

## Sufi Wisdom: Love as Philosophy

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[Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Ruzbihan Baqli by Kazuyo Murata \[State University of New York Press, 9781438462783\]](#)

Analyzes the place of beauty in the Sufi understanding of God, the world, and the human being through the writings of Sufi scholar and saint Ruzbihan Baqli.

According to Muhammad, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty." Yet, Islam is rarely associated with beauty, and today, a politicized Islam dominates many perceptions. This work tells a forgotten story of beauty in Islam through the writings of celebrated but little-studied Sufi scholar and saint Ruzbihan Baqli (1128–1209). Ruzbihan argued that the pursuit of beauty in the world and in oneself was the goal of Muslim life. One should become beautiful in imitation of God and reclaim the innate human nature created in God's beautiful image. Ruzbihan's theory of beauty is little known, largely because of his convoluted style and eccentric terminology in both Persian and Arabic.

"Murata opens up a vista on Islam that nobody talks about anymore: the Sufi vision of Islam as a religion of love and adoration of beauty. This is a fascinating book and an impressive achievement. I predict that it will remain the central work on the metaphysics of beauty in Sufism for decades to come." — Leonard Lewisohn, Senior Lecturer in Persian, University of Exeter

Excerpt: As Rūzbihān entered the `Atīq mosque through the bazaar, he overheard the following conversation between a woman and her daughter:

"My dear! I am giving you some advice. Cover your face and don't show it to everyone from the window of beauty—lest someone should fall into temptation because of your beauty! You hear my words—won't you take my advice?"

When Rūzbihān heard this conversation, he wanted to tell that woman: "Even if you advise her and try to prevent her from showing herself, she won't listen to you or take your advice, because she has beauty, and she won't be at rest with [her] beauty until it is joined by passionate love." —

Muhammad famously proclaimed, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty." In a world, however, where politicized, militant Islam dominates the news, it has become almost counterintuitive to associate beauty with Islam. Some may even wonder if there is any room for it in the religion. Edward Farley, a scholar of Christian theology, argues that this is in fact a common postmodern situation:

Beauty (the aesthetic) is not among the primary values or deep symbols of postmodern societies.... Certain features of postmodern society...tend to diminish beauty both as an important value and as an interpretive concept. Contributing to the postmodern effacement of beauty is a hermeneutic legacy, a tradition of interpretation, governed by dichotomies between the ethical and the aesthetic, religion (faith) and the aesthetic, and religion (faith) and pleasure. Accordingly, a contemporary aesthetic (or theological aesthetic) that seeks to restore beauty as important to human experience of religious faith faces the deconstructive task of exposing and breaking down these dichotomies. The displacement of the aesthetic by aesthetics (philosophy of the arts) in recent times has contributed to the suppression of beauty in hermeneutics, philosophy and criticism. A contemporary theological aesthetic also works in the setting of a centuries-long marginalization—in some cases suppression—of the aesthetic by Hebraic and Christian iconoclasm, asceticism and legalism.

It is not only theologians who bemoan the banishing of beauty from modern human life. For instance, the British poet and writer Kathleen Raine expresses this sentiment by way of quoting the poignant words of the Irish poet George William Russell (d.

1935): "One of the very first symptoms of the loss of the soul is the loss of the sense of beauty." A contemporary scholar of aesthetics, Elaine Scarry, published [On Beauty and Being Just](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) as a manifesto for protecting beauty from various postmodern attacks and reviving it in contemporary discourse. A more recent attempt at "recovering beauty" can be found in Corinne Saunders et al., [The Recovery of Beauty: Arts, Culture, and Medicine](#) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

It is not the purpose of the present study to reinstate "beauty" at the forefront of Islam, as Farley tries to do for Christianity. It aims, rather, to draw people's attention to a neglected dimension of Islamic thought, a dimension that was current especially among premodern Muslim intellectuals and literary figures. In their way of seeing things, beauty had a central place in the universe and human life. They saw God as beautiful in Himself and as creator of an inherently beautiful world, and they regarded the pursuit of beauty at all levels (e.g., material, ethical, spiritual, and divine) as part and parcel of the life of a good Muslim. My aim is to investigate the significance of beauty in Muslim conception of God, the world, and the human being taking as a case study the works of one prominent and prolific Sufi thinker, Rūzbihān Baqī (1128-1209), who presented some of the most fully developed discussions on the idea of beauty to be found in Muslim literature.

The questions to be addressed in this study include the following: Why did Rūzbihān talk so much about beauty? What is the significance of beauty for his understanding of God, the world, and the human being? How can God's beauty be contrasted with beauty in His creation—including that of humans, angels, and animals? What role does beauty have in the process of God's creation of the world and human beings? Does beauty have any soteriological significance? What determines the degree of beauty found in a thing or perceived by an individual? Does beauty have any role in the ideal way of life? Does the pursuit of beauty have any practical implications for the daily lives of Muslims? What exactly is the connection between love and beauty? Is there any Qur'ānic foundation for Rūzbihān's discussions of beauty (jamāl, husn, ihsan, etc.)? What key symbols and imagery does he employ in speaking about beauty? Overall,

what is the place of beauty in the intelligible structure of Rūzbihān's thought specifically and in the underlying worldview of traditional Muslim thinking generally?

Despite the refined nature of Rūzbihān's theory of beauty, his view on beauty—or for that matter, his thought in general—remains largely unexplored and unknown mostly because of his famously convoluted style. Moreover, even among scholarly publications on love and beauty in Sufism, there is nothing that focuses on the concept of beauty, as most discuss love and treat beauty in passing. This is the first book that is devoted to a systematic analysis of the concept of beauty as such in Sufism and that attempts a reconstruction of the worldview in which Rūzbihān and many other Sufis situate the idea of beauty.

In order to analyze the exact role and significance of beauty in Rūzbihān's thought, the following two steps must be taken: first to decipher his technical terminology and often cryptic and flowery language, and second to undertake a systematic does not refer to a unified historical movement, but functions rather as an ahistorical label for characterizing various authors from different times and places who happen to share a common tendency in thinking, though many of them may well have had historical connections.

Among the authors who frequently spoke about their love for beauty, Rūzbihān is especially worthy of attention. His works contain a substantial amount of discussion of beauty of all sorts, divine, human, and cosmic. Although key passages on the subject are scattered throughout his works, they are held together by an overall worldview and common themes. His discussions of beauty are multidimensional, encompassing the fields of theology, cosmology, cosmogony, anthropology, psychology, and prophetology. His firm training in the religious sciences—such as the Qur'ān, Hadīth, Arabic grammar, jurisprudence, and dogmatic theology (particularly Ash'arism)—adds depth to his discussions while allowing him to approach the notion of beauty from multiple angles.

### Rūzbihān's Life

Rūzbihān's life has been the subject of extensive discussion by several scholars, so I will only present the essentials here. The standard story is that he

was born in 1128 in the town of Pasā (also transcribed as Fasā or Basā in Arabic) in the Fārs province in southwestern Persia, near the ancient capitals of Pasargadae and Persepolis. He lived during the Seljuk period under the local Salghurid dynasty, whose capital was Shiraz, where Rūzbihān spent most of his adult life. Hence, he is called "Shīrāzī," though originally he was "Fasā'ī," that is, from Pasā.

Rūzbihān started having visions as early as at age three, and a vision at age fifteen left him in an ecstatic state for a year and a half, leading him to join up with Sufis. Paul Ballanfat argues that Rūzbihān was twenty-three years old when he first moved to Shiraz, where he commenced his formal studies in a Sufi convent established by Sirāj al-Dīn Mahmūd b. Khalīfa b. `Abd al-Salām b. Ahmad b. Sālba (d. 1165), from whom he is said to have received a *khirqā*, or a tattered cloak of initiation.

Thereafter, Rūzbihān led an ascetic life at Mount Bamū in the outskirts of Shiraz, where he remained for seven years. Not all the details of his life are clear, but at some point he undertook travels to various regions, such as Iraq, Hijāz (including Mecca), Syria, and possibly Alexandria. When he settled again in Shiraz, he established his own convent at the age of thirty-eight, in 1165. After spending some time in Pasā around 1174,<sup>18</sup> he went back to Shiraz and became established as a scholar-preacher in the grand mosque, known as Masjīd-i Atīq. He continued to instruct the public and his disciples until his passing in 1209.

### Rūzbihān's Works

Rūzbihān is known to have composed at least forty-five works in Arabic and Persian in diverse fields, such as Arabic grammar, Qur'ānic exegesis, Hadīth commentaries, jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence, dogmatic theology (*kalam*), and Sufism. The last category has the greatest number of works, thirty-one, some of which are extant in print or in manuscript form, and some of which are lost.<sup>20</sup> The present study draws on works from four of these categories, though the perspective in all of these works is Sufi: Qur'ānic exegesis ( 'Ara 'is al-bayan ft haqā'iq al-qur'ān), Hadīth commentary (al-Maknūn fī haqā'iq al-kalim al-nabawīyya), dogmatic theology (Masalik al-tawhīd), and Sufism

(`Abhar al-`āshiqān, Mashrab al-arwāh, Ghalatāt al-sālikīn,

Kitab al-ighana, Kashf al-asrar, Lawami` al-tawhīd, Mantiq al-asrar, Risalat al-quds, Sayr al-arwāh, Sharh-i shathiyyāt). I pay particular attention to works that have not received much scholarly attention, either because they are relatively new publications, were written in Persian rather than Arabic, or were simply too obscure to read. These include `Arā'is al-bayān, which had been available in an Indian lithograph edition but was newly printed by Dār al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyya in Beirut in 2008; al-Maknūn fi haqā'iq al-kalim al-nabazviyya (pub

lished in Iran in 2002); Masalik al-tazvīd (edited by Ballanfat in 1998; unstudied except for a brief discussion by the editor), `Abhar al-`āshiqān (two editions by Mu`In and Corbin and by Nūrbakhsh have been available for decades but have received little scholarly attention in the West, perhaps because of the high-flown Persian style), and Mashrab al-arwāh (published in 1973 but little studied until now).

Among these works, perhaps the most systematic in presentation is Mashrab al-arwāh, in which Rūzbihān explains the journey of human spirits from God to the world and back to God through a series of 1,001 stations. Systematic in a different way is his Masalik al-tawhīd, which is his sole extant work in dogmatic theology. He presents key theological terms in a rigid structure following the standard language in kalām. This is in good contrast to the language he uses in his other works, which is rather cryptic, allusive, ambiguous, and literary. His Qur'ān commentary follows a standard structure of tafstr works, which is to say that he cites clusters of verses and comments on them from the first chapter to the last, though it is a thoroughly Sufi work.

### Previous Scholarship on Rūzbihān

Much of the modern scholarship on Rūzbihān in the early twentieth century reflects the secondary interest of scholars working on figures preceding Rūzbihān. The most prominent example is the work of Louis Massignon, the first Western scholar to pay attention to Rūzbihān's writings. He tried to reconstruct the lost corpus of the famous Sufi martyr

al-Hallāj (d. 920) by salvaging snippets of his sayings quoted by Rūzbihān. A few scholars then took an interest in reconstructing Rūzbihān's life—Vladimir Ivanow (1928), followed by Muhammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh (1969) and Paul Nwyia (1970).

The first scholar to focus on the content of Rūzbihān's thought was Henry Corbin, who edited two of Rūzbihān's Persian works, Abhar al-`āshiqān (1958)<sup>26</sup> and Sharh-i shathiyyāt (1966). He also devoted half of his major work, En Islam ira'nien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques, vol. III, Les fidèles d'amour: Shī`isme et soufisme (1972), to a textual analysis of three of Rūzbihān's works, namely Kitab al-ighana, Kashf al-asrar, and Abhar al-`āshiqān. As suggested by the title of this volume, Les fidèles d'amour, which is Corbin's translation of Abhar al-`āshiqān (literally, "The Jasmine of Passionate Lovers"), Corbin devoted most of his study to this treatise by Rūzbihān. Forty years after the publication of his book, it remains the most in-depth analysis of Rūzbihān's overall thought.

Also active around the same time as Corbin was the Turkish scholar Nazif Hoca, who edited two of Rūzbihān's Arabic works, Kashf al-asrar (1971) and Mashrab al-arzvāh (1974). In Iran, Jawād Nūrbakhsh published an improved edition of `Abhar al-`āshiqān based on a newly discovered manuscript. He also published two short Persian treatises by Rūzbihān and the hagiography written by his great-grandson, Sharaf al Dīn Rūzbihān Thānī, which had also been published by Dānishpazhūh.

Annemarie Schimmel was perhaps the first to draw English readers' attention to Rūzbihān's writings through her works on Persian poetry, even though she never wrote a separate article or book on Rūzbihān himself. Her interest in Rūzbihān was carried on by her former student, Carl Ernst, who became the first major scholar to publish on Rūzbihān in English. His [Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism](#) (Richmond: Curzon, 1996) is still the only monograph on him. In it, Ernst focuses on the history of the Rūzbihāniyya order from its formation to its gradual institutionalization, the history of Rūzbihān's family, and an analysis of the "inner structure of

sainthood," in which he mainly treats Rūzbihān's visionary experiences. Ernst's earlier work, [Words of Ecstasy in Sufism](#) (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), devoted a section to the ecstatic aspect of Rūzbihāri's writings. He also translated *Kashf al-asrar* in 1997. Firoozeh Papan-Matin recently published a critical edition of [Kashf al-asrār](#) (Leiden: Brill 2006).

The scholar who has been most prolific in writing about Rūzbihān in recent years is Paul Ballanfat, who has edited a number of Rūzbihāri's Arabic works and translated his visionary diary, *Kashf al-asrar*, into French. In his long French introduction to the *Quatre traités inédits de Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī*, Ballanfat pays close attention to two things: the historical reconstruction of Rūzbihān's biography and an analysis of what he considers to be the key features of Rūzbihān's thought. Ballanfat's attempt at reconstructing Rūzbihāri's life is probably the most extensive among all existing biographical work. <>

[Ahmad al-Ghazali, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love](#) by Joseph E. B. Lumbard [SUNY Series in Islam, State University of New York Press, 9781438459646]

Discusses the work of a central, but poorly understood, figure in the development of Persian Sufism, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī.

The teachings of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī changed the course of Persian Sufism forever, paving the way for luminaries such as Rūmī, Aṭṭār, and Ḥāfiẓ. Yet he remains a poorly understood thinker, with many treatises incorrectly attributed to him and conflicting accounts in the historiographical literature. This work provides the first examination of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and his work in Western scholarly literature. Joseph E. B. Lumbard seeks to ascertain the authenticity of works attributed to this author, trace the development of the dominant trends in the biographical literature, and reconstruct the life and times of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī with particular attention to his relationship with his more famous brother, Abū Hamid al-Ghazālī. Lumbard's findings revolutionize our understanding of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's writings, allowing for focus on his central teachings regarding Divine Love and the remembrance of God.

Excerpt: The name al-Ghazālī rings through the annals of Islamic intellectual history. Many who know little about the Islamic tradition have heard of al-Ghazālī, and most whose professional lives are dedicated to the study of Islam, especially its intellectual sciences, have encountered this name in one form or another. For the vast majority, it is the name of Imām Abu Hāmid Muhammad b.

Muhammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) with which they are familiar. Imām Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī had an enduring influence on philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence that forever changed the course of these disciplines. Muslims of different eras and varying ethnicities have seen in his writings the tools for a revival of the basic piety of Muslim life.<sup>1</sup> Given the extent of his influence, Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī is arguably the most eminent intellectual in Islamic history. All of the attention received by Imam Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī has, however, overshadowed the contributions of his younger brother, Shaykh Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126), who, as an influential Sufi Shaykh and important figure in the early development of Persian Sufi literature, is more renowned for his spiritual attainment and instruction than for his achievements in the religious sciences.

### Why Study Ahmad al-Ghazālī?

Ahmad al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih* (Inspirations) is one of the earliest extant Persian treatises to be written on Sufism, preceded only by the *Sharh-i ta'arruf li-madhab-i taawwuf* (Explanation of the Introduction to the Sufi Way) of Ismā'īl b. Muhammad al-Mustamli (d. 434/1042-3), the *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Unveiling of the Veiled) of `Alī b. `Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077), and several works of Khwajah `Abdallāh Ansārī (d. 481/1089). There is clear evidence that Sufism was discussed extensively in Persian before these treatises. Many scholars whose native tongue was Persian, such as Abu `Abd ar-Rahmān as-Sulami (d. 412/1021), Abu Sa`id b. Abi'l-Khayr (d. 440/1049), and Abu'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), were among the most influential Sufis before Ahmad al-Ghazālī. But just as Arabic was at this time the only language in which Islamic law and theology were presented, so too did it dominate the textual presentation of Sufism. It was, however, only a matter of time before the Persians availed

themselves of the natural poetic nature of their language to express the subtlest of Islamic teachings. As William Chittick observes, "Persian pulls God's beauty into the world on the wings of angels. Persian poetry, which began its great flowering in the eleventh century, shines forth with this angelic presence." Along with `Abdallāh Ansārī a generation earlier, and his younger contemporaries Sanā'ī of Ghaznah (d. 525/1131), Ahmad b. Mansur as-Sam`ānī (d. 534/1140), author of *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā al-malik al-fattāḥ* (The Repose of Spirits Regarding the Exposition of the Names of the Conquering King), and Rashid ad-Dīn al-Maybudī (fl. sixth/ twelfth century), author of the ten-volume Quran commentary, *Kashf al-asrār wa `uddat al-abrār* (The Unveiling of Secrets and the Provision of the Pious), Ahmad al-Ghazālī stands at the forefront of the Persian Sufi tradition.

Written in the first decade of the sixth Islamic century, the *Sawmih* is the first recorded treatise in the history of Islam to present a full metaphysics of love, in which love is seen as the ultimate reality from which all else derives and all that derives from it is seen as an intricate play between lover and beloved, who are themselves laid to naught before love.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Leonard Lewisohn refers to the *Sawānih* as "the founding text of the School of Love in Sufism and the tradition of love poetry in Persian," and Leili Anvar affirms that the *Sawānih* is "justly considered as the founding text of the School of Love in Sufism and the tradition of love poetry in Persian." The centrality of love for the Sufi way was in many ways inaugurated a generation before al-Ghazālī in the works of `Abdallāh Ansārī, (*Chihil u du fasl*), *Intimate Discourses* (*Munājāt*), and *Treatise on Love* (*Mahabbat-nāma*). Nonetheless, the manner in which love can also be envisioned as the ultimate origin of all that exists is stated more directly in the *Sawānih*.<sup>6</sup> While the precise origins of this complete metaphysics of love may never be known, what is clear is that Ahmad al-Ghazālī was among the generation of authors who inaugurated the Persian Sufi literary tradition as we know it today. As such leading scholars of this tradition continue to declare, Ahmad al-Ghazālī is "one of the greatest expositors in Islam of the meaning of love."

## Initiatic Influence

In addition to his literary influence, Ahmad al-Ghazālī is said to have received many disciples; among those mentioned are influential political figures such as the Saljūq leader Mughīth ad-Dīn al-Mahmūd (r. 511-525/1118-1131), who ruled Iraq and western Persia, and his brother Ahmad Sanjar (r. 513-552/1119-1157), who ruled Khurāsān and northern Persia. But Ahmad al-Ghazālī's influence as a Sufi shaykh is more important for the initiatic chains (*silsilahs*) of the Sufi orders. As regards the initiatic history of Sufism, Shaykh Diyā' ad-Dīn Abu'n-Najīb as-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1186) is his most important disciple.<sup>1</sup> It is not known just how much contact al-Ghazālī had with as-Suhrawardī, but it appears that al-Ghazālī held him in high regard and appointed him as his representative (*khalīfah*) while they were together in Isfahān. Abu'n-Najīb's most famous disciple is his nephew Aba Hafs `Umar as-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), author of the famous *`Awārif al-ma`ārif* (*Gifts of the Gnostics*), which is employed as a manual of Sufi practice to this day, and the founder of the Suhrawardiyyah Sufi order, which spread throughout the Muslim world.<sup>10</sup> The Suhrawardiyyah gave rise to other orders such as the Zayniyyah, which spread throughout the Ottoman Empire among other places and still exists in Turkey. Along with the Chishtiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, and Qādiriyyah, the Suhrawardiyyah is one of the most influential orders in the history of India and Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> While it has died out in most parts of the Arab world, the Suhrawardiyyah is still active in Iraq and Syria.

Three of Abu'n-Najīb as-Suhrawardī's disciples, Ismā'īl al-Qasri (d. 589/1193), 'Ammar b. Yāsir al-Bidlīsī (d. 582/1186), and Rūzbihān al-Wazzān al-Misri (d. 584/1188), are said to have collaborated in the spiritual development of the eponymous founder of the Kubrawiyyah Sufi order, Najm ad-Dīn Kubra (d. 618/1221). This order spread throughout the region of Khwārazm into Persia, Afghanistan, India, and China. The Kubrawiyyah still exists with *klu nqāhs* in present day Iran, though its influence has diminished substantially. Among the Sufi orders that issued from the Kubrawiyyah are the Firdawsīyyah, the Hamadaniyyah, and the Ya`qūbiyyah, all of which

still exist in India, as well as the Dhahabiyyah in Iran.

Among the later luminaries of the Kubrawiyyah are such figures as Najm ad-Din Dāya Rāzī (d. 654/1256), who either revised or extended Kubra's Quran commentary, *ʿAyn al-hayāt* (The Spring of Life), which goes to the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of Sarah 51 (adh-Dhāriyāt) under the title of *Bahr al-haqāʾiq* (The Ocean of Realities). Rāzī also wrote *Mirsād al-ʿibād min al-mabdaʾ ilaʾl-maʿad* (The Path of God's Bondsmen from the Beginning to the Return), an influential Persian Sufi treatise that is still in use both in Iran and India as a guide for Sufi adepts. The *ʿAyn al-hayāt* was later completed from Sarah 52 (at-Tur) under the title *Najm al-Qurʾan* (The Star of the Quran) by another renowned shaykh of the Kubrawiyyah order, *ʿAlaʾ ad-Dawlah as-Simnānī* (d. 736/1336), who had many disciples in his *kliānqāh* outside of Simnan, two hundred kilometers east of Tehran, and is known for opposing Ibn al-ʿArabi's doctrine of the oneness of being (*wandāt al-wujud*) and proposing a perspective in which is found the germ of the oneness of witnessing (*wandāt ashshuhad*),<sup>18</sup> which later became prevalent among the *Mujaddidī* branch of the *Naqshbandiyyah* Sufi order.

Another disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazali who is important for the initiatic history of Sufism is Abu'l-Fadl al-Baghdadi (d. 550/1155). One *silsilah* of the *Niʿmatallāhī* order founded by Shah *Niʿmat Allah Wall* (d. 834/1331) comes seven generations through al-Baghdādī. This order has had great influence in Turkey and continues to have new waves of influence in the growing Muslim communities of Europe and America. Although the historical validity of this *silsilah* cannot be substantiated, it nonetheless demonstrates that later adherents of the *Niʿmatallāhī* order recognized the spiritual authority of both Ahmad al-Ghazali and al-Baghdādī.

The only *silsilah* given by Shams ad-Din Aflākī (d. 761 /1360) in his *Manaqib al-ʿārifīn* (The Feats of the Knowers of God) for the *Mavlavī* Sufi order founded by Jalal ad-Din Rūmī (d. 672/1123) records Ahmad al-Ghazali as the shaykh of Ahmad Khatibi al-Balkhi (d. 516/1123), upon whom he conferred the practice of remembrance (*dhikr*). Balkhi in turn conferred the *dhikr* upon Shams al-

*Aʾimma as-Sarakhsi* (d. 571 /1175), who was the Shaykh of Rūmī's father, Baba ad-Din Walad (d. 628/1231). Burhan ad-Din at-Tirmidhī (d. 638/1240) was then the next Shaykh in this line, and was followed by Jalal ad-Din Rumi. That later followers of the *Mavlavī* order recognized Ahmad al-Ghazālī's spiritual authority is demonstrated by a passage attributed to Jalal ad-Din Rūmī:

Imām Muhammad Ghazālī, may God have mercy on him, has dived into the ocean of the universe, attained to a world of dominion, and unfurled the banner of knowledge. The whole world follows him and he has become a scholar of all the worlds. Still ... If he had one iota of love (*ʿishq*) like Ahmad Ghazali, it would have been better, and he would have made known the secret of Muhammadan intimacy the way Ahmad did. In the whole world, there is no teacher, no spiritual guide, and no unifier like love.

Despite the presence of Ahmad al-Ghazālī in Rūmī's *silsilah* and the respect he is accorded, he does not appear to have been as much of a direct literary influence upon Rūmī as was Hakim Sanāʾī, whose *Iladīqat al-haqīqah* (Garden of Reality) was the prototype for Rūmī's *Mat/mawī*. Aflākī reports that Rumi said of the *Iladīqat al-haqīqah*, "By God this is more binding [than the Quran] because the outer form of the Koran is analogous to yoghurt, whereas these higher contents are its butter and cream." Of the spiritual efficacy of Sanāʾī's writings, Aflākī reports that Rūmī said, "Whoever reads the words of Sanāʾī in absolute earnestness will become cognizant of the secret of the radiance (*sana*) of our words." Whereas Ahmad al-Ghazali's *Sawānih* has had an extensive literary influence and he is accorded initiatic influence through several Sufi orders (*turuq*), Sanāʾī's influence has come only through his writings.

### Literary Influence

Given the importance of Sanāʾī and the still unexamined influence of figures such as Samʿānī and Maybudī, the importance of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih* for the history of Persian literature is a matter of debate. Like his younger contemporaries Samʿānī and Maybudī, he receives almost no mention in either Jan Rypka's [History of Iranian Literature](#) or in E.G. Browns [A Literary History of](#)

[Persia](#). This omission stands in stark contrast to Nasrallah Pourjavady's assertion that "the greatest Iranian Sufis and gnostics after him came under the influence of the special teaching which appeared from his beliefs about love ('ishq) and his manner of expression." Although it might be more accurate to say that Ahmad al-Ghazali was a pivotal figure among a generation of authors that forever changed the course of Persian Sufi literature, he nonetheless forms a crucial link in what some scholars have called "the path of love" or "the school of love." This "school" is not a direct succession of Sufi initiates marked by a definitive spiritual genealogy like the Sufi orders (tariqahs) discussed above, but rather designates a significant trend within Sufi thought in which all aspects of creation and spiritual aspiration are presented in an allusive imaginal language fired by love for God. As Omid Safi observes, "The Path of Love may be described as a loosely affiliated group of Sufi mystics and poets who throughout the centuries have propagated a highly nuanced teaching focused on passionate love ('ishq)." `Abdallāh Ansārī, Ahmad al Ghazālī, Ahmad Sam'ānī, Hakim Sanā'ī, and Maybudī are among the first to have written in this vein.

The most direct evidence of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's literary influence can be found in the commentaries on the *Sawānih* written in both Persia and India, as well as the many extant manuscripts of the *Sawānih*. His theory of love that presents all the stages of the spiritual path as an interplay between love, the lover, and the beloved became central to Persian Sufism in later generations, while his literary style, blending poetry and prose in one seamless narrative, was employed in many later Sufi treatises. Given the degree to which Ahmad al-Ghazālī's literary style and teachings are reflected in later Sufism, his influence must be reconsidered. It is, however, a subject that can be done justice only through extensive comparative textual analysis of the entire Persian Sufi tradition. Here I will touch on some of the most important traces.

As the goal of al-Ghazālī's writings is to facilitate traveling the spiritual path, his literary influence is intrinsically bound to his perceived spiritual and initiatic influence. All of his extant Persian writings are in fact addressed to his disciples. He never

writes as a scholar of love or as a theoretician attempting to dissect love with the rational faculties; rather, his is an attempt to guide and encourage others who are on the path, helping them realize the Ultimate Reality that he considers to be inexpressible. The first traces of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's literary influence are found in the works of his disciple `Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 526/1131), to whom al-Ghazālī addressed his Persian treatise `Ayniyah and perhaps nine other letters. Hamadānī's letters and his *Tamhīdāt* take up many of the same themes expressed in al-Ghazālī's writings, such as the sincerity of Satan, the limitations of religious law, and the all-encompassing nature of Love. In many instances, the *Tamhīdāt* can be read as a commentary that expands on the central themes of the *Sawānih*. In particular, the sixth chapter, "The Reality and States of Love," examines both the written and unexpressed dimensions of al-Ghazālī's teachings. The *Tamhīdāt* has had an extensive influence on the Persian and Indian Sufi traditions and has been the subject of several commentaries. `Ayn al-Qudāt instructed many students, teaching seven or eight sessions a day, and had many disciples, but he is not recorded in any major silsilahs.

In addition to his influence on `Ayn al-Qudāt, al-Ghazālī likely had a continued influence on the aforementioned writings of both the Kubrawiyyah and Suhrawardiyyah orders. Among those whom Pourjavady mentions are Abu'n-Najīb as-Suhrawardī and Abu Hafṣ 'Umar as-Suhrawardī, as well as Najm ad-Din Rāzī. But such influence is not as evident as that which he had on the writings of Farīd ad-Din 'Attar (d. 617/1220) and Fakhr ad-Din 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289). The latter's *Lama 'at* (Divine Flashes) is indebted to al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih* for both its style and content. `Irāqī expresses a subtle metaphysics that gives an intellectual architecture to the question of love in Sufi thought. As `Irāqī writes in the beginning of the *Lama 'at*, it is intended to be "a few words explaining the levels of love in the tradition of the *Sawānih*, in tune with the voice of each spiritual state as it passes." Like al-Ghazali, Irāqī bases the entirety of his metaphysical discourse on the idea that "the derivation of the lover and the beloved is from Love,"<sup>34</sup> and sees all of reality as an unfolding of

Love wherein none but Love is the lover or the beloved. Like al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih*, Irāqī's *Lama 'at* is both a work of art and a sublime metaphysical treatise. The *Lama 'at* continues to be regarded as a treasure of Persian Sufism, and 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī's (d. 833/1477) commentary on it, *Ashi 'at al-Lama 'at* (*Rays of the Flashes*), is still used as an introductory text for the study of the science of 'irfān (recognition) in Iran.

Ahmad al Ghazālī's *Dastān-i Murghan* (Ar. *Risalat at-tayr*; *The Treatise of the Birds*) most likely provided the outline for 'Attar's famous *Man fiq at-tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*). Both works begin with a gathering of the birds, which, despite their differences, recognize their mutual need for a sovereign and set out to find one; for, as the birds say in *Dastān-i Murghan*, "If the shadow of the King's majesty is not upon our heads, we will not be secure from the enemy." Both works describe a journey of many trials by which the birds find their sovereign, the Simurgh. But being of much greater breadth, *Attar's Mantiq at-tayr* deals with the theme of spiritual wayfaring in greater detail. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes:

He [*Attar*] uses the Ghazzalean theme of suffering through which the birds are finally able to enter the court of the celestial King. But he passes beyond that stage through the highest initiatic station whereby the self becomes annihilated and rises in subsistence in the Self, whereby each bird is able to realize who he is and finally to know him-Self, for did not the Blessed Prophet state, "He who knows himself knows his Lord"? In gaining a vision of the Simurgh, the birds not only encounter the beauty of Her Presence, but also see themselves as they really are, mirrored in the Self which is the Self of every Self.

Like Rūmī, Irāqī and 'Attar are both said to have received initiations that flowed from the initiatic chains attributed to Ahmad al-Ghazālī's disciples. 'Attar was a disciple of Majd ad-Din al-Baghdadi (d. 616/1219), a disciple of Najm ad-Din Kubrā, and Irāqī was a close disciple of Bahā' ad-Din Zakariyya (d. 659/1262), a disciple of Abu Hafṣ 'Umar as-Suhrawardī.

As Persian was the language of discourse for educated Muslims in India until the colonial period,

the influence of the Persian masters of love in the subcontinent has been extensive. Among the many masters who are indebted to Ahmad al-Ghazālī and his pupil 'Ayn al-Qudāt are Nizām ad-Din Awliyā (d. 1325), Nair ad-Din Chiragh-i Dihli (d. 757/1356), Burhan ad-Din Gharib (d. 738/1337), Rukn ad-Din Kashani (d. after 738/1337), and Gīsū Daraz (d. 825/1422),<sup>42</sup> the last of whom is reported to have taught the *Sawānih* and to have compared his own treatise, *Ilāzā'ir al-Quds*. When the Sufi poet, musician, and scholar Amir Khusraw (d. 1325) catalogued the nine literary styles of his day, the first that he listed was the style of the Sufis, for which he names two varieties. The first variety is that of "the people of gravity and stations," and the second variety is that of "the people of states," for which he gives the works of Ahmad Ghazālī and 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadani as examples. In addition, the Mughal prince Dara Shikuh (d. 1659) states that his treatise *Ilaqq numa* should explain all of the wisdom from the great writings on the subject, among which he lists the *Sawānih*, Ibn al-'Arabi's *Furs al-hikam* and *Futuhāt al-Makiyyah*, Irāqī's *Lama'āt*, and Jāmī's *Lawāmi* and *Lawā'ih*.<sup>45</sup> Such references demonstrate the high regard in which the *Sawānih* was held in the Indian subcontinent. Nonetheless, despite the respect accorded to the *Sawānih*, the *Tamhidat* of 'Ayn al-Qudāt played a more prominent role in Indian Sufism.

### Studies on Ahmad al-Ghazālī

Despite Ahmad al-Ghazālī's extensive influence, little information was available in the scholarly literature until 1979. This oversight was amended by the appearance of three monographs in Persian:

*Majm-rāh-ye āthār-i fārsī-ye Ahmad Ghazali* (Compendium of the Persian Works of Ahmad Ghazālī) by Ahmad Mujahid, *Sultan-i tariqat* (The Master of Sufi Paths) by Nasrollah Pourjavady, both in 1979, and *Āyāt-i husn va-'ishq* (Signs of Beauty and Love) by Hishmatallah Riyādī in 1989. The studies by Mujahid and Pourjavady made solid contributions to the study of Persian Sufism in general and of Ahmad al-Ghazālī in particular. Mujahid presented critical editions of all the extant Persian writings attributed to Ahmad al-Ghazālī. His extensive introduction documents the majority of

the available resources for the life and work of Ahmad al-Ghazālī and thus proves to be an invaluable resource. But Mujahid provides no analysis of either the literary works or of the historical information. For this one must look to Pourjavady, who provides a biography of Ahmad al-Ghazālī and then examines his teachings. Pourjavady's insightful study does not, however, analyze the historical accuracy of the available biographical information, and his examination of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's teachings includes *Bahr al-haqīqah* (The Ocean of Realities) and *Bawariq al-ilmā' fi'r-radd 'ala man yuharrimu's-samā' ` bi'l-ijma'* (Glimmers of Allusion in Response to Those who Forbid Sufi Music), works whose attribution to Ahmad al-Ghazālī has since been disproves. As Pourjavady himself has observed, this significantly undermines the value of the analyses in Sultan-itariqāt Riyādī's study shows a great appreciation for Ahmad al-Ghazālī, but seems to borrow from Mujahid and Pourjavady more than build on them. The works of Mujahid and Pourjavady provide a solid foundation for studies of Ahmad al-Ghazālī, and this study is greatly indebted to them.

Ahmad al-Ghazālī's introduction to Western audiences came in 1936 through James Robson's translation of *Bawariq al-ilmā'`,* a treatise that defends the use of music in Sufi gatherings and provides guidance for its implementation. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 1, the attribution of this text to Ahmad al-Ghazālī is erroneous. Many scholars still believe him to be the author of this work and thus count him among the chief defenders of Sufi music (*ṣamā' `*). The inclusion of this text in his oeuvre has led to misunderstandings about Ahmad al-Ghazālī that persist to this day.

Aside from a minor article by Helmut Ritter in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, it was not until almost forty years later that Ahmad al-Ghazālī was reintroduced to Western audiences through the translation of his *Sawānih* into German by Richard Gramlich. The *Sawānih* was translated into German a second time by Gisela Wendt two years later. It was then introduced to the English-speaking public through a translation by Nasrollah Pourjavady published in 1986. Ahmad al-Ghazālī's most substantial Arabic treatise, *at-Tajrīd fi kalimat at-tawlūd* (Abstract Regarding the Expression of Testifying to Unity), was translated into German by

Gramlich in 1983 and into French by Muhammad ad-Dahbi in 1995. Only the translations of the *Sawānih* by Gramlich and Pourjavady provide substantial introductory material, but neither is intended to be comprehensive. Pourjavady also provides a brief insightful commentary for the *Sawānih* to accompany his translation.

### The Goal of this Book

This study provides the first full examination of the life and work of Ahmad al-Ghazālī in any European language. It builds on the foundations established by Mujahid and Pourjavady, but adds to their invaluable contributions by fully ascertaining the authenticity of works attributed to Ahmad al-Ghazālī and critically evaluating the biographical literature regarding him. The first chapter provides an extensive analysis of all extant primary-source material on Ahmad al-Ghazālī. It examines the Arabic and Persian sources for his life and teachings, both the works attributed to him and the writings about him in the extensive Islamic biographical tradition. The authenticity of works attributed to him is examined. Then the biographical traditions are evaluated to see which authors provide new material, which authors borrow from previous authors, what are the dominant ideological trends in the biographical presentation of Ahmad al-Ghazālī, and how these trends change over time, moving from biography to hagiography. Examined in this light, many of the accounts regarding Ahmad al-Ghazālī appear to be hagiographical embellishments that developed over time. When one accounts for the sources, motivations, and historicity of these accounts, almost one hundred pages of extant biographical material boils down to less than two pages of raw historical data.

Chapter 2 draws on the biographical sources and other primary historical sources to reconstruct the life and times of Ahmad al-Ghazālī in the early Saljuq period. The biographies of Ahmad al-Ghazālī in and of themselves do not provide enough information to thoroughly reconstruct his life. But through an examination of the period in which he lived and references to his brother's life in the biographical literature, we can gain important insights into this period of Saljuq history and the nature of his position within it. This was a period of great intellectual fervor in all of the Islamic

sciences. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī came to be a central figure in several substantial developments in jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (kalam). His intellectual gifts brought him favor in the court, and he advanced to the highest academic position in the land as the head of the Nizāmiyyah madrasah (college). Ahmad al-Ghazālī also found favor at court. He too was actively engaged in many different aspects of the thriving intellectual culture of the era and also attained a high degree of proficiency in fiqh and kalām. But from an early age, his primary focus was Sufism.

The central focus of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's life and teachings is the Sufi path, and he spent all of his adult life engaged in devotional and spiritual exercises. Nonetheless, this aspect of his teachings has not been discussed in any of the secondary literature devoted to him. Chapter 3 endeavors to reconstruct this practice. Ahmad al-Ghazālī did not provide any explicit Sufi manuals in the manner of some of his spiritual descendants. Nonetheless, his Arabic treatise *at-Tajrīd fī kalimat at-tawhid* provides an extended discussion that portrays the spiritual path as various stages and degrees of remembrance and discusses the process whereby one becomes ever more immersed in dhikr, remembrance or invocation. For al-Ghazālī, as for most Sufis before and after him, dhikr is the central axis of Sufi life and practice. He envisions three way stations for the spiritual traveler: the first is the world of annihilation (*fanā'*) wherein one's blameworthy attributes predominate and one should invoke "No god, but God." The second way station is the world of attraction (*jadhabīyyah*) wherein one's praiseworthy attributes predominate and one should invoke the name Allah. In the third way station, the world of possession (*qabd*), praiseworthy attributes have vanquished blameworthy attributes and one invokes *Huwa*, *Huwa* (He, He), subsisting in God alone. This chapter also draws on al-Ghazālī's occasional advice scattered throughout his writings and sessions (*majālis*), as well as the works of his contemporaries and his spiritual descendants in order to flesh out the nature of his spiritual practice. The majority of his extant writings appear to come from the later period of his life when he was already an established Sufi shaykh, and the biographical tradition provides only vague allusions to his spiritual practice. It is therefore

difficult to trace the development of these practices over time. But it is clear that some form of supererogatory spiritual practice played a central role in al-Ghazālī's life from an early age.

The final two chapters turn from the life and practice of Ahmad al-Ghazālī to his central teachings, especially his understanding of love (*'ishq*). After briefly examining his controversial teachings regarding Satan, Chapter 4, "The Roots of al-Ghazālī's Teachings" provides an in-depth examination of the historical development of the Sufi understanding of love and the place of al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih* within it. A broad examination of the various Sufi teachings regarding love before the *Sawānih* demonstrates that although traces of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's ideas regarding love can be found in the Sufi tradition preceding him, there is no text before the *Sawānih* that expresses a full metaphysics of love in which all aspects of creation are presented as manifestations of Love and all phases of spiritual wayfaring are defined in relation to Love.

Chapter 5 delves into the ocean of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's *Sawānih*. In his writings and sermons, the Shaykh is always aware of the shortcomings inherent in language—because a signifier can never be the same as that which it signifies. This chapter thus begins by examining his attitude toward the medium he must use to convey his message. It first surveys his allusions to the relativity of language in the *Sawānih* and in the recorded public sessions (*majālis*) that he held in Baghdad. Then it discusses his relation to the secular literary tradition, particularly the *'udhrī ghazal* (longing love) and the *khamriyyah* (wine) traditions, arguing that, like many Sufis before and after him, Ahmad al-Ghazālī borrowed themes from these traditions but transferred them to a Sufi context. This is followed by a brief examination of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's use of Quran, hadith, and poetry as a means to incite his audience to seek love and recognition (*'irfān*). The last half of the chapter is devoted to a close reading of the teachings of love in the *Sawānih*. It begins by considering the central terms for Ahmad al-Ghazālī's discussion of love, *'ishq*, *ruh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), and *husn* (beauty). Then it examines the stages of spiritual wayfaring whereby the heart is brought to complete maturity

until it is immersed in the ocean of love, beyond duality, separation, and union.

The end beyond all ends and the beginning before all beginnings is that which Shaykh Ahmad al-Ghazālī strived to reach his entire life and to which he hoped to help others attain through his writings, sermons, and personal counsel. In the *Sawānih* he accomplishes this task through an allusive discussion of love, beauty, the spirit, and the heart. In *at-Tajrīd fi kalimat at-tawīd* he focuses upon dhikr and its progressive penetration through the heart and the spirit to the inmost core. In his *Majālis* he enjoins dhikr but concentrates more on recognition (*irfān*) as a means of spiritual attainment. These various ways of envisaging the Sufi path do not necessarily represent developments or changes in Ahmad al-Ghazālī's perspective. Rather, they are different ways of expressing the same fundamental understanding of reality and the means of attaining it and of trying to convey some small taste of it to others in order to inspire them to wayfare upon the Sufi path. Like most Sufis of the medieval period, Ahmad al-Ghazālī maintained that observance of Shariah was not complete without realization of *haqīqah* (reality) and that realization of *haqīqah* must be grounded in observance of Shariah. Unlike his more sober sibling, he left the definition of the particulars of Shariah to others, focusing instead on the *haqīqah* and the *tarīqah* through which the *haqīqah* can be attained. As such, the overall purpose of his extant writings is spiritual guidance.

For over nine hundred years, Ahmad al-Ghazālī's words have been regarded by seekers in the Persianate world, especially Iran and India, as a summons to the spiritual path. In this small way, Ahmad al-Ghazālī achieved at least one of his goals. The nature of his writings implies to many Sufi practitioners that he had also attained the other goal—immersion in the reality of Love that fully transcends the duality of lover and beloved. While he employs various modes of expressing Sufi teachings, his unique and lasting contribution lies in the discussion of love in the *Sawānih*. Were it not for this text, Ahmad al-Ghazālī's contributions to the Sufi tradition might not merit extensive investigation, and he would remain almost completely in the shadow of his older brother. His role as a Sufi Shaykh and his place within several Sufi silsilahs would remain of importance for the

study of various Sufi orders. But in the absence of the *Sawānih*, his place in Sufi silsilahs might also be diminished, since it was often through the teaching of this seminal text that he came to be revered by later generations in the Persianate world. When the *Sawānih* is taken into consideration, Ahmad al-Ghazālī emerges as a highly original thinker, whose teachings regarding love, though mostly condensed within a single brief text, altered the course of Persian Sufi literature.

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the *Sawānih* marks a new phase in discussions of love within the Sufi tradition. As a result of this new formulation, "Ahmad al-Ghazālī is today generally regarded as the " foremost metaphysician of love in the Sufi tradition." The *Sawānih* is one of several Persian texts that emerge in the first quarter of the sixth/twelfth century, the others being the *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* of Sam 'am Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrar*, and 'Ayn al-Qudāt's *Tamhīdāt*. Love as the focus of Sufi discourse and the goal of spiritual attainment had existed in various forms expressed by many Sufis before these texts emerged. But the works of Ahmad al-Ghazālī, Maybudī, Sam 'am and 'Ayn al-Qudāt present Love as the Ultimate Reality from which all else derives and outline the whole of the Sufi path as an intricate play between loveliness and belovedness that is eventually subsumed in Love Itself. Several passages in Maybudī's *Kashf* make it clear that he was familiar with the *Sawānih*, though as William Chittick has demonstrated, Maybudī was more directly influenced by 'Abdallāh Ansārī and Sam `ānī. Nonetheless, it is likely that Sam `am- was also familiar with the *Sawānih* even if he does not quote directly from it. The question of the relationship between these texts merits further investigation. At this stage it is clear that together they mark a significant watershed in the development of the Persian Sufi literary tradition, a phase that gave rise to such luminaries as 'Attar, Rūmī, and Hāfīz.

Due to its brevity and the alluring nature of its allusive style, the *Sawānih* appears to have had a more discernible influence over time than have *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* and *Kashf al-asrar*. Regarding the significant impact of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's literary style, Leili Anvar observes, In a deeper sense Ghazālī ... remedies the narrowness of language

by transmitting verbal expression into visionary experience. Rather than letting us merely hear about what love is, he makes us behold its various aspects through visual imagery, providing descriptions that resemble what came to be known in later works by Persian poets as 'divine flashes' (Lama 'at). Ghazālī's insistence on this visionary aspect of love, in which the radiance of the Beloved's beauty is the source of inspiration, soon became the founding principle of the tradition of the Persian mystical ghazal, which reached the absolute perfection of its lyrical art.

Given the importance of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's contributions to the history of Persian Sufi literature, a clearer understanding of his corpus has been required for some time. As demonstrated in the first chapter, most of the works attributed to him are most likely not of his pen. For many of these texts, the confusion arises from cataloguing errors resulting from the relative obscurity of Ahmad b. Muhammad at-Tūsī and the similarity of his name and that of Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Ghazali. For most texts, this matter is not significant because the texts remained unpublished and no scholars have analyzed them in discussions of Ahmad al-Ghazali. The misattribution of Bawariq al-ilmā' that was perpetuated in Western scholarship by James Robson has, however, resulted in an unfortunate situation wherein the majority of scholarly discussions regarding Ahmad al-Ghazali have centered on the discussions regarding saw' contained in the Bawariq. Removing this dimension from discussions of Ahmad al-Ghazali allows us to focus more squarely on his actual teachings.

A proper understanding of the parameters of Ahmad al-Ghazālī's corpus and his unique contributions also provides a solid foundation for comparing many aspects of the Ghazālī brothers' teachings, especially those regarding love and dhikr. Some Muslim philosophers such as `Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadani and Ibn Tufayl (d. 581 / 1185-6) maintained that Abu Hamid al-Ghazali had never revealed the full extent of his teachings.' As Ibn Tufayl writes, "I have no doubt that our teacher al-Ghazali was among those who reached this sublime goal and enjoyed the ultimate bliss. Nonetheless, his esoteric books on mysticism have not reached us." Such assertions are supported by Abu Hāmid's own writings, as he sometimes

maintains that certain teachings should be "left under the cover of dust until the wayfarers stumble upon it" and that when approaching such teachings in writing "the reins of the pen must be drawn in." In contrast Ahmad al-Ghazali was far less reticent. Like Maybudi and Sam' aril\*, he allows that the most sublime truths can be discussed so that wayfarers on the Sufi path might benefit from them. This is apparent in the nature of Ahmad's discourse and in statements such as this previously cited passage:

Sometimes an earthen vessel or a glass bead is put in the hand of a novice until he becomes a master artisan; but sometimes a precious, shining pearl that the master's hand of knowledge does not dare touch, let alone pierce, is put into his ignorant hand to pierce.

Writing with the intention of placing these teachings within the grasp of wayfarers at all stages along the path, Ahmad al-Ghazali rarely retreats into the calculated discourse of a theologian or a philosopher. Rather, as Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek observes, "Each poem"—one could even say each sentence—"is an expression of a spiritual 'moment,' or sentence carved out of realization of a mystical truth." It is in this vein that Shaykh Ahmad al-Ghazali can say of his own writings, "In the hearts of words lie the edges of a sword which cannot be seen except by inner vision (basīrat-i bāfinī)."

[Philosophy in the Islamic World](#) edited by Ulrich Rudolph [Handbook of Oriental Studies, Brill, 9789004323162]

A comprehensive reference work covering all figures of the earliest period of philosophy in the Islamic world. Both major and minor thinkers are covered, with details of biography and doctrine as well as detailed lists and summaries of each author's works.

Excerpt: This volume is an English version of a book that originally appeared as *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt. Band 1: 8.-10. Jahrhundert* (ed. by Ulrich Rudolph with assistance from Renate Würsch, Basel 2012). Both versions contribute to a wider project whose goal is to chart the history of philosophy in the Islamic world from its beginnings to the present day. As explained in detail in the original preface, four volumes are envisioned, which will follow one another in chronological sequence, stretching from the 8th to the 20th

century, offering extensive information on authors from all periods, divided into biography, descriptions of individual works, doctrines, and influence.

It is planned that all four volumes should appear in both German and English. The German version forms part of a series of comprehensive reference works, the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Ueberweg); the English version is intended to reach a wider audience in Europe and beyond, including especially the Islamic world itself. While the German volumes are appearing with the publisher Schwabe, the English series will be published by E. J. Brill, whose series 'Handbuch der Orientalistik' ('Handbook of Oriental Studies') offers an appropriate forum for a project of this all-embracing nature. We are grateful to both publishers for agreeing to this arrangement and for their readiness to cooperate with one another.

The publication of this English translation was made possible by the personal dedication of several people. Rotraud Hansberger expended considerable personal effort to translate the entire book—except where the German version was based on an English original—combining linguistic fluency with a keen sense of judgement and enormous knowledge of the thematic field. Peter Adamson edited and proofread the translation with care and expertise. Peter Tarras and Hanif Amin Beidokhti contributed greatly to the production of the manuscript, tracking down additional information and helping with crucial aspects of the copy-editing process. All three editors have gone through the entire manuscript and are responsible for the final redaction. The authors of the original German chapters have also been involved in the production of this new version, and have helped with the addition of new references to literature that appeared since 2012. In this respect, the English version actually adds new information and offers an updated picture of the state of research. One section, however, could not be revised by its author, since our cherished colleague Paraskevi Kotzia sadly passed away since the appearance of the German version.

Introduction by Ulrich Rudolph

Stages of the History of Research

When Friedrich Ueberweg wrote the chapter on Arabic philosophers of the Middle Ages' for his

*Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, there was not much for him to go on in terms of previous work done in the field. This applies to primary texts, of which only a few had been printed, let alone translated into European languages, and to secondary literature alike. Nevertheless the subject matter he was writing about was not new. Shortly before he began his work on the *Grundriss*, Arabic philosophy, which had not received much scholarly attention up to the middle of the 19th century, had begun to attract discussion. The reason was Ernest Renan's epochal work *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (1852), which for the first time had directed attention to this subject, and at the same time had led to a certain image of philosophy in the Islamic world being spread universally amongst European scholars and interested readers.

Renan's study discussed Ibn Rušd's life and thought as well as the vast influence he exerted on many Jewish thinkers and the Latin Middle Ages. It led Renan to a series of ground-breaking results which not only moved Latin Averroism into the centre of interest, but attracted attention also to its Arab-Islamic cultural context. Yet he undermined his own project of casting light on the Arabic tradition. His book contained a number of (prejudiced) verdicts which were able to exert all the more influence as they were brilliantly formulated, and pronounced with the apodeictic gesture of the expert. This included his convictions (1) that the Arabs, or rather the Semites in general, had no natural aptitude for philosophy; (2) that their historic 'task' had merely consisted in preserving Greek philosophy and transmitting it to the Latin Middle Ages; and (3) that only 'pure, classical' Greece had been able to create philosophy; this was also why philosophy had never been properly understood or further developed before the advent of the Renaissance, which was closely related to antiquity in spirit; by contrast, the Latin and especially the Arabic authors of the Middle Ages had merely 'imitated' it and passed it on; on all this.

Renan's judgements in many respects corresponded to certain expectations current in his day and age; apart from other ideological entanglements they reflected a certain aspect of the 'orientalism' that loomed large in Europe (not only) in the 19th century. One should furthermore grant that his study, despite arguing in a conventional way, also

broached unexpected viewpoints which in fact called Renan's own stance into question. Thus we find buried in his book the proclamation that 'the true philosophical movement' of Islam was to be found in its theological schools. Nevertheless Renan limited scholarship even as he was stimulating it. His pointed rhetorical formulations were essential in the establishment of a one-sided perspective on the philosophy of the Islamic world as the first paradigm of scholarly engagement with the field. According to him, the achievements of the 'Arabic philosophers' were confined to adopting the Greek heritage and passing it on to Latin Europe, leading naturally to the often-quoted conclusion that 'with Averroes' death in 1198, Arabic philosophy lost its last representative, and the Quran was to triumph over independent thought for at least six centuries'.

The basic elements of this paradigm can be traced in numerous accounts published after the middle of the 19th century. To begin with, this applies to Salomon Munk's *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, which appeared only a few years after *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (1859). Munk went far beyond Renan in his engagement with the subject matter, unlocking extensive new source material, and for the first time sketching detailed portraits of individual Jewish and Islamic authors. Nevertheless he, too, took it for granted that 'the last great philosophers flourished in the 12th century'. Resorting to a thesis he had advanced earlier, he suggested as an explanation that philosophy in the Orient had never managed to recover from the blow dealt to it by the fierce critique of al-Gazali (d. 505/1111).

Ueberweg, who followed Munk's account in many points, arrived at a similar assessment. He, too, had 'Arabic philosophy' ending in the 12th century, again stating the very same reasons: in the East of the Islamic world, its demise was the result of al-Gaza's attacks; in the West, it was the outcome of Ibn Rušd's death and the subsequent Spanish Reconquista (1864).

The same temporal boundaries can be found in numerous 19th century publications in the field of Islamic Studies, at times explicitly, at others mentioned only in passing. However, and this would prove to be of much greater importance for further developments, we also encounter it in the scholarly literature of the early 20th century — despite being, by then, based on much broader textual

foundations. Again the year 1200 is on principle accepted as an endpoint. In the first instance, this concerns Tjitze de Boer's *Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam* (1901), which was widely read, in its German original as well as in an English translation (*The History of Philosophy in Islam*) released only two years later, in 1903. In the second instance, it applies to Max Horten's account of 'Syriac and Arabic philosophy' (*Die syrische and arabische Philosophie*), which was published in the eleventh edition of Ueberweg's *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, revised by Bernhard Geyer (1927).

Remarkably, though, it was not just Renan's pointed claim that lived on in these works, but also his doubts concerning it. This emerges in de Boer as well as in Horten: both clearly articulate their misgivings about the very scientific paradigm they follow. At some point, de Boer comments on it in the following words: 'That Gazali has annihilated philosophy in the East, for all time to come, is an assertion frequently repeated but wholly erroneous, and one which evidences neither historical knowledge nor understanding. Philosophy in the East has since his day numbered its teachers and students by hundreds and by thousands'. Horten expressed his doubts in an even more emphatic manner. Before taking up his work on the new edition of the *Grundriss*, he had published several studies on Islamic authors after al-Gazālī and Ibn Rušd, for instance on Fahr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 607/1210), Nasīr al-Din al-Tūsī (d. 672/1274) and Mullā Sadrā (d.1050/1640). This may have been the reason why he felt compelled to add the following declaration to his contribution to the *Grundriss*: 'It is a consequence of the tradition of this *Grundriss* (lit., 'outline'), that from among the vast abundance of philosophies, i.e. world views, only those are included that are dependent on the Greeks, and that became known to the Latin schoolmen — i.e. only the Greek strand, which to the Orient itself was and remained a foreign body, and as an entire system was rejected, even if its individual concepts were put to use as building blocks within originally Oriental systems. This means that the real essence, and the main component of Oriental philosophy is excluded from this account, while only a comparatively minor, marginal strand within this entire complex is given attention [...] Due to prejudice and lack of comprehension, the old

Orientalist school had grown used to the phrase: "after al-Gazālī or after Averroes no philosophy can be found in Islam." They had not the least idea that the true philosophy internal to Islam begins only after 1100!.

The persuasiveness of Horten's own ideas concerning the history of philosophy is not at issue here; his diffuse concepts and his sweeping comparisons were at any rate repeatedly criticized in scholarly literature. What is important in the present context is simply that both he and de Boer early on expressed concerns regarding the prevalent labelling and periodization of philosophy in the Islamic world. Yet the uneasiness manifest in their remarks was to remain without consequence. As mentioned already, neither of the two authors ventured past the magical line apparently drawn by Ibn Rušd's death. Thus de Boer and Horten contributed to disseminating the paradigm they themselves had called into question, and to its treatment as a 'fait accompli'.

It was, therefore, not easy for alternative approaches to gain recognition. This first affected an interpretative model which had been developed in Egypt since the 1930s. An independent branch of research into the history of philosophy had established itself there, whose most important and influential representative was — alongside Ahmad Amin (d. 1954), Yūsuf Karam (d. 1959) and Mahmūd al-Hudayrī (d. 1960) — Mustafā 'Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1947). Following various preparatory studies, he drew up a new conspectus of philosophy within Islamic culture, which he laid out in a widely read study entitled *Prolegomena to a History of Islamic Philosophy* (*Tamhid li-ta'rīḥ al falsafa al-islāmiyya*).

At the core of this account stood the thesis that the concept of philosophy ought to be understood differently in the Islamic world and in Europe: in the Islamic context, it could not be reduced to the tradition that followed Greek role models, but would have to include all forms of reflection that were in any way responsible for laying the foundations of Islamic religion and culture. As a central point in this context, 'Abd al-Rāziq considered Islamic law. It had its theoretical foundation in the science of 'principles of law' (*usūl al-fiqh*), which he regarded as basis of Islamic philosophy, or rather Islamic thought; this is also

why in his account of philosophy, the development of *usūl alfiqh* was accorded the largest space by far. Only Islamic theology (*Wm al-kalām*) was able to claim a similarly prominent position in his presentation. To all other traditions, including Greek inspired philosophy (*falsafa*) and Sufism (*tasawwuf*), 'Abd al-Rāziq by contrast assigned subsidiary roles: they might have shaped or passed on certain elements of Islamic philosophical thought, but were never constitutive for its development as such.

The suggestion to broaden the concept of 'philosophy' in the Islamic context in the direction of 'Islamic thought', or 'pensée islamique' (thus the term later used by Arkoun 1973 and other authors arguing in a similar vein) constituted a challenge for European scholarship. It contested the identification of 'philosophy' with 'Greek philosophy', which in older scholarship had been taken for granted. Moreover, shortly after 'Abd al-Rāziq's publications, a further concept of (history of Islamic) philosophy emerged, which again vehemently questioned Renan's old paradigm. It did not come from the pen of an Arabic scholar, but from that of a European author, whose perspective was influenced by a strong affinity with Iran.

This was Henry Corbin, who in 1946 became the director of the *Département d'iranologie* at the *Institut franco-iranien* in Tehran. In his early work he had concerned himself mainly with *Sihāb al-Din al-Suhrawardi* (d. 587/1191). Now, in Tehran, he began to research the later Persian thinkers (13th-19th centuries) on this basis. This was first reflected in a large number of individual studies, many of which made previously unknown authors and texts accessible for the first time, through editions, translations and introductory commentaries. From the very beginning, however, these publications were based on a new overall concept of 'Islamic philosophy'. This concept was presented to a larger audience when Corbin set out his ideas in two detailed and comprehensive works. One of them is the four-volume work *En islam iranien*, which follows a thread from the beginnings of the Twelver Shia up to the Persian authors of the 19th century; the other work is the shorter, but even more influential *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, which was published in several stages, beginning in 1964.

Corbin aimed to provide an entirely new interpretation of philosophy and its history within Islamic culture. In his opinion, the early authors (up to Ibn Rušd), who previously had drawn all scholarly attention to themselves, were merely 'philosophes hellénisants', that is, thinkers that had been completely under the spell of the Greek heritage (with the exception of Ibn Sina). Real 'Islamic philosophy', by contrast, developed its own, unmistakable character, and began to flourish only in the 12th century. The location of this blossoming is, for Corbin, Iran. The distinguishing mark of 'Islamic philosophy' is supposed to consist in its having linked rational cognition, spiritual experience, gnostic insight, and prophetic knowledge to one another. This had been done particularly impressively and successfully by Mullā Sadrā (d. 1050/1640; on him cf. vol. 3), who accordingly was regarded by Corbin as the pinnacle of Islamic philosophy as a whole, or, as he puts it, of 'theosophy' ('theosophy' here rendering the Arabic term hikma ilāhiyya. Even Mullā Sadrā, however, is but one link in a long tradition of philosophico-mystical speculation and 'Oriental wisdom' for Corbin. He lastly describes it as eternal wisdom (sophia perennis), which supposedly harks back to early Islam and even beyond that, to pre-Islamic Iran, with a correspondingly lengthy list of characteristic features. These features in fact have no real historical connection, but Corbin puts them together on the basis that they form a unified intellectual structure. Amongst other things, they comprise (Twelver) Shiite thought, including the deeper knowledge it attributes to the Imams, al-Suhrawardī's metaphysics of light, which supposedly combined Platonism and old Iranian as well as gnostic wisdom, and the mystical speculations advanced by Ibn 'Arabi.

It is Corbin's great merit to have read the history of philosophy against the grain, moving entire epochs that had long since suffered neglect into the centre of attention. He thus opened up new horizons for scholarship, something that has been duly acknowledged by scholars reacting to his writings. At the same time, however, his outline also posed new problems. First of all, he intentionally applied the concept of 'philosophy' in a rather diffuse manner, distinguishing it neither clearly from theology, nor from mysticism or spirituality, but understanding it instead in the sense of a higher,

spiritual-metaphysical wisdom, whose blurry outlines were supposedly characteristic of 'Islamic philosophy'. In addition, he explicitly subscribed to the concept of *métahistoire*, which allowed him to dissociate ideas from their historical context and to interpret them as archetypal phenomena of the soul. Thus he developed a vision of 'Islam' with highly subjective and selective features. Examples include his ahistorical interpretation of the Shia; its pointed prioritization over the Sunna; the biased assessment of Sunni Sufism, which he regards as an extension of the Shia or as Proto-Shiism; and — more than anything else — the spiritual elevation of Iran. The latter marks Corbin's account as a kind of Orientalism in reverse: whereas Renan and other earlier authors had usually construed a defective 'Orient', inferior and lastly subservient to Europe, in Corbin's works the 'Orient' is hypostasized as an ideal and the true home of the soul.

Notwithstanding such objections, Corbin's approach was fascinating, and it is not surprising that he acquired numerous followers. Among the first was Seyyed Hossein Nasr who had already had a hand in the genesis of the *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (1964), and later on contributed significantly to the promulgation of its aims in the English-speaking world. Nasr studied natural sciences and the history of science in the USA, which had a pronounced influence on his early works. In them he attempts to interpret Ibn Sina, al-Suhrawardī and Ibn 'Arabi as three types of Islamic thinkers that he characterized as 'philosopher-scientist', 'illuminationist', and 'mystic'. In all fundamental questions, however, Nasr acknowledged that he was following Corbin. For him, too, 'Islamic philosophy' is a quest for truth under the guidance of God, uniting rationality, spiritual illumination, and prophetic knowledge in the sense of an 'eternal wisdom'. This quest for truth supposedly developed first and foremost in Iran, finding its ultimate expression in Mullā Sadrā's 'theosophy'. Thus Nasr stressed time and again that this 'theosophy' preserved a form of wisdom which had been lost in Western thought since the Renaissance — delivering what we need to understand as a decided plea for traditional Islamic metaphysics, and against modern, 'Western' civilization.

Besides the paradigm that was developed by Corbin and disseminated by his students (including

Nasr), there also have been other new trends of research since the 1950s. Leo Strauss' theoretical approach, for instance, was based on the assumption that within Islamic culture, philosophers were constantly exposed to suspicion and repression on the part of religious orthodoxy; from this he inferred that they had developed a certain literary strategy (or rather a 'political philosophy') in order to hide their true opinions from hostile readers and thus to avoid possible sanctions. Several scholars applied this approach to their interpretations of individual texts; but ultimately it was not able to yield a new overall perspective on the history of philosophy. Therefore we can, at this point, dispense with a more detailed account and evaluation of Strauss' arguments. Here we are primarily interested in the question as to which general framework — if any — should be used in the study of philosophy in the Islamic world. As we have seen, by the 1950s this question had been given three basic answers. One of them took Arabic philosophy to be a continuation of Greek philosophy, up to Ibn Rušd. The second postulated the concept of an 'Islamic thought' ('pensée islamique') that would encompass law, theology, philosophy (in the narrow sense) and mysticism. The third one, linked to Corbin's name, formulated the idea of an 'Islamic philosophy' that was rooted in perennial Oriental wisdom, that united rational speculation with spirituality and prophetic insight, and had found its completion in 16th and 17th century Iran.

This state of the discussion has been reflected in several surveys published since the 1960s. They are too numerous to be listed and introduced individually. However, a number of frequently quoted and widely read publications may nevertheless be mentioned briefly here, in order to indicate how they position themselves in the face of the three historiographical models described above.

The two-volume survey *A History of Muslim Philosophy* edited by M. M. Sharif in 1963 and 1966 mainly follows the idea of an 'Islamic thought': its aim is to include multiple intellectual traditions within its presentation. For Sharif, these comprise, apart from the 'philosophers' proper, the Quran, the theologians, the Sufis and the political thinkers. Majid Fakhry's *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (1970), by contrast, distances itself from

any integrative historiographical conception. Though containing two brief chapters on Mullā Sadrā, several theologians and Sufis (insofar as they came into immediate contact with philosophical thought) and some more recent intellectual trends (19th and 20th centuries), the focus of Fakhry's work lies entirely on those topics which have traditionally formed the centre of attention, i.e. the string of early philosophers up to and including Ibn Rušd. The short contribution Shlomo Pines wrote for *The Cambridge History of Iran* (1970) steers a middle course: under the title 'philosophy' he deals with Islamic theology as well as with philosophy up to 1200 (with a brief glance at later authors). 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī's two-volume *Histoire de la philosophie en islam* (1972) is similar in this respect: its first part introduces the most important theological schools, the second the philosophers up to Ibn Rušd. Michael Marmura's explications concerning 'Islamic philosophy of the Middle Ages' (*Die islamische Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Marmura 1985 [\*41]) again focus only on the well-known philosophical tradition from al-Kindi to Ibn Rušd. Marmura emphasizes, however, that there did exist philosophers after 1200 (basing themselves on the doctrines of the aforementioned authors), and that one ought to separate philosophy from the tradition of 'Islamic religious and theological thought'. By contrast, the two-volume *History of Islamic Philosophy* edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman in the mid-1990s renews the integrative approach, being indebted both to the idea of a 'pensée islamique' (reminiscent of Sharif) and to Corbin's conception. The former is evidenced by the extensive chapters on Quran, hadīth, theology, mysticism, and law; the latter by the great weight placed on the topics central to Corbin (Shiism, mysticism, Illuminationism, Iranian tradition), and on the explication of Corbin's hermeneutics.

By the time Nasr's and Leaman's work was published, however, scholarship had already taken a new turn. Since the 1980s, several corrections had been made to Corbin's model as well as to the other, older conceptions, eventually ushering in a new paradigm of the historiography of philosophy in the Islamic world. The starting point for this turn was a reappraisal of Ibn Sīnā's thought. Ibn Sina held a special place within the debate, insofar as the question how to position his philosophy in

historical as well as conceptual terms was a key element in Corbin's scheme. According to his view, Ibn Sina performed a remarkable U-turn in the course of his life. It supposedly induced him to distance himself from Aristotelian philosophy, and instead to design a mystical-visionary, 'Oriental philosophy', thus becoming the pioneer for all further significant developments within 'Islamic philosophy' — by which Corbin meant al-Suhrawardi's illuminationism and the 'theosophy' of the later Iranian authors. These assumptions, however, were met by increasing criticism in the 1980s. As a precise analysis of Ibn Sīnā's oeuvre was able to show, it is impossible to diagnose a break with the philosophical heritage. Instead it was demonstrated that Ibn Sina mastered the philosophical tradition systematically, and modified it with new ideas, though always — against the assumptions of Corbin and certain medieval authors (e.g. Ibn Tufayl) — holding on to a rational understanding of philosophy that was ultimately based on Aristotle.

These important findings were complemented by a second epochal development in recent scholarship. It consisted in the realization that Ibn Sīnā's very same rational philosophy, with its re-interpretation of the philosophical heritage, was of paramount historical significance, having been studied over centuries by a large number of authors in the Islamic world who had taken it as starting point for their own philosophical reflections. This insight rendered the earlier question, whether Ibn Rušd had found any readers after 1200, obsolete (even though his writings indeed continued to be read for some time. As it now emerged, engagement with Ibn Rušd was not, after all, the decisive criterion for answering the question whether philosophy continued to exist beyond the 12th century. Instead it was Ibn Sina whose writings on logic, metaphysics and physics constituted the focus of interest from this time onwards. This insight was bound to lead to a new paradigm of research. It ties in with Corbin's ideas insofar as it shares his conviction that philosophy continued to prosper in the Islamic world after 1200. At the same time, however, it distances itself from his conceptual approach, as it does not buy into the idea of limiting philosophy from this point forward to mystical/intuitive speculations on metaphysical topics, but conceives of it, even after 1200, as a rationally-based, argumentative

science comprising logic, metaphysics and physics as well as ethics.

This new historiographical approach was evident in Gerhard Endress' section on 'philosophy' within the *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie* ('outline of Arabic philology') (1992). It includes chapters on topics like 'the development of philosophy as a discipline' ('Die Entwicklung einer philosophischen Disziplin'), 'hermeneutics and logic' ('Hermeneutik und Logik') and 'encyclopedia' ('Enzyklopädie'). Endress' observations do not end with the 12th century, but continue with references to important later authors, up to the 16th or 17th century. The new historiographical paradigm was then presented in an explicitly programmatic fashion by Dimitri Gutas. In a 2002 article, he advocated calling the time from ca. 1100 to 1350 (not, that is, 1200!) the 'golden age of Arabic philosophy', producing at the same time a preliminary outline showing that in Iran, India, and parts of the Ottoman Empire, Ibn Sīnā's works and ideas were likely to have remained influential far into the 18th century. In parallel to these general surveys, new individual studies confirmed the continuation of philosophical activity in the 13th century and later. Noteworthy in particular are a number of publications produced by Sabine Schmidtke (2000), Gerhard Endress (2006), Heidrun Eichner (2007, 2011), Sajjad Rizvi (2009), Khaled El-Rouayheb (2010), Reza Pourjavady (2011), and Firouzeh Saatchian (2011). The overwhelming majority of later authors, however, yet remain to be studied. According to careful estimates, not even 10% of the Arabic texts that were composed between the 13th and the 18th centuries on philosophical topics, and are extant in manuscripts, are available in print. Hence one may well say that the new historiographical paradigm has opened up unexpected and promising avenues for research, which, however, will need to be refined and realized by many further studies.

A similar situation presents itself with regard to philosophy of the Islamic world during the 19th and 20th centuries. It had long been ignored entirely by scholars and had no impact on the discussions of philosophy's possible demise or continuation after 1200. If individual aspects of these developments were taken up at all, this happened within studies that were dedicated not to the history of philosophy as such, but to the history of ideas and

the religio-political developments of the last two centuries (most convincingly in Hourani (1962). Initial changes in this respect have, however, already been visible since the 1960s. Chapters that discuss contemporary philosophical thought are found first and foremost in Sharif (1966), but also in Fakhry (1970). The same applies for the history of philosophy edited by Nasr and Leaman (Nasr, Leaman 1996), though the temporal definition of 'modernity' is not consistent across the individual subsections). A proper branch of research into 19th and 20th century philosophy, though, has only begun to establish itself in the 1990s. In many respects this research is still in its infancy. Nevertheless it has already shown a surprising vitality and yielded important results, as is documented for instance by studies published by Anke von Kugelgen (1994), Reza Hajatpour (2002), Ursula Günther (2004), Geert Hendrich (2004), JanPeter Hartung (2004) and Sarhan Dhouib (2011). In addition, there have been several recent publications that chart the history of philosophy in the Islamic world up to the present day.

### Principles of Presentation

The circumstances outlined above have several consequences for our series of four volumes which now will appear successively within the framework of this series. On the one hand, they concern temporal boundaries. After all that has been said, the presentation cannot possibly be restricted to only one epoch, and most certainly not to the period before 1200. It must be chosen in such a way as to do justice to the entire development of philosophy in the Islamic world. This does not mean to say that, given the current state of research, compendia that impose temporal limits on themselves are unjustifiable. Two more recent publications in fact prove the opposite: the *Storia della filosofia nell'Islam medievale*, which paints a very broad and detailed picture of philosophy up to 1200 (including the lesser known authors), and the *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (2005), which focuses mainly on the 'big names' up to 1200, but also contains chapters on Ibn 'Arabi and Mullā Sadrā as well as systematic accounts of the different sub-disciplines of philosophy (logic, ethics, politics, etc.). For the *Grundriss*, however, a restriction to certain epochs or thinkers is out of the question, given that it is its conceptual aspiration to

impart an overview of the history of philosophy that is as extensive and detailed as possible. Applied to the Islamic world, this means that its presentation of the subject matter will need to stretch from the beginnings of philosophical activity up to the present time. As far as the current state of research allows, it moreover should include authors that are lesser known or that have not yet been dealt with in general surveys at all.

This objective is subject to one caveat, however. As our overview of the history of research has brought to light, in many areas our knowledge is still rather limited. First of all this applies at the level of philosophical topics, of individual texts and their interpretations, where there is a multitude of open questions to be dealt with (such as inadequate knowledge of the extant manuscripts, a lack of [reliable] editions, uncertain attributions to authors, the lack of proper analysis and contextualization of individual works, etc.). Therefore many results of the research presented here will be preliminary, and will require further verification on the basis of textual material which is not available as yet. With regard to the period beginning with the 13th century, however, our ignorance also applies at the level of authors, and even of entire authorial traditions. It would even be fair to say that the philosophy of the 13th century and later so far has yet to be situated historically, institutionally, or in the sense of a taxonomy of the sciences. Notwithstanding the by now established consensus regarding its continued existence, scholars have not yet been able to agree on how it should be described, or how it should be seen in its relation to other intellectual traditions. This is not only due to the still ongoing discussion about Corbin's approach. Even those scholars who subscribe to the new paradigm of a continuation of rational philosophy as described at the end of the previous section have not yet established a clear, common view on how autonomous this philosophy would have been, or of its place in the wider context. On such questions, we so far only have several divergent hypotheses, awaiting verification (or falsification) on the basis of the textual material. They stretch from the claim that even after the 13th century, large parts of philosophy can be described as 'mainstream Avicennism', to the assumption that in the long run, philosophy was only able to gain universal acceptance 'at the price of subordinating itself' to other disciplines, to wit,

theology, to the thesis that for the period between the 11th and the 19th century, it is in any case not possible to separate philosophy (falsafa) from Islamic theology (kalām), as they are best understood as 'a single hybrid enterprise.

Given these circumstances, it is impossible at this point to attempt an overview or even a classification of the various forms and expressions of philosophy that developed in the Islamic world over a period of many centuries. What we are hoping is rather that the four volumes which will be published within the framework of this series will help to increase our knowledge of the subject matter to an extent that will finally allow us to undertake a first description and (historical, institutional, taxonomical, etc.) contextualization of philosophy in its *longue durée*. One thing to mention briefly at this point, however, is the theoretical approach on which these volumes on Philosophy in the Islamic World are based. It may already have emerged to some extent in our account of the history of research. Nevertheless its essential elements shall be made explicit here.

Two basic assumptions have been decisive for the conception of the series. One of them concerns the fact that philosophical thought may be articulated in various ways, and will change over time. Even the concept of philosophy itself has a history, in the course of which it has time and again been subject to modifications, if not to far-reaching alterations. For research in European philosophy, this is a commonplace assumption. Scholars are of course aware of the fact that even Plato and Aristotle understood *philosophia* in different ways, and since then the concept of philosophy has seen numerous further interpretations in Europe. At least since the 19th century, this has led to a plurality of competing notions. Insights that are commonplace within the European framework, however, are not always transferred to other contexts. When studying non-European philosophical traditions, the scholarly community rather tends towards setting narrower criteria, and demanding a concept of philosophy that is fixed unequivocally, on the basis of almost ahistorical features. This postulate does not, however, correspond to reality. Varying ideas of philosophy can be observed in other regions too, and most certainly in the Islamic world. In order to prove this, one does not even have to point to the major ruptures associated with the 13th and the

19th century respectively; it suffices to read some of the authors introduced in the present first volume more carefully. For they already display considerable differences: Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, the 'Ihwān al-Safā', i.e. the 'Brethren of Purity' of Basra, Abu l-Hasan al-ʿĀmirī and Abu Sulaymān al-Sigistānī were practicing philosophy at nearly the same time, yet careful scrutiny quickly reveals that they all worked with different concepts of philosophy.

A first basic assumption is therefore the plurality and the internal diversity of the philosophical field. This does not mean that this field lacks unity, or cannot be demarcated from other intellectual traditions. To the contrary, a recognition of this diversity immediately demands that we find a suitably comprehensive definition. Even if philosophy is multifaceted, and even if its concept changes over time, the historian needs to circumscribe the philosophical field as a whole. This brings us to the second leading premise underlying the conception of this series. Like the first, it can be described as a consequence of the history of research: philosophy in the Islamic world is not defined relative to any specific culture. Rather, the same criteria and demarcations used in other areas of the history of philosophy are to be applied here.

This assumption implies a departure from the three older paradigms described above. For neither is philosophy here identified with 'Greek philosophy', as advocated by Renan and many authors after him; nor is there an assumption of a specifically Islamic concept of philosophy, as demanded by adherents of the 'pensée islamique' as well as by Corbin and his successors.

Within the framework of this series, philosophy is rather understood as a distinct form of rationality which appears everywhere, or may appear everywhere. If one wanted to define its peculiar characteristics, one could say that it consists in a fundamental reflection on the structures of thought and being (that is, of thought as considered in itself and in respect of its representations), as well as structures of action.

This definition in fact corresponds to contemporary conceptions of philosophy. Even though contemporary philosophy focuses mainly on analysing our thought, or rather the language in which our thoughts are expressed, it also

recognizes other problems and paths to knowledge. Moreover, even where it primarily aims at analysing our thought, it never shuts out the fact that our thoughts refer both to what is and what ought to be. In addition, it cannot be denied that for many earlier authors, it was natural to search for the laws of thought as well as for the structures of reality, and of the good. This most certainly applies to large parts of the philosophy of the Islamic world. The definition mentioned here has therefore already been adduced more than once in this context, for instance by Paul Wernst, who as early as 1967, in a critical review of the theoretical approaches of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Corbin, argued for describing philosophy as 'the quest for the general interrelations of thinking and being, whose results can neither be proven by sense perception, nor rely on postulates of a "higher" (e.g. religious or esoteric) kind as their formal presupposition'.

Thus defined, philosophy may, as mentioned before, appear in various forms. It may be expressed in technical terminology, allegories, or symbols; it may discuss individual questions or design entire systems; it may be taught in private settings or within institutional frameworks, and in general may be pursued in various scientific contexts. The only important thing is that it is aware of its premises, and that it always gives reasons for the way in which it proceeds. This, however, happens by way of reflecting on its own procedure, by way of 'thinking about our thoughts', something we can assume to be a constitutive feature of philosophy, in the Islamic world just as anywhere else.

In order to describe the philosophical tradition in the Islamic world specifically, yet another conceptual clarification is needed. It is connected with a question that has been discussed several times in recent scholarship: whether the subject matter under investigation should be termed 'Arabic philosophy', 'Islamic philosophy', 'Arabic-Islamic philosophy', or something else. These discussions have not yielded a consensus, in part because each of the solutions on offer adequately represents some of the aspects of the issue, while suppressing other aspects, or even putting a wrong complexion on them.

The expression 'Arabic philosophy' emphasizes the linguistic aspect. This is justified insofar as most of

the texts under investigation were indeed written in Arabic (which has always retained its position as scientific language of the Islamic world). It furthermore avoids tying the concept of philosophy to any particular religion, thus capturing the fact that philosophical debates were not conducted by Muslims only, but also by Jews, Christians and, it stands to reason, authors of yet other convictions. At the same time, a focus on the Arabic language also presents certain problems. As the philosophical tradition in the Islamic world progressed, its protagonists were increasingly likely to use other languages (Persian, Ottoman, Turkish, Urdu, French, English, etc.) The expression 'Arabic philosophy' therefore also implies a certain conceptual restriction, and it is not surprising that it was frequently used by Renan and other early authors, who regarded the end of philosophy around 1200 as a matter of course.

The term 'Islamic philosophy' avoids this problem, as it allows for all sorts of linguistic affiliations, and indicates that Muslims of any provenance and any era were able to practice philosophy. In turn, however, it generates other difficulties, as it ignores the contributions of Jewish and Christian authors and wrongly suggests that in the Islamic world, the study of philosophy was tied to Islamic religion. Those who had rather avoid such interpretations therefore can only use the term 'Islamic philosophy' in a pragmatic way, where the attribute 'Islamic' is understood as a general imputation which does not refer to a religion but — taken more broadly — to a certain culture or culturally defined geographic area. A parallel case could for instance be seen in the expression 'Islamic art', which usually subsumes all artistic and architectural artefacts which have been created in Islamic culture.

Such comparisons are not, however, without their own problems. Therefore it has been determined that within the framework of this series, expressions like 'Arabic philosophy' or 'Islamic philosophy' (or a combination of both) will be avoided from the outset. Instead, the series title avails itself of the expression 'philosophy in the Islamic world', ultimately taking up a suggestion by Louis Gardet and Georges C. Anawati, who long time ago were already advocating the use of the expression 'philosophie en terre d'Islam'. The decision has several conceptual advantages for the project. It allows for the inclusion of philosophical texts in all

languages, and independently of the religious affiliation of their authors. Furthermore, it makes it possible to avoid tying philosophy itself to certain religious or cultural conditions. Instead, as described above, it may be understood as an independent reflection on fundamental principles, open to all interested parties. Nevertheless one should be aware of the fact that this appellation, too, has its limitations. This will emerge in particular in the fourth volume of the series, which is concerned with the developments in the 19th and 20th centuries. It will feature, among others, Muslim authors in India or in France, and Marxist authors in Iran or in Turkey. In this context it will become clear in various ways that even the expression 'philosophy in the Islamic world' is no unequivocal term, but always ought to be understood pragmatically, and in relation to its respective context.

### Characteristics of the First Volume: Philosophy from the 8th to the 10th Century

Such deliberations largely concern the developments of recent centuries. In the early Islamic era, which forms the topic of the present volume, the situation of philosophy in the Islamic world was very different. As indicated above, we do need to expect various philosophical approaches, manifest on the one hand in the plurality of doctrines and methods which we encounter in the 9th and 10th century, and on the other hand in the fact that philosophy was already being conceptualized in various ways. Nevertheless, the philosophical field as a whole was still quite consistent. In this era, it may be described as a 'distinct, continuous, and self-contained school tradition' or as a community with its own epistemic norms. It constituted itself, once the requisite preconditions were in place, in 9th century Iraq, thereafter continuing to spread geographically, gaining increasing influence on the courtly and educated circles of society.

The characteristic features of this school tradition have been outlined several times, and have received an authoritative description by Endress. As he explains in his contribution to the *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie*, they included a number of features which were characteristic not just for

philosophy but for all sciences that were able to hark back to ancient traditions (like arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, medicine, etc.). Among them are the explicit reference to late ancient curricula and Greek models (in philosophy, first and foremost Aristotle), at times supplemented by related points from the Iranian tradition and Indian knowledge; the tremendous interest in translations from the Greek, which usually were produced by Syriac-speaking scholars (often from intermediary Syriac translations); the adoption and further development of certain literary forms and genres of antiquity, as e.g. commentary, treatise, textbook and didactic poem; financial and ideological support through the caliphal and other courts, including their viziers and notables; and, finally, the development of an Arabic technical terminology. The latter quickly turned into a precise and malleable instrument, suitable not only for adequately rendering ancient texts, but also for formulating new concepts and theorems.

Many of these topics have entered the present volume in one form or another. This in particular applies to the late ancient background, the philosophical tradition of the Syriac Christians, and the Graeco-Arabic translation movement. They all receive detailed discussion because they were indispensable preconditions for the development of philosophy in the Islamic world. Philosophy itself then comes to the fore, which is dedicated to Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. after 247/861), who was the first significant philosopher (and polymath) of the Arabic language. Then follows a long line of authors (Ahmad b. al-Tayyib al-Sarāḥī, Abū Zayd al-Balḥī, Ibn Farīgūn, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Amīrī, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Sulaymān al-Sigistānī, Abū Ali Miskawayh, and Ibn Hindu) who took over al-Kindī's ideas either entirely or in part, applying them to various scientific contexts, disseminating them as far as Iran. We introduce Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925), an original thinker whose ideas, however, seem to have been too eccentric to attract a large following. Next again discusses a number of authors: the so-called Baghdad Aristotelians of the 10th century, whose studies and commentaries mainly focused on Aristotelian logic (Abū Bīṣr Mattā b. ) (ūnus, Yahyā Ibn Adī, 'Īsā Ibn Zur`a, Ibn al-I ammār, Ibn al-Samh and Abū l-Farag Ibn al-Tayyib). From their circle arose Abū

Nasr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950-951), who used his studies of the *Organon* in order to safeguard philosophy methodically, and place it on new foundations. Thus he contributed substantially to its emancipation from the applied sciences, while at the same time ensuring that it developed in new directions, and established itself as the authoritative path to demonstrative knowledge. Another point to consider is that in the mid-10th century, philosophical thought had ceased to be a matter for experts only, but had spread to all sorts of other areas. This is documented by traces in literature, popular ethics, natural science, and in certain religious currents. They are discussed next, marking the philosophy of that era as a broad intellectual tradition embracing various options and possible applications. This also corresponds to its state at the turn of the 10th century — immediately, that is, before the emergence of Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037; on him of the second volume in this series), which would permanently change the practice of philosophy in the Islamic world.

The philosophy of the 9th and 10th centuries was already perceived as a distinct tradition sustained by its own scholarly community — by its own protagonists as well as by other contemporary observers. This is evident from the specific linguistic expressions used to refer to it: someone who had a share in it was a *faylasūf* (borrowed from Greek *philosophia*, via Syriac *pīlōsōpā*) and practiced *falsafa* (an Arabic derivative of *faylasūf*). Apart from that, one also spoke of *hikma* (αοϕλα), which al-Fārābī understood as the universally valid, demonstrative 'wisdom', and which later was to become the most prevalent name for 'philosophy'. The distinctive position of philosophy can moreover be gleaned from the texts of medieval Arabic historians and historians of science. They separated philosophy from the other disciplines, and described its history, as far as it was known to them, as a continuous journey from its beginnings in Greece up to their own day and age. This explains why certain Arabic authors — bio-bibliographers like Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) or historians of science like Sā`id al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070), Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248) and Ibn Abi Usaybi`a (d. 668/1270) — dealt with the lives and works of the philosophers in works or chapters reserved to them exclusively; which, incidentally, also means that these works are repeatedly referred to in this

volume as primary sources for information on the individual philosophers.

These circumstances allow even the present-day historian to separate philosophy in the 9th and 10th centuries clearly from other intellectual areas. This first concerns its demarcation from Sufism, i.e. Islamic mysticism. Not many difficulties are attached to this, insofar as it was only at a later date (approximately with Ibn `Arabi [d. 638/1240]) that mysticism began to engage significantly with philosophical questions. However, even if some of its early representatives, like al-Hakīm al-Tirmidī (d. 285/898), already leaned towards conceiving of mysticism as 'wisdom' *hikma* or as 'theosophy', this 'wisdom' meant something entirely different from anything that could be found in the works of the philosophers.

Matters are much more complicated with regard to Islamic theology, which was called *ilm al-kalām* (speculative science, or science of dialectical disputation) or 'ilm *usūl al-dīn* (science of the principles of religion). It naturally converged with philosophy on many more topics, which has induced several modern scholars, like Pines and Badawi, to present it as a second, as it were 'inner-Islamic' form of philosophizing. Therefore its case needs more detailed discussion, to explain why the Islamic theology of the 8th to 10th centuries has not been included in the present volume.

Prima facie there are several strong arguments for the inclusion of *kalām*. This is connected to the fact that like philosophy, early Islamic theology also developed in an environment that presupposed ancient learning and concepts. In addition, one may regard it as a striking characteristic of the first significant theological school — i.e. the Mu`tazila — that it justified the decisive points of its teaching with sophisticated rational deliberations. In this way the Mu`tazilites designed an epistemology that was essentially based on rational arguments. Similar considerations apply to their ideas concerning the physical structure of the world, which allowed them to present a proof of God's existence 'from the contingency of the world'. They furthermore designed a rationalist ethics, which declares good and bad to be objective standards that do not depend on God, and from this infers the necessity of human free will; on details of Mu`tazilite theory of action. Doubtless these are all philosophically

relevant reflections. On the basis of the Stoic division of philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics, one could even claim that the Mutazilites had produced a complete philosophical system.

There are, however, weighty arguments that can be mounted against their inclusion. To begin with, the rational arguments of the Mu` tazila, however impressive, never formed the only basis of their teachings. They were always accompanied by justification with reference to the pronouncements of the revelation. The foundations for this were laid down in Mutazilite epistemology: it accepted revelation or religious tradition as an important source of knowledge. This meant that their theological explanations often contained references to the Quran, as emerges clearly in respect of their explications on human free will, which lend themselves nicely to being divided into rational arguments and arguments based on the Quran. Of course, such a procedure is only to be expected. It would have been much more surprising if Islamic theologians had developed their dogmatics without any reference to the Quran. Nevertheless this has an important implication: theological speculation — even that of the Mu` tazila — was never truly free from presuppositions. It always laid claim to formulating orthodox doctrine, and ultimately conceived of itself as interpretation of God's revealed message to those that believed in Him.

This impression is further confirmed by a look at the taxonomy of sciences as it was commonly accepted in the early Islamic era. It indicates very clearly that philosophy and theology were not regarded as related or comparable disciplines, but were assigned to opposite poles within the system. The usual classifications were based on a dichotomy: sciences like philosophy, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and medicine, which had an ancient background, were assigned to one side. Depending on the aspect the thinker wanted to emphasize, they were called 'the ancient sciences' (al-`ulūm al-qadima), 'the sciences of the foreigners' ('ulūm al-āgam), or 'the rational sciences' (al-`ulūm al-aqliyya). On the other side we find e.g. Arabic grammar, theology, jurisprudence, and Quranic exegesis. Their common characteristic consisted in aiming at understanding revelation, and reflecting its consequences for Islamic society. Therefore they were also called 'the Islamic sciences' (al-`ulūm al-

islāmiyya) or 'the religious sciences' ('ulūm al-sarīra), or, later, 'the sciences that are based on traditions and conventions' (al-`ulūm al-naghiyya al-wad`iyya)). Philosophy and theology were thus strictly separated. One of them was assigned to reason, the other to revelation, or to the linguistic expression of revelation. This separation corresponded to a *communis opinio*, which was also shared by the philosophers, as can be observed in striking form in al-Fārābī, who did take theology quite seriously, but insisted that it (including its Mutazilite variant) was merely a discipline for Muslim believers, and could not lay claim to universally valid knowledge.

In addition, there is a third point, which carries particular weight insofar as it brings the 9th and 10th century theological protagonists themselves into play, i.e. the very scholars who are under discussion here. What emerges in this respect is that they did not even want to be associated with the philosophers.

In their eyes, philosophy was not a path towards knowledge, but a collection of dubious and misleading claims which were on a par with the doctrines of heretics, if not infidels. The only possible reaction to philosophy that could be expected from a theologian was its refutation. This was undertaken either in polemical works dedicated specifically to the purpose, or within the framework of systematic theological treatises. In those latter works, the authors did not only broach their own positions, but also the opinions of people who did not share their beliefs. In this context they discussed all dubitable arguments (subah) advanced by their opponents, be they Muslim heretics or simply infidels — who, apart from dualists, Jews and Christians, usually also included the philosophers.

It ought to be added, however, that the sources do present us with a problem in this context: a small number of exceptions and some fragments aside, the theological works of the 9th century are lost to us. With regard to this period, one therefore cannot do much more than pointing out that the extant bibliographical lists of the Islamic theologians repeatedly mention refutations of philosophy, or of Aristotle specifically. From the 10th century, by contrast, we do possess numerous theological works, in which an acid

criticism of philosophy can be easily detected, for instance in texts by Abū l-Hasan al-Aṣ'arī (d. 324/935-936) and by Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), who in turn explicitly mentions Muhammad b. Sabīb, a Mu'tazilite author of the 9th century, as his source. In such cases, the chasm that must have existed between philosophy and theology in the 9th and 10th centuries becomes glaringly obvious. Good reason perhaps to refrain from obliging the theologians of that time to become part of a history of 'philosophy in the Islamic world'.

[Unveiling Sufism: From Manhattan to Mecca](#) by William Rory Dickson and Meena Sharify-Funk [Equinox Publishing, 9781781792445]

In contrast to most introductory texts on Sufism, this work begins not with the historical past, but with the contemporary present. Beginning with Sufism as it is lived today, each chapter further unveils the complexities of Sufism, journeying through a variety of historical, political, and cultural contexts, moving deeper into the past, and closer to the origin and heart of Sufism. This genealogical framework will enable the reader to understand the patterns of connection between contemporary manifestations of Sufism and past realities. To ensure that the full range of Sufism's varied expressions is taken into account, each chapter is divided into four sections: Politics and Power, Philosophy and Metaphysics, Arts and Culture, and Overview of Historical Developments. Dividing chapters into these four broad categories enables the book to highlight some of the ways in which Sufism has influenced Muslim politics, philosophy, art, and culture in each historical period. In each category the relevant issues are illustrated through detailed case studies, whether of a particular Sufi figure, place, artistic expression, or philosophical view. This allows the reader to develop a genuinely three-dimensional appreciation of Sufism, neither reducing it to a private mystical experience divorced from social expression, nor limiting the tradition to historical names and dates.

Excerpt:

In the market, in the cloister — only God I saw.  
In the valley and on the mountain — only God I saw.

Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation;  
In favour and in fortune — only God I saw.  
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,  
In the religion of the Prophet — only God I saw.  
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance, Qualities nor causes — only God I saw.  
I opened mine eyes and by the light of his face around me In all the eye discovered — only God I saw.  
Like a candle I was melting in his fire:  
Amidst the flames outflashing — only God I saw.  
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,  
But when I looked with God's eyes — only God I saw.  
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,  
And lo, I was the All-living — only God I saw.  
(Baba Kuhi in Arberry 1960: 81-82)

The above poem is from one of the oldest collections of Persian Sufi poetry still extant, by Shaykh Abu 'Abdullah Mohammad ibn 'Abdallah ibn 'Ubaydallah Bakuya Shirazi (d. 1037), popularly known as Baba Kuhi or "Father of the Mountain". He was born in Shiraz in Southern Iran, the famous city of saints and scholars, poets and philosophers. Shiraz was a city renowned as the dar al-'ilm, the "House of Knowledge", for it possessed a rich heritage of theologians, Sufis, calligraphers, and scientists.

Hailing from Shiraz, Baba Kuhi travelled far and wide seeking knowledge. He met some of the leading Sufis of his time, even studying under one of the disciples of the famous Sufi martyr of Baghdad, Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922). After years on the road, he returned to his native Shiraz where he took up residence in a cave in a mountain north of the city, now named Baba Kuhi after him. The cave soon became a site for pilgrimage, vigil, and prayer. According to a popular legend (of which there are a number of versions), a young Shams al-Din Hafiz (d. 1326) working as a humble baker, caught a glimpse of an aristocratic girl and fell madly in love with her.

Knowing that she was beyond his reach, yet longing unceasingly, he sought a way out. Hafiz recalled the "promise of Baba Kuhi", that if someone spent 40 nights awake at his tomb on the mountain, the Sufi saint of the mountain would grant that person's wish. Hafiz struggled through 40 gruelling days of work for the bakery, with each night passed in wakefulness at the saint's tomb. Finally, after the 40th night, he encountered the archangel Gabriel. Gabriel asked Hafiz what he desired, and Hafiz, so struck by the angel's beauty, could only think of how much more beautiful God must be, and instead of invoking the girl that had taken his heart, he said that he wanted only God. After returning to town he found himself endowed with the gift of poetry, and was guided toward a Sufi teacher, to whom he would become a disciple for the next 40 years. Thenceforth Hafiz travelled the Sufi path to God and became one of Persia's most celebrated poets, read throughout the Muslim world and later beloved by Western readers.

Until recently, there lived in Baba Kuhi's tomb a local hermit who was himself called Baba Kuhi. The living Baba Kuhi resided in a small room built into the mountain, and would receive pilgrims who would climb the mountain to pay homage to both the original Baba Kuhi and his current representative. Some families would have their children make the rather arduous hike up to Baba Kuhi every Friday morning to bring him food and fruit, the weekly journey being a part of their moral and religious formation. In response, Baba Kuhi would recite from the Qur'ān and from the poetry of Hafiz. If many visitors arrived at the same time, Baba Kuhi would simply say, "when you have unexpected guests you just add more water to the pot". At times Baba Kuhi would have to keep a low profile to avoid intimidation by local authorities, who were not always friendly to Sufis. Eventually, one cold winter night the last Baba Kuhi passed away, with some speculating that locals had no longer been checking on him or bringing him food as they once did. In recent years the local government has built a shrine complex at the site, and the space has become a more popular destination for those seeking refuge from the bustle of modern urban life. Families with children and the elderly have picnics there; fashionably-dressed youth hold singing and story telling parties; tourists go seeking a beautiful view of Shiraz; while others find solace in prayer.

The story of Baba Kuhi and his tomb atop a small mountain near Shiraz conveys the rich legacy of Sufism within many traditional Islamic societies. Baba Kuhi's poem draws upon a range of imagery to express one of Sufism's central metaphysical claims, that amidst the varied landscapes, systems of belief, fortunes and misfortunes one encounters in the world, only God truly exists, all else having a relative, temporary, and ultimately illusory status. The legend of young Hafiz's vigil at Baba Kuhi's tomb highlights the inestimable significance of tomb-shrines in Muslim societies historically, as sites of seeking, prayer, vigil, spiritual experience, and artistic inspiration. The continuing importance of Baba Kuhi's site shows how until recently, for many Muslims, paying homage to Sufis and making pilgrimage to Sufi shrines was understood to be an integral part of Muslim devotion. The fact that these traditions are in some cases disappearing reflects a shift found in a variety of Muslim contexts, where Sufi traditions are being either forgotten or in some cases actively erased. As the most recent Baba Kuhi had to avoid official harassment, we can see that Sufism is not always something favoured by political elites.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

As illustrated above, Sufism is a multidimensional phenomenon. To introduce Sufism's many dimensions, we have divided each chapter in this work into four thematic sections: (1) Politics and Power, (2) Philosophical Principles and Practices, (3) Arts and Culture, and 4) Overview of Historical Developments. Sufism has informed all levels of Islamic culture and society, and dividing chapters into these four broad categories allows us to highlight some of the ways in which Sufism has influenced Muslim politics, philosophy, metaphysics, art, and culture in each historical period. With each category we illustrate the relevant issues through detailed case studies, whether of a particular Sufi figure, place, artistic expression, or philosophical view. This allows the reader to develop a richly contextualized appreciation of Sufism. We seek to avoid reducing Sufism to a private mystical experience divorced from socio-political expression, and present historical figures in dynamic relation to one another and to the major events and movements of an era.

In contrast to most introductory texts on Sufism, we begin not with the historical past, but with the contemporary present. We begin with the diversity of lived Sufism in North America today. We begin with the here and now. Starting with Sufism as it is lived today in North America, with each chapter we unveil the complexities of Sufism as we move deeper through time and space, journeying through a variety of historical, political, and cultural contexts, further delving into the past, and closer to the origin of Sufism. This geneological framework enables the reader to understand the patterns of connection between contemporary manifestations of Sufism and past realities. From the bustling metropolis of twenty-first century Manhattan, we move back to colonial Algeria, through medieval Delhi and Istanbul, back to Baghdad and ultimately Mecca — the birthplace of Islam and its mystical tradition. Of course, there are significant limitations inherent in any summative work, and as it is impossible to provide a comprehensive history of such a rich and varied subject, we have highlighted particular examples to suggest broader patterns. There is a multitude of examples that could have been chosen, though we have selected ones that should offer doorways for the reader to develop a deeper understanding of the subject as a whole.

We use the term "unveiling" in the title of this book with due awareness of the often clichéd manner in which the term has been employed in discussing subjects related to Islam and Muslim women in particular, a usage rooted in Orientalist tropes of exotification. However, we use the term in a specific sense, invoking the Arabic word *kashf*. Derived from the tri-lateral root *ka-sha-fa*, the word *kashf* can be translated as "unveiling", but has further connotations of searching, bringing to light, disclosing, discovering, exploring, and revealing what is hidden. Within the context of Islam's mystical or contemplative traditions, the word *kashf* is a technical term referring to mystical knowledge, the knowledge of the unseen that God "unveils" or reveals to the seeker.

Also in this book, we integrate accounts of women's participation in shaping the Sufi tradition historically and today. Feminist scholars have long noted the erasure of women from history, and have struggled to re-write women back into the larger story of humanity. Islamic history is no exception, and the historically critical roles played by women

remain in need of attention. In the present text we do not devote a separate chapter to Sufi women, but do address the absence of women in such histories by integrating stories of Sufi women throughout the text, as they naturally arise in discussions of Sufi thought and practice. The contribution of women to Sufism is important and cannot be neglected lest an inadequate treatment of the subject as a whole result. The influence of Sufi metaphysician Ibn al-`Arabi (d. 1240) for example, cannot be adequately discussed without noting his female Sufi teachers, nor can Sufism's theology of love be understood without an appreciation of the great female saint Rabi' a al-`Adawiyya's (d. 801) foundational role in its development. In the current context, there has been a notable rise of female Sufi leaders in both North America (Fariha al-Jerrahi, for example) and in the Middle East (Nur Artiran and Cemalnur Sargut).

In Chapter 1, we explore Sufism in twentieth century and twenty-first century North America. We begin painting a picture of the political climate within which contemporary Sufis operate, in exploring Sufism in post-9/11 Manhattan. Sufis frequently find themselves at the intersection of a variety of political pressures, including growing anti-Muslim sentiment among Americans, and growing anti-Sufi movements among Muslims. We then shift from contemporary politics, to discuss the different interpretive tendencies emerging among Sufi communities in North America, including universalist tendencies that understand Sufism as something not limited to Islam, to more traditionalist perspectives that assert Sufism's necessary connection to Islamic practices and laws. In order to shed light on Sufism's remarkable influence on North American artists, we look at the thirteenth century Sufi personality, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), whose immensely popular poetry has inspired a variety of cultural expressions, from restaurants, to visual art, yoga, social activism, dance, and music. We conclude with a brief mapping of Sufism's historical development throughout the twentieth century, charting the lives and influences of Sufi personalities, who would shape distinct trends, including more universalist approaches to Sufism, and those more closely affiliated with Muslim identity and ritual life.

Understanding the contemporary complexity of Sufism's place in North America, and indeed

around the world, is possible only if we understand how that place has been shaped by the global power shifts, conflicts, and migrations of the past three centuries, during a period known as the colonial era. The reverberations of this era continue to undergird contemporary patterns, such as the Western fascination with Sufism, and opposition to Sufism among some Muslims. Chapter 2 allows us to make sense of these contemporary dynamics. Politically, Sufis such as Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri (d. 1883) organized military resistance to growing European dominance of the Muslim world. Despite being at the forefront of Islamic resistance and revival movements, Sufis like Ahmad al-'Alawi (d. 1934) were soon facing anti-Sufi reformist movements, having to justify their place within Islam in unprecedented ways. Just as Sufism was being contested among Muslims however, Western literary figures like Johann Wolfgang van Goethe (d. 1832) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (d. 1882) were being drawn to Sufism's rich poetic traditions. The availability of Sufi poetry was in many cases a direct result of the access European colonial officials had to the classical Sufi literary canon. However, their presentation of Sufism largely situated it as something apart from Islam. This separation would have implications for how Sufism was perceived by Muslims and Westerners during this period and ultimately into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The diversity of contemporary Sufism and its dynamism during the colonial era can be traced to shared roots, which we explore in Chapter 3, considering Sufism's role during the height of the Muslim "Gunpowder" empires between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries: the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal dynasties. In terms of politics and power, this chapter delves into the close relations some Sufis had with Muslim dynasties. The Safavid political dynasty itself emerged out of a Sufi order, while Sufi orders were integral to the social and political structures of Ottoman life. In Mughal India, Sufism was closely associated both with efforts to dissolve boundaries between Muslims and Hindus, and with movements to reassert the superiority of Islam and to entrench the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims. In contrast to Sufism's relationship with imperial elites, we discuss the wandering mendicants of Islam, the dervishes, representing a counter-cultural Sufism that rejected social norms and conventions. Regardless of their

position in society, Muslims in general during this period congregated in Sufi shrines, seeking the blessings of the saints. The Sufi shrine then brought together all elements of Muslim society, being honoured by imperial courts, venerated by dervishes, and respected as focal points of local devotion. As we illustrate, in contrast to the contemporary period, Sufism during this era was integral to almost every facet of life in Muslim societies, infusing government, commerce, and industry as well as the arts and sciences.

Moving deeper into history, in Chapter 4, we consider those Sufis who integrated Islamic law, theology and philosophy with the aesthetics and practices of Sufism to forge a holistic paradigm in the medieval era. It was between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries that Sufism crystalized as a comprehensive worldview, one that would define Islam for centuries to follow, shaping the culture of Muslim societies and empires. The great synthesizers of Sufi thought, figures such as Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), played paramount roles in drawing the outlines of classical Sufism. Some Sufi scholars like al-Ghazali worked within government institutions, seeking to reconcile Sufism with both Islamic jurisprudence and the political powers of his day. Philosophically, Ibn al-'Arabi articulated a metaphysics of oneness alongside a conception of human perfectibility, leading to a cosmology of unity and sainthood. Socially, Sufism was institutionalized during this period as a series of religious orders, four of which will be explored in this chapter (the Shadhili, Qadiri, Naqshbandi, and Chishti orders), each representing a different cultural region within Islamic civilization. With Sufism's institutionalization in a system of orders, Sufi practices became more codified, with each order developing its own particular forms of devotion, meditation, and contemplation. We see during this time the development of a sound mysticism, as Sufi devotion was integrated with musical traditions, and Sufi chanting coordinated with breath and body, producing spiritual practices of song, dance, and ecstasy.

In Chapter 5, we trace the formation of Sufism in the early period of Islam, from the eighth to the tenth centuries. Islamic spirituality, like law and theology, was being formulated during this period. It was hence subject to conflicts over the nature of

God, the Qur'ān, and the ideal Muslim self and society, conflicts that affected all aspects of the emergent Islamic civilization. Proto-Sufis emerge as exponents of the Qur'ān's hidden meaning, rejecters of the newfound wealth and worldly status of early Islamic empires, and proponents of relating to God not simply as a law-giver and lord, but also as an intimate friend and lover. Seminal figures of this era include Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) and Rabi'a the great female Sufi and representative of the path of divine love. Sufis drew controversy for their claims of intimacy and unity with God, most notably culminating in the death of Sufism's famous "martyr of love" al-Hallaj. Also, in this period Sufism began to be understood as a distinctive science within Islam due in large part to the efforts of Sufi biographers like Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074) to document the principles and practices of Sufism. Sufis would further embrace the structure and themes of pre-Islamic poetry, using its imagery of loss, longing, and the journey to find the beloved, to represent the spiritual search for God.

In Chapter 6, we conclude our journey back through history to consider Sufism's origin during the seventh and eighth centuries. The many principles and practices of Sufism explored in the book can be traced back to the Qur'ān, the revelatory experience of the Prophet Muhammad. To understand the roots of Sufi hermeneutics and concepts such as kashf, we take a closer look at the interpretive approach of Ja'far al-Sadiq, one of Islam's early polymaths and mystics. His suggestion that kashf revealed deeper layers of meaning in the Qur'ān would shape Sufi approaches to the text thereafter. We further consider those verses of the Qur'ān and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that have shaped later Sufism. Sufi understandings of the Qur'ān were controversial, and their claim to have access to the Qur'ān's deeper meanings was contested by scholars who rejected the possibility of esoteric interpretation. This started a debate that continues to this day among Muslims over how to understand the Qur'ān. We then explore Muhammad's life and spiritual practices, which are exemplary for Sufis, and further consider the Prophet's metaphysical status and meaning for Sufi practitioners. Attention will also be given to Sufi use of Qur'ānic calligraphy to beautify expression of the Divine word, and to the development of Sufi thought about the mystical significance of Arabic

letters. Finally, we consider Sufism in the larger world historical context. Although Sufism may not have originated outside of Islam, it has undoubtedly integrated various mystical and philosophical systems prevalent in the Near East. As such, we look at the influence of some of these, including Christian mysticism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Zoroastrianism.

## DEFINING SUFISM

But what is Sufism? Who is a Sufi? The English word "Sufism" is derived from the Arabic term *tasawwuf*. To define *tasawwuf*, there is arguably no better place to start than with the first comprehensive treatise on Sufism written in Persian, the *Kashf al-Mahjub*, or "Unveiling the Mystery". The discussion of Sufism in the work remains paradigmatic, and many contemporary definitions of Sufism refer back to this work. The author 'Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1073) was renowned for the eloquence of his Persian. In the *Kashf al-Hujwiri* documents the origin and development of Sufism. He summarizes theories on the etymological origin of the word *tasawwuf*, relating that some consider the term to be derived from the Arabic word for wool, *suf*, as early Sufis wore wool as a sign of renunciation. Others say the word comes from *safa*, meaning purity. Some connect *tasawwuf* to the Greek word for wisdom, *Sophia*. Al-Hujwiri however, does not consider any of these theories to be certain, and concludes that no one can determine the origin of the name with any finality. Instead, he proposes a definition of a Sufi that tells us something about a Sufi's purpose: a Sufi is defined as "he that is absorbed in the Beloved and has abandoned all else". Unlike the English word, which, with the suffix "ism", indicates an ideology or doctrine, *tasawwuf* is a verbal noun that refers to a process, the process of becoming a Sufi. At its most basic then, Sufism is a process of becoming, or as al-Hujwiri suggests, the process of becoming absorbed in the Beloved or God.

This process of becoming is the culmination of many principles and practices, which early Sufi biographers like al-Hujwiri and al-Qushayri collected and recorded. Some of these include developing a keen sense of etiquette, renouncing attachment to the world, engaging in repentance, refining one's morals and practising virtues, trusting in God, gaining hidden knowledge, and longing for as well as experiencing Divine love. Early Sufi definitions of Sufism often highlight these principles,

as the definitions have a pedagogical purpose for Sufi aspirants. For example, Abu-Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr (d. 1049) said, "Sufism is this: Whatever you have in your mind — forget it; whatever you have in your hand — give it; whatever is to be your fate — face it!" 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492) relates that, "A seeker went to ask a sage guidance on the Sufi way. The sage counselled, 'If you have never trodden the path of love, go away and fall in love, then come back and see us'". According to 'Amr ibn 'Uthman al-Makki (d. 909), "The Sufi acts according to whatever is most fitting to the moment". Paradoxically, Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 874) says that, "the thing we tell of can never be found by seeking, yet only seekers find it". Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) relates that, "Sufism means that God causes you to die to yourself and gives you life in Him", reflecting al-Hujwiri's understanding that "The Sufi is absent from himself and present with God". Historically, this path of moral development, renunciation, knowledge, and love, was traced to the Qur'ān and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Sufis believe that, based on the Qur'ān, the Prophet shared with his closest companions, like 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) and Abu Bakr (d. 634), these principles of moral and spiritual transformation. As this transmission of spiritual transformation took place from master to disciple over generations, the various doctrines and practices associated with it became increasingly codified, and the term *tasawwuf* was developed to refer to those Muslims who focused on drawing closer to God by practicing these teachings. Once the term *tasawwuf* had a cultural currency however, those claiming to be Sufis for social status began to emerge. To distinguish genuine Sufis from the imposters, Sufis began to increasingly emphasize the importance of having a *silsila* or chain of transmission, naming their own master, and the masters before him or her going back to the Prophet. As we will see in the first chapter, this *silsila*, this chain of transmission of spiritual blessing so central to Sufism, continues to be passed on through generations from master to disciple, even in contemporary Manhattan.

[Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam](#) by Shahab Ahmed [Harvard University Press, 9780674047426]

One of the most controversial episodes in the life of the Prophet Muhammad concerns an incident in

which he allegedly mistook words suggested by Satan as divine revelation. Known as the Satanic verses, these praises to the pagan deities contradict the Islamic belief that Allah is one and absolute. Muslims today—of all sects—deny that the incident of the Satanic verses took place. But as Shahab Ahmed explains, Muslims did not always hold this view.

[Before Orthodoxy](#) wrestles with the question of how religions establish truth—especially religions such as Islam that lack a centralized authority to codify beliefs. Taking the now universally rejected incident of the Satanic verses as a case study in the formation of Islamic orthodoxy, Ahmed shows that early Muslims, circa 632 to 800 CE, held the exact opposite belief. For them, the Satanic verses were an established fact in the history of the Prophet. Ahmed offers a detailed account of the attitudes of Muslims to the Satanic verses in the first two centuries of Islam and traces the chains of transmission in the historical reports known as *riwāyah*.

Touching directly on the nature of Muhammad's prophetic visions, the interpretation of the Satanic verses incident is a question of profound importance in Islam, one that plays a role in defining the limits of what Muslims may legitimately say and do—issues crucial to understanding the contemporary Islamic world.

Excerpt: How Does Truth Happen?

In olden times, the earth was stationary, and the sun and the sky used to revolve around it. Poets used to say: By night and day the seven heav'ns revolve! And then a person by the name of Galileo came along and began to make the earth revolve around the sun. The priests were very angry that someone had put them in such a spin. By giving due punishment to Galileo, they put a stop to these sorts of movements, but even so they could not stop the world from rotating, and it still goes on moving in the same old way. -IBN-E INSHĀ'

This book was conceived as the first volume of a history of Muslim attitudes to the Satanic verses incident, covering the fourteen hundred years from the beginning of Islam down to the present day. The "Satanic verses incident" is the name given in Western scholarship to what is known in the Islamic tradition as *qissat al-gharānīq*, "The Story of the

Cranes" or "The Story of the Maidens," which narrates the occasion on which the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have mistaken words suggested to him by Satan as being Divine Communication—that is, as being part of the Qur'an. These Satanic verses praise the pagan deities of the Prophet's tribe and acknowledge their power to intercede with the supreme God. By uttering the Satanic verses, Muhammad thus committed the error of compromising the fundamental theological principle of the Divine Message of which he was Messenger—namely, the absolute and exclusive unicity (taihīd) of the One God, Allāh.

The facticity and historicity of the Satanic verses incident are today (with a few maverick exceptions) universally rejected by Muslims of all sects and interpretative movements—Sunni, Twelver Shī'ī, Ismā'īlī Shī'ī, Ahmadi, Ibādī, Hanafī, Shāfi'ī, Mālikī, Hanbali, Wahhābī, Salafi, Deobandī, Barelvi, and so forth—routinely on pain of heresy (kufr)—that is, on pain of being deemed not a Muslim. The Satanic verses incident is understood as calling into question the integrity of the process of Divine Communication to Muhammad—and thus the integrity of the Text of the Qur'an. The universal rejection of the Satanic verses incident constitutes an instance of contemporary Islamic orthodoxy—that is to say, it is the only truth that a Muslim qua Muslim may legitimately hold on the matter. For the last two hundred years, to be a Muslim, one should believe that the Satanic verses incident did not take place—that is, the contemporary Muslim should not believe that the Prophet Muhammad recited verses of Satanic suggestion as Divine inspiration. In other words, for modern Muslims, the Satanic verses incident is something entirely unthinkable.

The reason for my writing this book is that, as a straightforward matter of historical fact, this Islamic orthodoxy of the rejection of the facticity of the Satanic verses incident has not always obtained. The fundamental finding of the present volume is that in the first two centuries of Islam, Muslim attitudes to the Satanic verses incident were effectively the direct opposite of what they are today. This volume studies no less than fifty historical reports that narrate the Satanic verses incident and that were transmitted by the first generations of Muslims. This study of the Satanic verses incident in the historical memory of the early

Muslim community will demonstrate in detail that the incident constituted an absolutely standard element in the memory of early Muslims of the life of their Prophet. In other words, the early Muslim community believed almost universally that the Satanic verses incident was a true historical fact. As far as the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community in the first two hundred years was concerned, the Messenger of God did indeed, on at least one occasion, mistake words of Satanic suggestion as being of Divine inspiration. For the early Muslims, the Satanic verses incident was something entirely thinkable.

The juxtaposition of these two realities—the fact that the Muslim community in the first two hundred years of Islam pretty much universally believed the Satanic verses incident to be true, while the Muslim community in the last two hundred years of Islam pretty much universally believes the Satanic verses incident to be untrue—calls into being a number of simple but far-reaching historical questions. How was the Satanic verses incident transformed in Muslim consciousness from fact into anathema, from something entirely thinkable into something categorically unthinkable? How did the truth in the historical Muslim community go from being the one thing to the opposite thing? How did this happen? When did this happen? Where did this happen? Why did this happen? At whose hands did this happen? The history of Muslim attitudes to the Satanic verses incident is thus a case study in a larger question central to the history of all human societies: how does truth happen? These questions will not, however, be answered fully in the present volume, which presents the foundational historical data along with a detailed account of the attitudes of Muslims to the Satanic verses incident in the first two centuries of Islam. [Publisher's note: Author Shahab Ahmed died before writing the anticipated second and third volumes of this work.]

The history of Muslim attitudes to the Satanic verses incident is a history of the formation of a unit of orthodoxy. By orthodoxy, I mean in the first instance any belief, or set of beliefs, including means for arriving at a belief, the proponents of which hold that it is the only valid and correct belief—that is, the only truth, or means for arriving at truth, on that particular matter. However, if we were to stop our definition here, we would not yet have orthodoxy; rather, we have only a claim to

orthodoxy from which people may yet dissent. For orthodoxy to obtain as a social fact—that is: for a single truth-claim to establish and maintain itself in society as the sole and exclusive truth—it is necessary, as a practical matter, for the proponents of that truth-claim to be in a position to impose sanction (which need not necessarily be legal sanction) upon dissenters. Orthodoxy, in other words, is not merely an intellectual phenomenon: it is also social phenomenon—it is, as Talal Asad has famously said, "not a mere body of opinion, but a distinct relationship—a relationship of power."

The most successful orthodoxies, however, are those for which no sanction need ever be imposed at all—for the simple reason that there are no dissenters. One such example of a supremely successful orthodoxy is the belief, universally held today, that the earth is round—or, strictly speaking, is a geoid. This is a truth-claim for the maintenance of which no sanction need be imposed, for the simple reason that it is a truth-claim from which there are effectively no dissenters (the minuscule Flat Earth Society notwithstanding). That the earth is "round" is universally accepted as true—that the earth is "round" is an orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, if someone were to dissent from this truth-claim, it would result in sanction—this might take the form of that person's family and friends doubting his/her soundness of mind, and thus treating him/her differently to how they would treat a "normal" person; or, if that person happened to be an astrophysicist, in his/her being ostracized and rejected by his/ her colleagues, who would no longer regard the person as one of them. In other words, communities and orthodoxies are mutually constitutive: communities are constituted by their adherence to crucial and definitive orthodoxies of their making, and a person's nonadherence to a constitutive orthodoxy has the effect of placing him outside that community of truth. The historical process of the formation of orthodoxy is a process of the historical process of community—of a community of truth.

The process of the historical formation of authoritative truth in the demographically vast and geographically dispersed community of Muslims is particularly interesting since—unlike Christians, for example—Muslims did not develop the institutional equivalent of a Church: that is, an institution whose cadres are expressly invested with the corporate

authority and mechanisms for the determination of authoritative truth, and for the constitution of a community in that truth. There is no equivalent in the history of societies of Muslims to the institutional mechanism of a church council that is constituted precisely to determine the constitution of the truth that in turn constitutes the communion of salvation. Rather, what obtains is a loose community of scholars dispersed through a vast geographical space, holding to different, textually constituted legal and theological sects and schools of thought, and living in relationships of ongoing negotiation with political power in a variety of dispensations, on the one hand, and also in relationships of negotiation with other groups and formations of *'ulamā'*, on the other. In such a context, how does a single position come to be universally established as authoritatively true?

Of course, Islam is not the only truth-phenomenon characterized by the absence of a church institution. There is also no church in Judaism. However, the human and historical phenomenon of Islam is distinguished from Judaism (and from Christianity) by the fact that, from its very outset, Islam was an imperial religion the articulation of whose truths took place in a context charged with the demands of imperial power. Second, by virtue of the rapid and prolific geographical expansion of the early Islamic polity, Muslims have from the very outset had to articulate the truth-content of Islam in a demographically and geographically vast, dispersed, and diverse context. The territorial expansion of the Islamic polity began even before the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and within a century the territories of the Umayyad caliphate extended from the African shore of the Atlantic to the River Indus, from Yemen to Transoxania. Muslims never enjoyed the prolonged historical comfort of articulating their formative truths on an insulated local scale, or as minority communities whose formulations were of relatively little consequence for anyone beyond themselves.

Of course, Islam is not alone in being bound up with the constitution of a vast imperial domain: one might readily cite neo-Confucianism in China as a similar imperial phenomenon. However, two differences between Islam and neo-Confucianism are crucial for thinking about the formation of orthodoxy. The first is that whereas neo-Confucianism in China was the constitutive truth

of what was, for the bulk of its history, ethnically and linguistically a relatively homogenous space, Islam, in contrast, formed in a prolifically diverse ethnic and linguistic space whose communities were influenced by vastly divergent normative notions of truth. Second, neo-Confucianism was the constitutive truth of what was a territory ruled by at most two, and often by a just a single political dispensation. Islam has been for the overwhelming bulk of its history ruled by a myriad of different polities.

Again: in this diffuse social, structural, and spatial circumstance, how did a single truth-claim come to be established as authoritative and exclusive—especially, a truth-claim that is the opposite of that with which Muslims began? What is the process by which orthodoxy formed among Muslims on the question of the Satanic verses?

Scholarship on the Satanic verses incident in both the Islamic and Western academies has effectively confined itself to the question of whether the incident really took place. This issue, however, is of little interest to me. What I am concerned with is not whether the Satanic verses incident really happened, but whether or not Muslims through history believed it to have happened: if so, why; and if not, why not? To the extent that it is possible to demarcate in broad brushstrokes across such a vast geographical space a time line for the formation of orthodoxy on the Satanic verses, it appears somewhat as follows. In the first two hundred years of Islam, from about 600 to 800, acceptance of the historicity of the Satanic verses incident was the near-universal position. Over the period from about 800 to 1100, rejection of the incident presents itself more regularly in the literature: in this period it seems that the number of scholars who accept and reject the incident is roughly equal. However, in this period, those rejecting the incident rarely question statedly the orthodoxy of those who accept it: rather, the sentiment seems to be *Allāhu a`lam*, "God knows best!" In the rough period 1100-1800, rejection of the incident becomes established as the dominant position and those who reject the incident regularly accuse those who accept it of "denying (the Truth)" (*kufr*)—that is, of unbelief tantamount to heresy. Nonetheless, a number of historically important figures continue to argue in this period for the facticity of the incident, and hold that to believe the incident to be true (as they do) is entirely

consonant with Islam.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in the period after about 1800, rejection of the incident becomes near universal. In this period, the handful of Muslim scholars who accept the incident both tend not to be recognized as *`ulamā'* by the mutually acknowledging community of traditionally trained *`ulamā'*, and to have a larger reputation as "unorthodox" (or outright heretical) among Muslims at large.

The question of the formation of Islamic orthodoxy might well be investigated through any number of case studies. However, what makes the Satanic verses incident a particularly (perhaps uniquely) productive case study in the formation of orthodoxy is the fact that implicated in the incident are fundamental questions about the nature of Mubammad's Prophethood and the nature of Divine Revelation—that is, the two foundational component elements of Islam—that impinge on and were of concern to scholars engaged in almost every intellectual field in the history of Islam. As such, the incident was treated in a wide range of disciplines and genres across fourteen hundred years: *tafsir* (Qur'ān exegesis), *Hadīth* and the sciences of *Hadīth* transmission, *sīrah-maglaāzī* (epic biography of Muhammad), *ta'rikh* (history), *dalā'il* and *shamā'il* (devotional biography of Muhammad), philosophy, *kalām-theology*, jurisprudence and legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*), Sufism, and, in the modern period in particular, rebuttals of Christian polemicists and Orientalists of the Western academy. What emerges from this range of treatments of the incident is nothing less than a dizzying interdisciplinary debate conducted by Muslim scholars who approach the questions at hand on the varied basis of different criteria and methods of argumentation developed and employed in different disciplines and fields of knowledge. We have noted, above, the contrast between the first two hundred years and the last two hundred years of Islamic history—between near-universal acceptance of the incident and near-universal rejection. The history of Muslim attitudes to the Satanic verses in the intervening millennium is the history of formation of Islamic orthodoxy on this question. It is a history made complicated by the simultaneous, overlapping, and interacting presence of a number of different and variant trajectories: by the fact of different Muslims in different places and at different times variously accepting and

rejecting the incident on the basis of different epistemologies, all of which claimed equally to be fully and legitimately Islamic, while being perfectly aware of other positions and claims.

The rejection of the historicity of the Satanic verses incident that constitutes Islamic orthodoxy today is a position that is founded on rational argumentation. The Satanic verses incident is rejected as untrue on the basis of two epistemological principles, one of which we may call a historiographical principle, and the other a theological principle. These two epistemological principles are the criteria by which Muslims assess the truth-value of the claim that Muhammad mistook Satanic suggestion for Divine Communication—they are the principles by which the determination of truth is made. The authority of these two epistemological principles is universally accepted in the Muslim community today: they are, in other words, the epistemological principles of Islamic orthodoxy.

The historiographical principle on the basis of which the Satanic verses incident is rejected as untrue is the fundamental principle of Hadīth methodology. As is well-known, all historical reports (riwāyah) in the early Muslim community take the same textual format—namely, a chain of transmitters to which is appended a narrative body (or *matn*). A *riwāyah* thus takes the form so-and-so heard from so-and-so who heard from so-and-so who heard from so-and-so that the Prophet did such-and-such or said such-and-such. The basic principle of Hadīth transmission is that the truth-value of a report is assayed, in the first instance, on the basis of the reputation for veracity and reliability of the individuals in the chain, on knowledge that each person in fact studied with the person from whom he claims to have reported, and finally that the transmission should go back in an unbroken chain to an eyewitness. It is for this evidentiary reason that the chain of transmitters is called the *isnād* or "support" (for the *matn*-body). Now, as regards the Satanic verses incident, all but one of the fifty reports that narrate the incident are carried by defective chains of transmission—that is, by *isnād*-supports that include at least one (if not more) unreliable transmitters, or by chains that are incomplete and do not go back to an eyewitness (interestingly, the sole report that does have a sound and complete,

or *sahīh*, chain has never been noticed or commented upon after its initial fourth-/tenth-century citation—for all practical purposes of historical memory, it had no subsequent existence in the memory of Muslims). Thus, on the basis of the epistemological principle of *isnad*-assessment—a principle that acquired such universal authority that the great scholar Fazlur Rahman straightforwardly termed it "Islamic Methodology in History"—the story of the Satanic verses incident is deemed untrue on evidentiary grounds, and thus did not actually take place as a matter of historical fact.

The theological principle on the basis of which the Satanic verses incident is rejected as untrue is the principle of *ʿismat al-anbiyāʾ* or the "Protection of Prophets"—meaning God's protection of His Prophets from sin and/or error. Although there is some disagreement among the various sects and schools of thought of Muslims as to the exact portfolio of God's protection of His Prophets, there is universal agreement today that Prophets are protected from the commission of error in the transmission of Divine Communication—else, there would be no guarantee of the integrity and uncorruptedness of the Text of the Qurʾān. The principle of *ʿismat al-anbiyāʾ* is grounded in such Qurʾānic pronouncements—that is, in statements by God Himself—as "Indeed, it is We who have sent down upon you the Remembrance; and We, indeed, are its Guardians," "Falsehood does not come to it, neither from between his hands, nor from behind him,"<sup>8</sup> and, of course, the famous passage, "Nor does he speak from his own desire, Indeed, it is nothing other than an inspiration, inspired!"<sup>9</sup> Given the logical necessity of the guarantee of the integrity of the process of Divine Communication to Muhammad, as attested by God Himself, the Satanic verses incident is deemed on the basis of the epistemological principle of *ʿismat al-anbiyāʾ* to be impossible, and thus not to have taken place as a matter of historical fact.

Now, it is simply not possible to accept the authority of either of these two epistemological principles, and simultaneously to accept the historicity of the Satanic verses incident. If one accepts the epistemological principle that reports are assayed on the basis of the *isnāds*, one cannot accept the Satanic verses incident. Similarly, if one accepts that Prophets are protected by God from

the commission of error in the transmission of Divine Communication, one cannot accept the historicity of the Satanic verses incident. Thus, at any moment in history, for any Muslim to have accepted the Satanic verses incident, that Muslim cannot have accepted the authority and applicability of these two epistemological principles of orthodoxy. It means that, at that historical moment, in that place, and for that person, these two truth-making principles were themselves not true: that person must have been operating by some other epistemological principles than those that eventually became epistemological orthodoxy. In other words, the history of the formation of early Islamic orthodoxy is not only also the history of the formation of Islamic epistemology as a history of how something became the truth; it is also the history of the criteria by which truth is constituted. It is the history of the truth, and of its social and intellectual infrastructure.

[Proofs of Prophecy and the Refutation of the Isma'iliyya: The Kitāb Ithbat nubuwwat al-nabi by the Zaydi al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh al-Haruni \(d. 411/1020\)](#) by Eva-Maria Lika [Welten Des Islams - Worlds of Islam - Mondes De L'islam, De Gruyter Mouton, 9783110539769]

Al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh al-Haruni (d. 411/1020) was a representative of the intellectual center of the Zaydiyya in Northern Iran and a student of the leading Mu'tazilite theologians of the time. In his Kitāb Ithbat nubuwwat al-nabi he presents a proof of prophecy of Muhammad and a refutation of the Isma'iliyya. The present volume explores the historical and intellectual context of the oeuvre and includes a partial critical edition of the text.

Excerpt: The Kitāb Ithbat nubuwwat al-nabi by al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh contains two frames of arguments: a refutation of the Ismā'īliyya and a proof of Muhammad's prophecy. The presentation of the historical background shows that the Ismā'īlīs succeeded not only politically by establishing the Fātimid state in North Africa and the Qarmāṭī state in Bahrayn; with their missionary propaganda they also successfully converted important regional leaders in Persia and beyond. In Tabaristan, the domain of al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh, by the 4th/10th century, Ismā'īlī influence had grown considerably, and the established religious powers now perceived the increasing Ismā'īlī presence as a

dangerous threat. As an act of defence authors of various denominations composed refutations against the Ismā'īliyya in a more or less polemical style, as the overview of anti-Ismā'īlī works demonstrates. In his Kitāb Ithbat nubuwwat al-nabi, al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh refers to four authors of such earlier refutations, whose works are all lost, except for that by Ibn Rizām, which has partly survived through later references. A comparison of these citations shows that Ibn Rizām's refutation is a polemical work that mainly described the alleged origins of Ismā'īlism and the early development of the group. Al-Mu'ayyad refers to another text that served the anti-Ismā'īlī purpose: the Kitāb al-Balāgha. This forgery of an Ismā'īlī text has also been lost, but it did survive in various later citations, with which al-Mu'ayyad seemed to be acquainted. He makes use of such polemical writings and repeats some of the widespread stereotypes about the Ismā'īliyya such as the permission of wine consumption or the omission of prayers, though he does not further develop on these texts.

Instead the Zaydī imam provides a critical statement of important notions of Ismā'īlī theology or what he considers to be Ismā'īlī teachings, including the negation of God, the negation of prophecy, the abolishment of religious law, and the denial of resurrection. In line with his predecessors and colleagues, he identifies the Ismā'īliyya as the new enemies of Islam. In order to underline their heretical character, al-Mu'ayyad equates the Ismā'īliyya with the enemies of Islam in former times: the false prophets Musaylima and Tulayha at the time of Muhammad, the mulhid Ibn al-Muqaffa' of the Umayyad and the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd era, and first and foremost the arch-heretic Ibn al-Rāwandī, who was active during 'Abbasid times. The critical books of Ibn al-Rāwandī cited can be read as mirroring the reproaches directed toward the Ismā'īliyya. In the Kitāb al-Tāj, Ibn al-Rāwandī denies the createdness of the world and God the creator. His Kitāb al-Zumurrud is a fundamental attack on prophecy in general and of the prophethood of Muhammad in particular. Finally, the Kitāb al-Dāmigh and the Kitāb al-Farid target the miracle of the inimitability of the Qur'ānic text as evidence for Muhammad. These criticisms correspond in some respects to those addressed

toward the *Ismā`īliyya* in the Introduction even if this parallel is not explicitly drawn by al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh himself. An analysis of the individual criticisms against the background of authentic *Ismā`īlī* texts indicates that al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh had a clear opinion about the relevant aspects of *Ismā`īlī* theology and their inherent ability to threaten Islam. A comparison with other refutations of the *Ismā`īliyya*, in particular Abū l-Qasim al-Bustī's *Min kashf Asrār al-Bāṭiniyya wa-`Awār madhhabihim*, and the anti-*Ismā`īlī* passages in al-Hakim al-Jishumī's *Sharh `Uyūn al-masā`il* and Ibn al-Malāhimī's *Tuhfat al-mutakallimin fi l-radd `alā l-falāsifa* as well as his *Kitāb al-Mu`tamad ft usūl al-din* suggest that these Zaydī—Mu`tazilī thinkers were concerned with similar features of *Ismā`īlī* theology. Reading between the lines leads to the assumption that the Zaydī imam, in fact, criticised *Ismā`īlī* concepts for their suprarational character: (1) The notion of God based on the double negation of all characteristics and conceptions and the validity of two opposites is considered as transcending the human realm of language and mental perception. (2) The *Ismā`īlī* concept of prophets and revelation understood as divine inspiration through direct access to the Intellect is considered to contradict the concept of prophets and revelation based on rational proofs and irrefutable transmission. (3) Finally, the concept of a religious law, whose inner meanings can be understood only by infallible imams and which cannot be verified on the basis of precise linguistic analysis, is in contrast with a notion of Scripture that not only provides definite religious instruction for the believer, but also contains the main evidence for the truthfulness of the prophet. Thus, it appears that al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh perceived the suprarational interpretation of these three fundamental Islamic concepts to be intellectual challenges to rational theology and Islam as a rationally justifiable religion. This alone makes the *Ithbāt* worthy of notice, because it sheds some light on the question why the *Ismā`īliyya* was considered to be so dangerous. In addition to the quick spread and remarkable political success of the *Ismā`īlī* movement, viz. it was the *Ismā`īlī* teachings that taught other Islamic denominations the meaning of fear.

In response to the *Ismā`īlī* threat, al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh eventually decided not to compose another *Radd `ala l-Ismā`īliyya* in the style of the authors cited, but he rather contrasts the *Ismā`īlī* suprarational doctrines with a thorough rational proof of prophecy: *Ithbāt nubuwwat al-nabi*. The analysis of some exemplarily selected arguments leads to the conclusion that al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh generally did not present original ideas. But rather he availed himself of a standard set of arguments, that has been formulated to some extent in response to the *mulhida* of the 3rd/9th century, most importantly to Ibn al-Rāwandī. In refutation of his fundamental objections, the prophetological arguments were refined and developed into a set of well-established rational proofs available to anyone with doubts.

Al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh's sources comprise standard works of the Mu`tazilī tradition of *kalām* texts, which were continued in Zaydī scholarship, as the presentation of the relevant texts suggests. In addition, al-Mu`ayyad uses similar material as contemporary scholars with linguistic expertise, such as the Ash`arī theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, who turned to establishing a linguistic rationale of the *i jāz*. Al-Mu`ayyad's particular merit lies in his extending the known arguments by discussing additional objections and adding more examples. For this purpose, he utilises the whole historical and linguistic heritage, with which he was well acquainted, as the overview of his oeuvre illustrates. With these rational instruments the Zaydī theologian hopes to deliver a persuasive answer to the doubts raised by the *Ismā`īlī* propaganda. Al-Mu`ayyad bi-llāh's text is thus an important contribution in the history of rational theology and its contention with competing systems of religious thought.

The study suggests that the continuing preoccupation with prophetology by rational theologians of the 4th/10th century was a result of the ideological struggle with *Ismā`īlism*. In order to further investigate these intersectarian influences, it seems worthwhile to figure out if and in which way *Ismā`īlī* theology, in particular the teaching of the *bāṭin*, provoked or at least fostered the development of the linguistic rationale of *i jāz*, that was mainly developed during this century. In

this endeavour, the corpus of texts should not be limited on classical polemics and refutations, but include apologetic writings in general. They have to be read with possible intentions of refutation in mind in order to be fruitful for future research on the intellectual relationship between Zaydiyya and Ismāʿīliyya.

[Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation](#) by William Rory Dickson [State University of New York Press, 9781438457567]

Offers an overview of Sufism in North America. In this book, William Rory Dickson explores Sufism as a developing tradition in North America, one that exists in diverse and beguiling forms. Sufism's broad-minded traditions of philosophy, poetry, and spiritual practice infused Islamic civilization for centuries and drew the attention of interested Westerners. By the early twentieth century, Sufism was being practiced in North America. Today's North American Sufism can appear either explicitly Islamic or seemingly devoid of Islamic religiosity. Dickson provides indispensable background on Sufism's relation to Islamic orthodoxy and to Western esoteric traditions, and its historical development in North America. The book goes on to chart the directions that North American Sufism is currently taking, directions largely chosen by Sufi leaders. The views of ten North American Sufi leaders are explored in depth and their perspectives on Islam, authority, gender, and tradition are put in conversation with one another. A more detailed picture of North American Sufism emerges, challenging previous scholarly classifications of Sufi groups, and highlighting Sufism's fluidity, diversity, and dynamism.

"...thoroughly informed and informative." — Midwest Book Review

"[Living Sufism in North America](#) is the first book of its kind to bridge the gap between Sufi studies and the study of North American contemporary religious movements. As such, it is a comprehensive, pioneering work of potential interest to a wide array of scholars in the field of contemporary religion." — Patrick Laude, author of [Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon, and Schuon](#)

[Sufism and American Literary Masters](#) by Mehdi Aminrazavi and Jacob Needleman [SUNY series in

Islam, State University of New York Press, 9781438453521]

Explores the influence of Sufism on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers. This book reveals the rich, but generally unknown, influence of Sufism on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature. The translation of Persian poets such as Hafiz and Sa'di into English and the ongoing popularity of Omar Khayyam offered intriguing new spiritual perspectives to some of the major American literary figures. As editor Mehdi Aminrazavi notes, these Sufi influences have often been subsumed into a notion of "Eastern," chiefly Indian, thought and not acknowledged as having Islamic roots. This work pays considerable attention to two giants of American literature, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, who found much inspiration from the Sufi ideas they encountered. Other canonical figures are also discussed, including Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, along with literary contemporaries who are lesser known today, such as Paschal Beverly Randolph, Thomas Lake Harris, and Lawrence Oliphant.

Excerpt: For centuries, the Western fascination with the East has been the subject of countless books, plays, and movies, particularly after the economic and intellectual effects of colonialism in the early nineteenth century introduced "Oriental" cultures to a sophisticated drawing-room audience. However, Hafiz, Sa'di, Jami, Rumi, and other Sufi masters had a place, however obscure and inaccurately portrayed, in the corpus of English translations long before Oriental themes and settings became a popular characteristic of nineteenth-century poetry. In fact, Sufi poetry was available to a European audience as early as the sixteenth century: the earliest reference to Persian poetry occurred in English in 1589, when George Puttenham included four anonymous "Oriental" poems in translation in *The Arte of English Poesie*; translations of Sa'di's *Gulistan* were available in Latin as early as 1654's *Rosarium*, translated by the Dutch orientalist Georgius Gentius. From the early seventeenth century onward, Western interest in Persian and Sufi poetry steadily increased, though such interest most often took the form of general references to Persian language and culture and not to specific poets and their works. Such references were already a standard component of the medieval

travel narrative, and almost always misidentified the names of Iranian and Arab poets, mystics, and philosophers, accompanied by equally creative spelling variations. Moreover, there was no literary value attached to literal translations, and no effort made to replicate the formal elements of the original poems. Instead, Sufi poetry entered Western literary circles as versified adaptations or imitations. Sa`di's *Gulistan*, Hafiz's *Divan*, Omar Khayyam's *Ruba`iyyat*, as well as Firdawsi's monumental work of Persian epic *Shah Nameh*, were all available to English audiences in some form by 1790. With their libertarian sentiments and didactic bent, Sufis appealed to an Enlightenment-era mentality that emphasized deism and an ethical rather than doctrinal conception of religion.

By the end of the seventeenth century, references to individual Sufi poets occurred with greater accuracy and specificity. The *Travels of Sir John Chardin* (1686) in particular was notable for its surprisingly accurate assessment of the basic tenets of Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Mathnawi* and Mahmud Shabistari's *Gulshan-i raz*, including Rumi's proofs of the existence of God in man and the emphasis on individual and social tranquility that lay at the heart of Sufism's esoteric teachings. As a result of personal experience with the Sufis of Isfahan and a detailed understanding of the Persian language, Chardin included an unprecedented amount of factual information about Sufism itself, such as an extensive etymology of the term and an explanation of the important differences between Sufism as a mystical order and Sufism as the political basis of the Safavid Dynasty.

Though themes such as the vanity of the world, the analogies between experience in Nature and in love, and the inability of human reason to explain or address the world's mysteries were not unique to Sufism, they found an eloquence of expression in the ghazals of Hafiz, for instance, that resonated with the nineteenth-century Western world even in translation. Though its traditional themes and images were often exploited for purely aesthetic purposes, Sufi poetry did in fact have a more significant effect on Romantic and Transcendental poetry than simply providing a storehouse of Oriental imagery. The image of "the East" as a place of great wisdom that possessed an esoteric knowledge lacking in the West gained popularity

due to its compatibility with the spirit of Romanticism, which saw the essence of Eastern wisdom in the concept of *carpe diem*. The phrase, meaning "seize the day," was coined by the Roman lyric poet Horace, but emerged as a popular theme in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century love poetry, often as an incitement to a love affair. By the nineteenth century, *carpe diem* had become an axiom as well as a poetic motif, and invoked a sense profound spirituality intertwined with the very notion of daily existence that should not be confused with the present-day, self-serving connotation of the phrase.

What is remarkable is that the spiritual map of "the East" of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and America had no geographical location, and all Easterners were allegedly conveying the same message—that of living in the present, accompanied by a lack of concern for the material and a focus on goodness, peace, and love. The fact that there is no such thing as a monolithic East and that the Orient consists of diverse cultures was overshadowed by the interest of European and American literary masters and intellectuals in developing a utopian model inspired by the East. This fascination with the stereotypical image of Eastern cultures may have had something to do with the wounds of post-Civil War American society. As the extent of the inhumanity, cruelty, and tragedy of the Civil War was becoming more and more apparent, the perceived Eastern message of the temporality and fleeting nature of life and the idea of existence being closely connected with suffering was indeed therapeutic and soothing to the traumatized American society. Sufi beliefs in their most simplistic interpretations resonated on the level of the national consciousness. "Eastern wisdom," with its perceived message of brotherhood and love, transcended boundaries of education and sophistication. In fact, the spirit of universalism was so strong at the time that Islam itself was of little interest to American scholars; it simply served as the context within which Sufi poetry and prose were composed, not the true source of its message. This, of course, was the case for all Eastern spiritual traditions; the fact that they all were saying the same thing bore testament to the universality of the message and the irrelevance of the particularity of the religious doctrines that distributed them. Thus, the giants of American literature emphasized the intricacies of the

message of Sa`di, Hafiz, and other Persian Sufi masters but paid little or no attention to the religious tradition to which they belonged. The search was for that which unifies, and the need to discover the common humanity and decency of man made it necessary to break the barriers that religious traditions had imposed upon society.

Exploring other religious and spiritual traditions therefore became the earliest attempt to establish a dialogue among civilizations and create a global village. The corpus of Sufi poetry available in the 1840s was dramatically increased from that available at the turn of the century, and would only increase further as the century continued. By the end of that decade, Persian Sufi poetry had reached Concord, where the Sufi poets found an audience that appreciated them on philosophical and religious as well as literary levels. As a community of writers and intellectuals, the New England writers drew from the same available sources to produce unique written reactions in the forms of poetry, essays, and letters, all manifesting a similar attraction to the Persian-inspired ideals of Sufism. The spiritual landscape of New England spread throughout the rest of America in the form of inspired movements such as Transcendentalism and Perennialism, which stated that the Muslim Sa`di, the Hindu Rabindranath Tagore, and the other masters of "Eastern" wisdom had access to the same Universal Wisdom as Emerson and Whitman.

Sufism became entrenched in the American literary and spiritual scenes in two ways: the scholarly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the popular in the twentieth century. It seems hardly necessary to mention and nearly impossible to overemphasize the importance of Sir William Jones in transmitting Oriental history and literature to the West over the course of his government service in Bengal and Calcutta (1783-1794). The sheer quantity of information that he communicated back to England and America in the records of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the journals *Asiatic Researches* and *Asiatic Miscellany*, and in his posthumous collected Works is even more impressive with the knowledge that he was simultaneously serving as a puisne judge and diplomat in the service of the East India Company. Jones was well aware of the exhaustion of neo-Classical poetic themes, images, and forms, and he

saw in the poetry of Hafiz a possible infusion of new passion and spiritual awareness, provided the lyrics were free from the beleaguered eighteenth-century diction that characterized previous translations of the Divan. One of Jones's most famous poetic translations was "A Persian Song," based on Hafiz's eighth ghazal and widely circulated in the *Annual Register*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Monthly Review*, and *Town and Country* between 1772 and 1786. He was not the only scholar to bring new translations of Sufi poetry to the West; he was, however, the most prolific and most passionate contributor to the corpus of Sufi materials that was available to poets seeking to represent the Orient at the turn of the nineteenth century. The German influence was gradual but immense, most notably the work of famed orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. He translated Hafiz's complete Divan into German in 1812 and 1813 and sent a copy of these translations to Emerson, who translated them into English (sometimes with such literalness that they maintain the German word order) and distributed them among the Concordians who shared his interest in Sufi poetry.

The first popular American publication to include a poem by Hafiz was *The American Museum or Universal Magazine* in 1792, which printed, uncredited, "Ode Translated from the Persian of Hafez," one of the poems translated by John Nott in 1787. Though it was preceded by the "Tale of Hafez" included in the first volume of the *New York Magazine or Literary Repository* (1790), a story which starred two men named Hafez and Saadi, those characters were not intended to represent the poets of Shiraz; they were simply evidence of the name recognition attributed to symbolic Eastern figures in an imaginative landscape strongly shaped by the Arabian Nights and other popular Oriental materials. Additionally, the Oriental Translation Fund, founded in 1828 as an arm of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, supplied scholarly information to American journals such as the *Knickerbocker* and the *American Monthly Magazine*. The society's most valued contributions were translations, though the fund also published memoirs, articles, and other materials of interest to American students of Persian poetry. Limited by different trade routes that bypassed India and the Near East and a complete unfamiliarity with the Persian or Arabic languages,

American newspapers printed uncredited or pseudonymous translations, and occasionally complete fabrications, alongside British and French sources such as Sir William Jones and Sir William Ouseley. As in Britain, Hafiz and Sa`di proved to be the two most popular Persian poets, though Edward FitzGerald's 1868 second edition of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* inspired the creation of the Omar Khayyam Club of London and America as well as a circle of "Omarian Poets," including Nathan Haskell Dole and Henry Harman Chamberlin. Also as in Britain, the popularity of Persian poetry inspired a wave of imitations produced by less notable poets who did little more than patch together Oriental tropes and Byronic sentiments.

The popular twentieth-century version of Sufism came through such spiritual masters as Inayat Khan, who came to America in the 1930s from India. From the 1930s to 1950, the Muslim immigration from Lebanon, Syria, and later Palestine further strengthened the Sufi presence in America. The spiritual emphasis of the anti-war movement against the Vietnam War created a market for gurus and spiritual masters to come to America; it is during this period that Sufi centers (zawiyyah in Arabic and khanaqah in Persian) were established in major American cities. In the aftermath of the 1978-79 Iranian revolution, there was a large migration of Iranians to the United States which helped to establish various orders of Persian Sufi tradition. A full survey of the journey of Sufism to America would be a very interesting work, which however goes beyond the scope of this volume.

The political dimension of the response to Eastern philosophy and poetry by the American literary masters of the nineteenth century is also one that must serve as a subject of future inquiry. However, it seems noteworthy that at a time when the spirit of colonialism in Europe and America was heavily characterized by a condescending and even cruel ethnocentrism that declared the "Other" had nothing to offer, distinguished American scholars called attention to the profundity of the spiritual fruits of these civilizations. Perhaps these attempts to revere and respect the wisdom of the so-called inferior races were in part a subtle method of spiritual protest against the colonialists' perspective, comparable to the way in which contrasting the themes of Rumi's poetry of love

against Osama Bin Laden's theology of hate toward the West calls to attention the noble aspects of Islam in the present day.

This volume is divided into three parts. Following a chapter on the English Romantics as the background for the American literary master's interest in Sufism, the first section is devoted to a study of different aspects of Ralph Waldo Emerson's relationship with Sufism. The second section explores Walt Whitman's mystical writings and his influences, touching on Emerson and Sufism in the process. Finally, the third section discusses the Sufi influences of other American Transcendentalists, who were also inspired by earlier figures like Emerson.

The first essay, Leonard Lewisohn's "English Romantic and Persian Sufi Poets: The Wellspring of Inspiration for American Transcendentalists," does not concern the Transcendentalists directly, but provides an invaluable introduction to the root themes and images that underlie all poetry written by poets with Neoplatonic influences, including Sufis, Romantics, and Transcendentalists. Like the Romantic poets, the Sufi masters with whom they were acquainted worked with a common set of symbols that Lewisohn describes as "publicly hermetic, so that all writers and readers of Sufi poetry quickly understood its celebrated set of esoteric signs." Part of the aim of these symbols was to introduce the language of human love and physical experience as a counterpoint to the discursive and abstract language upon which mystical poetry relied to describe otherwise indescribable experiences. Well-suited to Romantic temperaments, Hafiz in particular was unmatched in the Sufi literature for his lyrics on love and wine. Hafiz was particularly revered in India, where Sir William Jones drew most of the material that introduced the West to Eastern culture and literature. Lewisohn traces examples of this and similar themes, including those of mystical death and *carpe diem*, between the works of British Romantic poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake, and Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz, providing insight into the little-explored relationship between Sufism and the Romantic poets as well as establishing the artistic and thematic framework occupied by the Transcendentalists later on in America.

In the first section, Ralph Waldo Emerson is given the title of "Master" for the seriousness of his

commitment to Sufi doctrine, and his pervasive influence on so many other writers. These essays illustrate Emerson's conflicted relationship with exoteric Islam, his serious interest in Persian Sufi masters, and his use of the "Orient" as a framework and vocabulary to align himself with the kind of spiritual universe he yearned for all his life. They also emphasize the crucial role he played in publicizing and popularizing Sufi poetry. Emerson did not publish his first volume of verse until he was 43, but between the ages of 40 and 55 he read and was constantly inspired by the work of Sa`di in particular. He even translated over 700 lines of Persian verses, often from the German, in the free versification tradition of the eighteenth century, often adding rhyme and regularizing rhythm in order to achieve a deliberate poetic sensibility. Silently, he sometimes combined fragments of different ghazals in passages intended for publication, or his own translations with those of von Hammer-Purgstall.

Mansur Ekhtiyar considers these and other aspects of Emerson's background in his essay "Chronological Development of Emerson's Interest in Persian Mysticism," in which he traces the gradual development of Emerson's interest in Eastern thought in general, and in Islamic and Persian mysticism specifically. Beginning with Emerson's college years, Ekhtiyar unravels how Emerson became interested in Hindu and Zoroastrian thought first, and then, through English and German translations of such Persian Sufi poets as Hafiz and Sa`di, came to develop an intense interest in Islamic mysticism. In his *Works*, the *Essays*, and the *Journals*, Emerson's enthusiasm for the Eastern use of imagery and symbolism is evident, although he consistently struggles with the Islamic sense of fatalism he found in Sufism. Still, the struggle did not prevent him from expounding upon Hafiz's use of "wine" or playing with the notions of solitude and exile.

In the next chapter, Marwan M. Obeidat takes a more analytical approach to the eminent Transcendentalist. Marking Emerson's interest in Oriental thought "as the beginning of interest in comparative religion in America," the author offers an insightful analysis of Emerson's uneasy and conflicted relationship with Islamic mysticism. While Emerson remained intensely interested in Oriental thought to the end, Obeidat shows how the poet's

Western mindset still considered the Occidental identity superior; as Emerson himself asserted, "Orientalism is Fatalism, resignation: Occidentalism is Freedom and will." This chapter also suggests that Platonism and Neoplatonism provided a common language with which the American Romantics understood and related to Islamic mysticism.

The following essay, Parvin Lolo'i's "Emerson and Aspects of Sa`di's Reception in America," primarily concerns the means by which Emerson became acquainted with Sufism and Persian mystical literature, and the poems of Sa`di in particular. Emerson became aware of Sufism when he was only eleven years old, but it was not until he became acquainted with German and French translations that his interest grew and matured into scholarly thought. His preoccupation with these translations both influenced his own transcendentalist sentiments and gave him a preexisting yet flexible linguistic framework to express them. As demonstrated in the autobiographical poem "Saadi" (1842), which Lolo'i quotes in full, Emerson came to identify Sa`di as the ideal poet, as well as an aspect of himself. In analyzing the poem, Lolo'i also traces its Romantic elements, including an emphasis on nature and its relation to "divine essence." Lolo'i affirms the role that Platonism and Neoplatonism played in interesting the Romantics in Oriental literature. Neoplatonism in particular made it possible for a common discourse and metaphysical language to emerge, as the author explores in the latter part of her essay.

The influence of Hafiz on Emerson is the subject of the next chapter. Farhang Jahanpour's essay, "Emerson on Hafiz and Sa`di: The Narrative of Love and Wine," is divided into four sections. In the first section, Jahanpour traces Emerson's interest in Persian poetry from his exposure as a teenager to the poetry of Sa`di, Hafiz, and Jami, to his more mature encounters with Firdawsi and Sa`di's *Gulistan*. The second section discusses the German translations that served as guides to Hafiz's difficult esoteric language, and quotes passages from Emerson's *Journals* in which he expresses sincere appreciation of Hafiz's poetry. The third section focuses on Emerson's own translations; of the approximately 700 lines of Persian poetry he translated into English, about half of them are from

the work of Hafiz. Although Emerson's dedication to the translations is unquestioned, his faithfulness to the originals varies; often, he attempted a literal translation, while other times he mixed poems together or elaborated upon them himself. The article ends with a section that traces the echoes of Hafiz's poems in Emerson's writings, both Oriental and involving other subject matter. This section features some of Emerson's own renditions of Hafiz's poems in English and compares them to the original Persian.

Whitman existed in the same cultural milieu that saw Ralph Waldo Emerson embrace Sufi poetry to justify his own belief in self-reliance by reinterpreting Sa`di's didacticism and libertarian sentiments into a doctrine of democracy and self-equality in Nature. Whitman saw evidence of divinity in the most commonplace people and objects, and celebrated the material world as part of the divine Logos and as proof of the underlying humanity in a nation that was increasingly divided by sectional differences. Like Hafiz, Whitman also accepted the ineffability topos that implicitly accompanied all Sufi mystical poetry. The interpretation of Walt Whitman as a mystical poet gained popularity among scholars in the 1960s. "He is the one mystical writer of any consequence America has produced," Karl Shapiro wrote, "the poet of the greatest achievement."

Eastern mysticism in particular seemed to resonate with Whitman, as V. K. Chari and T. R. Rajasekharaiah have examined at length using Hindu and Buddhist texts. Based on comparisons between poems and the contents of Whitman's unpublished journals and notes, Rajasekharaiah concludes persuasively that the poet was in fact well-read on the subject of Vedantic philosophy by the end of his life, though his understanding of Eastern mysticism was likely more intuitive than academic when the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855.

The next series of essays, grouped under the title "The Disciple: Walt Whitman," is meant to acknowledge the idea that the same connection between poet and philosophy holds true of Whitman and Sufism as well. The traditional starting point from which to test this connection is Ralph Waldo Emerson, the main conduit of Sufi poetry into the Transcendentalist literary community. Whitman was an avid reader of

Emerson, and would in all likelihood have read the poem "Saadi" when it was published in 1842. Additionally, the influence of Hafiz is quite clear in Emerson's 1848 poem *Bacchus*, though it is not a direct translation of a Hafiz sonnet. Whitman may also have read the series of "Ethical Scriptures" from the sacred books of the Orient that Emerson and Thoreau published in *The Dial* in 1842 and 1843, or the translations of several fragments of mystical poetry that Emerson provided *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Liberty Bell* in 1851. Like Emerson, Whitman found his path to Sufism through German translations of Persian poetry, and various Sufi doctrines, such as the annihilation of the Self in God (*fana' fi'llah*), had a deep effect on his life and work. In the first essay of this section, Mahnaz Ahmad, in "Whitman and Hafiz: Expressions of Universal Love and Tolerance," presents a biographical and analytical study and also illustrates Whitman's own concept of love, as depicted in the character of the "graybeard Sufi" in his poem "A Persian Lesson," alongside Ahmad's own exquisite translations of Hafiz's difficult ghazals.

Massud Farzan continues the study of Whitman in the essay "Whitman and Sufism: Towards 'A Persian Lesson.'" Farzan compares the mystical experiences Whitman evokes in writings such as "Song of Myself," and "A Persian Lesson" to the Sufi concept of ecstasy, especially as explored in some of Rumi's poetry. Whether it is in Sa`di's *Gulistan* or Rumi's *Mathnawi*, "argument, abstraction, and getting stuck in logistics are anathema to Whitman and Persian poet-mystics alike," Farzan states. The chapter continues with a discussion of Whitman and Sufi concepts of the self, wherein the selfish "I" is juxtaposed with the divine "thou," and concludes with the idea of the mystical death of the self and unity with God.

In the next essay, Arthur Versluis discusses other authors in his "'Islamic' Magic and Mysticism of Thomas Lake Harris, Lawrence Oliphant, and Paschal Beverly Randolph." He uses a biographical approach to highlight the similarities between three notable figures involved in both the American Transcendentalist and indigenous esoteric traditions of other religions. Thomas Lake Harris' work reflects aspects of Sufism, even though his direct familiarity with the "Sufi tradition" was nebulous at best. The case of Lawrence Oliphant is different, for his travel

to the Middle East and Palestine in particular may well have put him in contact with an array of Sufi groups. Oliphant specifically references Druze, whom he calls the "Druse," a splinter Shi'ite group with a strong esoteric orientation. Finally, Versluis compares the experiences of Paschal Beverly Randolph, who also traveled to the Middle East and claimed contact with some of the more esoteric and mystical orders. Versluis questions the legitimacy of some of their teachings, but notes that whether it came in the form of intimate knowledge of esoteric traditions or simply a projection of what they imagined such traditions to entail, the influence of Sufism and its themes on these three figures was considerable.

The next essay, by John D. Yohannan, focuses on a number of specific figures who were primarily disciples of Emerson: Thoreau, Whitman, Longfellow, Lowell, Melville, and Lafcadio Hearn. Each of these figures made a serious literary investment in studying Oriental mysticism, although for some the allure was stronger than for others. Thoreau, for instance, echoed Emerson's identification with Sa`di: "I know, for instance, that Saadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Saadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me." This more exaggerated assessment stems from Thoreau's limited understanding of Persian poetry. Less well-read than Emerson, he cared about the ideas themselves, not their sources, and it mattered little to him whether the poetry that expressed Sufi wisdom was well-translated or entirely fraudulent. Nor was he above deliberately misinterpreting Sa`di's aphorisms to suit his own philosophical agenda. Yet, however far from traditional Sufi doctrine, the expansive, subjective philosophy of Sufism allowed for such interpretations on his part, as well as on the parts of other Transcendentalists. Yohannan also examines authors of less renown, including Amos Bronson Alcott, whose interest in Eastern wisdom led him to Sa`di and Firdawsi, and William Rounesville Alger, whose anthology *The Poetry of the Orient* (1856) served as an invaluable source of information for Walt Whitman, and which indicates the extent of his fascination with Sa`di, Hafiz, and other Persian Sufi masters. Yohannan also mentions Moncure Daniel Conway, a second-generation Transcendentalist who helped establish a link between the American

and English devotees of Persian Literature and was instrumental in drawing attention to Omar Khayyam. The rest of the essay is devoted to Longfellow, Lowell, Melville, and Lafcadio Hearn, and shows their indebtedness to Emerson while quoting specific Sufi texts that helped shape their mystical orientation.

The next essay, Philip N. Edmondson's "The Persians of Concord," examines how the city of Concord became the locus of Transcendentalist writers, attracting literary minds such as Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, George William Curtis, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Edmondson also elaborates on how transcendentalism utilized a similar ideology and set of themes similar to that of Romanticism as a preestablished linguistic framework to communicate Muslim mystical concepts.

In the final essay, Mehdi Aminrazavi traces the impact of Omar Khayyam's *Ruba`iyyat* upon an American audience. Khayyam was a polarizing poet: he was elevated to the level of prophet by some and demoted to that of demon by others. He gained immense popularity among the New England literary circles shortly after the 1859 publication of FitzGerald's exquisite rendition of the *Ruba`iyyat*. The Omar Khayyam Club of America was formed in 1900 as an opportunity for literary figures to celebrate the great Persian sage, and produced a small school of Omarian poets. Even though Omar Khayyam was not a Sufi in the strictest sense of the word, his *Ruba`iyyat* were understood to espouse the same esoteric Eastern wisdom that American audiences perceived in the Sufi mystical poets. Aminrazavi shows the extent of his influence, both among less famous literary figures and more notable authors like Mark Twain, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

Mark Twain refers to the "wise old Omar Khayyam" for the first time in 1876, yet his life-long interest in the author of the *Ruba`iyyat* is well-known. Alan Gribben, in his essay "Bond Slave to FitzGerald's Omar: Mark Twain and the *Ruba`iyyat*," brings to light this little-known influence of Twain's and provides helpful context for understanding the place the *Ruba`iyyat* occupied in Twain's personal and poetic life. The sense of rebellion against the cruelty of life in the *Ruba`iyyat* resonated with Twain in the face of his own hardships. Gribben ends with a selected

number of Twain's more burlesque Ruba'iyat, while the complete version of the poems follows in the next chapter.

The original idea for this volume arose from a discussion with colleagues on the lack of a single volume highlighting the reception of Islamic mysticism by the academy, and the difficulty of accounting for increasing interest in Sufism after the turn of the nineteenth century. While there are many books dealing with the current interest in Sufi literature, particularly in the context of such popular authors as Rumi and Hafiz, there is no notable work on the historical background of Sufism's enthusiastic reception by eminent masters of classical American literature. It is hoped that including a variety of essays that bring together figures of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary scene in a single volume will make this an important contribution to the understanding of the complex web of ideological similarities that existed between Islamic mysticism and American Transcendentalism. Even without Emerson's background in the terminology and available translations of Persian poetry, the often-contradictory themes of mystical ecstasy, Oriental serenity, the divinely intoxicated intellect, and love for the emancipation of Soul just to name a few of Emerson's favorites—would have appealed to poetic imaginations such as those of Whitman and Thoreau. The use of the language of human love as a cipher for mystical knowledge of the Divine, the revelation of a new moral code as evidence of otherwise ineffable experiences, and the importance of embracing and transcending the physical world all find eloquent expression in the poetry of Emerson, Whitman, and a multitude of other writers, but they attain even greater clarity when compared to similar philosophical concepts illustrated by the Sufi masters. Today, their interest lives on in the form of continued interest in Sufi poetry and prose, and it is thanks to the works of early masters of American literature that translations of Rumi have remained among the best-selling works of poetry in the last decade in America. Mehdi Aminrazavi, April 2014 <>

[A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975](#) by Patrick D. Bowen [Muslim Minorities, Brill, 9789004299948]

[A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2, The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975](#) by Patrick D. Bowen [Muslim Minorities, Brill, 9789004353145]

In [A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975](#), Patrick D. Bowen offers an account of white Muslims and Sufis and the movements they produced between 1800 and 1975 and in [A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2, The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975](#) Bowen provides an account of the diverse roots and manifestations of African American Islam as it appeared between 1920 and 1975.

The present book, which is the first academic work to thoroughly examine the history of white American conversion to Islam before 1975, is a study of both the history of the conversions themselves and of the social and religious transformations that led to and shaped the phenomenon of white Americans becoming Muslims. While there have been a handful of books and articles on the most well-known early white American convert, Alexander Russell Webb; a book chapter and a non-scholarly biography on a prominent later female convert, Maryam Jameelah; and one study of white conversion narratives that were written before 1990, research on other pre-1975 converts and on the specific historical changes that led to their emergence and molded their characteristics has been practically nil. The primary reason for this scholarly silence is that there was little information on the subject available to researchers prior to the twenty-first century. Few early white converts besides Webb had ever been notable enough to earn mention in early scholarly studies of American Islam, and for the most part their impact on the American Muslim community was forgotten after that community went through its significant post-immigration reform transformation starting in the mid-1960s. But today, with growing numbers of old periodicals, books, and government records being made available through interlibrary loan and digitization, and unpublished and rare documents concerning early American Muslims being collected and made public, researchers have been able to uncover much of what was previously hidden, and, as a result, we now have access to a fairly detailed picture of the early history of this

important development in the us religious landscape.

The picture that emerges is one that both challenges and refines earlier views. It has become apparent, for instance, that the role that Alexander Webb played in the history of Islam in America has been somewhat distorted in the literature. Given the previous lack of information on early white American converts, it is understandable that the vast majority of scholarly discussions of this group of Muslims have focused on Webb. Nevertheless, this tendency downplays the important activities of other converts before and after Webb, and it frequently ignores the variety of ideological, social, and organizational forces at work in the development of the white American conversion community. Webb and the Muslim convert movement he started, for instance, were intimately connected to a specific nineteenth-century subculture that had a minimal role in the conversions of white Americans in the twentieth century—a fact that can be easily overlooked when no other white converts are discussed. One of the factors contributing to the emphasis on Webb is that there was very little known about Webb's religious transformation in the 1880s. No one has yet uncovered any extant private papers of Webb from the period, and his known writings from the 1880s and earlier reveal little about his thoughts on either Islam or the Theosophical Society—an esoteric religious movement with which he was connected. For the most part, scholars have relied on Webb's accounts from later in his life, most of which are dated from 1892 through 1896 and only vaguely discuss his conversion and his involvement with alternative religious movements. This has made it very easy to see similarities between Webb and later converts without perceiving the numerous differences. At the same time, there has been minimal research on the Theosophical Society in the US in the early 1880s—which was very different from the Theosophical Society of earlier and later periods—and so far no scholar has convincingly demonstrated what being a us member of the Theosophical Society in the early 1880s actually meant. This has led to the proffering of unclear and even somewhat distorted ideas about Theosophy's own role in the history of conversion to Islam in the us.

The view of Webb and the Theosophical Society that this book takes has been significantly shaped by the contents of a little-known cache of letters and documents in the possession of the Johnson Library and Museum. These materials are from the 1880s and concern the Theosophical Society and related groups, including the specific St. Louis Theosophical 'lodge' of which Webb was one of the few members. Although Webb's name is only mentioned once in these letters, they have nevertheless helped shed a great deal of light on Webb's Theosophy-influenced interest in Islam. As it turns out, Webb's conversion took place at the precise time that Islam was most influential in American Theosophy—and the St. Louis Theosophists specifically were, in all likelihood, the Theosophists impacted by Islam the most. Furthermore, by being a member of the St. Louis Theosophical lodge, Webb was connected to some of the most organizationally influential and ideology-shaping American Theosophists at the time—several of whom, like Webb, were involved in the publishing industry. Indeed, Webb's later ability to create an Islamic organization that was very similar to and relied upon the Theosophical Society should not be regarded as a mere 'borrowing' from Theosophy generally: it was a direct outcome of his involvement with the St. Louis group. Webb's particular connection with Theosophy and the history of the development of Theosophy in the us are therefore both of great significance for understanding the first white American Muslim convert movement.

As for converts in the twentieth century, we now have a much clearer understanding of the importance of their contact with Muslim immigrants. The available evidence suggests that by the 1930s, there were hundreds more white American Muslim converts than there had been in Webb's day, and the vast majority had little to no interest in esotericism—these were people whose conversions were the direct results of the growing number of relationships between white Americans and immigrant Muslims. Furthermore, we also now know that almost as soon as immigrant Muslims began to establish religious organizations and create a somewhat stable community, a number of white American converts became leaders in this new us Muslim community—a fact that had previously been almost completely ignored in the literature on Islam in America. These converts helped build the

national network of us Muslims that began developing in the interwar period and culminated with creation of the first successful national Muslim umbrella organization, the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada (Fia). Then, after the Fia was established in 1952, white converts continued to play important roles in the American Muslim community, serving as early leaders in both the Fia and another important national Sunni organization of the postwar period, the Muslim Students' Association. For these twentieth-century converts, I have relied especially on three types of sources: pre-1975 Islamic periodicals that were popular among immigrants and white converts, several FBI files made during the Second World War when the Bureau was investigating groups and individuals thought to be involved with 'subversive' activities, and interviews with Muslims—both converts and immigrants—who were active in the us Islamic community before 1975.

Perhaps the single most important issue that comes to light in this volume is the fact that these converts were individuals who, by and large, were interested in cultivating peace, justice, and brotherhood. In the early twenty-first century, there has been a growing fear that people who convert to Islam will become violent, anti-Western radicals. Islam itself is generally blamed for this; today many Westerners assume—as they have for centuries—that Islam is a religion that is inherently violent and intolerant of non-Muslims. It may therefore come as a surprise to some readers that there are no known confirmed instances of religiously-motivated violence perpetrated by white American Muslim converts before 1975. Many, if not most, of the converts studied for this book were in fact both pro-American and deeply concerned with fostering peace on multiple levels: in their own minds and souls, in their homes, in their local communities, in their country, and throughout the world. While the majority of the early white converts primarily used Islam as a tool for cultivating internal and domestic harmony, there were a handful of white Muslim leaders who desired to go beyond this and attempt to facilitate the development of national and international movements and philosophies that would spread brotherhood to all people. Indeed, by embracing and promoting the religion that was often seen as the West's greatest enemy, these converts helped

teach Americans that violence and hate were not essential to Islam, and that great progress could be made if Americans and all people lived up to the ideals of tolerance and love.

With this background in mind, the significance of white American conversions to Islam can only be appreciated by acknowledging the deep roots of anti-Islamic sentiment in the culture out of which they emerged, and the deep historical forces that would eventually begin to weaken the strong hold of Islamophobia on Western Christian culture. At the same time, because the history of these conversions is quite complex, involving numerous cultural changes, individual idiosyncrasies, and multiple waves of immigration, it will also be important to have a framework on which to direct this study. The remainder of this introduction, then, provides an introduction to early American Islamophobia and a concept known as 'deterritorialization,' which is at once both an important historical phenomenon and the main theoretical lens through which the history of white American Muslims will be told.

## Early Anti-Islamic Sentiment in North America

During the colonial and early independence periods, there was relatively little contact with Muslims who were not enslaved, and most white North Americans understood Islam through a traditional Christian anti-Islamic lens. Generally speaking, early white Americans looked at Islam's teachings as sinful, its prophet as an 'impostor,' and its followers as violent and oppressive brutes. These views had been inherited from their European forebears and were cultivated and reshaped for the American context.

Anti-Islamic sentiment among Christians has shown a great deal of continuity since its emergence in the Byzantine Empire during the early years of Islam's expansion. Since that time, Christian polemicists have, fairly consistently, attacked the character of the Prophet Muhammad, the legitimacy of the Qur'an, the doctrines of the Islamic faith, the religion's purported methods of converting people, and the morality of common Muslims.<sup>1</sup> The more direct antecedents of early American thought concerning Islam were, however, the polemics that developed in Western Europe starting in the twelfth century after Alfonso VI's 1085 conquest of Toledo,

the northernmost Islamic stronghold in Western Europe. With Toledo subdued, non-Spanish Christians now had access to the city's impressive libraries, and knowledge of Islam and its texts began to spread. Arabic, the Qur'an, and hadith (traditions of Muhammad and early figures in Islamic history) were soon being studied in several places throughout Europe and polemics against the religion of Muslims were refined, now often being backed up with references to particular sections of Islamic works.

At the same time, battles and growing economic and cultural competition with Muslims began to increase antipathy towards the Muslim people. The Ottoman sack of Constantinople in 1453 had created in Europe a greater fear of Muslim encroachment from the East. In the South, even after the Muslim relinquishment of Granada in 1492, traders who used the Mediterranean were under the constant threat of conflict with North African powers. Meanwhile, those same powers were seen as corroding Europe from the inside: Due to their wealth and allowance of relative social freedom, North African kingdoms were attracting tens of thousands of European Christian 'renegades' who moved to North Africa and often converted to Islam. Even though this phenomenon was not entirely consistent with the old Christian narrative that Islam has mostly been spread 'by the sword,' it was still taken as further evidence of Islam's corruptive nature. Given this context, then, by the time Europeans began colonizing the land that would become the United States, anti-Islamic sentiment among Europeans was relatively strong.

Although largely separated from events overseas, anti-Islamic sentiment persisted—and in some cases intensified—in colonial North America. Many of the early colonizers were from a Puritan background, which meant they were involved in religious communities that both saw themselves as especially critical of oppressive religious powers and believed that their journey to America was divinely sanctioned. Early colonists therefore sometimes compared the Church of England and Roman Catholicism to Islam, which was considered by Christians to be the penultimate example of an oppressive religion. The Puritan 'pilgrimage' to North America, meanwhile, was perceived as an escape not just from oppressive Christians, but also from Muslims, who, according to leading colonial

religious figures like Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards, would be wiped out in a coming apocalypse. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the widespread influence of Puritan religion and its notion of American exceptionalism helped to further establish the anti-Islamic current on North American soil.

The traditional European image of Islam for early colonists, however, was not solely shaped by religious polemic; a number of American colonists had encountered Muslims under violent circumstances abroad, which reinforced the commonly-held image of Muslims as blood-thirsty. One of these was famed Jamestown leader John Smith who had, as a young man, fought against Muslims in Hungary and was for a brief time enslaved by Ottoman Turks. Also, by the early 1700s, a few Americans who had personally spent time as captives of 'Barbary' (North African) Muslims had begun writing about their experiences and the harsh treatment they endured.

Occasionally, the American captives observed that even the European 'renegade' converts to Islam were similarly subjected to violence. All of this was contributing to the increasingly popular American 'captivity narrative' literary genre, in which non-Christian, dark-skinned 'savages'—usually Native Americans—imprisoned and assaulted innocent white Americans. By linking the image of the Native American with the Muslim, white North Americans were not only legitimizing the dehumanization of and aggression towards both groups, they were also defining true freedom—a core value in the US American<sup>12</sup> identity—as something that could only be produced and protected by white Christian Americans. With there being few voices critical of this anti-Islamic perspective, it is little wonder that, even if a white North American had wanted to convert to Islam during the colonial and early independence periods, he or she would generally have chosen not to do so out of fear of the significant social consequences that would accompany rejecting these pervasive views.

Almost as soon as the nineteenth century commenced, however, the US would see its first white converts to Islam. Although it would take ninety more years for a full-fledged white Muslim convert movement to emerge, and an additional forty years for a truly national network of white converts to begin to develop, by the time the first

reports of us Muslim converts appeared in 1803, the country had already entered a major cultural and religious metamorphosis that would eventually lead to the Islamic conversions of thousands of white Americans. American religious culture was now coming under the influence of the complex historical forces of deterritorialization.

## Deterritorialization

The fundamental causes of the us' dramatic cultural and religious transformations that ultimately produced thousands of white American Muslims are quite complex. They involve advances in communication, travel, and armament technology, political struggles, the emergence of a variety of new philosophical and religious movements, psychological and identity reconfigurations, and numerous other global cultural developments. Together, these various dynamics comprise the historical phenomenon that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have identified as the 'deterritorialization' of the modern world. By using the notion of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the modern era as being fundamentally characterized by its relative lack of traditional boundaries or 'territories'—be they physical, political, cultural, intellectual, spiritual, or psychological. Deterritorialization does not imply, of course, that boundaries no longer exist; indeed, Deleuze and Guattari propose that the modern world is constantly undergoing both deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Nevertheless, reterritorialization is itself shaped by the same globalizing historical processes—such as the emergence of both modern commercial markets and print technology—that are responsible for deterritorialization. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are therefore, to a great extent, the defining forces of the modern world—and it is the interaction of these two forces that led to the development of the white us American Muslim convert community. Building off of the ideas proposed by Deleuze and Guattari and certain related authors, the present section provides an introduction to the concept and historical foundations of de- and reterritorialization in order to establish a broad theoretical framework that will be helpful for understanding the deep historical causes of (a) Islamophobia loosening its grip on American religious culture and (b) the resulting

conversions of tens of thousands of Americans to Islam.

When each of the ancient civilizations fell, they left behind both traces of knowledge that they had gained and remnants of the trade, travel, and raiding networks that they had created. As new civilizations rose, they frequently adopted and built on the older knowledge and networks, increasing the chances for intercultural contact and exchange. Slowly over time, as the networks were strengthened, sciences from one region made it to others, leading to improvements in technical knowledge, which in turn helped the new societies and their networks develop further. By the eighth century an, with the emergence of the Islamic empires, a vast network of peoples had been established—both humans and knowledge could now, potentially, transverse the known 'civilized' world, from China to the northwestern coast of Africa. The world was becoming globalized.

This interconnectivity of people and knowledge had an immense impact on ideas, religions, and identities. In some cases, this impact was fostered by travelers who simply spread religious and philosophical teachings and sects to new regions; travelers could either transmit these ideas and organizations to local teachers, or they could become teachers themselves after settling in the new lands. Sometimes texts alone traveled, and were read and incorporated into the worldviews of discrete communities. Religious concepts and practices were also spread through violence. The development of global networks meant an increased ability for invaders who followed one religion to conquer people who followed another, and, although the ways in which this affected religions and identities could vary significantly, it almost always had a profound impact. The most infamous style of religious transmission in these situations was forced conversions of whole societies. In these cases, however, the vanquished populations often found ways to retain their traditional religions, either by practicing them secretly or by blending them with the imposed religion. In many instances, the conquerors did not force conversion, but allowed for conversion as a means for the local people—especially those who had formerly been the community's elites—to achieve positions of power in the new societal structures that had been instituted. In such scenarios, the new elites help

popularize or legitimize the doctrines and identities of the conquerors for the masses. Lower classes, on the other hand, particularly if their situations were not improving under the new rulers, might develop new ideas, religions, and identities—which often incorporated elements of the rulers’ own cultures—that were more focused on opposing or rejecting those in power. In some cases, though, the invaders themselves decided to adopt the religions and identities of the locals.

As these examples suggest, changes in ideas, religions, and identities always occur within, and are usually significantly shaped by, a context of power. Which ideas and identities are imposed, how freely they circulate, how they are transmitted, how they are understood—all of these factors are intimately tied to the forms of power active in a particular historical context. Power, however, is not limited to military strength and social and economic structures. Sometimes knowledge itself, especially in the form of technology, has the power to shape societies beyond political or economic borders. For instance, the spread of a certain armament technology can give multiple societies the tools necessary to successfully defend themselves and conquer others, but often in the process of maximizing the utilization of that technology, a society’s political, economic, and cultural structures change. In other words, the mere need or desire to use a certain technology can have the power to reshape the very institutions that regulate day-to-day life. When such reshaping happens—because it often involves micro-level changes that are not entirely the outcomes of direct use of military or political power—the masses are often unconscious of the transformations taking place; the individual man or woman has no idea that his or her entire ways of thinking and interacting with the world are being transformed not simply by a cultural or political forces, but also by the profound trans-societal impact of the circulation of knowledge and technology.

In the early modern period, the development and spread of armament, long-distance seafaring, and print technologies had this type of profound societal impact, and therefore began fundamentally reshaping religions, identities, and cultures. Gunpowder, a Chinese technology, began traveling westward via cultural transfusion and with the Mongol invasions of the medieval period. By

the fifteenth century, its use was becoming widespread throughout Islamic and Christian lands, and, as nations competed to create stronger and deadlier armies, many additional technological developments were being made to improve the use of gunpowder in warfare. Because it was very expensive to both develop modern armament technologies and to produce the large quantities of modern firearms needed to equip big armies, the advantage frequently went to those with greater wealth. The timing of this was fortuitous for Western Europe, as this region was making significant developments in long-distance seafaring technology, which gave that region a significant advantage in the acquisition of wealth.

The ability to transport goods and humans long distances by boat allowed for late medieval and early modern Western European merchants and kingdoms to directly enter commercial markets for which they had previously relied on middlemen. One major result of this was the explosion of the wool market; so much wool was being sold out of Western Europe that the whole system of land management started to be changed in order to increase the number of sheep they could produce. In England, this took the form of the enclosure movement, in which land that was previously left open for communal use by peasants was now closed off and designated as grazing areas for sheep.<sup>20</sup> The best land for sheep raising, meanwhile, became increasingly valuable and landowners realized they could make more money by renting or selling this land—with interest, of course. There was so much wealth to be had by participating in this process—wealth that would be invaluable for developing and producing modern armaments, which were in growing demand as the threat of others acquiring more and more advanced arms spread—that English law, which had previously forbidden profiting from interest, began allowing this, as well as other new laws that favored wealth acquisition. In doing so, the English government had to find a way to bypass the Christian foundations for its laws, and it increasingly looked toward non-Christian (usually Greek) models of law. At the same time, the desire to increase wealth led to the permitting of both de facto and de jure religious freedom to those Christian sectarian communities that were particularly adept at producing wealth.

The wool trade was not the only major source of wealth for Western Europe in the early modern period. Armed with modern weapons, modern boats, and immunity to numerous European diseases, Western Europe reached the Americas and Africa and took what it wanted, while, by and large, rejecting the humanity of the non-Christians of those regions. In pillaging foreign lands, Western Europe was not historically unique or even rare; but, with the particular technological developments it had acquired, its relative strength, and its inability to quickly produce laws and religious movements that might have significantly limited its impact, Western Europe's ability to exploit its power was unprecedented.

The levels of wealth being generated through these activities were also unprecedented—so unprecedented, in fact, that the whole global economy began to change. New companies were constantly springing up with the intention of trying to take for themselves a share of this new influx of wealth, so much so that the traditional, rural, peasant-based social and economic systems were destroyed. Large-scale farming was big business now, and poor tenants were increasingly forced off the land so that enclosures and modern mills could be developed. Western European peasants were now moving in droves to the growing urban centers, where they were largely employed by capitalist companies and in trades created specifically for modern capitalistic production. More and more, merchant ships were being sent to foreign lands for new trading opportunities, while at home industries expanded in order to buy and sell goods for the increasingly wealthy Europeans.

The impact all of this had on ideas, religions, and identities was tremendous. Modern urbanization, first of all, significantly destabilized traditional cultures and psychologies. Finding a stable life and livelihood in a city was very different from doing so in a rural community. Laborers would have to learn the kinds of skills necessary for commercial employment and be ready to pick up new skills when they needed to find a different job—one's labor skill knowledge, therefore, had to be more flexible and intellectually-based. Extended family networks, meanwhile, were often broken up, and could no longer provide the social, economic, and emotional safety net that they once had, dramatically reshaping the family relationship and

identity. At the same time, immigrants to the cities could now join new churches and trade guilds in an attempt to gain social and financial protection, and this meant exposure to new ideas and social networks. The city also brought people into greater contact with the modern printing press, another technology that had made its way to the West from its Chinese birthplace. Books and tracts—which were primarily for spreading religious ideas—were now increasingly popular, literacy rates began to rise, and professions requiring literacy were more and more in demand to help with the new business- and law-based way of life. To survive and thrive in such an environment, urban residents had to develop a highly technical way thinking about their work, their social networks, the religious ideas they encountered, and their own identities. By the end of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare's images of modern, urban people, characterized as independent-thinking individuals, were resonating with English audiences.

Travel was another key factor in the early modern transformation of ideas, religions, and identities. In Western Europe—as well as in North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and other locations—urbanization meant that modern laborers would be forced to go from city to city and company to company looking for employment. For people whose families had lived in the same town or county for generations, even this relatively local travel had a significant impact on their view of other people and of their own identities, as it exposed them to new ways of life—and the notion that there could be multiple legitimate ways of life—even within one's own broader culture. For those who were aboard the increasing number of ships voyaging to foreign lands, the exposure to other cultures was obviously even more profound. The diversity of the world's people and their religions and cultures was being observed on unprecedented levels. Old notions about foreigners were not eradicated, but, at the same time, to see in the flesh people who looked and lived very differently caused many to reconsider their own cultures and identities. The growing number of published travelogues containing descriptions of exotic peoples and religions helped bring these impressions to those who could not go overseas themselves.

With the influx of so much new information, the old symbols that had once represented the things people knew in their lives were no longer sufficient for explaining their new world. Symbols, in fact, were increasingly detached from the things they once represented. Wealth, to take a prominent example, is a very modern notion because it represents an idea that is disconnected from its material source. Prior to the early modern period, people rarely thought in terms of 'wealth'; they tended to think of how much of a certain material resource—such as grains, animals, or gold—that they had. But with the enormous influx of goods and currency in the early modern period, there was soon not even enough gold to back up all of the finances that existed on paper; traditional notions of money based on material resources would therefore not be adequate for expressing the amount of one's possessions in a clear way. More and more, people turned to the concept of 'wealth,' an abstraction of one's relative number of resources, and conducted business using this concept.

The development of the concept of wealth represented a broader transformation in the relation between symbols and the material world. In Western Europe's medieval period, symbols were largely seen as a direct link between the material world and God. With relatively little circulation of ideas, the meaning of a symbol—what it represented in the material world—was relatively stable, and, since it was understood that God created all things in the material world, including symbols, it was believed that a symbol simply represented a material thing that God had created. However, with the influx of new information through travel, books, and the constant development of technical knowledge, and with the increasing desire and ability of people—now armed with literacy and a need to constantly improve their technical knowledge—to manipulate symbols, the meaning of symbols was increasingly detached from its material origins. The notion of a 'dog' for a medieval European, for instance, would be far more limited than it would be for an early modern European who had learned about the huge variety of dog breeds found throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The very symbol or notion of 'dog,' had in fact been disconnected from its original meaning; not only did it no longer represent the same material objects, it was

recognized that there could possibly be more undiscovered species that would potentially be classed as 'dog.' Therefore the category should not be closed and the material basis of the symbol of 'dog' was no longer obvious. It was becoming, then, increasingly clear to people that the notion or symbol of 'dog'—and symbols generally—were not God-given but made and manipulated by humans in order to express a concept. The symbol, which is one of the most important building blocks of thoughts, ideas, religions, and cultures, had become radically destabilized. Like people, goods, and money, in the early modern period, symbols themselves began to lose their ties to a single location.

Deleuze and Guattari have introduced the term 'deterritorialization' to help conceptualize this destabilized state of modern people, objects/goods, money, and symbols. More so than the word 'globalization,' deterritorialization particularly emphasizes the fact that boundaries of all types are now much less restrictive. Of course, as has been mentioned, Deleuze and Guattari recognized the very modern conditions that created deterritorialization, and that these conditions contain within them forces that will inevitably restrict movement, such as economic inequality and cultural domination. To account for this, they introduced the corollary to deterritorialization: reterritorialization, which is the creation of 'territories' under modern circumstances. These territories can be material, such as when borders are imposed and protected by modern nation states or when a community must deal with its having limited resources; they can be ideological, such as when ideas about cultural or religious boundaries prevent individuals from exploring certain concepts; and they can be habitual—that is, certain intellectual and physical behaviors can become standard in a community.

Territories can also be economic, in both a monetary and non-monetary sense. The relative freedom of movement of all things produces, essentially, a large number of 'free markets' in which economic factors play important roles in promoting and restricting the movement of any type of good, whether it is material, behavioral, or ideological. This concept of market as territory is particularly important for understanding religious de- and reterritorialization because it reminds us

that, even when it comes to religion, humans generally behave in what they believe are 'rational' ways. So, for instance, both consumers and producers of religious 'goods'—ideas, practices, sects, etc.—desire to maximize profit and minimize loss, and will therefore calculate the risk of their decisions. A person who is considering religious conversion will analyze whether their 'purchasing' of this new religious 'good' will give them a greater gain than it will cost them—usually, the 'costs' in this scenario are associated with losing one's social position. For this reason, a person thinking about converting to a non-dominant religion—particularly when there are pre-existing prejudices against that religion—will decide not to because the cost will be too great. There will always be a few isolated outliers, people who convert no matter what the cost. But whole conversion movements—which are essentially the creation of new religious markets—tend to grow from within a preexisting market because the ability of a market to thrive means that it has achieved some degree of social legitimization, so new forms of religion that emerge within such a market will to some extent share that legitimization, which thus reduces the risk of social cost for the consumer.

Religious markets themselves can develop in a number of ways. Perhaps the simplest way is through the intervention of a powerful institution, such as a government or military group that imposes onto a population a religious market, or at least religious market boundaries. The emergence of new religious markets can also be the result, as mentioned earlier, of oppressed populations inventing new forms of religion to resist their oppressors. Religious producers, however, do not need to be oppressed to produce new religions in a free market system. Since, generally, the most successful producers are those who have the greatest desire, knowledge, and resources to supply goods that are in demand, the advantage in religious production usually goes, just as it does in any free market, to those who already possess these in abundance—i.e., the relatively 'wealthy.' So, when demand for certain religious goods increases, those with wealth will tend to be the people who profit most from this emerging market. In fact, on occasion, savvy, wealthy producers who have perceived subtle changes in the demands of consumers will intentionally create a whole religious

market by investing in a market infrastructure. In the modern period, elements of religious infrastructures can be religious or philosophical publications, supply houses that produce paraphernalia for rituals and clothing worn by religious consumers, and wages for religious leaders. The changes in religious demands, meanwhile, are frequently wrapped up in cultural and psychological currents that are shaped by the impact of de- and reterritorialization. So, for instance, in the modern period there has been a greater demand for religious and philosophical ideas that provide the consumer with justification for capitalistic behavior and the oppression of certain classes; religious producers have responded to this by creating publishing houses and supporting religious leaders that promote such ideas. We also see increased demand for religions and philosophies that address issues related to emotional, social, and intellectual crises experienced by modern people who face alienation as a result of urbanization, immigration, and social change. Hyper-technicalized minds may, for instance, sometimes find little comfort in religions or philosophies that reject science and may seek out religions that embrace it; or, in some cases, contact with new immigrants and social movements destabilizes a consumer's traditional models of the world and forces him or her to seek out new ways of being that better address their current condition. Countless religious producers have responded to this situation; some have even profited from it. The reterritorialization of religion is therefore often the product of the complex interplay between social change, personal experiences and desires, and the manifold impacts of modern forms of power.

At its core, the present volume argues that as the world has become more globalized, the spread of knowledge and technology has created two opposing but corollary forces: a tendency for virtually all human-related things to attempt to expand and circulate without restriction (deterritorialization) and a tendency for modern forms of boundaries to be imposed (reterritorialization). De and reterritorialization are, therefore, the fundamental modern historical forces that would destabilize the stronghold of traditional European anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States and eventually lead to the emergence of new religious markets through which white us Americans

were willing to convert to Islam. This book is both an exploration and explanation of that process.

### Outline of the Book

Using the concept of de- and reterritorialization as its broad historical and theoretical foundations, the present book examines how traditional cultural, social, religious, and psychological territories in the us were shattered and then reconfigured in ways that produced white American converts to Islam. Despite this general unity in perspective, however, as will become clear in the proceeding chapters, the history of white us Muslims contains a number of significant disjunctions. To help the reader better perceive and understand the relationships between these disjunctions, this book is divided into two parts, each of which deals with a key, and somewhat unified era in this history and applies the particular scholarly techniques that are most appropriate for examining that era. For example, to understand the trends that connect the nineteenth-century era, which saw few significant convert-related events and lacks a large amount of primary source data concerning the converts themselves, it will be necessary to spend a great deal of time examining non-Islamic esoteric communities and the writings they produced, which gave rise to the Islamic conversion movement that appeared in the 1890s. The second era, on the other hand, witnessed a great deal more Islamic activity and has a much larger pool of Muslim primary sources from which to draw, so more time will be spent examining the history of that era's organizations, activities, and leading figures. Because of these differences in subjects, sources, and techniques, the pacing and overall styles of the two parts of this book are themselves very different. It is my hope that the reader will find this approach, if nothing else, at least understandable.

Part 1 explores the first era of conversions: that which took place between ca. 1800 and ca. 1910. Here, I argue that while there were many motives for con-version during this period, and while American culture, as it became more and more deterritorialized, was showing increasing sympathy for Islam and Muslims, conversion to Islam only became a notable phenomenon when it was promoted and endorsed by people closely tied with a major reterritorializing current that has been called the 'occult revival.' The American occult revival, which began in the mid-1870s, was an

eruption of the creation of organizations focused on studying and practicing esoteric and non-Christian religious teachings. The supporters and leaders of the first American Muslim convert movement—including Alexander Webb himself—were closely tied with the us occult revival, and most likely would not have had any success had they not been connected to it. The occult revival not only gave them a solid pool of recruits, but also provided legitimization, models, and inspiration for creating a non-Christian religious movement that was primarily populated by white Americans from Christian backgrounds.

This book begins, in Chapter 1, with the earliest known white American converts to Islam: the small number of American sailors who embraced Islam while residing in Muslim-majority regions in the early nineteenth century. Some of these converts were captives of North African Muslims during the First Barbary War and were labeled, like their European predecessors, 'renegades' for embracing the religion of the enemy, while other 'renegades' were apparently either deserters or American spies working undercover in Egypt. Very little is known about most of these early converts—or supposed converts—save for one man, George Bethune English. English, interestingly, is also the only one of the early renegades who can be verifiably shown to have been influenced by the deterritorializing liberal religion currents that were gaining popularity in the us in the early nineteenth century. This chapter concludes, then, with a discussion of importance of the emergence of American liberal religiosity, which by the 1830s was epitomized by Transcendentalism and which produced a space in American religious culture for the serious appreciation of certain religious aspects of Islam. I argue that deterritorialization led to more and more Americans not only traveling to Muslim regions where some converted to Islam, but also to Americans breaking down traditional religious boundaries by publicly criticizing Christianity and identifying with—though not as—Muslims without the fear of being labeled renegades. It should be mentioned here that starting in this chapter I liberally use the words 'orient' and 'oriental.' These terms, which are often understood today as embedded with many negative stereotypes about non-Christian peoples, are generally considered outdated in contemporary scholarly parlance. However, they were used regularly by nineteenth-

century converts and Muslim sympathizers to characterize something similar to what we today sometimes refer to as the 'East'; that is, the peoples, cultures, and religions of Asia and North Africa. Although I will sometimes highlight the fact that this is now contested language by enclosing these terms in inverted commas, I retain the use of 'orient' and 'oriental' in order to highlight the distinctiveness of the terms as used in that era as well as the frequency with which they were utilized by converts and sympathizers. The reader will notice that in part 2, with the exception of Chapter 7, which represents a transition from the previous era, these terms are almost never employed.

Before the first liberally-motivated movement for full-fledged converts to Islam could emerge, as Chapter 2 shows, American religious culture would have to undergo yet another deterritorializing/reterritorializing transmutation. This was the emergence of the American occult revival. The American occult revival was a movement that, while it had roots in earlier liberal religious currents like Idealism and Transcendentalism, developed more directly out of spiritualism and early occult organizations in the us and England. Starting around the late 1840s, there was a visible growth in the popular interest in examining what were thought to be supernatural occurrences and powers, particularly in the forms of spirit 'manifestations' and 'mediums.' At least hundreds of thousands of Americans would soon be visiting séances and 'mesmeric' healers, and a few small groups of spiritualists and mesmerists also began attempting to cultivate additional supernatural—or 'occult'—powers through the use of magic mirrors or crystals, hashish, and the other tools of the magician. Interestingly, Muslims and other non-Christian communities were increasingly identified with in these supernatural-focused communities, although exclusive commitment to a non-Christian religion was still frowned upon. However, this would all change in the 1870s. After British Freemason esotericists, backed by a shrewd, wealthy businessman, had established—or reterritorialized—a stable market for Anglophone occult and non-Christian religious groups, this market was able to immigrate to America, where it was given life in the form of the Theosophical Society (TS), established in 1875. It would only be in the 1880s, however, after the group had found new ambitious promoters, that the Ts would finally

be able to achieve true success in the United States. When it did, though, a religious market in which conversion to Islam had the potential to thrive in organizational form had been reterritorialized in the us.

Alexander Russell Webb—the first prominent American convert to Islam— was one of the early participants in the American occult revival. Chapter 3 explores how Webb, the son of a Democratic newspaper publisher, made his religious journey from that of a deterritorialized young mind with little interest in religion to become not just a prominent Muslim convert, but the founder of the first relatively successful American movement for conversion to Islam. In this chapter, I look at the major events in Webb's pre-Islam life, highlighting his tendency for innovation and entrepreneurship. I also show how his background and personality traits were fortuitously fitting for his connecting with one of the most important exponents of the American occult revival: the St. Louis Ts. As one of the early members of the St. Louis Ts, Webb was exposed to the influence of some of the great early leaders of the early American occult revival, particularly Thomas M. Johnson, a prominent Platonist, a high-ranking Theosophist, and the American president for one of the first competitors of Theosophy, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. Johnson, who was a member of the St. Louis Lodge with Webb, did much to encourage the interest in Islam and Sufism in the Ts community. In fact, in March 1887, while Webb was still an active Theosophist, Johnson was responsible for creating the first American Sufi organization, the 'Sufic Circle.' Although a direct connection between Webb and the Sufic Circle cannot be firmly established, there is little doubt that Webb's Theosophical ties played a major role in his taking an interest in Islam around the same time Johnson created his group. Within months, Webb decided to attempt to go to the East to learn Islam directly from knowledgeable born-Muslims. It was in this de- and reterritorializing context, then, that Webb was molded to become the first true American Muslim convert leader.

Neither Thomas M. Johnson nor Alexander Webb, however, were the first people connected to the early occult revival to decide to organize a group for whites interested in embracing an Islamic identity. Chapter 4 discusses the important religious

and cultural current of Islamophilic Freemasonry in England and the us, which, starting in the 1870s, began creating para-Masonic organizations that emphasized Islam. I argue that one of the major motives underlying these groups was a desire to foster world peace, and these Masons— or at least one of the most influential ones—recognized that only through embracing an Islamic identity could they help Western Christians overcome one of their greatest obstacles to achieving that peace: their own prejudice against Islam. Although the most well-known of the Islamophilic Masonic groups—the Shriners—would devolve into a mere parody of orientalist stereotypes, early on, all of these groups appear to have taken their Islamic identities seriously. It is necessary to understand these groups for two reasons: (a) Their motivation for organizing may shed some light on the psychology of white American conversion to Islam generally. (b) Some of the prominent members of these groups became Webb’s earliest supporters when he started his own movement.

Chapter 5 turns, finally, to the Islamic movement Webb led starting in 1893. Here, in addition to detailing most of the known events that occurred over the three years that the movement was alive, I show how the creation and growth of this movement was dependent on the occult revival for its American support, publicity, and organization. Webb’s movement contained many elements that he had observed in the Theosophical Society and many of the movement’s original supporters had direct ties with the occult revival, some being Islamophilic Masons, others being Theosophists, New Thought followers, or individuals connected to the Rosicrucians. Despite the advantages that these ties with the occult revival brought to Webb’s efforts, however, they were not enough to prevent debilitating schisms and the movement’s eventual death. In the end, Webb’s major failure was his being unable to maintain control of the leading converts who had joined the community.

In Chapter 6, I look at the years following the Islamic movement’s collapse to bring to light both its various vestiges and the factors that contributed to its failure. A few Islamic organizations did continue to have a small presence in the years following the collapse of Webb’s movement, and at least one group, composed of people Webb possibly knew from his Theosophical days, had a movement called

the Order of Sufis, which was probably a revival of Johnson’s Sufic Circle. In this chapter, I call attention to the previously unknown fact that one of the leading members of this organization was, like Webb, involved in the French-based occult movement of Martinism—a movement that had ties to Muslims in America and throughout the world—and that it is likely that he connected his Sufi organization to the Martinist Order. This would make the Order of Sufis an early predecessor to the much more popular Martinist-influenced Sufi movement associated with René Guénon. In this chapter, I also discuss various failed attempts by early twentieth-century immigrant Muslim promoters of Islam, arguing that their failures in converting Americans reflect the fact that they were unable to successfully appeal to the white American population that would be most receptive to conversion: that involved in the occult revival. It seems that to intentionally create religious change in the era before large non-Christian immigration to the us, new ideas had to latch onto preexisting successful reterritorialized markets. I therefore conclude this chapter by examining other turn-of-the-century American movements for Asian-majority religions in order to identify the traits that made some of those movements more successful than those of the Muslims. As it turns out, there were two elements that the more successful movements had that the Muslims’—including Webb’s—lacked: an Eastern-born leader with advanced religious training and the ability to incorporate numerous occult revival movements as legitimate components of the religion.

With Chapter 7, I commence part 2 of the book, which looks at conversions between 1910 and 1975. In the twentieth century, the dynamics of white American conversion to Islam changed significantly. As I argue throughout part 2, twentieth-century conversion was characterized by the impact of the deterritorializing current of Muslim immigration to the us and the reterritorializing social bonds the immigrants developed with white Americans. Although some whites who embraced Islamic identities continued to be individuals tied to the esoteric subculture, the vast majority of converts were now average Americans who were not particularly interested in alternative religious views, but became friends and spouses of Muslims simply because they interacted with them in their daily lives. For many, if not most

of these converts, embracing Islam was merely a means to improve their relationship or family life—for them, religion itself was not the primary motive of their conversion. For others, though, exposure to Islam through relationships with immigrants gave the future converts unexpected but attractive new options for how to live in the world and cultivate an inner spiritual life. In the nineteenth century, when white Americans sought a new religion to help with personal or spiritual frustrations or with their desire for greater meaning, since the vast majority only knew other Christians, they almost always joined Christian communities. But in the twentieth century, when there was a growing likelihood that an average American had befriended or married a Muslim immigrant, this led to some people considering Islam as a legitimate religious choice. The fact that immigration played a significant role in these conversions also meant that the converts' backgrounds and views on Islam would be largely determined by the backgrounds and views that predominated in the immigrant community at any given period. This situation helps explain the differences between, for example, the backgrounds and views of converts in the 1930s, when most immigrants were working class and had little concern for Pan-Islamic movements, and those of converts in the 1970s, when a large percentage of immigrants were college-educated and many were supportive of Pan-Islamic ideas.

In Chapter 7, I begin by first laying out the general argument that for white American Muslim conversions between 1910 and 1975, Muslim immigration—and not connection to an occult religious market—was the dominant force shaping the dynamics of conversion. This change in conversion dynamics was not a sudden one, however. During the 1910s and 1920s, as this chapter argues, the most prominent Islam and Sufi convert movements, while they were led by immigrant Muslims, had strong ties to occult currents. Indeed, these movements seem to have been successful precisely because they were non-orthodox Islamic movements that were developed with an awareness and adaptation of Theosophy and other Western occult groups. It is a fascinating fact, for instance, that Rabia Martin, the first white convert of the Sufi leader Inayat Khan, was reportedly, like Webb, a Martinist and taught aspects of Martinism to her white Sufi followers. She may have even belonged to the (possibly)

Martinism-connected Order of Sufis. Nevertheless, after the 1920s, the relative impact of occult connections on white American converts to Islam and Sufism decreased dramatically, and the white members of these non-orthodox groups would be relatively quiet through the rest of the interwar period. I should comment here about my use of the terms 'orthodox' and 'non-orthodox,' which I employ on many occasions in this and in subsequent chapters. 'Orthodox' is generally understood as meaning mainstream tradition, but it sometimes implies 'correct' tradition, as if other traditions are somehow 'incorrect.' As I am not a theologian, I do not wish to make such types of normative claims. My use of 'orthodox,' then, is simply as a less cumbersome equivalent to 'mainstream tradition'; whereas 'non-orthodox' is used for 'non-mainstream tradition.'

It was in the late 1920s and 1930s that the immigration—the deterritorialization—of Muslims began to cause a major shift—a major reterritorialization—in white American conversion to Islam. As Chapter 8 shows, the evidence suggests that the principal way through which this happened was marriage. As more and more Muslim immigrants began to settle in the country, the chances increased that some of them—the vast majority of whom were males—would start taking American spouses, and that some of these spouses would convert. Here, I examine the available data and conclude that there were probably at least several hundred marriage-converts, making them the largest group of white Muslim converts in the country. I explain, too, that these converts generally showed little evidence of being strongly motivated by religious or spiritual urges; creating a family life with little friction was probably their greatest motivator in their embracing of Islam. Nevertheless, there were other individuals who demonstrated a great desire to convert for personal spiritual reasons and to spread Islam. These were, it seems, mostly friends of Muslim immigrants, the most notable of which was Louis Glick, the Chicago-born son of an immigrant Jewish couple. During the interwar period, Glick became the single most active white Muslim convert in the country, establishing a number of Islamic organizations and starting various other Islam-related enterprises, all of which greatly contributed to strengthening the national networks of Muslims. During the war years, as Chapter 9 reveals, Glick continued to play an

important role in the uniting of American Muslims, even working closely with the African American Sunnis who were, at the time, establishing their own national Islamic network. Glick, however, was not the only prominent white American Muslim during this period; in fact, it was during the war that two white Muslim women made history with their activities in the name of spreading peace and unity under the banner of Islam. Then, just after the war, white converts began receiving attention for their efforts to bring Muslims closer together—although in some cases these converts were ignored or dismissed by immigrants. In these, as well as in the following chapters, close attention is paid to the development of the immigrant Muslim community, a community for which the details of its pre-1975 history have frequently escaped the gaze of previous historians.

By the late 1940s, the history of Islam in America had entered a new phase as changes in postwar immigration began to produce very new kinds of Islamic leadership and institution-building. For the first time, a relatively large number of highly trained Muslim religious leaders began coming to the country, and they were accompanied by a quickly-growing college student and professional wave of Muslim immigration. Being much better educated, wealthier, and having better connections than the first generation immigrants, these individuals started reshaping the face of Islam in America and were soon befriending and marrying converts of their class. Now, a relatively large number of college-educated white converts began to appear, and some were soon even being put in leadership roles in the new Islamic institutions that were springing up across the country. The result of this change, as Chapter 10 shows, was a transformation of the position of white converts in American Islam.

They now had greater influence in the us Muslim community and they were increasingly influenced by the educated Muslim teachers and international reform movements with which many of the new immigrants were linked.

In the final chapter of this book, I demonstrate that after the passing of the 1965 immigration reforms, the tendencies of the early postwar period now became the dominant trends. Fewer and fewer white converts were associated with the old generations of immigrants, most of whom were

working class and primarily concerned with securing their livelihoods in America; white converts increasingly came from the educated middle class and were meeting internationally-minded Muslim students, who now had a significant influence on American converts, exposing to them their many global organizational and intellectual movements, including moderate Pan-Islam. However, converts' lives as Muslims were also being shaped by their own needs and desires. Due to having to negotiate a society undergoing rapid change, white converts tended to be interested in cultivating a new 'way of life.' For many, this meant the sacralization of both their interior and exterior lives through taking on new mental habits, clothing, and behaviors. In addition to these converts, most of whom were tied with Sunni and Shi'i immigrants, there was also a growing population joining the numerous new Sufi communities. By the end of 1974, white American conversion to Islam was a great deal larger, and far more complex—or deterritorialized—than it had been just eighty years earlier. Indeed, the us religious landscape, having undergone numerous deterritorializing and reterritorializing reconfigurations, now looked completely different from how it had appeared when the country first learned about its white Muslim converts in 1803.

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[A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2, The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975](#) by Patrick D. Bowen [Muslim Minorities, Brill, 9789004353145]

In [A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2: The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975](#) Patrick D. Bowen offers an account of the diverse roots and manifestations of African American Islam as it appeared between 1920 and 1975.

Excerpt: Starting around 1920, certain strands of African American folk culture were blended with orthodox Islamic knowledge, black nationalism, and various forms of esotericism to create a powerful and complex wave of Islamic movements. Over the next fifty-five years, literally hundreds of thousands of African Americans became aware of and interested in the notion that Islam may have been their 'original' religion; tens of thousands went beyond mere interest and embraced Islam outright; and hundreds of black Muslim leaders, writers, and artists took it upon themselves to develop, articulate, and shape the meaning of Islam for the broader African American community. The diversity and abundance of these Islamic currents was so great that the present book refers to the period between 1920 and 1975 as the era of the African American Islamic Renaissance (AAIR).

What distinguishes this volume from previous studies of black Muslims is its in-depth discussions of lesser-known roots, manifestations, and influences of African American Islam. Some of the most popular explanations for the attractiveness of Islam in the black community either focus on the charisma of prominent Muslim figures or look at what are typically framed as the 'political' motivations of the converts. Although both factors undoubtedly contributed to the development of African American Islam, they hardly tell the whole story. In fact, for two decades now, scholars who have recognized the inadequacies of such theories have expressed a vague awareness that the early black Muslim leaders were also drawing on a deep cultural reservoir that resonated with their followers.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, so far this has not led to a nuanced appreciation of the multitude of specific African American cultural and religious traditions that became the ideological roots of the AAIR, or of the numerous sociological and historical forces that led to the great diversity in the black Islamic

experience. The present volume thus serves as both an analytical corrective and as an updated—though not completely comprehensive—chronicle of African American conversion to Islam before 1975.

### Deterritorialization, Reterritorialization, and Religion

In order to make clear the manifold factors that shaped twentieth-century African American Islam, this book situates the AAIR within the theoretical and historical framework of de- and reterritorialization. Deterritorialization, as identified by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, is the modern tendency for all human-related things to circulate as if there were no boundaries, a phenomenon that emerged as the outcome of millennia of travel networks, markets, and technology developing across the world. Still, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, even in this era of relative freedom of movement, not everything can move with equal ease. Indeed, numerous restrictions—reterritorializations—have emerged, such as those imposed by political boundaries, access to technology, and cultural biases. De- and reterritorialization, then, are both historical forces and analytical concepts that help identify some of the dominant patterns shaping all elements of human culture in the modern era.

The impacts of de- and reterritorialization on religion have been numerous and complex. For example, through modern travel, communication technology, and the expansion of literacy, deterritorialization has enabled many to freely learn about, adopt, and develop religious ideas and practices to a degree that was unimaginable in prior eras. Nevertheless, the freedom to convert to a previously little-known religion does not guarantee that all religions will become equally widespread. In fact, it seems to be the case that no matter the relative freedom for religious seeking and expression, there are always reterritorializing restrictions on what is seen as an acceptable religion in a given region at a given time. One of the principal reasons for this is that religions always exist as 'goods' in a market of consumers and producers and, as in any market, the distribution of capital, access to production resources, and the ability to influence the regulation of the market itself all play significant roles in determining what the popular religions will be. Therefore, religions that are endorsed by a state and that are

organized in officially-permitted formal institutions tend to be much more publicly prominent than those that do not receive either official endorsement or institutionalization. The latter religions, which have classically been referred to as ‘folk’ religions, exist at the peripheries of the mainstream modern religious markets. As such, they may sometimes be repressed by the larger society or its government, and they may even have their own small markets within the larger societal markets.

The complexity of a modern religious market can vary significantly from place to place. In monoethnic societies with low class stratification and relative social harmony, there will not generally be great variation in the diversity of the religious goods demanded, and folk markets may be relatively few or may not face intense repression, particularly when traditional folk religions are incorporated into the dominant, institutionalized religions of that region. But in societies with great ethnic and class diversity, and especially where major tensions exist between social groups, demands for different religious goods will be incredibly diverse, and therefore there can be an abundance of folk markets. Such a situation is made even more extreme in cases like that of North America during the slave era, where, because of the cultural bias of white supremacy, multiple ethnic and religious groups were pushed against their will into the same ‘racial’ classification, thus forcing people with different religious demands to have to publicly identify with each other and sometimes with each other’s religion, all while privately attempting to retain their traditional religion.

Making matters even more complicated is the fact that oppressed communities, in addition to practicing various ethnic-specific traditional religions and the blended religions that emerge in their mixed ethnic or class groups, also frequently develop what James C. Scott has labeled ‘hidden transcripts’: folk religious ideas and practices that protest the dominant social system and are intentionally hidden from the gaze of the group doing the oppressing. Because these transcripts are generally not institutionalized, they are especially prone to deterritorialization and can easily morph into different forms even within a single oppressed community. This is especially true when that community is, like that of North American slaves,

spread over a large geographical area and is composed of a wide variety of ethnic, religious, social, and experiential influences. Therefore, hidden transcripts, like folk religions generally, can often take on regionally- and ethnically-distinct patterns—what might be called religious ‘dialects’—and can emerge in disparate regions simultaneously without direct or obvious influences on each other. Furthermore, because of the desire to keep such transcripts hidden, several tactics are employed to maintain the secrecy of this knowledge, which can result in even greater levels of religious complexity within a market. For example, in order to avoid detection from the dominant society, transcripts that oppose social systems might be transmitted clearly only when oppressed people are in private, but in a public setting they may cloak the transcript in language that can appear to the uninitiated to be perfectly in line with officially-permitted religious teachings, thereby inserting into a mainstream market elements that are opposed to that very market. Or, a transmitter of a hidden transcript may insist that a story is a mere ‘tale,’ when it is in fact used to communicate a very real perspective on society. Due to these factors, hidden transcripts can move between, and even function simultaneously in, mainstream markets, folk markets, and the small, isolated markets of regions, families, and individuals’ social networks.

It should also be recognized that folk traditions can both die and transform into mainstream religious currents. Conscious awareness of folk traditions, for instance, can be lost with the passing of generations—a reality all the more common for hidden transcripts due to their being placed under heavy camouflage. Therefore, as time goes by, some traditions may disappear except for as vague vestiges, taking the forms of nearly-forgotten secrets, unarticulated thoughts, unconscious or little-understood behaviors, hazy memories, or abstract symbols in one’s subconscious. Interestingly, though, on occasion after fading into near obscurity hidden transcripts and folk traditions can be later revived and even institutionalized—that is, reterritorialized—within folk and even mainstream markets. The reasons as to how and why this occurs can vary greatly. It seems, though, that it is often the case that such an event happens when a market, a group of markets, or a whole society has recently undergone a dramatic

transformation—a phenomenon that some sociologists refer to as an ‘institutional change.’<sup>9</sup> In this scenario, there are both religious consumers and producers; the consumers desire older religious goods as, because those goods are familiar to them, they offer a form of cultural orientation to help navigate oneself during a period of instability and alienation, whereas the producers are typically individuals who have mastered the folk traditions and have determined how to make them relevant for the current context. Because institutions can provide those involved with them rewards that are difficult to obtain outside of institutions—such as formally-established cultural legitimacy, abundant resources for capital, and political and legal power—if the new market environment permits the institutionalization of these old traditions, then it is likely that ambitious and savvy producers will indeed institutionalize them. Therefore, given institutional change, even nearly-forgotten hidden transcripts have the potential to become reterritorialized into mainstream religious institutions.

One particular African American hidden transcript offers a fascinating study of this hidden transcript-to-institutional religion transformation. Since at least the first half of the nineteenth century, tales about Europeans having used a red flag as a lure to enslave Africans have wafted through black religious and cultural markets, sometimes becoming incorporated into regional or familial folklore, sometimes transforming and blending with different stories, and sometimes finding no consumers at all.<sup>10</sup> By the early twentieth century, although throughout the country a significant proportion of ex-slaves still knew different versions of the tale, the folk tradition about the red flag was clearly dying out. However, as will be shown later, before it went completely extinct, an early twentieth-century institutional change in African American culture allowed the tradition to become institutionalized by two religious organizations in the 1920s and 1930s. These groups were thus able to appeal to those individuals who either consciously recognized the tradition or felt a vague familiarity with it due to, probably, a hazy or subconscious awareness of elements of the story. Soon, then, these organizations were incredibly influential, and one in particular would eventually gain enough cultural power to bring about a whole new institutional change. Because the red flag

tradition had originally emerged out of the deterritorialization of the African religions that were forced together during slavery, its journey to becoming an influential institutionalized religious concept serves as a clear example of the dynamic changes that religious traditions can undergo in a world of de- and reterritorialization.

### The AAIR and the Red Flag

Over the years, a number of academics have observed a general similarity between African American Islamic teachings and the older African American religious tradition, but because they have not been able to convincingly identify the specific religious roots of the AAIR, many of the sociological, historical, and market mechanisms behind the AAIR’s development out of pre-twentieth-century black religion have been missed. Of course, identifying specific religious roots is no easy task, especially in cases involving African American religion. Due to a large part of the black religious tradition having emerged from the blending of African traditions with European Christian traditions, it is often hard to persuasively prove that an influence on a later movement, such as African American Islam, came exclusively from the older African American tradition and not an independent European-based Christian tradition. And if one cannot do this, there will always be a lingering, subtle doubt as to whether the root genuinely came from black culture. On the other hand, if one can demonstrate that a uniquely African American religious concept or practice was indeed a root, then that root becomes a foundation on which one can build a framework of evidence to reveal other links between the new religion and the older African American tradition.

For the AAIR, the red flag hidden transcript is this foundational root. As it turns out, the red flag tale was one of the rare traditions that was truly unique to African Americans, and, as we will see, the very groups that reterritorialized it in the 1920s and 1930s happened to be the two most popular African American Muslim organizations of the AAIR.<sup>11</sup> We therefore have solid ground for comparing other specific black folk traditions with the teachings of the twentieth-century black American Islamic movements. When this is done, it becomes clear that a multitude of distinctly-African American stories, concepts, and practices were

indeed incorporated into those groups. Despite the fact that there are very few examples of African American Muslims acknowledging that some of the specific teachings presented as Islamic had previously been non-Muslim folk traditions, in the opinion of this author, the evidence is overwhelming. Indeed, so many black Muslim doctrines show clear parallels with specific African American folk traditions that by recognizing the folk connections of certain central teachings of the Muslims, one can suddenly understand a number of notions and practices whose deeper meanings had previously been virtually impenetrable. From this perspective, then, the AAIR was a renaissance in the sense of a rebirth: African American Muslim groups had given new life to old folk beliefs.

But for those who actually embraced Islam, the AAIR was a different kind of rebirth. One of the distinguishing features of the AAIR is that the vast majority of its Islamic movements asserted that Islam was the religion of African Americans' ancestors in Africa. If 'Islam' is defined as a religion that is nearly identical to what most self-identified Muslims throughout history have practiced, then this claim is not just inaccurate for most African Americans, it is also rather hard to believe, especially if it is presented without any obvious supporting evidence, as it seems to have been during the AAIR. However, if it is recognized that AAIR leaders were essentially helping black folk adapt to their recent institutional change by telling them that many of the stories and practices they already knew were actually Islamic, it is much more understandable why these individuals felt that there was indeed good evidence that their ancestors were Muslims. For them, then, the AAIR was the period of the rebirth of their true Islamic heritage—and this, as will be shown, was a central theme of the AAIR.

Still, it is not the case that every Islamic group that used black folk traditions became extremely popular. On the contrary; most did not, and sometimes only certain factions or certain leaders gained large followings. Furthermore, simply knowing that black folk traditions were employed cannot by itself explain why the various teachings of the different Islamic groups of the period each took on distinct traits. To help explicate the many different ways Islam and folk traditions were reterritorialized by black Muslim groups and why

some groups became more popular than others, this book makes use of detailed historical and textual analysis as well as a number of sociological theories. As we will see, although the folk traditions of the AAIR are important to recognize, they are only one piece of the puzzle; a great deal of additional information about the mechanisms behind the growth of African American Islam is revealed in the finer points in the biographies and patterns of development of each of the AAIR's several unique Islamic currents.

When all of this information is pieced together, the picture that emerges is one of an African American Islamic Renaissance that was comprised of two distinct eras. The first era, which lasted from ca. 1920 to ca. 1945, was that of the first generation of African American Muslim movements and converts. It was during this period that the notion that African Americans were or could be Muslims first became popular; thousands embraced the religion and at least a half-dozen distinct movements appeared. However, although using folk traditions like the red flag hidden transcript was important for black Islamic groups to be able to win people over, during this era the fundamental reason African Americans were suddenly, on a large scale, so willing to accept the claim that their folk traditions were Islamic was that at the time Islam and Muslims had recently become subjects of great interest in the black community—a phenomenon largely attributable to the religion being endorsed by the institution-changing black nationalist movement led by Marcus Garvey. By successfully employing the market-shaping tools of mass media; recruiting numerous small social networks; and promoting programs, charismatic leaders, and folk traditions that appealed to the black masses, Garvey's movement deeply transformed African American cultural and religious markets, and in the process promoted and legitimized Islam for African Americans. Garvey's black nationalism thus served as a central pole around which all of the deterritorializing

Islamic currents of the period gravitated and multiplied; and, as a result, no single Islamic movement solidly dominated this era.

The second era, which lasted from roughly the end of the Second World War to the beginning of 1975, was similarly put on solid footing by a single organization that made effective use of mass

media; social networks; and appealing programs, charismatic leaders, and folk traditions like the red flag tale. In this period, however, the culture-shaping organization was a Muslim one: the Nation of Islam (NOI). The NOI and its leading figures—most notably, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X—legitimized the major themes of African American Islam during this period in a way similar to that of Garvey’s movement in the first era. But the America in which the Nation had found itself after World War II was very different from that in which Garvey had risen, and the NOI had developed new tools that helped it thrive when other Islamic and black nationalist groups were failing. Although its teachings were still strongly tied to black folk traditions, the particular traditions that it now emphasized better appealed to the new generation of African Americans. And unlike Garvey’s movement, which had found a great deal of its support from church leaders, the NOI was tapping into the social networks of black prisoners/ex-convicts, black nationalists, non-NOI Muslims, and families. Through these and other efforts, the Nation became a new cultural pole, generating yet another institutional change in black American life, but one that, much more so than the previous era, made Islamic themes—particularly those that had been influenced by or connected to the NOI—widely-accepted elements of African American culture. It was in this second era, then, that Islam reached its fullest reterritorialization in the AAIR.

### Limitations and Outline of the Book

To better bring to light the numerous distinct historical, sociological, and thematic currents within the AAIR’s different periods, this book is divided into three parts: part 1, which examines African American religion and folk culture before the AAIR; part 2, which examines the first era of the AAIR; and part 3, which examines the AAIR’s second era. The reader will note that part 2 is significantly longer than part 3; this is due to the fact that, since it was primarily during the first era that most of the main AAIR movements and concepts originally developed, this part contains the majority of this book’s analysis of the teachings, founders, and emergence of the various Islamic organizations. Although several new Islamic groups appeared in the second era, none were as popular as the most influential organizations from the first, and, in fact, their teachings were often derived from those of

the first era. Spending extra time to lay a solid historical and analytical base in part 2 will therefore be of great help in explaining the post-1945 developments.

A few words might also be said at this point concerning some of the limitations and unique features of the book. First, the reader should be warned that although this volume makes significant use of sociological theories to help explain many of the patterns that appear to have defined African American Islam, it nevertheless remains primarily a work of history and, because of this, some of the book’s larger claims veer beyond strict sociology to the realm of impressionistic generalizing, which is more common to history writing. It is my view that using the tools of both fields has many benefits, particularly in the offering of what I believe is a clearer and more expansive view of the topic at hand, but it may also be somewhat disappointing for those who desire to see a fuller development of the sociological concepts brought up throughout the course of the work.

Another issue that will undoubtedly be of concern to many readers will be the book’s lack of significant attention to female Muslims and gender issues in general. This feature is largely the result of two factors: the book’s dependence on documentary resources, which for this subject are significantly malecentered, and its focus on understanding the key forces, movements, and individuals that shaped the spread of Islam in African American culture—not on the ways in which African American Islamic culture developed after it had spread and settled. As we will see, the expansion of African American Islam was indeed dominated by men; the vast majority of the Islamic organizational leaders, writers, popular speakers, and news makers were men, and men seem to have made up a significant majority of the rank-and-file black Muslims as well. Save for the Moorish Science Temple of America, which had a small number of ‘sheikesses’ who established and ran their own branches of the movement, most of the AAIR groups did not even allow women to officially run anything more than local auxiliary organizations; in most cases, women were to play a subservient role to the men and were to focus on homemaking and other ‘women’s’ affairs. There were of course a number of fairly prominent female writers, artists, auxiliary leaders, and informal branch and even movement leaders—

such as Clara Muhammad, who served as her husband's leading representative for five years in the 1940s for the Nation of Islam—and I suspect women, particularly mothers, played an enormous but as yet undocumented role as transmitters of folk knowledge. However, in the vast majority of cases women were nowhere near as prominent in the public sphere as many of the men who served in similar roles. This reality seems to have been largely a factor of a gender bias within African American Islam, which itself was reflective of a similar gender bias in the broader African American culture and in American culture generally; in fact, as we will see, a major trend in the AAIR linked Islam specifically to deep and widespread traditions regarding masculinity. And because of these patterns, the primary sources themselves do not give great insight into the lives of women in these movements, making the chronicling of their dimension of the AAIR extremely difficult. Women are of course mentioned several times in the book and I cite nearly every existing study concerning pre-1975 African American female Muslims, but at no point is there an in-depth treatment of Muslim women or gender issues.

A third feature that will be noted by many readers is the particular terminology employed in this book. For those familiar with African American Islam, one of the most obvious examples of my terminology is the use of the words 'conversion' and 'convert.' Particularly since the 1970s (as will be discussed in Chapter 15), there has been a popular trend among African American Muslims to refer to their turning to Islam as 'returning' or 'reversion'; for African Americans of that period, this language was generally based on the belief that prior to their enslavement all or at least a significant majority of Africans brought to North America before the nineteenth century identified as Muslims. However, beyond the fact that this idea is not supported by the extant historical evidence, it appears that not every African American who embraced Islam before 1975 believed in this claim; some black Muslims explicitly used the term 'conversion'; and, finally, because 'conversion'/'convert' are the preferred sociological terms for the phenomenon of religious switching, their use helps better link the sociological concepts that will be used here to elucidate the book's subject.

In addition, in order to distinguish between the uniquely African American Islam that emerged in the United States and the various forms of Islam that have been practiced by Muslims throughout the rest of the world and were brought to the us by immigrants, I use the terms 'orthodox Islam' and 'international Muslims.' Despite the fact that the term 'orthodox' sometimes has the connotation of 'right' doctrine—that is, as opposed to a 'wrong' doctrine—in this book I employ the more common understanding of the term, using it to refer to what might be vaguely called the generic, mainstream form of Islam found in most of the world, what is often labeled by Westerners as 'Sunni' Islam. Similarly, the term 'international' is used not to imply that there are no international roots or connections of African American Muslims, but rather that these Muslims were generally either not born in the Americas or were the children of immigrants from Muslim-majority regions. Of course, many have rightly argued that there is no true generic or mainstream form of Islam and, at the same time, all of Islam could be considered international; I hope, though, that the reader will understand the meanings for these terms in this book's particular context. Nevertheless, I still of course encourage those who wish to provide correctives to this volume's terminological and other shortcomings to do so.

With these issues addressed, we can now turn to the outline of the book, which begins, because of the foundational role of black religion for the AAIR, with an overview of some of the key trends in African American religion and culture that emerged prior to the end of the First World War. Two major institutions shaped black religion and culture during this period: slavery and Emancipation. Like the Garvey movement and the NOI later, the impact of both of these institutions was on the level of institutional change; that is, they reterritorialized life for black people who had been participating in many different regional and cultural markets. The emphasis in this chapter, however, is on the two aspects of black religion that are key for understanding the AAIR: the historical development of the increasingly complicated African American folk religiosity and on the presence of Islam in black religious life before 1920. It is argued that the reason Islam did not become a widespread religious identity during this period, despite Muslims accounting for perhaps up to twenty percent of all

of enslaved persons brought from Africa to the Americas, is that there was both little demand and, for those who were interested in spreading Islam, relatively poor access to religious markets. In other words, the ways black religious markets had been shaped by slavery and Emancipation were not conducive to conversion to the ideological and organizational forms of Islam that were being presented at the time. Nevertheless, many of the elements that would become part of the later African American Islamic movement were developed during this period, especially numerous folk traditions and hidden transcripts that were being cultivated through the mixing of traditional African religious currents with Christian elements.

Part 2 presents the emergence and spread of Islam in the first era of the AAIR. Starting around the year 1920, we see for the first time the rise of widespread interest in and conversion to Islam. Although there were multiple actors playing a role in this development, my argument in Chapters 2 and 3 is that the single most important party was Marcus Garvey and his massively popular black nationalist movement the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). By the early 1920s, Garvey had successfully reterritorialized African American culture through the use of mass media, offering various beneficial programs and ideas, and recruiting the leaders and leading institutions of numerous black communities throughout the country. Garvey's impact however went beyond mere culture. Since many of the UNIA's local leaders were connected to the church, Garvey also had a profound influence on religion. Indeed, he can be said to have initiated an institutional change that affected both black cultural life and black religious life. And, because while Garvey was doing this the UNIA was promoting the acceptance of Islam as a legitimate black religious identity, it was Garvey's movement that finally established a real market for Islam to circulate in the black community. Almost immediately after the UNIA endorsed the religion, a number of individuals began trying to exploit this market expansion, and the early 1920s saw several Muslim leaders—most of whom were nonorthodox and could appeal to folk beliefs—winning converts, and almost all of them had either direct or indirect connections to Garvey's movement.

The first major African American-led Islamic movement, however, did not appear until Garvey had been imprisoned. It was in 1925 that Noble Drew Ali, a former folk healer who had probably been raised by a Baptist preacher, brought forth a new Islamic teaching that would rapidly gain several thousand members. It will be shown in Chapters 4 and 5 that Drew Ali's teachings combined the red flag tale and other black folk religious beliefs with high intellectual ideals, white-derived esotericism, and black nationalist concepts. In fact, it does not seem to be a coincidence that Drew Ali's movement began making popular the assertion that African Americans were Muslim 'Moors' precisely when the UNIA was consistently praising and promoting North African Moors in its own newspaper. By so thoroughly connecting with the religious market Garvey had opened up, Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) more fully established Islam as a legitimate identity in African American religious culture and, at the same time, appeared as if it were headed to become the dominant form of African American Islam for all of history. Schisms, however, were emerging and upon Drew Ali's death in 1929 the movement fractured into numerous factions that, although they spread the MSTA further across the country and gained possibly more converts than had Drew Ali during his life, prevented the development of a united and strong Muslim community.

But the death of Drew Ali had other, greater implications for the history of African American Islam, for it represented a de facto deregulation of the African American Muslim market, and black Islam was suddenly deterritorialized. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the emergence of a post-Drew Ali Islamic movement that would not just thrive in this environment, reterritorializing key elements of African American Islam, but would eventually gain by far the most profound impact on the presence of Islam in African American culture in the twentieth century. Established in the early 1930s by an eccentric immigrant named W.D. Fard, the Nation of Islam taught ideas that seem to have blended black folk traditions, black nationalism, Eastern Islamic teachings, and MSTA concepts along with deep knowledge of history, science, esotericism, various forms of Christian fundamentalism, and a profound desire to resist white racist violence. Particularly when communicated by its leading

minister, Elijah Muhammad, himself the son of a Baptist preacher, the Nation's doctrines could speak to a wide variety of African Americans, and the movement seems to have been a relative success in its early years, gaining possibly several thousand followers in Detroit alone, as well as perhaps a few hundred more in Chicago and Milwaukee. Although it shared many similarities with the MSTA, the NOI was distinct in several ways, and its unique traits would prove to shape the movement's trajectory, although by the end of World War II its fate was not at all clear.

The NOI, nevertheless, was not the only Islamic movement to develop in Drew Ali's wake. As Chapter 8 shows, many new and revived expressions of African American Islam surged forth in the 1930s and 1940s. The diversity of forms of Muslim movements and identities during this period reveals the fact that African American Islam could be reterritorialized in a large number of ways, many of which were completely nonorthodox and often combined the teachings of the MSTA and NOI with other concepts. Despite this diversity, though, black nationalism and folk religion continued to play key roles, reflecting their fundamental reterritorializing positions in the development of African American Islam. This was true, as Chapter 9 explains, even when it came to the early spread of more orthodox forms of Islam from the 1920s through the 1940s. Several individuals who were either from or had visited orthodox Muslim communities throughout the world successfully promoted 'Sunni' Islam to probably a few hundred African Americans during this era, but they had often done so by appealing to the elements already present in the markets Garvey and the previous Muslims had so thoroughly shaped. Largely because of this fact, by the end of the Second World War, African American orthodox Islam was nearly just as deterritorialized and diverse as African American nonorthodox Islam.

With part 3 the second era of African American conversion to Islam is brought to light. The postwar generation was very different from the previous group of Muslims not only because its converts were far more likely to be urban-born and much less familiar with the old black folk traditions, but also because this era generally was a time of great change for African Americans, who were increasingly taking part in the remodeling of

American race relations. Fortunately for the Nation of Islam, the circumstances it had found itself in during the 1940s fostered a deep transformation that enabled it to develop tools that would better reach the new generation, thus giving the group far greater influence on African American culture than any other Islamic organization had before. Chapters 10 and 11 describe and explain this remarkable reemergence of the NOI starting in the late 1940s. The incarceration of many of its members that decade put the movement in touch with a population that had not been significantly proselytized to before: prisoners and active criminals. This contact and other changes in the group led to a transmutation in the NOI's programs and approach, which now put greater emphasis on economic black nationalism, the use of mass media, and certain folk themes that were increasingly popular in urban centers—all of which enabled the NOI, now firmly under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, to reach a fairly broad audience. Helping this growth, too, was the relative stagnation and decline of the various non-NOI Islamic movements. Although there were certainly a number of impressive developments in the non-NOI Muslim community, overall the community did not grow significantly, and therefore could not successfully compete with the NOI for the 'consumers' of African American Islam.

With its new prominence, the Nation of Islam also proved to be incredibly fertile religious soil for one Malcolm Little, an ex-convict and son of a Garveyite Baptist preacher. As Malcolm X, he became the NOI's most well-known minister and, after the movement received national attention in 1959, he was rocketed to the position of one of the most prominent, if controversial, speakers on the black experience in America. Chapters 12 and 13 explore how Malcolm X achieved an unprecedented amount of attention for African American Islam, culminating in, if not true mass conversion, true mass influence over American culture. However, upon gaining the national stage, Malcolm began to deviate from the quietest NOI teachings, increasingly calling for African American interreligious unity and revolution. Although his new rhetoric helped the NOI expand to have even greater influence on black culture than it might have had otherwise, philosophical differences between him and other leading members of the movement led to Malcolm, in March 1964, choosing

to leave the Nation and embrace orthodox Islam. In so doing, Malcolm unleashed a new torrent of Islamic interpretations and influences, as well as a rapidly spreading current of black nationalist and revolutionary perspectives that were, although ostensibly non-Islamic, often laced with Islamic themes. By the time of Malcolm's assassination in February 1965, the African American religious and cultural markets had become peppered with Islamic elements so thoroughly that the NOI and Malcolm can be said to have brought about yet another institutional change.

Chapters 14 and 15, finally, look at how Islam was reterritorialized in the wake of Malcolm's death. Explicitly Islamic themes had now become incorporated into popular black folk culture, and Malcolm, the NOI, and other Islamic movements had inspired and shaped numerous new non-Muslim cultural dynamics and markets that were themselves shaping—converting—black America. But, just as Drew Ali's death had released a flood of diverse Islamic currents, so too did Malcolm's passing, and a new wave of Islamic movements, leaders, and artistic expressions emerged in the African American community. Interestingly, although several nonorthodox currents developed and were revived by emphasizing their connections with the folk, the period also saw the rise of new forms of orthodox Islam that were significantly influenced by international Islamic trends, even if the black nationalist and folk roots were still present in their teachings. African American religiosity had thus undergone a dramatic transformation since the slave era; the de- and reterritorializations of its 350 years of North American experience had ultimately created an extremely diverse market of Islamic identities and cultural currents.

In his classic study of the religious lives of the enslaved Africans in the Americas, Albert Raboteau in *Slave Religion*, describes the bondspersons' loss of traditional African religions as the "Death of the Gods." Over twenty years later, the historian of American religions Jon Butler in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American*, referred to the same event as the "African Spiritual Holocaust." Such language—although perhaps overstated from a technical historical perspective—was truly fitting, for the forced deterritorialization from a familiar religious culture was akin to death for so many of the enslaved; it was largely for this reason that

their new pastiche, reterritorialized folk tradition was filled with numerous stories about resurrections and Dry Bones. But the black folk's despondency was not to end upon the advent of Emancipation. With the onset of the burdens and horrors of Jim Crow, by the early twentieth century many black folk felt more 'dead' than ever before; even some of their own traditions had taught them that they were cursed to suffer and that they were too inherently ignorant to rise in the white man's world. Their only hope, many felt, was either a spiritual suicide at the hands of the 'little man' or that someone—be it God or a human—would murder the Devil himself and redeem the 'underground nation.'

The leaders of the early African American Islamic movements looked at the black folk's spiritual and emotional condition and determined that their leaders had been guiding the community the wrong way. The best approach for building up the confidence and abilities of a people so poor in spirit was not by condescendingly telling them that they simply had to work harder to adapt to the racist world in which they found themselves with the hope that someday, perhaps after several generations, they might effect enough small changes that they would achieve true equality. Instead, these Muslim leaders pieced together some of the most comforting and inspiring elements of the black folk's mixed culture and used these to teach that black people were a holypeople who possessed divine knowledge and abilities, that they had a great history in which they could take pride, and that they could find the solution to their problems not outside, but within. African Americans, they insisted, had the power to change their own lives in the here and the now.

At first, Islam was mainly a veneer for many of these leaders' teachings. What they called 'Islam' was primarily a concoction of black folk traditions, black nationalism, Christianity, and white esotericism. Even when the Arabic language, Middle Eastern dress, and the Qur'an were held up as important elements of the religion they were spreading, these were at best superficial components; the true core of their teachings was a religious culture to which black folk were already attuned. On the rare occasions that orthodox Islam was actually taught, even then it was often understood through folk lenses. The reason the idea

of Islam was being used was because the religion and its followers across the world—but particularly the North African Moors—had gained the widespread respect and admiration of African Americans in the early 1920s through being endorsed by members of the incredibly influential unia. When Marcus Garvey created the major institutional and market changes that he did after the First World War, several African American Muslim leaders realized that if they could successfully reterritorialize certain inspiring elements of the black nationalist movement with their other teachings, they would have an unprecedented opportunity to transform and uplift black America. It was at this point that the African American Islamic Renaissance was truly born.

After the Second World War, the Nation of Islam adopted some of the very programs and practices that Garvey’s movement had used so effectively to unleash a new institutional change, this time giving Islam even more prominence and cultural power than it had had during the era shaped by Garvey. But what occurred in this second period was unexpected: the Muslim movement reached a height of fame and influence that brought it into the world of international politics, and by 1964, Islam had become for many African Americans the primary symbol of the liberation of the oppressed. Then, over the next ten years, as thousands embraced orthodox Islam, the non-orthodox Nation of Islam firmly established its place as one of the richest and most influential religious organizations in the United States. By the end of the AAIR, political leaders across the country and throughout the world were honoring the movement that had, only a few years earlier, been the object of government persecution. In this final transformation, African American Islam had firmly and permanently planted itself as a fixture in the American religious and cultural landscape—and in doing so the underground black folk religious currents had finally been resurrected.

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[The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment](#) by Alexander Bevilacqua [Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 9780674975927]

A succinct and erudite overview of 17th- and 18th-century European scholars and writers who focused on Islamic studies.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a pioneering community of Christian scholars laid the groundwork for the modern Western understanding of Islamic civilization. These men produced the first accurate translation of the Qur’an into a European language, mapped the branches of the Islamic arts and sciences, and wrote Muslim history using Arabic sources. [The Republic of Arabic Letters](#) reconstructs this process, revealing the influence of Catholic and Protestant intellectuals on the secular Enlightenment understanding of Islam and its written traditions.

Drawing on Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, and Latin sources, Alexander Bevilacqua’s rich intellectual history retraces the routes—both mental and physical—that Christian scholars traveled to acquire, study, and comprehend Arabic manuscripts. The knowledge they generated was deeply indebted to native Muslim traditions, especially Ottoman ones. Eventually the

translations, compilations, and histories they produced reached such luminaries as Voltaire and Edward Gibbon, who not only assimilated the factual content of these works but wove their interpretations into the fabric of Enlightenment thought.

[The Republic of Arabic Letters](#) shows that the Western effort to learn about Islam and its religious and intellectual traditions issued not from a secular agenda but from the scholarly commitments of a select group of Christians. These authors cast aside inherited views and bequeathed a new understanding of Islam to the modern West.

Excerpt: Around the time of his fifteenth birthday, in 1752, Edward Gibbon wanted to learn Arabic. The year before, he had discovered the Muslim conquests in English and French accounts. Yet his Oxford tutor "discouraged this childish fancy [and] neglected the fair occasion of directing the ardour of a curious mind," as Gibbon, who never took up the language, would recollect. The decision would haunt him in later years, when his great project of charting the decline of the Roman Empire led him beyond the confines of Western history and, via the entanglements of the Eastern Roman Empire, well into Asia and the histories of Muslim peoples. Though he could read sources in both Greek and Latin, Gibbon could not work autonomously on Islamic history. The ambition and scale of his historical vision outran his linguistic abilities, and he was well-aware of the challenges he faced.

The solution came from the European scholars of Arabic, writers whom Gibbon read and used in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: George Sale, translator of the Qur'an; Simon Ockley, historian of the Arab conquests; Barthélemy d'Herbelot, creator of an encyclopedia of Islamic letters; and others. These authors, who people the footnotes of Gibbon's great work, provided him with the sources he was unable to read himself. They form an Enlightenment, now largely lost from view, in which Europeans learned Arabic and read Islamic manuscripts. This book offers a history of this Arabic-reading Enlightenment.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a transformation in European knowledge of Islam and Islamic traditions. The imprecise and often incorrect body of notions available during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance gradually gave way to a vast

and diverse set of translations, insights, and interpretations. At the same time, a new attitude developed toward the peoples and traditions of Islam. No longer seen as deeply alien, Muslims came to be appreciated, not just for their religious piety and military prowess, but also for their music and architecture, their social customs, the heroism of their histories, and even for their poetry and for the beauty of the Qur'an. At this time, Europeans first came to recognize the culture of Muslim lands as a holistic set of religious, intellectual, and literary traditions deserving respect and attention, and as an object of study that would yield intellectual, aesthetic, and even moral enrichment in a variety of fields.

European understandings of Islam changed, then, in two separate ways: on the one hand, Europeans studied a much wider range of sources of the Islamic intellectual tradition than ever before, and, on the other, they began to think and write about Islam with a fair-mindedness that had until then been at best the exception rather than the rule. The two developments, although related, were distinct. Some Europeans improved knowledge of Islam for polemical ends; they studied it in order to refute it more decisively. These were by no means the least influential writers. By contrast, sympathy did not always lead to deeper understanding, for others misrepresented Islam to make it seem more worthy of Christian esteem. Even so, the two processes—of study and of charitable reinterpretation—were linked. Generally speaking, those Europeans who learned Arabic and wrote about Islamic topics tended to hold a high opinion of Islamic letters, of their importance and originality; they even tended to overestimate the antiquity of Arabic, which increased its significance in their eyes. Together, the tradition of research and the effort at charitable reinterpretation laid the foundations of the modern Western understanding of Islam: many of the translations and interpretations first produced in this period persisted into the twentieth century.

This venture was undertaken only after global commerce brought Europeans into increased contact with the peoples, goods, languages, beliefs, and customs of Asia. This was the era of the chartered trading companies, and many European powers established a commercial presence abroad, not just in the Mediterranean but as far afield as the Coromandel Coast of India or Batavia, on the

island of Java. European presence in the entrepôt cities of Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo, or in factories and settlements from North Africa to Southeast Asia, generated an increased awareness of the intellectual life of the Islamic city. If the merchants did not for the most part interest themselves in scholarly matters, they provided transportation and accommodation for those who traveled in pursuit of knowledge rather than profit. At the same time, Christian missionary efforts intensified European interactions with Muslim peoples.

The new knowledge of Islam was the product of studies undertaken by both Catholics and Protestants. Whether scholars, clergymen, or members of religious orders, they all participated in a tradition of erudition that originated in the humanist movement of the Renaissance and extended across the European continent and the British Isles (Map r). These men competed fiercely, and disagreed with vehemence, but they never duplicated one another's work, and they could agree across sectarian lines about what constituted good research. They can be called a Republic of Arabic Letters: a working community of scholars of different languages, political affiliations, and traditions of belief. Theirs was a province of the broader European Republic of Letters (a period term), the continental scholarly community whose origins dated to the time of Erasmus of Rotterdam, with shared rules of conduct and goals.

The translation movement described in this book was grounded in a perception of analogy between Western Christian and Islamic traditions. Analogy was one of the chief intellectual tools that European scholars used to make sense of Islamic history, religion, and letters and to make these intelligible to their readers. In particular, one of their most powerful comparisons was between Muslims and the "good pagans" of classical antiquity. The Christian tradition had, since the time of the Church Fathers, assimilated many aspects of pre-Christian Greco-Roman literature and thought. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the presence of so much classical culture at the heart of the Western tradition seemed to grant scholars permission to study Islamic materials as well. Through an analogy with good paganism, Europeans could validate their new interest in Islamic letters.

European scholars also compared Islam to Christianity and to Judaism. These comparisons were more ancient; they lay at the foundation of the polemical study of Islam in the Middle Ages. Christian writers then had aimed to prove that Islam was not the product of a genuinely inspired revelation but the forgery of an impostor who had confected it from bits and pieces of existing religions. This time around, however, the comparison served a different function: to normalize Islam. Scholars argued that the God of the Qur'an was the same God of the Christian Bible, and Islam came to seem to many a more intellectually sound version of Christianity because it did not require belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. The study of Islam became normatively decontaminated: Muhammad the impostor became Muhammad the legislator.

The scholars involved in the European study of African and Asian languages thought they were expanding the approach of humanism—the scholarly movement that had recovered the classics of Greece and Rome—to new literary traditions. For them, humanism was a universalist movement encompassing all the literary traditions of humankind. This sense of possibility and excitement is captured in some of their writings. In turn, they could and did use their knowledge of Islamic history and letters to reorient their understanding of their own place in world history, displacing themselves from its center.

One did not have to abandon one's own religious beliefs to take this intellectual step. Whether the European scholars of Arabic were clerics or laymen, they were not radical critics of their religion. They did not seek to overturn Christianity through their study of Islam. That antireligious readers ended up using the new knowledge of Islam to critique organized religion was an unintended consequence of their intellectual output; it had nothing to do with the original impetus for acquiring such knowledge. The Enlightenment understanding of Islam and Islamic culture was developed neither by the famous philosophes nor by the radical underground, but by a broader and less polemical group of researchers, who are the subject of this book: the thinkers who most intensively interacted with the written traditions of Islam.

European scholars aiming to build a new understanding of Islam—for instance, to read the

Qur'an as contemporary Muslims did—had to rely on the work of their Muslim counterparts in the areas of grammar, lexicography, commentary, compilation, abridgment, anthology, historiography (historical writing), biography, and more. Thus, many Islamic judgments about what mattered in the Islamic tradition were adopted by European scholars. With a remarkable naiveté, Europeans trusted information in Islamic sources, often taking their claims at face value. As a consequence, their new understanding was constructed with building blocks from the Islamic intellectual tradition.

The new knowledge allowed for an interpretation of Islamic letters as sophisticated as it was unprecedented in European history. This book is an account of this transformation, a new history of Islam and the European Enlightenment. It begins by relating how and why Islamic manuscripts were collected in great number all across Europe in the period beginning around 1600, then moves on to the process by which these manuscripts were spun into knowledge in learned and polite translations, editions, and histories. It considers the study of Islamic religion, first through the translation of the Qur'an published by the Italian Lodovico Marracci in 1698, and then through a broader look at how a new view of Islam emerged from the mid-seventeenth century to the early eighteenth. This new view was grounded both in a richer philological knowledge and in an effort to do justice to Islam—to extend intellectual charity to it. The investigation then moves to the study of Islamic history and letters broadly by examining the *Bibliothèque Orientale*, the masterpiece of the Frenchman Barthélemy d'Herbelot, published in Paris in 1697—the first true Western "encyclopedia" of Islamic culture—and then charting how the history of Islamic contributions to human civilization writ large was understood from mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century. Chapter 6 investigates the impact of all of this research on the canonical, secular French and British Enlightenment of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Gibbon. Readers like Voltaire and Gibbon adopted not just the raw materials but also the interpretations of the European scholars of Arabic, and wove them into the fabric of Enlightenment thought.

The argument of this book relies on a combination of what were viewed until very recently as two

distinct pursuits: intellectual history, on the one hand, and, on the other, the history of books and of reading. Only the use of this dual approach can reveal how new texts and new information transformed existing systems of knowledge. To the receptive reader, the impact of a new text could be as earth-shattering as that of a personal encounter with new places and peoples. In recent decades, cultural history has tended to consider the eyewitnessing of travelers to have been the most powerful disruption of inherited systems of thought. In contrast, this book reveals the immense transformative power of readerly experiences. The bookish encounters studied here reshaped long-standing Western intellectual traditions and biases.

The legacy of this new knowledge of Islamic history, religion, and letters was mixed. On the one hand, the achievements of European Islamic studies did not prevent the broader European turn to a patronizing view of Islam, as a religion and as a civilization, in the second half of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, these translations and interpretations lived on during the nineteenth-century age of empire. It has been insufficiently recognized that the foundations of the modern Western view of Islam were laid when a more equitable balance of power obtained between Western Christians and Muslims. Nineteenth-century European approaches to Islam had to contend with these earlier interpretations, for, through continual republication of certain works, such as Simon Ockley's history of the Arab conquests and George Sale's Koran, the Enlightenment understanding of Islam continued to reach new readers even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These visions of Islam, born in a moment of intercultural possibility, continued to act in Western history even after that moment had passed.

### Islam and the West from Muhammad to Mehmed the Conqueror

Intellectual relations between Christians and Muslims far predate the history recounted in these pages. Why did the translation movement described here not happen earlier? To understand how the intellectual projects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries diverged from what came before, it is necessary to cast a glance at the long history of Western Christian perceptions of Islam and of Muslims.

Islam was revealed—in the early seventh century CE—to a world already replete with religious beliefs and practices. Its first adherents were drawn from other religious communities: Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and polytheists. In the early years, this new belief system might have been of little concern to Christians living in Western Europe. Within a century of the revelation to Muhammad, however, Muslim armies had spread widely, and the political threat of Muslim invasion became real in such far-flung locations as Iberia, France, and Byzantium. As the Muslim empire expanded into territories that had long been Christian, and as Islam gained converts among Christians, the new religion began to impinge on the Western Christian worldview.

Inevitably, Islam represented a theological problem as well as a political one. The first Christians to deal intellectually with Islam were not the members of Western Christendom but Christians of the Near East. Their writings on Islam—composed in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic—would influence later European interpreters. Medieval Christians categorized non-Christians as Jews, pagans, or heretics. The Jews, involved in the foundational events of Christianity, had a peculiar status of their own—associated in the Gospel of Matthew with the death of Jesus, they were viewed with suspicion and outright enmity, and resented for resisting conversion to Christianity. Pagans were defined as those who had not heard the Word of God; heretics had heard it yet persisted in not accepting it. Muslims did not fit neatly into any of these categories, but clearly they were not true believers. Yet their false creed enjoyed immense worldly success. Though the ways of divine Providence were often difficult to apprehend, Christian thinkers needed to grapple with the popularity of Islam. Was Islam a diabolical parody of Christianity, something the devil had concocted to mock true believers? Was the rise of Muslim empire a divine punishment, a scourge brought down on the Christian community of believers because they had sinned? Millenarian ideas about the coming of the end of the world also latched onto the rise of Islam. Was Muhammad the Antichrist? If so, the rise of Islam presaged the end of days.

Medieval writers tried to fit Muslims into the history of the world, but the classical sources invested with most authority in the Western Christian tradition

had little to say about the Arabs and nothing about Islam. Some creative scholars endowed Muslims with a genealogy going back to Abraham's son Ishmael, who was cast into the desert with his mother, the Egyptian slave girl Hagar. Because these writers considered Hagar and Ishmael to be the origin of the Arabs, they labeled Muslims "Hagarenes" or "Ishmaelites," that is, descendants of Hagar or of Ishmael. "Saracens," the most frequently used word for Muslims, was more an ethnic than a religious designation.

Among the categories employed to understand Muhammad himself, the one that most influenced later tradition was that of false prophet, the figure against whom Jesus warns in the Sermon on the Mount, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). The concept of false prophet was compatible with millenarianism: the New Testament foretold that false prophets would help bring about the Second Coming, the final era of history. Casting Muhammad as a false prophet who had cunningly misled his followers, Christian writers attempted to explain how this caravan trader had created such a successful religion.

Other attempts to discredit Muhammad included dismissing his moments of divine inspiration as nothing but epileptic fits or claiming that Islam achieved such widespread success because Muhammad had promised believers carnal delights in Heaven. As for the origins of the Qur'an, Muhammad was supposed to have been illiterate, but the Qur'an evinced detailed knowledge of both Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad claimed that the book was God's word as revealed to him by the angel Gabriel; Christian writers thought that he had forged it with the help of Jewish and Christian assistants.

Even the man who did most to advance the Christian study of Islam in the Middle Ages, Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, did not definitively state whether Muslims were pagans or heretics. He oversaw the translation of the Qur'an into Latin in twelfth-century Toledo; Iberia, a frontier between Muslim and Christian states, was especially well placed for such an effort. For Peter, who composed a number of writings against Islam, knowledge-making was not the ultimate goal; religious polemic and conversion were.

Finally, Islam's central theological dogma, the unity of God, was a direct contradiction of the Trinitarian form of Christianity established at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The Qur'an's statements about God's nature offered a direct rejoinder to the Christian concept. Sura 112 of the Qur'an, for instance, reads: "Say, 'He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one: " Although ancient unitarian heresies (such as Arianism) had been defeated, Islam represented the obdurate persistence of a belief that the Nicene Council had already sought to quash in the fourth century. In addition, the Muslim doctrine of the unity of God did not seem beyond the powers of human reason to apprehend, unlike the doctrine of the Trinity. This feature of Islam—its greater appeal to human reason in comparison to Trinitarian Christianity—would become salient once more in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### The Renaissance and After

A European looking at a world map in the middle of the seventeenth century would have been struck by the transcontinental extent of lands governed or inhabited by Muslims. In that era, those domains stretched from Morocco to Malacca and from Timbuktu to Tashkent. Three great Islamic dynasties flourished between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries: from east to west they were the Ottomans in the Balkans, Anatolia, the Levant, and North Africa; the Safavids in Persia; and the Mughals in northern India. Yet these empires were distinct, and they were not allied. The Ottomans and Mughals adhered to the Hanafi branch of Sunni Islam, whereas the Persians professed Twelver Shiism, a branch of Islam that the Ottomans condemned as heretical. Political enmity compounded this sectarian disagreement.

The elegant craftsmanship of Muslim artisans had been known to Europeans for centuries. Textiles, carpets, jewelry, metalwork, ceramics, glassware, and illuminated books bespoke the cultural refinement of the peoples of this wide swath of the world." Muslims had long been part of European history, from the medieval battles on European soil, such as Tours (also known as Poitiers, 732 CE), to the Crusades in the Holy Land and the Iberian wars that ended with the fall of Granada in 1492. In short, they were familiar foreigners.

At the level of thought and belief, moreover, most educated Europeans knew that Islam professed to be a replacement for Christianity, the final revelation of the Abrahamic God. The relative proximity of Muslims, their political, religious, and cultural achievements, and the geographical sweep of their states all impressed themselves on the European consciousness. At a time when Europeans were not yet the masters of the universe, there were good reasons to be interested in Muslims and their traditions.

The Ottoman Empire, geographically the closest to Europe of the three Muslim empires, was the one that most heavily influenced European understandings of Islam. In May 1453 the Ottomans, led by Mehmed II, conquered Constantinople and what remained of the Byzantine Empire, an event that put the study of Islam on the agenda for many European thinkers. The capture of the city founded by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, was widely perceived as a second fall of Rome. The destruction wrought by the Ottomans associated them in European minds with hostility to learning and culture. These parvenu conquerors appeared to many Europeans to be the enemy of the learned traditions of Christendom. In addition, the anti-Muslim rhetoric that had fueled the Crusades remained a powerful cultural force well into the Renaissance.

The theological debates of the Protestant Reformation made European Christians more aware that their theology disagreed fundamentally with Islam's central creed—the unity of God. In the sixteenth century, Muslims, who had often been described in broad ethnic terms, such as "Saracens," gained new religious identifiers, like "Mahometists." "Mahometist" had a precise meaning—a follower of Muhammad. Like the terms for Christian heresies (for instance, Arianism, Nestorianism, and Pelagianism, after Arius, Nestorius, and Pelagius), it bore the name of its founder. (In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new theological movements were also named after founders: for example, Arminianism, Jansenism, and Socinianism after Jacobus Arminius, Cornelius Jansenius, and Faustus Socinus.) In other words, to European Christians the term "Mahometist" did not imply that Muslims adored Muhammad himself. The term "Muslims"—based on what believers are called in the Qur'an

(muslim, pl. muslimūn, a noun with the same root as the word "Islam")—first came to be used in this period as well; it was introduced by European scholars of Arabic, though it was not widely adopted. This new salience of religion can be tracked in the imaginative literature of the period. For example, in the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century romances of Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto, Christian and Saracen knights are hard to distinguish and follow the same code of honor. By contrast, the epic poems of Torquato Tasso and Edmund Spenser, both published in the late sixteenth century, are characterized by religious and ideological polarization.

As a result of Islam's association with unitarianism, by the sixteenth century, if not earlier, the religion became a resource for those who questioned orthodox Western Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant. Islam was so deeply associated with unitarianism in the minds of some Protestant Reformers that Adam Neuser, a German anti-Trinitarian, finally departed from his homeland for Istanbul, where he converted to Islam. The religion likewise held interest for such diverse readers as the Friulian miller Domenico Scandella, known as Menocchio, who was executed for heresy in 1600, and the early eighteenth-century English unitarian thinker John Toland, on whom more in Chapter 3. This renewed salience of Islam is also indicated by the Catholic Indices of Prohibited Books, which began as a Counter-Reformation measure: they banned both printed and manuscript versions of the Qur'an."

The problem of how to classify Islam—as heresy, paganism, or alien religion—would continue into the Renaissance and after. This ambiguity, however, made the religion an interesting intellectual resource for thinking about foreign faiths and their relationship to Christianity. Its ambiguous categorization allowed the freedom to suggest new points of view, and, in particular, to argue that considering Islam alongside the classical cultures of antiquity was more relevant than contrasting it with Judaism or with Christian heresies.

A desire among some observers to understand Islam as a living religion predated the serious study of its written traditions. To some degree European travel writing even inspired later scholarly work in this area. Since the late Middle Ages, Europeans

had produced accounts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and secular travels to Constantinople and beyond. In the late Renaissance, theorists of travel codified a veritable "art of travel" (*ars apodemica*) prescribing how learned travelers might gather knowledge on their journeys. In the age of print, travel accounts spread knowledge of Muslim societies, peoples, and traditions to readers far and wide. These works dedicated much space to descriptions of manners and customs, and several important ones contained pictures of Muslim men and women, including clerics and mystics. These lively depictions testify not just to the intense European interest in Islam but also to the European capacity to consider it as a living and breathing phenomenon. The images illustrating books by Melchior Lorichs, Nicolas de Nicolay, and others were attempts to depict the tangible practices of Muslim believers. More than simply conveying information, travel narratives employed their descriptions of Muslim piety to moralize about the shortcomings of Christians: If heretics could be so pious, the argument ran, how could Christians not be inspired to outdo them?

European travel writers praised other aspects of Muslim societies, such as their magnificence, charity, tolerance, and meritocracy. Muslim social institutions—charitable endowments of hospitals, for example—also impressed European visitors. The coexistence of different faiths within the Ottoman Empire seemed remarkable at a time when European states were much less religiously diverse and the continent was riven by sectarian violence and warfare, which lasted from about 1524 to 1648. From 1500 to 1700, dozens of published travel accounts of the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Persia, and Mughal India amounted to a large body of literature; during this same period, writings by Jesuit missionaries brought new knowledge of China to Europe. But it was especially the lands of Islam that captured the European literary imagination, as demonstrated by the fact that plays set in the Ottoman Empire were by far more common than those on Indian or Chinese subjects. Hindus, with their variety of deities, and their phallic lingam as an object of worship, seemed vastly more unfamiliar to Europeans than did Muslims, who recognized Jesus even if they denied that he was the incarnation of God.

Arabic scholarship produced in Europe—the subject of this book—had a vexed relationship with European travel writing. As forms of expertise about Asia, the two were in direct competition. Moreover, they had different epistemological bases. If the scholars valued linguistic and philological knowledge above all, eyewitnessing was the supreme form of authority for travel writers. As a result, some scholars of Arabic, like d'Herbelot and Johann Jacob Reiske, excluded travel writing from their sources. Others, like Richard Simon, Adriaan Reland, and Johann David Michaelis, employed travel writers whom they considered sufficiently learned and methodical and therefore trustworthy. Even so, to the end of the period Arabic scholarship and travel writing remained distinct undertakings, to the extent that some authors of the secular Enlightenment, such as Montesquieu, would rely on travel writing at the expense of the new Arabic scholarship altogether (see Chapter 6).

### European Traditions of Knowledge

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, a number of European scholars set out to acquire Arabic and Islamic learning. The model for their activity was scholarly humanism, a movement that had begun in the fourteenth century with the recovery of Latin manuscripts, medieval copies of classical works that lay neglected or forgotten in monastic libraries across Europe. Soon enough, the humanist scholars sought Greek manuscripts as well, not restricting their searches to Italy or northern Europe, but pursuing them as far afield as monasteries in the Eastern Mediterranean. The end of the Byzantine Empire with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought emigrant Greek scholars and their manuscripts to Western Europe, enhancing the range of available sources. The humanist revival of Latin letters defined elite education in Europe for centuries, providing the curriculum for both a moral and a literary education from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth and beyond.

In the Renaissance, humanist scholars broadened their studies beyond Greek and Latin to include Hebrew, not only because the Bible was written in it but also because it was widely considered the original language of humankind. What started as the recovery of Latin letters grew into an increasingly polyglot affair; trilingual colleges

were founded in Louvain (1517) and Paris (1530). Hebrew made European men of learning familiar with a Levantine, Semitic language. It also put the Christian scholars of the Renaissance into a complicated relationship with their Jewish contemporaries: they at once relied on them for their expertise and yet condescended to them on account of their religious difference.

The European study of Hebrew led to the study of Arabic, as well as of other Semitic languages, such as Aramaic (known as Chaldean); Syriac, the language especially of Near Eastern Christians in late antiquity; Ge`ez (known as Aethiopic); and Coptic. Knowledge of these languages was believed to enhance the understanding of Hebrew. Attention to Arabic could, therefore, be justified not merely on polemical or missionary grounds but also as a tool for understanding Christian Scripture itself. In significant ways, the study of Arabic followed the same path that the study of Hebrew had: first the creation of grammars and dictionaries, then the gradual translation of classical texts (the Hebrew Bible), on to the study of the Talmud and the main rabbinical commentators on Scripture, and eventually to the study of these writings as an end in itself. There were significant differences: the Jews held a unique (and unenviable) place in Christian theology, and they had lived on European soil in recent memory, or—in Italy, the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, and Poland-Lithuania—did so in the present. Their lack of political clout, moreover, made them easier to dismiss than the powerful and more distant Muslims.

European scholars recognized (and, indeed, overestimated) the family relationship of Arabic to Hebrew, and many thought that Arabic could clarify obscure Hebrew words. In addition, Arabic translations of the Bible existed in the Levant, and Europeans hoped that gathering them might illuminate obscure passages in the Hebrew Bible. The Complutensian Polyglot Bible, completed in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid, in 1517, and the three Polyglot Bibles that followed were all the result of massive efforts of erudition and typography, as well as piety; they were the scholarly equivalent of Gothic cathedrals. Their goal was to bring together the biblical text in as many languages as possible. The Paris and the London Polyglots both contained Arabic versions of

the Bible. Even if some scholars studied Arabic for its own sake, into the nineteenth century others continued to consider Arabic together with other Semitic languages, and especially as a resource for understanding biblical Hebrew.

Arabic was also the tongue of several communities of Eastern Christians and their liturgies and Bibles. Both Catholics and Protestants hoped to find in the Eastern churches evidence of the antiquity of their own beliefs and traditions. The Catholic Church, in particular, whose missions to the Holy Land had begun in the medieval period, sought to cultivate a special bond with the Christian communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, even compelling the Maronite Church of Mount Lebanon to join the Catholic Church in 1584. The Maronite College in Rome would form a link between Europe and the Christian Levant throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Above all, both Catholic and Protestant Europeans studied Arabic because they considered the language useful for shoring up their religious traditions. In an age of confessional states (states with an official religion), a ruler's legitimacy was based on religious and political theology. Even so, the interests that early modern scholars exhibited in practice were much broader than the mandates they used to justify their scholarship. Alongside official motivations, equally important ones were not articulated but can be reconstructed by observing the scholars at work. Attaining an objective view of Islamic culture was not an explicit goal, but in their explorations, scholars roamed well beyond the dictates of "utility," narrowly construed.

From the late sixteenth century to the late seventeenth, Europeans created their own tools for the study of Arabic. The history of the early European Arabists is one of penury and struggle with such basic problems as obtaining manuscripts to study, mastering the lexical wealth of Arabic, and grasping the complex rules of its grammar. Over time, collective sweat and toil made these challenges less forbidding. The Dutch, especially, led the way. The great Leiden scholar Joseph Scaliger left a small but significant donation of Arabic books to the Leiden University Library, later enriched by a gift from his student Jacobus Golius. Scaliger, a man of many interests, had studied Arabic and had even lived with his onetime Arabic

teacher, Guillaume Postel. The Arabic grammar of the Dutch prodigy Thomas Erpenius, published in 1613, was the standard reference into the early nineteenth century. For lexicography, Golius's *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum* (1653), a collation of several Arabic dictionaries, including that of al-Jawhari, replaced such earlier efforts as the *Lexicon* of Franciscus Raphelengius. Scholars elsewhere worked toward the same ends: the early English Arabist William Bedwell spent much of his life working on a dictionary that was never published, and, in Milan, Antonio Giggi translated al-Firūzābādī's dictionary, in 1632. Thanks especially to the contributions of Erpenius and Golius, the problem of teaching correct Arabic was in large measure solved by the middle of the seventeenth century. For the next two centuries, the instruments that they created would serve as vital references, and many of the protagonists of this book taught themselves Arabic from those pages.

Traditionally, Oriental studies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been seen as a Protestant achievement, though more recent scholarship has recovered Catholic contributions. Catholic scholars of the seventeenth century produced one of the first Arabic dictionaries, a new translation of the Vulgate into Arabic, and, most importantly, the first accurate translation of the Qur'an into a European language, the history of which is recounted in Chapter 2. A Catholic scholar created a first Western encyclopedia of Islamic history and letters, the *Bibliothèque Orientale*, which is investigated in Chapter 4. This book integrates both Catholic and Protestant contributions and brings out their similarities and connections.

Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, was also the language of most highbrow intellectual output in Muslim lands, from the religious disciplines to scientific treatises. Yet it was just one of the three languages educated Muslims were expected to know, at least in the Ottoman lands. Persian was the idiom of courtliness, poetry, and many mystical writings. Ottoman Turkish served for everyday conversation, and was also the language of administration and the law. Both Persian and Turkish shared an alphabet with Arabic, and contained copious Arabic loanwords, but these were in all other respects three distinct languages for different intellectual activities. Europeans

studied Persian and Turkish in the wake of Arabic, albeit not to the same extent. This book focuses on Arabic. A history told through Persian would be slightly different. Most obviously, it would offer a different geography—going all the way to South Asia—and different protagonists, both on the Muslim and on the Christian side.

Geographically the narrative marches from Rome and Padua north to Paris, Oxford, London, Cambridge, and Utrecht, and east to Leipzig. If such peregrinations prevent in-depth study of one location, they bring into view the parallels and connections between scholars of different languages, Christian sects, and affiliations. Spain, which to some degree was isolated from the European Republic of Letters, does not sit in the foreground of this study, yet it is nonetheless a subtle but insistent presence. Spain played a role in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European Arabic studies, and books written by European scholars, including Protestant ones, circulated there. Indeed, the translation of the Qur'an by Lodovico Marracci, which, as Chapter 2 will show, was crucial to the modern Western understanding of the Qur'an, began with a Qur'an commentary that had been collected in Spain by the papal nuncio Cardinal Camillo Massimo.

This book is not the history of the formation of a field or the emergence of a discipline; disciplines in the modern sense are not to be sought in an era in which scholars could and did pursue broad and eclectic interests. The present work focuses on a single area of inquiry, but its subjects did not. To take but one example: Adriaan Reland, whose work on Islam is discussed in Chapter 3, was also interested in Persian, Hebrew, Malay, Urdu, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, and the native American languages, and published maps of Persia, Japan, Java, and Palestine. (Nor was he a mere dabbler; his geographical study of the Holy Land was deemed, in the nineteenth century, "next to the Bible ... the most important book for travellers in the Holy Land.")

Although the Arabists of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe pursued very different career paths, and did not necessarily hold university posts in Arabic, they recognized a common set of problems and were able to tackle these across national, linguistic, and even confessional boundaries. At the same time as they

competed, Catholics and Protestants used each other's scholarship and pursued common goals. Occasional direct Catholic—Protestant exchanges, if not outright collaborations, are recorded. The new European knowledge of Islam was formed through this competition and cooperation among scholars—the Republic of Arabic Letters.

## Conclusion

What brought the [Republic of Arabic Letters](#) to an end? Eventually the keen sense of analogy, even kinship, felt by several generations of European scholars faded away. The heyday of the Republic, from 1650 to 1750, was an exceptional era in the European evaluation of Islam, a time when the religious, literary, and intellectual traditions of Muslim peoples held so much promise in the eyes of their European students. The distinction this book makes between the creation of knowledge, on the one hand, and normative reevaluation, on the other, can help us understand what happened at midcentury, when the overall perception of Islam changed from one of similarity to its European equivalents to one of difference. In general, the preceding chapters show greater knowledge and greater sympathy proceeding hand in hand. Yet these two interrelated processes could be decoupled. The story of Islam and its reception in the European Enlightenment is not merely about the many ways in which the attainments of European Arabic scholarship were assimilated into the Enlightenment's order of knowledge. It is also a tale of how normative ideas about Islam changed, especially after 1750.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the sense of kinship with Islam waned both within the broad intellectual culture of Europe and among the community of European scholars of Arabic. Over the course of the century there had been an evolution in the way Europeans understood themselves in regard both to non-Europeans and to their own past. The European economy had changed from primarily agrarian to increasingly commercial, with resultant shifts in manners, architecture, and urban life, transformations that seemed to support the notion of European singularity. Since the Renaissance, numerous observers argued, European civilization had been on a path that might be described as "progress," which marked it off from its own medieval past and from other regions of the world. This path ran from

the recovery of classical letters and the invention of the printing press to the "new philosophy" of Descartes and Isaac Newton; over time it led to an increasingly secular European intellectual culture and self-definition, which in turn lowered interest in Islam. No longer considered an equivalent of Christianity (albeit a false one), the religion's status dropped. It came to be regarded as a force holding Muslims back.

Contributing to this reassessment was a diminishment in the geopolitical status of Muslim states. In 1736 the Safavids were deposed by Nadir Shah, who soon threatened the Mughals as well; when he was assassinated in 1747, his empire quickly disintegrated. Meanwhile, the European powers' hold on parts of South Asia, particularly Bengal, expanded during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Then, after a major defeat at Russian hands in 1774, the Ottoman Empire seemed to teeter on the brink of collapse. In addition, the European economy significantly outpaced the Ottoman one throughout the eighteenth century, and the balance of trade shifted: in the seventeenth century, French merchants imported coffee from the Ottoman Empire, but by the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire was importing coffee grown in European colonial plantations.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, as the overland trade with Asia was rendered obsolete by European sea trade, the Mediterranean became a backwater. European observers took the great Muslim states' decline in power as confirmation that luxury brought about moral, cultural, and political corrosion, and they viewed the religion of Islam as complicit in this process. In short, due to new European self-definitions and to global geopolitical transformations, Islam ceased to play the exemplary role in the European imagination that it had done for such a significant season.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, European scholars disagreed as to whether Islam was a kindred tradition or a manifestly inferior one. Reiske thought that Arabic literature was akin, if not superior, to the Western classical tradition, while his contemporary and former classmate Johann David Michaelis believed that, for instance, the Muslim tradition of Qur'anic commentary had few insights to offer; he was persuaded that he could read the Qur'an without its assistance not only perfectly well but also more accurately.<sup>1</sup> A

gulf separates Michaelis's sense of superiority from earlier European scholars' indebtedness to Muslim mediation and their willingness to be guided by native judgments. Islam continued to be studied, but not necessarily as a religion endowed with exemplary qualities.

The internal intellectual dynamics of the European study of Islam also transformed over time. At the beginning of the study of Arabic, European scholars had no recourse but to rely on native grammars and dictionaries, and to accept native interpretations of the Qur'an. As time went on, they emancipated themselves from that dependence. For example, after the publication of Marracci's Qur'an, which included notes drawn from five different Qur'anic commentaries, translating further commentaries lost urgency.<sup>1</sup> Michaelis's rejection of the commentarial tradition as obsolete mirrored the earlier course of European Hebrew studies, which by about 1700 rejected the rabbinic tradition that had seemed so full of promise to earlier generations of Christian scholars. The ladder could be kicked away once it had been climbed. In the long run, learning more about the Islamic tradition led to the devaluation of many of its aspects.

To be sure, Arabic philology remained alive in Europe—it did not depend merely or mainly on sympathy—but its forms changed. Difference, rather than analogy, was emphasized. It is worth noting that drawing analogies is not an intrinsically sound strategy. As we have seen, European scholars could overstate similarities, misrepresenting Islam to make it more familiar. Likewise, emphasizing distinctions can lead to specious exaggerations of difference—but it can also bring about more precise knowledge. No longer attempting to reduce Arabic grammar to the rules of Greek and Latin, or Arabic literature to the conventions and categories of classical Greek literature, for example, was an achievement that had eluded earlier generations of European scholars of Arabic.

Eighteenth-century writers, influenced by the heightened sense of European distinctiveness, mined Islamic literary and intellectual traditions for examples of the foreignness of Muslim lands. Traditions of knowledge that are at the margins of the present inquiry, such as travel literature, often served such ends, but even Arabic scholarship could be enrolled to the cause. A case in point is

d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, which served as a storehouse of material for Romantic writers looking for Levantine "color."

Was the Republic of Arabic Letters then a mere flash in the pan, an intellectual cul-de-sac? Jumping to that conclusion would be too hasty. For one thing, it would overlook the movement's later impact. The great achievements of nineteenth-century Islamic studies in the West were built on the work of members of the Republic. When the illustrious French Arabist Isaac-Antoine Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) was starting out, he relied on the work of Reiske and his predecessors, and standard works produced in the Republic remained in use and in print throughout the nineteenth century—indeed, Ockley's *History of the Saracens* was published more often in the second half of the nineteenth century than throughout the eighteenth.<sup>1</sup> The greatest success of all was Sale's Qur'an translation, which remained the standard English version into the twentieth century.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that Western interactions with the peoples and religion of Islam did not go directly from Crusades to modern colonialism. The Republic of Arabic Letters stands as a reminder of a moment of intercultural possibility that our historical macronarratives have often overlooked. As a result of continued publication, not to mention continued existence on library shelves across Europe and North America, the knowledge produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was transmitted to later eras. Even as nineteenth-century Western views of Islam and of Muslims turned increasingly patronizing, the works of the Republic of Arabic Letters offered, at least in principle, a rebuke to any wholly dismissive view of Islam and its religious and intellectual traditions. As imperfect and incomplete as the Republic's intellectual contributions may have been, it seems fair to say that they did justice to Abū'l-Fidā' 's maxim: if you cannot know everything, do not for that reason give up, for partial knowledge is always preferable to ignorance. <>

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