrowed from Biblical mythology.

[453] Karamustafa, 82.

[454] Karamustafa, 77.

[455] Le Gall, 143.

[456] In his report to Sultan Suleiman I Aşik Çelebi declares that the tekke of "Seydi Gazi supported vice and immorality" their "faces free of adornment of belief which is the beard" even "clean-shaving of their eyebrows" which is known as the "four blows"(Per. *Chahar Zarb*) they would "follow their backs (that is, do everything in inverse order)" The author sees this as decay in society, "The student who fell out with his teacher, the provincial cavalry member (*sipahi*) who broke with his master (*aga*), and the beardless (youth) who got angry at his father would (all) cry out 'Where is the Seyyid Gazi hospice)'; go their, take off their clothes … the Işiks would make them dance to their tunes, pretending that this is (what is intended by) mystical musical audition (*sema'*) and pleasure. For years on end, they remained the enemies of the religion and the religious and the haters of knowledge and the learned. According to their beliefs, they would not be worthy of becoming a müfred if they did not humiliate the judges" Aşik Çelebi Cited in *God's Unruly Friends*, 76.

[457] Karamustafa, 77.

dervishes of Seyyid Gazi Tekke back on the "straight path," and the decidedly more acceptable

Bektashi order was in charge by the time Evliya visited the lodge.

During Ebu Su'ud's career prominent Sufi leaders were deemed heretical and executed

including Şeyh Isma'īl Maşūki of the Bayrami-Melami order, Muhyi al-Dīn Kermani, and

Shaykh Hamza Bali.[458] Isma'īl Maşūki subscribed to *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* and didn't shy away

from proclaiming "man was God," and was executed for heresy as a result,[459] whereas, century

earlier, Bedreddin was not executed for heresy, but rather rebellion,[460] demonstrating the

theological latitude of the early Ottoman Beylik relative to the 16th century. Molla Ilāhī's

commentary upholds *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* while smoothing over the more controversial aspects of

Bedreddin's text, reflecting an example of "confessionalization" increasing in the 16th century.[461]

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[458] Alberto Fabio Ambrosio, "Isma'il Rusuhi Ankaravi: An Early Mevlevi Intervention into the Emerging Ḳāḍīzādeli-Sufi conflict" in Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800 edited by John Curry, Erik Ohlander, (Routledge: 2011), 183.

[459] Finkel, 142-3 see also Ines Aščerić-Todd, *Dervishes and islam in bosnia: Sufi dimensions to the formation of bosnian muslim society*, (Brill: 2015), 163.

[460] The phrase used by Ottoman historians was "*malı ḥaram kanı ḥalal*" that his property wasn't to be touched but his blood — that is, his execution — was licit.

[461] According to Yıldırım Confessionalization: was coined simultaneously by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard (Yıldırım, 14), but Tijana Krstic has argued that "we should regard general religious trends in the early modern Ottoman and Safavid empires as part of greater Mediterranean-wide confessionalisation"(cited in Yıldırım, 17). Yıldırım identifies "the confessionalisation paradigm" as consisting "of the following elements: (1) rapprochement of the state and the church; (2) shaping and disciplining of society at large through education; (3) rationalisation of religion and routinisation of the leadership (charisma); (4) instalment of state authority upon the church and the bureaucratisation of religious institutions and clergy; (5) the rise of confessional blocs as religious, political, territorial and cultural units; and (6) the individualisation and spiritualisation of religion"(Yıldırım, 17). Rıza Yıldırım's body of work on the Qizilbash-Alevi identity is also useful for the 16th century persecutions that rose along with the prominence of the Şeyhulislam, a topic covered in useful detail by Nabil al-Tikriti. Nabil Al-Tikriti. "Ibn-i Kemal's Confessionalism and the Construction of an Ottoman Islam," in Living in the Ottoman Realm: Empire and Identity, 13th to 20th Centuries, Ed. Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent F. Schull, Indiana University Press: 2016.For confessionalism in comparative early modern empires, see Yasir Yılmaz, "Confessionalisation or a Quest for Order? A Comparative Look at Religion and State in the Seventeenth-century Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg Empires" and Rıza Yıldırım "The Rise of the 'Religion and State' Order: Re-confessionalisation of State and Society in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire" in Vefa Erginb*aş Ottoman Sunnism: New Perspectives* (Edinburgh University Press: 2019)

## Bedreddin's Religious Community

Added to the list of heterodox Sufis policed by the Ottoman state, there was a community associated with Bedreddin in the Balkans for centuries after his death, sometimes characterized as patently heterodox in both belief and practice.[462] Michel Balivet notes that this community was organized around Bedreddin's tomb in Serres, the "the ka'ba" of his worshippers along with a city district (*mahal*) that bore his name.[463] At the 15th century, the historian "Nesrî mentions the existence of disciples in the region," and Balivet has also found telling statistics for the population of Serres at this time which had seen its Muslim minority in 1464/5 at 43% become the majority in 1513 at 58%.[464] Balivet also claims a *zawiyya* under Bedreddin's order existed in Edirne at the time of Selim II.[465]

Among the accusations that Ottomans of the 16th century leveled at Bedreddin, was that he was an *ibāhī,* a "permissivist" who allowed all manner of practices contrary to the Sharī'ah. However, examining his works of Fiqh reveals that Bedreddin was deeply learned in Islamic jurisprudence and didn't advocate any radically antinomian views, save for his emphasis on the faqih's reasoned judgment (*ijtihād*) over blind obedience to tradition (*taqlīd*). Idrīs Bitlīsī writes that the Ottoman Ulema harangued Bedreddin over exactly this apparent paradox.[466]

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[462] The Ottoman historian Aşıkpaşazade, Oruç, and Shukrullah, claim that Börklüce Mustafa announced his prophethood, while Neşri says in his Cihânnümâ that it was *velayat* not *nubuvvet* that Mustafa pursued see Binbaş *Intellectual Networks,* 125. These two terms found in Neşri refer to "sainthood" and "prophethood" respectively.

[463] Michel Balivet, *Islam Mystique et Révolution Armée dans les Balkans Ottomans: Vie du Cheikh Bedreddîm Le 'Hallaj des Turcs' (1358/59-1416),* (Piscataway*,* NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2011), 96.

[464] Balivet, 96.

[465] Balivet, 97.

[466] According to Balivet's translation, the Ulema in Bitlīsī's account demand to know "comment ayant écrit des euvres notoires et étant renommé dans la science de la Shari'a, as-tu, obéissant à Satan, abandonné la

There are three 16th century fatwas against Bedreddin's community by two Shaykh al-Islams, Ebu Su'ud and Hoca Ali.[467] The fatwa of Ebu Su'ud Efendi on Bedreddin's "sectarians" displays this fear, but it also indicates that a community of "Bedreddinis" took on a life for at least a century and a half after their shaykh's death. The fatwa in question reads: "When a group of people from the order (*tarikat*) of Simawni drink alcohol and have sex with the wife of one another with permission, what it is required to them? Answer: Capital punishment is required."[468][469] Bali Efendi (d. 1553 c.e.), himself a scholar of Ibn al-'Arabī with a commentary on his *Fuṣūṣ,* writes a report on the community associated with Bedreddin in the 16th century Balkans where the barrier between man and God is threatened, but more importantly, alcohol is consumed, music is listened to, and the sexes mix in their gathering.[470]

Neither a reading of the *Menāqebnāme,* the *Wāridāt,* or the accounts of the Ottoman Historians supports all of the traits of the community that Ebu Su'ud's fatwa targets. In Bali Efendi's account of who he labels, "[f]ollowers of Badr al-Dīn," he describes a group "still flourishing" in the Deli Orman that equated the statement "I am God (*ana al-Haqq*) with the

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vraie voie de la Shari'a? Comment as-tu pu trouver juste d'organiser une conspiration de zindîq et d'athées parmi les Musulmans? Comment as-tu pu provoquer ce vaste complot et les troubles civils et religieux qui l'ont accompagné? Comment enfin t'es-tu révolté contre le Sultan des musulmans?"

[467] Balivet, 99.

[468] Recep Çiğdem, "A Life in Banishment in Iznik: Sheikh Badraddin Simawni," *Uluslararası İznik Sempozyumu* (2005), 459.

[469] Çiğdem concludes that this fatwa of Ebu'ssuud "indicates that his followers also saw women as common" (Çiğdem, 459) although it is also possible that whoever requested this fatwa had misunderstood an account of Börklüce Mustafa's community holding that all property was to be held in common *except* one's wife. It is also possible that a growing fear of Persian mystics was responsible for this accusation of wife-swapping as the persecution of Hurufis and Qizilbash increased in Ottoman lands during the 16th century. For a history of the practice of "wife-swapping" among heterodox Iranian groups, see Patricia Crone's *Nativist Prophets of Islam* (2012).

[470] Bali Efendi writes: "With wine and musical instruments, they all meet, men and women, brothers and sisters, old and young. The impostor sheikh who directs them admonishes them by saying 'What is called paradise is this world. Life after death, the doctors of the law are simple parables. Who knows man knows God: man is God!'" cited in Balivet, 93

popular Hadith of knowing God through the human self (whoever knows himself knows his Lord).[471] This mystical reflection on the nature of God and man is indeed found in the *Wāridāt*, but the practices of the community that Bali Efendi describes have no prescription in Bedreddin's extant works. Indeed, had Bedreddin prescribed such behaviors in his *Wāridāt*, Molla Ilāhī would have undoubtedly commented on and corrected such prescriptions and reminders about the impermissiveness of alcohol would appear in the strict Naqshbandi's commentary.

Bali Efendi imputes a selection of radically heretical practices that have no connection to Bedreddin's surviving works or his grandson's hagiography for the shaykh himself.[472] While Vladimir Minorsky took Bali Efendi's account to be an accurate description of Bedreddin's own heretical practices, Andreas Tietze points out that Bali Efendi is writing over a century after Bedreddin's death and that his letter to the Ottoman Sultan is complaining about a "a certain Chelebi Khalīfe the [spiritual] descendent of Sheykh Bedreddin of Simavna."[473] Although

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[471] The Hadith popular among Sufis here is "he who knows himself knows his Lord" (*man 'arafa nafsahu fa-qad 'arafa rabbahu*)—although perhaps inauthentic from the standpoint of Hadith scholarship—was used often by Ibn al-'Arabī and undoubtedly Bali Efendi would have been familiar with it. The heretical part is not this hadith but the statement immediately after, that Man himself is God, a heresy defined variously as unficationism (*ittiḥād*) and indwelling (*ḥulūl*). Bali Efendi's heresiological works extended to the Safavids and their Ottoman adherents (the Qizilbash), see Vladimir Minorsky "Shaykh Bālī-efendi on the Safavids" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 1957, Vol. 20, No. 1/3, Studies in Honour of Sir Ralph Turner, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 1937-57 (1957), especially p. 448.

[472] Minorsky writes that Bali Efendi also "described Badr al-Dīn as a dissolute drunkard recommending wine as the true nectar promised in the other world. […]Badr al-Dīn's ignorant followers performed sijda ('prostration ') before him and called him ' God '. Having blown out the candles they performed abominations in dark." in Minorsky, 448. This latter act of "blowing out the candle" — whether real or imagined — was associated with heterodox Persian sects. Regarding alcohol, Ottoman historians do record that this was among the accusations leveled at Bedreddin during his trial, but no permission for alcohol is made in the *Wāridāt* as Bilal Dindar has translated it.

[473] Andreas Tietze, "Sheykh Bālī Efendi's Report on the Followers of Sheykh Bedreddin," Osmanlı Araştırmaları VII—VIII (Istanbul: 1988), 119.

'Abdallāt Ilāhī's commentary on the Wāridāt makes no mention of a Sufi community following Bedreddin, Bedreddin's grandson Halil bin Ismail does describe followers of Bedreddin who "used to gather" for "zikr, tesbīh, and ibādet."[474] After being invited by his grandfather in a dream vision to the town of Serres where he was hung, Halil served in 1454 as "zāvijedār," or caretaker, of his father's "tomb"(Tr. *türbe*) and dervish lodge, or *zawiya*.[475] Kissling does note that a community of "Bedr ed-Dīnists [...] continued to speak out sharply" against the Ottoman government "for around 150 years after the execution of the Sheikh" suggesting that the Shaykh's community continued his tradition of opposing the centralizing tendencies of the state.

A speech that Bali Efendi claims derives from the "Chelebi Khalife" at one of his gatherings, does perhaps show some acquaintance with Bedreddin's *Wāridāt*, especially concerning the central — and perhaps most controversial — point of the text which is its allegorical interpretation of the afterlife as discussed in the Qur'an. Bali Efendi

> The wine which they say will come in Paradise is this wine, this sorrow-chaser and joy-producer… and what they call Kauthar are the lips of the beloved and the sheykh's wholesome speech and sacred breath ... and what they call the houries are these young women and girls [over here] ... and what they call the youths [of Paradise] are those young men and beardless boys [over there] … and what they call Paradise is this world, God's table filled with divine delicacies. Those matters as afterlife, doctors of law, taxes are not as they think they don't know that these are mere parables.[476]

It is also possible that Bali Efendi or Ebu Su'ud were responding to the practices — both real and supposed — of a group of Bektashi-Alevis in the Deli Orman led by a spiritual successor of

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[474] Hans Joachim Kissling, "Das Menaqybnäme Scheich Bedr ed-Dīn's, des Sohnes des Richters von Samāvnā," Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft , 1950, Vol. 100 (n.F.25), No. 1 (1950), 120.
[475] H.J. Kissling, 121.
[476] Tietze, 120. "Kauthar" (*al-Kawthar)* here refers to both "abundance" and a river in Paradise as mentioned in Qur'an 108.

Bedreddin. Bali Efendi writes about their gatherings wherein they "meet and hold a congregation, wine and rebeck, brothers and sisters, old and young, women and youths are all present,"[477] which resembles an Alevi gathering or *cem*, minus of course, the wine. It was not just the mixing of sexes, but also the mixing of religious beliefs and practices that caused some consternation for the Sunnitizing voices in the 16th century.

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[477] Tietze, 119.

**Chapter 5: The Mujaddidi critique of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in the 17th Century's "Crystallization" of Religious Boundaries**

This chapter will ultimately explore the rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in conjunction with the strict attitude towards non-Muslims professed by the Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh, Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624 c.e.). First, however, it is important to establish the religious milieu of late medieval and early modern South Asia as well as the pluralist project of Mughal Emperor Akbar in order to understand what Sirhindī's fundamentalist brand of Sufism was responding to. The first Sikh Guru, Nanak (1469-1539 c.e.), and the bhakti Sant Kabir will be examined as illustrative examples of religious figures appealing to both Hindus and Muslims, and the sociopolitical project of "peace for all"(*ṣulḥ-i kull*) under Akbar will finish the task of setting the stage for Sirhindī. Sirhindī's attitude towards Hindus and Sikhs will then be explored to establish his attitude toward non-Muslims before finally tackling Sirhindī's views on *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself. The result of this study is that both his attitude toward non-Muslims and his view on waḥdat al-wujūd are part of the worldview that characterizes Sirhindī's "Neo-Sufi" intervention, where the universals of mystical monism are eschewed for the particulars of Islamic tradition in response to the strongly pluralist political and philosophical projects of his time.

**Waḥdat al-wujūd and the Religious Landscape of Early Modern Religion in India**

The 15th and 16th centuries represent a remarkable period of religious and cultural ferment in Northern India and the Panjab. To be sure, there were clear confessional boundaries demarcating Muslims from non-Muslims and Hindus from non-Hindus, from the imposition of the tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*) to purity laws separating high caste-Hindus from non-Hindus.

Nonetheless, this era also saw the rise of movements that played with the boundary between Islamic and Hindu traditions. In particular, the Bhakti movement with its Sants professing devotion to God in hymns of love were able to draw popular appeal across confessional boundaries amidst the background of a Persianate moral view of "universal peace"(*suhl-i kul*). While there are several similarities between Sikhism and Sufism—and even a shared history, palpable through Shaykh Farid and Kabir's bani in the Adi Granth— one must avoid the pitfalls of labeling the milieu shared by Muslims and Hindus prior to Nanak as "syncretic," or creating an orthodox—heterodox distinction.[478]

Like S.A.A. Rizvi, Muzaffar Alam considers *waḥdat al-wujūd* to be highly influential in South Asia in the early modern period, especially among the mystically-minded Muslims and non-Muslims who were amenable to seeing "unity" in the "diversity" of religious expressions in South Asia. Beyond Kabir, the Chishtī shaykh 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohī (d. 1537 c.e.) wrote Hindavi and Persian verses identifying "Sufi beliefs based on *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the philosophy and practices of the Hindu Shaivite Gorakhnath" in his *Rushd-nāma*.[479] In his *Ḥaqāi'q-i Hindī,* 'Abd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī (d.1608) "sought to reconcile Vaishnava symbols, as well as the terms and ideas used in Hindu devotional songs, with orthodox Muslims beliefs,"

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[478] Ernst and Stewart indicate why it would be problematic to label this "syncretism" as "every 'pure' tradition turns out to contain mixed elements; if everything is syncretistic, nothing is syncretistic" Carl W. Ernst, and Tony K. Stewart, "Syncretism," in South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopaedia, eds. Peter J. Claus and Margaret Mills (New York, 2003), 586. Talal Asad points out the problem from an anthropological perspective, where a solution to "the problem of diversity" was often solved by "distinction between orthodox and nonorthodox Islam to the categories of Great and Little Traditions;" the latter is "rooted in variable local conditions and personalities, and authorized by the uncheckable memories of oral cultures" while "[o]rthodoxy" is "distinguished by its preoccupation with the niceties of doctrine and law, fulfilling its authority from sacred texts rather than sacred persons." in Talal Asad "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Center For Contemporary Arab Studies Occasional Papers Series,* Georgetown University, 1986, 6.
[479] Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, (Permanent Black, 2004), 92.

contending that "Krishna and other local names used in such verses symbolized the Prophet Muḥammad," or "the reality of a human being (*ḥaqīqat-i insān*)," while Gopīs "stood for angels" or the "relative unity (wa*ḥidiyat*) of divine attributes."[480]

Muslim scholars of 16th and 17th century India translated several of the great works of Hindu literature — whether out of polemical or genuine interests — and this, at least in part fuelled interest in the religious texts of non-Muslims. Carl Ernst notes that "extensive expositions of yogic teachings occur in pseudonymous texts that are ascribed to well known Sufis" such as the "Arabic manuscripts of the Pool of Nectar"(*Amrita Kunda*)" which "were attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī."[481] This yogic text was studied by the above-mentioned 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohī, but yogis themselves took interest in justifying their traditions to Muslims as the author of the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib* relates about the Gorakhnath that:

> It is their claim that the masters of all religions, communities, and teachings coming from the prophets and saints are students of Gorakhnath; whatever they have attained is attained from him. The belief of this group is that Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was trained by a student of Gorakhnath, but from fear of the Muslims they cannot say it. Rather they say this, that Baba Ratan the Hajji, that is, Gorakhnath, having been the nurse of the Prophet, and having nourished the revered Messenger, taught the Prophet the path of yoga.[482]

This assimilation of the prophet Muhammad into the Nath yoga tradition reflects that not only were Muslims interested in Yogic traditions, but yogic traditions were perfectly capable of relativizing "the sacred sources of Islam and subordinat[ing] them to Indian figures and categories" as Ernst suggests.[483]

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[480] Alam, 93.
[481] Carl Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India*, (Sage; Yoda Press, 2016), 292.
[482] Cited in Ernst, 295.
[483] Ernst, 296.

**Kabir, Guru Nanak, and the 'Unitarians of Hind' (*Muwaḥḥidān-i Hind*)**

Kabir (d. 1448 c.e.)[484] is perhaps the greatest exemplar of a Sant in the Bhakti

movement with cross-religious appeal. While it is perhaps difficult to separate out the myth from

the historical figure, Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh conclude that there are some basic details

of his life that can be stated:

> He was born in Varanasi around the beginning of the fifteenth century in a class of
> weavers recently converted to Islam. He learned the family craft (later composing a
> number of poems with weaving metaphors), probably studied meditative and devotional
> practices with a Hindu guru, and developed into a powerful teacher and poet, unique in
> his autonomy, intensity, and abrasiveness. His verses were composed orally and
> collected by disciples and admirers after varying periods of circulation.[485]

His positionality in a newly Muslim family at the Hindu holy center of Varanasi along with his

eclectic taste in religious learning certainly fit the all-embracing view of religion found in his

poetry and hagiography. Several traditions about Kabir relate that both Hindus and Muslims

claimed him as their own. S.A.A. Rizvi points out that Kabir is referred to as a "unitarian" (Ar.

*muwaḥḥid*) by shaykh Sa'du'llah (d. 1522 c.e.) when his son Rizqu'llah asked him "whether

Kabir was a Muslim or an infidel."[486] Akbar's courtier Abu'l-Fazl (d. 1602 c.e.) applies the

same term to Kabir: "[u]ntil this day people ascribe to him innumerable religious truths and

doings. Owing to his own catholicity and lofty vision he considered both Muslims and Hindus his

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[484] John Hawley notes that, according to their tradition, Kabir-Panthis hold that Kabir lived 120 years from 1398 to 1518. In John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in their Time and Ours*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 279. Charlotte Vaudeville examines the dispute over Kabir's birth and death dates and concludes with Chaturvedi that the greater probability is that Kabir was born in 1398 and died in 1448 c.e. Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 36-39. I am grateful to Pashaura Singh for pointing me toward the scholarship on Kabir.

[485] Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir*, (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 3.

[486] S.A.A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India vol 2, 411.

friends and when he died Brahmans wished to cremate him and Muslims to bury him."[487][488]
According to the famous legend, his Muslim and Hindu followers gathered to battle for the
privilege of taking charge of Kabir's body upon his death, only to discover "a heap of flowers"
under the burial shroud, upon which the "two religious groups divide the flowers, and each goes
off to bury or burn its half according to prescribed rituals."[489]

      S.A.A. Rizvi considers Kabir to have written a "large number of Hindi verses relating to
*tawhid (waḥdat al-wujūd)*"[490] while acknowledging that the author of the *Dabistan-i maẕāhib*
locates Kabir "against the background of the legends of the Vaishnavite *vairagis*
(mendicants)."[491] *Dabistān* describes this group, writing that they do not prevent from joining
"whoever among the Hindus, Muselmans, or others wants to" (*az hindū va musalmān va
ghayr har kes khāhad*).[492] The author describes "Kabir, a weaver by birth,"(*Kabir julah-i
nazhād*) as one "of the famous unitarians of India"(*az muvaḥḥadan-i hind ast*" and as a
"Vairagi" (bayrāgi).[493] An emphasis on the monotheist unity of God (*tawhīd*) can be found in the
primacy Kabir places on the name of the one God, often "Ram," or simply, the
"Word"(Shabad); Hess and Singh write that "Kabir's poetry is full of exhortations to recite the
name of Ram, to devote oneself to Ram, to drop everything except Ram," where Ram is not
understood in the sense of an anthropomorphic deity specific to the Hindu tradition.[494] Kabir's
verses point to an understanding of one God and one religion in myriad forms, as in the

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[487] S.A.A. Rizvi, 411.
[488] S.A.A. Rizvi, 411.
[489] Hess and Singh, 4.
[490] Rizvi, 411.
[491] Rizvi, 412.
[492] Mobad Kaykhosrow Isfendiyār, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib,* (Tehran: Kitābkhāneh Tawurī, 1364h./1943), 177.
[493] Isfendiyār, 178.
[494] Hess and Singh, 3-4.

following: "All these men and women of the world that you have created, O Lord, are in your form. Kabir is the child of Ram-Allah; everyone is my Guru, my Pir."[495]

Kabir's verses were adopted and adapted into the Sikh tradition, and the earliest preserved poetry of Kabir is actually found in the Guru Granth Sahib.[496] Pashaura Singh, in his study of the "speech" of the "devotees"(*Bhagat Bani*) found in the Guru Granth Sahib points out that:

> For Kabir, "Ram" is the divine Name par excellence. This "Ram" has nothing to do with the divinized hero of Ramayana or with the incarnation of Vishnu, but connotes the all-pervading Being. In this context. Guru Nanak acknowledged the usage of different names of God across religious boundaries: "What can the poor Nanak say? All the [devout] people praise the One Lord. Nanak's head is at the feet of such people [in reverence] May I be a sacrifice to all Your Names, O Timeless One!"[497]

Here there is agreement between Kabir and the Sikh Guru that God is One in spite of many names that religious communities ascribe to Him. Through absorption in the Name, distinctions fade away; this is reflected in a verse where "Kabir says, plunge into Ram! / There: No Hindu. No Turk."[498] In the *Dabistan-i maẕāhib*, both Nanak and Kabir are described as monotheists rejecting Hindu and Muslim rituals, idolatry, and espousing an all-encompassing name (*nāma* or *nām*) for God above traditional Hindu and Muslim epithets.

The *Dabistān* describes the Sikh founder Nanak as someone who "praised Muslims" as well as the "Avatars, devotees and divinities" of the Hindusm but he knew that all this was "created" (*makhlūq*) and not the Creator (*khāliq*)" and he "denied incarnation" (*ḥulūl*) as well

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[495] Pashaura Singh, *The Baghats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat Bani*, (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 88.
[496] Hess and Singh, 6.
[497] Pashaura Singh, 23.
[498] Hess and Singh, 67.

as the literal "union" between God and mankind (*ittiḥād*); Mobad Shah also notes that "they say" that he held the Muslim "rosary" (*tasbiḥ*) in hand, and wore the "*zunnār*" (the religious thread of the Hindus).[499] This description portrays Nanak as appreciating and even taking on the accouterments of both religious traditions, somewhat in contrast to the Nanak of Sikh tradition who is "neither Hindu nor Muslim," and rejects the superficialities of each. This is in keeping with the overall tendency of Mobad Shah to emphasize religious pluralism. It is also interesting to note that the author of the *Dabistān* is taking care to point out that the "Nanak-Panthis" distinguish between creator and created being as well as rejecting "incarnation"(*ḥulūl*) and "union"(*ittiḥād*), similar to the defense which Sufis professing *waḥdat al-wujūd* mustered in the face of accusations of pantheism.

Guru Nanak, like Kabir, resisted being defined as Hindu or Muslim though appropriated the language of both traditions. One of Kabir's verses sees him declare: "I have renounced the path of both the Pandit and the Mullah [...] All the codes inscribed by the Pandit and the Mullah. Those I absolutely renounce and will not imbibe.[500] According to Sikh exegete Sahib Singh, one of Guru Arjan's hymns is directly responding to these verses by Kabir as he sings:

> I neither keep the Hindu fasts nor the Muslim Ramadan. I serve him alone who in the end will save me. My Master is both the Muslim Allah and the Hindu Gosain, And thus have I finished the dispute between the Hindu and the Muslim. I do not go on pilgrimage to Mecca Nor bathe at the Hindu holy places; I serve the one Master, and none beside

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[499] Isfendiyār,197. "*Nanāk chenānkeh sitāyesh musulmānān kardī, uwtārān ve dīvuthay ve dīvūhaye hindū rā nīz setūdī. Amā hameh rā makhlūq dānest nah khāleq ve munkar ḥulūl ve ittiḥād būd. Gūyand tasbīḥ musulmānān dar dast ve zunār dar gardan dāsht.*" In the medieval Persian poetic tradition, the *zunnār* refers to a belt that Christians wore as an identity marker, but in South Asia it is used to refer to the sacred thread, or *yajnopavita*, worn by upper caste Hindus

[500] Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, (Chicago: UC Press, 1994), 57.

Him. Neither performing the Hindu worship nor offering Muslim prayer, To the formless One I bow in my heart. I am neither Hindu nor Muslim.[501]

Here, both Allah and Gosain are differences in name only as they describe the Supreme Reality behind both, and as with Kabir, ritual practices are eschewed in favor of an interior worship of the heart. Nanak's epithet as the "King Fakir, Guru to Hindus and Pir to Muslims"(*Shah Fakir, Hindu Da Guru, Musalman Da Pir*) resembles Kabir's cross-religious appeal.

Although the author of the *Dabistān* identifies Kabir with other *vairagis* who appealed to both Hindus and Muslims, 'Abd al-Raḥman Chishtī (d. 1683) considered Kabir to be a Sufi of the Firdawsiyya order in his *Mir'at al-asrār* ("Mirror of Secrets"), writing:

> One of the eminent *khalifas* of Makhdum Shaikh Bhikh was Kabir *malamati*. At the beginning of his mystic career, Kabir was a disciple of Shaikh Taqi bin Shaikh Ramazan Ha'ik (a weaver) Suhrawardi. Shaikh Taqi's grave is in Jhusi near Allahabad. Later Kabir malamati became a disciple of Ramanand Bairagi and did hard ascetic exercises. The predominance of *Tawhid* in his mystic perception caused him to ignore the externalists (*'ulama'*), and he began to express mystic thoughts without any inhibition. The externalists condemned him as having turned into an infidel, but gnostics and experts in esoteric knowledge considered him a frank *muwaḥḥid*. He lived like malamatiyya ecstatics. Finally he obtained the Firdausiyya *khlrqa* from Shaikh Bhikh and found spiritual comfort in *ṣulḥ-i kull* (universal concord).[502]

Multiple points here are worth emphasizing; not only is Kabir affirmed again as a "unitarian" (*muwaḥḥid*), but he is also identified as a Sufi of the *malamati* mode — that is to say one who courts blame through his actions as a way to criticize coreligionists focused on exoteric matters — and finally, his attitude of interreligious harmony is identified as *ṣulḥ-i kull,* a Persianate concept of religious pluralism that will be explored in greater depth below. He is described as a

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[501] Oberoi, 57.
[502] S.A.A. Rizvi, 412.

disciple to Ramanand Bairagi as well as to Muslim shaykhs, earning himself the patched cloak (*khirqa*) of the Firdawsiyya order.

Common themes of ego-death and a resulting experience of unity with God can be found in the hymns of Guru Nanak and Kabir. Mobad Shah in his *Dabistān* describes Kabir's conversion to the spiritual path at the feet of Ramanand, where Ramanand states "The Brahmin of our age is Kabir for he knows Brahm (meaning the Divine Essence)."[503] This reflects the mystical mode of knowing God in Sufism (*ma'rifat bi'llah*). He also reflects a favorite hadith of mystical monist Sufis — "he who knows his soul (*nafs*), knows his Lord."(*Man 'arafa nafsihi 'arafa Rabbihi*) — as he writes "[t]hose pure of heart shall find the Supreme Being within, Kabir says in knowing the self, one realizes the Supreme Being."[504] Here Kabir reflects the Upanishadic union between the divine self, Atman and the Supreme Being, Brahman. Remarkably, Mobad Shah describes Kabir as "chanting Ram Ram" (*zikr-i Rām Rām*) until all he saw was *Rām* and said "lofty words on *waḥdat al-wujūd*" (*dar vaḥdat-i vujūd sukhanhāyi boland*).[505]

Balbinder Singh Bhogal notes that for "Guru Nanak, killing the ego (*haumai*) is synonymous with destroying duality (*dubidhaa*)" citing an illustrative verse: "He who destroys the ego, finds the Guru's Word. (AG, 228)."[506] This reflects the "oft-quoted tradition attributed to the Prophet, 'Die before you die'" which "is reinforced by the indigenous Indian concept of

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[503] Mobad Kaykhosrow Isfendiyār, *Dabistan-i maẕāhib,* Vol 1, (Tehran: Kitābkhāneh Tawurī, 1943), 178. *Rāmanand guft: Brahmin īn aṣr Kabīr ast kih Brahm — ya'ni zāt-i Haqq — rā shanākhtah.*
[504] Oberoi, 57.
[505] Isfendiyār, 178.
[506] Balbinder Singh Bhogal, "Ghostly Disorientations: Translating the Adi Granth as the Guru Granth," *Sikh Formations*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (2007), 18

the, *jīvan-mukt*a, somebody who has attained salvation while still alive."[507] It is difficult not to draw a parallel here with the Sufi concept of "annihilation"(*fanā'*) of the ego-self (*nafs*) and the experience of God alone "subsiding"(*baqā'*) in the ecstatic experience of union between worshiper and worshiped.

Bhogal elaborates on ego-death in Nanak's hymns, writing that "[f]or Guru Nanak to translate the pure language and speak it, requires a kiss of death" as in the verse "Abandoning ego (*haumai*), one is steeped in the Unstruck (Word)[AG, 1040]," and as a result "a vision of the primal Word unveils itself as oneself in every sensual form: (All) colour, appearance and essential form, that (is the) One, One wonderful Word... . (AG, 946)."[508] Here, Bhogal skillfully illustrates the relationship between ego-death and the experience of a singular "One" that remains, that is to say God or the undifferentiated "Word." Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh reflects on mystical experience in Guru Nanak's evening Arati hymn wherein "each of us contains the flame, and the flame is that One—*sabh mai joti joti hai soi*""(AG, 663) and writes of the role of the "bellows of awe" necessary to "snuff out egoism" and enable mystical union.[509] To use a popular Sufi image, the worshiper, drawn to God as a moth to a flame, has the "self" burned up completely such that only God remains. The account of Guru Nanak's own death — nearly identical to Kabir's — contained non-confessional lessons for Muslim and Hindu audiences; both religious groups disputed the right to dispose of his body according to their traditions, so Guru Nanak had both communities to lay flowers on either side of his body with the instruction

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[507] In Simon Weightman, "Symbolism and Symmetry Shaykh Manjhan's Madhumālatī Revisited" The Heritage of Sufism vol III.

[508] Bhogal, 26.

[509] Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "Sikh Mysticism and Sensuous Reproductions," in Timothy D. Knepper and Leah E. Kalmanson ed., *Ine ability: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion*, (Springer: 2017),

that the side with flowers remaining fresh shall carry out his funeral rights, only to reveal upon his

death that both sides had fresh flowers.[510] It is not difficult to see how Sufis might be drawn

toward the familiar concepts in Guru Nanak's teaching, and unfortunately, also not difficult to

see the anxiety that the exoteric ulema likely had as not just Hindus, but Muslims flocked to

Guru Arjan toward the end of the 16th century.

The role of music is a final point of comparison that needs to be made between *wujūdī*

Sufism and the Sikh tradition. Both Kabir and Nanak put their verses to music, and musical

audition — whether in Sufi *samā'* or in Sikh kirtan — plays a pivotal role in the experience of

sacred verse. The legacy of Sufi *samā'* can be seen to this day in the Qawwali[511] session, as

also the debates on the permissibility of listening to music can be seen then and now. "Sikhism

and Music" by Pashaura Singh highlights several key ways in which Gurbani was formed and

then continues to be performed.[512] In his *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya,* Ibn al-'Arabī plays on the dual

meaning of "existence" (*wujūd*) with the word for "finding," as one is "[f]inding (*wijdān*) the

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[510] W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 50-1.

[511] The word is derived from the Arabic for Speech, as in the command in the Qur'an to the Prophet Muḥammad "Qul!).

[512] Singh writes that for "the Sikh, as for the Hindu, participation in the divine word has the power to transform and unify one's consciousness"(145). Meditating on the names and qualities of God, nam simaran, "is designed to bring a person into harmony with the divine order (*hukam*)" and even transport one to "mystical union with Akal Purakh (God)"(146). From the beginning, music has accompanied this devotional practice to achieve these aims; Guru Nanak's "lifelong companion" the "Muslim musician, Mardana" would play as the Guru recited (142), hence the role of music as an accompaniment to gurbani existed from Nanak's time. Guru Ram Das prescribed a daily routine of oral recitation of liturgical prayers" as "part of the 'code of conduct' (rahit) of the Khalsa"(145). To this day shabad kirtan (hymn singing) remains a central part of Sikh worship. Differing from music for the sake of entertainment, Gurmat Sangit is "music in the Guru's view"(Singh, 140). Singh also writes that "the sacred sounds of gurbani ('inspired utterances of the Guru') have transformative power only if they are replicated exactly as they were first enunciated by the Sikh Gurus"(663). This suggests that participating in kirtan is yet another way of reaffirming the continual presence of the Guru as scripture through the "transcendental" experience of "sacred sound"(663). In Pashaura Singh, "Scripture as Guru in the Sikh Tradition," *Religion Compass,* 2:4 (2008), 659-673

Real (*al-ḥaqq*) in ecstasy."[513] It is important to note that another word sharing the root *waw jīm dāl* is "ecstasy" (*wajd*), associated in Sufi circles with a state that seizes a mystic during musical audition.[514] Connecting the Sufi ritual of mystical audition, known as *samā'*, with the unitive experience of the Sufi mystic Ibn al-'Arabī writes that "there is no possessor of sound ecstasy — whoever may experience it — unless God is found (*wujūd*) in that ecstasy in a mode known to those who are gnostics through God."[515] Effectively, the annihilation of self (*fanā'*) found in ecstasy leaves God Himself as the "hearing" with which the worshiper "hears," as the formula in the *ḥadith nawāfil* puts it. While it would certainly be inaccurate to map subscribers to *waḥdat al-wujūd* onto Sufis in favor of *samā'* one-to-one, it is the case that Aḥmad Sirhindī and his reform-minded Mujadidiyya rejected both as central to their brand of Sufism. Musical audition was yet another mode of shared spirituality whereby *wujūdī* Sufis could recognize in Sikh and Hindu forms of worship a reflection of their own understanding of how sacred verses are to be experienced.

It is important to note that, being "neither Muslim nor Hindu" is not to say both are one and the same, but rather, the first Guru charted a unique course away from the two for Sikhs. In fact, Guru Nanak was quite critical of Yogis, Brahmin pandits, and, through terms like "mulla" and "qazi," the exoteric Islamic scholars of his time; instead of considering all forms of worship as one and the same, Nanak railed against religious practices such as idolatry, excessive fasting, purity and commensality laws, and celibacy. One of Guru Nanak's verses reads: "it is in

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[513] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 212.

[514] Indeed Sufi manuals like 'Alī al-Hujwirī's (d.1072 c.e.) *Kashf al-Mahjūb* and Shihab al-Dīn Suhrawardī's *'Awarif al-Ma'arif* offer detailed etiquette for the experience of ecstasy (*wajd*) during *samā'* and even "affecting" ecstasy (*tawajjud*).

[515] Ibn al-'Arabī *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (II 538.1,21) cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 213.

accordance with God's will that a person reads the Qur'an and becomes a mulla or a shaikh[, b]ut, whatever anyone is or does, he is so or he does so in accordance with God's will."[516] J.S. Grewal notes that the "safest inference" that can be drawn here is that "even if Guru Nanak does not question the veracity of the Qur'an he does not give it an exclusive veracity" which, like the Vedas "does not lead one to the realization of the Only True God."[517]

The text of the Guru Granth Sahib itself provides a universalizing vision for humanity while at the same time navigating a unique Sikh theology through the canonization process. Harjot Oberoi contends that "[w]hile there is no denying the fact that the Adi Granth has become a key cultural marker of Sikh ethnicity[, ...]t's heterodox textuality and diverse contributors were far more the manifestation of a fluid Sikh identity than a signifier of exclusivity."[518] Although the inclusion of fifteen non-Sikh saints (Bhagats) in addition to the Gurus' own compositions is truly remarkable and points to an attitude of inter-religious inclusivity in favor of truths held to be universal, it is also undeniable that the composition of the Adi Granth selectively included material in-line with the particularities of the Sikh religion at the time of Guru Arjan's canonization. To this effect, Pashaura Singh writes that:

> The fact that at the time of the canonization of the Sikh scripture Guru Arjan dropped several hymns of Kabir available in the copies of the Goindval pothis and deleted four hymns from the Kartarpur volume (1604) itself, clearly indicates that a selection was made out of Kabir material accessible to the Sikh Gurus.[519]

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[516] J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1982),12.
[517] Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*,12.
[518] Oberoi, 55.
[519] Pashaura Singh,The Baghats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat Bani, (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 84.

This process of selection — choosing verses of the *bhagats* like Kabir that were in line with the teachings of the Gurus — was an important part of the canonization process and represents a crystallization of Sikh identity as much as the text itself might represent a "fluid Sikh identity" for Oberoi. At the critical juncture that was the turn of the 17th century, the Sant and Sikh traditions navigated between a push for universal appeal across the boundaries of Hinduism and Islam while solidifying a unique identity independent of both.

**The Political Context: Akbar and Mughal Pluralism (*Ṣulḥ-i kull*)**

*Ṣulḥ-i kull*, as a Perso-Islamic principle of toleration predates the Mughal context by several centuries. For foundational Persian poets like Sa'di Shirazi, *ṣulḥ* literally means "peace" as an antonym of "war" (jang),[520] but in the early modern Mughal context — particularly in the 17th century — it becomes a potent symbol for an ethos of religious pluralism.[521] In a recent re-evaluation of the concept of ṣulḥ-i kull in the Mughal context, Rajiv Kinra notes that this term often was used in contrast to bigotry (*ta'aṣṣub*).[522] Akbar's courtier Abu'l Fazl, speaking of Mir 'Abd al-Latif Qazwini, an Iranian intellectual who served as Akbar's tutor, writes:

> Mir 'Abdu-l- laṭīf was distinguished for science, eloquence, trustworthiness and other noble qualities. From his lack of bigotry [*'adam-i ta'aṣṣub*] and his broadmindedness he was called in India a Shīa and in Persia [*'irāq*] a Sunnī. In fact he was journeying on towards the serene city of universal tolerance [*raftār-i Mīr ba-sūb-i dār al-aman-i*

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[520] For example, Sa'di's *Bustan* and his divan contain examples of ṣulḥ as a word for peace; "for me peace is better than war" (*bah nazdīk-i man ṣulḥ bihtar kah jang*).

[521] Ali Akbar Dehkhoda Qazwini (1879–1956) offers a definition of ṣulḥ-i kull as "an approach among [some?] monotheists (muwaḥḥidān) whereby, having understood the [basic] wealth/contents of all religions as one, they don't quarrel with people of different sects (*mardum-i mukhtalif al-mazāhib*), and strive for reconciliation (āshtī) with friend and enemy alike" cited in Rajiv Kinra, Revisiting the History and Historiography of Mughal Pluralism," *ReOrient*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2020), 165.

[522] This Persian term grows out of the Arabic *'asabiyya* which can signify tribalism and factionalism, which was in Ibn Khaldun's sociology a mechanism of social cohesion.

*ṣulḥ-i kull būd*], and so the zealots of each sect [*ghāliyān-i har ṭā'ifa*] used to censure him.[523]

Here Abu'l Fazl is not only equating ṣulḥ-i kull with religious tolerance as opposed to "bigotry," but he celebrates this as a valuable trait in a courtier. Abu'l Fazl also considered *ṣulḥ-i kull* to be part and parcel of Akbar's sacred kingship as "world lord" exercising "world-sway on the [lofty] principle of 'Universal Peace' [*bar farāz-i ṣulḥ-i kull*], every sect can assert its doctrine without apprehension, and every one can worship God after his own fashion."[524] Just as Akbar and his courtiers preferred to see him as a universal sovereign, the "universal peace" represented by *ṣulḥ-i kull* served the imperial project of ruling over Muslims and a majority non-Muslim population both. For this reason, Akbar advises his son, Prince Daniyal:

> It must be considered that the [universal] Divine mercy (*raḥmat-i 'āmma-yi Ilāhī*) attaches itself to every [community/nation and] creed (*Jāmī'-yi milal-o-naḥl*), and supreme exertions must be made to bring oneself into the ever vernal flower-garden of "Peace with all" (*gulshan-i hamesha-bahār-i ṣulḥ-i kull*).[525]

As with Abu'l Fazl, *ṣulḥ-i kull* stands in contrast to sectarianism of socio-religious identity. Thus, *ṣulḥ-i kull* serves a powerful symbolic function in Akbar's court as an ethos of pluralism in a highly heterogenous society, all with a universal sovereign at its head. It is not simply that it is politically expedient policy, but seems to have been a genuine impulse in Akbar's court as he held court over inter-religious debates at his "house of worship" (*ibādat khāna*). As Rajiv Kinra points out, *ṣulḥ-i kull* also took on a mystical aspect for poets like Muḥsin Fānī who

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[523] Cited in Rajiv Kinra, Revisiting the History and Historiography of Mughal Pluralism," ReOrient, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2020), 147.
[524] Kinra, 148.
[525] Kinra, 152.

equated this term with a triumph of mystical monism over religious plurality and division,[526] and

for 'Abd al-Raḥman Chishti (d. 1683) he explicitly joins *waḥdat al-wujūd* with *ṣulḥ-i kull*,

writing of Badi' al-Dīn Shah Madār (d. 1436) that:

> In every city and town to which His Excellence traveled, his presence inevitably
> produced the same disagreeable quarrels with the superficial local clerics ('*ulamā-yi
> ẓāhir*). But His Excellence, who had reached the profoundest depths of Unity of Being
> (*waḥdat-i wujūd*), maintained an attitude of complete civility (*mashrab-i ṣulḥ-i kull rā
> manẓūr dāshta*) and paid no attention to them, until finally each and every one of that
> rabble was put to shame.[527]

The popularity of *waḥdat al-wujūd* needs to be considered in conjunction with the

historical developments of Akbar's Mughal Empire. This philosophy was just one of several

ideologies employed by Akbar and likeminded Muslims that went into his "Divine Religion"

(*Din-i illahi*). Azfar Moin writes that Akbar's "enthusiasm for a pantheistic metaphysics, and his

political need to bind together a ruling class in India that was ethnically and religiously diverse"

was combined with an "idiom of messianism and enacted with rituals of sainthood similar to the

ones that the Safavids of Iran had deployed."[528] Akbar's "religion" was at least partly an

attempt to replicate the Safavid's martial order of fanatically devoted Sufis. It's important to

point out that Akbar's "Divine Religion" (*Dīn-i Ilāhī*) was never actually called by that name,

rather, it was simply referred to as "discipleship" (*muridī*),[529] and "divine monotheism" (*tawḥīd*

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[526] Fānī writes, "If the tavern elder would teach the book of *ṣulḥ-i kull* / He could wipe clean the pages of the maẓhabs with the wine of oneness" (*kitāb-i ṣulḥ-i kull 'gar dars gūyad pīr-i maiḵẖāna
tawān az bāda-yi tauḥīd shust aurāq-i maẓhab-hā*), and in another bayt: My eyes have been lined by *ṣulḥ-i kull* with the collyrium of unity / So that I can see beyond the temple and ka'ba, to the path of Allah"
(*surma-yi waḥdat kashīd az ṣulḥ-i kull dar chashm-i man tā zi dair-o-ka'ba dīdam jāda-yi Allāh rā*). Cited In Kinra, 164-5.
[527] In Kinra, 166.
[528] Moin, 132.
[529] Moin, 131.

*Ilāhī*). ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī (d.1615 c.e.), a contemporary and historian critical of Akbar's reign writes about those who were most influential in Akbar's religious formation. He describes a certain "Shaikh Taj ud-din" who was "most excellent in Sufism, and in the knowledge of theology second only to Shaikh Ibn 'Arabi"[530] as having been particularly influential.

The philosophy of "The Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) ubiquitous as it was at the time provided an intellectual Sufi framework for Akbar's *ṣulḥ-i kull* attitude toward non-Muslims, but this also drew the ire of ulema who rejected the universalizing language of this philosophy and the dislocation of Islam from the center of political and social life. Badāʾūnī provides evidence of Akbar's learning in the "unity of existence" with the assistance of a shaykh versed in this doctrine: "His majesty listened the whole night to his Sufic obscenities and follies. The shaikh, since he did not in any great degree feel himself bound by the injunctions of the law, introduced arguments concerning the unity of existence, such as idle Sufis discuss, and which eventually lead to license and open heresy."[531] Here Badāʾūnī is identifying the "unity of existence" as antithetical to *sharī'ah*, describing the monist shaykh as not feeling "bound by the injunctions of the law" and replicating the age-old critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a heterodox belief.

Akbar's philosophy manifested in terms of concrete policy for the Mughal empire. Muḥammad Abdul Haq Anṣārī provides a thorough summary of the policies Akbar put into place which provoked the Muslim scholarly establishment (*Ar. 'ulema'*):

> [Akbar] gathered at his court men who criticised, flouted and ridiculed Islamic beliefs, practices and personalities. … Faith in God was retained, but everything else was

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[530] Bada'uni, *Selected Histories* trans. Merry Weisner-Hanks, in *Religious Transformations in the Early Modern World*, (Bedford/St.Martin's: 2009), 117.
[531] Bada'uni,118.

rejected: creation of the world, existence of angels, resurrection of the body, revelation and prophecy. Eternity of the world and transmigration of the soul were instead affirmed. The life of the Prophet was criticised; his name was expunged from individual names; salat and other rites were flayed, and injunctions concerning lawful (*halal*) and unlawful (*haram*) were ridiculed. Things did not end here: those who refused to comply and dared to object were humiliated, imprisoned and sometimes exterminated. Third, and most important, Akbar acted to change the laws and institutions of the country based on Shari'ah. He abolished *zakat* and *jizyah*; withdrew the prohibition of drinking and gambling; forbade marriages between cousins allowed in the Shari'ah; proscribed more than one marriage, but ironically enough, removed censure on prostitution; banned slaughter of the cow; prohibited killing of animals on many days of the year; dropped the name of the Prophet and his Companions from Friday sermons; discontinued the Hijri calendar; introduced new coins marking the new millennium; discouraged the study of Arabic and Islamic disciplines; stopped or reduced government aid to Arabic schools; and did not seek to fill the Islamic posts which fell vacant.[532]

In short, the fear was that everything particular to Islam, especially in terms of the primacy placed on Muḥammad's prophecy and the provisions of Islamic law *(sharī'ah)*, were all being abandoned in favor of a universal monotheism with Akbar as divine king for all his subjects.

Sirhindī's disillusionment with Akbar's court at a young age appears to have been over the importance of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) — or rather the lack of importance placed on it — at Akbar's court. His first work, "The Proof of Prophecy" (*ithbāt an-nubuwwa*), serves as a formative thesis against what he saw as the abandonment of Muḥammad's religion in a court that favored a practice of pluralist *ṣulḥ-i kull* to support Akbar's universal kingship over all religious communities. Sirhindī saw his purpose as "renewer" as a corrective to Akbar's philosophy and policies, and as a result, his reformation of Sufism must be considered in this light. Anṣārī summarizes Sirhindī's own view of his mission:

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[532] Muḥammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's Effort to Reform Sufism*, (The Islamic Foundation: 1986), 25-6.

[Sirhindī] considered himself to be more than a wali, a renovator (*mujadid*) of religion, who had been commissioned to revive Islam at the turn of its second millennium. […] his mission was to criticise unbelief, heresy and false doctrines, and reaffirm faith in prophecy, revelation and the religion of the Prophet; to condemn evil, disobedience and innovation, and revive virtue, piety and adherence to the Sunnah; to oppose anti-Islamic forces and powers and restore Islamic institutions and laws.[533]

In the Naqshbandi order, Sirhindī found a home for a Sufi philosophy that eschewed innovation and adhered to the Sunnah of the Prophet.

### The "Neo-Sufism" of Aḥmad Sirhindī

"Neo-Sufism" is a term coined by Fazlur Raḥman to describe a "Sufism reformed on orthodox lines and interpreted in an activist sense."[534] The Naqshbandi Sufi order was quickly becoming the paragon of reform-minded Sufism by the time Sirhindī was initiated into it as Sirhindī's Naqshbandi teacher, Muḥammad al-Bāqī, or Bāqī Bi'llah (d.1603), took an activist approach to reforming what he saw as heretical "innovation" in the Sufis around him. Pashaura Singh — echoing a study by Wilfred Cantwell Smith on the "crystallization" of religious boundaries in early modern South Asia — points out that Bāqī Bi'llah was born in Kabul the same year Guru Arjan was born in the Punjab: 1563.[535] Both these figures of the Naqshbandi tariqa and the Sikh Panth would be impacted by the reign of Akbar and the reactionary impulse of his detractors. As will be explored below, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs was gruesomely put to

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[533] Anṣārī, 17.

[534] John O.Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Vol. 42, No. 2/3, *Engaging with a Legacy: Nehemia Levtzion* (1935-2003) (2008), 318. See also Fazlur Raḥman, *Islam,* UC Press:1968. 202, 239, and 254.

[535] Pashaura Singh, "Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan," *Journal of Punjab Studies,* 12:1, 41. See also Wilfred Cantwell Smith's chapter "The Crystallization of Religious Communities in Mughal India" in *On Understanding Islam* (De Gruyter: 1981).

death by Jahangir while Bāqī Bi'llah's successor, Sirhindī, celebrated the event in his correspondence.

Bāqī Bi'llah began to admonish Sufis for affiliating themselves with multiple Sufi tariqas, demanding instead that his followers belong exclusively to the Naqshbandi order.[536] Sirhindī, who had previously followed the same Chishti path of his father, was initiated into the Naqshbandi order by Bāqī Bi'llah. Bāqī Bi'llah began a "ruthless critique of the prevailing Chishti understanding of *tasawwuf*"[537] in Northern India. He attacked musical audition, or *sama',* and "dismissed as heretic (*zandaqa*) and stupidity (*ablahi, safahat*) the admiration of unbelief (*kufr*) and emphasis on the basic unity between a believer and an infidel."[538] This latter point is in refutation of pluralists like the syncretizing sants of the Bhakti movement and the "Unitarians" (*muwaḥḥidān*), but may also refer to some Chishti orders allowing Hindus to join their gatherings.

Sirhindī's own attitude toward coreligionists and all non-Muslims generally would develop — catalyzed by his experience working briefly in Akbar's pluralist government — into a severe animosity toward Shi'a Muslims, heterodox-minded Sunnis, and non-Muslims generally. Against the backdrop of figures like Nanak and Kabir who proclaimed that it was one God who was worshiped through various names and expressions of piety, Sirhindī rejected such universalism.

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[536] Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700.* (SUNY: 2005), 94-5; 168.

[537] Muzaffar Alam, "The debate within: a Sufi critique of religious law, *tasawwuf* and politics in Mughal India," *South Asian History and Culture*; 2011, Vol 2(2), 146.

[538] Alam, 146.

Yohannan Friedman highlights a telling response from Sirhindī to Hirday Rām in his correspondence:

> From Sirhindī's description of these two letters and from his reaction to their content, it seems likely that Hirday Ràm expressed in them his desire to join the Naqshbandi order without first accepting Islam; he probably based his request on the belief that all religions are essentially identical and that formal conversion would thus be meaningless and superfluous. […] His reply is devoted in its entirety to a devastating and scornful attack on Hinduism, on the human characteristics of the Hindu deities and on the idea that *Ram and Raḥman are one and the same.*[539]

In this letter, Sirhindī is responding to a play on two names for God — *Ram* for Hindus and *Raḥman* ("the Merciful") for Muslims — and is as opposed to this universalist attitude as he is to allowing Hirday Ram to join his *tariqa* without becoming Muslim. The Guru Granth Sahib and Kabir's hymns play with the different names for what they see as the same God. Hirday Ram is perhaps reflecting the attitude found in Kabir's *Bijak* where a hymn calls the "Lord [...]Allah Ram" who is "Hari in the East, Allah in the West," and who "in the heart alone: there live Ram and Karim"("the Generous") leading Kabir to declare "It's one, one in everybody! How did you make it two? Every man and woman born, they're all your forms, says Kabir."[540] From Sirhindī's point of view, this sort of monistic expression of God in everyone and identical in both traditions threatens the supremacy of Islam as the perfection and culmination of religion; if both Hindu and Muslim forms of worship are universally valid, then there is no point to the particularities of Sirhindī's sharī'ah-minded Sufism.

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[539] Yohanan Friedmann, "Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity," PhD diss. (McGill University: 1966), 109-110. Emphasis mine.
[540] Hess and Singh, 74.

Sirhindī wrote an "Epistle on the Refutation of the Shi'a" which Friedmann reads as an attempt to curb the "growing influence of the Shi'a in the Mughal court."[541] The influx of Shi'ah Muslims from Safavid Iran — especially those who held views heterodox in the eyes of the Safavid state — meant that Sirhindī was exposed to non-Sunnis and, as a result, produced his polemical work against them. He also rejected Sufis performing rituals he considered to be "innovation" (*bid'ah*), that is, practices not enjoined by his faction of the Naqshbandiyya. Sirhindī writes about the practice of silent *dhikr* in one of his letters:

> You have asked how it is that I forbid *dhikr* with loud voice and condemn it as *bid'at*, but do not condemn many other things which had not existed at the time of the Prophet [....] note that the acts of the Prophet were of two kinds: those that were performed as *'ibadah*, an act of worship, and those that were done as *'urf* and *'adah*, habits and customs. The acts which were done as *'ibadah*, we consider deviations from them to be evil innovations, and condemn them strongly, for they are innovations in religion (*din*) and must be rejected."[542]

Silent dhikr, although "not a central element" in Naqshbandi devotion, became a marker that "sets apart this tariqa from its counterparts" especially with regard to the "emotive" rituals of others involving "musical accompaniment and dance".[543]

**Sirhindī and non-Muslims**

During Akbar's reign, Sikhs could count on state policies more or less in line with *ṣulḥ-i lull*, and Akbar's eclectic interest in spiritual matters meant that Sikhs were even treated favorably. J.S. Grewal writes that with Arjan's compilation of the Adi Granth, "Sikhs became a people of the book (*granth*), like the Muslims with their Quran and Hindus with their

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[541] Friedmann, 89

[542] Ansari, 22.

[543] LeGall, 113-114

Shastras."[544] This did not escape the notice of Guru Arjan's enemies who reported on the competing revelation to the Mughal emperor:

> In 1605 Emperor Akbar was at Batala during his visit to Punjab. A complaint was lodged with him that the Adi Granth contained some blasphemous passages to Islam. The emperor called for the *granth* to his presence. The Guru sent it in the custody of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Buddha. Bhai Gurdas, who had written every word of it, assured the Emperor that there was nothing against Islam, and on the contrary it contained hymns of Muslim saints. Akbar got the *Granth* read out at random in the presence of learned Qazis and Pandits. On the first opening of the *Granth* a hymn said: we are all children of our Father God. On the second opening it stated: *God pervades all His creation and the creation resides in Him*. When there is nothing but God whom should one blame. On other pages also there was praise of God.[545]

This hagiographic narrative illustrates agreement between the Adi Granth and the Qur'an and thus, between Sikhism and Islam. Of particular interest in this study, the monistic expression "God pervades all His creation and the creation resides in Him" is not only in alignment with the overarching theme of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but is even portrayed as being in alignment with the dominant view of Islam held by the "Qazis" and presumably other Muslims, Akbar included.

Just as the position of Ibn al-'Arabī's school was to affirm simultaneously God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) and immanence (*tashbīh*),[546] verses from the Guru Granth Sahib also embrace this seeming paradox:

> O Nanak, He Himself remains distinct, while yet pervading all. [...] Many millions are the divine incarnations. / In so many ways, He has unfolded Himself. / So many times, He has expanded His expansion [...] From God they emanate, and into God they merge

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[544] J. S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, Manohar, New Delhi: 1998, 101.

[545] Gupta,1 143-144 *Emphasis mine.*

[546] On the coincidence of God's transcendence (tanzīh) and immanence (tashbīh) in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 48-65.

once again. / His limits are not known to anyone. / Of Himself, and by Himself, O Nanak, God exists.[547]

It is difficult not to be struck by the similarities to mystical monism in Sufism here; God's emanations (*tajaliyyāt*) or divine unfolding (*maẓhar*) are described as myriad, or as Ibn al-'Arabī would say, "there is no repetition in [God's] emanations" (*lā takrār fī tajalliyāt*). That God simultaneously "remains distinct, while yet pervading all" is at the crux of the *wujūdī* position for proponents and detractors alike. Verses that claim "[a]ll places belong to the Supreme Lord God / He Himself is All-pervading, in endless waves"(GGS, 275:7-8) would have struck *wujūdī* Sufis as particularly poignant. No doubt, the detractors of the *wujūdī* position would be quick to point out that "all places" would include the houses of worship of other religions; a theme in Sufi poetry of the *kufriyyāt* or *qalandariyyāt* mode that doesn't hesitate to claim God is present everywhere, even in the temple of idols(*būtkhāneh*) or the tavern (Per. *maykhāneh*).[548] Although Sirhindī was unfamiliar with the particularities of Sikhism — as demonstrated by his correspondence below — it's not impossible that he may have recognized themes parallel to *waḥdat al-wujūd* along with an unacceptably universalist attitude toward other religions in his encounter with Sikhism.

Before arriving at Sirhindī's comments on Guru Arjan's execution, at least three historical accounts of Guru Arjan's martyrdom are important to note: the account in the *Dabistan-i maẓāhib*, Jahangir's autobiographical account in *Tuzuk-e Jahangir*, and the account of a Jesuit missionary have all been explored thoroughly by Pashaura Singh and Louis

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[547] Guru Granth Sahib (276: 5-14) trans. Sant Singh Khalsa, https://www.srigurugranth.org/0276.html
[548] J.T.P. De Bruijn "The Qalandariyyat in Mystical Poetry" in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume II: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150—1500)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 85.

Fenech,[549] and they uncover some details useful for understanding the basis of Sirhindī's vitriol. In each account, the role of Guru Arjan in prince Khusrau's rebellion is cited as the cause for his punishment. In the *Dabistan-i maẕāhib*, Mobad Shah points out that by "the reign of *Guru* [A]rjan Mal, [the Sikhs] became very numerous. Not many cities remained in the inhabited region, where the Sikhs had not settled in some number."[550] The *Dabistan* gives this information as further context for Jahangir's punishment of Guru Arjan which was ostensibly, "on account of his having prayed for the welfare of Prince Khusrau."[551] Then, the author mentions that a certain "Shaikh Nizam Thanesari" was merely "exiled" for "uttering a prayer for the welfare of Khusrau."[552] While the disparity in punishment may be read as an indication of antipathy for non-Muslims, a more compelling case is that the Sufi shaykh's power was negligible in the face of the authority wielded by the Guru. A Jesuit priest's account confirms Guru Arjan's spiritual and temporal authority at the time:

> While the Prince was flying from Agra, he passed the spot where there dwelt one whom the Gentiles call Goru [Guru], a title equivalent to that of Pope amongst the Christians. This person was looked upon as a saint, and was greatly venerated. On account of his reputation for holiness, the Prince went to see him, hoping apparently that this would bring him good fortune. The Goru congratulated him on his new royalty, and placed his tiara on his head.[553]

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[549] P. Singh "Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan" as well as chapter 5 in Life and Work of Guru Arjan and Louis Fenech, "Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition" Journal of the American Oriental Society, 117(4), (1997): 623-642.

[550] Cited in J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib *Sikh History from Persian Sources* Tulika Books, New Delhi: 2011. 66.

[551] J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, 67.

[552] J.S. Grewal, 67.

[553] P. Singh, "Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan," 38.

Though "tiara" is a misunderstanding of the symbolic *tilak* as Pashaura Singh points out, the account reveals that the Jesuit was aware of the joint spiritual and political significance of this meeting as the events were related to him.

For his own part, Sirhindī rejoices at what he terms the "very fortunate" execution of the "accursed infidel of Goindwal" (*kafir-i la'in-i goindwāl*)[554] in his letter to Shaykh Farīd Bukhārī (a.k.a. Murtaza Khan d. 1616 c.e.) who was the official tasked by Jahangir with carrying out the execution of the fifth Sikh Guru. Singh estimates that this is self-congratulation for having been a part of the delegation that brought Guru Arjan to the attention of Jahangir in the first place.[555] Sirhindī refers to Guru Arjan as "an infidel-leader of the people of infidelity" (*kafir imam-i ahl-i kufr*) and "chief of the people of heinous sin (*reis ahl-i shirk*)."[556] The vitriol of his letter is worth exploring in greater detail as it highlights an attitude toward non-Muslims generally. Yohannan Friedman finds that this letter illustrates "Sirhindī's deep-seated hatred of the non-Muslims" as Sirhindī says:

> These days the accursed infidel of Goindwal was very fortunately killed. It is a cause of great defeat for the reprobate Hindūs. With whatever intention and purpose they are killed - the humiliation of infidels is for the Muslims life itself." Elsewhere he says: "Whenever a Jew is killed, it is for the benefit of Islam."[557]

It's apparent immediately that Sirhindī not only doesn't distinguish between Hindus and the distinct Sikh religion, but with the addition of Jews it becomes apparent that all non-Muslims are

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[554] Fenech, 628.

[555] P. Singh, "Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan," 35.

[556] P. Singh, 44.

[557] Friedmann, 111. The Persian transliteration provided is as follows: "dar īn waqt kushtan-i kāfir-i la'īn-i goindwāl bisyār khūb wāqi' shud wa bā'ith-i shikast-i aẓīm bar hunūd-i mardūd gasht bi-har niyyat kih kushtah bashand wa bi-har gharaz halāk kardah khwārī-yi kuffār khwud naqd-i waqt-i ahl-i islām ast" and "juhūd har kih shawad kushtah sūd-i islām ast."

painted together with one stroke by Sirhindī, and his attitude toward killing non-Muslims goes beyond simply fighting until the non-Muslim surrenders and agrees to pay the *jizya*.

Indeed, this attitude towards non-Muslims is reflected by his son and Successor, Shaykh Muḥammad Ma'sūm(d. 1669 c.e.), who complains in a "letter to the Mughal official Mirza 'Ubaid Allah Beg about the harm being done to Islam by those who espoused the ethos of *ṣulḥ-i kull*:"

> "It is strange," he laments, "that a group of those who have adopted the way of *ṣulḥ-i kull* and toleration of others are so good to the unbelievers, the Jews, the jogis, the brahmans, the heathens, the renegades, the Armenians, indeed to all the others except those who follow the path of the Prophet. [. . .] This is indeed a strange *ṣulḥ-i kull* that implies hostility to the Muḥammadis and friendship with the other peoples, in flagrant violation of the Qur'an's plea for hatred and enmity against them.[558]

Like his father before him, Muḥammad Ma'sūm is willing to paint all non-Muslims as one, and believe genuinely that "hatred" and "enmity" toward them all is a Quranic injunction. It is also of interest that the attitude and policy of *ṣulḥ-i kull* is singled out as the problem, reflecting his father's distaste for Akbar's treatment of non-Muslims during his reign. Muḥammad Ma'sūm and his like-minded members of the Mujadidi branch lobbied Aurangzeb to take a far harsher stance toward non-Muslims, and they reflect the increasing push among the ulema in Aurangzeb's reign who would ultimately encourage him to reimpose the *jizya* tax, ban non-Islamic holidays, and even demolish Hindu temples.

As with Sirhindī's designs on religio-political reform, Sikhism in the 17th century must also be understood in political terms in addition to the religious. The Sikh Gurus occupied a middle-ground between spiritual and temporal authority, and the blending of the two is

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[558] Rajiv Kinra, "Revisiting the History and Historiography of Mughal Pluralism", *ReOrient*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2020), 167.

exemplified in the term *miri-piri*. J.S. Grewal suggests that the lack of "dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal" is unique with regard to "all other Indian systems of religious belief and practice."[559] This is in response to scholars who mistakenly read Guru Arjan's martyrdom as the beginning of the Gurus' concern with worldly affairs. In contrast, Jagjit Singh writes that it was "not Guru Arjan's martyrdom which gave a political turn to the Sikh movement; rather it was the political aspect of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom.[560] This may be clearly seen in the development of the Sikh capital and court (*darbar*) at Ramdaspur. Akbar "removed all restrictions on the building of places of public worship" leading to the "building of numerous public temples in the famous places of Hindu pilgrimage"[561] and the site at Ramdaspur (modern Amritsar) is one such example of religious construction encouraged during Akbar's reign. This was not a purely spiritual location however, and in "Siri Ragu, Guru Arjan claims to have established the rule of justice and humility (*halemi raj*) in the town of Ramdaspur."[562] Given this was land granted by Akbar 1571,[563] and said to be sanctified with a cornerstone laid by Sufi saint Mian Mir,[564] the growth of the Sikh capital may perhaps be read as a physical manifestation of Akbar's policy of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. The Golden Temple was a holy site not just for Sikhs, but appealed across religious confessions providing *langar* for non-Sikhs to this day.

The concept of millennial kingship that Akbar wielded passed to his son Jahangir who "was the first Mughal sovereign to inherit a stable and fully functioning institution of messianic

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[559] Grewal, 222.
[560] Cited in Grewal, 222.
[561] Sri Ram Sharma "The Religious Policy of Mughal Emperors," Asia Publishing House: 1940, 37
[562] Pashaura Singh, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, (Oxford UP: 2006), 121.
[563] P. Singh 107.
[564] P. Singh, 112-113.

kingship adapted to the Indian environment."[565] Just as the Islamicate world was enveloped in millennial fervor at the turn of the 17th century, Arjan's role was imagined in terms of profound change. Several Sanskritic traditions hold that the present age is an age of "ignorance" or *kali yuga*. The "socio-religious community of Guru Nanak's followers had become 'a state within the state,'"[566] and the Guru seated at his new capital came to resemble a temporal ruler. While both "Akbar and Sirhindī were cast in the cosmological mold of a millennial 'being,'"[567] it is worth remembering that Guru Arjan was as well. In fact, Pashaura Singh notes that "Guru Arjan was looked upon as the 'true king' (*sacha patishah*) by the Sikh community."[568] The Guru was seen as reincarnation of Raja Janak, as Bhatt Kal writes: "You have re-established the rule of Janak, ushering in the Age of Truth (*satiyuga*) during the period of ultimate degeneracy."[569] Whether or not Islamic millennialism was a direct cause of this imagining of Arjan's cosmic kingship, it would have certainly competed with the Mughal ruler's claims to universal sovereignty whether it was Akbar or a more shari'ah-minded Jahangir. With a growing seat of power at the Harminder Sahib and the court of the Guru, the spiritual and temporal authority of Guruship were being reimagined during Arjan's time. Pashaura Singh notes one such imagining by Sikh Bhatts:

> The Guru was looked upon as a 'true king' (*sacha patishah*) in contrast with false earthly kings. In fact, the city of Ramdaspur emerged as a new 'power centre' in its own right. Here Guru Arjan had established the divine rule of justice and humility (*halemi raj*), where people enjoyed a comfortable living, fired with the spirit of fearlessness, dignity, and self-respect. The contemporary Sikh bards sang eulogistic

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[565] Moin, 22.
[566] P. Singh, 87.
[567] Moin, 136.
[568] P. Singh, 87.
[569] P. Singh, 88.

songs of the majesty of the Sikh court in regal metaphors. In their eyes Guru Arjan had re-established on earth the rule of the mythological King Janak.[570]

As a "true king" ushering in a new age, the martyrdom of Guru Arjan may be read as an indication that Guru Arjan posed a threat to the temporal and cosmic authority of Jahangir's Mughal state. While the tendency is to read opposition in purely religious terms, that of Sikh versus Muslim, it should perhaps first be read in terms of Timurid-Mongol universal sovereignty versus threats to the authority of the "Lord of Conjunction" (*Saḥib Qirān*) at the head of the dynasty.

Jahangir's own account also indicates support for Khusrau as the chief reason for the execution order, but one phrase provides a glimpse into the religious anxieties felt by Muslims at the growing power of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Arjan's martyrdom should be read in terms of the political challenge he presented to Jahangir because the fifth Guru presided over a Sikh panth with a growing market share in the spiritual economy of the Punjab. The account in the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* begins matter-of-factly:

> In Gobindwal, which is on the river Beas, a Hindu [sic] named Arjan used to live in the garb of a spiritual master and mystic guide, under the influence of which he had induced a large number of simple-minded Hindus and even some ignorant and silly Muslims, to become attached to his ways and customs. He had the drum of his spiritual leadership and sainthood loudly beaten. They called him Guru. From all sides and directions ignorant ones and d*ervish-garb worshippers* inclined towards him and reposed full faith in him.[571]

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[570] P Singh, Arjan 231-2

[571] JS Grewal and Irfan Habib *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (Tulika Books, New Delhi: 2011), 57. See also: P. Singh, "Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan" 30-31 and footnote on 55-56. Thackston simply translates the phrase "*gaul parastān*" as "fools," Wheeler M. Thackston *The Jahangirnama*: *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India,* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 59.

Guru Arjan's appeal across confessional lines is readily apparent in Jahangir's account where already the Sikh Guru is represented as representing something beyond the labels Muslim or Hindu. The translation, "dervish-garb worshippers," is certainly worth interrogating[572] but the idea that Sufi-leaning Muslims would be attracted to the concordant notes found in Guru's message should be beyond doubt; already among Nanak's epithets, *"Musulman ka Pir"* and *"Shah Faqir"*[573] indicate the receptivity of the Sikhism among Sufi-leaning Muslims.

As Pashaura Singh observes, the execution of the fifth Sikh Guru not only "became the single most decisive factor in the crystallization of the Sikh Panth," but it also "signaled the end of Akbar's policy of religious pluralism" and "marked the beginning of a transformation in the religious and cultural landscape of Mughal India."[574] In this moment of transformation, one finds Sirhindī in contact with Mughal officials and advocating this execution, representing the hard-line faction in favor of clearly delineated boundaries between Islam and non-Muslims. By contrast a Sufi like Mian Mir of the Qadiri order is memorialized in Sikh tradition for his cordial relations with Guru Arjan. Mian Mir pleaded with Jahangir to spare the fifth Guru's life, and, though failing on that count, interceded to have his son, Guru Hargobind, released from Gwalior

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[572] In their Persian dictionaries, both Francis Steingass and Sulayman Hayyim offer translations of the noun "gaul" into English as "fraud, deceit" but it is only the former who offers the translation "A dervish's coarse woolen garment". "Parastān" signifies the human plural of worshipper/adherent (*parast*), where the noun "gaul" is the object. As with phrases like "fire-worshipper" (*atash parast*), the "woolen garb" would be the object worshipped and make little sense here. Hence, "fraud-worshiping," seems a more appropriate translation of the term.
See: Sulayman Hayyim, *New Persian-English Dictionary*, Digital Dictionaries of South Asia, University of Chicago, vol 2, 739. <https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/hayyim_query.py?page=1817> and Francis Joseph Steingass, Digital Dictionaries of South Asia, University of Chicago, page 1105. <https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?page=1105> Accessed December 12, 2018.
[573] Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs Vol 1,* Munshiram Manoharlal, (New Delhi: 2000), 100.
[574] Pashaura Singh, *The Routledge Companion to the Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind: Sovereignty, Militancy, and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth,* (Routledge: forthcoming), 164.

Fort.[575] Sirhindī's harsh words against non-Muslims were one facet of his religious worldview — intricately linked with his opposition to *waḥdat al-wujūd* —as he favored the particulars of Islamic belief and practice over the universalizing vision he felt the need to condemn in the lax Sufism and religious pluralism he saw reigning in the intellectual climate of the Mughal Empire. It is Sirhindī's rejection of the primacy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that this study now turns to.

### Sirhindī's Critique of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*

It must be admitted that Sirhindī does not outright reject *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but rather it is a stepping stone on the way to greater realizations. In fact, he even penned a treatise in defense of this doctrine, though he interprets it in such a way that eschews radical monism. He uses the phrases "all is He" and "all is from He" in order to illustrate the difference between identifying all in existence with God and recognizing that all in existence is a manifestation from God:

> The Sufis believe that things are manifestations of the Truth and not the Truth Itself, that they originate from the Truth and not that they are the Truth. So, the words «all is He» must be interpreted in the sense that «all is from Him» (hamah az ūst), which would be the  sentence preferred by the 'Ulamàs.[576]

Sirhindī's espousal of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* and rejection of the centrality of *waḥdat al-wujūd* appears not to be such a major point of contrast, and yet, there is a vast world of difference between these two positions. David Damrel describes exactly what's at stake in this debate:

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[575] Singh, 306-7. Guru Arjan's son, Guru Hargobind, had cordial relations with Mian Mir as well; according to one narrative from the *Mahimā Prakāsh Vārtak,* Mian Mir defends Guru Hargobind when "orthodox Muslims strongly objected" to the former's reception of the latter, and the Sufi proclaims the sixth Guru as a "'divinely approved saint' (*makbūl Ilāhī*)." Singh, 188-9.

[576] Alberto Ventura, "A Letter of Šayh Aḥmad Sirhindī in Defense of the'Waḥdat al-Wuğūd'," *Oriente Moderno,* 1992(2), 512.

interpretation of the Naqshbandi reaction suddenly involves much more than the dispute between the Mughal Padishahs and a Sufi order over religious practice at court. It becomes a battle between syncretism and exclusivism, religious tolerance and intolerance, and, for some, nothing less than the defining moment in the course of Hindu-Muslim relations to this day.[577]

While the debate over mystical monism in Islam can seem impossibly esoteric, it is actually one microcosm of a greater competition between religious worldviews which, as Damrel points out, is a debate between "syncretism" and "exclusivism." Sirhindī's uncompromising attitude towards non-Muslims and his rejection of the centrality of *waḥdat al-wujūd* are each facets of a whole.

By exploring Sirhindī's religious worldview, the gulf between the *wujūdī* and *shuhūdi* positions can be glimpsed. At first, Sirhindī subscribed to *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī to whom he unequivocally attributes this philosophy.[578] Sirhindī gives autobiographical details about his relationship to Ibn 'Arabi and his philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> I believed in the *tawḥīd wujūdī* (i.e. *waḥdat al-wujūd*) from the time I was a boy … the Unity of Being (*tawḥīd wujūdī*) was revealed to me in a short period in virtue of following the Naqshbandi *tarīqah*. [...] I was informed of the profoundest ideas of Shaykh Muhyi 'l-Din ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy and was blessed with the experience of Divine self-illumination [...which Ibn 'Arabi] had claimed to be a privilege of the "Seal of Saints." I was so much engrossed in that *tawḥid* and intoxicated with it that in one of my letters to [Bāqī Bi'llah] I wrote the following two couplets which were the product of sheer intoxication (*sukr*). This Shari'ah is, alas, the way of the blind. / Our way is the way of infidels and fire-worshippers. / Infidelity and faith are the lock and the fact of that beauty."[579]

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[577] David W. Damrel, "The 'Naqshbandī Reaction' Reconsidered," in B*eyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*. Ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (University Press of Florida: 2000), 177.

[578] Ibn al-'Arabī never used this exact phrase in his own writings, but over the centuries this phrase came to define the view of his interpretive community.

[579] Anṣārī, 14.

Sirhindī admits to his adherence to the ideas of Ibn al-ʿArabī including *waḥdat al-wujūd* and also to his composition of "intoxicated" verses in a state of ecstasy associated with the experience of such a *tawḥid wujūdī*. Contrastingly, he writes later in a letter explaining that ecstatic utterances must be overcome as "sobriety overshadows intoxication" and that "completion is in faith and experiential inner knowledge (*maʿrifat*), not in infidelity and ignorance, no matter what kind of infidelity or ignorance."[580] Here he punctuates his response with a hadith wherein the prophet Muḥammad says: "Oh God I ask you for a faith that is not after infidelity."[581]

It's true that Sirhindī was not entirely ill-disposed toward Ibn al-ʿArabī, but rather had ambivalent feelings toward the Great Shaykh. In a letter Sirhindī gives voice to his ambivalence toward the Great Shaykh:

> What can I do! Sometimes I war with shaykh Ibn ʿArabi—may God rest his soul—and other times we are at peace! He was the one who laid the foundations of the doctrine of the mystical knowledge of God (*maʿrifat wa ʿirfān*) and thoroughly explained it. He is the one who spoke in detail of the Unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and the union with him (*ittiṣāl*) and who explained the origin of multiplicity and multiformity. […] Most of the Sufis who came after him chose to follow him and most used his terminology. Even I, miserable as I am, have profited from the blessings of this prominent man and have learned much from his views and insights. May God reward him from me.[582]

Sirhindī is, on the one hand, forced to admit the influence Ibn al-ʿArabī has had over his formative years as a Sufi, but still sees a great harm in some of his teachings and especially in how they are employed by the Muslims of his time and place. Sirhindī laments his view that the Shaykh al-Akbar was wrongly guided in "unveiling"(*kashf*):

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[580] Beuhler, 229.

[581] Beuhler, 229.

[582] from Sirhindī's *maktūbat,* letter 3.79 trans. Ter Haar, *Follower and Heir of the Prophet*, 130-1, cited in Beuhler, 56-7.

How can I deny the shaykh who is an accepted friend of God only because of his errors in unveiling? On the other hand, how can I blindly accept [certain parts of] his science that is far from being correct and that is contrary to the opinions of the "people of truth" [i.e., the rightly-guided ulama of the mainstream Sunni community].[583]

Contrary to a view that juxtaposes *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as some sort of opposite to *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Sirhindī doesn't outright reject *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but proclaims it to be merely one step on a ladder which the seeker must pass. He writes about his realization of stages beyond Ibn al-ʿArabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd:*

I was shown that *tawhid* (*wujūdī*) was a lower stage, and was asked to move to the stage of *zilliyat* (i.e. the vision that things are the shadows of God and different from Him). [... ] It happened that God by a pure act of grace and love carried me beyond that stage and brought me to the stage of *ʿabdiyat* (i.e. the vision that man is nothing more than a servant of God, that things are merely His creation and that He is absolutely other and different from the world)[584]

It is significant that the stage above *waḥdat al-wujūd* is *ʿabdiyat* or "servanthood" in Sirhindī's estimation since this serves as a reaffirmation of Islamic worship (*ʿabūdah*) above the potentially universalizing language of experiential oneness. For Sirhindī, Ibn ʿArabi's *wujūdī* state is an ecstatic stepping-stone towards a greater, but sobering realization that God is not immanent in the world; the Mujaddidi Naqshbandi mystical ascent is described by Arthur Beuhler as a four-fold path where one must ultimately return to every-day reality. Sirhindī writes of a "first abiding" or "[e]veryday consensus reality" which is "the mental realm preoccupied with linear, dualistic content," and this is followed by a stage of "lesser intimacy with God" (*walayat-i sughra*) containing what Sirhindī describes as "the unity of contemplative witnessing" (*waḥdat*

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[583] Irshad Alam Faith Practice Piety, 137
[584] Anṣārī, 15.

*al-shuhūd*) that comprises both "annihilation" and "abiding in God" (*fana'* and *baqa'*).[585] Often associated with the highest stages of Sufi rapture, these are merely points along the path to greater attainments for this shaykh.

This is where Sirhindī's *Mujaddidi* form of Sufism really differentiates itself from others; rapturous elevation is not the goal, but rather, a third phase of "returning to the world of creation for God and by means of God (*sayr 'an Allah bi'llah*) begins a phase of "greater intimacy with God" (*walayat-i kubra*).[586] The culmination of this path is the "station of separation after synthesis (*maqam al-farq ba'd al-Jāmī'*)" in which one experiences multiplicity.[587] Put simply, the end goal of the *Mujaddidi* path is to straddle two worlds, the esoteric world of God's unity beyond time and space, and the mundane space of difference here and now. As Beuhler phrases it, the "goal of Sirhindī's juristic sufism was to get as many people as close to God as soon as possible and then to return to everyday life and invite people to God, the realm of the shariat."[588] Placing servanthood (*'abudah*) above the ecstatic experience of God's Oneness serves to reassert Islamic particularity and supremacy over the expression of religious universalism that Sirhindī so detested in the Sufism of his day, and it fits well with his attitude toward the non-Muslim other.

The centrality of *sharī'a* and rejection of the primacy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Sirhindī's activist sufism colors his attitude toward other religions or those who support any other than Islam. Yohanan Friedmann contends that his "[d]enunciations of Hinduism and attacks on the Hindūs, which have become one of the main themes in modern analyses of Sirhindī's historical

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[585] Beuhler, 37.
[586] Beuhler, 37.
[587] Beuhler, 38.
[588] Beuhler, 49.

significance, actually play only a peripheral role in his thought" and that "Sirhindī is primarily a Sūfi and a theologian, and not a person preoccupied with problems of a particular historical period."[589] On the contrary, this study contends that no philosophy or theology exists in a vacuum devoid of historical circumstance, and the whole of a theologian's world-view ought to be taken into consideration. Much of Sirhindī's harsh language for Akbar is due to his attitude of *ṣulḥ-i kull* toward non-muslims, and his refusal to implement every stricture of the sharī'ah in state policy.[590] Regarding the poll-tax on non-Muslims that Akbar abolished, he writes to Shaykh Farid that:

> The real purpose in levying jizya on them (the non-Muslims) is to humiliate them to such an extent that, on account of the fear of jizya, they may not be able to dress well and to live in grandeur. They should constantly remain terrified and trembling. It is intended to hold them under contempt and to uphold the honour and might of Islam.[591]

This appears to be an amalgamation of two ideas: first, the Qur'anic provision to: "Fight those who believe not in God and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and who follow not the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book, till they pay the *jizya* with a willing hand, being humbled"(Qur'an 9:29); and second, sartorial laws from the Pact of 'Umar, an early Muslim template placing restrictions on religious minorities within a Muslim society.

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[589] Friedmann, (1966), 103-4.

[590] 'Abbas Amanat also argues that he had a hatred of secular philosophy: "his preoccupation in his *maktūbat* with the prevailing disbelief (kufr) may also be taken as a reference not only to the hindus, Parsis, Jews and Christian missionaries in the Mughal court who stood to benefit from *ṣulḥ-i kull* doctrine, but more so to the philosophers and the atheists *(mulḥid s and zindīq s)*. even study of rational sciences, among them geometry, and study of such benign works of Persian literature as sa'dī's Gulistān and Būstān rendered harmful to true adherence to islam." in Amanat, 377

[591] Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India*, (Agra: Balkrishna Book Co, 1965), 249.

Rizvi points out a number of Sirhindī's statements that reflect an attitude of enmity

between Muslim and Hindu. Again writing to Shaykh Farid Bukhari, he writes that:

> They would, if they got an opportunity, make us abandon Islam or would kill all of us or
> would make us *kafirs* again. […t]he honour of Islam lies in insulting *kufr* and *kafirs*.
> One who respects the *kafirs*, dishonours the Muslims. To respect them does not merely
> mean honouring them and assigning them a seat of honour in any assembly, but it also
> implies keeping company with them or showing consideration to them. They should be
> kept at an arm's length like dogs.[592]

That Sirhindī became symbolic of Muslim chauvinism in South Asia is echoed in a

hagiographical account where he miraculously summons a military force to aid Muslims in

tearing down a Hindu mandir.[593] It is worth pointing out, as Harry Neele does, that Sirhindī's

"harsh stance with regard to the martial jihad and the subjugation of those who refuse to

embrace Islam is no less uncompromising than that of his Sufi spiritual predecessors al-Jilānī,

al-Ghazālī, and Ibn 'Arabī."[594] As Gregory Lipton has demonstrated, Ibn al-'Arabī himself once

admonished Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'us (r. 1211-20 c.e.), for being too

lenient toward the non-Muslims in his domain, citing the former's letter to the latter found in his

*futūhāt*.[595] Ultimately, no philosopher or theologian exists in a vacuum outside of their historical

circumstances, and just as Muslims and Hindus living side-by-side could find common

expressions of religiosity in a *wujūdī* mode of Sufism, so too was Ibn al-'Arabī moved by the

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[592] Rizvi, 248.

[593] Friedmann, 93. See also Rizvi, 311-12.

[594] Harry S. Neele, Jihad in Premodern Sufi Writings Palgrave Macmillan, NY: 2017, 68.

[595] Lipton translates the relevant portion of the letter, where Ibn al-'Arabī writes: "The calamity that Islam
and Muslims are undergoing in your realm— and few address it—is the raising of Church bells, the display
of disbelief (kufr), the proclamation of associationism (shirk), and the elimination of the stipulations
(al-shurūṭ) that were imposed by the Prince of Believers, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him,
upon the Protected People." in Gregory A. Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*, (Oxford: OUP: 2018), 55.

events of the "Reconquista" in his native Spain as Christians violently conquered Muslim territory and began a series of expulsions of both Muslims and Jews for centuries.

## Conclusion: Sirhindī's Legacy

One of Sirhindī's most controversial claims in his writings (*Maktūbat*) is his claim to have surpassed the station of Abu Bakr al-Ṣadīq. This came about as part of a spiritual experience where he describes ascending the stages of three of the first caliphs "one after the other" and came to the stage of "*maḥbūbiyah*" just below that of the Prophet.[596] Additionally, "orthodox Sunni opinion was deeply disturbed by the Mujaddid's thesis that the *ḥaqiqat-i ka'ba* ("reality of the ka'ba") was superior to the *ḥaqiqat-i Muḥammadi* (reality of the Prophet Muḥammad)."[597] These controversial views, along with his outspoken opposition to Shi'a Muslims at court, ultimately landed Sirhindī in Gwalior prison during Jahangir's reign in 1619 c.e. Sirhindī's theological claims earned him a fatwa from ulema in Mecca in 1682 who denounced his views in harsh terms. Even his self-professed title, "renewer of the second millennium" (*mujaddid-i alf-i s̱anī*), didn't catch on until over a century after his death.

Sirhindī's successor and son, Muḥammad Ma'sūm continued his fathers neo-Sufi project, petitioning Aurangzeb to reinstate the *jizya* tax and denouncing the pluralism of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. To this latter point he wrote in a letter to a Mughal official, Mirza 'Ubaid Allah Beg,

> that a group of those who have adopted the way of *ṣulḥ-i kull* and toleration of others are so good to the unbelievers, the Jews, the jogis, the brahmans, the heathens, the renegades, the Armenians, indeed to all the others except those who follow the path of

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[596] Anṣārī, 95.
[597] Rizvi Vol 2, 222

the Prophet. [...] This is indeed a strange ṣulḥ-i kull that implies hostility to the Muḥammadis and friendship with the other peoples, in flagrant violation of the Qur'an's plea for hatred and enmity against them.[598]

Like his father before him, Muḥammad Maʿsūm clung to a view of non-Muslims steeped in outright enmity, and here he paints the conciliatory policy of ṣulḥ-i kull as un-Islamic. Not only was his battle against ṣulḥ-i kull an uphill one, but his father's rejection of waḥdat al-wujūd as the highest realization came under fire in a Sufi milieu that continued to be enamored with this philosophy. Sirhindī's son was even forced to remind his audience that his father never outright rejected this doctrine, writing in question and answer format:

> Question: It is claimed that the Mujaddid refutes the principle of the *Wahdat al-Wujud* unanimously accepted by sufis. Answer: The Mujaddid states that the *Wahdat al-Wujud* is only a preliminary stage in sufic ascension and that there are many higher stages. [...] He urges that Reality should be attained by adhering to the orthodox form of Islamic monotheism and obedience to the Shariʿa."[599]

Notably, Muḥammad Maʿsūm does not push back on the statement that *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is "unanimously accepted" by Sufis, reasserting instead the *Mujaddid*'s emphasis on the particulars of Islamic law and practice over absorption in the state of the Unity of Being.

In spite of his son's attempts to improve his father's reputation, Emperor Aurangzeb banned his books in 1679, ostensibly for the radical claims made in his *Maktūbat* but equally likely, the antagonism he had shown toward Shiʿa Muslims and non-Muslims at court earned him a negative reputation as a radical at odds with the imperial program of ṣulḥ-i kull. Thomas Danhardt's study of later Mujadidi Naqshbandis reveals that the 18th century branch of the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya Mazhariyya Naʿimiyya under Mīrzā Jān-i Jānān not only

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[598] In Kinra, 167.
[599] SAA Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India,* vol 2, 219.

embraced Indic religious concepts, but permitted Hindus to join the tariqa as "People of the Book."[600] His remarkable study follows this branch of the Naqshbandi-Mujadidi order into the 18th century, revealing a level of syncretism between Hindu and Muslim religious and linguistic worlds. Given Sirhindī's attitude toward non-Muslims, it is truly surprising that:

> Descendants of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī and his renowned heir at Delhi, Mīrzā Mazhar Jān-i Jānān (d. 1780), that contacts were established with non-Muslims which eventually led to an intense spiritual collaboration and the transmission of the tariqa's teachings and methods into a Hindu environment. This occurred during the second half of the last century, i.e., at a time when the relations between the two communities began to be increasingly strained.[601]

While Sirhindī was adamant about never sharing religious instruction with non-Naqshbandis — let alone Hindus like Hirday Ram — his successor Mirza Jān-i Jānan " had no basic objection towards granting initiation (*bai'at*) to non Muslims."[602] According to Dahnhardt, Jān-i Jānān had initiates pronounce "the *kālima-i tawḥīd*, proclaiming the unicity of the metaphysical Principle and Its projection as Creator" without the second part of the *shahada* that declares Muḥammad's prophecy, and thus, "does not automatically imply a conversion to Islam as a whole and would probably not have caused any embarrassment for any spiritually inclined Hindu."[603] Bāqī Billah's son Khwaja Khurd may have been one of the first to attempt a synthesis between *wahdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, diffusing the controversy Sirhindī began. S.A.A. Rizvi explores "Khwaja Khwurd's sufism" which "was strongly rooted in the principles of the Wahdat al-Wujud," and:

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[600] Thomas Dahnhardt, *Change and Continuity in Indian Sufism A Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Branch in the Hindu Environment*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2002), 10.
[601] Dahnhardt, 5-6.
[602] Dahnhardt, 11.
[603] Dahnhardt, 11. Ftnt. 3.

he regarded both Ibn 'Arabi and 'Ala'u'd-Daula Simnānī as perfect mystics and their differences as purely superficial. He believed that the basis of the *Wahdat al-Shuhud* was some form of nisbat (mystic connection), but there the very notion of nisbat deprived the Tawhid of its essence and turned the unity into a duality. [...] He reminded followers of the *Wahdat al-Wujud* that they should promote peace and harmony among themselves. He wrote a number of short treatises to popularize the principles of the Waḥdat al-Wujūd and even wrote to Shaikh Muḥammad Ma'sum in an effort to convince him of the superiority of the *Wahdat al-Wujud*.[604]

By declaring Ibn al-'Arabī and 'Ala ad-Dawla Simnānī to have "purely superficial" differences, Khwaja Khurd is attempting to diffuse the *wujūdī-shuhūdi* debate at its historical epicenter. Later, the great Naqshbandi shaykh of the 18th century, Wali Allah Dihlawi (d. 1762 c.e.) would not only attempt to synthesize *waḥdat al-wujūd* with *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, but assert the former as "the final stage" in the mystical development of the sufi,[605] subverting Sirhindī's intervention where *waḥdat al-wujūd* was merely a stepping stone on the way to the final stage of spiritual enlightenment. Ultimately, it would be the Khalidi offshoot of the Mujadidi Naqshbandis that would spread in Ottoman lands and carry on Sirhindī's Neo-Sufi variety of Naqshbandism. In South Asia at least, *waḥdat al-wujūd* would remain ascendant among Sufis, albeit not without criticisms from within, and certainly, outside of Sufism.

This study has operated on the assumption that is impossible to completely separate the philosophy from the philosopher's historical circumstances, and, in the case of Aḥmad Sirhindī, his rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd* reflects an increasing push for confessionalization and the "crystallization" of religious boundaries found in 17th century Mughal India. It is clear what Sirhindī was responding to: a remarkable confluence of Indic religious thought and Islam forging new religious pathways like those of Kabir and Guru Nanak that mobilize mystical monism

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[604] S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India,* Vol 2, 251.

[605] Rizvi, 257.

toward shattering clearly delineated boundaries between the two religions. It is easy to see the political expediency that mystical monism offered for the Indo-Timurid dynasty where a non-Muslim majority was a fact of reality and recourse to the *wujūdī* tradition could proffer religious support for the political ethos of "Peace for All" (*ṣulḥ-i kull*). Sirhindī's disgust with a Mughal court that employed Hindus and his rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, far from being unrelated, are both expressions of his religious worldview and speak to a refutation of the axiom of mystical monism that two religions can flow from the same fountain of Truth.

## Chapter 6: Dārā Shikūh's (d. 1659) Religious Pluralism and Mystical Monism

Exploring Dārā's work confirms his pluralist vision with the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* at the center.[606] Although other works will be touched upon, this study will explore the "Truth-revealing Treatise" (*Risāla-yi ḥaqq Numā*) as the treatise with the express purpose of explicating the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and his "Merging of the Two Seas"(*Majma' al-Baḥrayn*). Like several other Sufi works of the early modern period, this work attempts a didactic explanation of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[607] After reviewing even Dārā's most controversial

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[606] Dārā Shikoh agreed with the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and even goes as far as to explicitly acknowledge his debt to Ibn al-'Arabī's work in a Persian *ruba'ī* in his *Risāla-yi ḥaqqnuma*. "If thou dost not know in detail the essence of the Law (Shara) thou must not however look on counterfeit coins as true, for know this one truth :—He is one and throughout both worlds everything is He, nothing is separate from Him. This is the truth taught in Fatuhat and Fasus" in Dārā Shikoh, *The Compass of Truth, or Risāla-i ḥaq-numa* trans. Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, 4. The Author includes the original Persian "quatrain" in full: *tō baṬin-e shar' gar-nedānī bekhosōs / ve rahm nekonī naẓr-e tō bar naqhd-e nosōs / yek dān ō medān-e tō ghayr-e ou dar dō jehān / īnast haghighat-e fotōhāt ō fosōs.* Not only is the "Truth of the *Futūhāt* and the *Fuṣūṣ*" — Ibn 'Arabī's two best-known works being alluded to here, but the end of the first bayt nods toward Jāmī's classic commentary on the Fuṣūṣ: the *Naqd al-Nusus*.

[607] Dārā spells out the purpose of his letter: "I tell thee the secret of monism, perchance thou mightst understand it aright, 0 friend ! There exists nowhere anything else but God. All that thou seest and thinkest as other than God, they are verily in their essence one with God, though separate in name" (*tawḥīd*

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"universalist" works, one must inevitably conclude, as Supriya Gandhi does, that "Dārā never renounced Islam," rather, his "universalist position allowed him to embrace ideas from other traditions while remaining a Muslim."[608] This chapter will first establish Dārā's brand of mystical monism and then explore his views on non-Muslims in his writings and in historical record. Although the monist philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* doesn't necessarily entail religious pluralism, Dārā Shikūh's works and his relationships with several non-Muslims both reveal that he is a remarkable case study for the employment of mystical monism in the service of a pluralist religious outlook.

## Dārā's Religious Belonging

Dārā's own spiritual journey can be glimpsed through his works. He begins as a Qadiri disciple penning the "Ship of the Saints"(*Safīnat al-Awliyā*) which includes all the major Sufi orders of South Asia, not just the Qadiriyya. Later, when he writes his "Tranquility of the Saints" (*Sakīnat al-Awliyā*), Dārā is situating himself as a Qadiri shaykh and devotes a substantial portion of the work to the saint to whom he attributes his own spiritual instruction, Mīān Mīr, who he refers to respectfully as Mīān Jīu.[609] Finally, in his *Risāla-yi Ḥaqq Numā* and especially his *Majma' al-Baḥrayn* Dārā's religious project expands beyond the boundaries of Islam into what might be considered a universalist project or at least a Hindu-Muslim synthesis. This is not

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*begūyam az bofahmī yārā / mowjūd nabūd hīch geh* [*sic*] *gheyr khodā / ānhā keh tō mī bīnī ve mīdānī gheyr / dar ẕat hameh yeksīst ve dar nām jedā.*)   Dārā Shikoh "The Compass of Truth" Trans. Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, 24.

[608] Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was,* (Harvard University Press, Belknap: 2020), 8.

[609] Even though he was initiated into the Naqshbandiyya first, Dārā identifies with the Qadiriyya order as is apparent in his pen-name (*takhalluṣ*) "Qādirī."

to say that Dārā ever leaves Qadiri Sufism or Islam; although the polemics against him would state otherwise, his works remain grounded in Islamic scripture.

By Dārā's own account, he was drawn to Mian Mīr from an early age. His first formative experience with Sufism took place when his father, Shah Jahan, brought a young Dārā to visit the great Lahori pir who was rather uncouthly chewing and spitting out cloves during the royal visit. In what may be seen as a gesture of humility before the shaykh — and also as an indication of the power saintly bodies were believed to hold — Dārā placed these scraps in his own mouth which instilled "a sense of detachment from worldly matters and a knowledge of his intense belonging to Miyan Mīr's community."[610] Dārā's formal discipleship in the Qadiri order was under the tutelage of the controversial student of Mian Mīr, Mulla Shah Badakhshī when he and his sister Jahanara went to Kashmir in 1640. After being refused several times by Mulla Shah and after doing obeisance in the form of prostration normally reserved for the emperor among other gestures of humility, Dārā was finally taken as a disciple of Mulla Shah.[611] Mulla Shah offered Dārā a path of spiritual exercise that would not "necessitate abandoning the world," which the young prince excelled so rapidly at that Mulla Shah began placing him as a guide to other Qadiri seekers.[612] Mulla Shah would even compose panegyrics of praise to Dārā, declaring "Our Dārā Shikūh has become the heart's Lord of the Conjunction" a play on an astrological term denoting his dynastic ancestor Timur's divine kingship as the Lord of the Conjunction.[613]

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[610] Gandhi, 89. See also Sakinat, ##
[611] Gandhi, 107-8.
[612] Gandhi, 114-15.
[613] Gandhi 114. See also Sakinat, 180.

In his "Tranquility of the Saints" (*Sakinat al-Awliyā*) Dārā describes himself as a Qadiri and a Hanafi,[614] denoting his belonging to Qadiri Sufism and the same Hanafi school of jurisprudence that the Mughal Empire held as standard. Although Dārā belonged to the Qadiriyya Sufi order of his Pir and Pir's Pir, Mullah Shah and Mian Mīr respectively, he did not limit his interest to this order alone even though he belonged to it. S.A.A. Rizvi writes:

> The interest of Miyan-Mīr and other Qadiriyya pīrs in Prince Dārā-Shikūh increasingly stimulated his interest in sufism. Gradually he came to have an obsessive belief that the five main sufi orders in India (the Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya, Chishtiyya Kubrawiyya and Suhrawardiyya) were the pivot on which all worldly and spiritual matters depended. Accepting the impossibility of a Muslim attaining his spiritual goal in this world and final salvation without the assistance of these orders, Dārā Shikūh argued that Muslims should not remain outside their influence. His own well-being he attributed to the Qadiriyya.[615]

Dārā's first *tazkīra,* the *Safinat al-Awliyā*, is divided into sections covering each of these orders, although Supriya Gandhi is right to note that he "entirely leaves out the more somber Naqshbandis"[616] like Aḥmad Sirhindī (d.1624 c.e.) though he includes his master, Bāqī Billah.[617] In the end of his treatise on mystical exercise, the "Compass of Truth," *Risāla-i ḥaqq Numā,* Dārā concludes by telling the reader in a ruba'ī that his treatise is "verily a revelation from the Almighty (*al-Qādir*) and do not think it to be a sectarian work of the Qādiriyya sect" (*hast az Qādir madān az qādirī*).[618] In the very beginning of his Divan of poetry — called the "Great

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[614] Gandhi, 105.

[615] Rizvi, Vol 2., 119.

[616] Gandhi, 105.

[617] Bāqī Billah receives a very brief entry, *Safinat*, 85. It is quite possible that Dārā omits Sirhindī because of his well-known opposition to mystical monism and *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Although it is also possible that this omission is due to Sirhindī's controversial status — having been imprisoned by Jahangir for his "ecstatic utterances" (shaṭḥāt) — Dārā's own ecstatic utterances and his collected volume of such sayings in his made by Sufis, *Ḥasanāt al-'ārifīn*, suggest controversy was not a cause for omission.

[618] Dārā Shikūh, *The Compass of Truth: Risāla-i ḥaqq Numā*, trans. Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, (Allahabad: The Panini Office: 1912), 28.

Elixir" (*Iksīr-i Aʻzam*) — Dārā praises his Qadiri shaykh and his shaykh's shaykh, Mullah Shah and Mian Mīr respectively, and humbly declares that he is a mere "dog" at the "doorstep" of ʻAbd al-Qadir al-Jilānī, while also praising Bahāʼ al-Dīn Naqshbandī as the "pole of the world (*quṭb-i dunyā*).[619]

The center of Dārā's axis was a Sufi inflection of Islam, but he was deeply interested in learning from holy men and sacred texts of other religions, especially those belonging to those he called "monotheists of India" (*muwaḥḥidān-i hind*). A remarkable number of Indic texts were translated into Persian by scholars of the Mughal Empire from the time of Akbar's reign in the late 16th century and throughout the 17th, and Dārā "himself supervised the Persian translation of fifty of the most important Indian scriptures" including his Persian translation of the *Upaniṣads*, the "Greatest Secret" (*Sirr-i Akbar*).[620] In the realm of Yogic thought, one of the most prevalent texts, known as the "Pool of Nectar" (*Amritakunda*), was "circulated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu versions from the seventeenth century onwards, in Persia, Turkey, and North Africa as well as in India" as the "Water of Life" (*Baḥr al-Hayāt*).[621]

Translations of Hindu epics like the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita were undertaken at Akbar's court, many of which were conducted by Abu'l Faẓl. Sufis like ʻAbd al-Raḥman Chishti also translated the Bhagavad Gita, giving it the mystically profound title, "The Mīrror of Verities" (*Mīrʻāt al-ḥaqāʼiq*).[622] First translated into Persian by Abu'l Faẓl, the mystical

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[619] Dārā Shikūh, Divān Dārā Shikūh (Iksīr-i Aʻzam), Ed. Aḥmad Nabi Khan, (University of the Punjab, Lahore:1969), 44.

[620] Carl Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages," *Iranian Studies,* Vol 36(2) 2003, 185.

[621] Carl Ernst, Refractions of Islam in India, (Sage; Yodapress: 2016), 424.

[622] Carl Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages," 184.

dialogue known as the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* would again be translated by the traveling Persian scholar Mīr Finderiski, before Dārā offered his own translation. Carl Ernst has convincingly argued that translations like these did not display an effort to categorize these texts into anything like the modern category of "Hinduism."[623] Perhaps this is why rather than as a curiosity or for polemical purposes, the act of translating Indic texts to Persian often went hand-in-hand with the effort to render their concepts legible within Islamic mysticism, in many cases not distinguishing between Islam and the religious truths contained within these texts. As will be explored in Dārā's translations below, the Mughal prince was remarkable at synthesizing Indic and Islamic texts through the idiom of mystical monism.

### Dārā's Political Philosophy

Dārā's attitude toward non-Muslims reflects the Persianate ideal of governance articulated in Nasir al-Dīn Tusi's (d. 1274 c.e.) influential *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī* which influenced Abu'l Fazl in Akbar's court and held that the ideal city "composed of men of different sects and social groups" would be led by a "philosopher king" who will push his subjects to "reach potential wisdom by the use of their mental powers."[624] Muzaffar Alam states that the "Nasirean *akhlāq* literature recommends that men be evaluated and treated on the strength and level of their natural goodness or maladies (*khair-o-sharr-i tabī*)," and holds that the basic rights for the

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[623] "although many Muslims over the centuries engaged in detailed study of particular aspects of Indian culture, which may appear in a modern perspective as religious, there was for the most part no compelling interest among Muslims in constructing a concept of a single Indian religion, which would correspond to the modern concept of Hinduism" Ernst,173.

[624] Muzaffar Alam, "Shari'a and Governance in the Indo-Islamic Context," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*. Ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (University Press of Florida: 2000), 228.

"*ri'aya* do not follow from their religions; Muslims and kafirs both enjoy the Divine compassion (*raḥmat-i ḥaqq*)."[625] In contrast to the sharī'a-minded Sufism of Aḥmad Sirhindī's mature writings, Dārā was drawn to a more ecstatic expression of Sufism. S.A.A. Rizvi translates a few couplets from Dārā's *Diwan* that display a counter-cultural Sufi trope of criticizing the "Mullas," that is to say, the 'ulema concerned only with the "externals" (*ẓāhir*) of Islam; Dārā writes: "Paradise is only at a place where no Mulla lives, / Where no uproar and clamour from a Mulla is heard. / May the world rid itself of the terror of a Mulla. / May no-one pay heed to his fatwas. / In a city where a Mulla dwells, / No wise man is ever found."[626] Likewise, when some strict ulema came forward with a fatwa to encourage Shah Jahan to execute Mullah Shah for his ecstatic verses, Dārā Shikūh intervened on his behalf and convinced his father to "put a hold on the decree" in light of his discipleship to Mian Mīr.[627]

Dārā had to make sense of his status as both a worldly prince and a seeker on the Sufi spiritual path. In order to do so, Dārā cites a famous Sufi of Lahore, the Persian 'Ali Hujwīrī (d. 1072 c.e.) who writes in his *kashf al-mahjūb*: "He who holds poverty to be superior, does not become worldly by virtue of his wealth, even if it is proprietary. He who rejects poverty is worldly, even if he is in distressed means. [...] He who is named by God 'faqir,' is poor though he may be wealthy. He is doomed who thinks he is not a prisoner, though his position may be a throne."[628] In citing this passage from Hujwiri's chapter on "spiritual poverty"(*faqr*), Dārā is

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[625] Muzaffar Alam, 234.

[626] Translation is from Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India,* vol 2, 145. Cf. the original in Dārā's Divan: *"Bihisht ānjā kih mulāyi na bāshad / 'z mulā baḥs va va ghūghāyi nah bāshad / jihān khālī az shūr-i mulā / 'z fatwāhāsh purvāyi nah bāshad / khodā khwāhī 'z da'vī bagozarī ay yār / tarā bāyad kih da'vāyī nah bāshad / dar ān shahrī kih mulā khānah dārad / dar ānjā hīch dānāyī nah bāshad"* Dārā Shikūh Divan, 104-5.

[627] Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 90.

[628] Gandhi, 119-120.

differentiating between literal and spiritual poverty where spiritual "poverty consists in ceasing to act on one's own initiative"[629] relinquishing one's will in favor of letting God's will be all that remains. In the same section, Hujwiri makes the point that "every man is 'poor', even though he be a prince," citing the example that "God said to Job in the extremity of his patience, and likewise to Solomon in the plenitude of his dominion: "Good servant that thou art!"[630] Like several Sufis before him, Dārā sees no contradiction between the spiritual path and having wealth.[631]

Muzaffar Alam explores multiple translations of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and identifies a number of ways in which Dārā Shikūh's translation pays particular attention to narratives and dialogues that include princes and kings. According to Alam, Dārā's desire to translate this text was likely born out of his recognition that it is "centrally concerned with the connections between royal power (to which he aspired) and spiritual truth (that he claimed to possess)."[632] At one point in a dialogue the roles of the Kṣatriya and Brahmin castes are discussed along with the ability to become a "seer"(*ṛṣi*) who has "the knowledge of past and future" where a king named Viśvāmitra wishes to become a Brahm Rsi rather than a Raj Rsi in spite of being of Kṣatriya lineage and destined for the latter. Muzaffar Alam is convinced from this section and others that, unlike his great-grandfather Akbar "who could only aspire to Kṣatriya status" Dārā

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[629] 'Ali bin 'Uthman al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub*, trans. R.A. Nicholson, (Taj: New Delhi, 1982), 25. Hujwiri also cites an Arabic aphorism on poverty, *Laysa 'l-faqīr man khalā min al-zād : innama 'l-faqīr man khalā min al-murād* which R.A. Nicholson translates as "The poor man is not he whose hand is empty of provisions, but he whose nature is empty of desires"

[630] Hujwiri, 24.

[631] 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar (d.1492 c.e.) and Baha al-Dīn Zakariyya Multani (d. 1262 c.e.) are examples, from the Naqshbandi order in Central Asia and the Suhrawardi order in Northern India respectively, of Sufi shaykhs acquiring significant land and wealth.

[632] Muzaffar Alam, "In Search of a Sacred King," History of Religions, Vol. 55, No. 4. (2016), 452.

Shikūh "sought a much higher position: a combination of the powers of a 'Raj Rsi' and a 'Brahm Rsi,'"[633] merging spiritual and worldly power.

Dārā's version of the *Yogavāsiṣṭḥạ* reflects his interest in stories of kings and contains the famous exchange between Arjuna and Krṣṇa drawn from the Mahābhārata where one's duty (*dharma*) in the face of battle is given spiritual meaning. Alam summarizes the gist of this passage and describes its significance for Dārā's own situation:

> Only the soul that is eternal and has no relation to any one person can never be killed. Death occurs only for the body, not the soul. Krṣṇa explains that since Arjuna has been born as a Ksatriya, it was hiṣ duty to act in the battlefield: "To turn your face from the battlefield is the height of cowardice." Of course, this story has deep personal resonance with Dārā's own political situation: the question of how a spiritually accomplished person, as both Arjuna was and Dārā claimed to be, could allow himself to engage in a war of succession against his own brothers haunts both Arjuna and Dārā.[634]

Alam is of course speaking of Dārā's succession battle with Aurangzeb which culminated in the former's defeat at the battle of Samugarh in 1658 that ultimately led toward the Prince's execution in 1659. Similar to Arjuna, Dārā never refused his duty to meet enemies of the Mughal Empire or even his own brother on the battlefield, but he could draw lessons from the life of the Prophet as well who faced his own relatives on the battlefield before the conquest of Mecca brought the last holdouts into the religious fold. Dārā once sought advice from his pir, Mullah Shah, when heading out on campaign against the Safavids at Qandahar, and was advised with the Qur'anic verse regarding Muḥammad at the battle of Badr "You threw not, when you threw, but God threw"(Q 8:17) with the monist interpretation that these words signified "our

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[633] Muzaffar Alam, In Search of a Sacred King, 452.
[634] Alam, 456.

unity with the divine."[635] Often used in conjunction with the *hadith nawāfil* to describe the

subsumption of the believer's self in God such that His is the only agency remaining.

As Mughal princes, Dārā Shikūh and Aurangzeb are often portrayed as polar opposites

in their attitudes toward non-Muslims in the Mughal state.[636] However, Audrey Trushke has

recently pushed back against the popular readings of Aurangzeb "the bigot" bent on "destroying

Hindus and Hinduism"and Aurangzeb "the pious" as Muḥammad Iqbal labels him "an Abraham

in India's idol house."[637] The issue of Aurangzeb's temple-destruction has become hotly debated

in scholarly and political arenas since the 1992 destruction of the Baburi Masjid in Ayodhya

reignited tensions over Hindu sites destroyed or converted to mosques. To be sure, Aurangzeb

destroyed Hindu temples at Benares that supported his brother Dārā, and Richard Eaton

provides a list of temples destroyed by Indo-Muslim rulers that prominently features

Aurangzeb's name and those of his agents.[638] Eaton does note, however, that several of these

temples were destroyed for reasons that could be categorized as political.[639]

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[635] Gandhi, 117.

[636] For example, Audrey Truschke writes of Aurangzeb's crackdown on non-Muslim practices and celebrations such as Persian New Year (Nowruz), Shi'i commemorations of Muḥarram, and Hindu festivals including the mass gathering of ascetics that preceded today's Kumbh Mela. See Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2017), especially chapter 5 "Moral Man and Leader". At the conclusion of this chapter Truschke recognizes that Sirhindī's writings were ironically attacked by Aurangzeb as too radical in spite of Sirhindī's conservatism relative to other Sufi groups.

[637] Truschke, 107.

[638] Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000) 272-4.

[639] Specifically, Eaton cites the destruction of: Kuch Bihar "after local rajas there defied Mughal authority" in 1661; Visvanath temple in Benares 1669 for aiding Shivaji's escape; the Kesavadeva Temple in Mathura 1670, which had been supported by imperial grants and was therefore "considered state property" was destroyed "in the wake of a serious Jat rebellion in the region that claimed the life of the city's commandant and patron of its congregational mosque"; and  prominent temples in Rajasthan in 1679-80 —including Khandela, Udaipur, and Jodhpur—once it was established that they, too, had been associated with anti-state rebels,"

While Dārā and his father, Shah Jahan had issued commands protecting the Gujarati

Jain merchant, Santidas, one of Aurangzeb's first acts as governor of Gujarat was to desecrate

his temple dedicated to the twenty-third Jain *tīrthaṅkara* ("ford-maker").[640] On the other hand,

Truschke points out that "Aurangzeb counted thousands of Hindu temples within his domains

and yet destroyed, at most, a few dozen" going on to state that a "historically legitimate view of

Aurangzeb must explain why he protected Hindu temples more often than he demolished

them."[641] Richard Eaton explains why the destruction of Hindu temples was never purely

iconoclastic or without a thick layer of political significance.[642] Eaton also cites the example of

Sufi Shaykh, Muḥammadī (d. 1696 c.e.) who took refuge in a mosque instead going into the

exile Aurangzeb commanded as evidence that Mosques were "detached from both land and

dynastic authority and hence politically inactive" in contrast to Hindu temples which "were

considered politically active, inasmuch as the state deities they housed were understood as

expressing the shared sovereignty of king and deity over a *particular* dynastic realm."[643]

Truschke admits that it is true that — after a century of not imposing the tax — in 1679

"Aurangzeb levied the *jizya* on most non-Muslims in the empire" but contests that this was "in

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Brahmins who had sheltered the son of Shivaji. Richard Maxwell Eaton. India in the Persianate Age: 1000–1765. (UC Press: 2019), 335.

[640] Gandhi, 126-7.

[641] Truschke, 78.

[642] Eaton reasons as follows: "Had instances of temple desecration been driven by a 'theology of iconoclasm,' as some have claimed, such a theology would have committed Muslims in India to destroying all temples everywhere, including ordinary village temples, as opposed to the strategically selective operation that seems actually to have taken place. Rather, the original data associate instances of temple desecration with the annexation of newly conquered territories held by enemy kings whose domains lay in the path of moving military frontiers. Temple desecrations also occurred when Hindu patrons of prominent temples committed acts of treason or disloyalty to the Indo-Muslim states they served. Otherwise, temples lying within Indo-Muslim sovereign domains, viewed normally as protected state property, were left unmolested." in Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," 269.

[643] Eaton, 267.

lieu of military service (Rajput and Maratha state officials and Brahmin religious leaders were exempt, but lay Jains, Sikhs, and other non-Muslims were obliged to pay)."[644]

Both temple destruction and financial support for Hindu and Jain temples represent the ambivalence of Mughal rulers with no one ruler holding the monopoly on either their support or their destruction. Shah Jahan supported temples from the imperial coffers and yet acted on a fatwa that cited the Pact of 'Umar against constructing new non-Muslim religious buildings to sanction the destruction of "seventy-six unfinished temples" in Benares.[645] It would be entirely speculative to conclude that Dārā would never have destroyed or converted Hindu temples had he become emperor, but the study below will examine his close relationships with non-Muslims and his mystically monist attitude since both express a remarkably universalist religious worldview quite unlike that of his brother.

## Dārā Shikūh and Mystical Monism

Dārā Shikūh's religious outlook was influenced by his pir Mulla Shah, and his pir's pir, Mian Mīr. Although Dārā credits Mian Mīr with saving his life as a child, and with two visionary meetings wherein the latter instructed the former in divine secrets, Mian Mīr was tight-lipped when it came to discussing *waḥdat al-wujūd*, especially with the public. Nonetheless, Mian Mīr's circle attracted several Sufis passionate about *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the dissemination of this doctrine. A certain Shaykh Aḥmad of Delhi, who took Mian Mīr as his pir, is said to have "acquired an impressive knowledge of Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and the *Futūhāt*

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[644] Truschke, 70.
[645] Gandhi, 73.

*al-makkiyya*" and also "managed to lecture on the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Futūḥāt*, and instructed Dārā

Shikūh on a portion of the *Fuṣūṣ*."[646] It was also under Muḥib Allah Allahabadī (d. 1648 c.e.)

that Dārā received instruction in Akbari thought as Mohd. Javed Anṣārī has demonstrated in his

doctoral dissertation that Allahabadī was known for his "coherent and systematic exposition of

the intricate ideas of *waḥdat al-wujūd* won for him the appellation of Ibn-i-Arabi Thāni (the

second Ibn-i Arabi),"[647] and "the Ibn-i 'Arabī of Hind."[648] Dārā Shikūh began a

correspondence with Muḥib Allah during his appointment as governor of Allahabad.[649] Their

correspondence not only reflects an interest in *waḥdat al-wujūd*,[650] but also in the question of

non-Muslims as Muḥib Allah instructs Dārā that the pre-Islamic prophets were indeed

monotheists — followers of "*Tawḥīd*" —since their "*ayn* (essence) perceived the self

manifestation of the Absolute."[651] In his *Risala*, Dārā condenses the whole teaching of Ibn

al-'Arabī to a simple formula of mystical monism, writing "If for you the inner essence of the law

is abstruse / And to really criticize Sufi texts you're far too obtuse / Know the One and no other

in this world and the next / This is the truth taught in the *Futūḥāt* and the *Fuṣūṣ*."[652]

Dārā also received instruction in *wujūdī* thought from the man who he took as his Pir,

Mullah Shah Badakhshanī. In Dārā's anthology of "ecstatic utterances" (*shaṭḥāt*) made by

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[646] S.A.A. Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol 2, 112.

[647] Mohd. Javed Anṣārī, Sufi Thought of Muḥibbullah Allahabadi, Ph.D. Thesis, Aligarh 2006), 7.

[648] Perwaiz Hayat, 34.

[649] Anṣārī, 27-8.

[650] For example, Dārā Shikūh asks how to perform *namāz bī khatra* or how to pray [u]ndisturbed from external thoughts" and is instructed that this is done by the "Sufi's love for Allah" uproots all hope and fear such that the "exoteric and esoteric eyes become so engrossed in enjoining the sight of the waves of the *waḥdat*"(Unity) and that "thoughts on the *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being) should be free from anxieties relating to the waves of the creation." in Anṣārī, 31.

[651] Anṣārī, 30.

[652] Gandhi, 133.

Sufis, known as the *Ḥasanāt al-'ārifīn*, he records his pir's ecstatic sayings and inspired verses, several of which express an extreme mystical monism.[653] His epithet, "Tongue of Allah"(*Lisān Allah*) reflects the high regard his followers had for his sayings.[654] Dārā writes about Mian Mīr in glowing and reverential terms and devotes a massive portion of his *Sakinat al-Awliya'* to the life and miracles of his Pir's Pir. However, because of Mian Mīr's reluctance to articulate ecstatic experiences of God's oneness publicly, Dārā's *Ḥasanāt al-'ārifīn*, "beautiful (sayings) of the Gnostics", on the other hand, relates only a few expressions from Mian Mīr, while Mulla Shah's ecstatic sayings are numerous. Dārā even relates a "couple of verses from Miyān Mīr" on "speaking of oneness"(*sukhan-i waḥdat*) to the public (*'āmmī*); Miyān Mīr says "*za ān chīh khîzad bi ghayr-i badnāmī* (what came out of that, except [a] bad name?)," recognizing that Manṣūr and Ibn al-'Arabī had been subject to scorn for relating mystical monism to the public.[655]

In a letter to Dārā Shikūh's sister Jahanara (d. 1681 c.e.), "which was also intended for the Prince," Mulla Shah gives an explanation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* with respect to Sharī'a and ecstatic utterances that seems to have had an effect on Dārā's spiritual worldview:

> The ocean which is all-embracing is not affected by the loss of a single drop of water. In the same way the universe is constituted of earth, heaven, God's throne and footstool, as well as millions of other objects between the heavens and earth. [...] In relation to the limitless and unbounded *Wujud* (Being) and to the inconceivable Lord [...] Reality transcends all. The ignorant discuss the question of *Wujud* with the sufi saints only because of their obscurantism, for they have not cast their glance on the Infinite and

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[653] Dārā Shikūh, *Ḥasanāt al-'ārifīn,* ed. Makhdūm Rahīn, (Tehran: Weissman Institute for Research and Publishing, 1352/1973), 64-67.
[654] Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol 2, 115. This title is also perhaps playing on the Hadith Nawafil famous among Sufis which describes God becoming the "tongue" (*Lisān*) with which the worshiper speaks.
[655] Perwaiz Hayat, *Dārā Shikoh and Wilayat,* MA Thesis, McGill: 1987, 74. C.f. Dārā Shikūh, *Sakinat al-Awliya,'* 40-1..

unknowable Being and are unaware of the fact that whatever sufis say is reinforced by the *Shariʿa*. The *Shariʿa* of which the critics boast, they themselves don't understand. They are thoughtless and deny their own God. They fail to realize that *the highest aspect of the Shariʿa is dependent on the acquisition of knowledge of the Unity of Being* and the sight of Allah. Only the noblest of the spiritualists know about the Infinite who created the prophets and the saints. It may be noted that eminent spiritualists do have in mind that aspect of the *Shariʿa* which is known as the *Haqiqa*. It is rightly said that the *Shariʿa*, *Tariqa* and *ḥaqiqa* are also the stages of the *Shariʿa*. Externalists concern themselves only with the first aspect of spiritual development; sufis confine themselves to the stage of the *Tariqa*. The perfect among mystics seek to achieve the ḥaqiqa, identified with the final goal. Only those who perceive the true significance of the Absolute (divested of His attributes) reach their final goal. The attainment of this final stage prompted Bayazid, Hallaj, Shaikh Junaid and Shaikh ʿAbduʾl-Qadir to make *ecstatic utterances identifying themselves with Reality*. To these great proteges who annihilated their own 'selves' into the unknowable Infinite and Absolute and identified themselves with the Absolute Being, whatever God had taught was meant to be understood and not merely talked about. This fact was to be spiritually realized, not only discussed. As not every one could understand the truth of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, eminent sufis did not initiate every layman into a system of devotional exercises. Discussions relating to the status of believer and unbeliever should be the prerogative of the ignorant. You (Jahan-Ara and Dārā-Shikūh) should know your own selves and your own statuses. Your paradise is the Divine Essence and your hell is separation from Him. Your paradise is eternal and will never be lost.[656]

Most strikingly, Mullah Shah is describing the Unity of Being as "the highest aspect of the *Sharīʿah*," at the level of *ḥaqīqah*.[657] As someone at risk of being persecuted for his ecstatic sayings, Mullah Shah also situates himself among other Sufis who "annihilated their own 'selves' into the unknowable Infinite and Absolute and identified themselves with the Absolute Being."[658] Finally, it is also of interest that Mullah Shah redefines Paradise and Hell in terms of proximity to or distance from God rather than through prayer, fasting, or adherence to the letter of the Law.

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[656] S.A.A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India, Vol. 2, 117-118. Italics mine.
[657] Here Mullah Shah is playing on a common Sufi hierarchy of Shariʾah, Tariqa, ḥaqiqah where the Sufi's aim is to travel through these levels to arrive at ḥaqiqah (Truth).
[658] Rizvi, 118.

It is perhaps this elevation of ecstatic experience that leads him to say "the state of [spiritual] intoxication is higher than prayer"(*sukr ḥālatī bolandtar ast az namāz gozārdan*).[659] During one such state of intoxication, Mulla Shah declared "I am hand in hand with God / Why should I care about Mustafa?"[660] On the surface, this utterance is immediately controversial for downplaying the role of the Prophet Muḥammad, but could also be interpreted esoterically as an expression of a state of union with God that knows none other than Him in that mystical moment.

Not unlike his prose work, Dārā's Divān — also known as the "Great Elixir" (*Iksīr-i a'ẓam*) — is full of the language of *wujūdī* sufism as he frequently employs the terms of mystical monist Sufism like Absolute Existence (*wujūd muṭlaq*) or Absolute Truth (*ḥaqq muṭlaq*) and its manifestation (*ẓāhir, tajalli*) into all that exists. He describes the only True Existence as God's: "Whatever thou beholdest except Him, / is the object of thy fancy; / Things other than He / have their existence like a mirage."[661] In his poetry, Dārā also expressed his mystical monism in the Persian tradition of *All is He* (*Hama Ūst*), one couplet that captures the Quranic verse "wherever you turn, there is the face of God"(Q 2:115) writing: "Everywhere you look, All is He / the face of God, face-to-face, is self-evident."[662] His first ghazal starts with the beginning of Sufi cosmogony as described in the Hadith Qudsi of the Hidden Treasure: "every existent is in our existence is a manifestation of the Hidden Treasure."[663] The distinction between

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[659] Shikūh, Ḥasanāt al-'ārifīn, 64.

[660] Gandhi, 90.

[661] Cited in Perwaiz Hayat, 34.

[662] "*Har sū kih naẓr kunī hamah ūst / vajh Allah 'iyānast rū birū rā.*" Dārā Shikūh, *Divan Dārā Shikūh (Iksīr-i A'zam)*, Ed. Aḥmad Nabi Khan, (University of the Punjab, Lahore:1969), 46. Perwaiz Hayat translates the passage similarly: "Look where you can, All is He: / God's face is ever face to face." Perwaiz Hayat, 34.

[663] "*hamah mavjūd dar vujūd-i mā / ganj makhfī ast in namūd-i mā.*" Shikūh, Divan, 51.

Creator and creature becomes so blurred in Oneness that the final *bayt* ending this *ghazal* sees Dārā use his penname, Qādirī, to declare: "there's no difference between Qādirī and al-Qādir" using one of God's names.[664] Additionally, Dārā draws on another Persian poetic tradition, and using his pen name (*takhallus*) "Qādirī [Dārā] saw You in everything until / *Sulḥ-i Kull* ("peace for all") was made to pass from rebellion (*'enād*).[665] Here Dārā marries the Unity of Being with the politico-ethical program that opposes factionalism and religious particularism in favor of *Sulḥ-i Kull* (peace for all).

Dārā Shikūh's "Compass of Truth" (*Risāla-yi ḥaqq numa*), written in 1056 h. / 1647 c.e., is arguably his work that has the most exposition on the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, although it is ultimately a meditative handbook. Rizvi explains that Dārā "seems to have plunged himself even more deeply into the study of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*" after completing the *Sakinat al-Awliyā',* and lists the sources going into his *Risāla*, including several of the greatest Akbari works of prose and poetry: "the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* and the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* by Ibn 'Arabī, the *Lama'at* of Fakhru'd-Din 'Iraqi and the *Lawami '* and the *Lawa'ih* of Nuru'-Din 'Abdu'r-Raḥman Jāmī."[666] His preamble wastes little time after the *Bismillah* in applying the language of this school of thought: "praise be to that Essence who is the Absolute Existence"(*hamd ẕatī rā kih Ūst mawjūd-i muṭlaq*).[667]

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[664] Shikūh, 51.

[665] Dārā Shikūh, *Divan of Dārā Shikoh*, ed. Aḥmad Nabi Khan, (Lahore: Research society of Pakistan, 1969), 72. Emphasis mine.

[666] S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol 2, 134. Dārā mentions that his treatise "is an abstract of those books called *Fatuhat, Fasus, Swaneh, Lawyeh and Lamat*" Dārā Shikūh, *The Compass of Truth: Risāla-i Ḥaqq Numā*, trans. Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu, (Allahabad: The Panini Office: 1912), 4.

[667] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 1. See also Seyyid Muḥammad Rezā Jalāli Naīnī ed., *Muntakhabāt āsār: Risāla—i ḥaqq Numā,* (1335), 1.

In the Risala's fifth chapter "on the identity of the Lord of Lords" (*dar bayān hūwiyat-i rab al-arbāb*), Dārā begins with a meditation on All is He (hama ust) as a necessary realization of the "truth of Oneness and the manifestation of God's Essence" (*ḥaqiqat-i tawḥīd va tajjalī ẕātī*), supporting this with a Qur'anic verse "He is in your souls but you see Him not"(*wa fī anfusikum aflā tabṣirūn*)[Q 51:21].[668] Dārā employs the metaphor of water to illustrate that unity and plurality are a matter of perspective:

> My friend, when the ocean of reality begins to move, waves and bubbles appear on its surface. These waves and bubbles constitute the earth and the heavens. But they cannot be separated from the ocean. Therefore, although everything has a separate name and form, in essence everything is all one.[669]

Just as waves and bubbles are parts of a whole, the ocean, all the myriad forms in existence and the names one gives them are in actuality part of the same essential whole. He follows this immediately with a ruba'ī: "I speak of Oneness that you may understand / nothing exists but God / all else that you see and know / is One in essence though separate in name."[670] Dārā's sixth and final chapter, in explanation of *waḥdat al-wujūd,*[671] uses the analogy of water in a quatrain, writing: "The essence of the Supreme Self is like an ocean and all souls and objects are

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[668] Shikūh, Risala, 23 and Naīnī, 16.

[669] See Shikūh Risala, 23-4 and Naīnī, 17.

[670] *Tavḥīd bagūyam az bafahmī bādā / mavjūd nabūd hīchgah ghayr khudā / ānhā kih tū mī bīnī va mī dānī ghayr / dar ẕāt hamah yak ast va dar nām jadā.* Naīnī 17. C.f. Chandra Vasu's flowery translation, "I tell thee the secret of monism, perchance thou mightst understand it aright, O friend! There exists nowhere anything else but God. All that thou seest and thinkest as other than God, they are verily in their essence one with God, though separate in name." Shikūh *Risala* 24. Although a trivial difference, Chandra Vasu's version has *yārā*, "friend," rather than Na'ini's *bādā* which Hayyim equates to *bāshad*, Hayyim *New Persian-English Dictionary*, Vol. 1, 194.

[671] Seyyid Muḥammad Reẓā Jalāli Na'īnī ed., Muntakhabāt āsār: Risāla—i ḥaqq Numā, (1335), 17-20.

like forms in water. It is an ocean that heaves and stirs in waves within itself; for sometimes it is a drop, sometimes a wave and sometimes it is a bubble."[672]

Dārā switches between prose and poetry to describe his method of meditation wherein one ought "in spite of all limitations, to consider himself as the very absolute and the true and only existence [...]thus to extirpate from its very root the tree of duality[, ...] and to see everything as one essence, and to realise the joy of self in the Self."[673] To this effect he returns to the idiom of a drop of water in the ocean, this time as a parallel for the "creature" — literally the servant (*bandih*) — and God: "A drop is a drop, so long as it does not realize that it is one with the ocean, but thinks himself separate from it. The creature is a creature, so long as he does not know himself to be the Creator"(*qatrah qatrah-ast tā bih pandārad kih az daryā jadāst; bandih bandih khwīshtan rā tā na mīdānad khodāst*).[674] Not only does Dārā divide several of his chapters according to the Akbari "presences,"[675] but he even mentions two great works of Ibn al-'Arabī, the *Futūḥāt and the Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, by name, going as far as to compose a quatrain were he says "He is one and throughout both worlds everything is He, nothing is

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[672] Shikūh, *Risāla-i ḥaqq Numā*, 24, see also Naīnī, 17
[673] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 26.
[674] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 26.
[675] Among the "presences" (Ar. *ḥaḍrāt*) Dārā includes in his chapters: the human, material realm (*nasūt*); the symbolic and imaginal (*jabrūt*); the angelic (*malkūt*); and divine (*lāhūt*) realms. Rizvi breaks down Dārā's use of the different presences along the path of spiritual wayfaring: "Dārā-Shikūh described the 'ālam-i nasūt (physical world) variously called by sufis the world of sensorial existence, the world of material forms, of fantasy and of consciousness. The seeker of ḥaqq (Reality) could in fact gain the highest perception of Being and God's perfection while still in this sphere. [...] This spiritual state led into the 'alam-i misal (world of images) which in turn directed one to the 'alam-i malakut (angelic kingdom), the world of spirits, of invisible realities and of mystery. Naturally the 'alam-i nasut was perishable, and although the 'alam-i malakut resembled it in form, it itself was eternal. Dārā-Shikūh exhorted the seeker of the mystic path to abandon the 'alam-i nasut and to control both the 'alam-i misal and the 'alam-i malakut. Then further efforts should be made to illuminate and purify the heart through the devotional and meditational exercises devised by the Qadiriyya pirs"(Rizvi Vol 2 135-6).

separate from Him. / This is the truth taught in the Fatuhat and Fasus."[676] Ultimately, in his

*Risāla,* Dārā writes that gnosis (*'irfān*) is "nothing more than" that "thou shalt know thyself, and

realise that thou art verily That, and everything is That."[677] Here, Dārā echoes the Delphic

maxim said to be inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, "know thyself" though it could

easily be based on a popular aphorism among Sufis often attributed to the Prophet that "he who

knows his self, knows his Lord"(Ar. *man 'arafa nafsah 'arafa rabbah*).[678] More striking, in

the phrase above Dārā is marrying the "great declaration"(skt. *mahāvākya*) from the

Chandogya Upanishad "Thou art That" — a pithy phrase to indicate union between

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[676] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 4.

[677] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla* 24, and Naīnī, 18, where the Persian is "*pas 'irfān ziyādih barīn nīst kih khud rā bishinākhtī valā tū khūd 'ayn-i Ū būd va hama Ūst*. The next line, Dārā concludes "and it is impossible that there should exist anything which is not He (*va mahāl ast ghayr-i Ū mawjūd bāshad*).

[678] Dom Sylvester Houédard notes that Ibn al-'Arabī uses variants of this phrase several times in his *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, and traces the phrase in the Abrahamic traditiona as far back as Clement of Alexandria who wrote: "The most beautiful learning and the greatest is to know yourself, for whoever knows himself knows God and whoever knows God becomes like Him." Dom Sylvester Houédard, "Notes on the More Than Human Saying: 'Unless you know yourself you cannot know God'" *Newsletter of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, (Summer, 1990), <https://ibnarabisociety.org/notes-on-unless-you-know-yourself-dom-sylvester-houedard/> . Last Accessed 9 October, 2023.

"self"(Atman) and "Supreme Being" (Brahman)[679] — and the phrase of Persian monistic
Sufism: "All is He"(*Hama Ūst*).[680]

## Dārā Shikūh's Religious Project

It is clear that Dārā was interested in holy men and philosophers of many sects and
religions, much like his grandfather Akbar who arranged inter-religious discussions in his
*'Ibādatkhānah*. Dārā was interested in the other Abrahamic faiths; François Bernier "reports
that the prince sought out a Flemish Jesuit, Father Henri Busée, also known as Henricus
Busaeus, for dialogue about religious matters,"[681] and he studied the Hebrew Bible from

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[679] The relevant text of the Chandogya Upanishad has a knowledgeable sage instructing his Brahmin son:
"That which is this subtle One, which all this has for its Self, is the Real. That is the Self. That you are."
Shankara's commentary on this phrase is as follows: "That... subtle existent... is the Root of the world.... This
(world) has this Being as its Self.... This world has no other Self, such as a transmigrating self.... And that
Self by which this whole world is Self- endowed, that, called Being, is the (world's) Cause, the Real, existing
as the supreme Being. Therefore, that Self (*ātmā*) is the true nature of the world...its Reality. For when the
word ātmā appears without any qualifying term it applies directly to the inner self (the *pratyagātman*), just
as the words "cow" etc. (apply directly to the cow-reality etc. when they are not qualified further by
adjectivals such as "white," "broken- horned" etc.). Therefore, the text means "O Svetaketu, you are that,
i.e., Being (which is the ensouling Self of the world)" cited in Julius J. Lipner, "The Self of Being and the
Being of the Self: Śamkara on 'That You Are'(*Tat Tvam Asi*)," in *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta:
Essays in Commemoration of Professor Richard De Smet*, ed. Bradley J. Malkovsky, (Leiden: Brill 2000),
55-57.
[680] Scholars have previously noted similarities between the Sufi Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 874 c.e.) and the
Upanishads which may have come to him by way of his teacher Bū 'Alī al-Sindī. Gopal Stavig compares
Bayezid's ecstatic utterances to the language in the Upanishads including"I looked into myself and lo! I was
he" which he relates to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad. Although he claims Bayazid "uttered terse
statements like 'Thou art That'" which "is identical with the phrase (*Tat tvam asi*)," he fails to cite where
Bisṭāmī is recorded saying this. Gopal Stavig "Congruencies between Indian and Islamic Philosophy,"
Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 81, No. 1/4 (2000), 224-225. Tara Chand reckons
that both Tat tvam asi and "I am Brahma (Aham Brahmāsmi)" are "exactly equivalent to the Sufistic
aphorism:" *Ana al-Haqq* "(I am the Reality)" uttered by Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922 c.e.). Dara Shikūh, *Sirr-i
Akbar (Sirr ul-Asrar) the Oldest Translation of the Upanishads from Sanskrit into Persian*, ed. Tara Chand
and S. M. Reza Jalali Naini, (Tehran: Taban, 1957), 37.
[681] Gandhi, 182.

Sarmad whose disciple produced a Persian translation.[682] Dārā was of course building on figures like Akbar's court historian Abu al-Faḍl who translated the Bible and the *Mahābhārata* into the courtly language of Persian, and Sufis like Muḥammad Ghawth Gwaliorī who took an interest in translating Yogic texts.[683] Although most famous for commissioning and overseeing a translation of the Upanishads, Dārā fostered the translation of several other works. One work Dārā commissioned is the *Jōg Bāshist* — translated as the *Minhāj al-Sālikīn* ("syllabus of the spiritual wayfarers") — and Perwaiz Hayat explains that this work was:

> [c]onsidered an important work on Hindu gnostic philosophy, the Sanskrit original had already been translated during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar; however, Dārā felt that the previous translation was inadequate and therefore commissioned a new translation under his supervision. The work is divided into six chapters, beginning with the idea of abandoning the world and ending with the concept of release from the cycle of re-birth. The preface to the Jōg Bāshist shows his broad-mindedness towards other religions without compromising his stand regarding his own.[684]

Hayat's interpretation of Dārā's "broad-mindedness" regarding other religions makes sense, especially when one considers the fact that Dārā doesn't distinguish certain Indic truth-seekers as outside his own religion. It is indicative of Dārā's attitude toward Indic religious thought that

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[682] On the Sirr-i Akbar Rizvi notes "Dara-Shukoh's unquenchable thirst for Tawhid (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) failed to be satisfied with available Persian translations of the Sanskrit classics. He turned towards the revelatory literature of other religions, such as Christianity and Judaism. He perused the Book of Moses, the Gospels and the Psalms to find that these scriptures referred to the Tawhid allegorically and enigmatically. His study of the Qur'an convinced him that the prophets had been sent by God to India to spread Divine revelation. Rizvi Vol 2, 423. Regarding the "Book of Moses" it is likely this was among the topics Dārā broached with Sarmad during their discussions. The chapter in the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib* on Judaism as well as a Persian translation of the Torah were among the works produced by Sarmad and his disciple Abhay Chand explaining the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

[683] Carl Ernst, Refractions of Islam in India, (Sage; Yodapress: 2016), 424. One example of such a text is the "Pool of Nectar" (*Amritakunda*), which was "circulated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu versions from the seventeenth century onwards, in Persia, Turkey, and North Africa as well as in India" as the "Water of Life" (*Baḥr al-Hayāt*).

[684] Perwaiz Hayat, The Conversation between Dārā Shikūh and Lal Das, (PhD dissertation McGill: 2016), 52-3.

his translation of this text was undertaken after a dream vision (*vāqiʿ*) of the two interlocutors

who frame the text, Vasiṣṭha and Rām Chand who recognize him as a seeker of the same

wisdom.[685]

While South Asian Sufi literature describes interactions between shaykhs and Brahmins

or Yogis, this literature is often hagiographical and features the shaykh besting his Hindu

opponent in a contest and converting them to Islam.[686] Shikūh, however, belonged to a milieu of

Sufis in South Asia who sought to freely merge Indic and Islamic religious concepts.[687] Yohanan

Friedmann speculates that "Dārā Shikūh's view of the relationship between the Hindu religious

literature and the Qur'an seems to be his most significant contribution to Islamic thought," but

that this put him "beyond the pale of mediaeval Indian Islam" since the "idea that one must use

the Hindu scripture in order to attain the real meaning of the Qur'ān is hitting at the very core of

the conviction that Islam is a self-sufficient system which is in no need of ideas extraneous to

it."[688] In one of his ghazals, Dārā plays with Indic forms of religious piety, arguing poetically that

"a person is a believer who doesn't spend time in the world" (*yak kasī mu'min nagashtī dar

jihān*), taking asceticism rather than the particulars of Islam as the mark of a true believer

(*mu'min*).

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[685] Alam, 456-7.

[686] A number of examples of Sufi shaykhs and Yogis in spiritual competition can be found in *tazkīra* literature, such as in the Fawā'id al-Fu'ād where a prominent Chishtī shaykh engaged in debate with a yogi and even bested him at levitation. See Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā "Morals of the Heart" trans. Bruce B. Lawrence, Paulist: New York; Mahwah, 1992, 138.

[687] Meditation techniques feature heavily, however these have entered Sufi practice as in the Shattari through Muḥammad Ghaws Gwaliori and the Chishtiyya through 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi at least two centuries prior to Dārā's writing. The Naqshbandiyya had meditative practices since 'Abd al-Khalq Ghijudwani asserted his Eight Principles including "conscious breathing" (*hosh dar dam*). Rizvi claims Ghijduwani's principles were "based on yogic practices, current in the Bukhara region" (Vol 1, 95).

[688] Yohanan Friedmann, "Islamic Thought in Relation to the Indian Context," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750,* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 58.

Just as Sufis had been writing about "infidelity"(kufr) for centuries in ways that shock and alarm the orthodox, Dārā takes up this tradition of playing with infidelity in poetry with the goal of challenging the binary of faith and infidelity. In one instance, Dārā writes "the heat of Oneness [is] in the forehead of the ascetics / the line of Oneness is the *qashqah* of our unbelievers" *(dāgh-i vaḥdat dar jabīn zāhidān / khaṭ-i vaḥdat qashqah-i kufār-i mā)*, which references both the "heat" (skt. *tapas*) generated by ascetics and the *tilaka* mark on the forehead.[689] The Hindu poet Banwalidas was a fellow student of Mulla Shah as well as a companion and scribe (*munshī*) assisting Dārā in his translation projects.[690] On one occasion the pir ordered the student to "become a Muslim" to which Banwalidas replied, "I've gone past infidelity and Islam, and broken both the sacred thread and the rosary. No shackle remains on me."[691] It is easy to glimpse in Banwalidas's verses the same ethos toward "infidelity"(*kufr*). Rizvi notes that Dārā took the Sufi Shah Muḥammad Dilruba as his pir at some point between his writing of the *Sakinat* and the *Ḥasanat al-ʿārifin*,[692]and Dārā wrote a letter to him epitomizing what Sufis refer to as "true infidelity"(*kufr ḥaqīqī*):

> Now I have ascertained the value of true infidelity, I have hung round my body the Brahmanical thread (*Zunnar*); I have become an idol worshipper instead of a self-worshiper and the resident of an idol temple.' Were the Muslim to know the significance of the idol, He would have realized that real faith is in idol worship.[693]

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[689] Shikūh, Divān, 52.
[690] Sakaki, 139.
[691] Gandhi, 95.
[692] Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol 2, 144.
[693] Rizvi, 144.

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Here Dārā is playing with non-Muslim religious imagery, the *zunnār* [694] and the "idol-temple," and performing the *malāmatī* trope of "courting blame" by declaring oneself an infidel rather than boasting of one's piety.

Dārā also reflects what Leonard Lewisohn identifies as the theme of "unity-of-religions" in Mahmūd Shabistarī's Akbari poetry, principally through the:

> daring Antinomian doctrine of 'true infidelity' (*kufr-i ḥaqiqi*) already advanced several centuries earlier by Hallaj, 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, and later, Ruzbihan Baqli; and [...] Ibn 'Arabī's theomonism, an idea which "goes beyond mere metaphor or simile," but is in fact "the ultimate semiosis in Islamic thought" where "...everything is a sign or a signal of God..." so that "semiotics in the context of his [Ibn 'Arabī's] theology may be simply defined as an identification and classification of the signs of God who is existence (*al-wujūd*).[695]

Lewisohn hones in on the confluence where the poetry of "true infidelity" meets Akbari theosophy; when one realizes that the myriad forms and symbols that one might classify as "infidelity" owe their "existence"(*wujūd*) to God and are ultimately manifestations of Him, they can no longer be seen as markers of "infidelity." In other words, there is no "outside" the bounds of the God whose Oneness subsumes all differentiation at the level of highest spiritual realization. Dārā's recognition that Muslim and non-Muslim alike can draw from the well of God's Oneness  is in stark contrast to Aḥmad Sirhindī's neo-Sufism where a separation between Muslim and non-Muslim is strictly maintained.

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[694] It is interesting to note that the *zunnār* in medieval Persian poetry refers to a "girdle" that served as a sartorial marker that Christians were required to wear to differentiate themselves from the Muslim majority. In a famous example from ʿAṭṭār Nishapūrī's (d.1221 c.e.) *Parliament of the Birds* (*Manṭiq al-tayr*), the pious shaykh San'ān engages in every form of "infidelity" including donning the girdle after he falls madly in love with a Christian girl. In Mughal India, *zunnār* comes to refer to the sacred thread worn by Brahmins following a rite of passage inducting them into their caste. The word — and its denotation of non-Muslim identity — serves the same function in mystical poetry that evokes imagery of "infidelity."
[695] Leonard Lewisohn, "The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in  the Sufism of Shabistarī," in Heritage of Sufism, Vol II, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 389-90.

Dārā Shikūh's *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn* represents an attempt to synthesize and make legible Indic religious concepts within a Sufi mode of Islam. For example, he identifies Muḥammad as the "great" and "universal" soul (*rūh aʿzim and rūḥ kulī*) and considers him a parallel with the "Supreme Soul"(*Jīv Atmān*).[696] In this text, Dārā applies his *wujūdī* outlook in analyzing Sufism and Indic religious thought, as can be seen from his prologue to "The Merging of the Two Seas" (Per. *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*; H. *Samudra Sangama*).[697] Dārā sets the stage with a quatrain that asserts "[f]aith and infidelity, both are galloping on the way towards Him," and ends with a verse emphasizing that this binary is obliterated in the monist phrase: "By God, All is He and, verily by God, All is He"(*biʾllah hama ūst sum biʾllah hama ūst*).[698] Dārā explains that his purpose in writing this work was to collect the "truth and wisdom" of "two Truth-knowing"(*ḥaqq shinās*) groups; these "two oceans" Dārā sought to combine were the "true religion of the Sufis" and the non-Muslim "monotheists" (*muwaḥḥidān*) of India.[699] Dārā cites the great Central-Asian Naqshbandi ʿUbaydallah Aḥrār (d. 1490 c.e.) to justify seeking knowledge from non-Muslims: "If I know that an infidel, immersed in sin, is, in a way, singing the note of Monotheism, I go to him, hear him and am grateful to him."[700]

The yogic concept of the "unstruck" — and therefore un-caused and eternal — "sound" (*anahata nada*) is a major feature of Dārā's own religious program which culminates in the

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[696] Dārā Shikūh, *Majmaʿ ul-Baḥrain*, 3.

[697] Dārā writes: "In the name of the One who hath no name. With whatever name thou callest Him, he upliftist His Head" and includes an original Rubaʾi which ends "By God, He is all and, verily by God, He is all". Dārā Shikoh, *Majmaʿ ul-Baḥrain*, 37.

[698] Dārā shikuh, "*Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*," in *Muntakhabāt āsār*: ed. Seyyid Muḥammad Rezā Jalāli Naʾīnī, (Tābān: 1917), 3.

[699] Dārā Shikūh, *Majmaʿ ul-Baḥrain*, 38.

[700] Dārā Shikūh, *Majmaʿ ul-Baḥrain*, 38. cf. Dārā Shikūh, "*Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*," in *Muntakhabāt āsār*: ed. Seyyid Muḥammad Rezā Jalāli Naʾīnī, (Tābān: 1917), 2. "*Agar dānim kih kāfir pur khaṭā zamzama-i tavḥīd bihanjār[ī] mi sarāyad mīravam va az u-yi mīshanūm va manat dār shuvam.*"

"Sultan of remembrances"(*Sulṭan al-Azkār*).[701] This form of silent *dhikr* focuses on breath-control (Per. *habs-i nafs*) and especially the meditation upon the "absolute sound"(*avāz-i mutlaq*) which Dārā believed permeates the universe. As recounted in his *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, Mian Mīr appears to Dārā in a dream vision and teaches him this meditative practice,[702] though Dārā holds that the transmission of this *dhikr* goes all the way back through the Qadiri lineage to the Prophet Muḥammad's exercises in the cave at Hira just prior to revelation.[703] In his Risala, Dārā describes "regulation of breath" in "the posture in which the holy Prophet used to sit,"[704] making his meditative program not an innovation, but an attempt to get back to the prophet's own meditative techniques.

In his Majma' al-Baḥrayn, Dārā provides a discourse on "sound"(*avzā*) which relates theories of "sound" (*Nād*) according to "Indian monotheists," listing three varieties of sound ranging from the mundane to the sacred.[705] However, the first mention of sound in then MB, as Kazuyo Sakaki points out, is God's command "Be!"(Ar. *kūn*) by which God brings all existence into being in Sufi cosmogony.[706] In the *Risāla*, Dārā claims "there is no practice higher" than the meditative practice of focusing on the "primeval sound" that "existed before the creation of the worlds [...] and will continue to exist even when the worlds enter into non-existence."[707]

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[701] On Anahata in various forms in Dārā's work, see Kazuyo Sakaki, "Dārā Shikūh's Contribution to Philosophy of Religion with Special Reference to his Majma' al-Baḥrayn" Ph.D. Thesis. (Aligarh Muslim university: 1998), 84-89.

[702] Dārā Shikūh, *Sakīnat al-Awliyā'*, 55.

[703] Rizvi, History of Sufism in India Vol 2, 136.

[704] *Risāla*, 13.

[705] Shikūh, *Majma' ul-Baḥrayn*, 47.

[706] Sakaki, 84.

[707] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 17.

In his *Risala,* Dārā describes the unstruck, eternal melody equating it with the voice of

God, and uses a dialogue between Moses and Plato to elaborate:

> It is also said that Plato once had a debate with Moses (peace be upon him). Plato
> began, "You say your God speaks to you, when in fact God is above holding any such
> conversations." Moses replied, "Yes, I do claim God speaks to me, because from
> everywhere I hear a sound, which is ceaseless and continuous, and is not composed of
> syllables." When Plato heard this he believed that God did speak to Moses. My friend,
> when you hear this voice, you must continue to listen to it. Try to hear it not only in the
> solitude of the desert and the cloister, but also in the bustle of the marketplace and the
> meetinghouses of humankind. And when you have accomplished this practice, this
> sound will overpower the sounds of timbrel and drums, trumpets and bells, and all the
> loudest instruments ever invented, because this sound is the origin of them all, and all
> other sounds come to manifestation through it.[708]

Not only is this dialogue between philosophy and religion personified in the figures of Plato and

Moses, but these two are searching for the eternal and finding it in this "unstruck melody," that

is, the voice of God Himself. It is worth noting that the phrase *Majma'' al-Baḥrayn* is found in

the eighteenth sura, "The Cave" (*al-Kahf*), of the Qur'an wherein Moses seeks knowledge

where "the two seas meet." It is in this sura that Moses encounters the mysterious Khiḍr, a

favorite albeit mysterious figure in Sufism, who has knowledge given to him by God (*'ilm*

*ladunnī*).

Dārā attempts to fuse Indic and Sufi cosmology to describe how existence comes about

from the single origin in Brahman or God. In his "discourse on the elements" (*bayan dar*

*'anāṣir*) Dārā describes the motivating force bringing everything into existence as Love (*'ishq*),

which "in the language of the Indian monotheists" is "*māyā*" and he affirms this with the

perennially popular Hadith Qudsi among Sufis known as the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure.[709]

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[708] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla*, 18 and Naīnī ed., 13.
[709] Dārā Shikūh, Majma'' al-Baḥrayn, 39.

"*Māyā*" for Dārā and his interlocutors here resembles Śankara's (700-750 c.e.)[710]

interpretation of the Upaniṣads in his *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* where he writes of *māyā*

is understood as "the divine power of the Lord" that "gives birth to the whole universe."[711]

The concept of mankind as microcosm of the universe and the universe as macrocosm

of man — dating back to Al-Kindi's 8th century translation and interpretation of Greek works

espousing this concept is a key part of Akbari Sufism found in Ibn al-ʿArabī and his

interpreters' works. The anthropocentric view of the universe as macrocosm, the "Great

World"(*ʿālam al-kabīr*) and man as microcosm, the "Small World" (*ʿālam al-saghīr*), are

twinned with Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) who is one in

whom the macro and microcosm is embodied. This sentiment is also present in the *shabad* of

the Hindu poet Pipa preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib, where he writes that the "body is the

deity" and "(The One) Who is in the universe, That (One) alone is in the body; whoever seeks,

that (one) finds."[712] In his *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*, Dārā likens the Perfect Man to the cosmic man

(*puruṣa*); he writes that "the form of every single human being is the abode of *mahā puras*; the

perfect man is the closest and special abode of *mahā puras*."[713] Dārā further links the Perfect

Man with the Indic concept of being "liberated while living" (*jīvan mukt*) and the prophet

David (Dawūd). Dārā writes that God spoke to David, saying:

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[710] Exact dates are not known, but modern scholarship locates Shankara in the first half of the 8th century. Koller, John M. , "Shankara", in Meister, Chad; Copan, Paul (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, (Routledge: 2013), 99.

[711] Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination (Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi)*, (Hollywood: Vedanta, 1978), 58-9.

[712] GGS 695 cited in "Bani Bhagat Pipa," *Guru Granth Sahib Project*. <https://app.gurugranthsahib.io/bani/details/BBP/1/2>. Accessed 23 January, 2024. I am very grateful to Pashaura Singh for informing me about this Hindu poet and the themes of his verses that are preserved in the Adi Granth.

[713] Mahfuz ul-Haq, *Majmaʿ ul-Baḥrain*, 72.

"Oh David, build a house for Me." (He) replied, "Oh God ! Thou art exempt from habitation." (God) said, "Thou art my abode. Make thy house void of 'others'." The attributes, found in abundance in Barhmānd [Brahman], are present in man who is the epitome of 'the Great World' (*'Ālam-i Kabīr*). In fine, one who beholds and understands in this way attains *jīvan mukt*, and the following verse [of the Qur'ān] is in favour of the above: "Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace."[714]

In a swirl of the Indic and Islamic, Dārā uses the prophet David as an exemplary "Perfect Man" in whom God's attributes are manifest and attains liberation(*mokṣa*), all while citing the Qur'an to reaffirm God's grace (*fayḍ*) rather than the individual's actions bring about this liberation.

The *Sirr-i Akbar* "The Greatest Secret" is Dārā Shikūh's Persian translation of the Upanishads and serves as a capstone to his interreligious investigations before his brother cut his project short. His translation is also notable for spreading the Upanishads to a global audience, as Tara Chand reckons that "the credit of introducing the philosophy of the Upanishads to Europe belongs to Shikūh."[715] Indeed, comparative religionists in the Western academy perhaps have Dārā to thank seeing as French and British diplomats or travelers who had acquired the courtly language of Persian could read from Dārā's translation centuries before that of Friedrich Max Müller in the 19th century. Writing on the Sirr-i Akbar, Supriya Gandhi notes how Dārā's mystical monism led him to explore the Upanishads as, in his view, Indian scholars "do not reject unity, nor do they find fault with the unity-affirmers, rather, it is the foundation of their belief."[716]

Not only were these vedantic texts affirmations of God's Unity for Dārā, but he also saw them as revelatory texts mentioned in the Qur'an as the "Hidden Book"(*Kitāb maknūn*).

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[714] Mahfuz ul-Haq, 72.

[715] Perwaiz Hayat, 51.

[716] Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 206.

Supriya Gandhi explains Dārā's religious project with the *Sirr-i Akbar* and the role he assigns

the Upanishads within an Islamic scriptural tradition within the work's preface:

> Each problem, and each lofty word that he had wanted, and of which he was the seeker, and had sought and not found, he obtained from that quintessence of the ancient book, which is, without doubt the first heavenly scripture, the font of truth-realization, ocean of divine unity, in agreement with the glorious Quran, and, not only that but its exegesis. It becomes clearly manifest that the following verse is literally applicable to this ancient book: "It is a noble Quran, In a hidden Book (*kitāb maknūn*), which none save the purified touch, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds"[Q 56:77-80].[717]

As Gandhi notes, this cryptic verse in sura *waqi'ah* about a "hidden Book" was none other than

the Upanishads in Dārā's estimation. Likewise, Hayat discusses Dārā's attribution of the

Upanishads to the *kitāb-i maknūn* as Dārā:

> rejects the idea that the *kitāb-i maknūn* could be the *Tūrayt* (Torah), *Zubūr* (Psalms) or *Injīl* (Gospels). For him, it could only be the Upanishads, as these were kept hidden by the Hindu pandits. He considered them to be revealed books that could serve as a commentary on the Qur'ān (*tafsīr-i ān ast*). For Dārā, these two books of different religions represented the same Truth.[718]

Most remarkably, Dārā is recognizing that the Upanishads can be used as a "commentary"

(*tafsīr*) of the Qur'an, and Hayat is in agreement with Gandhi that both books emerge from the

same font of Truth in Dārā's religious worldview. Gandhi also notes that the *Sirr-i Akbar*

contains a "*glossary of about 114 Sanskrit terms*" their meaning translated into Persian,[719]

which again reflects Dārā's aim of making Sanskritic concepts legible to a Muslim audience. It is

worth noting, as Svevo D'Onofrio does, that Dara likely did not translate the Upanishads

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[717] Cited in Gandhi, 206-7.

[718] Perwaiz Hayat, 51-2. See also Friedmann, "Islamic Thought in Relation to the Indian Context," 57.

[719] Gandhi, 207.

himself, but relied on his scribes, and also that this text is better understood as a "commentary" on the Upanishads rather than a word-for-word translation.[720]

It is worth concluding this section with a reflection on what Dārā's opponents — and the opponents of mystical monism in general — found so objectionable in his later religious projects that sought a "Joining of the Two Oceans." Dārā's *Majma' al-Baḥrayn* was particularly singled out by ulema who found this blurring of confessional boundaries anathema. One of Aurangzeb's supporters in the ulema elite by the name of Shaykh Burhān wrote that: "Dārā Shikūh has *stepped out of the religion of Islam* and has adopted the wrong path by following the non-believers (*mulḥidān*) who have abandoned the obligations prescribed by God and (he) has given a bad name to *tasavvuf* and has called Islam and infidelity twin brothers and for this purpose wrote *Majma' al-Baḥrayn*."[721] Shaykh Burhān is calling out Dārā's statements about "faith" and "infidelity" and declaring that he has effectively left Islam because of his refusal — albeit in poetic trope — to demarcate Islam from Indic religions. Hayat, however, notes that none of the fatwas in the *Tārīkh Shāh Jahānī* sanctioning Dārā's death mention the *Majma' al-Baḥrayn* by name.[722] Although it's clear that Aurangzeb ordered Dārā's execution like so many other Ottoman and Mughal rulers who found fratricide a necessity to secure their own rule and to eliminate a potential civil war, the death sentence composed by Aurangzeb's ulema hints that Dārā's religious ethos of Indo-Islamic syncretism was a "disturbance," as the text declares:

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[720] Svevo D'Onofrio, "A Persian Commentary to the Upaniṣads: Dārā Šikōh's «Sirr-i Akbar»," in , D. Hermann & F. Speziale (eds.), *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Period*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2010), 536-7. D'Onofrio also demonstrates that the *Sirr-i Akbar* might better be described as a commentary on the Upanishads by Dara's Hindu interlocutors who were predominantly of the Advaita (non-dualist) school of Vedanta (D'Onofrio, 535). Dara himself describes his project using the term *'ibārah*

[721] Perwaiz Hayat, 49. Emphasis mine.

[722] Hayat, 49.

The *pillars of Canonical Law and Faith apprehended many kinds of disturbance from his life*. So, the Emperor, both *out of necessity to protect the Faith and Holy Law*, and also for reasons of State, considered it unlawful to allow Dārā to remain alive any longer as a destroyer of public peace.[723]

In this fatwa for his execution, the "reasons of State" are almost an afterthought, where "Canonical Law," "Holy Law," and "Faith" itself are in need of protection from Dārā who threatens not just "public peace" but the holy Sharī'ah itself.

Dārā's efforts in translating the Upanishads did not go unnoticed by his opponents either. Aurangzeb's "official historian," Muḥammad Kazim, clearly implicates the *Sirr-i Akbar* as part of Dārā's detestable religious outlook:

> [N]ot content with displaying the degrees of permissiveness and apostasy that were fixed in his nature, which he named *tasawwuf*, he developed an inclination for the religion (*din*) of the Hindus, and the traditions and institutions of those people of bad faith. He always had affection for brahmins, jogis and sanyasis, and considered that wayward, misleading and false group to be perfect spiritual guides and gnostics united with the truth. He thought that their books, which they call Veda (*bed*) were the word of God revealed in heaven, and he called them "eternal codex" and "noble book." Because of the false belief he reposed in the fruitless Veda, he gathered together sanyasis and brahmins from various areas for a mammoth effort, and with great patronage, to help in translating it. His time was constantly spent on this immoral task and in thinking and meditating on the misguided contents of this book. Instead of the Beautiful Names of God, he etched a Hindu name, which Hindus called Prabhu, on his ringstones of diamond, ruby, emerald and other gems, which he wore.[724]

The "Veda" that Kazim discusses here is clearly the Upanishads that Dārā considered to be part of revelation alongside the Qur'an, though he fumbles the fact that Dārā actually equated it with the "hidden book" (*kitāb-i maknūn*) rather than the Qur'an itself. Kazim notably declares

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[723] Alika-Ranjan Qanungo, Dārā Shikūh, Vol 1., (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons: 1935), 314.
[724] Gandhi, 238-9.

"Prabhu" to be a "Hindu" name and contrasts it with the ninety-nine "Beautiful Names" of God found in the Qur'an, and provides an apt simile for the contrast between Dārā's universalism and the confessional particularism of his opponents; While Kazim is convinced this name belongs to the separate religious category, "Hindu," Dārā's unbounded God has more than the ninety-nine names found in the Qur'an and he may have seen no problem in borrowing another name from the "Monotheists of India." This is the same policing of confessional boundaries through semiotics that Sirhindī is engaged with when he vehemently rejects Hirday Ram's suggestion that "Ram" and "Raḥman" are merely two signifiers for the same God.

**Dārā Shikūh and Lal Das**

Perwaiz Hayat's dissertation offers an excellent overview and analysis of the recorded text of the conversations between Dārā and the Hindu mystic Lal Das known as the "Questions and Answers"(su'āl va javāb). The *Dabistān* mentions Lal Das in the section of Vairagis (*Bayrāgīyan*) which situates him in this strain of Hindu-Islamic mystics like Kabīr.[725] Dārā might have known Lal Das from the latter's visits to Mian Mīr as another of the prominent holy men of the Punjab. Hayat notes that the "bayrāgī sect arose in southern India in response to the teachings of Rāmānuja, and then became prominent in Northern India after the preaching of Rāmānand (14th /15th century)."[726]Dārā considers Lal Das as one of the "monotheists of India" (*Muwaḥḥidān-i Hind*) and a *walī* ("friend of God"), yet Lal Das differs from the iconoclastic Kabir on the issue of idol-worship, and Dārā interrogates him on the matter.

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[725] bayrāgī or vīrāgī refers to "someone without passion" and according to Hayat, 69.
[726] Hayat, 69.

Unlike Kabir who detested external forms of religious worship, Lal Das answers a question from Dārā as to why he defends idol-worship thusly:

> It (idol worship) is for strengthening the heart. One who knows what is behind the form does not need (any particular form to worship). However, one who does not know the meaning behind form retains one's attachment to the form. It is like those girls who play with forms (dolls). They do not play [with them] after getting married. This is what idol worship is. Those (people) who do not know the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of form (remain attached to the form), [but] after attaining the knowledge of the inner meaning, they go beyond the form.[727]

Here, Lal Das is describing the esoteric "inner meaning" (*bāṭin*) that the "forms" that idol-worship are stepping stones for. Dārā likely includes this justification of idol-worship because it rings true with the common Sufi juxtaposition between "form" (*ṣūra*) and "meaning"(ma'na), and between "exterior" (*ẓahir*) and "interior"(*bāṭin*). Lal Das appears to land in favor of an "attributeless" (*nirguna*) concept of God over the forms that have attributes (*saguna*) although he can find utility in the latter as a path to the former for some people. It is worth noting how exceedingly rare it is to find apologies for idol-worship in Islam given the many iconoclastic episodes from the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet. Dārā finds in Lal Das — just as he might have found in Ibn al-'Arabī's entry on Hārūn in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* — an evaluation of idol-worship that recognizes God's manifestation in all forms, albeit further removed in idols than in a gnostic's focus on the point of origin of that manifestation. Dārā has other translations that discuss In his translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, Dārā has Mahādev describe the "worship of god (*dev-pūja*) which contains in itself all the perfections and virtues" as follows:

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[727] Hayat, 71, 130 and 143.

> Don't regard Viṣṇu, Brahma, Mahādev, and the other bodies and souls as God. Dev [deva] is that which has no origin and no end, which has no form, no appearance, and no resemblance, is neither born nor bred by anyone. Absolute and pure existence, joy itself, and knowledge itself (*anand swarup va gyan swarup; ānandasvarūpa vā jñānasvarūpa*). Perform prayer and worship (*pūja and ʿibādat*) for him. Let the others worship the form. What I mean is as follows: since the people of the world find the form closer and the meaning very far [from their understanding], the perfect masters allowed them to have the form before them initially, so that their heart could remain at peace.[728]

Here too, Dārā is drawing lessons about a *nirguna*, or attributeless concept of God, and the utility of "forms" as stepping stones to arrive at this conception of God.  Describing God as "pure existence" itself, "neither born nor bred," fits with his *wujūdī* brand of monotheism,[729] and yet both Indic and Islamic words for worship, *pūja* and *ʿibādat*, each correct if it goes beyond worship of the "form." When Dārā questions Lal Das about both Indic religions and about Islam, this indicates not only a deep respect for the Hindu ascetic's knowledge in all religious matters, but this is also indicative that Dārā considers Lal Das to be within the same tradition of mystical monotheism. It is likely for this reason that Dārā includes the sayings of Baba Lal Das in his *Ḥasanat al-ʿārifin* which is otherwise mostly comprised of Sufis.[730]

Dārā poses questions to Lal Das in their conversations that navigate toward spiritual mediation and guidance. Dārā asks "[s]ince it is said that a particle (lit. drop) of the light of God exists in every existence, how can this particle be verified?" and  Lal Das responds "[w]hen the word (*sukhan*) of a perfect master is remembered by the heart, (the individual soul) realizes its own self and (as a result) all wishes in existence will be burnt away, (while) that part of the light

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[728] Alam, In Search of a Sacred King, 454.

[729] This latter resembles the verse of Sura Ikhlāṣ (Q 112:3), where God is described as "neither begetting nor begotten" (*lam yalid wa lam yūlad*). Defining God as "pure existence" (*vujūd maḥḍ*) is indeed an axiom for *wujūdī* Sufis.

[730] *Hasanat al-ʿarifin*, 143.

of God will manifest (itself, free) from existence."[731] In this and the two following exchanges, Dārā is using the same language from his Risala and Majma' al-Baḥrayn, describing the particle or "drop of divine light" (*qaṭrah-i nūr Ilāhī*) in the individual in relation to the "sea" of pure divinity from which it originated: God.[732] When Dārā asks how the individual can come to achieve this realization and "reach the sublime essence," Lal Das insists that a "medium"(*vasīlah*) is needed such as a "perfect guide"(*murshid-i kāmil*) is necessary just as a mirror needs someone to polish it in order to reflect the sun.[733] Whether one calls this necessary spiritual leader a "guru," or "pir," it is likely Dārā saw a reflection of his own Sufi path where Mian Mīr and Mullah Shah performed the spiritual alchemy necessary for his progress.

Finally, it is easy to imagine Dārā nodding in agreement when Lal Das states that "[n]obody knows the way to Mighty Creator except he who knows himself; so that in reality there is no difference (in the self and God)."[734] Lal Das's statement perhaps reveals his alignment with Śaṅkara's *advaita* (non-dual) commentarial tradition on the Upanishads where the Self (Atman) and Brahman (Paramatman) are held to be ultimately identical. Yet, this relationship between self and God is also mirrored in the *hadith* authoritative for many sufis where the Prophet Muḥammad states: "he who knows his self, knows his Lord"(*man 'arafa nafsihi 'arafa rabbihi*). Dārā's *Risala*, as discussed above, mirrors Lal Das when the former

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[731] Hayat, 136.
[732] Hayat, 123-4 and 136-7.
[733] Hayat, 124 and 137.
[734] Hayat, 139

writes: "gnosis" ('*irfān*) is "nothing more than" that "thou shalt know thyself, and realise that thou art verily That, and everything is That" (Hama Ūst).[735]

## Dārā Shikūh and the Sikhs

In his Divan, Dārā begins with a panegyric to his beloved Punjab and the city of Lahore, praising its God-given beauty, fecundity, and especially its saints (*avliyā*) like his spiritual grandfather "Ḥazrat [Mian] Mīr."[736] Dārā Shikūh and his beloved Mian Mīr have become a part of Sikh tradition and memory. In Sikh tradition, Mian Mīr laid the foundation stone for the Sikh Harimandir in Amritsar known as the "Golden Temple" at the request of Guru Arjan which would mean a Muslim participated in the foundation of the central Sikh holy site. Madanjit Kaur explores the accounts of the laying of the foundation stone at Harmandir and finds that the earliest accounts have Guru Arjan lay the stone himself and that the version claiming Mian Mīr laid it is part of later Sikh tradition.[737] As Louis Fenech and W.H. McLeod point out, there is no

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[735] Dārā Shikūh, *Risāla* 24, and Naīnī, 18, where the Persian is "*pas 'irfān ziyādih barīn nīst kih khud rā bishinākhtī valā tū khūd 'ayn-i Ū būd va hama Ūst.* The next line, Dārā concludes "and it is impossible that there should exist anything which is not He (*va mahāl ast ghayr-i Ū mawjūd bāshad*).

[736] Dārā Shikūh, *Divān*, 106.

[737] Madanjit Kaur's full analysis is as follows: "According to the earliest Sikh tradition, the foundation-stone of the Harimandir was laid by Guru Arjan himself. A mason, so goes the story, accidentally displaced the brick (foundation stone). On seeing this, the Guru prophesised that the foundation would be laid again in the near future. This version of Bhai Santokh Singh is carried by almost all subsequent Sikh sources right up to the twentieth century. Gian Singh Giani has thought it fit to add to the version the fact that the foundation of the temple was laid by Guru Arjan on Kartik Sudj 5, 1645 BK (AD 1588). The renowned English scholar, M.A. Macauliffe, who sought help from Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha for collecting data for his book. The Sikh Religion, records that Guru Arjan laid the foundation of the Harimandir on 1st Magh, 1645 BK (AD 1589) The same date is to be found in the Mahankosh of Kahan Singh Nabha. Two Modern Sikh historians, Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, accept this version. The later Sikh tradition, however, persists in believing that the foundation of the Temple was laid by the Muslim Saint, Mīr Mohammad (AD 1550-1635) popularly known as Hazrat Mian Mīr of Lahore, on a request from Guru Arjan", the year being the same. The first recorded reference to this version is to be met in The Punjab Notes and Queries. It records that "The foundation stone of the Harimandir was laid by Mian Mīr… between whom and Guru Ram Das there existed a strong friendship." The contributor of the entry, E. Nicholl, (Secretary, Municipal Committee, Amritsar) does not

substantiation for this in the Persian sources,[738] and both Dārā Shikūh's hagiographic accounts of Mian Mīr in his *Safinat al-Awliyā'* and *Sakinat al-Awliyā'* make no mention of any such event, nor do they record any relationships between Mian Mir and the fifth Guru. Pashaura Singh's recent study highlights how Mughal authorities took up a policy of "wilful silence"[739] regarding any mention of Sikhs in their chronicles following the execution of Guru Arjan, and combined with the rising enmity between Sikhs and the Mughal authorities, this may go a long way toward explaining why connections between the Sikh Gurus and Qadiri Sufis may have been omitted or expunged. In his study of Guru Hargobind, Singh highlights the role Sikh tradition records for Mian Mir interceding on behalf of the Guru Arjan and his son Guru Hargobind, as well as items in the possession of "Makhdum Sayad Sain Chann Qadri, a scion of Mian Mir" that were said to be "presented by Guru Arjan and Mata Ganga Ji to his ancestors."[740] As seen above, Mian Mīr did entertain Baba Lal Das, and his student Mulla Shah took Dārā's companion Banwalidas as a student.

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cite any authority; he merely states the fact [...] it is a pity that this fact is not supported by any of the earlier Sikh sources, nor by Persian chroniclers including biographers of Saint Mian Mīr. This tradition, however, got a strong footing in the twentieth century Sikh literature and was adopted by both Indian and European scholars writing on the subject. Soon, this version gained currency. Even the Report issued by the Darbar Sahib Authority followed this version." Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple Past and Present*, (Shambala: 1979), 11-12.

[738] Louis E. Fenech and W. H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism,* 2014, p. 205.

[739] See below ftnt. 744.

[740] Pashaura Singh, 306-7.

Although Dārā credits Mian Mīr with saving his life in his *Sakinat al-Awliyā',*[741] there is a traditional Sikh account that credits the Seventh Guru, Har Rai, with saving Dārā's life during a major illness in his youth.[742] Kushwant Singh writes that:

> At the end of 1658, Har Rai returned to Kiratpur. He became friendly with Shah Jahan's eldest son, Dārā Shikoh, who being of Sufi persuasion sought the company of saintly men of all denominations. When the war of succession began between Shah Jahan's sons, the Guru's sympathies were naturally more with the liberal Dārā Shikoh than with the bigoted Aurangzeb. Dārā Shikoh was defeated and fled northwards to the Punjab. He called on the Guru and asked for assistance. The manner of the assistance given by the Guru to Dārā Shikoh is not clear, but it was sufficient to arouse the wrath of Aurangzeb.[743]

Like his grandfather Akbar who met with Guru Arjan before him, Dārā did indeed seek the "company of saintly men of all denominations" and — given his voracious intellectual and spiritual appetite — it is hard to imagine he wouldn't have sought to learn from Sikhs, though sadly no account of these encounters remains in his writings. It would appear that it was military support for Dārā that earned the 7th Guru Aurangzeb's ire. Sujān Rāi Bhandārī affirms that

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[741] Dārā gives the account of his illness whereupon his father says that physicians failed to heal his son and tells Mian Mīr that "this boy loves you" (*īn pesar dūstdār shomāst*) and pleads with the saint to concentrate his spiritual attention on his son (*tavajjūh*). Dārā then says that Mian Mīr "placed a clay cup in my hand in which was water [, …] took the water in his blessed hand, said a prayer (lit. made *du'a*) and recited the *fātiḥa*." in Dārā Shikhūh, *Sakīnat al-Awliyā*, Ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Reza Jalali Na'ini, (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Maṭbū'ātī 'Ilmī, 1965), 49. This account fits the trend in his *Sakīnat al-Awliyā* where Dārā establishes his deep spiritual connection with Mian Mīr as a successor of his Qadiri lineage.

[742] In a footnote, Kushwant Singh writes "Sikh records maintain that the Guru cured Dārā Shikoh of the effects of poison. When asked why he had saved the life of a son of Shah Jahan, who had tormented his father and grandfather, the Guru replied: 'The man breaks flowers with one hand and offers them with the other, but the flowers perfume both hands alike. The axe cuts the sandal tree, yet the sandal perfumes the axe.'" Kushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs* Vol 1, (Princeton: PUP, 1963), ftnt. 16, 68. This account demonstrates Sikh attention to Mughal dynastic struggles, likely viewing Dārā as the lesser of two evils. Guru Har Rai's words highlight the lack of ego (*haumai*) in the decision to offer assistance for the Mughal scion.

[743] Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol 1, 68.

Guru Har Rai supported Dārā against Aurangzeb in his *Khulāṣat al-Tawārīkh.* He writes of

Dārā at his lowest point, following the major defeat of his forces against Aurangzeb:

> He thought it to be beyond his power to face the Imperial Army [of Aurangzeb] in battle, and entertained the design of proceeding to Multan and Qandahar. [...] From expediency, he left his son as his agent at Lahore; but after some days, his son also departed one night. So too Gurū Har Rai, the successor of Baba Nanak, who had come with a large force, left on the excuse of collecting [more] troops. Thus most people separated themselves from Dārā Shikūh.[744]

On the one hand, Guru Har Rai may have simply been supporting the Mughal heir-apparent, but

it is tempting to consider, as Kushwant Singh does, that Guru Har Rai brought military support

for Dārā out of friendship or out of the perception that non-Muslims would fare better under his

rule than under that of Aurangzeb. It is likely due to this support for his brother that in 1660

"Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Rai to appear before him to explain his relationship with Dārā

Shikoh."[745] J.S. Grewal describes Aurangzeb's "aggressive policy" toward the Sikhs:

> On the rumoured support of Guru Har Rai to Dārā Shikoh during his flight to the Punjab, Aurangzeb called him to his court. Guru Har Rai sent his elder son, Ram Rai. The emperor kept him as a hostage in Delhi. Guru Har Rai chose his younger son, Har Krishan, as his successor. Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Krishan also to Delhi. He continued to patronize Ram Rai and eventually granted revenue-free land to him in the present Dehra Dun in Uttar Pradesh.[746]

Aurangzeb's patronage of Ram Rai, like the heavy-handed tactic of hostage taking, must be

read as an attempt to assert control over the Sikh Gurus and make them beholden to the

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[744] J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), 94.

[745] Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (Bloomsbury Academic: 2013), 50–51. I am grateful to Pashaura Singh for pointing out that this account does not appear in the Mughal record. This is in keeping with what he terms the policy of "wilful silence" beginning with the execution of the fifth Sikh Guru. Singh, *The Routledge Companion to the Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind:Sovereignty, Militancy, and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth*, 63, 164-65, and 259, See also Singh, *The Life of Guru Arjan*, 234.

[746] J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Panjab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1998), 68.

Mughal throne. And yet, as Pashaura Singh notes, neither Ram Rai nor Guru Hargobind before him are mentioned in Mughal records.[747] In the case of the Sikhs, Aurangzeb's treatment of non-Muslims is bound up with political concerns, namely their proximity to his brother Dārā.

## Dārā and Sarmad Kāshānī

Dārā and Aurangzeb held quite different views about the role of Sufism and its relationship to non-Muslim religions. While Dārā had his father spare Mulla Shah's life following his ecstatic sayings, Aurangzeb had the ecstatic Sufi, Muḥammad Saʿīd Sarmad Kāshānī (d.1661 c.e.) executed, although it remains somewhat ambiguous whether this was due to religious controversy or as a result of being Dārā's friend. Sarmad, originally born a Jew in Safavid Armenia converted to Islam while studying under the great Persian philosopher of the 17th century, Mulla Ṣadrā (d. 1636 c.e.) — who synthesized the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ishrāqī philosopher of Suhrawardi Maqtūl — but he became an ecstatic Sufi upon traveling to Hindustan. He courted controversy in a number of ways; not only did he write ecstatic poetry of the *kufriyāt* genre, but he fell in love with a Hindu boy named Abhay Chand who would go

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[747] See Pashaura Singh, The Routledge Companion to the Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind: Sovereignty, Militancy, and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth, (Routledge: forthcoming). I am very grateful to Pashaura Singh for pointing out the absence of Ram Rai in Mughal sources and for sharing his latest research on Guru Hargobind.

on to become his disciple,[748] and went about completely naked.[749] In a letter to Sarmad attributed to Dārā Shikūh, he writes:

> My pir and spiritual teacher. Every day I have the intent to serve you, but it is unattained. If I am I, why would my desire be in vain? And if I am not I, what fault is it of mine? . . . When the chosen Prophet would go to battle against the unbelievers, and the army of Islam suffered losses, the literalist ulama would say, "This is a lesson in fortitude." But what need does the Final One have of lessons?[750]

Differentiating between "literalist" ulema and preferring an esoteric response, Sarmad replies with a couplet: "Whatever I've read, I've forgotten / Except the Friend's words, which I keep repeating."[751] Sarmad's poetry must have struck a chord with Dārā on account of both the centrality of mystical monism and the attitude towards non-Muslims, all in addition to providing a knowledge of Judaism to Dārā's religiously eclectic interests.

Although he also writes poetry in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, Sarmad plays frequently with talk of "idols" and blurring the mosque-temple distinction in his Ruba'iyāt; for example in one quatrain he writes: "Who is the lover, beloved, idol, idol maker, but you? / Who is the universal Beloved of the Kaaba, the temple, / the mosque? / Come to the garden and see the unity in diversity of colours. / In all this, who is the lover, the beloved, the flower, the

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[748] Abhay Chand went on to translate parts of the Hebrew Bible into Persian and served as an informant for the author of the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib*.

[749] According to Supriya Gandhi, Sarmad reasoned that the Jewish people (Bani Israel) "did not consider it necessary to clothe the private parts, and that indeed the prophet Isaiah too roamed naked in his final years," Gandhi,183. The French physician in Shah Jahan's court gives us an account, citing Sarmad's nakedness as the ultimate reason for his execution: "I was for a long time disgusted with a celebrated Fakire named Sarmet, who paraded the streets of Dehli as naked as when he came into the world. He despised equally the promises and the threats of Aureng-Zebe, and underwent at length the punishment of decapitation from his obstinate refusal to put on wearing apparel." François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press: 1916), 317.

[750] Supriya Gandhi, 184.

[751] Gandhi, 184.

thorn?"[752] This quatrain in the *kufriyāt* genre of Persian Sufi poetry purposely juxtaposes the

opposites of proper Muslim practice and "disbelief," of mosque and temple, and even of "lover"

and beloved" to reflect the *coincidentia oppositorum* in the mystic's experience of Oneness. In

another poem Sarmad equates the Ka'ba with a Hindu idol: "In the Kaaba and the idol-temple,

the stone is he, the wood is he/In one place, the black stone, in another, the Hindu idol."[753] In

Sarmad's estimation a "true lover of God is misled / Both by religion and lack thereof / a moth

does not choose / Between the burning candle, / Whether in the mosque or the temple."[754] This

type of poetry has a long history in Persian poetry, where the Zoroastrian fire-temple is replaced

with the idol-temple (*butkhānah / butgār*). On one level this genre serves to express the

mystic's experience of God's Oneness, in Ibn al-'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam, he reflects on the idol

worship of the golden calf in the Quran, reasoning that "since Allah decreed that only He would

be worshipped" God is actually dictating that He is "worshipped *in every form*."[755]

Determining the exact cause of Aurangzeb's execution of Sarmad in Delhi in 1661 is

complicated by his association with Dārā Shikūh.[756] Audrey Truschke reasons that Sarmad was

ultimately one of "only a few" of Dārā's "circle" who "were not shown mercy" because he

"prophesied that Dārā Shikūh would take the throne."[757] Following Dārā's death Sarmad gave

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[752] Sarmad Kāshānī, *The Rubaiyat of Sarmad*, Trans. Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, (New Delhi: The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1991), 7. The Persian is "*āshiq va 'ishq va but va butgar va 'ayār yakīst / Ka'ba va dayr va masājid hamah jā yār yakīst / Gar dar āyi bichaman vaḥdat-i yak rangī bīn / kih dar ān 'āshiq va gul va khār yakīst*. In Fazl Mahmudn Asiri, *Rubaiyat-i-Sarmad*, (Santiniketan: Santiniketan Press, 1921), 50.

[753] Cited in Gandhi, 183. Cf. Mobad Kaykhosrow Isfendiyār, *Dabistan-i maẕāhib,* Vol 1, (Tehran: Kitābkhāneh Tawurī, 1943), 216. *Dar Ka'ba va butkhāna sang u shud u chūb u shud / yakjā hajar-al-aswad yakjā but-i Hindū shud.*

[754] Kāshānī, 30.

[755] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, trans. Aisha Bewley, (Diwan Press: 1980) 111-112.

[756] For a list of the reasons given for Sarmad's execution in the historical sources see M.S. Gupta *Sarmad the Saint: Life and Works*, (South Asia Books: 1991), 41.

[757] Truschke, 34.

the following bayt suggesting he had set his mind on martyrdom: "It is ages since the tale of

Mansur has become dated. / I'll give a new shine to the Gallows and rope."[758] Indeed Sarmad

is often remembered in like-minded Sufi circles as the "Second Hallaj" (Ḥallāj s̱ānī),[759] placing

him in the category of a number of Sufis famous for their ecstatic sayings who were ultimately

put to death,[760] though it's important to add, not without some political aspect to their deaths.[761]

Sarmad embraced his execution in *wujūdī* mode, seeing God in all, even in his executioner:

"The sweetheart with the naked sword in hand approached / In whatever garb Thou mayst

come I recognize Thee!"[762] Although Sarmad's poems and behavior were certainly

controversial,[763] Natalia Prigarina notes that this was not out of place with the behavior of a

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[758] Natalia Prigarina, *Sarmad: Life and Death of a Sufi*," in: Yanis Eshots ed., *Ishraq*. Islamic Philosophy Yearbook, No. 3 (2012), 320.

[759] Prigarina, 315.

[760] Annemarie Schimmel translates a poem from Sachal Sarmast (1739-1826) listing those who have suffered for their love of God: "Welcome, welcome Thou art — to which place wilt / Thou bring me? Thou wilt again cut off / a head! Giving a kick to Sarmad Thou hast killed him; / Thou hast brought Manṣūr on the gallows, / cut off Sheikh 'Attar's head — / Now Thou art asking the way here! / Thou hast split Zakariya with a saw, thrown Joseph into a well, / Thou hast made Shams to be killed at the hand of the mollas, / Thou usest to afflict the lover. / Thou hast made Ṣan'an bind the brahmins' thread, / Thou hast made to be slaughtered Bullhe Shah, Ja'far to / be drowned in the sea." in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (UNC Press:1975), 394-5.

[761] Herbert Mason notes that Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj had Shi'ī in-laws sympathetic with the Zanj Rebellion prior to his execution. See Herbert Mason, *al-Hallaj*, (Routledge: 1995), 5-6. Omid Safi blames a political rival ultimately for the execution of 'Ayn al-Quzāt Hamadānī in Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry,* (UNC Press: 2006).

[762] Prigarina, 319.

[763] Among his most infamous poems, he wrote a ruba'ī that appears to reject a literal interpretation of the Prophet Muḥammad's *mi'rāj*, declaring that the "Mulla says "Aḥmad went to heaven; / Sarmad says 'Nay, heaven came down to Aḥmad.'" Another of his potentially "blasphemous" acts was his saying "lā ilahā'" but refusal to say the next part of the *shahada* (ilā'llah) since, as he put it "I find myself unable to recite the whole Kalima as I have known only negative part so far. The second stage, where I can understand the positive aspect, I have not entered yet." He also claimed that one could "learn the method of servanthood" from Shaytān. in Prigarina, 318-19. On this latter point, it certainly courts blame or controversy in the *malāmatī* mode, but it is not without precedent. In Hallāj's *Kitāb al-Tā wa sīn*, he writes of Satan's refusal to bow before Adam as the ultimate expression of bowing before none but God, making his expulsion from proximity to God an act of sacrifice. Annemarie Schimmel notes that Aḥmad Ghazālī said: "whoever does not

*malāmatī* Sufi courting blame[764] in order to abolish the ego (*nafs*). Several legends and

hagiographic accounts see Aurangzeb chastised for his execution of Sarmad.[765]

**Conclusion**

Dārā Shikūh's religious worldview can be glimpsed from the Indo-Islamic, spiritual

synthesis he expounded on in his many works and translation projects and also in his many

relationships and dealings with non-Muslims. The contention of this study is that Dārā's mystical

monism — namely his subscription to *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *hama Ūst* — went hand-in-hand

with his openness to non-Muslims and their religious thought. Dārā didn't differentiate between

the spiritual truths of his own Sufi expression of Islam and the philosophies of the "Monotheists

of India" (*Muwaḥḥidān-i hind*), just as he found the Upanishads to be the "Hidden Book"

(*kitāb-i maknūn*) mentioned in the Qur'an and, as a result, part of Islamic scripture. It must be

conceded that Dārā was largely drawing from a specific well of Indic religious thought, namely

Shankara's brand of Advaita Vedanta for his religious project, and he likely never conceived of

a single category of "Hinduism" which means terming his thought an Islamic-Hindu synthesis

would be misleading. That said, his willingness to synthesize monist Sufism with this strain of

Indian non-dualism along with his prolific relationships with non-Muslims, indicates his religious

worldview was a sharp contrast from Aḥmad Sirhindī's rejection of any confluence between

learn adherence to Divine Unity from Satan, is an unbeliever" cited in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (UNC Press:1975),19.
[764]Prigarina, 320.
[765] In one such account, the Prophet Muḥammad comes to Aurangzeb in a dream vision and reprimands him for executing Sarmad while justifying posthumously Sarmad's belief in the *shahādah*. M.G. Gupta, Sarmad the Saint, 57.

Islam and "infidelity" as well as his view that non-Muslims ought to be excluded entirely from the state.

The contention between the "*ḥaqiqah*-minded" promoters of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and their opponents has been, and remains a philosophical debate with real-world ethical and political implications. Dārā Shikūh and Aḥmad Sirhindī represent a fault-line in 17th century Sufi thought where they differed not only over the monistic doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but also over the enforcement of confessional boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims; Dārā embraced a universalism in his religious program that considered the religious truths of Indian non-Dualists and Muslims to flow from the same Supreme Being, while Sirhindī rejected that "Rām" and "Raḥman" could be signifiers for the same God.[766] Further, Aurangzeb and Dārā Shikūh represent different visions for Islam and the status of non-Muslims, the latter imposing the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims and destroying or converting Hindu temples. Just as the division between Sufis of the 17th century on the question of mystical monism represented a sea-change in Sufism, Aurangzeb's victory over his brother carried a shift in South Asian religion and politics that reverberates to this day, as the Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem claims the "Seeds of Partition were sown when [Mughal prince] Aurangzeb triumphed over [his brother] Dārā Shikoh."[767]

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[766] Yohanan Friedmann, "Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity," PhD diss. (McGill University: 1966), 109-110.
[767] Noted by Audrey Truschke in her book on Aurangzeb (Stanford University Press: 2017) c.f. Interview by Tehelka, May 1, 2015.
<http://old.tehelka.com/seeds-of-partition-were-sown-when-aurangzeb-triumphed-over-dara-shikoh/>. Last Accessed: 5 November, 2021.

## Chapter 7: The Debate over Mystical Monism in Early Modern Iran

The present study explores the fluorescence of mystical monism during the 17th century

in Safavīd Iran with the ultimate aim of assessing the embattled position that the philosophy of

*waḥdat al-wujūd* and its adherents found themselves in. Much like the Mughal and Ottoman

empires, the Safavīds also saw the rise of puritanical voices opposed to Sufism, philosophy, and

especially the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* which occupies a confluence of the two in a space

which Shahab Ahmed termed "the *Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam.*"[768]

At the same time Ottoman Istanbul saw the Kadizadelis fight establishment Sufis for position in

the imperial mosque preaching circuit and in the imperial administration at the highest levels,

Hadith-oriented Twelver Shi'a clerics known as Akhbaris sought to do away with Sufism and

philosophy, both of which were regarded as pernicious "innovations." As early as the last

quarter of the 13th century, the seeds of Ibn al-'Arabī's (d. 1240.c.e.) brand of mystical

monism were laid in Persian soil by several poets, and Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385 c.e.) persuasively

merged Ibn al-'Arabī's thought with Shi'a Islam in the 15th century. This background sets the

stage for the apogee of Iranian mystical monism in the 17th century where Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī

(d. 1640 c.e.) synthesized Twelver Shi'ism, Ibn al-'Arabī's theosophy, and *Ishrāqī*

("Illuminationist") philosophy with *waḥdat al-wujūd*. After laying this history of *waḥdat*

*al-wujūd* in Iran up to the work of Mullā Ṣadrā, the debate targeting *waḥdat al-wujūd* as the

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[768] Ahmed writes that Fazlur Raḥmān's "fundamental, and insufficiently recognized, historical point is that the Sufi and philosophical claim to a Real-Truth (*ḥaqīqah*) that lay above and beyond the truth of the Revealed law (*sharīʿa*) was not a bit of intellectual or esotericist social marginalia, but was effectively the manifesto of a wide-ranging social and cultural phenomenon that Raḥmān has called "a religion not only within religion but above religion. We might profitably characterize this "religion not only within religion but above religion" as the Sufi-philosophical (or philosophical-Sufi) amalgam" Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam* 2015, 31.

convergence of the twin "innovations" of philosophy and Sufism will be explored in order to shed light on a major flashpoint in 17th century Safavīd intellectual history.

Huseyin Yilmaz describes the political weight of powerful Sufi shaykhs in the Early Modern world, writing that "kings who come and go are but the servants of such a saint, as many beloved anecdotes make clear; no Caliph had such power over his governors as the Sufi shaykhs, and especially the supreme shaykh, the *quṭb* of any given time, had over the earth's rulers."[769] The Safavīd state is unique in that the role of king (Per. *shah*), and the "perfect spiritual guide" (*murshid-i kāmil*) merged with the leader of the Safavī tariqa and founder of the Safavīd state, Shah Ismail I (d. 1524 c.e.). "Safavī Islam", as Kathryn Babayan describes it, "may have been a mixture of many different currents and tendencies in Islamdom, but *ghuluww*, Alid loyalty, and sufism (mysticism) are its predominant features".[770] *Ghuluww* is a polemical term meaning "exaggeration" — namely the exaltation of the prophet's son-in-law 'Alī to a divine being — is often used by Sunnis to describe Shi'a beliefs, but it was also used to describe Christians[771] and Sufis[772] who "exaggerated" the nature of Jesus and their shaykhs respectively. Concerning the latter, Babayan puts it succinctly when she writes that a "thread that ties the *ghulat* together with the Sufis was their common belief in unitive fusion (*ittiḥād*) and incarnation of part or all of the divine in humans (*ḥulūl*)."[773] Leonard Lewisohn summarizes the

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[769] "being in the hands of the shaykh as a corpse is in the hands of the corpsewasher" cited in Beuhler, 159.
[770] Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxiv.
[771] Babayan writes that "*Ghuluww* symbolizes one worldview against which Islam came to define itself, as well as one among many interpretations and adaptations of Islam. The verb *ghala* (to exceed or overdo) appears twice in the Qur'an (3:171, 4:71) in the context of condemning those "People of the Book" (Christians) who raise the station of Jesus above that of the human being, deifying him." in Babayan, xxv.
[772] Amelia Gallagher, "The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismāʿīl Revisited," *Iranian Studies*, (51:3), (2018): 380.
[773] Babayan, xliv. For an early example of *ghulat* see William F. Tucker on the *Kufan Ghulat* continuation of prophecy (beyond Muḥammad), allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān and religious norms, the magical use

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"Safavīd theocracy" as being "based on a politicalization of the master–disciple relationship, focusing upon an idolatrous cult of personality built around the ruler as both 'perfect master' (*murshid-i kāmil*) and absolute monarch" Isma'il I who was "[a]potheosized as a divine incarnation[, …] glorified as the Mahdi and even as God himself by his zealous Qizilbash army."[774] Below the Safavīd state's shift away from this shared past of Sufism and "*ghulat*" toward a clerical Twelver Shi'ism will be explored in detail.

The presence of the Safavī order was felt by the Safavīd state's neighbors as well. The Qizilbash (lit. "red-heads"), named for their distinctive headgear, were "the Anatolian supporters of the Safavīd Sufi order in Ardabil and were largely composed of Turkmen tribes. Known as Alevis in contemporary Turkey, the Qizilbash believed in an extremist expression (*gholat*) of Shi'ism."[775] Specialist on the topic of the Qizilbash, Rıza Yıldırım prefers the term "Qizilbah-Alevis" as it indicates "that the Qizilbash and the Alevis are the same community of faith" and that referring to this community only as "Alevi" is the result of the late nineteenth-century policies of "Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909) toward the Qizilbash."[776] The Qizilbash threat — whether real or imagined — fed into the efforts toward Sunni confessionalization in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, and it is worth pointing out some

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of esoteric (Bāṭinī) knowledge (Greatest Name of God e.g.), religious elitism, violence against opponents, transmigration of souls ( tanāsukh ), and successive incarnations or manifestation of God." in "The Kūfan Ghulāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Türkmen Iran" Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov.(Brill: 2013), 180

[774] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: taṣawwuf and 'irfān in Late Safavīd Iran ('Abd al-Razzāq Lahījī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī on the Relation of taṣawwuf, Hikmat and 'irfān)" in *Heritage of Sufism Vol 3*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 68.

[775] Fariba Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Porous Frontiers and Hybrid Identities," in *Iran Facing Others,* ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani, (London: Palgrave, 2012), 140-1. <https://www.academia.edu/5498133/Rebels_and_Renegades_on_Ottoman_Safavīd_Borderlands>. Accessed 23 January, 2024.

[776] Rıza Yıldırım,"The Safavīd-Qizilbash Ecumene and the Formation of the Qizilbash-Alevi Community in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1500–c. 1700," *Iranian Studies*, 52:3-4, (2019): 450.

parallels taking place in Early Modern Iran. During this time, there are roughly two main trends that mark the relation between the state and Sufis in Safavīd Iran; first, the suppression of the largely Sunni Sufi orders in Safavīd lands beginning immediately in the 16th century and second, the increasing Shari'a-mindedness of *ithna'asharī* clerics in the mid 17th century that led to anti-Sufi diatribes not unlike the Kadizadeli movement in the Ottoman Empire.

In a much needed study, Ata Anzali provides an archaeology of the term *'irfān* and notes the rise of this term as opposed to "Sufism"(*taṣawwuf*) in Safavīd Iran. The shift away from *taṣawwuf* is understandable as the very head of state itself was the lineage of the Safavī order, making all other Sufi orders potentially subversive to their authority. Additionally, most Sufi orders had decidedly Sunni leanings with notable exceptions like the Dhahabiyya, Ni'matullahiyya and Nurbakhshiyya orders. Terry Graham, writing of Sufism In Safavīd Iran, describes the two choices before Sufis: "either declare themselves officially adherent to the Twelve-Imām Shī'ite sect or else quit Persian soil altogether" and notes that Naqshbandis and Qadiris prompted for the latter while the "Dhahabiyya, the Nurbakshiya, and the Ni'mullahiyya opted for the former."[777] With only three orders left, "Sufism" (*taṣawwuf*) as a larger category became anathema to the religion of the Safavīd state. As will be explored in the case of the School of Iṣfahān and Mullā Ṣadrā below, much of what is signified by "Sufism" outside of Safavīd Iran becomes repackaged under the titles "gnosis" (*'irfān*) and "philosophy" or

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[777] Terry Graham, "The Ni'matu'llāhī Order Under Safavīd Suppression and in Indian Exile," in HS Vol. III, 165. Graham interprets the Ni'matu'llahi conversion to Shi'ism as superficial and as a form of *taqiyya* or "politic dissimulation" possibly as a reaction to the murder of the fifth master of the order, Shah Khalilullah II. Graham notes the irony of a Sunni order claiming to be Shi'a in the Safavīd state where this practice is normally associated with Shi'a minorities living in Sunni majorities. The Ni'matullahis also had a presence in the Deccan where Ni'matullah's son and descendents married into the ruling Shi'a Bahmanid dynasty there (Graham, 184-5).

"wisdom" (*ḥikmah*). First, however, it is necessary to tease out the story of mystical monism in Iran prior to the establishment of the Safavīd state.

## Persian Proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Ibn al-'Arabī's Brand of Mystical Monism in the Late Medieval Period

Although the potent phrase *Hama ūst* was used in the Persian poetic tradition to express mystical monism centuries before Ibn al-'Arabī did so, the latter's brand of philosophical Sufism entered onto the Persian stage and caught fire decades after his death. Before arriving at the 17th century, it is necessary to briefly explore the transmission of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought in Persian lands through its primary medium: poetry. Two Persian poets exemplify the transmission of Akbari philosophy[778] in Persian poetry from the 13th and 14th centuries. Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d.1289 c.e.) and Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340 c.e.) are two Sufi poets and students of Ibn al-'Arabī's school whose poems became widely circulated and commented upon. The transmission of Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy was effectively translated to poetry by Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī's student Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī and exploded across the Persianate cultural sphere during the 14th century while Shabistarī's famous *masnavī*, the *Gulshān-i rāz* ("the Mystic Rose Garden"), became the poetic epitome of Akbari thought.

Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d.1289) was a poet who should also be understood as a philosopher in the tradition of Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1240).[779] His master was the

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[778] Ibn al-'Arabī was known to adherents as the "Greatest Shaykh" (*al-Shaykh al-akbar*), hence his school of thought was known as the "Akbari" school..

[779] Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī was buried "in the Saliḥiyyah cemetery, beside the tomb of Ibn al-'Arabī" in 1289 c.e. and "[t]ravelers have reported that when the Damascenes visit the tomb they say of Ibn al-'Arabī, 'This is the ocean of the Arabs'; and of 'Irāqī, 'This is the ocean of the Persians' in Fakhruddin Iraqi, *Divine*

personally-groomed successor and son-in-law of Ibn al-'Arabī, Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. In their

personal correspondence, 'Irāqī addresses Qūnawī in terms that recognize his spiritual

leadership and their bond in the philosophical language of Akbarian sufism.[780] His poetry often

expressed philosophical themes, especially his "Divine Flashes" (*Lama'āt*) which is modeled

after Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.[781] Taking inspiration from Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1123 c.e.),

'Irāqī elevates love to a divine, philosophical, principle in his poetry.[782] He even inspired the

great Persian poet Ḥafiz Shīrāzī (d. 1390 c.e.) to the extent that *'Irāqī* is one of the few poets

(other than Ḥafiz himself) mentioned by name.[783] Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, mirroring al-'Arabī's

*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* uses this "Divine Hadith" (*Ḥadith Qudsī*) of the "Hidden Treasure" and

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*Flashes (Classics of Western Spirituality)*, Trans. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York; Ramsey; Toronto: Paulist, 1982), 62.

[780]In their personal correspondence, 'Irāqī addresses Konavi in terms that recognize his spiritual leadership and their bond in the philosophical language of Akbarian sufism. "In the heart of your sincere servant Iraqi, love—which incites unrest and is mixed with pain, and which constantly rattles the chain of desire and strife and ignites the flame of longing and rapture [...] and the muddied course of my life can be purified only with the water of the visage of our lord, the Manifest Guide and Great Conjunction, the Leader (*sadr*) of the Shari'ah and the Tariqah, the Locus-of-Theophany for God and the Truth—may he remain forever a refuge for the people of the Way and an authority for the masters of Verification May you continue to dwell in the station of perfecting the imperfect and elevating the words of the perfect. I ask for you the best, and that within you the Whole may become manifest—that Whole within which there is no whole and no part." 'Irāqī, 48-49.

[781] 'Irāqī , 46.

[782] 'Irāqī describes his intention behind writing one of his more famous poems, the "Divine Flashes" (*Lama'āt*), namely that he "wants to write a book in the tradition of Ahmad Ghazali. In other words, he wants to bridge the gap between Ibn 'Arabi and Ghazzali by expressing the semi-philosophical teachings of the Fuṣūṣ according to the poetic non-philosophical Sufism of the Sewanih" Ahmad Ghazali *Sawanih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love* trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London: Routledge, 1986), 9.

[783] "O minstrel, turn the key and strike the Hejaz mode / For by this route the friend went and did not remember us. / The ghazals of 'Irāqī are the song of Ḥafiz- /Who has heard this heart-kindling mode and not cried out?" Poem CXXXVIII in Ḥafiz Shīrāzī, *The Selected Poems of Ḥafiz of Shīrāz,* Trans. Peter Avery, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2007), 188. Avery confirms it is 'Irāqī who "in every beautiful face or object, a reflection, as in a mirror; of the Eternal Beauty' may be seen" Ftnt. on 189.

explains that it is "an allusion to the infinite ontological perfections of God […] summarized as the Names and Attributes."[784]

The Āẕarbayjanī Sufi shaykh, Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340 c.e.) provided answers to seventeen questions from Rukh al-Dīn Amir Husayn Harawi (d. 1318 c.e.) regarding "mystical theosophy" (*'irfān*) and "spiritual wayfaring" (*sulūk*) in *masnavī* form and this became Shabistarī's *magnum opus*, the *Gulshān-i rāz* which has been translated into English variously as the "The Garden of Mystery" or "The Mystic Rose Garden."[785] Shabistarī wrote this work as a response to questions about Islamic mysticism including the ideas of Ibn al-'Arabī posed in a letter by Mīr Husayn Harawī (d. 1318 c.e.).[786] Henry Corbin sums up the importance of this text, writing that it has "been read, re-read and meditated [upon] by generation after generation, and has been a sort of *vade-mecum* [guide or handbook] for Iranian Sufis.[787] The topic at the center of this famous text is a philosophical expression of mystical monism made more palatable through the use of rhyming couplets that bear florid metaphors. Leonard Lewisohn points out that "in the Garden of Mystery Shabistarī embraces without reservation the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi,"[788] and goes as far as to say that "[o]ne of the main reasons that his Garden of Mystery

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[784] Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, 18.

[785] Although most translations render "*Gulshān*" as garden or rose-garden, Henry Corbin plays with the dual meaning of "rosary" as a bouquet of roses and the rosary as a tool of prayer, namely in the Catholic tradition.

[786] See Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity:The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*, (Curzon Press: 1995), 20-22.

[787] Corbin, 305.

[788] Lewisohn, 29. Although Lewisohn also notes that in another work known as the "Sa'adat-nama" Shabistarī "is more cautious and raises certain objections to [Ibn al-'Arabī], relying mainly on the 'politically correct' [al-]Ghazali."

ranks as one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian literature is that it encapsulates, despite its

brevity, the main philosophical doctrines of post-Ibn 'Arabian Persian Sufism."[789]

Mukhtar Ali writes of the influence held by Shabistarī's magnum opus and his late 15th

century commentator Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lahījī (1506-7 c.e.):

> Maḥmūd Shabistarī is the greatest Persian poet associated with the school of
> philosophical Sufism. A masterpiece of Persian poetry, his *Gulshān-i rāz* (The Garden
> of Mystery) forms the basis of Lahījī's 800-page commentary entitled *Mafātıḥ al-iʿjaz
> fı sharḥ Gulshān-i rāz* (Keys of Wonder Commenting on the Gulshān-i rāz). Lahījī's
> opus is the most complete work on philosophical Sufism in the Persian language.[790]

Lahījī belonged to the Khorasanian Nūrbakhshiya branch of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order which

would become aligned thoroughly with Shi'a thought in the 16th century. Although brilliant in its

own right, his association with a Shi'a Sufi order may in part explain the success and influence of

his commentary in Safavīd lands. The historical circumstances for Shabistarī's *Rose Garden* are

also evident where Lewisohn writes that "the Garden of Mystery can be seen to mirror the Sufi

tolerance" of the Ilkhans during the time of Rashīd al-Dīn and Ghazan Khan."[791]

Leonard Lewisohn highlights eighteen couplets in the *Gulshān-i rāz* which convey

Shabistarī's argument about the superficial difference between monotheism and polytheism in

light of "the most fundamental tenet of Islamic esotericism," the "Unity of Being." Lewisohn's

lyrical English translation is worth citing as Shabistarī evaluates "idolatry" in light of the Unity of

Being using several choice words:

> Since both faith and infidelity- both piety / and blasphemy-in Being are always / abiding
> and residing, thus idolatry  / and Unity are both but one essentially.  / Since from Being
> all things are proceeding[. …] All infidelity has Faith inside; within each idol's heart a

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[789] Lewisohn, 143.

[790] Mukhtar Ali, 7.

[791] Lewisohn, 31.

soul resides and every heresy has hymns and litanies and daily, infidelity recites the rosary - "Verily, all which is, does hymn his praise." [...] "See one, say One, know One:" this axiom sums the root and branches of Iman.

The reasoning, similar to other mystical monists who look sympathetically on religious "others," is that God's Being gives rise to all that exists, even idolatry, and furthermore, the humanist realization that "within each idol's heart a soul resides" reminds the reader that all are of "Adam's tribe" (*banī Adam*)[792] and have a shared heritage as a creation "in God's image."[793] Lewisohn encapsulates how Shabistarī obliterates the dualism of "belief" and "infidelity" in this passage with an eye toward another great Sufi and proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> Shabistarī's aim in these eighteen couplets was to demonstrate the unity of devotional intention, the 'doxological oneness', one might say, of both the polytheist's and monotheist's approach to the Absolute. No doubt he would have endorsed Dara Shikuh's (1615-1659 A.D.) opinion, expressed two centuries later, that the adepts among the Hindu mystics were the true monotheists or "unitarians of India" (*muwahhidan-i hind*); he would also have agreed with the latter's conclusion that there is a difference in the verbal expression of gnosis and theology, but no essential doctrinal distinction between the Hindu adept and the Muslim.[794]

This tantalizing comparison between two proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* expresses the similar religious worldviews held by Dārā Shikūh and Maḥmūd Shabistarī who, although separated by centuries and thousands of miles, are both exhibiting what Lewisohn calls the "ecumenical"

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[792] Sa'dī Shīrāzī (d. 1291/2 c.e.), writing a generation earlier than Shabistarī reflects a similar humanist current in Medieval Persian poetry through his poem on The Tribe of Adam (Banī Ādam): "The members of the human race are limbs one to another, for at creation they were of one essence. When one limb is pained by fate, the others cannot rest. You who are unsympathetic to the troubles of others, it is not fitting to call you human." (*banī-ādam aʿzāy-e yek peykarand / keh dar āfarīnesh 'zeh yek goharand / cho ʿozvī be-dard āvarad rūzgār / degar ʿozvhā rā namānad qarār / to k'az meḥnat-e dīgarān bī-ghamī / nashāyad keh nāmat nahand ādamī*). In *The Gulistan of Sa'di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, Trans. Wheeler Thackston, (Bethesda: Ibex, 2008) 22.

[793] From the popular Hadith that mirrors a similar statement in Genesis.

[794] Leonard Lewisohn, "The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistarī," in Heritage of Sufism, Vol II, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 382-3.

attitude of "theomonism" in their refutation of the religious "otherness" of non-Muslims in light of God's Unity and plurality of manifestations.[795]

Lahījī's commentary on Shabistarī's verses regarding "true infidelity" are particularly germane when analyzing the radical attitude towards non-Muslims found in this brand of mystical monism. Lewisohn translates Lahījī's commentary on this topic as follows:

> If the Muslim who professes Divine Unity (tawḥīd) and disavows the idol, were to become aware and conscious of what the idol is in reality, and of Whom it is a manifestation of, and of what Person it is who appears in the idol's form - he would certainly comprehend that the religion of the Truth (Ḥaqq) is in idolatry. Since the idol is a theophany (maẓhar) of the Absolute Being Who is God (Ḥaqq), therefore in respect to its essential reality, the idol is God. Now, seeing as the religion and rite of Muslims is Truth-worship (Ḥaqq-parastī) and [as has been explained above] idolatry and Truth-worship are one and the same, therefore true religion is in idolatry.[796]

Behind the shocking statement here that "true religion is in idolatry" is the key philosophical precept of Akbari Sufism that in all things one can find God's "theophony" or "manifestation," (tajallī, maẓhar), even within idols.

It is essential to note that mystical monism was also given poetic expression in the late 13th century through the work of that powerhouse of medieval Persian Poetry, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273 c.e.). Perhaps better than Ibn al-'Arabī's prose could, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's poetry describes the transcendence of confessional identity through the mystical experience of oneness and the obliteration of plurality from view. For Ibn al-'Arabī and Rūmī both, poetic expression was an essential way to convey a reality that went beyond discursive intellect toward the undifferentiated "Truth"(Ḥaqq) religious differentiation. In one passage from the *masnavī* he has God say "I have given everyone a character / I have given each a terminology (M2:1754) [

[795] Lewisohn, 383.
[796] Lewisohn, 395.

... ] Hindus praise me in the terms of India / and the Sindis praise in terms from Sind / I am not made pure and precious / We do not look to language or to words / We look inside to find intent and rapture(M2:1757-9)[. ... ] Love's folk live beyond religious borders / the community and creed of lovers: God" (M2:1770).[797] Religious plurality was not just in the message he preached, but in the company Rūmī kept. Perhaps the most telling example is from a biographical account of his funeral, which included "Christians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, Turks" who "marched ahead, each holding their sacred books and reading from the Psalms, Torah, and Gospel. When the Christians were asked why they came to Rūmī's funeral, they replied, 'In seeing him we have comprehended the true nature of Jesus, of Moses, and of all the prophets.'"[798] In a sense, they were living out the multivalent "Truth" espoused in Rūmī's poetry and in Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy. Rūmī's poetry is a useful reminder that mystical monism accompanied by an attitude of "ecumenical theomonism" was by no means particular only to Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, and his popularity goes a long way toward explaining how the signifier *waḥdat al-wujūd* took root in Persian soil.

**The Mystical Monist Shi'ism of Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385 c.e.)**

Henry Corbin once claimed that it is "a fact of fundamental significance" that "Shi'īte thinkers found themselves completely at home in the work of Ibn al-'Arabī."[799] Perhaps no Shi'ī scholar of the late medieval period was more "at home" in Akbari philosophy than Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385 c.e.). Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes that Āmulī was not just a "Sufi and follower

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[797] In Lewis, *Rūmī East and West*, 406.
[798] Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, (Penn State UP: 2003), 78.
[799] Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 332.

of the school of Ibn 'Arabī" but that his "*Jamī' al-asrār* is a summit of gnostic Shi'ism" where

the relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism can be summarized by his belief that "every true

Shi'ite is a Sufi and every true Sufi a Shi'ite."[800] Following a "profound spiritual crisis" which

caused him to break with "all worldly ambitions" and move to "the holy Shi'ite places in Iraq,"

Ḥaydar Āmulī began to study and write on numerous topics including mystical monism.[801] Āmulī

wrote on an "esoteric ontological *tawḥīd* (only God 'is') which bears witness to the unity of

being "and he penned "one of the longest" commentaries on Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ* titled "'The

Text of Texts Commenting on the Fuṣūṣ' (*Naṣṣ al-Nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*).[802] His

magnum opus, "The Compendium of Mysteries and Source of Lights" (*Jāmīʿ al-asrār wa*

*manbaʿ al-anwār*) discusses *tawḥīd wujūdī* and the "five presences" associated with Akbari

thought. In this text he speaks favorably of Ibn al-'Arabī and his son-in-law Sadr al-Dīn

Qūnawī, quoting from them on the topic of divine unity.[803]

Although *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy are present in Āmulī's

thought, Wisnovsky notes that "so too is Avicenna's metaphysics and al-Ṭusī's and ['Allamah]

al-Ḥillī's Twelver-Shīʿī *kalām*,"[804] making him an excellent representative of major currents in

both Persianate Islamic philosophy and medieval Shi'ī theology. It should be noted that Āmulī

didn't uncritically accept everything from Ibn al-'Arabī, and the former opposed the latter's

view that, while Muḥammad was the seal of prophecy (*nubuwwa*), "Jesus" was "the Seal of the

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[800] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Shi'Ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History, *Religious Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Sep., 1970), 238.

[801] Corbin, 334-5.

[802] Corbin, 334-5 and Muktar Ali 8.

[803] Mukhtar Ali, Philosophical Sufism: and Introduction to the School of Ibn al-'Arabī, (New York: Routledge, 2022), 46.

[804] Wisnovsky, 60.

absolute or universal *walayah* [spiritual initiation] " since, for Āmulī, the "Seal of the *walāyah*" is the Imamate.[805] Although Āmulī married Akbari thought with Twelver Shi'ism quite successfully, this difference of opinion denotes a tension between the contested meanings of *walāyah* between the "Imamate" and "sainthood" in Shi'i and Sufi thought respectively, and this tension will flare up in 17th century anti-Sufi polemics.

Āmulī was skilled in expressing mystical monism, not only through recourse to Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy, but in a manner reminiscent of the great Persian mystics of the first centuries of Islam like Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī. In another work, titled "The Secrets of the Law" (*Asrār al-Sharī'a*) Āmulī wrote of the "Greater Resurrection of the spirit" which Mukhtar Ali translates as:

> the unveiling of God's Essence and Being from behind the veils of Beauty and Majesty. It is removing the veils of otherness, whereby one sees nothing but Him, namely, the theophany of a single Essence in the infinite names. As it is said, "There is nothing in existence except God," His Names, Attributes and Acts. Everything is Him, by Him, from Him and to Him.[806]

In this passage the familiar refrains of existential monism are present, both that of al-Ghazali and Ibn al-'Arabī's commentarial tradition, "There is nothing in existence except God," and from classical Persian Sufism, "All is Him" (*hama ūst*) and "All is from Him" (*hama az ūst*).

Regarding *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a specific expression of mystical monism, Āmulī followed other commentators of Ibn al-'Arabī in adopting this term. While other Sufis and Islamic mystics balked at the term for seemingly making God too immanent in the world and sacrificing his transcendence, Robert Wisnovsky writes that, by contrast:

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[805] Corbin, HIP, 335.
[806] Mukhtar Ali, 193.

Ḥaydar Āmulī seized upon the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* with enthusiasm, because it could explain, in cosmological terms, the presence of the divine on earth, and particularly in the form of the imams. What Ḥaydar Āmulī still needed was a way to differentiate the imams from other creatures. This is where the Neoplatonic metaphysics of perfection, as articulated by Avicenna in Kitāb al-shifā' / Ilāhīyyāt 4.3 and transformed by Ibn al-ʿArabī into a perfect-man cosmology, came in handy, because it enabled Ḥaydar Āmulī to explain the perfection of the imams as resulting from the higher degree to which the divine names of majesty and beauty were instantiated in this elite subset of humans.[807]

For Āmulī, then, the concepts of Perfect Man and waḥdat al-wujūd — so popular in Ibn al-'Arabī's commentarial tradition — helped explain the role of the Imams in his Shi'ī theological worldview.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr highlights more confluences between Akbari thought and Shi'ī theology that Āmulī emphasized, namely the highest saintly pole (*quṭb*) in Sufi hagiology and the Imams and the elevation of Muḥammad to a primordial principle often described as light, or the Muḥammadan light (*al-nur al-Muḥammadī*). Nasr explains these two confluences:

> The idea of the Imam as the pole of the Universe and that of the *quṭb* in Sufism are nearly identical, as asserted so clearly by Sayyid Haydar Āmulī when he said, "The *quṭb* and the Imam are two expressions possessing the same meaning and referring to the same person." The doctrine of the universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*) expounded by Ibn 'Arabi is very similar to the Shi'ite doctrine of the *quṭb* and the Imam, as is the doctrine of the mahdi developed by later Sufi masters. All these doctrines refer essentially to the same esoteric reality, the *haqīqat al-Muḥammadīyah*, as present in both Shi'ism and Sufism.[808]

Here Nasr touches on a key point of convergence for Haydar 'Āmulī between Shi'i and Sufi thought, namely, the "pole" (*quṭb*) and the "Imam" as "two expressions" denoting the "same

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[807] Robert Wisnovsky "One Aspect of the Akbarian Turn in Shi'i Theology" in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 59.
[808] Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism," 235.

person." This effectively makes the highest saint in Sufi hagiology identical to the Imam which, along with the shared principal of the "Muḥammadan Truth" (ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadīyah), helps both Shiʾi and Sufi traditions become more legible to one another.

## Mystical Monism and the School of Iṣfahān

Marshall Hodgson writes that "the whole age from Bihzad the painter (b. *c*. 1450) through Mullā Ṣadrā the philosopher (d. 1640), in which the cultural forms associated with the Persian language culminated, ranks as something of a golden age and may usefully be called the 'Persianate flowering'."[809] Without a doubt, mystical monism occupied a place of prominence during this "Persianate flowering," and crescendoed with Mullā Ṣadrā's synthesis of Ishrāqī and Akbari philosophies with Shiʾī theology. In Ata Anzali's estimation, although "the traditional *social structure* of Sufism was marginalized over the course of the seventeenth century," Mullā Ṣadrā's synthesis incorporating "fundamental elements of the Sufi worldview into Safavīd Shiʾī thought" was so successful that even "the most controversial of Sufi doctrines, the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), was discussed and debated in Qajar madrasas through the teaching of, and commentary on, Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn ʿArabi."[810] Here, the school of Iṣfahān will be evaluated for its role in centering mystical monism — especially the ideology of *waḥdat al-wujūd* — within its philosophy and Shiʾī theology before also considering the connections to non-Muslims that this school witnessed.

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[809] Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, Vol 3, 49.
[810] Ata Anzali and S.M. Hadi Gerami, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavīd Iran: Mulla Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qummī's Ḥikmat al-ʿĀrifīn,* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018). 2.

The "School of Iṣfahān" was a term coined by the scholar of Islamic philosophy, Henry Corbin, in the mid 20th century to describe Mir Dāmād (d.1631-2 c.e. ) and his successors.[811] Epitomizing a trend in the school of Iṣfahān, Toshihiko Izutsu characterizes Mir Dāmād's thought as "a kind of harmonious combination of rational thinking and visionary experience."[812] Indeed, rather than seeing a contradiction between mystical insight and discursive philosophy, the two were combined in the School of Iṣfahān which could count both rigorous philosophers and mystics among its ranks. Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes that Mullā Ṣaḍrā "expounded a rigorously logical philosophy" but that he also "wrote a treatise on a mystical vision he had received in Qum."[813] Muḥammad Bāqīr Astarābādī, also known as Mir Dāmād , is considered "the central figure in the school of Iṣfahān" by Henry Corbin and S.H. Nasr,[814] but the pinnacle of this school was arguably his student and "spiritual son" Mullā Ṣaḍrā Shīrāzī (d. 1640 c.e.).[815] Ṣaḍrā's magnum opus, *al-Hikma al-muta'āliyya fī 'l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* can be translated as "The Transcendent Wisdom in Four Intellectual Journeys" and its very title suggests the "spiritual journey as the actualization of transcendence" available to the spiritual seeker and philosopher both.[816] The end result of Ṣaḍrā's work is the synthesis of philosophy and mystical

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[811] S.H. Nasr "The School of Iṣfahān" in *Heritage of Sufism,* Vol 3, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 3.

[812] Cited in Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān," 91-2, cf. Toshihiko Isutzu, "Mir Dāmād and his Metaphysics," in *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, 2.

[813] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy,* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 32.

[814] Lewisohn, 90.

[815] Sajjad Rizvi, "Mullā Ṣaḍrā" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Revised 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mulla-Ṣaḍrā/#Bib>. Last Accessed 19 January, 2024.

[816] Janis Ešots, "Mullā Ṣaḍrā's Teaching on Wujud: A Synthesis of Mysticism and Philosophy," Ph.D. diss., (Tallinn University: 2007), 13.

seeking, both of which revolve around the fulcrum that is the "unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

It is worth examining what exactly "mystical monism" looks like in the School of Iṣfahān as well as the connections to Sufi philosophy and literature that thrived among its students. Although the Safavīd state brooked little to no expression of organizational Sufism outside of its own order, Islamic mysticism flourished under different titles, namely, under "gnosis" (*'irfān*) and "wisdom" (*ḥikmah*). Leonard Lewisohn concludes from Mullā Ṣadrā's *Three Principles* (*Sīh aṣl*), that the great Persian philosopher was "an advocate of specifically Sufi philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*), rather than some independent Shi'ite philosophical mysticism divorced from the Sufi tradition," noting that his particular *ḥikmat* ("wisdom") is "undeniably the fruit of his philosophical affiliation with the Sufi gnostic tradition – both that of the Akbarian theosophical school and the purely lyrical Persian Sufism of Rūmī – a fact demonstrated by his continual citation of Rūmī's Mathnawi and Shabistarī's 'Garden of Mystery' (*Gulshān-i rāz*) to illustrate the key concepts and ideas in this treatise."[817] As one would expect from a native son of the poetry-capitol Shiraz, Nasr writes that Mullā Ṣadrā:

> also knew intimately the tradition of Persian Sufi poetry in one of whose centers, Shiraz, he had in fact been raised. But within the Persian cultural world it is the Mathnawi of Mawlana Jal al al-Dīn Rūmī that is quoted most often by him. Many of its verses adorn his writings and he often turns to this inexhaustible treasury of wisdom to demonstrate through a beautiful verse some particular intellectual argument he has tried to prove through logical demonstration. In the spirituality characteristic of Sadr al-Dīn, both the Sufism of the type of Rūmī and that of Ibn 'Arabi and his followers meet.[818]

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[817] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān," 98.
[818] S. H. Nasr, Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 74.

In Lewisohn and Nasr's estimation the *ḥikmah* tradition contains both the Sufi philosophy of the Akbari school and the deeply philosophical poetry of Rūmī and Shabistarī. It is the "Akbari" tradition — Ibn al-'Arabī and his commentators — that is worth exploring in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā as it will bring this analysis closer to the centrality of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Ṣadrā's thought.

Muḥammad Reza Juzi finds that "no philosopher had ever been so intimately steeped in and associated with Ibn 'Arabi as Sadr al-Dīn [Mulla] Shīrāzī, for no other philosopher had, up until his day, ever been able to bring about such a grand conformity between mystical intuition (*kashf-i 'irfānī*), intellectual demonstration (*burhān-i 'aqlī*), and divine revelation (*wahy-i Ilāhī*)."[819] Regarding the ideology of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being) so associated by his time with Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought, Ṣadrā's intervention in the School of Iṣfahān was first, to take up the primacy of "being" over "quiddity" as he adopted this ideology and second, to add his own unique stamp to the "Unity of Being" by acknowledging "gradations of being"(*tashkīk al-wujud*).

Shihab al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191 c.e.) whose influential philosophy known as "Illuminationism" (*Ishraq*) differed from Muslim peripatetic — that is to say, Aristotelian — philosophers like Bū 'Ali Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037c.e.):

> For the Muslim Peripatetics, being/existence (*wujūd*) was held to have a priority over essence (*māhiyya*). Essence was thus relegated to the status of accident. Suhrawardī held this to be unacceptable, since, for him, existence could "not have any external

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[819] Muḥammad Reza Juzi,"The Influence of Ibn 'Arabi's Doctrine of the Unity of Being on the Transcendental Theosophy of Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. 3, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 272.

reality outside the intellect which abstracts it from objects." The existence of an object was its essence and should not be considered as "a separate reality."[820]

So Suhrawardī overturned the primacy of existence (*wujūd*) in favor of essence (*māhiyya*) in his *Ishrāqī* philosophy, and Mir Dāmād would carry up this torch in what would become known as his School of Iṣfahān. His student Mullā Ṣadrā was also initially a proponent of the "principality of quiddity"(aṣālat al-māhiyya), but had come to acknowledge the "principality of existence"(aṣālat al-wujud) later after being won over by the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his interpreters.[821] Particularly influential in Ṣadrā's ideological formation were Saʾīn al-Dīn Turka's *Tamhīd al-qawaʾid* and Dawud Qaysari's commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.[822] Ṣadrā describes how his reasoning was guided toward the Unity of Being:

> God Almighty guided me on the straight path and showed me that Being and its existing phenomena are all one and the same. Whatever can be seen in the universe is nothing but the revelation of that unique reality and the manifestation of His attributes and divine Names. All created beings, from the Holy Spirit down to matter, with all their various forms and modes of existence, are nothing but various degrees of the one true Light and separate self-determinations of one divine Being.[823]

Here one is faced with a veritable "creedal" statement professing *waḥdat al-wujūd* from Mullā Ṣadrā, where "Being" itself and all existing phenomena are — at the most esoteric level — "one and the same." Where God's "one divine Being" is only separate from "created beings" by degrees, one can glimpse the age-old problematic with the "Unity of Being," namely that it risks contravening the transcendence of the Creator (God) with His creatures. As will be explored in

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[820] Richard Ian Netton, "Suhrawardī's Heir? The Ishrāqī Philosophy of Mīr Dāmād," in *Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. 3, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 234.

[821] Juzi, 268-9.

[822] Juzi, 269.

[823] Juzi, 272. Citing book 2 chapter 25 of Ṣadrā's *Four Journeys*.

detail below in this study, "waḥdat al-wujūd" would become the target of vehement attacks from the Safavīd clerical establishment in the mid-late 17th century for precisely this reason.

As if anticipating these critiques, Mullā Ṣadrā's unique twist on *waḥdat al-wujūd* was to enumerate "gradations of being" (*tashkīk al-wujud*) that elucidate how one goes from God's undifferentiated Existence to all the existents that comprise the world. Remarkably, the great Shi'ī polymath Nasr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274 c.e.) described a "gradation of being" (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) in his correspondence with Ibn al-'Arabī's successor Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī when asked about *wujūd* and its relationship to quiddity (*māhiyya*).[824]  Not unlike other Akbari philosophers, the highest level of God's undifferentiated Unity is His "Divine Essence (*dhāt*)".[825] This stage is also termed the "Absolute Unseen" (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*) and as there is no gradation or differentiation at this stage, it  is characterized by negative theology. Then, the "first self-manifestation" (*al-ẓuhūr al-awwal*) of that essence is also known as "the most holy emmanation"  (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*).[826] Finally,  the third stage is what both Ibn al-'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā call the "holy emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*) which is the "level in which limited or conditioned beings (*wujūdāt muqayyada*) emerge from potentiality in the Absolute into outward 'reality.'"[827]

In short, these three phases explain how one goes from absolute unconditioned Oneness to conditioned or delimited beings necessary for the difference and plurality found in the world. Juzi notes that for Ṣadrā there "is only one real instance of Being in creation," and that this

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[824] William Chittick, "Mysticism Versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Ṭūsī al-Qūnawī Correspondence," *Religious Studies,* 17 (1981). 101.
[825] Juzi, 271.
[826] Juzi, 271.
[827] Juzi, 271.

"reality of Being" (ḥaqīqat al-wujud) engages in "self-disclosure" to form what we call the "cosmos of world" which by itself, has "no independent or substantial reality" of its own, but relies on that "reality of Being" for its own existence. Put simply, everything that exists does not exist on its own accord but relies on God's Existence, the only true Existence. While critics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* are quick to declare the violation of God's transcendence over creation with this ideology, Ṣadrā emphasizes the singularity of God's Existence and the dependence of all in existence on It.

Examples of discursive philosophy like the above are not the only way in which Mullā Ṣadrā engages with mystical monism, rather, as a true son of Shīrāz, he makes recourse to poetry. Sayeh Meisami explains the junction between philosophy and poetry in Mullā Ṣadrā and Martin Heidegger where the "methodological priority of poetic thinking and writing" is used "for a type of philosophy whose primary object of inquiry is existence or being (*wujūd*)."[828] Mullā Ṣadrā is building off of a tradition that makes recourse to poetry to explore the concept of *wujūd* and express the paradoxical or otherwise ineffable; Ibn al-'Arabī not only peppers his prose with poetry, but it the likes of Maḥmūd Shabistarī and Fakhr al-Dīn Irāqī who translated Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy into poetic form in the Persian language. Mullā Ṣadrā, in his *Four Journeys* uses the poetry of Maḥmūd Shabistarī[829] and quotes amply from the latter's Gulshān-i rāz in a "collection of his favorite lines of poetry"[830] which makes sense as Shabistarī's magnum opus was an attempt to distill the philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabī in poetic form. Both Ṣadrā's gradations of Being (tashkik al-wujud) and "unity of the knower and known" (*ittiḥād al-'āqil*

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[828] Meisami, 58.
[829] Meisami, 61.
[830] Meisami, 63.

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*wa'l ma'qūl*) are complex and even paradoxical; "The poetic method also facilitates an imaginative understanding of the unity of the knower and the known that defies the subject-object dichotomy of Peripatetic epistemology on the grounds of the graded unity of existence."[831] Ṣadrā ends his treatise on the "Unification fo the Intellector and the Intellected" (*ittiḥād al-'āqil wa'l ma'qūl*) with a couplet: "It is not to be denied for God / To gather the entire universe in one."[832]

Mullā Ṣadrā's student 'Abd al-Razzāq Lahījī (d.1661-2 c.e.) would continue the mystical monist project within the School of Iṣfahān. Like his teacher, Lahījī subscribed to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Lahījī describes the mystical path in terms that lead ultimately toward *waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> It should be understood that the via mystica which leads to God Almighty is a way upon which none should ever imagine any methodical progress (*sulūk*) can be made except by means of humble entreaty and self-abnegation (*'ajz va nīstī*). Indeed, what relation does a clod of dust and dirt have to the pure Creator? What likeness does an earthborn being have with the Lord of Lords? For there is no kinship between the creature and the Creator, or between the possible and the Necessary Being, the temporally created and the Eternal Being and the perishing and the Everlasting One, such that by betaking oneself to the former one should be able to attend the latter's Court. The only way to that Court is through negation of all relationships (*ṣalb-i hama-yi nisbatha*), for when all relationships and ties are abolished and the veils of fantasy and imagination are removed from one's sight, such that one utterly despairs of all things, then the good tidings of hope in all things is issued. [...] Thus, the object of those who have personally verified the Truth among the Sufis (*muḥaqqin az sufiyya*) in professing the 'Unity of Being' (*waḥdat-i wujud*) and complete self-annihilation (*fana'-yi muṭlaq*) cannot be anything above and beyond the idea here alluded to. Whatever else you hear about this matter, beware, pay it no heed![833]

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[831] Meisami, 73.

[832] S.H. Nasr and M. Aminrazafi, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia Vol 5: From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century*, 221.

[833] Lewisohn, "Sufism and The School of Iṣfahān," 108.

One gets the indication of an embattled position in defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as Lahījī implores the reader to pay no heed to "whatever else you hear about this matter," as well as the belabored point that there is "no kinship between the creature and the Creator" which preserves God's transcendence (*tanzīh*).

As is often the case with those interested in mystical monism, an attendant interest in non-Muslim religions could be found among members of the School of Iṣfahān. Syed Hossein Nasr makes note of the remarkable interest taken in non-Muslim religions among these scholars of Iṣfahān:

> more than any of the other former philosophical schools in Islam, the thinkers of the school of Iṣfahān were very much interested in understanding the doctrines of other religions. Their philosophical interest in religious diversity embraced, first of all, Judaism and Christianity, religions which had been examined by Muslim theologians before them, yet which had seldom been made the subject of inquiry by Islamic philosophers. Several philosophers of the Safavīd period composed treatises on the Bible and a few others studied Hebrew with a view to understanding the Torah. Another religion which attracted their interest was Hinduism, so that for the first time in Islamic thought (with the possible exception of the scientist-cum-philosopher Biruni), one finds Persian-Islamic thinkers composing studies and commentaries on Hindu texts in Persia itself as well as in India, where the school of Iṣfahān had many follower.[834]

With regard to the interest in Hinduism, Nasr surely has Mīr Findiriskī in mind, and Mullā Ṣadrā is said to have taught the Armenian Jewish convert to Islam later known in India as Sarmad Kashani who, along with this student Abhay Chand informed much of the chapter on Judaism recorded in the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib*.

The interest in non-Muslim religious thought in the school of Iṣfahān is epitomized by none better than Mīr Abū al-Qāsim Findiriskī (d. 1640–1 c.e. ). Findiriskī visited India in 1606

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[834] S.H. Nasr, "The School of Iṣfahān in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism," in *Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. 3, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 13-14.

and 1611, electing to stay there for years at a time.[835] Prior to his visit, the Mughal emperor

Akbar and his courtiers oversaw a remarkable translation movement as numerous Sanskrit texts

were translated into Persian. According to Hodgson, Mir Findiriskī was "associated with the

work going on at the Indian court of translating Sanskrit literary and philosophical works into

Persian, and must have carried the awareness that the Vedanta and Sufism could be seen as

identical in substance."[836] Hodgson seems to suggest that, by looking back to Plato and to the

"old Iranian Mazdean tradition" like Suhrawardī's *Ishrāqī* philosophy, the philosophy of the

"Iṣfahān Platonists" was "broadly" and "humanistically" based, but this would overlook the

adherence to the particulars of Twelver Shi'ī thought that one can also find in Mullā Ṣadrā and

other thinkers of this school. Regardless, Mīr Findiriskī's travels to India and translations of

Sanskritic texts represented a remarkable intellectual curiosity and openness to exploring

non-Muslim religious thought, and one of his best works was the translation of the mystical

Vedic text, the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*.

Findiriskī translated "Selections from the Yoga-vāsiṣṭha" (*Muntakhab-i Jūg Basisht*)

and held this Hindu text in high regard spiritually, writing: "[t]his book/speech (*sukhān*) is for the

world like water, Pure and wisdom-giving like the Qur'ān. When you have passed through the

Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet, from no one else is there a speech of this nature."[837]

Muzaffar Alam compares a number of Persian translations of the Yoga-vāsiṣṭha including

Findiriskī's and notes that:

> the history of Findiriskī's version of the text is both part and proof of the fact that from
> Jahāngīr's time onward the text was primarily received as Sufi. Findiriskī, a traveler and

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[835] Muzaffar Alam, "In Search of a Sacred King," 434.

[836] Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, Vol. 3, 52.

[837] Alam, 440.

newcomer to India who had learned Sanskrit, seems to have been so taken with quṭb-i Jaḥānī's version of the text since it bore clear filial ties to the philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī that, when it came time to choose a text for his own translation project, he selected not the Upanisads or the Rāmāyaṇa but the Yogavāsiṣṭḥa.[838]

As Alam notes, the mystical thought in the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭḥa* was so compelling for mystically minded Muslims that it is hardly surprising that it was translated so many times, but especially intriguing is the affinity the text was seen to have with Ibn al-'Arabī's brand of mystical monism. The Mughal prince and Sufi shaykh, Dārā Shikūh, would offer yet another translation of the Yoga-vāsisṭḥa and work this text into his religious worldview where *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabī was at the center of a pluralist religious outlook.

Not only was Findiriskī interested in translating Sanskrit texts, but a "connection with the noted Zoroastrian priest and author Āẕar Kaivān is also reported."[839] Āẕar Kayvān (1533-1618 c.e.) led a "a neo-Mazdean renaissance" that set out to "recover the memories of the pre-Islamic past and to alter the allegorical meaning of Iran's ancient history and culture," he could count among his disciples "Zoroastrians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus" and one of his most influential students, Fath Allah Shīrāzī (d. A.H. 997/A.D. 1588), was "a close advisor of the Mughal Emperor Akbar."[840] Āẕar Kayvān claimed "that the different schools of the Indian, Persian, and Islamic intellectual traditions all reflect a single essence."[841] M. Athar Ali notes that Mobad Shah was indeed a follower of Āẕar Kayvān, meaning that one of the greatest works of

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[838] Alam, 443

[839] Alam, 434.

[840] Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran," *Iranian Studies,* Vol 29(1), (Winter-Spring) 1996, 259-260.

[841] Daniel J. Sheffield, "The Language of Heaven in Safavīd Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āẕar Kayvān and His Followers," in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014),172.

comparative religion produced in the early modern period, the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib,* was produced by a member of this universalizing sect.[842]

The common thread of interest between the School of Iṣfahān and Āẕar Kayvān's neo-Zoroastrian movement was Ishrāqī philosophy as Kayvan's "group included ardent admirers and translators of al-Suhrawardī," and Henry Corbin goes as far as to describe his works as an "*Ishrāqī* Zoroastrian literature."[843] A work from Kayvan's circle titled "The Region of Knowledge and the Garden of Vision" (*Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman*), "composed circa 1610 CE"[844] claims that the "second name of Zardusht is Ibrāhīm" and Sheffield breaks down the significance as follows:

> In this interpretation, not just the 'People of the Book' but members of all religious traditions have an equally valid claim to Divine Truth. If Zarathustra can be equated with the prophet Abraham, Zoroastrian revelation is made legitimate within an Islamicate worldview at the same time that Muslim revelation is legitimized within a Zoroastrian worldview.[845]

Here, Zoroaster is made into a Quranic prophet by equating him with Abraham, making Islam and Zoroastrianism legible to one another through a common prophet. Although Kayvan's link to the School of Iṣfahān is tenuous at best, representing a fascinating zeitgeist of religious pluralism between Iran and India, interest in the shared philosophical and religious past of Zoroastrian Persia seeped into the School of Iṣfahān; a "pupil of Mir Dāmād" named quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Ashkivarī" (d. 1664-1665 c.e.) "wrote a vast rhapsody in Arabic and

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[842] See M. Athar Ali, "Pursuing an Elusive Seeker of Universal Truth: The Identity and Environment of the Author of the 'Dabistān-i maẕāhib,'" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1999), 365-373.

[843] Henry Corbin, History of Islamic Philosophy, 329-30.

[844] Sheffield, 166.

[845] Sheffield, 177.

Persian" which explores "the ancient sages prior to Islam," and his "chapter on Zoroaster contains a remarkable comparison of the Twelfth Imam of the Shiites with the Saoshyant or eschatological Saviour of the Zoroastrians."[846]

## Opposition to Sufism and Mystical Monism in 17th Century Iran

While institutional Sufism suffered a decline early on in the Safavīd period, mystical philosophy continued to thrive on Persian soil, but in the 17th century twelver Shi'ī clerics launched a polemical assault on philosophy and Sufism, with especial vehemence against Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophical sufism and the adherents of waḥdat al-wujūd. In his third volume, Marshall Hodgson writes about the Shar'ī-minded clerics known as "Akhbaris" in the 17th century Safavīd Empire; while "Hadith" was the term preferred by *ahl al-Sunna wa'l jama'a,* "Shi'is commonly called" these "*akhbār* rather than *ḥadīth*."[847] Hodgson associates the rise of "Shi'ī Sharī'ah-mindedness" with the centralization of religious authority in the office of the *sadr* and no figure was more emblematic of the shift away from the Safavīd Sufi past than Muḥammad Bāqīr al-Majlisī (d. 1699 c.e.). Ferenc Csirkés points out that "for much of the Safavīd period the Shiite ulema were only one of the competing status groups" and that "their influence at court became superior only at the end of the dynasty in the early eighteenth century with the establishment of a hierocracy independent of the court."[848] Major opponents of both

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[846] Henry Corbin, HIstory of Islamic Philosophy, 340.

[847] Hodgson describes "The Akhbaris" who "seem to have had an orientation similar to those ]amali-Sunni groups that especially stressed 1).adith reports; they were suspicious of the continuing tradition represented by most of the mujtahids. Though so severely Shari'ah-minded a man as Majlisī could be an Akhbari, many Shi'īs of mystical tendencies also preferred the Akhbari position, presumably as allowing them at once to claim the unimpeachable authority of literalism" Hodgson, Vol III 54.

[848] Ferenc Csirkés (2019) A Messiah Untamed: Notes on the Philology of Shah Ismāʿīl's Dīvān, Iranian Studies, 52:3-4, 346

philosophy and Sufism in the 17th century Safavīd Empire, like Majilisī, turned their sights on *waḥdat al-wujūd* which epitomized the juncture of these two ideological spheres.

To be sure, anti-Sufism in Iran begins with Shāh Isma'īl I who was both head of state and the Twelver Shia, Safavī Sufi order. Leonard Lewisohn summarizes the early Safavīd suppression of Sufi orders where "the graves of Jami, a Nasqhbandī Sufi, and Abū Ishan of Kazarun, a Sunni Sufi, were despoiled" and "most of the great Sufi orders were forced to flee to Mughal India or Ottoman Turkey, or to go underground."[849] Nearly all Sufi orders were abolished as:

> The Naqshbandiyya were ferociously suppressed; Sufis of the Khalvatiyya order fled to Ottoman protection in Anatolia[. …] In 909/1503, after a massacre of 4,000 people, he drove the followers of the Kazaruni Sufi order out of Fars and desecrated the tombs of the Sufi shaykhs of that region. As for the Nasqhbandiyya, all trace of this order "was extirpated from Western and Central Iran by the Safavīds, for whom the slaughter of Sunni scholars and shaykhs was an essential part of establishing Shi'i supremacy.[850]

As Lewisohn points out, several Central Asian "Sunni" orders were wiped out from Iranian lands and forced to flee. Although the Shi'a-leaning "Dhahabiyya, Nūrbakhshiyya, and Nimatullāhiyya Orders survived" Lewisohn notes that they only did so "with none of their former glory, remaining mostly underground and persecuted, increasing subjected to fanatic anathema by the theocratic establishment."[851]

The persecution of Sufis continued into the 17th century as Shah 'Abbas I moved away from all Sufism including the very Sufis that comprised the Safavīd rank-and-file. Lewisohn writes that Shah Abbas I put to death "scores of the veteran Lāhījānī Sufis of Qarājadāgh"

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[849] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān," 76.
[850] Lewisohn, 76.
[851] Lewisohn, 76.

which court historian "Iskandar Beg Munshī justified by explaining that 'the Shah, by ordering

this purge, wished to indicate that this group from now on was no longer to be included in within

the circle of the Sufis, and to make a clear distinction between Sufis and non-Sufis.'"[852]

Lewisohn analyzes this purge where 'Abbās's "disassociation from the politics of Qizilbash Sufi

extremism" and that "[o]nly by suppressing the radical forces which had created, yet continued

to challenge, the Safavīd revolution could Shah 'Abbās unify his government."[853]

Not only did the Safavīd dynasty dissociate itself from its Sufi past, but the 17th century

also witnessed the ascendancy of Twelver Shi'a clerics, several of whom migrated from modern

day Lebanon, that Lewisohn calls the "mujtahid cult."[854] Katherine Babayan provides a case

study of just how emboldened orthodox Shi'a clerics had become in the mid 17th century with

the figure of Mulla Qasim who "in 1664, openly preached that the monarch should abdicate in

favor of the son of Mirza Qazi, the foremost religious notable (Shaykh al-Islam) of Iṣfahān, for

only he was worthy of kingship."[855] Along with the rising power of the clerical faction, anti-sufi

and anti-philosophical treatises flowed in the 17th century. Ata Anzali has helpfully compiled a

list of almost twenty "refutations"(s. *Radd*, pl. *rudūd*) from the "anti Sufi campaign" in the

period between 1633 and 1733[856] marking the most vociferous opposition to Sufism that took

place as the Safavid dynasty neared collapse. Sajjad Rizvi examines the same time period,

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[852] Lewisohn, 83.
[853] Lewisohn, 83.
[854] He writes: "One need not search far afield to find the reason why Sufism has been marginalized: it lies in the crisis of cultural identity experienced by Sufis in late seventeenth-century Iran when confronted by an evil even worse than the Qizilbash warriors of Isma'īl: the rise of the cult of the Uṣūlī *mujtahids*, creating a trend which, amongst its latter-day fundamentalist heirs, has carried on right down to the present day in Iran."
[855] Babayan, 405.
[856] Anzali, 38-42.

finding that the "refutation" literature is often as vehemently opposed to Sufism as it is to philosophy. Rizvi captures how opposition to philosophy and Sufism converges on the topic of *waḥdat al-wujūd* noting that the:

> anti-Sufi, anti-philosophy texts take on a simple formula of attacks. First, they condemn the groups for espousing *waḥdat al-wujūd* by following the classical Sufis associated with the doctrine *avant la lettre* such as al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is considered to mean that they hold everything is God and there is only one existent (*mawjūd*).[857]

The attack on Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī not only indicates that their brand of mystical monism had become as associated with philosophy as it was with Sufism, but attacking them as proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* indicates how this doctrine had come to be anachronistically applied to all forms of mystical monism by the 17th century.

Perhaps the most vehement criticism of Sufism and philosophy from the Safavīd clerical establishment came from Muḥammad Bāqīr Majlisī (d. 1110/1699), "the powerful Mullā-bāshī" — that is, the head of the religious establishment in Safavīd Iran — whose position on *waḥdat al-wujūd* as kufr was uncompromising, who wrote in his *ʿAqāʾid al-Islām* that "the doctrine of waḥdat al-wujūd constitutes 'the greatest unbelief.'"[858] Leonard Lewisohn compares "Majlisī's role in the suppression of Sufism in late Safavīd Persia" with Thomas Cromwell's dissolution of the monasteries in the time of Henry VIII's reformation.[859] Majlisī "enlisted the support of the state, "not only to destroy[, … ]eradicate and murder the Sufis and destroy the *khānaqāhs*, but also to attack the learned traditions of the Sufis and their presence in Persian society."[860] In his

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[857] Rizvi, 254.
[858] Rizvi 252.
[859] Leonard Lewison, Heritage of Sufism Vol III, 133.
[860] Lewisohn, 133.

*Jawāhir al-ʿuqūl*, Majlisī went so far as to pronounce the murder of one Sufi to be equivalent to the performance of a 'righteous deed' (*ḥusna*).[861]

Many of Majlisī's students went on to attack Sufism as well, including a "renegade Christian renamed ʿAlī-Qulī Jadīd al-Islām [d. 1734 c.e.] who converted in 1686."[862] Alberto Tiburcio explores this late Safavīd polemicist attacked those in favor of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as being ideologically identical with pagan philosophers and Christians, going as far as writing in that "our Sufis are the Christians of the umma" (*Sufiān-i mā nasāra-yi ummat-and*).[863] Jadīd al-Islām not only "wrote a number of anti-Christian works such as *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn wa-taqwiyat al-muʾminīn* and *Sayf al-muʾminīn fī qitāl al-mushrikīn*," but his "anti-Sufi tract," the *Radd bar jamāʿat-i ṣūfīyān*, "focused upon what he considered to be the social threat posed by the presence of these 'unbelievers' at the centre of Empire in Iṣfahān."[864] In Jadīd al-Islām's critique, Sufis are likened to other non-believers, each receiving a declaration of *takfīr* equidistantly outside of proper Islam.

Jadīd al-Islām mobilizes a common anti-Christian polemic against Sufis, namely, the opposition to God's incarnation (*ḥulūl*) in the form of Jesus and he "associates *waḥdat al-wujūd*" with this form of "Christian incarnationism."[865] Although the accusation of "incarnationism" or "in-dwelling" has been leveled against adherents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* since Ibn Taymiyya, Jadīd al-Islām highlights the perceived violation of God's transcendence (*tanzīh*)

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[861] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān," 133.

[862] Alberto Tiburcio, Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavīd Iran, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020), 168.

[863] Tiburcio, 168. The sixth chapter of Tiburcio's book on Jadid al-Islam takes its title, "Sufis as the Christians of the Umma," from this remarkable statement.

[864] Sajjad Rizvi, "The takfīr of the Philosophers (and Sufis) in Safavīd Iran," in *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on takfīr*, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 251-2.

[865] Rizvi, 255.

in this doctrine and in Christianity. He also attacked Ibn al-ʿArabī "not only for his espousal of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* his belief that God's mercy doesn't permit punishment in hellfire to be eternal, and finally, because "a unity-centred approach to reality means that a follower of the Imams cannot distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and the normal relationship of causality breaks down so that Sufis espouse not only a fatalist approach to life but also are determinist (*jabriyya*)."[866] On this final point, Jadīd al-Islām is teasing out the implications of the emphasis on "unity" in mystical monism where all dichotomies break down, including "good and evil" and even the nature of cause and effect. It is precisely the social effect of following a doctrine of mystical monism that has the staunch Shi'a Jadīd al-Islām worried; Rizvi paraphrases Qummī who reckons that since "Sufis hold everyone to be equal, they practice a *sulḥ-i kull* and consider no one to be bad," this undermines the Imam's "authority" (*valāyat*) and the need to "ritually curse" (*barāʾat*) where the Sufis' "love for ʿUmar has made their hearts black so that Iblīs resides in them and becomes their leader."[867]

Sajjad Rizvi points to a common theme in the clerical "anti-Sufi, anti-philosophy texts" where they "condemn the groups for espousing waḥdat al-wujūd by following the classical Sufis associated with the doctrine avant la lettre such as al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī."[868] It is important to note that the ecstatic Sufism of Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī — two larger than life figures in Persianate Sufism — comes under fire from Safavīd clerics precisely for the monist vision espoused in their ecstatic statements.[869] Babayan notes that Mullā Ṣaḍrā "sees these utterances

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[866] Rizvi, 255.

[867] Rizvi, 255.

[868] Rizvi, 254.

[869] Ḥallāj famously uttered the words "I am the Truth [God]" before being sentenced to death and a number of Bisṭāmī's ecstatic statements similarly explode the dichotomy between man and God as he proclaimed "there is naught within my robes but God" and "praise be to me."

as 'worse for the general public than deadly poison'" and that although "Ṣadrā defends Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī, he seems to agree with Ghazali (d. 1111 c.e.) that these are words that need to remain in private, as social chaos can arise if they are vocalized."[870]

Muḥsin Fayz Kashānī (d. 1680 c.e.) not only criticized Sufi practices such as "loud chanting of dhikr, the carnival-like atmosphere of Sufi gatherings," but also condemned "the groups for espousing waḥdat al-wujūd by following the classical Sufis associated with the doctrine *avant la lettre* such as al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī."[871] Mulla Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qūmmī (d. 1689 c.e.) was another vocal critic of Sufism from the clerical establishment and he echoes Kashānī's words against these two paragons of monist Sufism, emphasizing the "non- and indeed anti-Shī'ī nature of these figures," writing in his "Refutation of Sufism" (*Radd-i ṣūfiyya*): "[y]ou have strayed far from the path of ʿAlī and his descendants, so much so that you have become followers of Manṣūr, You have wanted to become followers of Bū Yazīd, but tomorrow you will be resurrected with Yazīd."[872] Here Qūmmī is declaring the non-Shi'a status of al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī by playing on the name of then 9th century Sufi "Bū Yazīd" and a key antagonist in Shi'a history, the Caliph presiding over the second Fitna and the martyrdom of 'Ali's son Husayn: Yazīd ibn abī Sufyān.

Similarly, Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) "wrote an influential work entitled *al-Ithnā ʿashariyya fī maṭā ʿin al-mutaṣawwifīn*" wherein he "allows for a genuine mystical quest and separates proper Shī'ī mysticism from the trend of al-Ḥallāj and other antinomians."[873] Although Ḥallāj and Bāyazīd are favorite targets of the anti-Sufi clerics, their

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[870] Babayan, 418.
[871] Rizvi, 253-4.
[872] Rizvi, 254.
[873] Rizvi, 251.

attention invariably turns to Ibn al-'Arabī and the Sufi-philosophical amalgam in their own day. Qummī considers it to be "clear" that

> the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* did not exist and was not well-known before Muḥyi al-Dīn al-ʿArabī al-Andulusī al-Ḥanbalī and his followers, and his statements make clear that he was possessed of the lowest and most nonsensical intellects. As for the earlier generation of Sufis like Abī Yazīd [al-Bisṭāmī] and al-Ḥallāj and the likes of them, their statements make clear that some of them believed in *ittiḥād* (unity of man and God in essence) and others in *ḥulūl* (divine incarnation) … therefore, you must be aware that it was Muḥyi al-Dīn, who in reality is Mumīt al-Dīn (the killer of religion), who made the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* famous among the [intellectually] weakest Muslims using treachery and deception"[874]

Just as the opponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Mughal India, Ahmad Sirhindī, reifies the connection between Ibn al-'Arabī and this doctrine, the clerics of Safavīd Iran in the same century put in equal work to tie this doctrine to the Andalusian Sufi who never explicitly used the phrase. It is also worth noting how Abu Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and al-Ḥallāj are connected here to Ibn al-'Arabī along with accusations of *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*; the clerical establishment is identifying the common thread of mystical monism between all three figures and in the ideology of *waḥdat al-wujūd* even though they are hostile to it.

Mullā Ṣadrā comes under attack from the clerics as well. Al- Hurr al-ʿĀmilī "focuses in on three sets of heretical notions: the unfettered and incorrect use of *taʾwīl*, the uncorroborated claims of mystical intuition (*kashf*) and" — most importantly for the present study — "the adherence to a singular vision of reality in *waḥdat al-wujūd*."[875] Here al-ʿĀmilī points the finger, not just at *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but to the other building blocks of mystical monism: mystical unveiling (*kashf*), and mystical exegesis (*taʾwīl*), all of which were central to Mullā

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[874] Anzali, 42.
[875] Rizvi, 251-2.

Ṣadrā's intellectual framework. Qummi also offers a meta-critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, criticizing Mullā Ṣadrā sharply, and declaring that "the concept of wujūd corresponds to nothing outside the mind. If wujūd exists only as a universal concept (*mafhūm kullī*) in the human mind, says Qummī, talking in terms of gradations or primacy, let alone conceptualizing it as a principle that permeates all, is absurdity."[876] This argument against *waḥdat al-wujūd* essentially posits that such overarching conceptions of reality are just that, mere conceptions, and are tied to nothing concrete in this world. Babayan points out that even "The religious judge of Shiraz (Shaykh Ali Naqi Kamara'i) in one of his works (*Himām al-thawāqib*) dedicated to Shah Safi voiced his resentment toward the shah who had commissioned Mullā Ṣadrā to translate the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm aI-dīn* of Ghazālī into Persian."[877]

When considering the broad strokes of the mid-late 17th century clerical opposition to mystical monism in Safavīd Iran outlined above, a number of ironies become apparent. In his refutation of Sufism (*Radd*):

> Qummī does not seem to care that the Safavīd dynasty was rooted in the Sufi order established by Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī, but in *Tuḥfat al-akhyār*, the final version of which was completed around 1075 [h.], he is careful to pay lip service to the Safavīd claims to legitimacy by affirming Ṣafī al-Dīn, while claiming that the legendary figure was neither a Sufi nor a Sunni. Rather, says Qummī, Ṣafī al-Dīn was a true Shiʿi gnostic (*ʿārif*) who was opposed to the path of Ḥallāj and Bāyazīd, but who practiced dissimulation (*taqiyya*) due to the Sunni milieu in which he lived.[878]

The first irony here is that Qummī's reckoning with the Safavīd past entails crowbarring Ṣafī al-Dīn out of his Sunni Sufi milieu, albeit with the strategic use of *ʿārif* here as a nod toward the

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[876] Anzali, and S.M. Hadi Gerami, "Opposition to Philosophy in Safavīd Iran: Mulla Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qummī's Ḥikmat al-ʿĀrifīn," (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 42.
[877] Babayan, 416.
[878] Anzali, 24.

acceptability of mysticism when labeled *'irfān*. The next irony is that Ṣafī al-Dīn is distanced

from two greats of Sufism on Persian soil, namely Ḥallāj and Bāyazīd, who had become

anachronistically associated with the later doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. The Final irony comes

in the use of *taqqiyya* — which normally indicates the necessary and permissible "dissimulation"

of Shi'a living in majority Sunni lands — here describing Ṣafī al-Dīn's true Shi'ī nature, and

mention of *taqqiyya* appears elsewhere in clerical critiques of Sufism where the polemic

accusation that "the Shī'a use taqiyya to lie and deceive others is," ironically, " turned around

and deployed against Sufis."[879] One final irony of Iranian Sufism in the Early Modern period to

contemplate here is that *Ṣulḥ-i Kull,* a socio-political attitude of interreligious "convivencia" that

emerged and thrived in Persian *belles lettres* was pushed into exile by the clerical elite.

Even though the modern period is outside of the purview of this study, it would be

remiss not to at least nod toward the revival of mystical monism — and rejection from its

discontents — that was ushered in by the rise of the Baha'ī faith. *waḥdat al-wujūd* had

become such a mainstay of Persian philosophical mysticism that Bahā'ullah's son and successor,

'Abd al-Bahā', fielded questions on and wrote about the Unity of Existence in his writings.[880]

Not only does the son of the founder of the Baha'ī faith demonstrate an understanding of

*waḥdat al-wujūd*,[881] but he emphasizes its universality as this ideology "is not restricted to the

Theosophists and the Sufis alone," but "was espoused by some of the Greek philosophers,"

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[879]Rizvi, 255.

[880] Abdu'l-Bahā', "Some Answered Questions." (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2014).
<https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/1#610118851>.
Accessed 3 December. 2023. The relevant chapter here is chapter 82, on the "Unity of Existence."

[881] For example,'Abd al-Baha' explains *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a "solitary Reality, which is sanctified and
exalted above composition and division, has resolved itself into countless forms" and pithily captures the
paradox that "real Existence is all things, but it is not any single one of them." Abdu'l-Baha, "Some
Answered Questions."

going on to cite Plotinus's *Enneads*.[882] Although not the sole motivating factor, the affinity for mystical monism perhaps goes some way to explaining tenets of Baha'ī faith such as "world unity, abolition of prejudices, sex equality," and "ecumenism" and also the "anti-clericalism"[883] that mystical monists and Baha'īs have historically shared in Iran.

What makes Islamic mysticism unique in the Iranian context, beginning in the early modern period and continuing to today, is the way in which *'irfān* has eclipsed "Sufism"(*taṣawwuf*). As noted above, Ata Anzali provides a good history of how this came to be so, but a recent ethnographic study from Seema Golestaneh bears mentioning here as well. Her interlocutors use terms like "tasavvuf" and also "*sufigari*, which most closely approximates what might be called "organized Sufism" as opposed to the more "nebulously defined category" of "mysticism" (*irfān*).[884] After the 1979 revolution, "organizational" Sufis have had to operate largely underground and Golestaneh even encounters one Ni'matullahi order that is forced to stoically endure the city government's razing of one of its places of ritual gathering near a cemetery due to the ambiguous reasoning: 'beautification of the neighborhood' (*zibayi-ye mahal*)."[885] This would indicate that even the heavily Shi'a-leaning Ni'matullahis who once married into the Safavid dynasty for survival face harassment by the Iranian government even today. Conversely, major figures of the 1979 revolution like Allameh Tabatabai,

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[882] Abdu'l-Bahā'. He miscites Plotinus as "Aristotle" although this reflects a common conflation of Neoplatonism with Aristotle dating back to the amalgamation of mystical Greek philosophy in the early Islamic text known as the *Theology of Aristotle*.

[883] Denis MacEoin, "The Baha'is of Iran: The Roots of Controversy," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1987): 81.

[884] Seema Golestaneh, *Unknowing and the Everyday: Sufism and Knowledge in Iran,* Duke University Press, 2023), 30.

[885] Golestaneh, 145. For more on this particular act of erasure by the government and this Sufi group's willful "amnesia" about the event, see the attendant chapter "Unknowing of Memory" in Golestaneh,135-164.

Mohammad-Taqi Bahjat, and even Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself have staunchly defended *irfān*.[886] Alexander Knysh examines Ayatollah Knomeini's mystical poetry and studies that include such classics of Akbari thought as Ṣadr al-Din Qunāwī's *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* and Qaysari's commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.[887] Not only was Khomeini's mysticism informed by Ibn al- al-ʿArabī, but Golestaneh quotes from the correspondence of Allameh Tabatabai (d, 1981 c.e.), who was "himself a renowned teacher of mysticism," as he refused to stop teaching from Mulla Ṣadrā's *Asfār*.[888] It seems, then, that the 17th century clerics could not conquer mystical monism, but rather, over the following centuries, mystical monism conquered the clerics.

The conclusion reached by this study is that mystical monism, especially through poetry, and particularly in the philosophical mysticism of *waḥdat al-wujūd* became an integral part of the intellectual life of Iran beginning in the late medieval era and culminating in the 17th century, though not without arousing the ire of the Twelver orthodoxy clerical establishment. This study began with the emergence of Ibn al-ʾArabī's mystical monism through the influential poetry of Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d.1289 c.e. Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340 c.e.), and traced the great project of synthesizing Ibn al-ʾArabī's thought with Shi'a Islam in the figure of Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385 c.e.) and finally in the 17th century under Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1640 c.e.) as a paragon of the School of Iṣfahān. Finally the Twelver Shi'a clerical elite attacked *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a convergence of the twin "innovations" found in the Sufi-philosophical amalgam. Thus, *waḥdat*

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[886] Golestaneh, 33. Golestaneh includes an excerpt from Khomeini's *Islam and Revolution* (1981) defending *irfān* to begin her first chapter: writing that "it is regrettable" that "certain scholars" deny "the validity of mysticism and thus depriv[e] themselves of a form of knowledge." in Golestaneh, 29.

[887] Alexander Knysh, "Irfan" Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (1992): 635.

[888] Golestaneh, 39-40.

*al-wujūd*, as well as the opposition to it, represents a major current in 17th century Safavīd intellectual history and is essential to mapping out the spread of, and debate over, *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Early Modern Islamicate world.

## Chapter 8: 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's (d. 1731 c.e.) Defense of Waḥdat al-Wujūd and the Ḳāḍīzādeli Challenge in the Ottoman Empire

This study examines the arguments in favor of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by the great 17th-to-early 18th century polymath 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731 c.e.) amid the backdrop of an anti-Sufi campaign waged by a faction of preachers and politicians commonly known as the "Ḳāḍīzādelis" in Ottoman lands. Before diving into his defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, it will be necessary to establish the religious climate of the mid-late 17th century Ottoman lands and the shifting attitudes toward Sufism that al-Nābulusī contended with. Attention will then be paid to Nābulusī's Sufi identity and defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, before considering his interactions with and attitudes toward non-Muslims and other religions. Ultimately this final case study reveals that although the "Unity of Existence" is a thoroughly Islamic ideology in the hands of 'Abd al-Ghanī, it is also part of his lenient, perhaps even pluralist, view of non-Muslims where God is universally manifested in all religious worship.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī bin Isma'īl al-Dimashqī al-Salahī al-Hanafī al-Naqshbandī al-Qadirī al-ma'rūf bi'l-Nābulusī's (1641-1731 c.e.) name already hints at some relevant biographical information; arguably he was first and foremost a Sufi shaykh, and Akkach points out the nuance of his plural religious belonging, noting that Nābulusī's title indicates that he was "Hanafi by School of law, […]Qadiri by spiritual learning," and "Naqshbandi by spiritual order."[889] His name also indicates that he was a Hanafi jurist, having held the position of "Chief Jurisconsult of the Hanafis" in Damascus, albeit only briefly.[890] His was a well-established family

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[889] Akkach, *'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī: Islam and the Enlightenment*, (Oxford: Oneworld 2007), 30.
[890] Akkach, 20.

in Damascus in the Ṣaliḥiyya district[891] "founded in the twelfth century on the slopes of Mount Qāsyūn by Ḥanbalî families migrating from the region of Nāblus"[892] in Palestine, having been displaced by the crusades.

Nābulusī's spiritual pedigree predates his birth, as his mother received an "annunciation" from an antinomian shaykh predicting "'Abd al-Ghanī's" birth.[893] A precocious intellectual, by the age of twenty 'Abd al-Ghanī had already mastered not only the "core texts of the exoteric sciences of the Arabic language, Islamic law, prophetic tradition, Qur'an incantation, and religious obligatory practices" but by this age he "had already read the works of eminent Sufi masters, such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235), Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), al-Tilimsānī (d. 1291), and al-Jīlī (d. 1428)."[894] Nābulusī developed a particular affinity for Ibn al-'Arabī, whose tomb was located nearby in the Ṣaliḥiyya district, and he would go on to consider himself the Great Shaykh's "spiritual son."[895] Like Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazālī and many others Islamic scholars drawn closer to Sufism after a period of spiritual anguish, Nābulusī suffered a breakdown as he neared forty and he retreated from public life for seven years from 1680-87 wherein he experienced profound mystical visions and a "healing experience" after a period of being "spiritually sick."[896] It is likely no coincidence that his period of seclusion coincided with the apogee of Ḳāḍīzādeli influence, and his works produced in seclusion covered several topics that this faction detested as he wrote a "word-for-word commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*," on the "legality of smoking,

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[891] This district is also where Ibn al-'Arabī spent his last years and was buried.

[892] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī'*, (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 130.

[893] Akkach, 9-10.

[894] Akkach, 25-6.

[895] On this, see the attendant section, "'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and Ibn al-'Arabī," below.

[896] Sirriyeh, 51.

the validity of MawlawÎ ritual," and even a defense of "the practice of gazing on the beauty of youth."[897] It is to this fundamentalist, anti-sufi faction that the present study now turns its attention.

## The Ḳāḍīzādeli Challenge in the 17th Century Ottoman Empire

Madeline ZIlfi, whose *Politics and Piety* is the indispensable study dealing with the Ḳāḍīzādelis, sees this movement as the 17th century Ottoman version of a "vociferous minority in every century" which has "held to the belief that all innovations were unacceptable" going back to the time of the prophet.[898] Prone to the "publicly denouncing the Sufis for encouraging disobedience to the sharia," one leader managed to persuade the grand vizier Melek Ahmed Pasha to permit the destruction of a Halveti lodge and force the shaykh al-Islam to issue a *fatwah* "critical of dervish practices" before Köprülü had him and the Ḳāḍīzādeli leaders exiled to Cyprus.[899] In 1665 they "had the public performance of Sufi music and dance rituals-the *sema*, *raks*, and *devran*—forbidden."[900] One leader, Vani Efendi, also led the effort to convert the leader of a Jewish messianic movement, Sabbatai Zevi and his followers, obtaining a fatwa from the shaykh al-Islam permitting "Christians or Jews" to be "ordered to convert to Islam."[901] Karen Barkey has called this a "'scripturalist interlude' in Ottoman state making" and adds that scripturalism "appealed for harsher and better-defined boundaries, whereas Sufi dissent called

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[897] Sirriyeh, 52.

[898] Madeline Zilfi, "The Ḳāḍīzādelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," The Journal of Near Eastern Studies Vol. 45, no. 4, (1986): 253-254.

[899] Finkel, 254-255.

[900] Zilfi, 263.

[901] Finkel, 280-281. Cf. Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality," 195.

for syncretism and porous boundaries."[902] Figures like Bedreddin or Ismail Ma'ṣūki certainly fit the label of "Sufi dissent" during the 15th and 16th centuries respectively, but Berkey's dichotomy serves the 17th century less well with the rise of what has been termed "neo-Sufism" and the members of the Naqshbandi order aligned with the Ḳāḍīzādelis, as will be explored below. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the particulars of Islam and the policing of confessional boundaries stood in contradistinction to the universalizing tendencies of the Sufis of the Ottoman Empire who preferred mystical monism.

The label "Ḳāḍīzādeli" has been interrogated in the years since Zilfi's study; in his dissertation, Nir Shafir argues that "historians should stop using the narrative of the Ḳāḍīzādelis or even regard it as a particularly distinct movement" and demonstrates that the "term "Ḳāḍīzādeli," was not frequently used in the seventeenth century," so much so, "that even a well-educated early eighteenth-century scholar" like Mustafa al-Bakrī "could not get their name right" as he called them the "Zādaliyya."[903] Shafir is right that the appellation "Ḳāḍīzādeli" has typically restricted the discussion of fundamentalist reform movements in the 17th century Ottoman Empire to the capital Istanbul, but the name was likely known to 'Abd al-Ghanī in Damascus nonetheless. Barbara von Schlegell highlights a correspondence between Nābulusī and someone seeking his advice about a "Qāḍīzādelī of high standing" who holds that the Messenger of God is dead" and therefore his "*madad* (assistance) has ceased."[904] Additionally, in 1711 c.e. riot broke out in Cairo as the Bab Zuwayla lodge and its dervishes were attacked by Turkish soldiers led by a Turkish medrese student (*sufta*) who preached against heresy and

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[902] Barkey, 163.

[903] 31-37.

[904] von Schlegell, 94. Nābulusī responds that, even in death, the Prophet Muhammad "is still carrying out his mission" and that anyone who says "'Muḥammad was the Messenger of God' has committed unbelief."

"innovations" identical to those railed against by the "Ḳāḍīzādelis" in Istanbul whose ranks were also drawn from medrese students.[905] Similar to Nābulusī's interlocutor who wished to argue against a Ḳāḍīzādeli about the Prophet Muhammad's continued ability to intercede for the faithful, this Turkish medrese student in Cairo preached that the "[m]iracles of saints cease after death"[906] which was a deliberate stab at the Sufi cult of saints.

Much like 'Abd al-Wahhab's Saudi campaign against the cult of the saints, this Cairene medrese student had tomb construction and visitation in his crosshairs, as he declared those who kissed the threshold of tombs to be "unbelievers" and declared the demolition of tombs for saints obligatory for Muslims.[907] He also violently rallied the populace against the practice of *dhikr* and called for the abolition of Gulşeni, Mevlevi, and Bektaşi *tekkes*, yet another commonality shared with the Ḳāḍīzādelis of Istanbul. Whether "Ḳāḍīzādeli" was the label applied in every instance or not, there certainly was a fundamentalist, anti-Sufi movement sweeping the Ottoman Empire starting in the 17th century, and the present study will continue to use the appellation "Ḳāḍīzādeli" for this movement, albeit with the caveat that this label may not have been used as much at the time as it is now for scholars of the Ottoman Empire.

Ḳāḍīzāde Mehmed "was born the son of a provincial judge in 1582" studying in his home province of Balikesir with "disciples of a fellow Balikesir native, the renowned fundamentalist theologian" Birgivī Meḥmed Efendi (d.1573), though he "abandoned the puritanical teachings of his Balikesir mentors" and "sought out the guidance of the Halveti shaikh

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[905] Rudolph Peters, "The Battered Dervishes of Bab Zuwayla: A Religious Riot in Eighteenth-Century Cairo," in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (Syracuse, N.Y., 1987), 93
[906] Peters, 94.
[907] Peters 94-5.

Omer Efendi (d.1624)."[908] He went to the "Tercuman lodge in Istanbul" just as Birgivī had "in his youth sought affiliation with a Sufi order,"[909] but unlike Birgivī before him, Ḳāḍīzāde seems to have left the Sufi path altogether. He began work as a preacher (*vaiz*) at the Friday mosques and met with success due to a strong puritanical message combined with the fact that — as even the suspicious Katib Çelebi had to cede — he was a "good and effective speaker."[910] In 1631 he was "promoted to Aya Sofya" the "imperial mosque par excellence."[911] Ḳāḍīzāde's target was not Shi'a Muslims, nor did he focus on the antinomian dervishes still roaming Anatolia. Instead, he and those of his movement systematically targeted the most influential branches of Sufism in the imperial Capital: the Mevlevis and especially the Halvetis. Of all religious factions, the Halveti order had a significant presence in Istanbul's mosques. Zilfi found that, during the "Ḳāḍīzādeli era" spanning 1621 and 1685, "some forty-eight appointments were made to the Friday *vaiz* posts at the imperial mosques of Aya Sofya, Sultan Ahmed, Suleymaniye, Beyazid, and Fatih. If the appointments reflected something of the views of the Şeyhulislams and sultans (or the sultans' chief deputies, the Grand Vezirs), Sufi shaykhs were favorite choices for the five grandest mosques in the city. Of the forty-eight appointments, at least nineteen were of Halvetis, including Sivasi" Efendi.[912] Sivasi, also a *vaiz*, and a member of the Helveti order would serve as his opponent, splitting the population of Istanbul which would occasionally erupt in violent clashes following Friday prayers through the century.

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[908] Madeline Zilfi, "The Ḳāḍīzādelis," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1986. Vol. 45, No. 4, (Oct. 1986), 252.
[909] Ibid.
[910] Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, Translated by G.L. Lewis, Tinling: 1957. 135.
[911] Zilfi, 253.
[912] Ibid.

Caroline Finkel aptly describes what made this movement so disruptive in Ottoman politics; she explains that "Ḳāḍīzādelis were as much opposed to high Islam — considering its clerics to be tainted by their association with the political life of the state — as to the mysticism and ritual practices of the dervishes" and that "Ḳāḍīzāde Mehmed represented another type of cleric — neither mystic, nor member of the state religious hierarchy trained in Islamic thought, law and religion, but one who considered his proper milieu to be the day-to-day religious life of the mosque."[913] Neither state-trained, nor belonging to Sufi orders, the Ḳāḍīzādelis represent a revolt from outside of the religious establishment as well as within where disaffected medrese students joined their ranks. The cathedral-like Friday mosques dotting Istanbul which numbered "about two hundred by the end of the seventeenth century" in Zilfi's estimation.[914] It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Friday mosque; not only were these the most imposing structures on the physical landscape of Istanbul and throughout the empire, but they carried socio-political importance as the Friday sermon (khuṭbah) is read out in the Sultan's name. Ḳāḍīzāde and his faction's eruption on the Friday mosque scene may have initially represented a populist revolt against the "old boys" network of Halveti and Mevlevi preachers, but his incitements would lead to violence, and eventually, Ḳāḍīzādelis would become just as preoccupied with court politics and attaining political status as any other faction vying for power in the Ottoman Empire's capital.

This disruption saw the unprecedented execution of the highest religious office holder, Ahizade Hüseyin Efendi in 1634, and Finkel surmises that it "was doubtless Ḳāḍīzādeli rhetoric

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[913] Finkel, 214-215.
[914] Zilfi, 130.

that made possible the execution of the Sheikhulislam."[915] However, this execution also "reflected the real role played by the religious hierarchy in contemporary politics and spelled out to them the price to be paid for access to the material rewards of state service."[916] In other words, the office had become as powerful and lucrative as any other high ministerial post, and as a result, carried the ultimate penalty for failure. Murad IV initially appeared to be a "champion" of Ḳāḍīzāde when the latter backed his cause to shut down "taverns and coffeehouses" as they "were hatcheries for sedition."[917] The 1622 regicide of Osman II fresh in memory, it was likely that Murad was striking at coffee houses and taverns because they were often staffed and frequented by Janissaries who were instrumental in the revolt.[918] Both Sivasi and Ḳāḍīzāde served as mosque preachers with the support of Murad IV and during Ḳāḍīzāde's time in Istanbul the Halveti "Sivasi Efendi also had his share of honors from the sultan."[919] It seems then that Murad was content to play both the Ḳāḍīzādelis and their opponents off of one another.

After Ḳāḍīzāde, the next wave of reform came when the Ḳāḍīzādelis and Turhan Sultan joined forces in her rivalry with Kösem Sultan.[920] The dowager Kösem, a truly formidable presence at the top of the empire during the first half of the 17th century, "was a generous Halveti benefactress."[921] This made her enemies, Turhan and Mehmed IV, natural allies of the Ḳāḍīzādelis and Üstüvani Efendi rose to power upon Kösem's assassination in 1651.

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[915] Finkel 215.
[916] Finkel 215.
[917] Zilfi, 257
[918] James Muhammad Dawud Currie, "Ḳāḍīzādeli Ottoman Scholarship, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, and the Rise of the Saudi State," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 26, Issue 3, 1 September 2015, 269.
[919] Lewis Thomas, *A Study of Naima*, 107.
[920] Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality," 200.
[921] Zilfi, 257.

"Damascene by birth and education" Üstüvani gained a following among the "Halberdiers, Gardeners, Gatekeepers, and Sweetmakers, all of whom were armed imperial guardsmen" by becoming their personal preacher.[922] Two changes are worth noting in the coming of Üstüvani; he represents the entrenchment of the Ḳāḍīzādelis in Ottoman court politics, as well as being one of the few preachers from the Arab lands who managed to insert himself into Istanbul's Friday mosque circuit. Mustafa Naima recounts the heights to which Üstüvani reached, stating he "sold his influence and became wealthy as well as powerful."[923] He was then the first Ḳāḍīzādeli to amass wealth and influence like a true Ottoman courtier. Mehmed Köprülü "had been grand vezir for scarcely a week when the orthodox ulema again stirred up a riot in the city. They planned to pull down all the *tekkes*, to kill all the dervishes who refused to renounce Sufism, and finally to get the sultan to forbid all 'innovations.'"[924] Üstüvani managed to persuade Melek Ahmed Pasha to permit the destruction of a Halveti lodge and force the shaykh al-Islam to issue a *fatwa* "critical of dervish practices" before Köprülü — in no mood for dissent in the streets of Istanbul — ultimately had Üstüvani and the Ḳāḍīzādeli leaders exiled to Cyprus.[925]

The next Köprülü grand vizier, Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Paşa, brought the Ḳāḍīzādeli preacher Mehmed Vani to court to serve as tutor to Mehmed IV. He soon "revived the practice of publicly denouncing the Sufis for encouraging disobedience to the *sharia*, and as of 1665 had the public performance of Sufi music and dance rituals — the *sema*, *raks*, and *devran* — forbidden."[926] Additionally, Vani "gained support from the Grand Vizier and the Sultan to have a

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[922] Zilfi 258; Cf. Thomas, Lewis. *A Study of Naima*. Ed. Norman Itzkowitz. New York University Press: 1972,109-110.
[923] Thomas, 108.
[924] Thomas, 108.
[925] Finkel, 254-255.
[926] Zilfi, 263.

Bektashi shrine demolished" in 1668, suggesting to James Currie that the Kadezadelis were aiming to compete with the Alevi-Bektashis "for the hearts and minds of the ordinary Janissary soldiers."[927] Then Vani Efendi turned his attention to the empire's Jewish population, successfully expelling the Jewish community from Balık Pazarı following a fire as a "domestic parallel to the war conducted against foreign infidels."[928] He also led the effort to convert the leader of a Jewish messianic movement, Sabbatai Zevi and his followers, obtaining a *fatwa* from the shaykh al-Islam permitting "Christians or Jews" to be "ordered to convert to Islam."[929] Fourteen years after Zevi's forced conversion, Vani Efendi pushed for the 1680 death sentence of stoning-to-death (*rejm*) for a Muslim woman convicted of having sex with a Jewish man; neither a lack of witnesses, lack of Qur'anic support for the penalty, nor the disagreement with the verdict by the 'ulema' was enough to dissuade the Ķāḍīzādelis who obtained the order from the Sultan himself.[930]

This wave of anti-Jewish violence was partly brought about by the discord and distrust of Ottoman Jews fostered by Sabbatai Zevi's international, millenarian movement in the mid 17th century, however, the Ķāḍīzādelis were eager to persecute non-Muslims in a way unmatched by most early modern Muslims. After encouraging the Sultan to undertake the Vienna campaign, and having made himself the official army preacher, the failure of the siege of

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[927] Currie, 273-4.

[928] Finkel, 279-280.

[929] Finkel, 280-281. For forced conversions from Sabbatai to Jewish court physicians see Marc David Baer's *Honoured by the Glory of Islam,* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), ch 6 as well as *The Dönme*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009). Another excellent study of the Dönme is Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, (Oxford: OUP, 2015). A seminal study of Sabbatai Zevi was produced by the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem's *Sabbatai Ṣevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, (Princeton: PUP: 1973).

[930] Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul*, 69. See also Fariba Zarinebaf, "Policing Morality: Crossing Gender and Communal Boundaries in an Age of Political Crisis and Religious Controversy," 202-205.

Vienna in 1683 resulted in his banishment.[931] Marc David Baer links Vani Efendi's campaign against Istanbul's Jews to his foreign policy commenting that apparently "no one could any longer stomach his goading to jihad or his harsh criticism of contemporary Muslim practices."[932] Vani Efendi marks the fever pitch of the Ḳāḍīzādeli efforts to both embed within the Ottoman court and carry out their puritanical designs against Sufis and non-Muslims. His political efforts paid off as his son-in-law, Feyzullah Efendi, became one of the most powerful Shaykh al-Islams in Ottoman history before his own ignominious fall in 1703.

**Naqshbandi Ḳāḍīzādelis and Neo-Sufism in the Ottoman Empire**

Osman Bosnevi, a Naqshbandi Sufi and Ḳāḍīzādeli, is outlined by Dina LeGall. Le Gall describes "Osman Bosnevi, the incumbent of one of the tariqa's oldest and most active tekkes" who was an "imperial mosque preacher" and "one of the principal spokesmen of the Ḳāḍīzādeli movement" who took his inspiration from Mehmed Birgivī.[933] LeGall notes just how remarkable it was for a Sufi like Bosnevi to involve himself in the Ḳāḍīzādeli movement as he "both took the fight to the public and participated in an anti-Sufi campaign that turned manifestly violent, and this in a society that was permeated by Sufi institutions, discourse, and practice, and in which Sufis and ulema were far from being aligned neatly against each other."[934] LeGall casts Bosnevi's actions as falling under the category of neo-Sufism that permeated the Mujaddidi and, later, Khalidi offshoots of the Naqshbandi order from the 17th century onwards, but also notes

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[931] Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, 157.

[932] Marc David Baer, *Honoured by the Glory of Islam*, (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 226.

[933] LeGall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700.* (SUNY: 2005), 150.

[934] Dina LeGall, "Ḳāḍīzādelis, Nakşbendis, and Intra-Sufi Diatribe in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *The Turkish Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 28(1), (2004): 5.

that the pre-Mujadidi Ottoman Naqshbandiyya "made rigorous adherence to the Holy Law and the Prophet's custom one of the pillars of their identity."[935]

Here, one is faced with multiple valences in the Naqshbandi order; on the one hand LeGall points to "Sultan Suleyman's reliance on the Naqshbandiyya in the struggle against Anatolia's Kizilbaş,"[936] but on the other hand, she also mentions that "what propelled Sultan Mehmed II to build the first Naqshbandi tekke of the capital for Isḥaq Bukhārī-i Hindī was precisely the association of the Naqshbandi shaykhs and their Central Asian mentors with expertise in the *waḥdat al-wujūd*."[937] This is to say that the Naqshbandiyya migrating to Ottoman lands were simultaneously known for their expertise in Ibn al-'Arabī's commentarial tradition including the study of the Unity of Being as well as their strict adherence to Shariah and knowledge of the Prophet's Sunnah. Khaled El-Rouayheb is right to offer the reminder that the "necessity of respecting the law was not a novel, "neo-Sufi" idea but rather a familiar refrain in writings of the most prominent advocates of *waḥdat al-wujūd* from the thirteenth century onward,"[938] and many mystical monist Sufis clung to the centrality of the Shari'ah as Ibn al-'Arabī did. That said, a critical turning point in Naqshbandi history came with Aḥmad Sirhindī 's rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that appears to have established this doctrine as antithetical to the Shari'ah in like-minded Sufis.

The dual nisba of the first Naqshbandi to have a lodge in Istanbul, Isḥaq "al-Bukhārī al-Hindī" indicates that this Naqshbandi expert in *waḥdat al-wujūd* came from India by way of

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[935] LeGall, 8-10.

[936] LeGall, *A Culture of Sufism,* 143.

[937] LeGall, 125.

[938] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 346.

Bukhara in Central Asia. The last Ḳāḍīzādeli Sheikh al-Islam, Feyzullah, was actually initiated

into the Naqshbandiyya by "Sheikh Murād al-Bukhārī (d. 1720 c.e.) of the

Mujaddidi-Naqshbandis. This branch of the Naqshbandiyya were named after Aḥmad Sirhindī

(d. 1624 c.e.) whose counter-doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* reworked Ibn 'Arabi's theory to

fall safely in-line with a stricter, more "orthodox" thinking.[939] As will be explored in greater

depth below, 'Abd al-Ghanī was inducted into the Naqshbandiyya through a student of a certain

Tāj al-Dīn who opposed Ahmad Sirhindī and was a staunch proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Scholars in the the 17th century Ḥaramayn, like Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī would debate Sirhindī's

spiritual claims as well as his opposition to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Basheer Nafi cites a student of

Ibrahim al-Kūrānī who records that:

> A fierce debate over the teachings of the Indian Naqshbandi reformer, Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624), erupted in the Ḥaramayn in the late eleventh Hijri century and led to dividing the 'ulama' of Makka and Madina into two opposing camps. The distribution of copies of Sirhindī's maktubat (Letters; the form in which he laid out his views) in the Hijaz, and the dissemination of his ideas by followers of his school of thought, engendered an unprecedented polemics in the Haramayn, especially among the Persian-speaking *'ulama'* who had the opportunity to read Sirhindī's writings in its original form.[940]

Thus the debate over Sirhindī's ideas became an issue dividing the beating heart of the

Afro-Eurasian Islamic intellectual network of the Early Modern period, and *waḥdat al-wujūd*

was one of the hotly debated topics. This debate didn't begin and end with Sirhindī, however,

since opposition to *waḥdat al-wujūd* among Sufis dates at least as far back as 'Ala al-Dawla

Simnānī with Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz using *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as a counter doctrine as early as

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[939] LeGall, 154.

[940] Basheer M. Nafi, "Tasawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: In Search of Ibrahim al-Kūrānī," *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 42, Issue 3 (2002): 324.

the late 14th century and a "Meccan contemporary of Sirhindī even used the formula *waḥdat al-shuhūd* independently of Sirhindī, claiming that it was typical of the Shādhilī order."[941] The change in the Naqshbandiyya ushered in by Sirhindī was reflected as far away as the Ottoman Empire revealing the vast network that the debate over *waḥdat al-wujūd* was played out on with discursive arteries converging on the beating heart of the Early Modern Islamic intellectual network, Mecca and Medina.

The Naqshbandi order played a role in Enveri Dede, a Naqshbandi from Bursa "was made its shaykh" and oversaw the "purge" of the Seyyid Gazi Tekke and its heterodox, Abdal 0nhabitants.[942]  A Madrasah was founded to ensure reeducation in addition to the expulsion of "recalcitrant heretics."[943]Aşik Çelebi gives an account of the former inhabitants to Sultan Suleyman,[944] and by the time"Evliya Çelebi visited the foundation around 1058/1648, he was entertained in a thoroughly Bektaşi institution"[945] To be sure, the move against heterodox Sufism in the Ottoman Empire dated back at least to shaykh al-Islam Ebusu'ud Efendi (d.1574 c.e.) who executed prominent Sufi leaders during his career, including: Seyh İsmail Ma'şuki the

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[941] El-Rouayheb, 245.

[942] LeGall, 143.

[943] Ahmet Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994). 77.

[944] In his report to Sultan Suleiman I Aşik Çelebi declares that the tekke of "Seydi Gazi supported vice and immorality" their "faces free of adornment of belief which is the beard" even "clean-shaving of their eyebrows" which is known as the "four blows"(Per. *Chahar Zarb*) they would "follow their backs (that is, do everything in inverse order)"  The author sees this as decay in society, "The student who fell out with his teacher, the provincial cavalry member (*sipahi*) who broke with his master (*aga*), and the beardless (youth) who got angry at his father would (all) cry out 'Where is the Seyyid Gazi hospice)'; go their, take off their clothes … the Işiks would make them dance to their tunes, pretending that this is (what is intended by) mystical musical audition (*sema'*) and pleasure. For years on end, they remained the enemies of the religion and the religious and the haters of knowledge and the learned. According to their beliefs, they would not be worthy of becoming a *müfred* if they did not humiliate the judges." Aşik Çelebi cited in Karamustafa, 76.

[945] Karamustafa, 77.

Bayrami-Melami order, Muhyi'l-Din-i Kermani, and Shaykh Hamza Bali.[946] Ismail Ma'şuki held Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wujūd* "oneness of being" and that "man was God" executed for heresy.[947] This stands in contrast to the heterodox Shaykh Bedreddin (1420 c.e.), who was executed for "rebellion" instead of for religious reasons. The ideological diversity of the Naqshbandi order, and that of Sufi orders generally, is worth keeping in mind as this order could count Ḳāḍīzādelis and the anti-Ḳāḍīzādeli Nābulusī among its ranks. El-Rouayheb reminds the reader that "it was only with the spectacular spread of the so-called Mujaddidī-Khalidī suborder of Shaykh Khalid Shahrazūrī (d. 1827) that Naqshbandīs in the Near East eventually ended up with an almost emblematic rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd*."[948]

## 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and Ibn al-'Arabī

Elizabeth Sirriyeh's biography of 'Abd al-Ghanī identifies him as "spiritual son" of Ibn al-'Arabī,[949] and rightly so. Ibn al-'Arabī was not merely one of the patron saints of Nābulusī's Damascus, but Nābulusī had a special relationship with the Shaykh al-Akbar. Von Schlegell captures Nābulusī's close connection to Ibn al-'Arabī: "he commented on his works, he was employed as a teacher at his mosque, he meditated at his tomb, he dreamed of him often, he regarded himself as his son and perhaps his incarnation, and he fled to him at the end of his life to live within hearing distance of the *adhān* at his mosque."[950] In short, not only was Nābulusī

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[946] "Isma'il Rusuhi Ankaravi: An early Mevlevi intervention into the emerging Ḳāḍīzādeli-Sufi conflict" in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World 1200–1800*, ed. John Curry and Erik Ohlander (New York: Routledge, 2012), 183.

[947] Finkel, 142-3 see also Ines Aščerić-Todd, 163.

[948] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, 261.

[949] See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī 1641-1731, (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 18-38.

[950] von Schlegell, 219.

physically and ideologically close to his beloved Sufi saint, but he had a close relationship through dream-visions that affirmed Ibn al-'Arabī as a father and teacher.[951] Nābulusī's connection to Ibn al-'Arabī is a good example of an 'Uwaysi relationship between a shaykh and disciple;[952] they were distant from one another in time and space, but connected through dream visions. Just as Nābulusī views the prophet Muhammad as continuing his mission after death along with other prophets like al-Khiḍr, the saints (*awliyā'*) continue to intercede and guide Sufis according to their view of the world and the unseen realm. It is this emphasis on the connection to the "unseen" (*al-ghayb*) that makes the tomb of Ibn al-'Arabī a lightning-rod for Sufis like Nābulusī. In a poem about Ibn al-'Arabī's tomb Nābulusī reflects on the tomb complex of his spiritual father:

> Whoever approaches it [the tomb of Muhyiddin] in the mode of Moses, / shall converse with Truth with sorts of presence. / [...]A mosque up high and a garden down below, / with a river that is among the most beautiful. / He is in a presence in between the two. / below, yet above in the loftiest places./ [...] So reflect on what we have granted you, / of sciences belonging to this and the other world.[953]

The exultant language Nābulusī uses to describe the shrine not only evokes the gardens and rivers of *janna* and he all but describes it as a veritable burning bush to "converse" with God if approached in the "mode of Moses," all of which is to emphasize the connection with the divine afforded by the location through Ibn al-'Arabī's intercession and blessing (*barakah*).

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[951] In one dream, Nābulusī witnessed his mother seated next to Ibn al-'Arabī "as if she was his wife and I was her son by him" and goes on to relate: "I was raised suckling at his two breasts from the time I was a child who knew nothing. I am his suckling child, son of the Shaykh al-Akbar, and he is my milk-father. How blessed is he as a guiding father!" see von Schlegell, 221.

[952] The adjective *'uwaysī* derives from 'Uways al-Qarnī (d. 656 c.e.) who is said to have had a connection to the prophet Muhammad without ever having physically met him.

[953] Samer Akkach, "The Eye of Reflection: al-Nābulusī's Spatial Interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's Tomb," *Muqarnas*, vol. 32, 2015, 84. Here Akkach is drawing from Nābulusī's poem: *Al-Sirr al-Mukhtabi*.

The renovated shrine of Ibn al-'Arabī and attendant mosque complex, as Nābulusī would have known it, was ordered by Sultan Selim I in 1517 upon his return to Damascus after conquering Mamluk Egypt.[954] This new tomb complex marked a change in attitude toward the Great Shaykh prior to Ottoman conquest, as 'Ali bin Maymun al-Fasī (d.1511 c.e.) attests that when he went to locate the tomb, "I found none to direct me, for all were frightened of the tyranny of the wretched clergy."[955] Al-Fāsī's account of the hostile Mamluk clergy prior to Ottoman conquest contrasts sharply with the official Ottoman stance defending Ibn al-'Arabī found in Kemalpaşazade's fatwa,[956] and Selim's construction of a tomb and mosque complex served as a physical marker of the Shaykh al-Akbar's saintly status and lofty role in the pantheon of Ottoman saints. With the rise of the Ḳāḍīzādeli challenge in the 17th century ideological allegiance to Ibn al-'Arabī became a hotly debated topic, and the tombs and shrines of Sufi saints became a locus of contestation, making Ibn al-'Arabī's tomb doubly controversial.

As befits one so dedicated to Ibn al-'Arabī, Nābulusī wrote several commentarial works on Ibn al-'Arabī. Denis Gril examines Nābulusī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom), titled "*the Jawāhir al-nuṣūṣ fī ḥall kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ* (Textual Gems

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[954] Ibn 'Arabi's tomb complex was constructed by the Ottoman Sultan Selim I shortly after his conquest of Mamluk lands to "officially sanction Ibn 'Arabi's sainthood"(Akkach 82). The apocalyptic text *al-shajara al-nu'maniyye fi dawla al-usmaniyye* sees Ibn al-'Arabī predict that his tomb will be rediscovered when the "Sin" enters the "Shin," which is understood to mean when Selim enters the Sham (Levant). The miraculous rediscovery of a saint's tomb by a sultan calls to mind Mehmed II's discovery of another Ottoman patron saint's grave — that of Abu Ayyub al-Anṣārī — during the conquest of Constantinople.
[955] Samer Akkach, "Al-Nābulusī's Spatial Interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's Tomb" 83 here Akkach is citing Nābulusī's late seventeenth century travellogue-cum-treatise, *Al-Sirr al-Mukhtafi fī Darih Ibn al-'Arabī* (The Concealed Mystery in the Tomb of Ibn 'Arabi) the details of the text on ibid. 80
[956] For a translation and study on this Fatwa, see Ahmed Zildžić, "Friend and foe: the Early Ottoman reception of Ibn 'Arabī," (Ph.D. Dissertation UC Berkeley: 2012), 133-141.

Decoding the Words of the Bezels [of Wisdom]).”[957] While many of the numerous

commentators on the *Fuṣūṣ* wrote for adepts initiated into esoteric Sufi philosophy, Gril points

out that Nābulusī's commentary stands apart for its goal of making the *Fuṣūṣ* "understandable

for the uninitiated."[958] Like Ibn al-'Arabī before him, Nābulusī elevated the Prophet Muhammad

to a spiritual, First Principle, emanating from God. Nābulusī describes this "supreme Spirit

(*al-Rūḥ al-'aẓīm*)" as "the first being to be created with no intermediary between itself and the

command of God," and calls this first being, "the Light of Muḥammad (*al-nūr

al-Muḥammadī*)" rather than "the Reality of Muḥammad (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), an

expression that belongs specifically to Ibn ʿArabī."[959] This elevation of the prophet of Islam to a

philosophical ideal was the intellectual counterpart to the popular beliefs and customs of Sufis

regarding his continuing intercession — largely through dream visions — in the lives of Muslims,

both of which were rejected by the conservative faction represented by the Ḳāḍīzādelis.

Unsurprisingly from someone so deeply connected with Ibn al-'Arabī intellectually, 'Abd

al-Ghanī defended the doctrine of mystical monism that had become so associated with the

Great Shaykh, the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

**Nābulusī's Defense of Waḥdat al-Wujūd**

Nābulusī not only penned a treatise defending Ibn al-'Arabī titled "A Rejection of those

who Argue Against ibn al-'Arabī' (*al-Radd ʿalā man takallam fī Ibn al-ʿArabī*), but he also

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[957] Denis Gril, "*Jawāhir al-nuṣūṣ fī ḥall kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam," in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).
[958] Gril, 50.
[959] Gril, 54.

wrote multiple treatises in defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. His *Kitāb al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa'l-khiṭāb al-ṣidq* ("Book on the True Being and Truthful Discourse") is, in large part, a refutation of al-'Ala' al-Bukhārī's (d.1438 c.e.) early 15th century polemic against Ibn al-'Arabī titled, *Fadiḥat al-mulḥidin wa nāṣiḥat al-muwaḥḥidīn* ("The shame of renegades and good advice to monotheists"), which was mistakenly attributed to Maṣ'ūd ibn 'Umar al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390 c.e.) in Nābulusī's time.[960] While, El-Rouayheb points out that a "combination of attitudes – admiration for Ibn 'Arabi while keeping a distance to the claims and concerns of the later Persianate tradition of ontological monism – was common in the Arabic-speaking lands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,"[961] Nābulusī felt no such compunction and vigorously defended his "spiritual father" along with the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* which had become so associated with Ibn al-'Arabī by the 17th century.

Among his works explicating and defending *waḥdat al-wujūd* the shortest but most succinct is his treatise, *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd min ma'na waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Clarifying What is Meant by the Unity of Being," hereafter shortened as *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd*).[962] Without doubt though, his primary work on the topic of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is his *Kitāb al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa'l-khiṭāb al-ṣidq* ("Book on the True Being and Truthful Discourse").[963] It was also a topic that featured in his correspondence, and Samer Akkach has published two letters "On

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[960] Nābulusī, *al-Wujud al-ḥaqq*, 15-21.

[961] El-Rouayheb, 247.

[962] Walīd Jabbar Isma'īl al'Abīdī and Ra'id Salim Sharīf al-Ta'ī, "*Idāḥ al-maqṣūd min waḥdat al-wujūd li'l-shaykh al-'alamah 'abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*," Journal of Education and Science, Volume 15(4), 2008.

[963] Nābulusī, *al-Wujud al-ḥaqq wa khiṭāb al-siḍq*, trans. Bakri Aladdin, (Damascus: French Scientific Institute for the Study of Arabic,1995). Aladdin provides a French introduction for his critical edition. Another critical edition of this text is Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-Wujūd*, ed. Sayyid Yusuf Ahmed, (Dār al-kutūb al-'ilmiyah, Beirut: 2002).

Cosmogony and the Unity of Being."[964] Like his spiritual father, Ibn al-'Arabī, Nābulusī received his own mystical revelations (*fatḥ*), recorded in his *al-Fatḥ al-rabbānī wa'l-fayḍ al-raḥmānī*, which devotes its third chapter to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the form of a creedal statement.[965]

The first short treatise, *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd*, uses very clear and concise language — a departure from Nābulusī's typically erudite Arabic — indicating that it is a didactic treatise intended to explain *waḥdat al-wujūd* to an audience that may not be initiated in Sufi philosophy. Toward the end of his treatise, Nābulusī indicates his embattled position and reasserts his goal in the treatise, writing "I have stood up to the late scholars on many messages explaining the Unity of Being" that one may better "understand what is meant by the phrases of the outward (*ẓāhir*) scholars and the interior (*bāṭin*) scholars in this matter."[966] The division between the "outward" scholars who understand *waḥdat al-wujūd* in superficial terms and reject it, versus the scholars of the "interior" who understand the deeper meaning is a common refrain among defenders of this doctrine. Nābulusī is at pains to emphasize that "what is meant by the Unity of Being is not contrary to what the imams of Islam agreed upon,"[967] and asserts the agreement of this doctrine with the "people of the Sunnah and consensus" (*ahl al-sunnah*

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[964] Samer Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi Scholar,* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 71; 109-113; 294-322.

[965] Elizabeth Sirriyyeh translates a portion of this statement, which includes the following: "My Lord has caused me to witness through His might and power, not through my might and power, that He is God and there is no god but He, an essence from pre-eternity that does not resemble the essences and is totally unlike the essences of the existents, whose being (*wujūd*) is its very essence with nothing added to it." Sirriyeh, *Visionary*, 28-29.

[966] *Wa qad waqaftu li'l-muta'akhirīn min al 'ulamā' 'ala rasā'il kathīrah fī bayān waḥdat al-wujūd* [...] *an nufaham al-maqṣūd min 'ibārāt 'ulamā' al-ẓāhir wa 'ulamā' al-baṭin fī hadhahi al-masa'lah*. Walīd Jabbar Isma'īl al-'Abīdī and Ra'id Salim Sharīf al-Ta'ī, *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd*, 270.

[967] *Laysa al-marād bi-waḥdat al-wujūd khilāf ma 'alayhi a'imah al-islām*. Nābulusī, 263.

*wa'l-jum'ah*).[968] Undoubtedly, the most forceful appeal to authority comes at the end of this short treatise where 'Abd al-Ghanī, citing an unnamed treatise in favor of *waḥdat al-wujūd* from Shattari Sufi shaykh and Medinan jurist Aḥmad al-Qushāshī (d.1661 c.e.), claims that shaykh al-Islam Kemalpaşazade went as far as declaring in a fatwa that it is even "necessary for the Sultan to compel the people to adopt *waḥdat al-wujūd*"(*yujib 'ala walī al-'amr an yuḥmil al-nas 'ala al-qawl bi-waḥdat al-wujūd*).[969]

His opening preamble leaves little doubt that he is an adherent to the doctrine seeking to rectify misunderstandings, as he declares: "Praise be to God who is described as the unity of existence"(*al-ḥamdul'illah al-mawṣūf bi-waḥdat al-wujūd*), and that he means it not as the corrupt meaning of the "people of atheism and heresy"(*ahl al-ilḥād wa'l-zandiqah*).[970] Nābulusī lists his ideological predecessors: "Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, Sheikh Sharaf al-Dīn ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, Sheikh 'Abd al-Ḥaq ibn Sab'īn, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī and their ilk, may God Almighty sanctify their secrets, and multiply their lights, for they say the Unity of Existence."[971] With the exception of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn Sab'īn, the list includes Ibn al-'Arabī and his major commentators. Ibn Sab'īn is a notable inclusion as he — rather than Ibn al-'Arabī — was the first to use the phrase "Unity of Being" in the meaning it

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[968] al-'Abīdī and al-Ta'ī, 262.

[969] al-'Abīdī and al-Ta'ī, 270. In a footnote on this passage, al-'Abīdī and al-Ta'ī pontificate that "this speech is unacceptable because Islam is a religion of freedom that rejects fanaticism of opinion"(*hadha kalām ghayr maqbūl wa dhalik liana al-islām dīn al-ḥurriya wa yunabidhu al-ta'aṣṣub fī al-ray*), but do not connect this passage to any actual fatwa from Kemalpaşazade. Bakri Aladdin speculates that it is possible this could be a fatwa that has not been preserved, but considers the passage to be from Qushāshī's own zealous interpretation of Kemalpaşazade's fatwa defending Ibn al-'Arabī. See Nābulusī, *al-Wujud al-Haqq wa Khiṭāb al-Siḍq* trans. Bakri Aladdin, 78. I am following Aladdin's translation of *walī al-'amr* (a Quran-based construction meaning the one in charge of the community) as "Sultan" given the Ottoman context.

[970] al-'Abīdī and al-Ta'ī, 261.

[971] al-'Abīdī and al-Ta'ī, 262.

later carries in Arabic philosophy and he also marked out a position more radically monist than Ibn al-'Arabī's. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 c.e.) divided "esoteric"(*bāṭinī*) Sufis into two "opinions," with Sufis like Ibn al-Fāriḍ belonging to the faction of "self-disclosure"(*tajallī*) and "manifestation"(*maẓhar*) on the one hand, and Ibn Sabʿīn's more radical faction of "Oneness"(*waḥda*) on the other,[972] but Nābulusī is rallying together the "Akbari school and the school of Ibn Sabʿīn" together under one banner as the "existentialist faction"(*firqa wujūdīyya*). Where there may have been room for nuance between these types of mystical monism in Khaldūn's time, it is a sign of the embattled position of mystical monism and his own inclusive view of fellow Sufis as he circles the wagons around this greater *firqa wujūdīyya*.

Nābulusī points to two meanings of *wujūd* at the core of critics' misunderstandings, namely the Eternal Existence (*al-wujūd al-qadim*) signified by *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that is God, and conditional existents (*al-mawjūdat al-ḥādith*) that are caused by God and owe their existence to Him. The difference is enormous as it is the difference between things in existence which have a cause, and God who is the very cause of all those things in existence. This error is glimpsed in one of the most common *reductio ad absurdum* critiques of *waḥdat al-wujūd* where profane things are listed with the implication that followers of the doctrine consider God to be identical with each item, whether it's a tree, a dog, or any number of things too profane to make explicit in a doctoral dissertation, without realizing that these are contingent existents that rely on God's creation, whereas God is Being (*Wujūd*) Itself. In his *Kitāb al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa'l-khiṭāb al-ṣidq* ("On the True Being and Truthful Discourse"), Nābulusī similarly explains that "ignoramuses" (*al-jāhilīn*) criticize the saying "Being is God" (*al-wujūd huwa Allah*)

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[972] Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibn Khaldūn on Sufism: Remedy for the Questioner in Search of Answers Shifāʾ al-Sāʾil li-Tahdhīʾb al-Masāil*, trans. Yumna Özer, (Islamic Texts Society: 2017), 60-2 and 127.

because they do not understand the difference between *al-wujūd* (Being or Existence itself) and *al-mawjūd* (that which is existent), and also clarifies this difference is between God, the "eternal Existence"(*al-wujūd al-qadīm*) and "contingent existence"(*al-wujūd al-ḥādith*).[973] Nābulusī is at his most explicit and succinct when he tells the reader repeatedly in his *Kitāb al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa'l-khiṭāb al-ṣidq* that "verily the Existence (*al-wujūd*) is God almighty, so don't think we mean by this that the existents (*al-mawjūdāt*) are God."[974] This difference between Existence (*al-wujūd*) and the existent things (*al-mawjūdāt*) mirrors the pithy phrases found in *Idāḥ al-maqṣūd*.

Nābulusī's *Kitāb al-Wujūd* attempts to counter a number of frequent critiques of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. His preamble makes it apparent that Ibn Taymiyya's critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is at the forefront of Nābulusī's mind in his apologia, as he writes: "Praise be to God the Eternal True Existence, the one who manifests in all sensations and intellections, without in-dwelling (*ḥulūl*), and not uniting (*ittiḥād*) and not divesting [of His attributes] (*taʿṭīl*) and not similarity (*tashbīh*) and not embodiment [or corporealism] (*tajsīm*)."[975] As an accomplished poet, Nābulusī also employs poetry to make his point in an aesthetically pleasing manner, and in this regard he is also following his Spiritual father, Ibn al-'Arabī, whose *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* switched frequently between poetry and prose, not just to break up the monotony of

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[973] Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-wujūd,* 54-6.

[974] Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-wujūd*, 19.

[975] Nābulusī, *Wujūd al-ḥaqq*, ed. Bakri Aladdin, 5. This is contrary to what Bakri Aladdin describes as "Ibn Taymiyya's manifest lack of precision"(*le manque de précision manifeste d'Ibn Taymiyya*) when he claims that "Absolute union"(*ittiḥād*) is what the adepts of the Unity of Being profess by claiming that the existence of the created is the very essence" of the "being of the Creator" cited Nābulusī, *Wujūd al-ḥaqq*, ed. Bakri Aladdin, 28-29. For more on the arguments against *waḥdat al-wujūd* employed by Ibn Taymiyya, See Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart,* 76.

philosophical exposition, but in order to convey truths gleaned through unveiling (*kashf*) that transcend the rational, discursive mode of explanation.

Without doubt, it is Nābulusī's *Kitāb al-wujūd* which offers his most lengthy and thorough rebuttal to the critics of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. 'Abd al-Ghanī's opponent in this work is, nominally, Sa'd al-Dīn Taftazānī, however Bakri Aladdin has demonstrated that this "Pseudo-Taftazānī" was actually the Hanafi *fāqih*, Maturidi theologian, 'Ala al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 1438).[976] Al-Bukhārī was a "virulent critic" of the "mystical monism of Ibn 'Arabi," but he even "considered Ibn Taymiyya an infidel,"[977] an opinion all the more striking for Ibn Taymiyya's status as one of the first critics of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Al-Bukhārī penned *Fadiḥat al-mulḥidin* which was "a lengthy and vituperative attack on the Andalusian mystic Ibn ʿArabi (d. 1240) and his followers," which "seems to have been widely read in Ḳāḍīzādeli circles (judging by the numerous manuscripts of the work that survive in Turkish libraries)."[978] Much of Nābulusī's *Kitāb al-wujūd* is dedicated to refuting the arguments of al-Bukhārī, focused especially on the topic of the Oneness of Existence and defending the "party of Existence (*al-firqa al-wujūdīyya*)" used by al-Bukhārī to disparage mystical monists.[979] Finally, Bakri Aladdin considers this work "as his spiritual testament, since the end of the writing was to coincide with his preparation for a great journey [...] which will end with the pilgrimage to Mecca" and reminds the reader that, during this time, "whoever undertakes [the pilgrimage] exposes his life to real danger.[980]

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[976] *Kitāb al-Wujūd* trans. Bakri Aladdin, 16.
[977] El-Rouayheb, 193
[978] El-Rouayheb, 16.
[979] El-Rouayheb, 343.
[980] *Kitāb al-Wujūd,* trans. Bakri Aladdin, 34-5.

South Asian Naqshbandi, and ideological opponent of Aḥmad Sirhindī, Tāj al-Dīn 'Uthmanī (d. 1640 c.e.) travelled to Mecca twice inducting "a considerable number of local scholars from Yemen and the Hejaz" into the Naqshbandi order.[981] El-Rouayheb speculates that Tāj al-Dīn's exit from India may have been "prompted by losing out to Sirhindī in the struggle to succeed their common Indian master Khwāja Bāqībillah."[982] Unlike Ahmed Sirhindī, Tāj al-Dīn was a staunch proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as seen in his pithy phrase: "there is no Existent in this Existence but God (*Lā mawjūd fi hadha al-wujūd illā Allah*)." El-Rouayheb explains just what this phrase means for Tāj al-Dīn, as it:

> represents the highest level of understanding the basic Islamic profession: *la ilaha illā Allah*. The novice understands the profession to mean that there is no proper object of worship except Allah; the intermediate seeker understands it to mean that there is no reliance on anything except Allah; the advanced mystic understands it to mean that there is nothing in existence except Allah.[983]

This phrase is the central axiom in the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and here Tāj al-Dīn is clarifying that it represents the essential truth underlying the first half of the Muslim profession of faith, that "there is no God but God." At the behest of his Naqshbandi master, Nābulusī wrote a translation and commentary of Tāj al-Dīn's Persian treatise on Naqshbandi way[984] titled, *Miftāḥ al-ma'iyya fi dustūr al-ṭariqah al-Naqshbandiyya*, wherein he dwells favorably on this aphorism.[985]

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[981]El-Rouayheb, 257 and El-Rouayheb, , "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century." *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 38, No. 2 (2006): 273.

[982] El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, 258.

[983] El-Rouayheb, 258.

[984] El-Rouayheb, (2006): 273.

[985] Nābulusī, *Miftāḥ al-ma'iyya fi dustūr al-ṭariqah al-naqshbandiyya*, 75-77.

Nābulusī's adherence to the "Unity of Being" was reflected in his soteriology, where he differentiates between repentance "according to Sharīʿah," escaping "God's anger," on the one hand, and repentance, "according to the Ḥaqīqa" which he defines as forgetfulness "about God's Being" as the "repentant sinner is forgetful of God in His universally creative role and, consequently, it can be a sin even to repent of sins."[986] This "repentance of the elect" that Nābulusī calls a "repentance of repentance," is mystically monist in outlook as Nābulusī describes it as a "sinking of plurality in the oneness of being such that the penitent says, 'I am not I and He is not He.' Then he says, 'Not He.' Then he says 'He.' Then he is silent forever.[987] This subsumption of the individual will in God denotes a mystic realization wherein one's sins cannot exist just as the individual cannot be said to truly exist when God alone is the sole Existence. This esoteric interpretation of repentance, although it helps explain why he rallied to the defense of his fellow Sufis in defense of their mystically inspired statements, could not be further from the puritanical reforms, like the Kāḍīzādelis, in their push to "command the right and forbid the wrong"(*'amr bi'l-maʿrūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*) wherever possible.

## Nābulusī's Defense of Sufism against Puritanical Reformers

Nābulusī seems to have had a negative yet formative experience when he traveled to the Ottoman capital "where he met with several of the leading religious figures and military judges, including shaykh al-Islam," but he seems to "have had a lukewarm reception," and also

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[986] Sirriyeh, 27.
[987] Sirriyeh, 27.

"abruptly ended his visit and returned home."[988] His biographer, al-Ghazzī, claims that Nābulusī "met an anonymous mystic who instructed him to leave and head back south, saying: "you have no good fortune here."[989] Although it is unclear from his own writings or those of his biographer exactly what cause Nābulusī to flee Istanbul quickly, Akkach seems right to suppose that he encountered the staunchly anti-mystical Ḳāḍīzādeli faction, and notes that his first writing after this experience was a treatise on Islamic doctrine ('aqIdāḥ) "in which he distinguished sharply between the sphere of religious law and the sphere of truth."[990] Largely because the name "Ḳāḍīzādeli" itself is a neologism used to describe an ideological and political faction, one needs to read between the lines in locating the Ḳāḍīzādelis in his writings, but this can be done through his writings on the "officious" or "exoteric" ulema and numerous "Turks."

In his travels and writings Nābulusī occasionally encounters "Turks" to whom he ascribes overly orthodox views. During his visit to the great Sufi poet and saint Ibn al-Fāriḍ's shrine Nābulusī describes in vivid detail the ecstatic nature of the *semā'* ceremony where the poet-saint's verses were sung in a ritualized gathering. By way of emphasizing the spiritual potency of this "divine audition" he notes that even those critical of Sufi practices were moved to ecstasy:

> At times some of the critics from among the Turks (*arwām*) are there, but they are unable to constrain themselves from the spiritual state, which descends upon them unawares, or from the humility, which overwhelms them. Once I met one of them on another Friday after I had previously attended his audition alone with some of my group. He said to me, "Oh sir, this thing that they do here [at the shrine], is it permissible or

[988] Akkach, Islam and the Enlightenment, 28.
[989] Akkach, 28.
[990] Akkach, 30.

forbidden?" But I would not talk to him, and I calmly endured him until the audition began. Then he was seized by a spiritual state, and I have not seen him since.[991]

It is the more than likely that the "Turks" referred to here are partisans of Ḳāḍīzāde's anti-Sufi faction, and recognizing Nābulusī as a jurist, one of these Turks questions the permissibility of musical audition. Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Wine Ode* (*Khamriyya*) consistently interprets the Sufi saint's mystical poetry in terms of the Unity of Being. Shigeru Kamada analyzes Nābulusī's interpretations of the *Khamriyya,* concluding that he "explains away every word or phrase in the poem according to his Sufi thought which is based on Ibn al-'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine.[992]

Von Schlegell, making sense of a number of Nābulusī's harsh remarks reserved for "Turks," points out that Nābulusī was loyal to the Ottoman Sultans, had many devoted Turkish disciples, and that his remarks are not about a burgeoning Arab national consciousness, but instead are "barbs aimed at the Turkish members of Damascus society who chose to slander the Sufis."[993] For example, Nābulusī refers to questions from "oafish Turkish students (*sukhṭ al-Turk*)" who "object to the people of the *ṭarīqah*," and to "*dhikr*" especially.[994] This is from a polemical treatise against a "Turk" who denies that Jews and Christians may enter paradise that will be explored in greater detail alongside Nābulusī's view of non-Muslims below.  Even in Nābulusī's more chauvinistic remarks targeting this "Turk," it is apparent that the primary concern is that this Turk, and others like him, charges Arabs "with infidelity" and the "proof that he hates the Arabs is that he is looking for their slips, and attacks what he imagines as their

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[991] Th. Emil Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, His verse, and His Shrine,* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 81.
[992] Shigeru Kamada, "Nābulusī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Khamriyah," *Orient*, (1982): 36.
[993] von Schlegell, 96-99.
[994] von Schlegell, 100.

mistakes. He justifies his (aggressive) behavior in his effort to support religion."[995] Perhaps

striving to serve as a corrective to the views of these "Turks," Nābulusī goes out of his way to

defend Sufi practices like *dhikr*. In his *Jamiʿ al-asrār fī radd al-ṭaʿn ʿan al-ṣūfiyya al-akhyār*

(The Collection of Secrets in Refuting the Defamation of Good Sufis), he goes as far as to argue

that "all forms of *dhikr*, no matter how 'extreme' its external expressions, are legitimate and

praiseworthy, effectively 'legalising' and 'normalising' varieties of sufism frequently disparaged

by even 'sufi-positive' 'ulamā'."[996]

    As mentioned above, Ḳāḍīzāde's own mentor — and the figure commonly cited as the

ideological father of the Ḳāḍīzādeli movement itself — was Mehmed Birgivī (d.1572 c.e.).

Ivanyi writes that the "fact that Birgivi served as a direct inspiration for a number of active

members of the kādīzādelī movement is undisputed," but notes that "by the seven- teenth

century, he and his work had taken on somewhat of a life of their own, becoming the focus of

contention between those of Ḳāḍīzādeli leanings and their opponents."[997] Mehmed Birgivī

composed his magnum opus the *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya* ("the Muhammadan Path") a

year before his death, and this text may be described as a "manual of exhortation (*waʿz*) and

advice (*naṣīḥa*)" two-thirds of which is devoted to the subject of "piety" (*taqwa*).[998] Katherina

Ivanyi, in her study of *al-Tariqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, locates this text in a broader context of

"an intolerant current within the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school, represented by such scholars as 'Alā'

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[995] Winter, 97.

[996] Allen, 166-7.

[997] Katherina Ivanyi, *Virtue, Piety and the Law A Study of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendīʾs al-Ṭariqa al-muḥammadiyya*, (Brill: 2020), 231.

[998] Ivanyi, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Commentary on Birgivī Mehmed Efendi's *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 138.

al-Dīn al-Bukhārī[999] whose critique of Ibn al-'Arabī and *waḥdat al-wujūd* was the impetus for

Nābulusī's *Kitāb al-Wujūd.*

While Birgivī's student, Ḳāḍīzāde Meḥmed, founded the anti-Sufi Ḳāḍīzādeli

movement, Birgivī himself doesn't launch any such sweeping attack on Sufis in his *al-Ṭariqa*

*al-Muḥammadiyya*, and seems to have had an ambivalent view of Sufism. He was himself the

"son of a family of prominent Balıkesir Sufis and onetime Bayrāmī initiate,"[1000] and he discusses

a series of "sober Sufis" from the early centuries of Islam in his work. In a section titled "On

Pernicious Innovations," in Tosun Bayrak's "translation" of *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya*,

nowhere are specific Sufi practices mentioned.[1001] Instead, the work contains several references

to famous Sufis from the formative period like Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī,[1002] Sarī al-Saqaṭī, and

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[999] Ivanyi, 82.

[1000] Ivanyi, "Virtue, Piety and the Law: a Study of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendī's Al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton: 2012), 92.

[1001] Tosun Bayrak, *The Path of Muhammad (Al-Tariqah al-Muḥammadiyyah): A Book on Islamic Morals and Ethics*. World Wisdom: 2005, 70-76. Although Bayrak leaves this out, Ivanyi writes that "we know from elsewhere that Bigivi considered a whole range of Sufi practices unlawful, including vocal *dhikr, sama,* and *dawran*." Ivanyi, (Dissertation: 2012), 142. It is worth noting, as Ivanyi does in her monograph that the translator, Tosun Bayrak, is himself from a branch of the Khalwatiyya, "a Sufi order Birgivī seems to have particularly disliked and which, more than once, became the target of his followers' wrath." Ivanyi notes that Bayrak's translation is, by his own admission, more of an "interpretation" and lacks scholarly clarity regarding which editions and manuscripts he is drawing from and he "presents material from the extensive commentary tradition as part of the original." Katherina Ivanyi, *Virtue, Piety and the Law A Study of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendī's al-Ṭariqa al-muḥammadiyya*, (Brill: 2020), 9.

[1002] A Khurasanian Sufi of Zoroastrian grandparentage who was known for "ecstatic utterances"(*shaṭḥiyat*) where—in the case of Bistami—the speaker talks from God's point of view. However, Birgivī gives an anecdote with Bistami where he is seen to be mindful of Shari'a: Abu Yazid al-Bisṭāmī "once took his students on a first visit to a man who was famous as a saint, loved by many, and considered to be devout and pious. They saw him coming out of his house, and followed him in the crowd until they came to the mosque. As the man was about to enter the mosque, he spat in the direction of the qiblah. Abu Yazid gathered his students and left without even a greeting. He said to his students, 'This man is not worthy of trust, because he has not acted in accordance with the behavior of the Prophet. How can we trust him in the things that he claims he possesses? Do not be fooled even by someone who can perform miracles, though he is sitting cross-legged in midair. See if he behaves in accordance with what Allah has ordered and what He has forbidden, whether he is sincere in guarding himself within the borders of the religion, whether he follows unfalteringly the religious law.'" Bayrak, 75.

Junayd al-Baghdādī. It is clear from Ivanyi's study that Birgivī did indeed decry certain forms of contemporary Sufism; the scope of acceptable Sufi practices are narrower for Birgivī who held in his *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiya* that a Sufi is not to be followed if he "has not memorized the Qur'ān and has not written Ḥadīth," and he considered "vocal *dhikr*, *samā'* and *dawrān*" to be unlawful Sufi practices.[1003] Nābulusī, by contrast, characteristically defended each of these practices from his Sufi brothers. On the use of *Tariqa* in his book, Von Schlegell notes that he uses this word "not to promote a new Sufi order," and goes as far as to conclude that his intention is "to nullify those in existence,"[1004] likely favoring an imagined, sober Sufism of the past. That said, and contrary to the perception of *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya* as an anti-sufi text, it appears to have been popular among Ottoman Sufis, with copies found in Bektashi *tekkes*,[1005] and Evliya Çelebi records a curious encounter with a Bektashi dervish carrying a copy of the text.[1006] Nonetheless, Birgivī does take a conservative, sober, approach to Sufism that privileges the formative period and ascetic-minded Sufis as an ideal, possibly to contrast with the Sufi orders of his day.

'Abd al-Ghanī viewed Birgivī positively while attempting to wrest his major text away from the religious conservatives who used it against Sufis and against several hotly debated

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[1003] Katherine Ivanyi, "Virtue, Piety and the Law: A Study of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendī's al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton: 2012),141-2.

[1004] von Schlegell, 95.

[1005] Allen, 155.

[1006] Çelebi describes a "Bektashi shaven in the 'four strokes' manner" whose chest is "gashed and shirtless;" is "mad, wild, naked and hairless; barefoot and bareheaded." This description matches that of the "deviant," antinomian "Abdals" who were able to persist after entering the Bektashi order associated with the Janissary corps in the 16th century. corps. See Ahmet Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994). This Dervish presents Melek Ahmed Pasha with a book purported to have been printed in "infidel" Spain, it is none other than *al-Ṭariqa al-muḥammadiya*. This account is from Evliya Çelebi, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662)*, trans. Robert Dankoff, (SUNY: 1991), 262-3.

"innovations" of the time like tobacco-smoking and coffee-drinking. In order to combat the Ḳāḍīzādelis' use of Birgivī, he offered his own commentary, and, on the 23rd of Rajab 1682, he penned *al-Ḥadīqa al-nadiyya fī sharḥ al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya* ("The Moist Garden in the Explication of the Muḥammadan Path").[1007] Von Schlegell notes that in Nābulusī's time "low-level Turkish *fuquhā'* had settled in Damascus, preaching from *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiya* against music and dance in Sufi *ḥaḍrahs* in the mosques, certain practices at tombs, and especially, against smoking."[1008] In his analysis of ʿAbd al-Ghanī's explanatory commentary (*sharḥ*) of *al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, Allen writes that "Nābulusī worked to rhetorically defuse particular elements of Birgivī's text, so as to wrest it away from his puritan-minded opponents."[1009] Nābulusī, in his explanation for his commentary, "hopes that through his commentary he might turn 'the people of ignorant fanaticism (*ahl al-taʿaṣṣub min al-juhhāl*) away from sponging off the table of (*al-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiya*)'s benefits.'"[1010] Ivanyi also provides an examination of this commentary and finds that ʿAbd al-Ghanī offers his most extensive commentary on the third of three types of "innovation"(*bidʿa*) that Birgivī examines, namely "innovation in custom"(*bidʿa fī l-ʿāda*).[1011] This prompts Nābulusī to defend innovations of "custom" which are not to be attacked like innovations in religion and he defends

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[1007] Jonathan Parkes Allen, "Reading Mehmed Birgivī with ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī Contested Interpretations of Birgivī's al-Ṭariqa al-muḥammadiyya in the 17th–18th-Century Ottoman Empire," in *Early Modern Trends Islamic Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 154.

[1008] Barbara von Schlegell, "Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: SHaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1731)," Ph. D. Dissertation, (UC Berkeley: 1997), 84.

[1009] Allen, 154.

[1010] Allen, 157.

[1011] Ivanyi, "ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Commentary on Birgivî Mehmed Efendi's al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya: Early Modern Ottoman Debates on Bidʿa fī l-ʿāda," in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 142.

tobacco and coffee as a primary case in point.[1012]  Writing at the time of the third Ḳāḍīzādeli

wave and Vani Efendi's political ascendency, it is clear that Nābulusī has Ḳāḍīzādeli opponents

in mind when he inserts his defense of these two substances here.[1013]

Nābulusī adopted an attitude of radical acceptance toward other individual Sufis, their

writings, and their orders; Nābulusī writes about the validity of other Muslim mystics in a way

that reflects his belief that God is capable of unveiling Himself to all Sufis in myriad ways. This

stands in stark contrast to the single-ṭariqa adherence that Bāqī Billah (d. 1603 c.e.) demanded

of his Naqshbandi students like his successor Aḥmad Sirhindī in South Asia, a strict type of

Naqshbandi Sufism that caught on among Ḳāḍīzādeli Sufis. Although he was a Qadiri and a

Naqshbandi Sufi, not a member of the Mevlevi order, Nābulusī wrote a treatise in defense of

the Mevlevi order titled: *The Book of the Pearl Necklaces of the Path of Mawlawi Sayyids*

(*kitāb al-'uqūd al-lu'lu'iyya fī tarīq al-sādah al-mawlawiyya*). Nābulusī writes a 25 couplet

(*bayt*) long *qasīda* in praise of Rumi's Masnavi in which he declares: "[t]he pleasure of

Existence is in the book of the Mathnawi, / and [through it] every blessing of Existence

continues"(*bi-kitāb al-mathnawī ṭāba al-wujūd / wa tawālī kul in'ām wujūd*).[1014] The fifth

chapter of Nābulusī's defense of the Mevlevis is dedicated to the subject of *sama*'[1015] which

was under rigorous attack from the Ḳāḍīzādelis as one of the two Sufi orders along with the

Halveti order previously holding a monopoly in Istanbul's Friday mosque preaching circuit.

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[1012] Nābulusī's own treatise on tobacco was titled *al-ṣulḥ bayn al-ikhwān fī ḥukm ibāḥat al-dukhkhān.*
Ivanyi notes that a correspondent of his requested that Nābulusī remove the remarks about the
permissibility of smoking from his commentary on Birgivī, which he refused. See Ivanyi, 150.
[1013] Ivanyi concludes that 'Abd al-Ghanī's "commentary on Birgivî's discussion of bid'a fī l-'āda thus
directly responded to Kadızâde Mehmed Efendi, Ahmed Rûmî Akhisârî and the like" in Ivanyi, 152.
[1014] 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-'uqūd al-lu'lu'iyya fī tarīq al-sādah al-mawlawiyya*, ed. Bakri
'Aladdin, (Damascus: Ninawa, 2009), 34-5.
[1015] Nābulusī, 38-46.

Nābulusī's defense of the controversial Halveti shaykh Niyāzī Misrī (d.1694 c.e.) caused him to weigh in on the topic of ʿAlid loyalty made so controversial by conflict with the Safavids and their Qizilbash partisans in Ottoman lands since the start of the 16th century. Misrī preached "that the imam al-Ḥasan and the imam al-Ḥusayn, the sons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may God be pleased with them) are two prophets and messengers from among the messengers of God. And he declared that this is his belief (iʿtiqād), and that whoever does not believe this is not a Muslim."[1016] Although associated with Shi'ism, love for ʿAli's sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn was a staple of acceptable Ottoman Islam of the period.[1017] ʿAbd al-Ghanī defended what he saw as the esoteric meaning behind Misrī 's declaration, claiming that "the first 'concealed' caliphs are Ḥasan and Ḥusayn" and that "'God concealed in their humanity the authority (taṣrīf) derived from the Muḥammadan Reality' (al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya)."[1018] Nābulusī sides with the pragmatic Hanafi wisdom against making takfīr, and he rejects this part of Misrī's statement,[1019] but he defends his fellow mystic Misrī by contending that he is "not legally responsible" if he uttered this "in a state of ecstasy."[1020] Nābulusī's rigorous defense of Sufis everywhere regardless of their order derives from a fundamental Oneness in his religious worldview with

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[1016] Pagani, in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, 317.The treatise from ʿAbd al-Ghanī in question here is *al-Ḥāmil fī l-falak wa-l-maḥmūl fī'l-fulk fī iṭlāq al-nubuwwa wa-l-risāla wa-l-khilāfa wa-l-mulk* (The One Who Carries in the Sphere and the One Who is Carried in the Ark: On the Attribution of Prophecy, Mission, Caliphate and Kingdom).

[1017] Massive placards of their beautifully calligraphed names adorn the walls of the Aya Sofya mosque in Istanbul to this day. Evliya Çelebi includes the two sons of ʿAli in his dream-vision inspiring him to undertake his massive travelog, the *Seyahatname*. See Dankoff, Robert and Kim, Sooyong. *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Çelebi*. (London: Eland, 2011), 4-5. It's also notable that, although he's Sunni, he mentions these two grandsons of the Prophet along with all "twelve Imams" and the "martyrs of Karbala" in the same dream-vision.

[1018] Pagani, 318.

[1019] Pagani, 319. Here Pagani identifies Nābulusī's opinion cited from Ḥanafī textbooks: "'If there are aspects in a case that require a declaration of unbelief (takfīr) and one single aspect that prevents excommunication, then the jurist (muftī) must incline to the aspect that prevents it."

[1020] Pagani, 320.

*waḥdat al-wujūd* at its center. This worldview colors his view of non-Muslims as well, and it is to this topic that the study now turns.

**Nābulusī and Non-Muslims**

It is worth noting that both Ibn al-'Arabī and Nābulusī both had cause to view Christians in a negative light; Ibn al-'Arabī witnessed the violent "reconquista" of Islamic Spain by Christian kingdoms, and as Nābulusī recounts when he visits the Holy Land, his family fled Nablus for Damascus when it fell to Crusaders. Having fled from the "Reconquista," Ibn al-'Arabī advised then Seljuk ruler of Rum to not be so lenient with his *dhimmi* population,[1021] and 'Abd al-Ghanī lived through several wars with the Ottoman Empire's Christian neighbors including the decades long wars on Crete and the military failures that lead to the humiliating treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. Instead, however, one can find positive encounters with Christian monks in his travelog (*riḥla*), an intellectual correspondence with a Melkite patriarch he calls his "spiritual brother" about philosophy, and an esoteric interpretation of other religions as ultimately worshiping the same, One God. This section will treat each of these encounters with the non-Muslim "other" in turn, reflecting on the role that *waḥdat al-wujūd* plays in 'Abd al-Ghanī's religious worldview.

To lay the context for Nābulusī's journey (*riḥla*) and the spiritual tourism he engages in, it is worth briefly exploring the remarkable role of shared sacred spaces in the medieval Near East. For example, Josef Meri's study on shared saints in the Holy Land reveals a rich religious geography where saints and holy sites were visited by members of all three Abrahamic faiths.

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[1021] See below; ftnt 156.

Meri mobilizes Victor Turner's use of "communitas" — a result of "unmediated temporal experience whereby individuals come together for a common purpose" — to argue that this performed the function of a "social cement" which "binds Christians, Jews, and Muslims together in their respective places of worship on celebration days."[1022] One particular example of a shared, holy figure, can be seen in the figure of the mysterious prophet Khizr or al-Khaḍir who "was the locus of the cult of al-Khaḍir" seen throughout "Greater Syria,"[1023] and was not only a saintly figure in Islam but also was conflated with "Eliyahu ha-Navi' (Prophet Elijah)" in the Jewish tradition.[1024] As a result, the "synagogue of Elijah" was a sacred space for Muslims as well. Shrines for Ezekiel (*Ḥizqiyāl*) and Ezra (*'Uzayr*) in Iraq also provided another example of shared holy space for Jews Muslims and Chrstians, and accounts "concerning the shrine clearly demonstrate the state of peaceful coexistence between devotees."[1025] Sarah Ethel Wolper also explores sacred spaces as pivotal in the transition from Christianity to Islam, this time in Eastern Anatolia, where shrines dedicated to St. George were conflated with the prophet Khizr.[1026] Nābulusī's own home of Damascus was not religiously monolithic in spite of being a historically Sunni and Muslim majority city and one could find a vibrant Jewish community there. In a letter dated to shortly after the Ottoman possession of Damascus in 1522, Moses Bassola, the Rabbi of Ancona in Italy, remarked that the "500 households" of Jews "have three

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[1022] Josef Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria,* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 123.
[1023] Meri, 178.
[1024] Meri, 224.
[1025] Meri, 232.
[1026] Wolper uses Ibn Battuta to describe Christian "shrines" for St. George that "had been rededicated to the semi-legendary Muslim prophet Khidr. There was a Khidr mountain in Merzifon, a Khidr Ilyas dervish lodge in Amasya, a Khidirlik bridge in Tokat, and a column named after Khidr in the main mosque of Sivas." Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia*, (University Park: Penn State UP, 2003), 97.

synagogues which are beautifully built and adorned — one for the Sefardim, one for the native Jews, and one for the Sicilians." Remarkably, Rabbi Ancona also describes a fourth synagogue with an attendant cave complex associated with the prophet Elijah where "in times of distress, Jews always gather in it, and nobody harms them."[1027]

On one level, Muslims already have an appreciation for the prophets shared across the Abrahamic religions, but Nabil Matar also links Nābulusī's visits to extra-Quranic saints of the Levant to his adherence to Ibn al-'Arabī's worldview, especially *waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> Al-Nābulusī was a follower of the great Damascus-buried Sufi, Ibn ʿArabī, who had proclaimed a vision of the unity of all being, *waḥdat-al-wujūd*. For al-Nābulusī, who mentions Ibn ʿArabī frequently, the visit to the different shrines and tombs was part of the celebration of God's immanence in the history of all prophetic revelations – from Adam to Jesus and Muhammad.[1028]

In Matar's estimation, then, God's immanence — as important in Ibn al-'Arabī's worldview as God's transcendence — in all prophetic revelation means that veneration is not reserved for Quranic saints only.  Matar lists some of the sites on Nābulusī's itinerary in his *riḥla,* writing that "al-Nābulusī visited in Jerusalem the gate and miḥrāb [prayer niche] of David, the gate and kursī [throne] of Solomon, the gate of the tribes of Israel (*Bāb al-Asbāt*), and the *miḥrābs* of Maryam [Mary], Yaʿqūb [Jacob], and al-Khiḍr [Saint George]."[1029] It must be conceded, however, that these points of interest are part of a shared Islamic, Jewish and Christian sacred

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[1027] Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 289. The Sephardic Jews in this account were welcomed into the Ottoman Empire since their expulsion from Spain and Portugal in 1492 and 1497.

[1028] Nabil I. Matar, "The Sufi and the Chaplain: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and Henry Maundrell," *Through the Eyes of the Beholder: The Holy Land, 1517-1713*, ed.  Nabil I. Matar and Judy A. Hayden, (Brill: 2013), 169.

[1029] Matar, 172.

history, but it's through Nābulusī's interactions with non-Muslims that his attitude towards other religions really shines through.

Nābulusī appreciated the religious devotions of Christians he met in the Holy Land. Nabil Matar summarizes his writings on the Christians he encountered:

> [Nābulusī] was impressed by the monks of Bethlehem because they sang beautiful songs to God, and when Bethlehem Christians approached him selling trinkets, "we and our group bought from them what God made possible." In the triangle of Christian villages in Bayt Laḥm, Bayt Jālā, and Bayt Sāḥūr, al-Nābulusī was intrigued by the Christian shrines and worshippers. It was part of accepted tradition for Muslim pilgrims to receive shelter and food at the Church of the Nativity and to venerate the Manger at the Grotto. When in 1693, al-Nābulusī went on another and much longer journey to Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia, he still recalled the monks and wrote a little poem in praise of their organ-accompanied singing, expressing wonder at the workings of the musical instrument which sounded like a nightingale and a blackbird.[1030]

As a staunch defender of music in religious devotion, it is no wonder that Nābulusī thought highly of the hymns Christian monks sang, but it is also remarkable that he not only gave charity by purchasing "trinkets" from Christians in Bethlehem, but also was able to receive "shelter and food" at the Church of the Nativity. Nābulusī was able to take advantage of the shared traditions of charity and hospitality that facilitated centuries of pilgrimage in the region for each of the Abrahamic faiths.

Bakri Aladdin highlights a correspondence between Nābulusī and the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch, Athanasias Dabbas (d. 1724 c.e.), a native of Damascus who served as patriarch twice for a total of 12 years.[1031] Nābulusī fielded the Patriarch's questions about theology including the topic of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and published his response as a fatwa. Not only is it

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[1030] Matar, 173.
[1031] Bakri 'Aladdin, "Deux Fatwas du Sayh Abd al-Gani Nābulusī (1143/1731): Présentation et Édition Critique." *Bulletin d'études orientales*. 39/40 (1987-1988), 8.

remarkable that the two scholars were able to converse across the theological divide using the common medium of philosophy, but additionally, Nābulusī refers to the Patriarch as one of his "brothers of spiritual exercise, whose noble souls and subtle essences have become moons in the sky of theology"[1032] in his response. Far from viewing Dabbas as an "infidel," Nābulusī considers him a "brother" in spiritual matters as they converse in the shared language of Arabic philosophy, a situation reminiscent of Muslim and non-Muslim philosophers during the Translation Movement in Baghdad's 8th-9th century "House of Wisdom," or of the Toledo School of Translators in 12th and 13th century Iberia. Thus, it is through Nābulusī that Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, and especially *waḥdat al-wujūd* finds an audience even across religious lines.

The discussion of monist philosophy between Nābulusī and Dabbas itself hints at the underpinning religious worldview that allows for such a conversation to take place in amity. Bakri Aladdin is certain that the "Patriarch had read the most representative book of Nābulusī's thought: *al-Wuǧūd al-ḥaqq* (The True Being)."[1033] The Patriarch asks a number of questions familiar to any student of Arabic-language, discursive theology (*kalam*), as he inquires of Nābulusī whether primacy must be placed on God's quiddity ("is-ness") first, or on His existence. Nābulusī responds in a fashion typical of a mystical monist, emphasizing "that quiddity

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[1032] 'Aladdin, "Deaux Fatwas," 8 and 23. Nābulusī refers to the question in his letter as coming from "some of the Christians" (*ba'ḍ al-nuṣāra*) whom he describes as: '*Ikhwān al-tajrīd' aladhī aṣbaḥat nufūsihim al-sharīfah, wa dhawātihim al-latifah, aqmār[an] bi-samā' al-tawḥid*. Aladdin translates this as "frères de l'exercice spirituel, dont les âmes nobles et les essences subtiles sont devenues des lunes dans le ciel de la théologie.'"

[1033] 'Aladdin, "Deaux Fatwas," 13. "*Sans doute, le Patriarche avait-il lu le livre le plus représentatif de la pensée de Nābulusī: al-Wuǧùd al-ḥaqq.*"

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and being (existence) are one thing in God, for He is a single essence" and uses the favorite

verse of mystical monists to illustrate that "Everything perishes, except His face"(Q 28:88).[1034]

When al-Nābulusī returned from his trip to Damascus, he penned "a polemical reply to

a tractate written in Arabic by an unnamed Turkish writer, who criticized al-Nābulusī's

commentary on a passage from al-Futūhāt al-Makkiya,"[1035] and a central subject in this treatise

was the question of whether salvation — literally "happiness" in the afterlife (Ar. saʿāda) — is

available to non-Muslims. This polemic, completed in 1692, responds to someone he calls the

"ignorant and stubborn Turk" (al-Rūmī al-jāhil al-ʿanīd) who "had argued that Christians and

Jews would never attain the saʿāda [felicity] of paradise," and Nābulusī asserts in reply that

"God in His mercy would receive the virtuous among the People of the Book into paradise."[1036]

Nābulusī not only defends the salvific efficacy of his non-Muslim neighbors in Ottoman lands,

but he also asserts their property and lives are to be protected:

> What fault could the ignorant and wicked man find in the assertion that the Jews and the
> Christians gain happiness if they pay the ǧizya? They are legally (šarʿan) assured of
> happiness by agreeing to pay the ǧizya and then giving it to the Muslims, because by
> this they save their lives and protect their property and honor. With this they become
> like the Muslims: It is forbidden to fight against them, to interfere with their property and
> children, to slander, curse or defame them, or generally to harm them. A Muslim who
> kills a dimmi is to be put to death, and it is reported that the Prophet executed a
> Muslim for unjustly killing a dimmi.[1037]

Here, Nābulusī is describing the legal protection afforded to non-Muslims through the payment

of the jizya poll-tax. While the idea of a tax on religious minorities might offend modern

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[1034] ʿAladdin, "Deaux Fatwas," 15.
[1035] Michael Winter, "A Polemical Treatise by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious Status of the Dimmīs," *Arabica*, Vol 35 (1988), 93.
[1036] Matar, 180.
[1037] Winter, 98.

sensibilities in the 21st century, it effectively entered non-Muslims into a covenant binding rulers by the Shariʻah to protect their non-Muslim subjects and also to exempt them from military service. To be sure, the salvific efficacy of "People of the Book" appears in Qurʼanic passages at 2:62 and 5:69 where other monotheists are guaranteed heaven, so long as they "believe in God, the day of judgment," and do "good works." Nonetheless, it is also apparent that the Oneness emphasized in the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the appreciation for God's infinite manifestations in forms belonging to Islam and outside of it.

Nābulusī uses philosophical language in a way that emphasizes truths which are universally shared among mankind by way of their intellect, rather than allocating to religion an absolute monopoly over truth. In his *Kitāb al-Wujūd*, Nābulusī emphasizes the "Necessary" which is the "isolated Absolute Existence" (*al-Wājib huwa al-Wujūd al-Muṭlaq al-mujarrad*) that is the "principle" (*aṣl*) at the center of all "laws" (*sharāʼiʻ*) and "religions" (*adyān*), and even the "areligious (*la dīn lahum*) school of philosophy (*madhhab al-falāsifah*)."[1038] All of the religions, including the philosophers are "built upon the One Absolute True Existence" which is "God almighty and none other."[1039] Nābulusī goes on, explaining why even philosophers "without religion" can tap into the same font of knowledge that religious truths derive from, writing: "as for your saying the philosopher has no religion, that he has no religion does not indicate that all he has is in error  and this is awareness of the First Intellect which every intelligent individual has."[1040] Using Islamic neo-Platonic philosophy going back to al-Farabi and Avicenna, Nābulusī is pointing out that every individual has an intellect (*ʻaql*) which can receive

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[1038] Nābulusī, Kitāb al-Wujūd, 172-3.
[1039] Kitāb al-Wujūd, 173.
[1040] Kitāb al-Wujūd, 174.

knowledge from God's first manifestation, the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*). Those familiar

with the broad strokes of the history of Jewish philosophy will find familiar the theme of whether

or not philosophy is tapping into the same universal truths as religion or not, and Nābulusī very

much seems to parallel Philo in his universalism, though with regard to the role of "existence" as

a universal principle, he is most akin to his contemporary, Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677 c.e.).[1041]

Scholars of Sufism are right to become increasingly wary of categorizing all Sufis as

necessarily promoting a religious pluralism that holds no differences between religions, that is,

the emphasis on the "Religion of Love" that supposedly transcends the particulars of any one

religion in favor of a universal encounter with God found in Ibn al-'Arabī and Rumi's poetry. The

latter is more famous as represented in the following verses in the *Masnāvī*: "Love's folk live

beyond religious borders / the community and creed of lovers: God" (M2:1770).[1042] For Ibn

al-'Arabī, the famous lines on the "religion of love" are found in his "Translator of Desires"

(*tarjuman al-Ashwāq*):

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a
> pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
> And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaʿba and the
> Tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.
> I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's
> camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[1043]

[1041] Nābulusī would likely have found much in common with Spinoza as the latter reasons "that God—an infinite, eternal (necessary and self-caused), indivisible being—is the only substance of the universe" in Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Revised Nov 8, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/#GodNatu> Last Accessed 24 Jan, 2024. Not unlike Spinoza, the word "Pantheism" is often bandied about when attempting to categorize the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.
[1042] Cited in Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present East and West,* (Oneworld: 2008), 406.
[1043] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* trans. R.A. Nicholson, ( London: Royal Asiatic Society), iii. Ibn al-'Arabī also describes the object of his affection, a young Persian woman named Nizam, in terms that draw from Judaism, Christianity and Islam freely: "When she kills with her glances, her speech restores to life, as tho' she, in giving life thereby, were Jesus. The smooth surface of her legs is (like) the Tora in brightness, and I follow it and tread in its footsteps as tho' I were Moses. She is a bishopess, one of the daughters of Rome, un-adorned: thou seest in her a radiant Goodness. [...] She has baffled everyone who is learned in our

The imagery covers not only the Torah and Christian monks, but even includes "temple for idols" which contrasts with the Qur'an which by contrast devotes countless verses to admonishing idol-worship. Yet, Gregory Lipton has rightly pushed back on extrapolating from these verses of poetry a universalizing religious worldview for Ibn al-'Arabī, most notably with a letter chastising the Seljuk Sultan of Rūm for being too lenient in his dealings with the People of the Book.[1044]

Before taking too rosy a view of this great scholar, it should be noted that Nābulusī did indeed have his own sectarian sentiments, not uncommon for his time. Although he believed all sinners who sincerely repented could be hopeful of God's forgiveness, he did write of "exceptions" to God's forgiveness such as "those who insult any of the prophets or Caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the heretic who holds all religions to be right and true and, finally, the practitioner of magic."[1045] Nābulusī's "fiercest rebukes are reserved for the Shī'ī sects of Syria, whom he judges to be unbelievers worse than Christians because of their rejection of all prophets, laws, revelations and the Last Day, and because of their belief in the transmigration of spirits," but Sirriyeh is quick to point out that Nābulusī doesn't have reliable information on

religion, every student of the Psalms of David, every Jewish doctor, and every Christian priest. If with a gesture she demands the Gospel, thou wouldst deem us to be priests and patriarchs and deacons" *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* 49. The trope of the learned Shaykh hopelessly in love with a non-Muslim, often a Christian youth (*tarsā bachchā*) is not uncommon. One famous example can be found in 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* in the figure of Sheikh Sam'an. For Shaykh Sarmad Kashānī (d.1661 c.e.), the Armenian Jewish convert to Islam, student of Mulla Ṣadrā, and *mazjūb* (divinely attracted mystic), it was a Hindu boy named Abhay Chand that sent him down his spiritual path.

[1044] Lipton translates the relevant portion of the letter to Seljuk Sultan of Anatolia, 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'us (r. 1211-20 c.e.), where Ibn al-'Arabī writes: "The calamity that Islam and Muslims are undergoing in your realm— and few address it—is the raising of Church bells, the display of disbelief (*kufr*), the proclamation of associationism (*shirk*), and the elimination of the stipulations (*al-shurūṭ*) that were imposed by the Prince of Believers, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, upon the Protected People." in Gregory A. Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi,* (Oxford: OUP: 2018), 55.

[1045] Sirriyeh, 28.

the "Nuṣayrīs" — that is, the ʿAlawīs — who he confuses with the Druze.[1046] In response to a request from the last of the Ḳāḍīzādelis and shaykh al-Islam, Fayzullah Efendi, ʿAbd al-Ghanī prays for the "Ottoman army's victory in it's war against the infidels" (*al-jaysh al-'uthmāni fī harbihi ḍad al-kufār*).[1047]

That said, Nābulusī reiterates the verses from Ibn al-'Arabī's *tarjuman al-Ashwāq* in his *Kitāb al-wujūd*, Nābulusī provides these verses and goes on to interpret Ibn al-'Arabī's famous lines, writing that "all the forms of manifestation on the hearts of His servants are equal" and that if GOd "appears in an image in the heart of one of you, he will have no doubt or suspicion that He is the Truth, Glory be to Him."[1048] He follows this with a note that the "Gospels"(*Injīl*) were not to abrogate (*nāsikh*) all the rulings (*aḥkam*) in the Torah along with a reminder from *Sura Ibrahim* from God that "we didn't send a messenger (*rasūl*) except in the tongue of his people"(Q14:4).[1049] This poem leads into a defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* against the exteriorists (*ah al-ẓāhir*) who accuse proponents of this ideology of uniting God with creation (*ittiḥad*) and "incarnation"(*ḥulūl*), denying this latter because the very "condition for incarnation (*sharṭ al-ḥulūl*) is that there are two existences (*wujūdān*) but rather there is One Existence (*bal huwa wujūd wāḥid*).[1050] For a more in-depth discussion of other religions in light of *waḥdat al-wujūd* one must turn to his discussion of what ʿAbd al-Karīm Jīlī describes as the hidden "secrets of the religions"(*asrār al-adyān*).

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[1046] Sirriyeh, 32.

[1047] Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi Scholar*, 72. Although, in an earlier correspondence with an Ottoman army official he emphasizes the difference between the "minor jihād" against "infidels" and the "major" jihād against "the bad and sinful thoughts and deeds in one's own self." Akkach, 86-7.

[1048] Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-Wujūd*, 98.

[1049] Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-Wujūd*, 99-100.

[1050] Nābulusī, *Kitāb al-Wujūd*, 100.

Nābulusī responds to Aḥmad al-Qushāshī's consideration of ʿAbd al-Karīm Jīlī's "The Perfect Man" (*al-Insān al-kāmil*) in a treatise titled "Revealing and Clarifying the Secrets of Religions in the Book *The Perfect Man*" (*al-Kashf wa'l-bayān ʿan asrār al-adyān fi kitāb al-insān al-kāmil*).[1051] In his commentary, al-Qushāshī "dismissed al-Jīlī's ecumenism that presents all major religions as legitimate forms of worship that are, in one form or another, grounded in divine unity" as he found it undermined "the superiority of Islam," but Nābulusī's counter-commentary sought to "defend Sufi ecumenism and to re-enforce[sic] al-Jīlī's ideas."[1052] Akkach writes of the role that *waḥdat al-wujūd* plays in this commentary:

> from the ecumenical, universal perspective of the Unity of Being, all beings (or creatures) necessarily have an equal relationship to Being, the very foundation of their existence. In this respect, ʿAbd al-Ghanī asserts, "all are on the straight path and right in their states, speeches, and deeds, because they are all, in this regard, the acts of the most high and the traces of his most beautiful names."[1053]

Akkach captures the radical revaluation of non-Muslim religious practice in this commentary, and it is worth delving into in greater detail.

At the beginning of the section on the Ten Creeds (*al-milal al-ʾashirah*) Jīlī writes: "know that when God almighty made all the existents for His worship they were composed such that there is nothing in existence except that it worships God Almighty [...] for everything in existence is obedient to God."[1054] This reflects Ibn al-ʿArabī's meditations on idol-worship in his

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[1051] ʿAbd al-Bāqī Miftāḥ, *al- Sharḥ al-shāmil li-kitāb al-Insān al-kāmil fī maʿrifat al-awākhir wa-al-awāʾil lil-Shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī: maʿa risālat al-Kashf wa-al-bayān ʿan asrār al-adyān fī kitāb al-Insān al-kāmil wa-kāmil al-insān lil-Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī,* (Dār Ninawa: 2019), 15.

[1052] Akkach, *Islam and the Enlightenment,* 107.

[1053] Akkach, 112.

[1054] *ʿAlama an Allah taʿala innama khalaqa jamīʿ al-mawjūdāt li-ʾibādatihi, fa-hum majbūlūn ʿala dhalik, mafṭūrūn ʿaleyhi min ḥaythu al-ʾaṣilah, fa-ma fī al-wujūd illa wa huwa yaʿbid Allah taʿala bi-ḥalihi wa maqālihi wa afʾālihi, bal bidhātihi, fa-kull shayʾ fī al-wujūd muṭīʿ Allah taʿala.* Miftāḥ, *al-Sharh al-shamil li-kitab al-insan al-kamil*, 525-6. Here the eleventh verse of *Surat al-fussilat* is then cited to emphasize the obedience of all in existence — here exemplified by the "heavens and the earth" (*samawāt wa'l-'ard*) — to

chapter on Harūn and the Jews who worshiped the Golden Calf at Mt. Sinai in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*; because God "decreed" that none should be worshiped but Him, this decree is taken by ibn al-'Arabī to indicate that everything that humans do worship is in fact Him, albeit differing in degree of His manifestation.[1055]

The "creeds" discussed by Jīlī and Nābulusī here are not just what typically falls under the umbrella of "religion" but include philosophy as well. One of the creeds is described as "a faction of the philosophers" (*ṭā'ifah min al-falāsifah*) who "worshiped Him with regard to His Names"(*'abadūhu min ḥaythu asmā'ihu*).[1056] This section resembles Nābulusī's discussion of philosophy in his *Kitāb al-Wujūd*[1057] though in this section Jīlī also enumerates the theological significance behind natural phenomena like "planets"(s. *kawkab* pl. *kawākib*) which also represent the names of God. This section follows a description of the "worship of naturalists" (*'ibādat al-ṭabā'iyya*) who worship God according to his four attributes (*ṣifātihi al-arba'a*): "life, knowledge, capacity, and will."[1058] Jīlī and Nābulusī, in their consideration of philosophy and nature echo the enlightenment philosophers who used "God" and "Nature" interchangeably, as Spinoza presages in his *Ethics* where he uses the appellation "God, or Nature", (*Deus, sive Natura*), which he describes as that "eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists."[1059]

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Him: "He said to [the sky] and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly'"(Qur'an 41:11).

[1055] Ibn al-'Arabī writes that "the One the people of the Calf worshipped since Allah decreed that only He would be worshipped. When Allah decrees something, it must occur[. ...] The complete gnostic is the one who sees that every idol is a locus of Allah's tajalli in which He is worshipped." Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, trans. Aisha Bewley, (Diwan Press: 1980), 111-112.

[1056] *Miftāḥ*, 536.

[1057] See above.

[1058] Miftāḥ, 535.

[1059] Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza."

Turning now to the religions represented among the "ten creeds," Jīlī says of the Christians (*Nuṣāra*) that, although "inferior to Muhammadans" (*dūn al-Muḥammadiyīn*), they are "closer than all the past nations to God almighty" (*fa-anhum aqrab min jamī' al-umam al-māḍiyah ila al-ḥaqq ta'ala*).[1060] Even the belief in God's incarnation as Jesus, which is normally written off as simply heretical, is justified, because "whoever bears witness to God in man, his witnessing is more complete than all who bear witness to God in types of creation other than man."[1061] To be sure, Nābulusī does contend in a comment that Christians have "disbelieved in God" (*kāfirū billah*),[1062] and his willingness to describe non-Muslims as unbelievers is re-visited below.

On the Zoroastrians (*al-majūs*), Jīlī writes "as for the Majūs, they worship Him with regard to his Oneness (*aḥadiyya*) […] so for this subtlety they worship the fire and its Truth: His almighty Essence."[1063] Nābulusī clarifies that the "Existence" manifest upon the fire is the "True Existence, the Living and the Sustainer" (*al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq al-Ḥayy al-Qayyum*).[1064]The section proceeds on to the "Brahmins" (*al-barāhimah*), who "worship God absolutely" (*ya'badūn Allah muṭlaq*[an]) not with regard to prophet or messenger, but rather they say: "verily nothing exists except that it is created by God," so they draw nearer to the Oneness of God (*waḥdaniyat Allah*) almighty in Existence," though Jīlī concedes that they "reject the prophets and the absolute messenger"(*yankirūn al-anbiyā' wa al-rasūl muṭlaq*[an]).[1065] Nābulusī,

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[1060] Miftāḥ, 542.

[1061] *Liana man shahada Allah fī al-insān kāna shuhūdihi akmal min jamī' man shahada Allah fī ghayr al-insān min anwa' al-makhluqat.* Miftāḥ, 543.

[1062] Miftāḥ, 543.

[1063] Miftāḥ, 539.

[1064] Miftāḥ, 539.

[1065] Miftāḥ, 540. Curiously, Jīlī goes on to add that some of this sect claim they are children of Abraham and that they have a book written by him (531).

however, notes to the contrary that "many of their scholars acknowledge the prophets and messengers, and do not deny their prophethood and message, but they see that by adhering to their religion they are not obligated to follow them."[1066]

Nābulusī reserves his most pithy and profound statements about *waḥdat al-wujūd* for his commentary on the "worship of the disbelievers" (*ʿibādat al-kuffār*) where his commentary quickly outpaces Jīlī's original text. In this section Jīlī describes God as the "Truth of these idols which they worship," (*fa-kāna taʿala ḥaqīqat tilik al-awthān alatī yaʿbidunha*) so they actually "worship  none but God" (*fa-ma ʿabadu illā Allah*).[1067] Throughout this section, Nābulusī repeatedly refers to God's "decrees" (*taqādir*) and His "depictions" (*tasāwir*) which refers back to Ibn al-'Arabī's emphasis in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* that God decreed "none is worshiped but Him" and that all images ultimately derive from God.[1068] Nābulusī reasons with this passage thusly:

> There is no Existence but the True Existence — praised be He — the one who depicts (*al-muṣawwir*), the one who exemplifies (*al-mumiththil*), the one who decrees (*al-muqaddir*). [...] Considering that He is the One True Existence, the One and Only, He formed the forms and decreed the decrees. [...] So the sum of existence and its forms and measurements are called "idols" (*awthān*), or "idols"(*aṣnām*), just as they were called "worshipers"(*ʿābidīn*), were called "acts of worship"(*ʿibādāt*), "places" (*amkān*) and "times"(*azmān*) were called, and so on. And all are that One Existence. He is the Divine Existence regarding what He said: "everything is  perishing except His face"[Q 28:88]. And if everything is perishable and mortal, then there is no existence except His almighty Existence and it is the Face of God, Glory be to Him, with which He directed us to depict and determine every destined form. There is no existence for every form that is determined by itself, but rather its existence that is attributed to it

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[1066] Miftāḥ, 530.
[1067] Miftāḥ, 532.
[1068] Miftāḥ, 532.

according to the apparent (*al-ẓahir*), or attributed to it according to the hidden (*al-bāṭin*), is the One True Existence and there is no other.[1069]

By emphasizing God's role as ultimately the one who "depicts" and "decrees" — even the forms of idols and the worship of them — the act of idol-worship is even deriving from God's Existence, as all existent things do.

Ultimately, Nābulusī follows Ibn al-ʿArabī's lenient assessment of idol-worship found in the chapter on Harun in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, and Andrew Lane summarizes Al-Nābulusī's views on the subject within his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* where he argues that:

> the worshippers' knowledge of the object of their devotion determines the status of their worship. If they know that they are worshipping God as a manifestation in an idol, then their worship is licit because they know that God is not the same as the idol. On the other hand, if they are ignorant of this distinction and maintain their worship of the idol, not knowing that God is manifest in it, then their worship is illicit: they believe that God is the same as the idol."[1070]

Here a crucial point in Nābulusī and Ibn al-ʿArabī's emphasis on the interiority, or *batin*, of worship can be seen; no matter what the external form of worship looks like to the outsider, whether the worship is "licit" or not depends entirely on the heart (*qalb*) of the believer and whether it recognizes God's manifestation or not.

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[1069] Miftāḥ, 532.

[1070] Andrew Lane, "'Abd al-Gharif al-Nābulusī's (1641-1731) Commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam an Analysis and Interpretation," Ph.D. Dissertation. (St. Catherine's College: 2001), 11. Compare this to what Ibn al-'Arabī writes in his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*: "The perfect knower (gnostic) is whoever regards every object of worship as a manifestation of God in which He is worshiped. For this reason, they all call every object of worship god (ilÁh), although its specific name might be stone, tree, animal, human being, star, or angel. This is the particular name of each god. Divinity causes the worshiper to imagine that this is the object (literally: level – martaba) of his worship, while truly it is the manifestation of the Real in the perception of the worshiper who devotes himself to this object in its specific manifestation" Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-ʿArabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam: An Annotated Translation of 'The Bezels of Wisdom,"* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 154.

With the "licitness" of worship being so radically extended to idol-worship, it seems as though this argument could be applied to a radical antinomianism where Islamic Law and all "external" forms of Islamic worship could be abandoned. It is telling, however, that Nābulusī was noted for attending rigorously to his prayers, fasting, and the rest of the "pillars of the religion" (arkān al-Dīn). It must be conceded that, although Jīlī evaluates the ways in which non-Muslims do worship God, ʿAbd al-Ghanī's commentary doesn't shy away from mentioning where each group has engaged in "disbelief"(kufr).[1071] El-Rouayheb cautions the reader that "Nābulusī was certainly not condoning antinomianism," though he considers it "farfetched to sum up his enterprise as that of effecting a novel reconciliation between Ibn ʿArabī-inspired mysticism and religious law" and instead, El-Rouayheb suggests that "he was boldly expressing one of the most controversial aspects of mystical monism and drawing a very fine line indeed between ultimate mystic 'verification' and sheer antinomianism"[1072] In his Kitāb al-wujūd, under "Wasl 44" ʿAbd al-Ghanī provides an "analysis of the concepts of Zandaqah and ilḥād" (taḥlīl mafhūmī al-zindaqah wa'l-ilḥād), noting that "Some groups invoking Ibn al-'Arabī are led to heresy (zandaqah) and atheism (ilḥād) because they are "seeing everything as one" in the condition of "union" (jamʿ), offering an explanation of ecstatic utterances that go too far.[1073] Such mystics are in the condition of "witnessing the True Existence" (shuhūd al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq) and Nābulusī offers up a bayt excoriating Muslims not to "blame the drunks" (la

[1071] For example: Miftāḥ, 540 ftnt. 3; 542 ftnt. 1; 543 ftnt. 1.
[1072] El-Rouayheb, Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb, 342.
[1073] Kitāb al-Wujūd trans. Bakri Aladdin, 255-6 and El-Rouayheb 341-2.

*talam al-sukrān*) "in their state of intoxication" (*fī ḥāl sukrihi*), because "obligations" (*taklīf*) have been lifted in our intoxication."[1074]

Returning to the lines from the *tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* the heart of the believer that recognizes God's reality as the One True Existence, is the "heart has become capable of every form" as Ibn al-'Arabī put it, a heart that is even capable of perceiving God in the form of an idol. Whether or not one agrees that this application of the "Unity of Being" to non-Muslim worship makes Ibn al-'Arabī or Nābulusī what could anachronistically be termed a religious "pluralist" or "unitarian" in service of a post-Enlightenment understanding of religion is a matter of secondary importance though the tendency to label it as such is a reminder of the relevance of mystical monism and the controversy surrounding it that carries on to this day.

## Conclusion

There is little doubt then, that the monist worldview 'Abd al-Ghanī held as an adherent of *waḥdat al-wujūd* informed his attitude towards non-Muslims. Carrying forth this ideology from his "spiritual father" Ibn al-'Arabī, even "idol-worship" could be seen as part of God's ever-unfolding manifestation. He lived in a 17th century Ottoman Empire that saw the war against Sufism and "unbelievers" waged by the puritanical Ḳāḍīzādeli faction and wrote in defense of everything they detested. Finally, this study has considered the relationship between the mystical monist worldview espoused by adherents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and a benevolent, perhaps even "ecumenical,"[1075] attitude toward non-Muslims. Because all that exists ultimately

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[1074] *Kitāb al-Wujūd* trans. Bakri Aladdin, 257.

[1075] Leonard Lewisohn describes an "ecumenical" attitude of "theomonism" to define the *waḥdat al-wujūd* worldview that views all religions and forms of worship having their basis, to varying degrees, derived from that same, singular God.

derives from God's singular Existence, according to this worldview, non-Muslim worship —

even idol-worship — can be spiritually justified insofar as the worshiper recognizes God as the

source of manifestation for the idol.

In spite of the Ḳāḍīzādeli presence throughout the century, Khaled El-Rouayheb has

argued that the "triumph of fanaticism" in the Turkish-speaking parts of the Empire is a myth

reasoning, among other considerations, that the spread and translation of Persian Sufi works in

favor of *waḥdat al-wujūd* into Arabic in this century thrived, especially at the "cosmopolitan

towns of Mecca and Medina" which served as "a center for such translation activity."[1076] In the

Ottoman Hijaz the intersufi debate culminated with "a Shadhili Puritan who governed the

Haramayn" named Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Maghribī (d.1683 c.e.).[1077] Al-Maghribī was

"invited to Istanbul to meet with the grand vezir, Aḥmad Pasha Köprüllü" (served 1661-1676

c.e.), where he:

> obtained an order from the Ottoman sultan to ban several practices in Makka and
> Madina, which were associated with popular *tasawwuf*, including the use of musical
> instruments and drums in ṣūfī *zawiyas* and the women's joining of procession during the
> celebration of the Prophet's birthday.[1078]

However, after having antagonized Sufis and Ulema alike in the Haramayn and following the

"death of Aḥmad Pasha Koprulu, Kara Mustafa Pasha, the new grand vezir, removed him from

the guardianship of the Haramayn waqfs in 1087/1676 and ordered him "not to interfere in

matters of the state.'"[1079]

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[1076] El-Rouayheb, 348. Here El-Rouayheb cites the pro-waḥdat al-wujūd Naqshbandi, Tāj al-Dīn ʿUthmānī,
whose translations circulated in Mecca and Medina. The reader may recall that this is the Naqshbandi figure
whose student inducted 'Abd al-Ghanī into the order.
[1077] Nafi, 316.
[1078] Nafi, 317-18.
[1079] Nafi, 318.

The demise of the last Ḳāḍīzādeli shaykh al-Islam, Feyzullah Efendi, in 1703 signaled the beginning of the "Tulip Age" (*Lâle Devri*), in which the "Ottoman Empire opened up to closer diplomatic, cultural, and commercial contacts" with countries like France.[1080] This era contrasts with the sabre-rattling against European Christendom and outrageous punishments against Istanbul's non-Muslims that Feyzullah's Ḳāḍīzādeli predecessor, Vani Efendi, advocated during his tenure as shaykh al-Islam. Nābulusī saw his own popularity rise in contrast to the years of seclusion he spent in the 1680s, and even Feyzullah "addressed him in one letter as the 'pole of the circle of righteousness, and the centre of guidance and good deeds.'"[1081] While Nābulusī quit Istanbul in his youth as soon as he arrived and fled from public life after his short judicial career ended, he returned to public life later on. Poetry flourished in the Tulip Age and Nābulusī's anthology, "*The Wine of Babel and the Singing of Nightingales* (*Khamrat*)" is a "valuable record" of "regular gatherings in private and public gardens for entertainment and poetic exchanges" taking place in Damascus that mirrored those in the Ottoman capital.[1082]

While the Ḳāḍīzādelis had so strongly opposed coffee-drinking and the coffee house — which originally owed its popularity to Yemeni Sufis in the 16th century[1083]— Nābulusī's defense of this beverage weighed in on the side of the victors and the coffee house would flourish as centers of popular culture and the free flow of ideas in the 18th century. The Ḳāḍīzādelis had driven Ibn al-'Arabī's writings underground, but 'Abd al-Ghanī defiantly "presided over many

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[1080] Fariba Zarinebaf, *Mediterranean Encounters: Trade and Pluralism in Early Modern Galata*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 148.

[1081] Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi Scholar*, 109.

[1082] Akkach, 122.

[1083] Hatim Mahamid and Chaim Nissim, "Sufis and Coffee Consumption: Religio-Legal and Historical Aspects of a Controversy in the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman Periods," *Journal of Sufi Studies,* 7, 2018, 144-5.

public readings" of the Great Shaykh's *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, which his biographer al-Ghazzī noted "was unprecedented" at the time as "this divine science used to be read in secret."[1084] The apogee of both the Tulip Era and Nābulusī's stature was represented in a grand celebration three years before Nābulusī's death that "lasted for three days and was attended by all Damascene dignitaries, religious authorities, government officials, soldiers, and a large local crowd" complete with fifty "bounds of coffee" to serve guests.[1085] It is tempting to see in the example of 'Abd al-Ghanī's later career a sort of victory for *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Sufism in the Ottoman Empire.

On the surface, it does appear that 'Abd al-Ghanī and Sufism weathered the Ḳāḍīzādeli storm, but the anti-*wujūdī* position of Aḥmad Sirhindī—along with his strict emphasis on the particulars of Islam—would become dominant in the Naqshbandiyya. Above, it was observed how the Ḳāḍīzādelis even had a presence in the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya in the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the Khalidiyya offshoot in the 19th century would inspire further reform-minded Sufi efforts. That said, the Helveti, and especially Mevlevi orders, so despised by the Ḳāḍīzādelis, would thrive well into the same century, being curbed only with the blanket ban on Sufism brought by the Kemalist regime in 1925.

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[1084] Akkach, 124.
[1085] Akkach, 131.

Rūmī could count Greek Christians among those he preached to in Anatolia[1086] and those who were present at his funeral.[1087] Likewise, the Mevlevihane in cosmopolitan Galata, located geographically, and with its vibrant enclaves of expats, socio-politically, between "East" and "West" attracted the interest of Europeans. It is unsurprising then, that when Comte Claude-Alexandre de Bonneval (d.1747 c.e.) "turned Turk" and became Humbaracı Ahmed Pasha, he "studied the Koran and Sufi mysticism"[1088] and it is no surprise that he "seems to have become a devotee of the order of Mevlevi Sufi[sm]."[1089] He claims that, although he had to pronounce the *Shahada* the pragmatic "Turks do not bother their heads over whether I thought it or not."[1090]

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[1086] Rumi's "Discourse 23" relates the following account: "We were speaking one day to a group that included some infidels [Greek Christians], and during our talk they were weeping and going into ecstatic states. "What do they understand? What do they know?" someone asked. "Not one out of a thousand Muslims can understand this kind of talk. What have these people understood that they weep so?" It is not necessary for them to understand the words. What they understand is the basis of the words. After all, everyone acknowledges the oneness of God and that He is the Creator and Sustainer, that He controls everything, that everything will return to Him, and that either eternal punishment or forgiveness emanate from Him. When they hear words that are descriptive of God they are struck with a commotion, yearning, and desire because their objects of desire and search are made manifest in these words. Although the way may differ, the goal is one. Don't you see that there are many roads to the Kaaba? Some come from Anatolia, some from Syria, some from Persia, some from China, some across the sea from India via the Yemen. If you consider the ways people take, you will see great variety. If, however, you consider the goal, you will see that all are in accord and inner agreement on the Kaaba." cited in Thackston *Signs of the Unseen: Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi,* trans. Wheeler M. Thackston Jr. (Shambhala: 1994), 101-2.

[1087] Aflāki, *Manāqeb al-'Ārefīn*, Trans. John O'Kane, (Brill: 2002), 405-6.

[1088] Julia Landweber, "Leaving France, 'Turning Turk,' becoming Ottoman: The transformation of Comte Claude-Alexandre de Bonneval into Humbaraci Ahmed Pasha" in *Living in the Ottoman Realm: Empire and Identity, 13th to 20th Centuries*. Ed. Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent F. Schull, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 219.

[1089] Julia Landweber, "Fashioning Nationality and Identity in the Eighteenth Century: The Comte de Bonneval in the Ottoman Empire," *The International History Review*, Mar., 2008, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2008): 30.

[1090] Landweber, 218-19. Shortly before his death in 1747 he would write to Voltaire that he "always thought that God is utterly indifferent to whether one is Muslim, or Christian, or Jewish." Landweber, 222. It shouldn't escape notice that Voltaire's *Candide* features a "dervish" described as "the best philosopher of Turkey" who serves as a mouthpiece for Spinozism and pantheism. See Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 102-4. Here, Sedgwick notes that Sufism was identified in the West as "esoteric Pantheism" and with the thought of Baruch Spinoza at least as early as "English journalist Ephraim Chambers" in 1743.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

In short, this study has waded into the early modern debates over the philosophy of the "Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) while attempting to test out whether or not *waḥdat al-wujūd* is indeed a "universalist" or "pluralist" philosophy through a series of case studies. The resounding conclusion is that yes, *waḥdat al-wujūd* has indeed been a foundational part of the universalizing worldview of certain Sufis in the late medieval and early modern period, but that it remains an Islamic ideology even while espousing a more lenient view of non-Muslims. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is characterized by ambivalence; on the one hand its adherents are transported to heights of mystical ecstasy that see further beyond the boundaries of Islam, and on the other hand, these adherents routinely remain faithful to many if not all of the particulars that make this ideology uniquely Islamic. By studying the debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd,* one is able to see the push and pull between what is universal and what is particular within Sufism and, more broadly, in Islam.

It will be prudent to summarize the findings from the chapters first before diving deeper into just what the thesis of this dissertation signifies. This conclusion will then review some of the misconceptions that this study has sought to combat, namely the association of the Naqshbandi order with Ahmad Sirhindī's puritanical views toward non-Muslims and rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* and the misconception that all forms of "universalism" and "pluralism" are merely European concepts incorrectly projected onto times and places in the Islamicate past. The ambivalence between the universal and the particular in *waḥdat al-wujūd* will then be considered in light of Shahab Ahmed's revaluation of the "Islamic" in *What is Islam?* Finally,

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some caveats to the chapters' findings will be in order as will some proposed avenues for further study.

**Chapter Findings Summarized**

The first chapter demonstrated that, not only did Ibn al-'Arabi never use the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but perhaps it was more radical mystical monists like Ibn Sab'in who made this term a doctrinal position in the first place. Another misconception the first chapter sought to rectify is that *waḥdat al-wujūd* is not the only expression of mystical monism in Sufism although it may be the most popular in the Arabic language, and this chapter also explored the Persian expression "All is He" (*hama Ūst*). The second chapter illustrated that *waḥdat al-wujūd* was not by any means the dominant position in Sufism, but rather, opposition within Sufism and from without has been present at least since 'Ala al-Dawla al-Simnānī and Ibn Taymiyya respectively. This chapter also introduced the counter-doctrine of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* which begins, not with Aḥmad Sirhindī but with Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsu Darāz in the 15th century. The first two chapters reveal that  historians of Islam ought to take care not to simply equate Sufism with *waḥdat al-wujūd* but instead should recognize *waḥdat al-wujūd* as an ideological faultline within Sufism.

The case study of Bedreddin and his *Wāridāt* in the Ottoman Empire occupied the third and fourth chapters where drastic changes in the religious landscape matched the political changes from the Beylik to Empire periods. Bedreddin provides a remarkable case study of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Ottoman Beylik as well as a snapshot of the multireligious environment and heterodox Sufism that made up this early period. Tellingly, it was not his controversial ideas

that earned him his death sentence, but rather his politics. Indeed, these chapters saw how Ibn al-'Arabī was a patron saint of the Ottoman Empire and *wujūdī* thought was commonplace in this intellectual landscape. That said, there simply isn't enough evidence to conclude that Bedreddin himself advocated an "Islamo-Christian" syncretism — although this is more than likely in the case of his close companion and follower Börklüca Mustafa — but it is entirely plausible that his intimate Christian connections and *waḥdat al-wujūd* were integral parts of his worldview playing a significant role in his appeal to Balkan Christian peasants. Like Ibn al-'Arabī before him, Bedreddin's worldview is a balance between the particulars of Islam — being classically trained jurist and author of influential works on Shari'ah — and the emphasis on universality that his life and use of *waḥdat al-wujūd* hint at. Shifting to the next chapter, Molla Ilāhī's *Kashf al-Wāridāt* articulated a distinctly Naqshbandi interpretation of Bedreddin's *Wāridāt*, at once embracing *waḥdat al-wujūd* while forcefully asserting the centrality of the "Muḥammadan Truth"(*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*) and the particulars of the Shari'ah which lacked emphasis in the original text. Ilāhī's commentary predicts the shift taking place in the Ottoman empire away from heterodox Sufism as the Empire became increasingly "Islamic" with the conquest of the Ḥaramayn and the rise of Sunni confessionalism as a result of conflict with the Twelver Shi'a Safavids to the East and their Qizilbash followers within Ottoman borders. Ilāhī's commentary indicates precisely what the Naqshbandi were known for prior to Sirhindī's intervention, balancing *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the Shari'ah.

The goal of the fifth and sixth chapters was to locate *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the intellectual and political landscape of the 17th century Mughal Empire where Sirhindī's "Neo-Sufi" intervention in the Naqshbandi order stands in stark contrast to prince Muhammad Dārā

Shikūh's universalizing project. Juxtaposing these two figures, it becomes quite clear that — at least in this context — the difference between embracing *waḥdat al-wujūd* and rejecting its primacy is the difference between an inclusive attitude toward non-Muslims and an exclusivist one. These two Sufis reflect alternate attitudes toward the interreligious contact of the early modern Mughal context; while Sirhindī lines up with the tendency toward the "crystallization"[1091] of religious identity along confessional lines between Hindu and Muslim and Sikh, Dārā Shikūh reflects a worldview that prioritizes universalism, albeit a universalism with his Sufi understanding of Islam at the center.

The seventh chapter reflects on the Iranian context of *waḥdat al-wujūd* which spread and flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries just as in Ottoman lands before becoming a locus of heated debate in the 17th century. The eighth chapter returns to the Ottoman context, this time in the 17th century and examined 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī's support for *waḥdat al-wujūd,* cordial relations with Christians, and attitude toward non-Muslim worship that stood in stark contrast to the puritanical project of the Kadizadelis he vigorously debated and wrote against. 'Abd al-Ghanī also highlights the remarkable intellectual network that saw the flow of ideas like *waḥdat al-wujūd* across the Islamic world in this century with its beating heart at the pilgrimage centers of Mecca and Medina. This remarkable network can be glimpsed in the fatwa request against Sirhindī arrived in the Haramayn where judgment was offered and entered into the hands of Nābulusī who defended Sirhindī from his home in Damascus in spite of being himself inducted into the Naqshbandiyya order by Sirhindī's rival. Nābulusī's defense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the paralleled developments in Iran where the fluorescence of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in

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[1091] Again the early modern "crystallization" of religious identity is used with Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Pashaura Singh in mind.

the hands of Mulla Ṣadrā and "School of Isfahan" also saw the rise of a strict clerical elite opposed to *waḥdat al-wujūd* and eager to reify religious boundaries.

These chapters find firstly, that *waḥdat al-wujūd* flourished in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires where sizeable non-Muslim populations were the norm, and secondly, that in the hands of its proponents *waḥdat al-wujūd* could indeed be used in a universalizing fashion and that favorable attitudes toward non-Muslims often went hand-in hand with those professing this doctrine, but that this ideology remains Islamic by adhering to the particulars of the religion. There are, however, no shortage of caveats that need to be added to this conclusion. While this study does conclude that *waḥdat al-wujūd* definitely can be a universalizing philosophy, terms like "universalism" and "religious pluralism" will need to be interrogated. First, this conclusion turns to the observations made about the Naqshbandi order.

**The Naqshbandiyya and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd***

Several of the misconceptions this study has attempted to rectify arise from the treatment of a complex reality as a monolithic whole, from Sufism itself, to the Naqshbandi order specifically. While it is not uncommon for historical surveys to simply equate *waḥdat al-wujūd* with Sufism in passing, we have seen how *waḥdat al-wujūd* was a hotly debated topic almost from its outset within Sufism. A single Sufi order, like the Naqshbandi order, can have a tremendous degree of ideological diversity within it, and this study contributes to a more complex understanding of the order and its intellectual history.

Naqshbandi history is divided into three phases according to Itzchak Weismann with Sirhindī's 17th century Mujaddidiyya and that branches 19th century offshoot Khalidiyya

occupying the last two thirds of this order's history.[1092] While Weismann is certainly not wrong to focus on these dominant forms of the Naqshbandi order, this periodization privileges the Khalidiyya as a teleological end to all Naqshbandi thought that precedes it. Dina LeGall's *A Culture of Sufism* calls for an exploration of more, non-Mujaddidi, expressions of the Naqshbandiyya precisely because Sirhindī's branch and its offshoots have eclipsed all others in the modern age. To be sure, Naqshbandi exclusivity was made the norm by Sirhindī's teacher, Bāqī B'illah, but Sufis with multiple tariqa belongings and other branches of the Naqshbandi order shouldn't be ignored. Furthermore, reading the success of the Mujaddidi branch in the modern era backward into the early modern era overlooks the fact that Sirhindī was a marginal figure in the 17th century; he was imprisoned, had fatwas proclaimed against him, and had his own writings banned during Aurangzeb's reign, a time when his Shari'ah-minded brand of Sufism was supposed by many scholars of the period to have been more welcome than ever.

This study offers a few glimpses into Naqshbandi belonging that challenge the inexorable march toward shari'ah-minded militancy that a focus on its Mujaddidi and Khalidi branches in modernity would have one assume. Instead of this unidirectional valence of Shari'ah-minded Sufism, there could often be an ambivalent push and pull between the universalizing vision of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the commitment to the particulars of Islam. Molla Ilāhī emerged in the formative period of *wujūdī* Naqshbandis like 'Ubaydallah Ahrar and 'Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī and his commentary insulated Bedreddin's *Wāridāt* from scorn; he couched its mystical monist vision within the particulars of the Islamic tradition that no-doubt helped the Bedreddin and his text weather the controversy of the heterodox Alevi-Bektashi's who appropriated Bedreddin in

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[1092] Weismann, xiv-xv.

the 16th century Balkans. 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī was inducted into the Naqshbandiyya, not from Sirhindī's branch, but from the *waḥdat al-wujūd* professing Tajiyya, all while defending Sirhindī as he did virtually every other Sufi in his "yes-and" approach to Sufism. Even the exclusivist Naqshbandism of Sirhindī would be eschewed by the Mujaddidi Mīrzā Jān-i Jānān who permitted Hindus into his order, and let it not be forgotten that Dārā Shikūh — although primarily a Qadiri Shaykh — was also inducted into the Naqshbandi order.

As a result, the Naqshbandi order is a good case study in demonstrating the ideological complexity of a single Sufi order as it varies over time and in the hands of its individual shaykhs. With regard to mystical monism, one finds diversity in the debate first recorded in the *Rashahat 'ayn al-hayat*, between those who say *"All is God"*(*hama ūst*) and those who say "All is *from* God"(*hama az ūst*).[1093] In the 15th century Naqshbandi specialization in Ibn al-'Arabī's thought and *waḥdat al-wujūd*, alongside — and not in contradistinction to — the order's commitments to sharī'ah-minded Sunnism that inspired Mehmed II to invite them to his ascending Ottoman empire. Sirhindī's 17th century intervention rejected the primacy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* along with its universalizing "ecumenical" attitude of "theomonism"[1094] that failed to pay sufficient homage to the particulars of the Islamic tradition in his mind.

The popularity of his Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya, and its 19th century offshoot, the Khalidiyya, has led to this order becoming so closely associated with opposition to the primacy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Yet, as we have seen, Tāj al-Dīn in the 17th century and Jān-i

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[1093]Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies, religion and society in medieval islam*, (Columbia University Press: 2011), 99.

[1094] This phrase is inspired by Leonard Lewisohn's remarks on the universalizing tendency in Sufi mystical monism, specifically *waḥdat al-wujūd*. See Leonard Lewisohn, "The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistarī," in Heritage of Sufism, Vol II, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 382-3.

Jānān in the 18th diverged from Sirhindī's Shi'a and Hindu exclusionism.[1095] A major figure of

the Naqshbandi order in the 18th century, Shah Waliallah Dihlawī's (d.1762) "ecumenical

attitude" saw him attempt to "resolve the controversy" between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat

al-shuhūd*, "accommodate the Shi 'a" and even translate the Qur'an into Persian, all while

emphasizing the primacy of the Prophet Muhammad and promoting rigorous study of Hadith.[1096]

In a sense, Sirhindī does not stand that far apart from other Naqshbandis, and

Weismann summarizes how his was not even a complete rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd*:

> Sirhindī maintained that the *wujūdī* utterance "all is He" (*hame ust*) does not imply that
> God dwells in the material world or is united with it, but only that beings are
> manifestations of the Divine Essence. It is thus actually identical with the orthodox "all is
> from Him" (*hame az ust*). On the other hand, over against *waḥdat al-wujūd* Sirhindī
> places *wahdat al-shuhūd*, the unity of perception, a higher stage in which God is
> perceived as one and completely different from his creation.[1097]

We can see that, in Sirhindī's hands, the rejection of the primacy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is not

unlike other Naqshbandis before him who add the all-important preposition, "from," to qualify

God's relationship to creation. Yet, what seems like a small, semantic quibble in an esoteric

debate at first, that of *wahdat al-shuhūd* over *waḥdat al-wujūd,* is in fact a wide gulf between

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[1095] Weismann writes that "possibly in an attempt to appease the influential Shi'i group in the court Mazhar maintained that respect for the Companions of the Prophet did not belong to the essentials of the faith either, and that owing to their profession of the unity of God (*shahada*) the Shi'a should be included within the fold of Islam. The greatest departure of Mazhar from the Mujaddidi tradition, however, concerned his attitude toward the Hindus. Showing acquaintance with the basic teachings of Hinduism, he stated unequivocally that they too profess the unity of the One and therefore should be exonerated from the charge of polytheism (*shirk*). Mazhar recognized Krishna and Rama as prophets and the Vedas as of divine origin, and even went so far as to describe Hindu idol worship as resembling the sufi *rabita* in that both practices involve using an intermediary for the concentration on God. Mazhar nevertheless regarded the Hindus as unbelievers (*kafir*), as distinct from polytheists, since they did not follow the divine laws delivered by Muhammad, the seal of the prophets. On the practical plane, Mazhar admitted Hindu disciples to his circle, some of them on the basis of a shared interest in Persian and Urdu poetry." in Weismann, 66.
[1096] Weismann, 137.
[1097] Weismann, 59.

two worldviews regarding non-Muslims. Just as the boundary between God and creation is firmly asserted and "worship" (*'ibādah*) is placed over and above the "Unity of Being," so also Sirhindī stresses the boundary between Islam and "infidelity"(*kufr*). Sirhindī "naturally confirms the absolute opposition between Islam and infidelity (*kufr*)" in his *maktūbāt*, writing that they are "two antidotes that will not meet until the arrival of the hour of resurrection[;] Reinforcing the one demands elimination of the other and honoring the one requires humiliation of the other."[1098]

In the hands of Sirhindī, then, his rejection of *wujūdī* universalism is not a mere quibble in an esoteric debate without real-world ramifications, rather, it is an important part of his religious worldview that starkly delineates the "infidel" from the Muslim. It is Sirhindī's intervention, and the Mujaddidi and Khalidi branches he gave rise to, that would ultimately relegate *waḥdat al-wujūd* to a mere stepping stone in the early stage in the mystical path where ecstatic experience must give way to orthodox, Sunni piety. In *The Naqshbandi Guidebook of Daily Practices and Devotions* Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani of the Islamic Supreme Council of America begins its book with a chapter on annihilation" (*fanā'*) for, as "the Naqshbandi Saints" said, "Our Way begins where others leave off.'"[1099] Whether or not one calls Sirhindī's variety of Sufism "neo-Sufi," the fact remains that his rejection of *waḥdat al-wujūd* goes hand-in-hand with his discomfort over the "pluralist" blurring of religious boundaries that he sought to reform in the Sufis and Mughal administrators of his time. This study turns now toward a consideration of whether or not "neo-Sufism" is a helpful category for

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[1098] Weismann, 58-9.
[1099] Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Naqshbandi Guidebook of Daily Practices and Devotions* (ISCA: 2004), 18.

understanding the opposition to *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the dividing line it represents in Sufi thought.

## Neo-Sufism and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*

Originally used by Fazlur Rahman to describe a Sufism focused on "orthodox doctrine" and "activism,"[1100] the category of "neo-Sufism" is unavoidable in Sufi Studies,[1101] and one can also find related categories like "Salafi Sufis."[1102] As with most Weberian "ideal types," there is utility in identifying some of the undeniable patterns in modern Sufism, but these categories often fall apart under scrutiny when applied to the complex and multivalent thought of each individual Sufi. For example, Mehmed Birgivī and Ahmad Sirhindī in the Ottoman and Mughal early modern contexts respectively seem ideal candidates for the label "neo-Sufi," but they don't fit if the label when "neo-Sufism" is used to describe largely 19th century and later forms of Sufism

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[1100] Cited in John O. Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again" Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines, Engaging with a Legacy: Nehemia Levtzion (1935-2003) Vol. 42 (2), 2008. Cf. Fazlur Rahman 1968, 239.

[1101] This term was first coined by Fazlur Raḥman, but has been "reconsidered" multiple times See R. S. O'Fahey and Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered" *Der Islam*, Vol.70 (1), (1993): 52-87, and also John O. Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Engaging with a Legacy: Nehemia Levtzion (1935-2003) Vol. 42 (2), (2008): 314-330. This term has been of keen interest to scholars of Sufism in South Asia and Island Southeast Asia in recent decades and works well with the *Mujaddidi* and later *Khalidi* Naqshbandī orders in Ottoman lands of the 17th century to present. For the South Asian use of "Neo-Sufism" see Pnina Werbner "Reform Sufism in South Asia," in Caroline and Filippo Osella (eds.) Islamic Reform in South Asia. (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51-78. Bruce Lawrence gives a useful breakdown of what are often considered the Neo-Sufi movements of Asia and Africa, in Bruce B. Lawrence, "Sufism and Neo-Sufism 2010" in *The Bruce B. Lawrence Reader* ed. Ali Altaf Mian, (Duke UP, 2021), 191-217.

[1102] Julia Day Howell, "Indonesia's Salafist Sufis" *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, 5, (2010): 1029-1051.

that are engaged in militant resistance to the colonial encounter as Sedgwick and Lawrence do.[1103]

*Waḥdat al-wujūd* and the philosophical Sufism of Ibn al-ʿArabī is sometimes cited as the key fault line that divides the "neo-Sufi" from other forms of Sufism, where Ahmad Sirhindī's criticism of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and his emphasis on the Shariʿa carried on in his Mujaddidi, and later the Khalidi, sub branches of the Naqshbandiyya. Yet, John Voll is absolutely correct to cite Dina LeGall that emphasizing the Naqshbandi hostility toward Ibn al-ʿArabī inducted by Ahmad Sirhindī "casts observance of the *sharia* as inconsistent with theosophical speculation."[1104] To find a militant "neo-Sufi" perfectly comfortable with theosophical speculation, one only has to consider Emir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1883 c.e.) who led armed resistance to French occupation in Algeria while expressing ideological loyalty to Ibn al-ʿArabī and *waḥdat al-wujūd* in his writings. If one remembers that "ideal types," while useful, are a "map" and not the "territory" itself, then "neo-Sufism" can be a helpful category for understanding several trends in early modern and modern Sufism with the caveat that each individual Sufi is more complex. Instead of Sufis and "neo-Sufism," in the early modern period, it is the acceptance of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its rejection itself that constitutes the major fault-line and division in Sufism.

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[1103] Sedgwick has 19th century examples in mind like ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's resistance to French occupation of Algeria, Imam Shamil's Caucasian resistance to the Russian Empire, and the Madhist revolt against the British in the Sudan, Sedgwick,125-130. However Sedgwick also equates Guenonian "Traditionalist Sufism" with "neo-Sufism" and what he calls "Western Sufism." Bruce Lawrence, similarly looking at Sufi anticolonial resitance concludes that it was "Colonialism, not Wahhabism," that "became the midwife of neo-Sufism," Bruce Lawrence, 194.

[1104] O Voll, 326.cf. Dina LeGall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*. (SUNY: 2005), 125.

The debate over *waḥdat al-wujūd* and whether one considers Ibn al-ʿArabī to be the "greatest shaykh" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) or the "most unbelieving shaykh" (*al-shaykh al-akfar*), are mere facets of a more profound division within Sufism, perhaps in Islam itself. As the first two chapters endeavored to show, the division articulated in debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd* is something greater than Ibn al-ʿArabī, in spite of what the somewhat myopic Ibn ʿArabi scholarship within Sufi studies would suggest. The aspect of Sufism in question is what the late scholar of Persian Sufism, Leonard Lewisohn, calls "ecumenical" attitude of "theomonism" in *waḥdat al-wujūd,*[1105] and the refusal to designate religious "otherness" to non-Muslims in light of God's Unity and plurality of manifestations. The receptivity to the "Unity of Being" and to the Persian *ghazals* that proclaim "All is He" are part of a deeper, mystical hermeneutics. This hermeneutic is epitomized by ʿAbd al-Ghanī who, recognizing the mind-boggling infinity of God's unfolding and manifestation (*tajallī*), seems to respond to everything his fellow mystics find in their own "unveiling" (*kashf*) with a "yes, and" rather than a "no."

### *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* and Universalism

The debate over *waḥdat al-wujūd* serves as a good case study in Islamic philosophy where one can observe the push and pull between the "universals" and "particulars" that is documented so well in Jewish intellectual history by Aaron Hughes in his *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy*. Gregory Lipton points out that when the "universal" is used to simplify reality, "something *must always* be left out" and he describes this as the "paradox of religious

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[1105] Leonard Lewisohn, "The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistarī," in Heritage of Sufism, Vol II, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 382-3.

universalism."[1106] "Universalism" as a Western Enlightenment category excludes just as much as it includes, and it's necessary to study a topic like *waḥdat al-wujūd* precisely to arrive at alternate ways of thinking through "universalism" and what this means in an Islamic context.

Perhaps even more important than studying the doctrine itself, the debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd* often reveal where philosophers and theologians have set the boundaries of universalism; the "Unity of Being" — and, mystical monism generally, as in the ideas of Ibn al-'Arabī or the ecstatic utterances of Hallaj and Bistami — act as a line in the sand where the universalizing heights of mystical monism meet the particulars that ground Sufism uniquely in Islam. Following Hughes, and in the light of the universal and the particular found in Islamic mystical monism, and in *waḥdat al-wujūd* specifically, it must be concluded that this doctrine exists at the "intersection of the particular and the universal."[1107] Bedreddin, Dārā Shikūh, and 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī could engage with the mystical monist reality of God as all Existence while tethered to their Muslim identities, just as Jewish philosophers balanced a supposedly universal Greek philosophical system with their specific religious identity, ideas like chosenness, and the unique conception of God articulated in the Hebrew Bible from the ancient to Modern periods.

Mark Sedgwick's *Western Sufism* offers food for thought regarding the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* but requires careful digestion. What is called "universalism" — in the Western varieties that Sedgwick shines a light on anyway — locates the center of its "universe" in Western beliefs and practices, usually in Christianity and a Protestant, fideist expression of

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[1106] Lipton, xiii-xiv. Original italics.
[1107] Aaron Hughes, *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy: Beyond Particularism and Universalism*, (Oxford: OUP 2014), 28-9.

Christianity at that. "Universalism" is simply defined by Sedgwick as "the idea that truth can be found in all religions" and he dates this no earlier than the "early Enlightenment."[1108] Certainly *wujūdī* Sufism posits the Truth (*Haqq*) as manifesting in all religions, as early as Ibn al-'Arabī and Ibn Sab'in, though they predate the Enlightenment by centuries. An attendant concept, Perennialism, is defined by Sedgwick as "the idea that the secret, esoteric core [of religion] is very ancient, and can be found in the remote past,"[1109] is not unique to Western Christian, intellectual traditions as he suggests. One need only consider the role of the "Magian elder" (*pīr-i magān*) in Persian Sufi poetry and the ancient Zoroastrian wisdom that is imagined as predating the formal structure of Islam. Dārā Shikūh's identification of the Upanishads as an ancient scripture mentioned in the Qur'an is yet another example of the appeal to antiquity to legitimize religious truths. Ibn Sab'in and others appeal to Hermeticism for precisely the "Perennialist" appeal to ancient wisdom that transcends religious divisions.

Clearly the American context has accelerated a new trend of universalizing movements claiming Sufism; Inayat khan and his father initially toured the U.S. as musicians in the Sufi musical tradition that goes back to the *samā'* that the Chishti order was so well known for in the medieval and early modern periods, but he would go on to form International Sufi Movement that makes no mention of its Chishti in origin. Mevlevi organizations stemming from Süleyman Dede and his student Kabir Helminski including the Mevlevi Order of America "does not require conversion to Islam" nor "any change in religious affiliation" instead "forging communal

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[1108] Sedgwick, 6. Sedgwick considers both universalism and "anti-exotericism" to originate "in the early Enlightenment," but Lewisohn, on the other hand, has demonstrated the shared theme of anti-clericalism in Medieval Persian Sufism and in Early Modern English poets, both categories which predate the Enlightenment, so it is perplexing why Sedgwick locates
[1109] Sedgwick, 86.

bonds by concentrating on spiritual psychology and sharing in the fellowship of *zekr* and turning"(*devran*).[1110] The Threshold Society, though they "obviously draw their inspiration from Islam" does "not require conversion to Islam in order for an individual to become a Mevlevi dervish."[1111] This serves as a useful contrast with the Naqshbandi order which derives in its global forms from Sirhindī's early modern branches which promoted the primacy of the particulars of Islam like the  Law (Sharī'ah) and worship (*'ibāda*) over the universalizing vision of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

The Aryanist scholarship of the 19th and early 20th centuries often privileged the Persianate in Sufism precisely as a counter to the particulars of Islam like the shari'ah or the prophethood of Muhammad.[1112] Gregory Lipton uses the example of Frithjof Schuon, and his Maryamiyya order, to criticize a reading of Ibn al-'Arabī that goes too far in the direction of "nonreductive" "religious universalism" at the cost of ignoring the particulars of Islam, particulars that Ibn al-'Arabī did indeed uphold in his writings.[1113] Yet, as this study has endeavored to show, Ibn al-'Arabī's work — and Islamic mystical monism generally — has been used in the service of ecumenically-minded and universalizing Muslim thinkers since before Western Europeans got their hands on the writings of the *Shaykh al-Akbar*.

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[1110] Lewis, *Rumi East and West*, 521-2.

[1111] Lewis, 523.

[1112] Masuzawa writes "this devaluation of the Semitic in relation to the Aryan (or Indo-European)" was part of a  "scientifically based anti-Semitism" that "facilitated a new expression of Europe's age-old animosity toward the Islamic powers insofar as this science Categorized Jews and Arabs as being 'of the same stock,' conjointly epitomizing the character of the Semitic 'race.'" Sufism comes into the picture where, "in obvious correlation to the vilifying and condescending ir Semitic Islam, there surged among European scholars a renewed interest in socalled Islamic mysticism. Sufism was particularly valorized as a higher form of Islam, Persian (or possibly Indian or neo-Platonic) in origin, therefore_essentially Aryan in nature, hence exterior to what was deemed Islam proper." Masuzawa, 25-6.

[1113] Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi,* xii. For more on this topic see Gregory Lipton, "De-Semitizing Ibn 'Arabī: Aryanism and the Schuonian Discourse of Religious Authenticity," Numen, Vol. 64, 2017, 258–93. Also Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi,* esp. 120-151.

It's not necessarily "Western Sufism" — that is, Sufism in the hands of Western European thinkers — which started the conflation of Sufism with religions other than Islam; considering the significant role that Dārā Shikūh's Persian translation and Sufized commentary on the Upanishads played in transmitting Vedanta to the West in the first place, maybe the starting point for "Western Sufism" should go at least as far back to Dara's universalizing project, who in turn likely took inspiration from his great grandfather Akbar. From his study of the *Dabistān* at the end of the 18th century, Sir William Jones described Sufism as "the primeval religion of Iran" which became the "accepted orthodoxy of the emerging science of Orientalism."[1114] This idea that Sufism was part of an ancient form of mysticism held in common with Greeks and Hindus is a prime example of what is known as "Perennialism," named for Aldous Huxley's "Perennial Philosophy" that he saw the mystical traditions of all religions as engaging in. Yet William Jones is not entirely inventing his Perennialist reading of the *Dabistān*, but rather, the author Mobad Shah expressed his own view of the unity of religions throughout; Mobad Shah was himself a follower of Āzar Kayvān's (1533-1618 c.e.) universalizing sect of neo-Zoroastrianism influenced highly by mystical monist Sufism.[1115] As a result, one finds in William Jones's reading of the *Dabistān* a veritable nesting-doll of perennialisms; Jones didn't invent Sufism as a "Perennial philosophy," he encountered this idea in the *Dabistān* itself.

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[1114] Sedgwick, 110.

[1115] Āzar Kayvān claimed "that the different schools of the Indian, Persian, and Islamic intellectual traditions all reflect a single essence." See Daniel J. Sheffield, "The Language of Heaven in Safavīd Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āzar Kayvān and His Followers," in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014),172. For the identification of the author of the *Dabistān* see M. Athar Ali, "Pursuing an Elusive Seeker of Universal Truth: The Identity and Environment of the Author of the 'Dabistān-i maẕāhib,'" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* , Third Series, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1999), 365-373. Sheffield likewise considers the author of the *Dabistān* to be a disciple of Kayvān.

Similarly, Sedgwick examines René Guénon's metaphysics that draw on *waḥdat al-wujūd* but also include the cosmic principle of vedanta, Brahman, and the three manifestations of God (*trimurti*) in Hinduism as he writes: "the Arabs say, 'existence is one,' and everything it contains is nothing but the manifestation, in multiple modes, of one and the same principle, which is the universal Being."[1116] Sedgwick more or less correctly identifies Guénon's topic here as "Ibn Arabi's insistence on the unity of being" which is "emanationist" as it draws from the common heritage of Neoplatonism, but Sedgwick concludes that "his concept of 'universal Being' can only be reconciled with Hindu conceptions with some difficulty."[1117] Well, as the present study has shown, Guénon was by no means the first to merge Hindu concepts with *waḥdat al-wujūd*, preceded as he is in this project by Dārā Shikūh. That said, just as "universalism" in the Western context often carries the strong imprint of the hegemonic, Christian past, so too does *waḥdat al-wujūd* remain married to the Islamic context out of which it emerged.

Analyzing the history of discourse within the field of religious studies is now rightly the norm and this process is a central part of one of Dipesh Chakrabarty's stated goals of the post-colonial project to "provincialize Europe."[1118] In the name of the post-colonial project, there is surely a need to go beyond the conceptions of "universalism" defined in Western Europe and search out emic terms and concepts from within Islamic civilizations themselves. Not only

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[1116] Sedgwick, 174

[1117] Sedgwick, 174.

[1118] In his preface to the 2007 edition of his book, Chakrabarty writes that "To "provincialize" Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. It was to ask a question about how thought was related to place." Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, PUP: 2007), xiii.

"universalism" but also "pluralism" can be re-imagined in emic terms that pre-date the Western Enlightenment. To this end scholars have put forward a number of possibilities that have featured in the present study; one can perhaps find "pluralism" in the Persianate conciliatory politics of "universal peace" (ṣulḥ-i kull), or in the Ottoman imperial practice of legal autonomy for religious minorities that scholars coined as the "*millet* system,"[1119] and in the policy of "accommodation" (istimālet) with subjects in newly conquered areas that "accounts to no small extent for the success enjoyed by the Ottomans in establishing and maintaining their rule in the overwhelmingly Christian Balkans.[1120] Figures like Bedreddin and his Cretan disciple Börklüce Mustafa also illustrate how the Ottoman context *is* the European context as well as how the Greek East has too often been ignored in intellectual history in favor of the Latinate West after the rise of Rome.

To be sure, one finds ample examples in the history of Islam for the acceptance for other religions, particularly the "People of the Book" (ahl al-kitāb) who have variously been interpreted as including Zoroastrians and Hindus alongside the Jews, Christians, and "Sabians" mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an confirms the salvific efficacy of other monotheists so long as they believe in God, the day of judgment, and do "good works" (Q 2:62 and 5:69) and even informs the reader that, originally, "people were one community (umma)"(2:213), although this same passage does touch on the differentiation between people according to their acceptance or rejection of prophets and revealed books. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are all regarded as

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[1119] Sachedina describes "the *millet* system" as "granting each religious community an official status and a substantial measure of self-government" and goes as far as to call this an Ottoman "pre-modern paradigm of a religiously pluralistic society." Abdulazzi Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 96-7.
[1120] Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, 99.

"Muslims" and the Qur'an and the hadith acknowledge men and women upright in belief and practice called "ḥanif" (pl. ḥunafa) before the coming of Islam. Abdulaziz Sachedina takes the view that a certain universalism is found in the Qur'an and identifies the culprits behind religious exclusion as the "theological doctrine of 'supersession'"(naskh)[1121] and the "acceptance of the prophethood of Muhammad as an inescapable requisite for salvation."[1122]He even goes so far as to say that the *Shahada* itself is a "political development" and that it "marked a clear shift from the Quranic recognition of religious pluralism."[1123] Here Sachedina is reflecting the scholarship of those like Patricia Crone and Michael Cook[1124] or Fred M. Donner[1125] who speculate that the earliest community of Muslims were initially undifferentiated from other monotheists like Christians and Jews.

In political practice, religious minorities (*ahl al-dhimma*; *dhimmis*) were afforded protections in exchange for payment of the *jizya* tax at least as early as the reign of Caliph

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[1121]Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'an and other Religions" The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an Ed. Jane Dammen McAulife (CUP: 2006), 297. References to supercession can be found in Q2:106 and Q16:101.
[1122] Sachedina, 297.
[1123] Sachedina, 301.
[1124] Patricia Crone, and Michale Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977). The author's preface their controversial work by presumptuously stating that "this is a book written by infidels for infidels, and it is based on what from any Muslim perspective must appear an inordinate regard for the testimony of infidel sources" viii.
[1125] Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). Donner stresses the ecumenism of the early Muslim community, calling them simply "Believers"(Ar. Mu'min; pl. Mu'minūn) "The reason for this 'confessionally open' or ecumenical quality was simply that the basic ideas of the Believers and their insistence on observance of strict piety were in no way antithetical to the beliefs and practices of some Christians and Jews" in Donner, 69. On a less speculative and related note, the followers of 17th century Jewish millenarian and convert to Islam, Sabbatai Zvi, although known pejoratively as the "turn-coats"(Tr. *Dönme*) referred to themselves simply as "The Believers" (Heb. *ha-Ma'aminim*). Marc David Baer argues that these "Believers" merged Kabbala and Sufism, see Marc David Baer, *The Dönme,* 5-7, 17, 243. Cengiz Şişman, however, cautiously sides with Bitek that although "one could detect the effect of Sufism on Sabbateanism on the surface," it "remained a branch of Jewish mysticism" at its core. In Şişman, *The Burden of Silence,* 238.

'Umar in the 640's c.e. Even if the "Pact of 'Umar" (*shurūṭ 'Umar*) is apocryphally attributed to him, it describes protections for religious minorities reliably found in Islamicate polities. It must be conceded, however, that the leniency or strictness of the application of these conditions was at the discretion of a totalitarian ruler and the clerical elites interpreting Islamic political philosophy; whether the conditions of 'Umar and the *jizya* was seen as a guarantee of rights and privileges as well as a waiver from military service, or as a means to penalize and "humble" the non-Muslims or force them to visibly stand apart from Muslims, all depends on those in power and how they implement these conditions.

Shahab Ahmed's 2015 *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* has called for a reconceptualization of the category of "Islam" that encompasses "the varieties, possibilities, complexities, and contradictions of the meaning of the Muslim human,"[1126] citing examples of mystical philosophy and poetry throughout to make his case. Ahmed touches on the interplay between the particular and universal when he asserts that "the question in conceptualizing Islam is that of how to reconcile the relationship between 'universal' and 'local,' between 'unity' and 'diversity.'"[1127] Instead of an understanding of Islam that focuses solely on the Law or the "Text" of the Qu'ran, Ahmed calls attention to the meaning-making processes that also consider the "context" and "Pre-Text" as he calls it. Ahmed criticizes the "Islam as Law" paradigm and makes use of two Sufi counter-examples that appeal to a higher esoteric source of knowledge, the role of mystical encounter with Truth (*Ḥaqq*) known as "investigation"(*taḥqīq*) and the "school of love"(*madhhab-i 'Ishq*).

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[1126] Ahmed, 284.
[1127] Ahmed 156.

Representing this latter, we have seen Ibn al-'Arabī declare "I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith."[1128] From the same century, few Sufis have proven more influential than Rumi who provides copious verses on love and the obliteration of religious boundaries, writing for example that "Love's folk live beyond religious borders / the community and creed of lovers: God" (M2:1770).[1129] The "religion of love" and mystical investigation (*taḥqīq*) are not separate, but can be seen merged at least as early as Ibn Sina (d. 1024 c.e.) who Ahmed notes established the "philosophical foundations of the idea of the cosmological value of love" as he "wrote in his *Epistle on Love* that "love is the manifestation of Essence and Existence"—meaning that even the age-old philosophical debate surrounding the primacy of either Essence or Existence is obliterated through love.[1130]

Comprising elements of both Islamic philosophy and Sufism, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and mystical monism generally are significant parts of what Ahmed calls the "Sufi-Philosophical amalgam." Ahmed assertively makes the case that "esoteric" philosophies like the "Unity of

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[1128] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* trans. R.A. Nicholson, ( London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), iii. Ibn al-'Arabī also describes the object of his affection, a young Persian woman named Nizam, in terms that draw from Judaism, Christianity and Islam freely: "When she kills with her glances, her speech restores to life, as tho' she, in giving life thereby, were Jesus. The smooth surface of her legs is (like) the Tora in brightness, and I follow it and tread in its footsteps as tho' I were Moses. She is a bishopess, one of the daughters of Rome, un-adorned: thou seest in her a radiant Goodness. [...] She has baffled everyone who is learned in our religion, every student of the Psalms of David, every Jewish doctor, and every Christian priest. If with a gesture she demands the Gospel, thou wouldst deem us to be priests and patriarchs and deacons" *Tarjuman al-Ashwāq,* 49. The trope of the learned Shaykh hopelessly in love with a non-Muslim, often a Christian youth (*tarsā bachchā*) is not uncommon. One famous example can be found in 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* in the figure of Sheikh Sam'an. For Shaykh Sarmad Kashānī (d.1661 c.e.), the Armenian Jewish convert to Islam, student of Mulla Ṣadrā, and *mazjūb* (divinely attracted mystic), it was a Hindu boy named Abhay Chand that sent him down his spiritual path.
[1129] Cited in Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present East and West,* (Oneworld: 2008), 406.
[1130] Ahmed, 39. Cf. Maha Elkaisy Freimuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: 'Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 83.

Being" are not "marginal" to Islamic society.[1131] Rather, Ahmed takes Fazlur "Rahman's fundamental, and insufficiently recognized, historical point" to be that:

> the Sufi and philosophical claim to a Real-Truth (*ḥaqīqah*) that lay above and beyond the truth of the Revealed law (*sharīʿa*) was not a bit of intellectual or esotericist social *marginalia*, but was effectively the manifesto of a wide ranging social and cultural phenomenon that Rahman has called "a religion not only within religion but above religion.[1132]

It may be this emphasis on the "Real-Truth (*ḥaqīqah*)" in Islamic mystical philosophy that Ahmed has in mind when he refers to revelation in Islam as including "Pre-Text."[1133] Ahmed recognizes how the debates surrounding mystical monism are a fault-line in the ambivalence between "universal" and "particular, here including Suhrawardī Maqtūl's *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* with the "Unity of Existence:"

> These were societies in which Muslims who took *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and *waḥdat al-wujūd* as the means to the meaning of Divine Truth, and Muslims who condemned *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and *waḥdat al-wujūd* as rank heresy; Muslims for whom to be a Sufi was to subordinate the *sharīʿah* to the *ḥaqīqah* and Muslims for whom to be a Sufi was to subordinate the *ḥaqīqah* to the *sharīʿah*."[1134]

Instead of conceiving a binary spectrum where a Sufi like Sirhindī who appealed to *sharīʿah* over *ḥaqīqah* is "Islamic," in contradistinction to a Sufi who appeals to *ḥaqīqah* over *sharīʿah* and is therefore appealing to "other-than" Islam, Ahmed's framework incorporates both as "Islamic."

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[1131] Ahmed repeats A.I. Sabra's criticism of the "marginality thesis" which would have one believe "that scientific and philosophical activity in medieval Islam had no significant impact on the social, economic, educational and religious institutions," and had "little to do with the spiritual life of Muslims" in Ahmed, 14.

[1132] Ahmed, 31.

[1133] Ahmed writes that "*something is Islamic to the extent that it is made meaningful in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muḥammad as one or more of Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text.*" Ahmed, 405.

[1134] Ahmed, 102.

Whether it is the "school of love" or a layer of "truth" (*ḥaqīqah*) that goes above the

Law (*Sharī'a*), this does not mean that the latter no longer matters, rather, all are part of a total,

perhaps contradictory, whole for mystical monists like Ibn al-'Arabī and Rūmī. Perhaps this is

what Shihab Ahmed is getting at when he identifies "contradiction" as a key feature of

hermeneutical engagement in Islam, and calls for a "reconceptualization of Islam by which and to

which difference and contradiction cohere."[1135] As explored in the case studies preceding this

conclusion, the particulars of the Law and the universalizing vision of *waḥdat al-wujūd* are not

part of an "either/or" proposition, rather, both have a right to be conceptualized as "Islamic" by

Ahmed's metric. Ahmed's broadening of what is "Islamic" can perhaps help make sense of the

*wujūdī* attitude toward non-Muslims — as expressed by Ibn al-'Arabī and echoed by Nābulusī

in the example of the Golden Calf[1136] — can paradoxically use the Qur'an to justify all forms of

worship as having God as their object, for God "*determined* that you will not worship other

than He."[1137]

     Ultimately Shahab Ahmed makes the case that something is "Islamic" so long as there is

hermeneutical engagement with the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad in its Text, ConText or

Pre-Text. It is this latter category of "Pre-Text" that Ahmed seems to identify as the purview of

the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam:"

> It is evident that what is Islamic about philosophy and Sufism is that they are both
> hermeneutical engagements with the Pre-Text of Revelation (the one identifying the
> Pre-Text with Reason, the other with Existence). A society perfused by the
> Sufi-philosophical amalgam—like the Balkans-to-Bengal complex—is a society in

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[1135] Ahmed, 152. See also his rephrasing of his goal: "to conceptualize Islam in a manner that retains contradiction in a constitutionally coherent manner *because this is the only way that we can map the human and historical reality of the internal contradictions of Islam*" in Ahmed, 233. Original italics.
[1136] Ahmed, 26-32 and 519.
[1137] Q17:23; Ahmed's italics and translation. see Ahmed, 28-9.

which the notion of the direct accessibility of the Pre-Text of Revelation is simply normative: that the PreText is directly knowable is an idea that people in such a society carry around in their heads and with which they live.[1138]

The case made by Ahmed here, again, is that philosophy and Sufism constituted normative sources of knowledge as part of the "Pre-Text of Revelation" but he clarifies that reason and "Existence" are the respective sources sources for philosophy and Sufism. That "Existence" is the named source of Sufism would suggest that Ahmed primarily has *wujūdī* Sufism and its concerns over "Existence" or "Being" in mind.[1139]

Shahab Ahmed offers more food for thought regarding the deeper chasm between the worldviews of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd.* Ahmed interprets Ibn al-ʿArabi's famous lines about the "religion of love" from his *Tarjuman al-ashwāq* as part of what he terms the "*expansivist* position" found in "Pre-Textual projects of philosophy and Sufism which have precisely sought not to restrict Truth to Text or to specific readings of Text."[1140] Ahmed contrasts this "expansivist" with the "specificist or *restrictivist* position" that he equates with the "Textual project of the Hadith" which attempts to "identify, specify, and prescribe a delimited set of creedal, praxial, and legal forms and norms as exclusively Islamic—and thus to eliminate other creedal, praxial and legal forms and norms as un-Islamic."[1141] In short, Ahmed is describing a valence toward an expansive definition of Islam, that includes "Pre-Text" and a valence toward a restrictive definition of Islam that includes only "Text," and this would seem to align more or

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[1138] Ahmed, 506.

[1139] This would perhaps relegate those like Suhrawardī *maqtūl* who held the primacy of "essence" (*māhiyya*) over "existence" (*wujūd*) to the field of philosophy instead of Sufism if

[1140] Ahmed, 508-9.

[1141] Ahmed, 507.

less with the "universalizing" tendency of mystical monism and the "particularizing" tendency of its critics that the present study has noted.

Those familiar with Sufi vocabulary won't miss the fact that Ahmed works the twin Sufi notions of "expansion"(*basṭ*) and "contraction"(*qabḍ*) into this binary framework. Nābulusī is a perfect candidate for this "expansivist position" when he reacts to nearly every form of Sufism and ecstatic utterance with a "yes, and" rather than a "no," and when he considers his fellow Christians as "spiritual brothers," affirming through this acceptance the infinite unfolding of God's manifestation in myriad forms. Not only has Ahmed worked the Sufi binary of expansion and contraction into his framework, but he connects this to the philosophical binary of "the Absolute"(*muṭlaq*) and the "delimited"(*muqayyad*). Ahmed writes that the structural question that lies at the heart of inter-Muslim debates and contestations over what it is that constitutes orthodoxy in Islam" is the question of "*to what extent* Islam is truth unrestricted in form"(*muṭlaq*) and to what extent "Islam is truth restricted in form"(*muqayyad*).[1142]

Not only is there a tendency in his final chapter to couch the issue of what is and isn't Islamic in terms drawn from the Sufi-philosophical amalgam itself, but there is undoubtedly a tone of dismay when he observes that "Muslims have, in making their modernity, moved decisively away from conceiving of and living normative Islam as hermeneutical engagement with Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation," preferring instead hermeneutical engagement solely with the "Text of Revelation."[1143] Ahmed views this as a delimitation, or a "downsizing of Revelation from PreText, Text, and Con-Text, to Text more-or-less alone—or to Text read in

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[1142] Ahmed, 510.
[1143] Ahmed, 515.

highly-depleted Con-text."[1144] Perhaps then, Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam* is not just a description of how prevalent the Sufi-philosophical amalgam was in the early modern Balkans to Bengal complex, with *waḥdat al-wujūd* taking pride of place, but also an impassioned case for the modern era not to write such a hermeneutical engagement out of Islam. It will now be possible to place Shahab Ahmed in conversation with Gregory Lipton and his "rethinking" of Ibn al-'Arabī the revaluation of and the relation between mystical monism in Islam and non-Muslims.

As Gregory Lipton has demonstrated, Ibn al-'Arabī affirms the "abrogation (*naskh*) of all of the (previously) revealed laws (*jamīʿ al-sharāʾiʿ*) by Muhammad's revealed law (*sharīʿa*)"[1145] and that "Judaism and Christianity can only be considered 'valid' religions if their adherents follow Qur'an 9:29" and pay the *jizya* "*willingly, in a state of humiliation,*"[1146] writing a letter to the Seljuk ruler of Rum, ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāʾus I, that he ought to impose 'Umar's conditions strictly on non-Muslims.[1147] Lipton is right to criticize "Shuonian Perennialism" for its attempt to "separate" Ibn al-'Arabī's "unitive mysticism" from his "heteronomous modes of religious absolutism"[1148]and dissociating from Ibn al-'Arabī "all connections and associations with larger issues of context, politics, and power."[1149]  The present

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[1144] Ahmed, 516.
[1145] Lipton, 71.
[1146] Lipton, 115.
[1147] Lipton, 55. Here he cites the *Futūḥāt*, "The calamity that Islam and Muslims are undergoing in your realm—and few address it—is the raising of Church bells, the display of disbelief (*kufr*), the proclamation of associationism (*shirk*), and the elimination of the stipulations (*al-shurūṭ*) that were imposed by the Prince of Believers, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, upon the Protected People."
[1148] Lipton, 177.
[1149] Lipton, 179. Here citing McCutcheon, cf. Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion:  The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93.

study has made no attempt to strip mystical monists and Ibn al-ʿArabī's later interpreters of their historical context, to the contrary, the preceding chapters have demonstrated exactly how the "Unity of Being" offers a universalizing discourse that could be politically expedient in the hands of early modern Muslims living among sizeable non-Muslim populations and trying to make sense of religious difference. Trying to get at "what Ibn al-ʿArabī really meant" does not somehow negate the myriad uses of his thought in the centuries after his death, and it misses the mark of the hermeneutical project. On the contrary, Shahab Ahmed argues that Ibn al-ʿArabī's "positive valorization of idol-worship," among other examples from the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam," can "provide a rich indigenous resource of historical 'Muslim practice,' as well as Muslim ideals, that may well be mobilized by modern Muslims for the cultivation of pluralism."[1150]

## Caveats and Cautions

While the "Unity of Being" certainly has a universalizing vector plausibly in the hands of Bedreddin, and certainly in the hands of Nābulusī and Dārā Shikūh, a counter-example can be informative and remind one of just how much a "universalizing" attitude is truly dependent on the

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[1150] Ahmed, 524. Here Ahmed is providing counter-examples to contest Aziz al-Azmeh's assertion that "classical Muslim historical experience presents us with a set of precedents of plurality and pluralism which would not be recognisable to modern notions of pluralism, or which would provide 'sources of inspiration' for them," because " Islamic jurisprudence regarding non-Muslims (*fiqh al-dhimmah*) was "inequitable in its legal underpinnings." Aziz al-Azmeh, "Pluralism in Muslim Societies," in *The Challenge of Pluralism : Paradigms from Muslim Contexts*, edited by Abdou Filali-Ansary, and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed, (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 11, 13-15. Shahab Ahmed suggests that Farīd-ud-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's example of Shaykh Sanʿān's infatuation with a Christian girl represents a "different sort of *fiqh al-dhimmah*" as a poignant reminder of the trope of the "devotion of a Muslim lover to a non-Muslim beloved." in Ahmed, 524. Ahmed's point, however, is rendered somewhat unconvincing by the fact that ʿAṭṭār's Christian girl is made to convert, repent, and promptly die in the end of the story.

individual philosopher or theologian and not the philosophy or theology itself. As mentioned

above, Ibn al-'Arabi held fast to plenty of particulars within Islam while articulating a philosophy

capable of ascending to universalizing heights in the hands of his interpreters. Again, it is

ambivalence between the universal and particular that is the norm, not the rejection of the

particular in favor of the universal. This ambivalence can also be seen in the example of the early

modern Chishti Sufi, 'Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537 c.e.), who fled Babur's violent

establishment of the Mughal dynasty but also left his "ancestral home because it had temporarily

come under Hindu domination."[1151] Simon Digby expertly lays out the complexities and seeming

contradictions that coexist in this figure who "urged the necessity of strict orthodoxy" in his

Sunni understanding of Islam while remaining a "vigorous advocate of the doctrine of *waḥdat*

*al-wujūd.*"[1152]

      Gangohi was familiar with Yoga and taught the "Yogic manual" known as the "Pool of

Nectar" (*Amritakunda*)[1153] and even fell into ecstasy listening to Hindus singing verses.[1154] On

the other hand, he was adamant in his letter to Babur that only "Muslims of pure and zealous

faith should be appointed to posts of government" and "Non-Muslims should not wield the pen

[1151] Simon Digby, "Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537): The Personality and Attitudes of Medieval Indian Sufi," *Medieval India, A Miscellany III,* (Aligarh, 1975), 36

[1152] Digby, 19.

[1153] Carl Ernst, Refractions of Islam in India, (Sage; Yodapress: 2016), 424. The "Pool of Nectar" (*Amritakunda*), was "circulated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu versions from the seventeenth century onwards, in Persia, Turkey, and North Africa as well as in India" as the "Water of Life" (*Baḥr al-Hayāt*).

[1154] Digby, 36 see also Carl Ernst *Refractions of Islam in India*, 194 and 281. Ernst also notes an "unusual literary phenomenon, in which extensive expositions of yogic teachings occur in pseudonymous texts that are ascribed to well known Sufis. Most of the Arabic manuscripts of The Pool of Nectar in Istanbul libraries are attributed to the authorship of the great Andalusian Sufi master, Ibn `Arabi. The founder of the Indian Chishtiyya, Mu`in al-Dīn Chishti, is likewise said to be the author of an extremely popular work on yoga that is found under several different titles, most commonly called wujūdīyya (The Treatise on Existence)." Thus, there is a remarkable connection — albeit likely an imagined one — drawn between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and syncretic manuals on Yoga translated into Arabic. Cited in Ernst, 292.

in offices and they should not be commanders and tax-gatherers," prefiguring Sirhindī's view that non-Muslims not be allowed to serve as administrators in the Mughal state. Gangohi continues, saying that because "subordination of *kafirs* is enjoined" in the Shari'ah, "they should be humbled, subordinated and made to pay tax" — as is instructed in Qur'an 9:29 — but also "forbidden to dress like Muslims" and "prohibited from practising heathen observances ostentatiously and publicly,"[1155] as is found in the Pact of 'Umar. Perhaps case studies of *wujūdī* sufis with universalizing tendencies have been cherry-picked by scholars who align more with pluralism against confessional strictness. If more counter-examples of *wujūdī* Sufis with negative views of non-Muslims are uncovered, it will be worthwhile to reconsider the conclusion of this dissertation, yet the capacity for *waḥdat al-wujūd* to be used in universalizing religious projects remains.

Much of the discussion surrounding *waḥdat al-wujūd* and religious universalism treads into territory where one begins to describe a causal chain of "influence" from one religious or philosophical system to another or a "syncretism" of at least two philosophies and religions. To this effect, the cautionary words of Carl Ernst and Tony K. Stewart are in order as they think through how scholars treat such "syncretic" figures as "Akbar, Dara Shikuh, Kabir," and "the Sikhs."[1156] They describe "syncretism" which is "more often than not associated with the products of inter-sectarian or inter-religious encounters, such as that of Hindu and Muslim, producing a mixed product that mysteriously exhibits features of both."[1157] They make reference undoubtedly to Clifford Geertz's infamous phrase the "thin veneer of Islam" over what he

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[1155] Digby, 33-4.

[1156] Tony K. Stewart and Carl Ernst, "Syncretism" in *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia,* ed. Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills (Garland Publishing, Inc., 2003).

[1157] Stewart and Ernst.

perceived to be deeper, native religious identity in Java as they caution about using syncretism to describe a "cultural veneer" or a "product of the large-scale imposition of one alien culture, religion, or body of practices over another that is already present."[1158] Hamid Dabashi's excellent study of cosmopolitanism in Persian literature asserts that Dārā Shikūh sought to "think through the possibilities of a syncretic religion that would bring Islam and Hinduism together toward a third, common faith."[1159]Although he certainly brought Islam and Hinduism closer together in his remarkable religious project, we have seen above how Dārā subsumed Vedantic Hinduism inside of Islam by making the *Upanishads* the "Hidden Book" mentioned in the Qur'an, not some new, "syncretic" faith that no longer bears the name of Islam. As we have seen above, Hindus could even be interpreted as "people of the book" within an Islamic framework. Ultimately, Stewart and Ernst reason that "every 'pure' tradition turns out to contain mixed elements" and that "if everything is syncretistic, nothing is syncretistic."[1160]

    *Wujūdī* Sufism is itself building on philosophical discussions about "essence" and "existence" that entered Arabic philosophy in the 8th and 9th century translation movement, and as such, it's tempting to find tributaries and deltas of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in other philosophical systems of Afro-Eurasia and the Mediterranean. To illustrate the complexity of "influence" and "borrowing," we may consider the thought of the Christian theologian Paul Tillich and the "Unity

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[1158] Stewart and Ernst.

[1159] Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism,* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 202. Dabashi's full excerpt is as follows: "Dara Shikoh was the perfect model of a learned and benevolent monarch. In his writings he was determined to think through the possibilities of a syncretic religion that would bring Islam and Hinduism together toward a third, common faith. He gave his life for that effort." Although he seems to suggest Dārā was killed for his religious ideas here, Dabashi does admit later that he "was ultimately murdered by his brother for political reasons, though his ecumenical and comparative disposition must have offended  fanatics on both sides of the sectarian divide" (Dabashi, 204).

[1160] Stewart and Ernst.

of Being" this study has focused on. Drawing heavily from the "universalism" of Baruch

Spinoza's 17th century philosophy,[1161] Paul Tillich writes of a "God Beyond God" who

"transcends the God of the religions,"[1162] a God who could even conceivably be encountered by

an atheist like Friedrich Nietzsche who also figures prominently in Tillich's writing. This is a God

who is not just the highest "being" but is the "ground of Being" or "Being" itself that is, for Tillich,

"the object of all mystical longing."[1163] The development of the "Unity of Being" that preceded

Tillich by roughly a millennium arrived at similar conclusions that God is "Being" itself, even

beyond the particulars of religion, and who is the object of mystical experience. This could be

an example of "convergent evolution" where mystically minded monotheists arrived at the same

conclusion and this could be an illustration of just how remarkably deep the groundwater of

philosophical mysticism is that Islamic, Christian, and Jewish mystics have drawn upon over the

last millennium and a half truly is. Still, it would be a complete misnomer to label the philosophy

of Tillich and *wujūdī* Muslims as identical; for as much as the remarkable similarities are exciting

and worth exploring, there are plenty of particulars that give each worldview of each thinker a

distinct shape and form that is historically contingent and laden with unique vocabulary. In short,

Tillich's "ground of Being" are two examples of a plurality of "universalisms" rather than one

singular discourse.

It is also worth remarking briefly on the benefits and drawbacks of a study with such a

broad geographic scope as this. This study has focused on what Hodgson's third volume of his

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[1161] Spinoza also wrote extensively about "Being" which was a central and overarching concept in his philosophy: "We are accustomed to refer all individuals in nature to one genus which is called the most general, that is, to the notion of Being, which embraces absolutely all the individuals in nature."(Baruch Spinoza, Ethics IV pref., II: 207)
[1162] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be,* (Yale UP, 2000), 186-190.
[1163] Tillich, 171-2.

*Venture of Islam* terms the "Gunpowder empires" of the early modern era and is also drawn toward the cultural and linguistic boundaries that Shahab Ahmed terms the "Balkans to Bengal" complex. Although Ahmed makes use of some examples from North and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as Island Southeast Asia, these regions simply don't feature quite as much. This is a shortcoming of this dissertation as well since it is limited to the three early modern "gunpowder" empires, and it is worth making explicit that this dissertation does not propose that mystical monism and the debate over mystical monism is in any way exclusive to this context. The fact that the *wujūd*-versus-*shuhūd* debate took place in the 17th century Aceh Sultanate should not escape notice.

Lessons drawn about the centralization of power and religious authority in early modern state-making projects apply to the debate over *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Sutanate of Aceh as well. Mystical monsm thrived in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in Aceh to such a degree that Sultan Iskandar Muda (d. 1636 c.e.) took *wujūdī* shaykh, Shams al-Dīn Sumatranī (d. 1630 c.e.), as his personal *murshid*, perhaps seeing "in pantheistic Sufism a means for enhancing the popular perception of his kingship as one sanctioned, blessed and in-dwelt by God."[1164] Later, Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī (d. 1658 c.e.) was appointed Sheikh al-Islam of Aceh by Iskandar Thānī upon the death of his father Iskandar Muda in 1636.[1165] Al-Ranīrī then spearheaded an effort to purge the Sultanate of Aceh from "what he considered to be the heretical teachings" of *wujūdī* shaykhs like Hamzah Fansūrī (d. ca. 1590 c.e.) and Shams al-Dīn Sumatranī.[1166] Much like 'Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmūn's (d. 833 c.e.) support for the

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[1164] Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World Transmission and Responses.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 112.
[1165] Riddell, 116
[1166] Riddell, 116

Mu'tazila to the detriment of other schools of thought including jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855 c.e.) the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is ultimately rests with the head of state.[1167] The rise of the post of Shaykh al-Islam, like in the Ottoman Empire or the Mulla Bāshī in the Safavid Empire, also reflects the centralization of authority in the early modern state in Aceh where Shaykh al-Islam al-Ranīrī's opinion of *waḥdat al-wujūd*[1168] became state doctrine. The Island Southeast Asian context also offers links between the early modern past and today. As noted above, Julia Howell's "Salafi-Sufis" represent a trend in Sufism that links Ahmad Sirhindi's anti-*wujūdī* intervention to Sufism today, but so too can the state's power to shape discourse be seen in the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) which weighs in on the 17th century debate and sides with Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī against those professing *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[1169]

On a final, and cautionary note, care must be taken in a study of "universalism" and "pluralism" in Islamic thought not to reify a problematic debate over "good" and "bad" Muslims in the post September 11th discourse on Islam. All too often, Muslim majority countries and

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[1167] I am grateful to Muhamad Ali for a seminar on Island Southeast Asia that sparked my interest on the topic of debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the 17th century in the first place. Ali offered a crucial observation in my dissertation defense that, as is so often the case, state alignment with a particular philosophical school makes all the difference in determining what is "orthodox" in a given context which applies whether it is the Abbasid-era espousal of the Mu'tazilite school or the anti-*wujud* policy of 17th century Aceh under Iskandar Sānī.

[1168] In his treatise Hujjat al-siddiq li-daf' al-zindiq, Al-Ranīrī explains that the "heretical" Sufi philosophy of "equating creator with created" comes from a state of intoxication which leads them to believe they are free from obligations in Shari'a and behavioral norms." This is no mere admonition, as he declares that these Sufis "who continue on the path of Heresy" deserve "death and fire." in Riddell, 121.

[1169] The Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) declares deviationist "any teachings or practices which are propagated by Muslims or non-Muslims who claim that their teachings and practices are Islamic or based on Islamic teachings, whereas in actual fact the teachings and practices which they propagate are contrary to Islam […] and against the teachings of Ahli Sunna wal Jamaah." Al-Ranīrī is judged to be "orthodox" while Hamzah Fansūrī and Shams al-Din Sumatrani are labeled as deviationist. see Riddell, 258.

individual Muslims themselves are labeled as "backward" or "fanatical" because they do not live up to the standards of secularism and religious pluralism currently being articulated in North Atlantic and Western European countries. One can find parallels with "Homonationalism" where Islamic countries and individual Muslims are evaluated based on their acceptance of Western discourses surrounding homosexuality,[1170] all this, ironically after colonial regimes spread the categorization, medicalization and legal persecution of "homosexuality" to several Muslim majority countries which were previously decried as "backward" for the forms of same-sex relations that existed prior to the colonial encounter in the first place. Even though a scholar can never stand objectively outside of their own positionality, and this positionality undoubtedly factors into the topics in history that spark their interest, care ought to be taken not to conduct an intellectual history that denigrates those who are deemed by liberal, progressive scholarship as "cultural and political Others."[1171]

Dārā Shikūh and his brother Aurangzeb are used as archetypes of the "good" and "bad" Muslim in the Asian subcontinent. This can be glimpsed when Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem claims the "Seeds of Partition were sown when [Mughal prince] Aurangzeb triumphed over [his brother] Dārā Shikoh,"[1172] or when columnist Ashok Malik writes that Dara's execution was "the partition before Partition" and "with him died hopes of a lasting

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[1170] On this topic, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[1171] This is Saba Mahmood citing Susan Harding's caution. in Saba Mahmood *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* (PUP: 2012). 34. A germane example might be found in Nir Shafir's criticism of Madeline Zilfi's treatment of

[1172] Noted by Audrey Truschke in her book on Aurangzeb (Stanford University Press: 2017) c.f. Interview by Tehelka, May 1, 2015.
<http://old.tehelka.com/seeds-of-partition-were-sown-when-aurangzeb-triumphed-over-dara-shikoh/>. Last Accessed: 5 November, 2021.

Hindu-Muslim compact."[1173] These a-historical and overly simplistic portrayals make Dara and Aurangzeb into caricatures; they become shadow puppets made to fight on the stage of today's religious and political debates when scholars like Audrey Truschke have demonstrated Aurangzeb's rule subverts several, though definitely not all, of the stereotypical narratives about his rule.[1174] Likewise, in his 1936 "Epic of Bedreddin son of the Qadi" (*Simavne Kadısı oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı*), an incarcerated Nazim Hikmet was able to find in Bedreddin a kindred, proto-marxist sentenced to death for his ideas, in spite of the historical record and Bedreddin's own writings not aligning with this narrative. Although they communicate a *wujūdī* worldview capable of seeing a God's-eye perspective of unity across religious divides, if one is to respect their "rhetorical sovereignty,"[1175] one must also take Bedreddin, Dārā Shikūh, and 'Abd al-Ghanī Nābulusī at their word when they tell us that they are Muslims (and members of the Hanafi *madhhab* at that), no matter how appealing a vision of interreligious unity and pluralism is in the face of overwhelming communal violence and religious nationalism.

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[1173] Cited in Supriya Gandhi, 3.

[1174] See Audrey Truschke's evaluation of Aurangzeb's administration of Hindu communities in her sixth chapter examines not just the destruction and desecration of non-Muslim religious sites but also his support and protection for them. Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King*, (Stanford UP, 2017), 78-89.

[1175] "Rhetorical sovereignty" is defined by Scott Lyons as the "inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" in Scott Richard Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 51(3), 2000, 449-450.

# GLOSSARY

Akbari — Refers to the school of thought surrounding Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240 c.e.) and is based on his epithet as the "Greatest Shaykh" (Shaykh al-Akbar).

*dhawq* — Literally "tasting;" refers to a direct experience of the divine.

*fanā'* — "Annihilation;" the experience of ego-death and a goal in Sufism.

*ḥulūl* — "Incarnationism" or "indwelling" of God in a created being.

*ittiḥād* — "Unity" between human and God.

*ibāha* — "Permissivism" or "libertinism;" often a pejorative description of certain Sufis and Muslims as heterodox.

*jazba* — "Divine attraction;" one who is in this state is said to be *mazjūb*.

*al-Ḥaqq* — "The Truth;" one of the divine names of God in Islam and of particular importance in Sufism.

*Kashf* — Literally "unveiling;" knowledge gleaned through mystical experience.

*ma'rifat* and *'irfān* — Literally "knowledge" but denoting mystical knowledge of God. In the modern Iranian context, *'irfān* can mean "mysticism" broadly.

*muwaḥḥid* — One who professes God's Oneness; also "unitarian."

neo-Sufism — A term for puritanical, *sharī'ah*-minded Sufism first coined by University of Chicago professor, and towering figure in Islamic Studies, Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 c.e.).

*Sālik* and *sulūk* — Spiritual "wayfarer" and spiritual "wayfaring" on the Sufi path.

*Sharī'ah* — Islamic Law.

*Sukr* — "Intoxication" or "drunkenness" either from alcohol or from an experience of spiritual ecstasy.

*ṣulḥ-i kull* — "Universal peace," a Persianate socio-political ideology promoting a *lasseiz-faire* attitude toward religious difference.

*taḥqīq* — Literally "verification" or "investigation;" in Sufism this refers to a form of knowledge gained through mystical experience and one who engages in it is referred to as a *muḥaqqiq* ("verifier" or "investigator).

*tanzīh* — God's "transcendence"

*tarīqah* — Literally "path;" this is the word used to designate a branch or order of Sufism such as the Naqshbandiyya.

*tashbīh* — God's "immanence;" or "resemblance" to His creation

*tawḥīd* — God's Oneness, a foundational belief in Islam.

*waḥdat al-wujūd* — The "Unity of Being / Existence;" derived largely from the commentarial tradition the Anadalusian Sufi and philosopher Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240 c.e.).

*waḥdat al-shuhūd* — "unity of witnessing;" a counter-doctrine to *waḥdat al-wujūd* often attributed to Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624 c.e.), but credit for first use in this respect goes to Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gīsu Darāz in the 15th century.

*ta'wīl* — Mystical exegesis, usually of, but not limited to the text of the Qur'an.

*Wilāyah* — "Sainthood" or "friendship" with God; this refers to the status of saints in Sufism. An individual possessing this is described as a *walī*.

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