Reconsidering Sufi Hagiographies in Medieval Persia, an Archaeology

Ashkan Bahrani
Vanderbilt University
4/3/19

1. Introduction

This paper forms part of a broader exploration, namely the question of Sufi debates in premodern greater Iran. I have been looking for an answer to this question: Why have these debates been overlooked, underestimated, neglected or forgotten both in premodern narratives about Sufism and in modern scholarship? Among the former, the Sufi manuals written by Kalābadhī (d. 990s) and Jāmī (d. 1492) and among the latter the scholarship of such figures as Annemarie Schimmel and William Chittick are noteworthy. The portraits of Sufism, in general, and Iranian Sufism, in particular, have been drawn in a remarkably monolithic way, and the discourse internal to Sufism has been represented, in no small extent, as a moderate, normativized, and quasi-canonized set of ideas in which major players had broadly agreed upon a fixed set of beliefs and practices despite their regional and temporal divergences. The complexity of networks consisting of figures, orders, and institutions – manifested in

---

1 - The larger project sets the scene for the rise of debates in Islamic mystical theology, for example, that of poverty (faqr) and wealth (ghinā'), annihilation (fanā') and subsistence (baqā'), satisfaction (ridā'), trust (tawakkul), Divine intimacy (qurb), divine omnipotence (qudra), divine justice ('adl), and so on. Sufis did debate on these issues among which one can mention some examples from that very period of the formation of early Sufi communities in the 9th and 10th centuries in Iraq and South-Western Iran. To mention but a few instances for the time being, we may refer to the debate between the prominent Sufis, Abū Bakr al-Shibli (d. 946) and Ibn Yazdānyār (d. 944-5), the debate between Junayd (d. 910) and Abū Muzāhim al-Shirazi (d. 956), the debate between Qushayrī (d. 1072), and Abū Sa'īd Abu’l Khayr (d. 1049), and so on.
monographs, manuals, treatises, correspondences, relics, monuments, and Sufi lives – is largely sacrificed in order to provide a monolithic, consonant narratives. This narrative is found, not only in uncritical premodern writings but also in modern works in the Academy, which perpetuate essentialist definitions of Sufism. To mention a couple of examples, one can refer to the majesterial work of Marshal Hodgson (d. 1968), *The Venture of Islam* (particularly the second volume which dedicates a specific place to discuss the formation of Sufi communities in Islamdom) and John Voll (b. 1936)’s introduction to the new edition of Spencer Trimingham (d. 1987)’s classical work, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*.

In this paper, I explore the cultural significance of different kinds of Lives, and thereby recovering the Sufi debates that circulated around them. Addressing the social life of Muslim mystic-ascetics in Medieval Persia (10th-15th centuries CE), I intend first to circumscribe the boundaries of religious and social institutions through an exploration of spiritual training and pedagogy (*tarbiyya*). This practice has been reflected chiefly in the posthumous spiritual biographies of teaching and training Sufi masters. An archeological approach\(^2\) to the question of Sufi lives and afterlives manifested in hagiographies\(^3\) will provide insight into a historical configuration of ideas that can be traced in the course of history. By recognizing the significance of impersonal and autonomous ‘discursive structures,’ I establish alternative bases upon which to

---

\(^2\) - Taking advantage of a Foucauldian language, the archaeologial approach deals with a practice thanks to which ‘a multiplicity of statements’ will be emerged. It is by this practice that statements can survive and ‘undergo regular modification.’ See: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge (and the Discourse on Language)* translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130.

\(^3\) - The term hagiography is still used extensively by scholars in the context of Islamic mysticism. See, for example, John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Second Edition) (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 9.
rearrange the ‘objects and concerns’ of the history of Suﬁ practices. That work then contributes to the analysis of the unwritten systems of Suﬁ thought.\footnote{As objects of knowledge, Suﬁ lives are examined as constitutions in an historical process. See: Jeremy Carrette, \textit{Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality} (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 10- 11.}

Secondly, by selecting a handful of significant Lives written between the 10th and 12th centuries, I will recover profiles that have been obfuscated within other genres such as Suﬁ manuals and hagiographical anthologies. To clarify at the outset, by the Lives I refer to those hagiographic monographs that have been authored by direct or indirect disciples of a Suﬁ master within his pedagogical circle. Suﬁ manuals refer to the scholarly works that seek to provide a homogenous account of the formation of Sufism in the early period, and hagiographical anthologies include a compilation of Suﬁ lives that are organized to summarize the thoughts and praxes of the mystics within a homogenizing narrative. My approach will provide a tool to overturn the hegemony of Suﬁ Manuals and hagiographic anthologies in the formation of a historically monotonous narrative of Sufism. The dominance of Suﬁ manuals is symptomatic of an inclination to control and paint a picture of a moderate, normative Sufism. At the same time, the rising popularity of some hagiographical anthologies – most famously ‘Atṭār (d. 1221)’s \textit{Memorial of the Friends of God} - has contributed to the popularization of a sterilized version of Sufism in which tensions among Sufis are erased in favor of a homogenous narrative that sweeps any internal strife under the carpet. An in-depth analysis of different kinds of Lives will also reveal their complex nature. I argue that ‘Lives’ functioned one way when free-standing, and differently when subsumed into dedicated sections of the manuals and hagiographical anthologies. To this end, I will focus on the Lives of a handful of Suﬁ masters most notably that of Ibn al-Khaﬁf al-Shirāzī (d. 982) and the ways in which he was portrayed in his exclusive
biography penned by his disciple al-Daylamī (fl. 10th century) on the one hand, and the developed, reappropriated, and reframed counterparts preserved in Sufi manuals such as Hujwīrī (d. bet 1073 and 1077)’s the *Unveiling the Veiled*, and ‘Aṭṭār’s *Memorials of the Friends of God*.

2. Demarcating the boundaries of socio-religious institutions in medieval Persia: the case of Sufi Pedagogy according to Ibn al-Khaṭīf

Throughout the history of Sufism, it has been quite common for both medieval Sufi compilers and modern scholars to magnify the points of consensus rather than contention. A latent tension, however, is present in the individual biographies of Sufi masters.

A prominent Sufi master, an eminent Ash‘arī theologian, and a Shafi‘i jurist in the 9th and 10th centuries in the Persian Plateau, Ibn al-Khaṭīf al-Shirāzī, represents such a tension in his copious ascetic-mystical and theological treatises. His extant works along with a detailed biography written by one of his intimate disciples, al- Daylamī shows clearly how the reception of Baghdadi Sufism in the southern Persia came down to the later generations via such social institutions as Sufi disciples’ circles and Sufi individual biographies.

The significance of Ibn al-Khaṭīf had not been appreciated before the critical edition of his main pedagogical treatise, *The Book of the Golden Mean* and his brief treatises on Sufism. Among other observations, in her introduction to al-Daylamī’s *Sirat-i Shaykh-i Kabīr (the Biography of the Great Master)*, Annemarie Schimmel sees his excessive renunciation as the most outstanding feature of his personality.⁵ According to Schimmel, Sufis such as Ibn al-Khaṭīf left behind neither a record of those provocative utterances we find in the works of Sufis like Dhu’l-nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 860) nor of startling and dramatic miracles. In her view, the utility of

---

discussing the thoughts of Ibn al-Khafif is limited to exploring social lives of Sufis in Shiraz in the 9th and 10th century. For Schimmel, Ibn al-Khafif is of importance not due to his “spreading a uniquely valuable Sufi method of thought and action” but because of establishing a bridge between the 3rd and 4th Sufi generations, on the one hand, and the 5th and 6th generations, on the other.\(^6\) This reductive approach to the legacy of these early training masters limits their significance to a mechanical transitional one which is manifested in the Ṭabaqāt (generations) genre,\(^7\) namely the literary genre that charts the generations of Sufis, one after the other. As we will see, the influence of Ibn al-Khafif far exceeds the boundaries formulated by conventional premodern and modern Sufi historiographies. The life and works of Ibn al-Khafif present a diverse example of Baghdadi Sufism nurtured by a complex network of individual Sufis, theologians, and traditionists all within a variety of schools of spiritual practice competing on the Persian Plateau.

As a traditionist who was expected to travel widely within the Islamdom in order to record prophetic traditions (Hadiths), Ibn al-Khafif visited Isfahan and Ray in Central Iran, Mecca and Medina in the Arabian Peninsula, Basra, Baghdad, and Wasīṭ in Iraq, Damascus in Syria, and Fasā, Istakhr, and Bayḍā in southern Iran.\(^8\) In the course of these travels, he had met at least forty-seven Sufi Masters whose names were recorded by al-Daylamī.\(^9\) Similarly, some Sufi masters had traveled extensively: apprentices of al-Junayd, al-Nūr̄i (d. 907-8), and al-Kharrāz (d. 899) both introduced and developed Baghdadi Sufism in Fars, the Arabian Peninsula, and

\(^{6}\) Ibid, 5 and 22.

\(^{7}\) Regarding the Ṭabaqāt genre as a highly productive genre in the history of Islamic tradition, see: Jawid Mojaddedi, The Biographical Tradition in Sufism, the Ṭabaqāt genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī, (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 1-6.


\(^{9}\) Ibid.
Northeastern Iran. The legacy of Baghdadi Sufi masters was extensively spread by their predecessors among which the most prominent is Ibn al-Khaffī.\textsuperscript{10}

Ibn al-Khaffī’s lodge was one of the first multi-purpose gathering places for Sufis and novices. His biographer, al-Daylamī enumerates fifteen long writings as well as fifteen concise treatises under his master’s name, among which at least five are extant, namely \textit{The Priority of Sufism}, \textit{The Creed}, \textit{The Spiritual Will}, \textit{The Ascendancy of the Poor [= Sufis]}, and \textit{The Book of the Golden Mean}. In what follows, a succinct analysis of his works discloses how his Life as well as pedagogical treatises provide us with a uniquely valuable picture of Ibn al-Khaffī which is significantly different from his portrait in compendia.

\textit{The Priority of Sufism} was penned by Ibn al-Khaffī to prove the superiority of Sufis over jurists and traditionists, namely those who are specialized in Islamic law and prophetic hadiths, respectively. He suggested a three-pronged division according to which the Islamic scholars were divided into traditionists, jurists and Sufis. Among these, Sufis were the most exalted on condition that they are honest, cherish spiritual truths, and acquire esoteric knowledge. In every chapter, the \textit{Priority of Sufism} is full of Quranic verses as well as prophetic hadiths. This indicates an entwined pedagogic project within which Ibn al-Khaffī mixes a potent cocktail of theological creeds and practical training.\textsuperscript{11}

An abridged and concise treatise, \textit{The Creed} explains his most pivotal, vital beliefs concerning Islamic dogmatic theology. In that treatise, one can find the fundamentals of Ash’arī Kalam in a clear and eloquent voice as well as his most essential Sufī principles reinforced by


his theological beliefs. *The Creed* is an exemplary treatise in the description of ‘Islamic mystical theology’ in early Sufism.12

As he has acknowledged, *the Ascendancy of the Poor* was his first treatise to impress the masters of Baghdad and Fars. It is comprised of six chapters on the ascendancy of the poor containing several Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions, narratives by the successors of the Prophet, and various other prophets as well as quotations from great Sufi Masters.13

Illuminating and groundbreaking, *Kitāb al- Iqtisād (the Book of the Golden mean)*, edited by Florian Sobieroj, was a significant treatise written to provide pedagogical instructions for novices and neophytes gathered in the Sufi lodges. Its guidelines were circulated at least in Fars for over a century. In the case of organizing the Sufi lodges as well as feeding and training aspirants to Sufism, *The Book of the Golden Mean* is of high importance in the 10th and 11th centuries.14

In his treatise on doctrinal theology, *The Creed (al-Mu’taqad)*, the Shaykh advises his neophytes to identify their souls as an aggressive enemy. The assertion of renunciation and self-denial, both in his lectures and writings, evoke a certain dualism. In his treatise, *The Priority of Sufism*, the Shaykh suggests a renunciatory point of view, referring to a prophetic tradition: “I do not belong to this lower world and it has nothing to do with me.”15 The Shaykh regards the Sufis as the only manifestations of piety and detachment.16 We can also find such binary between the here and the hereafter in his brief treatise, *The Ascendancy of the Poor*:

---

16 - Ibid, 66.
The lower world is comprised of dirt. All worldly matter is dirty while divine intimacy is a spotless and pure exuberance, which cannot be contaminated. Therefore, He commands his ignorant creature to cleanse the station of divine intimacy of the dirt of this lower world by detachment.  

The combination of his instructions about the social lives of disciples, his emphasis on the role of detachment, and the extolling of poverty as the most ascendant form of life, led to the formation and preservation of a powerful, stratified community around his example. His unique status as the leading Sufi figure in Fars is reinforced by his association with some prominent figures of Baghdadi Sufism such as Ruwaym, Ibn ‘Aṭā, al-Hallāj, and Shibli. Two of these figures are more influential than the others, namely Ruwaym and the tumultuous, enigmatic figure of Husayn Ibn Maṣur al-Hallāj (d. 922) who has been visited by Ibn al-Khaṭīf purportedly during the former’s house arrest. Interestingly enough, the ‘moderate,’ sober Sufi, namely Ibn al-Khaṭīf has provided one of the most valuable accounts of the ardent mystic, al-Hallāj.  

This, in turn, has led to a different standpoint for Ibn al-Khaṭīf in hagiographical traditions.

3. Bringing out ‘the dead’: Refashioning a training master in the collective biographical tradition

In analyzing Sufi Lives, I distinguish between two varieties. The first is the spiritual biographies of individual Sufi training and teaching masters. These texts were written by their direct and indirect disciples nurtured in the intellectual milieus and institutions that the masters had constituted. The case of Daylamī’s biography of his master, Ibn al-Khaṭīf serves as exemplary work. A uniquely outstanding and fully interconnected community was formed

---

around the example of Ibn al-Khaṭṭīb and his biography along with his pedagogical writings contributed to the consolidation of a distinct elite group which remains open to public reception.

Secondly, in this section, I also place the biographies that have been collected and preserved in iconic Sufi manuals. In the manuals, these lives are not about a specific Sufi master. Instead, they collect generations of Sufis into homogenous or homogenizing narratives. We see this homogenization in the works of such Sufi writers and as Sulami (d. 1021) and Anṣārī (d. 1089) for example. Also, in the manuals, for example, Hujwīrī’s *Unveiling the Veiled*, the sets of homogenized lives are designed to fortify a unified notion of Sufism. In other words, such Sufi authors as Hujwīrī combine an overview of Sufi teachings with Sufi lives to illustrate narratives of ‘correct’ and ‘valid’ Sufism.

Additionally, there are hagiographical anthologies that serve to popularize the idea of sainthood in medieval Persia through repetitive narratives of the Sufi’s miraculous acts and spiritual powers. The Lives also reveal the complex power relations not only among the members of Sufi institutions but also between the Sufi masters and the political authorities who mutually patronized one another in different ways.

In what follows, I will examine how this liminal status is exchanged by some technologies of power that aim at the unification, homogenization, and normativization of Sufism through the prevalence of Sufi manuals, on the one side, and the popularization of Sufism, again as an allegedly integrated body by the supremacy of hagiographical anthologies, on the other side. To this end, I will discuss the representation of Ibn al-Khaṭṭīb’s life in the works of Hujwīrī and Aṭṭār.

As the first Persian Sufi manual, *Kashf al-Mahjūb [The Unveiling the Veiled]* (compiled around 1050) by Hujwīrī fixes the boundaries of a normative Sufism, contributing to the
formation of homogenized Sufi communities in Sufi lodges, convents, and monasteries.\textsuperscript{19} Both as a secondary resource regarding the thoughts and deeds of early mystic-ascetics in the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries, and as a first-hand work that exposes the original ideas of the author regarding the notion and the history of Ta\textsuperscript{s}awwuf (in the comprehensive application of the term which encompasses all those esoteric leanings among Muslims as a specific approach to Reality or Haq\textsuperscript{i}qa),\textsuperscript{20} The Unveiling provides the readers with an assessment of the evolution of Sufism, from a specific mode of piety in Baghdad to a universal and popular lifestyle in Islamdom, from Egypt to the Subcontinent.\textsuperscript{21}

In the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, and after this initial formation of Sufism, such compilers and authors as Qushayr\textī and Hujwir\textī were profoundly worried and upset about the decadence and corruption of ‘genuine ta\textsuperscript{s}awwuf’ in their times.\textsuperscript{22} Apparently, Hujwir\textī decided to compile The Unveiling to prevent the process of decay and debasement. Based on his understanding of the nature of Baghdad Sufism, he presents an integrated history of Sufism. In one chapter of this Sufi manual was he treats the issue of mal\textsuperscript{\text{\text{"}}}, which was originally a vernacular mystical trend in north-eastern Iran, that have been developed independently from Baghdad Sufism at least in its initial phase.\textsuperscript{23} In this way, the author of the Unveiling of the Veiled extends the idea of Ta\textsuperscript{s}awwuf to the People of Chivalry (futuwwa) and the People of Blame in a conversation between Mal\textsuperscript{\text{"}}mat\textī Ḥamdūn al-Qa\textsuperscript{s}ār (d. 884-5) and Nūh al-‘Ayyār.\textsuperscript{24} In doing so, Hujwir\textī contributes to the integration of indigenous and local mystical trends into the increasingly dominant, cosmopolitan Sufism of Baghdad and in the final analysis, he paved the road for the normativization of

\textsuperscript{19} - Ahmet Karamustafa, Sufism: The Formative Period, viii- ix.
\textsuperscript{21} - Ibid, 31-2.
\textsuperscript{22} - Ma\textsuperscript{\text{"}}hmūd ‘\text{"}Abedi, Kasha\textsuperscript{f} al-Mahjūb (Introduction and comments), (Tehran: Sorush Publication, 2010), xxviii.
\textsuperscript{23} - Hujwir\textī, Kasha\textsuperscript{f}, 271 (Persian)
\textsuperscript{24} - Ibid
Baghdad Sufism. As a crucial instance of the process of the normativization of Baghdad Sufism in Sufi manuals, one may point to the issue of spiritual poverty (faqr/darvīshī) in early manuals. This trend continued in manuals written in the 12th and 13th centuries by the training masters whose names appeared behind the major Sufi orders.

Siding with Sufi authors such as Sarrāj (d. 988), the compiler of The Unveiling identifies some debates among early Baghdad Sufis and offers different opinions on the issues such as poverty and purity.25 Even though the recognition of different ideas being held among Sufi masters of Baghdad might lead to a recognition of diversity according to which Sufism could escape an essentializing narrative, his rigid formulations of the Sufi issues provide repetitive and stereotypical answers to major questions. Most notably, one can refer to his formulation through which he classifies themes and concepts in a hierarchy that begins with the Gnosis of God (maʿrifat Allāh) and ends in such Sufi rituals as Audition (Samāʾ).26

Also, Hujwīrī’s classification of Imams or spiritual leaders of Sufis was tremendously influential in the formation of a ‘normative’ understanding of Sufism. Considering some of the Prophet’s companions, the House of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt), and the People of the Veranda (Ahl al-Ṣuffa) to be Sufi spiritual leaders, although historically they belong to the period before the emergence of Sufism, plays a significant role in the ‘authentication’ of Sufism.27 These somewhat artificial and historically inaccurate genealogies obscure the variety of ways several vernacular groups in Islamdom developed their communities. In particular, the lineage establishes, enhances and intensifies that very version of renunciation and interiority which was advocated by the proponents of Baghdad Sufism.

25 - Ibid, 58.
26 - Ibid, xvi.
Hujwīrī’s distinctions around some of the key concepts in the practice of Sufism (for instance, that of fear and hope), as well as his classification of Sufi groups, in the final analysis, contributed to the formation of the Sufi orders in the 13th century. The classification in The Unveiling is quite innovative and unprecedented. No one can find the similar categorization in Sarrāj’s al-Luma’, Makkī (d. 996)’s Qūṭ al-Qulūb [The Sustenance of the hearts], Khargūshi (d. 1015 or 1016)’s Tahdīḥ al-Asrār [Refining the Secrets], Qushayrī’s Risāla [The Epistle] or Sulamī’s Ṭabaqāt [The Generations of the Sufis].

According to his classification:

The whole body of aspirants to Sufism is composed of twelve sects, two of which are condemned (mardūd), while the remaining ten are approved (maqūl). The latter are the Muḥasibīs, the Ḵaṣṣarīs, the Ṣahīfs, the Ḵafīfs, the Ḥakīms, the Kharrāzīs, the Khafīfs, and the Sayyārīs. All these assert the truth and belong to the mass of orthodox Muslims.

This classification of Sufi groups into twelve sects recognizes the variety and the differences of beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and confines the varieties to a number of groups so that the author can draw the borders of ‘authentic’ Sufism. It is precisely within this somewhat arbitrary classification that the intellectual and practical legacy of Ibn al-Khaṣīf as an influential training master is entangled within the fabrication of a normativized, unified narrative of Sufism.

First of all, an accurate investigation of the history of Sufism during the 9th and 11th centuries indicates that the groups mentioned above cannot be considered actual communities.

31 - Karammustafa, 102.
In this regard, the historian Fritz Meier contends that Hujwīrī’s classification of the Sufī schools is inaccurate and artificial, unsupported by the historical evidences. Such is the case for Ibn al-Khaffī himself. In spite of the continuation of his legacy, specifically within the institution of hospitality as preserved in the lodge of his indirect disciple, al-Kāzarūnī (d. 1033), in Fars, there is no evidence for the presence of a specific Sufī group calling itself the Khaftīyya. In other words, unlike what Hujwīrī tries to represent, the intellectual legacy of Ibn al-Khaffī was preserved not through an ossified eponymous community, but through the practice of hospitality within the communities that fluidly associated themselves in Fars with the heritage of Ibn al-Khaffī.

Moreover, Hujwīrī holds that there are affinities between each group, on the one hand, and overarching Sufī themes, on the other. In other words, he uses pairing here to explain the major themes in the science of Sufism. In this way, he associates the Muḥāsibīyya with ṭidā (satisfaction), the Qassārīyya with malāma (blame), the Ṭayfūriyya with sukr (intoxication), the Junaydiyya with sahw (Sobriety), the Nūriyya with īthār (selflessness), the Sahliyya with mujāhada (the spiritual struggle), the Ḥakīmīyya with wilāya, the Kharrāziyya with fanā and baqā (annihilation and survival), the Khaftīyya with ḥudūr and ghayba (presence and absence) and the Sayyāriyya with jam’ and tafraqa (Union and separation).

In the case of Ibn al-Khaffī, this manufactured and concocted pairing has a few consequences: firstly, it fails to include other aspects of the thoughts of Ibn al-Khaffī which have been reflected in Daylami’s hagiographical narrative as well as the Shaykh’s pedagogical

---

32 - Hujwīrī, 282 onward (en) and 336-348 (Persian)
treatises on poverty, *tasawwuf*, and the fundamentals of ‘Islamic mystical theology.’ In other words, even though Hujwīrī tries to identify and clarify the major themes found in the works of each of those figures, this clarification reduces a variety of themes, conceptions, and conceptualizations to one theme or concept. Secondly, it fails to account for the intellectual influences between these figures, specifically among the members of Shunīziyya mosque, i.e., al-Junayd, al-Nūrī and al-Kharrāz, and their direct and indirect disciples, including but not limited to Ibn al-Khaṭīf. Thirdly, and more importantly, through this classification, Hujwīrī treats non-institutionalized intellectual schools as if they are ordered social institutions which have concrete influence and material effects on society- a consideration that cannot be supported by any historical evidence. As we have observed, the ascetic-mystical communities in the Persian Plateau had been in contact with one another through travels, correspondence, and intellectual debates; nonetheless, these fluid and ad hoc connections were far from the integrated, unified organization that Hujwīrī presents.

In another hagiographical context, Ibn al-Khaṭīf has been refashioned as the spiritual paragon who transmitted the mystical legacy of the mystic-martyr al-Hallāj to the next generation of Sufis. Whereas in the case of Sufī manuals, the life of Ibn al-Khaṭīf was utilized for the integration and unification of Sufism, in the case of hagiographical anthologies, Ibn al-Khaṭīf is presented as the vehicle for al-Hallāj’s mystical legacy. In this scenario, the meeting between al-Hallāj and Ibn al-Khaṭīf purportedly between 913-916 in Baghdad is singled out. Whereas there is a detailed account by al-Daylamī in the Life according to which Ibn al-Khaṭīf was immensely impressed by Al-Hallāj in ‘Aṭṭār’s narrative, the main focus is on the miraculous
operations while the intellectual exchange between the two figures is largely dismissed.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, ‘Aṭṭār takes advantage of this account to provide endorsements for al-Hallāj by some later ‘sober,’ ‘moderate’ Sufi masters. According to ‘Aṭṭār, most of the masters denied al-Hallāj’s sincerity on the path of Sufism except Ibn al-Khaffīf, Shiblī, Abū Sa‘īd Abū-l Khayr, Kurrakānī (d. 1076), Fārmadhī (d. 1084-5), and Yūsuf Hamadhānī (d. 1140). Many years after the passion of al-Hallāj, Ibn al-Khaffīf still lauded him, calling him a ‘divine sage.’\textsuperscript{36} In another hagiographical anthology largely dedicated to the justification of al-Hallāj’s words of ecstasy and exoneration from the accusations of heresy, Rūzbihān Baqlī Shirāzī (d. 1209) refers to Ibn al-Khaffīf. According to Rūzbihān, Ibn al-Khaffīf maintains that there would be no monotheist in the whole world if we were not to take al-Hallāj as a real monotheist.\textsuperscript{37}

4. Revisiting Individual Lives and Sufi Manuals: Reading Ibn al-Khaffīf as the narrator of Sufi Debates

In the previous sections, I have shown the parallel ways the Lives of an influential early Sufi master have been formulated. On the one hand, we witness the lives and afterlives of such Sufi masters as Ibn al-Khaffīf, and his indirect disciple, al-Kāzarūnī, exemplified by hagiographies emerging out of the example of the Sufi masters over time.\textsuperscript{38} In the evaluation of the Lives of Sufi masters, the impact of shrine community in the production of hagiographies cannot be overstated.\textsuperscript{39}

On the other hand, in the case of Sufi manuals such as Hujwīrī’s Unveiling the desire to classify Sufi communities is concomitant with the privileging of Baghdadi Sufism as the

\textsuperscript{36} - Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} - Ruzbihan Baqli, Sharh-i Shathiyyat, edited by Muhammad Moein and Henry Corbin (Tehran: Tahuri, 2006), 326
\textsuperscript{38} - Karamustafa, Sufism, 123.
\textsuperscript{39} - Ibid, 144.
prevailing form of Islamic mystical-ascetic tradition. By contrast, in regard to popular hagiographical anthologies, even though there is no decisive criterion to indicate a straightforward relation between the presence of miracles in the individual Lives and the hagiographical anthologies (e.g., ‘Aṭṭār’s *Memorial*), it seems that the proliferation and magnification of miraculous acts serve as a catalyst for the popularization of a Sufi master in the constellation of Saints’ cults. In this way, the proliferation of hagiographical anthologies can serve as a marker of the popularization of Sufism which transcends the limits of the shrine communities.

In this section, we can now turn to the life of Ibn al-Khalfīf preserved in his treatises as well as his individual biography penned by al-Daylamī. The revisited version of Ibn al-Khalfīf equips us with an instrument to cast light on the complicated history of Sufi internal critiques preserved in the archive. This archive has been provided by the Shaykh’s intellectual legacy.

In his own writings, Ibn al-Khalfīf reflects upon the conflicts that were current in the Sufi milieu of his day. On the one hand, he has had several debates with his contemporary Sufis, and on the other, he had tried to record, report, and evaluate the debates between other Sufis.

### 4.1. Ibn al-Khalfīf’s debates versus other Sufi Masters

Ibn al-Khalfīf is undoubtedly among the masters who have been interested in Sufi debates as well as theoretical discussions on the foundations of ascetic-mystical tradition. Several of his debates are recorded in his biography, including his differences with Abū Bakr al-Fuwaṭī on the problem of the ascendancy of fear or hope⁴⁰ (two states that a Sufi may undergo during his wayfaring) as well as his debates with an eminent pupil of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), that is Ibn Sālim al-Baṣrī (d. 967) both on the latter's rejection of Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 848 or 875) and his

---

⁴⁰ - Daylamī, *Sīrat 79*.  
16
words which could have been interpreted as though he believed in the eternity of the world.\textsuperscript{41} Their disputations were so severe that Ibn al-Khafif compiled a treatise to record his positions. In addition to those debates, one can find additional polemics against such famous Sufis as al-Junayd and Ibn ‘Aṭā on the problem of the ascendancy of the first thought or the second thought (an ongoing issue among the Sufis of the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries), and the problem of foresight (the inherent spiritual knowledge which empower Sufis to know the thoughts of other people directly without having a conversation with them).\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{4.2. Sufi debates reported by Ibn al-Khafīf}

Due to his contentious personality, Ibn al-Khafīf was fervent about recording his debates with other Sufi masters. Thus, we notice several Sufi polemics reported by him both in his biography as well as other Sufi texts, notably the debate between Abū Ali Rūdhbārī (d. 932 or 935) and Abu Yaqūb Nahrajūrī (d. 941-2) on self-annihilation and self-subsistence with God, a significant debate between Ibn Zīzī (d. ?) and Khawwās (d. ?) on trust in God, and the constant Sufi polemics between Shiblī and Abū Muzāḥim al-Shirazī on the problem of Sufi words of ecstasy as well as the problem of poverty in the Sufi context. The latter had been started in Baghdad continued in Shiraz among Abū Muzaḥim and the pupils of Shiblī. In those debates, Ibn al-Khafīf sided his fellow Shirazi.\textsuperscript{43}

Through the examination of these reports we come to know that despite his qualified sympathy for mystics such as al-Al-Hallāj , Ibn al-Khafīf preferred to associate himself with more reserved approaches to Sufi issues relating to unity with God, self-annihilation, and the thorny interconnection between Sufi theology and anthropology found in the works of Junayd and Ruwaym. In this way, spiritual sobriety characterized his essential positions in recognition of

\textsuperscript{42} - Daylamī, 273.
\textsuperscript{43} - See: Daylamī, \textit{Ṣīrat}, 159- 60; Masumalishah Shirazi, \textit{Tara’iq al-Haqa’iq}, vol. 2, (Tehran: Sanai, 2003), 485
the greatest Sufi masters when he stated: “You Shall follow these five masters: Ḥarīth al-Muḥāṣibī [d. 857], Junayd, Ruwaym, Ibn ‘Aṭā, and ‘Amr Ibn al-Uthmān al-Makkī, [d. 908-909] because they combined rational knowledge and mystical reality, while other masters simply relied only on their mystical states.”

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have indicated that Sufi masters such as Ibn al-Khaṭṭīf and the biographical tradition around him best exemplify the will to stand out as uniquely influential spiritual leaders. I have shown that whereas the Sufī Lives that are presented in the individual hagiographies emphasize the distinction, uniqueness, and exclusive authority of a Sufī Shaykh or a pedagogical community, the transition of Sufī Lives to the biographical section of Sufī manuals as well as the hagiographical anthologies lead to the transfiguration of the life of a Sufī master into a one-dimensional brick in the wall of a static and calculated version of Sufism. Also, whereas the individual lives of Sufis carry an innate popular characteristic that is supposed to appeal to the sentiments of disciples and followers in a certain community, the addition of that hagiographical narrative to a hagiographical anthology leads to a faceless, overtly popularized depiction of the Sufī Lives in an allegedly overarching narrative which is supposed to tame the incongruities blatantly circulating in the individual works of hagiography. Alternatively, it has been shown how a revision of the pedagogical works penned by Ibn al-Khaṭṭīf as well as a meticulous study of his individual biography grant us an exceptional opportunity to reconsider his life on the basis of his willingness to engage in mystical-theological debates with his peers, as well as a vigilant recording of debates occurring among other Sufī teaching and training masters.