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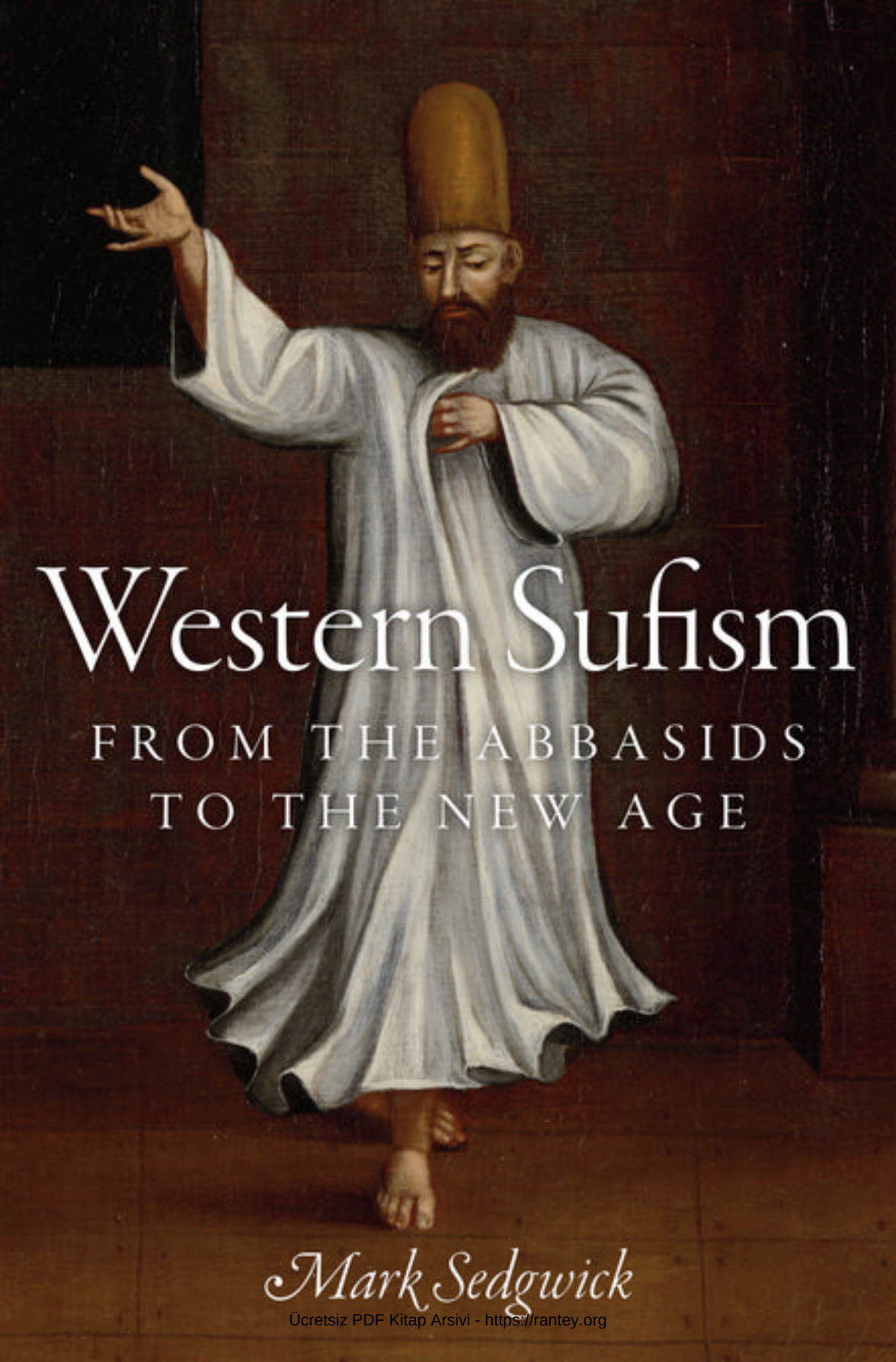
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Western Sufism

FROM THE ABBASIDS
TO THE NEW AGE

Mark Sedgwick

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WESTERN SUFISM

Introduction



MOST AMERICAN AND European bookstores have a selection of books on Sufism. Sometimes these are in the religion section and sometimes in the spirituality section; they are usually separate from books on Islam, which are normally found in religion, not spirituality. This is in contrast to arrangements at Western universities, where Sufism is generally taught by someone in the Islamic Studies program—not, it might seem, very successfully, if bookstores and their customers remain convinced that Sufism is one thing and Islam is another. But the idea of Sufism and Islam as distinct and separate entities is also found in many of the books on sale, especially in books by such bestselling Sufi authors as Inayat Khan and Idries Shah.

There is a gap, then, between what Sufism is according to Islamic Studies scholars, and the role that Sufism plays in the lives of contemporary Westerners. According to the literature scholar Nancy Shields Hardin, writing on the work of Doris Lessing, the Nobel prize winner who often described herself as a Sufi, “for a non-Sufi to understand what it means to be a Sufi is perhaps impossible,” as Sufism “is a composite of anomalies.”¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, does attempt to define Sufism, and states that it is “a sect of Muslim ascetic mystics.”² This is close to how Sufism is generally understood in university departments of Islamic Studies. It is not how it is understood by many best-selling Western Sufis or their readers, however.

The first Sufis whom I myself met, shortly after I moved to Cairo in the mid-1980s, were definitely Muslim, and did not seem especially anomalous. Neither did they seem especially ascetic, or even especially mystical (though I was not then very sure what it was to be mystical, or how to recognize a mystic if I met one). As I got to know more Sufis and began to work on my PhD thesis, which dealt with the history of one particular group of Sufi orders, or *tariqas*,³ in the Arab world and in Southeast Asia, it began to seem relatively easy to say what it means to be a Sufi. Being a Sufi seemed to be about belonging

to a *tariqa* and following a spiritual guide or *shaykh*, and involved developing Islamic practice from an obligation into an art. Some Sufis did follow some ascetic practices, and there was some talk of mystical states. So it seemed the *Oxford English Dictionary* had got it more or less right, and Hardin had got it wrong, as had Idries Shah, Doris Lessing, the managers of many Western bookstores, and their customers.

After I finished my PhD, I became more curious about Western understandings of Sufism. One branch of one *tariqa* I had been studying for my PhD was located in Milan, and the Italian *shaykh* of that branch introduced me to the work of an early twentieth-century French Sufi, René Guénon. That introduction led to many other discoveries, and finally to a book I wrote on the Traditionalist movement that derived from Guénon's work, *Against the Modern World*.⁴

My work on the Traditionalist movement led to an invitation to write an entry on "Neo-Sufism" for a *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, and to give a conference paper on "European Neo-Sufi Movements in the Interwar Period." Guénon and the Traditionalist Sufis, it seemed, were examples of something called "Neo-Sufism," and people were interested in the other Neo-Sufis as well. This led me to look into Inayat Khan, one of the bestselling Western writers on Sufism whom I, like my academic colleagues, had until then ignored. It also led me to look into George Gurdjieff, an even more widely read writer whom some, apparently unaccountably, took for a Sufi. Inayat Khan and Gurdjieff were contemporaries of Guénon, and in the mid-1920s all three men lived in Paris, though it seems none of them ever met. If they had, they would certainly have disagreed with each other. And yet, somehow, different though they were, their writings did all seem to have something in common.

What was being called Neo-Sufism—and what in this book I prefer to call "Western Sufism"—was evidently a significant phenomenon. As well as people buying books by Inayat Khan, Guénon, and Gurdjieff, there were also people participating in groups inspired by them. I already knew how influential Guénonian Traditionalism was. Gurdjieff seemed important, too, with a network of Gurdjieff groups covering the US and many other countries, and with the nine-pointed Enneagram's system of personality analysis becoming ever more popular.

While I was working on Inayat Khan and Gurdjieff, I was teaching history at the American University in Cairo. A new department chair asked us to think of new courses that might attract more students, and I proposed courses on the two topics that our students were discussing more than any other during the early 2000s: terrorism and Zionism. To my slight surprise, neither proposal was deemed too sensitive, and both courses were accepted. My Zionism course started, as most such courses do, with the history of the Jews in Europe, with oppression, emancipation, and Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment). Emancipation and Haskala led me to Moses Mendelssohn and his German friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose play *Nathan the Wise*, performed in 1783, is often taken to represent the change in European attitudes to Jews that led to emancipation. I read *Nathan*, and found not so much a plea for Jewish emancipation as

an argument for religious universalism—an argument for an approach to religion similar to that I had found in Guénon and Inayat Khan. The background to their thought, it seemed, was a trend in European intellectual history going back to at least 1783, not merely a fashion of the 1920s.

I soon found myself in the seventeenth century, with the controversy attending the translation of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, a twelfth-century Sufi tale that is still found in Western bookstores today; it is usually described as philosophy, but perhaps shelved in spirituality. In the same century I also encountered the works of John Toland, an Irish journalist one of whose books was ceremonially burnt by order of the Irish parliament. Toland led me to his own, even more controversial inspiration: Baruch Spinoza. Neither Spinoza nor Toland had been interested in Sufism, but their views on religion explained the reception of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, and also explained some understandings of Sufism I had found in the eighteenth century, notably in the writings of “Oriental Jones”—that is, Sir William Jones, the founding president of the Asiatic Society and also the founder of the modern discipline of comparative linguistics. Jones and Toland are little known today, certainly in comparison to Spinoza, but they were major figures in their own time.

Toland rejected the established religions that Spinoza had attacked so effectively, and saw them as instruments of oppression (one and a half centuries before Marx condemned them as the opium of the people). He also went further than Spinoza in one important way. As well as oppressive (and untrue) established religion, he suggested, there was esoteric truth, above and beyond and *before* exoteric religion. Jones agreed, and proposed that Sufism was, contrary to appearances, precisely that: esoteric truth, above and beyond and before any exoteric religion, including Islam. He was led to this conclusion partly by the Western intellectual movement that Toland was part of, and partly also by an unusual Persian-language work from the previous century, the *Dabistan-i madhahib* or *School of Sects*, an early forerunner to Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions*. The author of the *Dabistan* is unknown, and his ideas radical.

Toland’s esotericism and Jones’s Sufism provided much of the common ground on which, more than a century later, Guénon, Inayat Khan, and Gurdjieff all stood. Tracing these ideas over the intervening century, however, was complicated by the fact that the century in question was the nineteenth century, a century in which so much was going on. Many nineteenth-century understandings of Sufism proved to be largely or entirely frivolous, and I ended with less respect for Goethe than I had started with. Here and there, however, were exceptions to the general frivolity: Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, and some less famous Americans, including a failed theology student, Carl Henrik Bjerregaard, who had ended up as one of the first librarians at the New York Public Library, and a popular lecturer in “advanced” circles in New England.

Bjerregaard did not entirely complete the picture, however. Toland’s conception of esoteric truth was not new, though his use of the adjective “esoteric” to describe it was. I found that universalist understandings of religion went further back, to the

sixteenth-century French scholar Guillaume Postel and the fifteenth-century Italian scholars Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. I also found that European understandings of Sufism likewise went back to the fifteenth century, to the writings of George of Hungary, the first Westerner known to have become a Sufi.

Pico della Mirandola and Ficino are best known for their role in the revival of the study of Platonic philosophy during the Renaissance, and Platonic philosophy turned out to be the final stop in my exploration of Guénon, Inayat Khan, and Gurdjieff. Of course, Platonic philosophy really starts with Socrates, and not a lot is known about what preceded Socrates, so in some ways Platonic philosophy was the end of the line, anyhow. It turned out that the key philosopher for my purposes was not Plato himself, but his later interpreter and developer, Plotinus. Plotinus is nowadays not as famous as Plato, but for many centuries he was the more influential of the two. His philosophy, now called Neoplatonism to distinguish it from the earlier Platonism of Plato himself, is at first not easy. Its basic assumptions are very different from those of our own day, and a certain amount of preparation is therefore needed. That preparation, however, is amply rewarded, as the basic idea of emanationism, as understood and taught by Plotinus, is then found time and time again, in one guise or another, until today. The basic idea of emanationism is that human souls share in the divine, and can and should return to the divine.

Emanationism took me all the way to Emerson and Bejerregaard in the nineteenth century, and then on to Guénon and Inayat Khan and Gurdjieff in the twentieth, though all three modified emanationism in one way or another, and Guénon even tried to reject it, without success. As often happens on a journey, the scenery looked different on the return trip, seen from a new perspective and in a changed light. There turned out to be much more intercultural transfer going on than I had thought, for a start. In *Against the Modern World* I had looked at how Guénon, a Westerner, had understood Sufism, an Islamic system, and I had thought that this was the most important intercultural transfer involving Sufism. I also looked at the return transmission, as developments of Guénon's ideas were read in Iran and Turkey and Morocco. A transfer and a reverse transfer—perhaps characteristic of globalized modernity, it seemed. But following Plotinian emanationism showed that intercultural transfer was not about modernity. During the premodern period, St. Augustine of Hippo had been reading Plotinus in the fourth century, so there was a transfer from late antiquity into early Christianity. Then the scholars of the Islamic golden age in Abbasid Baghdad started reading Plotinus, whose influence on the subsequent development of Arab philosophy was strong. A transfer from late antiquity into early Islam, then. And, because Sufi theology draws on Arab philosophy, a transfer into early Sufism, as well. Then, because Jewish high culture was integrated into Arab high culture during the golden age in al-Andalus, there was a transfer into Judaism. And, because of that integration, astonishingly, in thirteenth-century Cairo, there were Jewish Sufis. Non-Islamic Sufism turned out to be seven centuries older than people had thought.

While Jewish Sufism was developing in thirteenth-century Cairo, yet another pre-modern intercultural transfer was taking place in Paris. As the various golden ages of Islam were coming to a close, so the darkest ages of Europe were also ending. Order, political stability, and prosperity returned to a Europe that had known little of any of them since the collapse of the Roman Empire. The direct ancestors of today's universities were established, and the study of philosophy flourished. New texts were in demand, and translations were made of Arab philosophical works. With Arab philosophy came Plotinus and emanationism. Just as emanationism had fed into Sufism in the Arab world, so it fed into Christian mysticism in Europe, most notably into the mysticism of Meister Eckhart in Erfurt, Germany, in the early fourteenth century. Several modern scholars have already noted and marveled at the common ground between Eckhart and the great Sufi mystic, Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi. Here, in the complex transmission of Plotinian emanationism, lay the explanation, as well as another part of the common ground on which Guénon, Inayat Khan, and Gurdjieff later stood.

The journey from Idries Shah to Plotinus and back again took me almost ten years. During those years, many excellent studies of Western Sufism appeared.⁶ Most major contemporary Western Sufi orders or *tariqas* have now been studied, often multiple times. They have generally been studied in isolation, however, and little attention has been paid to the history of the phenomenon, which is often assumed to be recent, perhaps related to the so-called "New Age." This is the gap in our understanding of Western Sufism that this book aims to fill. It looks at Western Sufism as one phenomenon, not just at individual Sufi groups, and it looks at the origins and development of Western Sufism up to the New Age. Its central argument is that Western Sufism is the product of Islam, of the antique world, and of the West's intellectual history from the Renaissance via Spinoza to Helena Blavatsky and Doris Lessing.

History is sometimes defined as that which happened at least fifty years ago—a useful rule of thumb, as it takes time for patterns in the jumble of events to become clear. This book departs from this rule of thumb only in the case of developments that straddle the fifty-year line, which are followed through for as long as necessary, and in the case of one Western *tariqa* that originated forty-eight years ago, in 1968. This, the Darqawiyya of Abdalqadir as-Sufi, was the first Western *tariqa* not to reflect the influence of early modern Europe. It initiated a new phase in the history of Western Sufism.

This book, then, follows the establishment of Western Sufism between 1910 and 1933, and its development up to 1968. It argues that Western Sufism was distinguished primarily by emanationism, anti-exotericism, perennialism, and universalism. Emanationism, as we have seen, is the idea expressed by Plotinus that human souls share in the divine, and can and should return to the divine. Anti-exotericism is the idea expressed by Toland that religions can be divided between a public, exoteric form and a secret, esoteric core, and that what is valuable is the secret esoteric core, not the exoteric form. Perennialism

is the idea that the secret, esoteric core is very ancient, and thus can be traced back to the remote past. Universalism is the idea that truth can be found in all religions.

This book argues that emanationism was a product of late antiquity, passed through Arab and Scholastic philosophy. Perennialism was a product of early Christianity, passed through the Renaissance. Universalism and anti-exotericism both originated in the early Enlightenment. Between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, many of the structures of Christianity that had sustained the Latin West for more than a millennium slowly collapsed. Some others were deliberately demolished in the struggle for human freedom. The objective, however, was not to leave a void; rather, some of the independent thinkers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment dreamed of an alternative religion, pure and simple and true. Once something has been dreamed, even if it does not exist, it can be brought into existence. One way of understanding Western Sufism is as the Renaissance and Enlightenment dream of a pure, simple, and true religion, made real during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This book divides the origins and development of Western Sufism into four periods. The first is the premodern period, during which the philosophy of late antiquity, especially the emanationism of Neoplatonic philosophy, was developed by Abbasid philosophers, which contributed to the original emergence of Arab and Persian Sufism. Arab philosophy and Sufism then contributed to developments in Judaism and Jewish mysticism, all of which then contributed to developments in Latin Christianity and Latin Christian mysticism. The second period is the early modern period, during which Europe imagined Sufism and read Sufi texts in particular ways, while developing the new understandings of religion that later became part of institutional Western Sufism. During the third period, which is modern, Sufi groups were established in the West, and during the fourth period, which is also modern, those groups developed in various ways. In addition to these four historical periods, there is also the contemporary period, after the end of the High New Age. This period needs a separate book for itself.

This introduction has used the word “mysticism,” which many scholars find problematic. The history of the term, however, is one of this book’s topics. An important understanding of Sufism during the seventeenth century was as “mystical theology,” and the variety of religious practice to which that term referred had then already been known for centuries. This book will not address scholarly discussions about “mysticism” at any length, however. Instead, it generally seeks to contribute to this and to other discussions indirectly. Those who are already familiar with certain discussions will recognize much that is relevant to them, but the discussions themselves will not be introduced or addressed directly. The name of Edward Said, for example, will not appear again, save in one note. There are two reasons for this indirect approach. One is purely practical: this book is long enough as it is. The other is that not everyone will be interested in all the discussions on which this book touches. An approach that follows classic historical conventions, which is the approach that this book takes, avoids troubling those who are not

engaged in particular discussions with details they are not interested in, while those who are interested can fill in the missing details themselves.

A different policy, however, has been followed when difficulties would arise from the impossibility of filling in missing background details. Some readers will be familiar with the religious history of the West, and some will be familiar with Sufism, but few will be equally familiar with both. The book therefore gives both types of background.

As well as being about Western Sufism, this book is about globalization and intercultural transfer. It will argue that globalization has been increasing steadily since the early sixteenth century, and it will identify intercultural transfers that have taken place by means of texts, through individual contacts, and through organizations. The results of these intercultural transfers will be identified in two major areas: theology and philosophy, and practice. The term “theology” is used very loosely, to indicate all conceptions of the relationship between humanity and what is understood as the transcendent, which was one of the original concerns of philosophy. The term will even be used in relation to the modern period, despite a tendency in this period for the focus to shift away from the relationship between humanity and the transcendent and toward the relationship between the individual and consciousness.

The period after the end of the High New Age is excluded from this book, save in the exceptional cases already mentioned. Regions other than the West and religious movements other than Sufism are also generally excluded, though references will sometimes be made to them. This is in some ways artificial, as regions and religions do not develop in isolation. The development of Western Sufism interacts with the Western encounter with Hinduism, and indeed with the Western encounter with Islam as a whole. This book does not aim to be a comprehensive treatment of all the phenomena that it touches on, however. It focuses on the Latin West, and generally ignores the Greek East. It is written in English, and gives developments and texts in the English-speaking world a prominence that they may not entirely deserve. Developments in France and Germany are less well covered, and developments in countries such as Italy and Russia are only mentioned when they are relevant to other areas. This is unfortunate, but the coverage that this book attempts is already ambitious, and some arbitrary limits are therefore inevitable. Even so, tracing chains of transmission over such a long period requires much simplification. If the forest is to be seen clearly, individual trees may not always be visible. This approach brings benefits, but also suffers from problems. One is that the few pages that the early chapters devote to each of the major figures they cover are entirely inadequate. The work of many of these figures is a complete scholarly field in itself, and at least one entire book is required for a basic introduction to nearly each one of them. However, if each tree is examined in detail, the forest will never become visible.

Within these limits, this book has attempted as comprehensive a treatment as possible. It will not, however, be the last word on the various topics it covers. Additional

information and corrections will therefore be made available online at www.westernsufism.info. I am always interested to hear from readers.

The first part of this book, the part that covers the premodern period, is divided into three chapters. The first of these covers Neoplatonism and emanationism, and introduces the concepts of emanation and emanative pull through the work of Plotinus. Crucial concepts such as the distinction between matter and form are examined, and the idea of the One as ultimate cause is explained, as is the crucial idea of the return of the soul to its origin. The chapter then looks at the fate of Neoplatonism and of emanationism after the coming of Christianity, tracing the book's first intercultural transfer, with St. Augustine and the major early Christian emanationists Severinus Boethius and Dionysius.

The second chapter covers Arab Neoplatonism, examining the impact of Neoplatonic emanationism in Islam, the book's second intercultural transfer. It also introduces Sufism and crucial Sufi concepts in their classic form. It argues that Arab philosophers such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina) were generally successful in reconciling Neoplatonism with Islamic doctrine, and that the resulting Arab Neoplatonism provided the philosophical content of the theology of Sufism. The chapter argues that Sufism is more than Islamic Neoplatonism, however, as it also contains Islam, asceticism, and such practices as *dhikr*, which are explained. The chapter closes with three Sufi writers: al-Ghazali as the classic exponent of sharia-compliant Sufism, who warned of the need to keep the esoteric secret; Ibn Arabi as the classic exponent of Sufi emanationist theology; and Ibn Tufayl, author of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, as the most easily comprehensible exponent of both of these approaches to Sufism.

The third and final chapter in the first part of the book deals with the two other premodern intercultural transfers. It shows how Neoplatonism penetrated the Jewish intellectual milieu, and looks at its impact on Jewish thinkers from Ibn Gabirol to Maimonides, who (like the Arab Muslim philosophers) attempted to reconcile philosophy with religious doctrine, and like al-Ghazali stressed the need for secrecy. It was his son Abraham who appreciated Neoplatonism and Sufism to the point where he established a Jewish version of Sufism, for which he claimed a Jewish origin. He thus anticipated non-Islamic Western Sufism by seven centuries. Unlike the Kabbalah, which was also influenced by emanationism, Jewish Sufism did not survive. In Europe, when translations of Arab philosophical texts became available at the schools of Paris in the thirteenth century, attempts were also made by the Scholastic philosophers at reconciling emanationism with Christian doctrine. There was no clear equivalent of the Kabbalah or of Jewish Sufism, but Meister Eckhart publicly preached radical emanationism. He was judged a heretic.

The second part of the book, which covers the early modern period, is divided into four chapters. The first chapter covers the earliest Western understandings of Sufism, starting with the account of George of Hungary, printed in 1480. It shows how Sufism was then used in Western theological and political controversies by Martin Luther,

by Sebastian Franck during the “Radical Reformation,” and by French political propaganda after the Franco-Ottoman alliance. Despite this, dervishes (as mendicant Sufis were known) soon became material for sensationalist and often purely derivative accounts of exotic deviance. Finally, however, as French Orientalist scholarship matured and provided access to original texts, the connection between Sufism and emanationism, the then topical “mystical theology,” came to be understood. It was explained most completely by Barthélemy d’Herbelot in his *Oriental Library*. By 1697, then, Western scholars had reached an understanding of Sufism that was little different from that of much of today’s scholarship.

The second chapter of this part looks at other ways in which Sufism was understood, despite the work of Barthélemy d’Herbelot. The earliest of these is as Deism, a pared-down “rational” religion that some found in Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* when it was translated and published in 1671, although some still correctly identified this Sufi work as mystical theology. The chapter looks at the origins and nature of Deism, and at the origins and nature of the other Enlightenment theologies that would later be used to revise the Western understanding of Sufism. The earliest of these was the *prisca theologia* and perennialism, developed during the Renaissance Neoplatonic revival that is often (wrongly) understood as Hermetic, and which has its origins in early Christianity. A variant, universalism, was promoted by Postel in sixteenth-century France. Then, in late seventeenth-century England, Toland promoted Spinoza’s Pantheism and developed anti-exotericism.

The following chapter shows how these Renaissance and Enlightenment theologies came to be applied to Sufism, resulting in an understanding of Sufism as perennial, esoteric, Deistic, universalism that replaced the earlier (and more accurate) understanding of Sufism as mystical theology. It shows how Pierre Bayle’s understanding of Spinozism accidentally created a category into which Sufism was then fitted. It further shows how this understanding was developed in British India by Jones, and looks at the role played in this development by the *Dabistan*. The Jones version of Sufism was then further developed by another British colonial scholar, James Graham, whose portrayal of Sufism would prove permanently influential, even though other Orientalist scholars quickly pointed out its deficiencies.

These were not the only ways in which Sufism was understood, however, so the final chapter in the second part of the book looks at other understandings, showing how these developed and were conveyed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in verse, fiction, drama, painting, and journalism. They were often trivial, emphasizing dervishes as stereotypical Oriental characters or vaudeville figures. Even Lessing and Goethe, whose work deserves to be taken seriously, ultimately did no more than trivialize Sufism. The best-known, possibly Sufi poem in Western history, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, is considered in detail, and is shown to have been understood as both Epicurean and as mystical. It is argued that the tension between these two understandings is precisely what makes it a great poem. The chapter closes with a very different

alternative understanding of Sufism: namely, of dervishes as fanatical warriors, the product of colonial warfare from Algeria to the Caucasus via the Sudan.

The third part of the book consists of three chapters and covers the period from 1910 to 1933, during which Western Sufism first became established in institutional form. The first chapter shows how emanationist, Renaissance, and Enlightenment understandings reached organized Western Sufism, which they did by two routes. Emanationism and universalism passed through the New England Transcendentalists, notably Emerson, and through the Neoplatonists of Missouri, notably Thomas Moore Johnson. Anti-exoteric perennialism passed through Blavtsky's Theosophical Society. Emerson modified Neoplatonist emanationism slightly, shifting the focus somewhat from the One to nature. The Theosophical Society modified anti-exoteric perennialism rather more. Perennialism implies sources of wisdom that are hidden because they are ancient. The Theosophical Society added new sources that were hidden but contemporary: namely, the Mahatmas. It also emphasized a new development of Enlightenment thought: anti-dogmatism.

Sufism was not the main focus of any of these groups, but two individuals connected to these groups were interested in Sufism. One was Bjerregaard, who wrote on Sufism for both the Theosophical Society and the Missouri Neoplatonists. The other was Ivan Aguéli, a Swedish Theosophist who not only wrote on Sufism in Arabic and French, but who actually became a Sufi himself, in Egypt. Aguéli then became the first Westerner ever to transmit a Sufi initiation to another Westerner in the West, in 1910.

The second chapter in this section follows Bjerregaard into the Sufi Movement of Inayat Khan, established in 1915, and the first significant Western Sufi organization. The chapter looks at Inayat Khan's time in America, where he met Bjerregaard and discovered earlier Western understandings of Sufism. It also looks at the Sufi Movement's origins in the English Theosophical milieu and at its later years in France, its teachings, and at its practice. It argues that the Sufi Movement's teachings combined Islam, emanationism, and anti-exoteric universalism. Its practice was divided between the exoteric Universal Worship of the Church of All and the esoteric practice of the Esoteric School. The Sufi Movement prospered during the interwar period, and established an institutional framework that enabled it to survive the early death of Inayat Khan in 1927. With time, however, it became less Islamic and more exoteric.

The next chapter in this section follows Aguéli into the Traditionalism of Guénon, whom he had initiated in 1910. Guénonian Traditionalism is one of two interwar movements in addition to the Sufi Movement that link Theosophy and Western Sufism, the other being the teachings of Gurdjieff. The chapter argues that although Guénon publicly rejected both Theosophy and emanationism, he was still influenced by both, as well as by perennialism and by anti-exotericism on the model of Toland. It also argues that the Gurdjieff teaching owes less than is thought to Sufism, and much more than is thought to Peter Ouspensky and, through him, to the psychology of William James. Gurdjieff's Sufis were simply his version of Blavatsky's Mahatmas. Ouspensky

and Gurdjieff, it argues, were early promoters of the transformation of emanationism from its original focus on the soul and the One, to a focus on consciousness and the expansion of consciousness. To this end they used novel practices, including asceticism and “discomfiture.” The chapter also introduces the two men who would later apply Traditionalism and the Gurdjieff teaching to Western Sufism, Frithjof Schuon and John G. Bennett. Schuon established a Traditionalist Western Sufi *tariqa*, the Alawiyya, in 1933, and Bennett followed the Gurdjieff teaching from 1921.

The fourth and final section of the book consists of four chapters that cover the further development of Western Sufism through the New Age. The first chapter covers a period of polarization after the end of the Second World War, as Western Sufism began to divide between more Islamic and less Islamic tendencies, reflecting its inherent tensions. The most important Islamic tendencies were represented by the Traditionalist Alawiyya in Paris and the work of the Traditionalist Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Iran, where he established the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, and then in America. The most important less Islamic tendencies were represented by Meher Baba, an Indian understood to be an avatar, and by Pak Subuh, an Indonesian guru. Both were universalist and anti-dogmatic, and both perhaps owed something to the Theosophical Society, but neither were particularly Sufi. Schuon and Bennett exhibited polarization within their own selves. Schuon was adopted into the Oglala Sioux, a Native American tribe, while remaining shaykh of a Sufi *tariqa*; he ended up gravitating toward universalist perennialism. Bennett lived as a Muslim Sufi in Damascus and Turkey, but then moved away from Islam to sponsor Pak Subuh, only to end up joining the Catholic Church.

The next chapter looks at Idries Shah, the most widely read Western writer on Sufism. At one level, Shah’s books simply retell the folk wisdom of the Muslim world, especially through the delightful stories of Nasruddin, and this is one reason for their popularity. The chapter argues that at another level, however, they reflect the example of Shah’s friend Robert Graves, who also retold good stories to good effect, and the influence of Gurdjieff. The chapter traces Shah’s complex relationship with Bennett and the Gurdjieff teaching. Despite the popularity of his writings, Shah refused to lead more than a few followers, criticizing both those whom he disparaged as gurus and their followers. Even so, he had a great impact on the Western public. His understanding of Sufism, however, did not survive his death in 1996.

Shah was much read during what many took as a “new age,” the period introduced in the following chapter. During this period, the Sufi Movement split into four sections, which reacted to the new age in different ways, all of which tended towards greater universalism. The “official” Sufi Movement, based mostly in the Netherlands, safeguarded its heritage very effectively, but declined for lack of charisma and innovation. In California, “Sufi Sam” Lewis spread the universalist Sufi message among the hippies with the aid of his antiestablishment rhetoric and his Dances of Universal Peace. In America and Europe, Vilayat Inayat Khan’s Sufi Order International responded to the new age by speaking more about consciousness and less about Sufism, and establishing

a Sufi “community” resembling a commune in upstate New York. In England, Fazal Inayat-Khan established a community which closely resembled a hippie commune, and led his followers toward freedom, including the limited use of narcotics and freedom from the “neurotic” traditional family.

The final chapter of this section looks at two Western Sufi groups that also established communities in response to the new age, but moved toward Islam rather than universalism. One was an offshoot of the Sufi Order International that came under the guidance of a colorful Turkish exile, Bülent Rauf, and established itself as the Beshara School, focusing on the study of Ibn Arabi. With the Beshara School, Western Sufism returned to the original theological roots of Sufism in Arab Neoplatonism. The other Western Sufi group was the first Western Sufi *tariqa* to be founded on entirely new bases, with no connection to any of the Western Sufi or religious groups discussed in earlier chapters or to the alternative theologies of early modern Europe. This was the Darqawiyya of Abdalqadir as-Sufi, originally Ian Dallas, a Scot. It was not anti-exoteric, perennialist, or universalist. It was simply Islamic. Even so, it did develop in unusual directions, reflecting the politics of its shaykh. As the Murabitun, it established a number of self-governing communities ruled by the sharia. In theory these were intended to prepare for jihad, but in practice they ended up developing expertise not in military matters but in the scholarly interpretation of the sharia, notably the Maliki *madhhab* (school). The final chapter of the book offers a conclusion.

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PART I

Premodern Intercultural Transfers



I

Neoplatonism and Emanationism



THE TEACHINGS OF the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, who was born in Thuringia, Germany in about 1260, show remarkable similarities to the teachings of the great Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, who died in Damascus, Syria in 1240, twenty years before Eckhart's birth. The agreement between Eckhart and Ibn Arabi has been noted before, but has not been satisfactorily explained.¹ As we will see, the key explanation is that Eckhart and Ibn Arabi both built much of their theology around emanationism, an aspect of the Neoplatonic philosophy that was developed in late antiquity on classical Greek foundations. In the Latin West, few philosophical texts survived the collapse of the ancient world, but knowledge of late antique philosophy survived in the Greek East, from where it passed into Arab philosophy under the Abbasids, during the ninth century. The first intercultural transfer that this book considers, then, is from the late antique world to the early Muslim world, and happened at a time when it was not yet possible to speak of "the West." Even so, it was later of significance for what we now call "the West," as Emanationism would become one of the chief characteristics of Western Sufism.

Neoplatonism passed into Arab philosophy, and one early consequence of this was the rise of Sufism, which owes much of its distinctive theology to Neoplatonism. Ibn Arabi was one of the great exponents of Sufi theology; he was also, though he did not realize it, an Islamic Neoplatonist. Arab philosophy, then, had a similar impact on Judaism, which shared a cultural space and a cultured language with Islam, especially in al-Andalus (in the Iberian peninsula). This was the second intercultural transfer that this book considers. The best known Jewish thinker who was influenced by Arab philosophy is Maimonides. Neoplatonism also contributed to the theology of the Kabbalah (which is in some ways a Jewish parallel to Sufism), and the example of Sufism led to the

development of Jewish Sufism by Maimonides's son Abraham ibn Musa, who argued that Sufism was actually of Jewish origin. In doing so, Abraham anticipated similar developments in Western Sufism by many centuries.

After al-Andalus fell to the Christians in the eleventh century, many captured Arabic texts were translated into Latin, and translations of crucial Neoplatonic texts reached the Latin world, which was then emerging from centuries of disorder. This led to the third intercultural transfer that the first part of this book considers: from Arab philosophy, both Muslim and Jewish, into early Latin thought. One consequence of this transfer was the mysticism of Eckhart. This transfer explains why Eckhart has so much in common with Ibn Arabi, the Islamic Neoplatonist. The Catholic Church attempted to suppress some aspects of Christian Neoplatonism, and partially succeeded, but new versions of Neoplatonism resurfaced periodically over the following centuries. With time they merged into other systems that emerged during early modernity, and which ultimately developed into the Western Sufism that became established in the modern period, and which is the topic of the final parts of this book.

The premodern period is when many concepts and practices that would be important in the early modern and modern periods were developed. As well as Neoplatonic emanationism, the Sufi concept of the esoteric (*batin*) and the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (ritual remembering) originated in this period. Much later, in 1671, the first Sufi text to speak directly to Western readers was Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Ibn Tufayl, like Ibn Arabi and other Sufi writers whose impact is still felt today, wrote during the premodern period.

That Eckhart and Ibn Arabi both drew on Neoplatonist emanationism is one explanation for the similarities between their teachings. Another is that they were both mystics, and both experienced the same apparently transcendent reality in what is sometimes called "the mystical experience," and so described that experience in the same terms.² A third possible explanation combines the first two: Eckhart and Ibn Arabi had similar experiences, and found that the conceptual framework of emanationism helped described them most accurately.

The ways in which Eckhart and Ibn Arabi understood their mystical experiences were not identical, as we will see, but both expressed their experiences within what was essentially the same system. That system was an emanationism that was different in details, but not in essentials, from the system developed at the end of antiquity by the philosopher Plotinus. Neither Eckhart nor Ibn Arabi were aware of their debt to Neoplatonism, and the chains of transmission that link both of them to Plotinus in Rome and Alexandria at the end of antiquity are long and complex. In the case of Ibn Arabi, the transmission of emanationism passes more or less directly through the reception of late antique philosophy by philosophers and Sufis in ninth-century Baghdad. In the case of Eckhart, this transmission passes at least in part directly through the few Neoplatonic texts that, in Latin translation, survived the end of antiquity, and partly indirectly, through ninth-century Baghdad, twelfth-century al-Andalus, and the reading of Latin translations of

Arab texts—both Islamic and Jewish—in Paris during the philosophical revival of the thirteenth century.

One contention of this book, then, is that Eckhart and Ibn Arabi were saying much the same thing, because both were saying what they said within the framework of the same system. It is not a contention of this book, however, that the sources that it identifies were the *only* sources of Eckhart and Ibn Arabi. Firstly, there is also the mystical experience itself. Secondly, the time and distance separating Eckhart and Ibn Arabi from Plotinus are both very great. A full study of all that happened over that time and distance would take many volumes, not three chapters. Many other sources are therefore necessarily ignored; among these is Aristotle. Much has been written about the medieval struggle between Aristotelianism and Platonism, including about whether there really was such a struggle. The question is complicated by the way in which “Aristotelian” positions were sometimes actually Platonic or Neoplatonic or even Middle Platonic, and by the way in which competing interests that were not of philosophical origin were reflected in philosophical and theological disputes. The influence of Aristotle on Eckhart and Ibn Arabi is an interesting question, but is not a question dealt with in this book. The question is not to what extent their sources were Aristotelian, Platonic, Middle Platonic, or Neoplatonic; rather, the question is what emanationist sources they drew upon, and with what consequences.

PLOTINUS: THE KEY

The conceptual world of Greek philosophy, Ibn Arabi, and Eckhart may be most conveniently approached through the work of Plotinus, a key late-antique philosopher. Consideration of Plotinus and his sources, philosophy, and practice will take us on a necessary detour into classical times, from where we will be able to return, via late antiquity, to the thirteenth century in a later chapter.

Plotinus was born around 204 A.D. in Roman Egypt, and was either a Hellenized Egyptian or a Greek, or perhaps even a Roman. He studied philosophy in Alexandria, and after participating in an unsuccessful military expedition to India, moved to Rome. He began to teach there at the age of about forty, acquiring many auditors (*akroatai*), and rather fewer actual disciples (*zelotai*).³ He is thus the first of many teachers this book will discuss who combined teaching at a theoretical level with acting as a guide at a practical level.

Plotinus saw himself as a follower of Plato, often attempting to respond to criticisms of Plato by other later philosophers, from Plato’s pupil Aristotle through to the Stoics and Epicureans and the Middle Platonists. In the process of responding to these criticisms, he inevitably modified Plato’s original teachings, sometimes answering objections made by later philosophers in a way that incorporated the views of those later philosophers into Plato’s views, and sometimes going even beyond that, carried forward by one

or another particular line of enquiry into entirely new territory. It is for this reason that Plotinus is known as a “Neoplatonic” rather than a “Platonic” philosopher, and his teachings and those of his followers are known as “Neoplatonism” rather than “Platonism.” This distinction, however, is a relatively recent one, dating from the nineteenth century. For earlier centuries, the Neoplatonists were simply philosophers, or perhaps Platonists. This book will distinguish between Platonism and Neoplatonism, but the writers and teachers it discusses often do not make this distinction themselves.

While Plato and Aristotle are today given places of honor in the mainstream of “Western” thought (even if they are perhaps more honored than actually read), Plotinus is now ignored by nonspecialists. It could, however, be argued that he should be seen as the last major philosopher of the ancient world, working as he was in the final century before that world collapsed. His work encompassed both Plato and Aristotle, and he in a sense completed their work, producing a more complete system than ever before, with fewer loose ends. In earlier ages than our own, Plotinus was quite as influential as either Plato or Aristotle.

The central concern of Plotinus, as of Plato and Aristotle, was the nature of existence and of the soul, and how life should therefore best be lived. What Plotinus meant by “philosophy” was thus somewhat different from what is commonly meant by that word today, since it included some of what is now denoted by the word “religion.” Religion is now generally placed in opposition to philosophy, but this was not the case in antiquity. Marcus Terentius Varro, a scholar of the first century B.C., however, did make a distinction between “civic theology,” “mythical theology,” and “natural theology.” In a text now lost and known only indirectly through later references to it,⁴ Varro defined “natural theology” as philosophy, both in the sense in which Plotinus would later understand it, and in terms of the investigation of the natural world. “Mythical theology” was the concern of poets and others who retold the exploits of the gods. “Civic theology” was that which related to “public cult and ritual, holidays and festivals, temple service and personnel, augury and divination,” all of which, in Varro’s view, played an important part in maintaining law and order.⁵ Varro himself valued natural theology (philosophy) most of all, but believed this was not for the general public, and should be kept “within the walls of a school.” What concerned him was the apparent decay in civic theology—that is, in the communal life of the people and the functioning of the Roman state.⁶ In Varro’s distinction between natural and civic theology we see the outline of what much later developed into a distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric.

Matter and Form

Plotinus shares with all the major classical philosophers an understanding of the world as matter and of the soul as something other than matter, and a need to explain the origin of the world. Like Plato, he calls that which lies at the origin of the world “God,” a conclusion which even Aristotle had been unable entirely to escape, even though

Aristotle concluded that matter ultimately had no cause, and so was eternal. Like Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus understood soul (*psuche*) not primarily as consciousness—which is how it is often understood today—but as that which distinguishes the living from dead matter. For ancient philosophers, soul was closer in some ways to “life force” than to the modern understanding of the term. Like Plato, Plotinus distinguished rigidly between matter and form (*eidos*). Matter and form were quite different things, as was sometimes illustrated through the example of the geometrical figure of the triangle. As a concept, the triangle is a form. A triangle drawn on paper, and thus made of matter, is not a form, but an imperfect reflection of the perfect form of a triangle. In this example, the concept of form as distinct from matter is relatively easy to follow. It becomes more difficult to follow when the other standard ancient example, of appleness, is introduced. A material apple is a reflection of the form of appleness, just as a material triangle is a reflection of the form of a triangle.

This seems at first to make little sense in contemporary terms, but may be understood in terms of what we now call the laws of nature. In our terms, a material apple is a reflection of various laws of nature—those governing the chemistry of photosynthesis, for example. The ancients might have understood these laws as close to forms. Our conceptions are thus not so far from those of the ancients after all.

As a material apple has a form (appleness), so a material human being also has a form, and that form may be called the soul.⁷ The soul is thus that which links the forms to the world of matter, and to the human body within that world.⁸ In general, the soul may be divided into three parts: the vegetative soul, the animal soul, and the rational soul.⁹ As these names suggest, the vegetative soul gives life to plants and all other forms of life, the animal soul gives life to animals and humans, and the rational soul is exclusive to humans. This understanding of the soul is further from contemporary conceptions than either the idea of God or the distinction between matter and form. It is central to Neoplatonism.

EMANATION EXPLAINED

The essential components of the conceptual world of Plotinus and both his predecessors and successors, then, are God, form, soul, and matter. Plotinus made six major modifications to his inherited understanding of these concepts. These modifications complicate his system, and are not all easy to follow, but they are important, as they are all included in the emanationism we will encounter repeatedly over the centuries, which was defined in the introduction to this book as “the idea that human souls share in the divine and can and should return to the divine.” First, Plotinus modified the meaning of God. For Aristotle, God was the same as the ultimate first cause. Plato’s God was a Craftsman (*demiourgos*), while Aristotle’s was an Intelligence (*nous*).¹⁰ In either case, in the view of Plotinus, there was a problem, as something must have caused the Craftsman or the

Intelligence to do what it did, in which case neither was actually the ultimate cause, which made little sense.¹¹ Plotinus therefore argued for the existence of a truly ultimate cause, which he called “the One”¹² (*to en*): a cause so ultimate, remote, and total that it was impossible to say anything about it. It was, however, easier to say what the One was not. The One, for example, was not produced by any other cause. This way of describing the One later became known as “negative theology,” and is—like the identification of God as the One—a hallmark of Neoplatonism.

A second change to the Platonic original followed from this first change. Plotinus retained something like Aristotle’s Intelligence or Plato’s Craftsman, but in a subsidiary position, proceeding or “emanating” from the One. Emanation is a difficult concept that Plotinus illustrated in terms of light: the Intelligence emanates from the One as light emanates from the sun¹³ (a simile that works best without a background understanding of quantum theory). The concept is needed because, as Dominic J. O’Meara says, “everything must derive from the One without implicating the One in any form of change, for such change would mean ending the perfect simplicity that is required of the One as first cause.”¹⁴ The concept of emanation and the image of light in this connection are two more hallmarks of Neoplatonism. Emanation has an important consequence: everything tends toward that from which it emanates,¹⁵ a tendency sometimes called “emanative pull.” This is related to the appreciation of beauty: as Plotinus put it, “whatever [the soul] sees that is related to it, or a trace of this relation, delights it; it is startled and relates it back to itself and recalls itself and what belongs to it.”¹⁶ Forms are beauty: the more something material conforms to its form, the more beautiful it appears.¹⁷ A perfect apple is more beautiful than an imperfect apple because the perfect apple is closer to the form of appleness.

A third change was to identify the Intelligence with the forms. The sequence of the chain of being, then, becomes from the One to Intelligence, from Intelligence to soul, and from soul to matter.¹⁸ As has been noted, this rearrangement involves a modification to the understanding of forms, which were previously separate from the Intelligence. In contemporary terms, the laws of nature now proceed from the unknowable One.

Plotinus modified the concept of soul by placing it in the chain of being as proceeding from the Intelligence, and thus locating it partly in matter and partly in the Intelligence. Soul as found in matter (for example in a human being) was divided: I have one soul, and you have another. Soul as found in Intelligence, called the Universal Soul, was not divided.¹⁹ And both divided soul and undivided, Universal soul were one. By parallel, a landscape which a number of people are admiring remains one, even though each person has their own separate and different view of that landscape.

Plotinus also modified the understanding of matter, a fifth change to the Platonic original. If the forms were perfection, good, and beauty, and if “there must always be something opposed to the good,” as Plato has Socrates say, then that something may be called evil, and evil is opposed to the forms. Since what is opposed to the forms is matter, matter becomes evil—pure evil, or what O’Meara calls “metaphysical evil.” Moral evil—that is, the evil done and suffered by humans—is not the cause of metaphysical

evil. Rather, metaphysical evil, matter, is the cause of moral evil. Matter, however, is not moral evil: this was the position of a school which Plotinus opposed, the school known as the Gnostics.²⁰

Finally, in his sixth major change, Plotinus turned his entire scheme inside out. This was, ultimately, because a problem arises from the meaning of the preposition “in.” If we say that one thing is “in” something else, we are implying that that thing is dependent on that something else. If we say that the soul is “in” the body, we are saying that the soul is dependent on the body, which is ridiculous, as the soul does not emanate from matter, but rather matter emanates from the Intelligence. In fact, it must be the other way round: the body must be “in” the soul. In fact, matter is “in” the soul, and the soul is “in” the Intelligence, and the Intelligence is “in” the One. We are all, thus, in the One.²¹

The system of Plotinus, then, differs from those of Plato and Aristotle. It is at first somewhat hard to grasp, but once grasped makes some sense. It is of great importance: it is the basis of emanationism, and thus it is also the basis of Sufi theology, and of a major stream within Western theology, of which Eckhart is the best known early example, and which has continued down the centuries to our own day. It is also important because it is basic to the Neoplatonic answer to the question of how life should best be lived—an answer which we will see being accepted time and again over subsequent centuries.

Homoiosis to theos

Plotinus was not just a theoretician. As was true for all ancient philosophers, the purpose of his investigations was to answer the question of how life should best be lived. He concluded that if matter is metaphysical evil, and if part of the soul is in matter, then that part of the soul may move in two possible directions: away from the Intelligence and toward evil, or away from evil toward the Forms and the Intelligence, and thus toward the One. This extremely important point was not entirely novel. In a famous but somewhat obscure passage, Plato has Socrates state:

It is impossible that evils should be done away with . . . for there must always be something opposed to the good; and [humans] cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like/assimilate to God (*homoiosis to theos*), so far as this is possible.²²

The difficulty with this passage is whether *homoiosis* means “to become like” or “to assimilate to,” which are rather different. For Plato, it may have meant “become like;” for Plotinus, who quotes part of this passage,²³ it meant “assimilate to,” or “become united with.” For Plotinus, *homoiosis* with God was not merely a philosophical concept or a theoretical possibility: it was a reality, a real experience. According to his pupil and

biographer Porphyry, Plotinus achieved *homoiosis* four times.²⁴ *Homoiosis* is the objective of Plotinus's teaching (as it was the objective of Plato), and thus of the Neoplatonic system, and thus of mystics from Ibn Arabi to John G. Bennett. It is, or can be taken as, what is known as the mystical experience. It is of course impossible to establish whether or not all these experiences are identical, but there are few if any neighboring concepts with which *homoiosis* might have become confused.

Although Plotinus's inquiries into the nature of existence and of the soul were not ends in and of themselves, but rather means to the far more important end of establishing how life should best be lived, the inquiries that lead to that most important of all conclusions—namely, *homoiosis*—are not superfluous. They are not merely means of discovering what the ultimate end should be, but also a means of reaching that ultimate end. As Plotinus put it,

There must be a two-part explanation given to those who are disposed in this way, if you will turn them toward opposite things . . . and lead them up to the . . . One . . . What then are these [two] parts? One shows the little value of the things that the soul now values ... the other teaches and reminds the soul of her origin and worth.²⁵

The two-part explanation can be taught by rational demonstration, but does not on its own produce *homoiosis*. What comes next cannot be taught, as for this the soul is approaching the One, in realms beyond description. "Teaching extends to the road and the passage, but the vision is the work of him who has decided to see."²⁶ In one of his most beautiful passages, Plotinus writes:

Analogies teach, as do negations, and knowledge of what comes from [the One] . . . But what conveys us are purifications, virtues, and right-ordering; ascent within the Intelligible [the forms], establishing ourselves there, and feasting on what is there. Whoever has himself become contemplator and object contemplated, both of himself and of the others, becoming being and Intelligence and the complete living animal, no longer looks outside. Having become this he is near, and the next is [the One], already shining in proximity on all the Intelligible. Now, leaving behind all learning, [he is] . . . disciplined and established in the beautiful . . . But carried by the wave of Intelligence itself, lifted up high by it as it swells, he suddenly sees, not seeing how. The sight, filling the eyes with light, does not make him see another through itself, but the light itself is the sight seen.²⁷

For Plotinus, then, there are five stages in the return of the soul: philosophy teaches the "little value" of the material and "reminds the soul of her origin and worth" (the first two stages); then comes purification, ascent within the Intelligence (two more stages), and finally, *homoiosis*.

Emanationism

This, much simplified, is the central system of Plotinus, and of emanationism. Human beings are connected by their individual souls to the Universal Soul, which is connected to the Intelligence, from which it emanates and where the Forms, beauty and truth are. Human souls share in the divine. This is what we need to understand, which is where philosophy can help us. Beyond that, to move toward the Universal Soul, rather than away from it into the metaphysical evil of matter, we need other means: purifications and virtues. With the assistance of purification and the virtues, we can reach the Intelligence, and from the Intelligence, we can take the final step, to the One. Human souls not only share in the divine, but can and should return to the divine.

This understanding of the system of Plotinus is not the only possible one, and some will certainly disagree with it. It reads Plotinus somewhat through the eyes of what was later made of his system, and so in one sense is methodologically wrong. Plotinus, it might be argued, should be read purely in his own context. In another sense, however, it solves a methodological problem. In the absence of any consensus on what Plotinus actually meant, reading him with hindsight unlocks what he meant to others, if not what he meant to mean, which cannot be known anyway.

This book considers practice as well as philosophy. What Plotinus's system meant in terms of practice is less clear than what his system was. Although Plotinus refers to purifications and virtues, he writes little about them. According to his biographer Porphyry, he lived simply, as did some of his followers. He slept little and ate lightly, eschewing meat.²⁸ Porphyry tells of one of Plotinus's followers, a senator, who, when he had been elected to the important (if no longer very powerful) office of Praetor, not only rejected that office just as the ceremonial escort of lictors had arrived at his house to escort him to the Capitol, but also gave away all of his property and lived for the remainder of his life on the generosity of his friends, eating only every second day. He found, incidentally, that this diet, far simpler than the one he had enjoyed as senator, cured him of his gout. Plotinus, says Porphyry, described this former senator as a model of the philosophical life.²⁹ One of the things that Plotinus's system involved in practice, then, was asceticism, a standard practice of the philosophers of his age. Asceticism is a key practice and concept that will appear many times in this book.

Little is known of Plotinus's views in the category that Varro called "civic theology" and that we would call "religious." On one occasion, when a pious follower asked him to join in observing temple sacrifices to the gods, Plotinus replied: "It is they who should come to me, not I to them." No one, according to Porphyry, dared ask him what he meant by this.³⁰ We will encounter similar apparently shocking statements many times, made by others who understood reality in the same terms as Plotinus. In their case, the meaning is clear: a person who has contemplated the One, and knows the relation of his soul to the One, knows also that beings such as those in whom the Romans believed are inferior to the One. This may have been what Plotinus meant.

NEOPLATONISM SPREADS

Plotinus's system survived in a text by his pupil Porphyry, who transcribed and edited Plotinus's lectures, and then arranged them, more or less by topic, into six books of nine chapters.³¹ This text, written in Greek, came to be known as the *Enneads*, or "Nines." As we will see, the *Enneads* became an extremely important text for Arab philosophy and so for Sufism.

The *Enneads*, however, were not the only source that later ages had for Neoplatonism. From Porphyry arose a small school of Neoplatonic philosophy, based in the Hellenized eastern half of the Roman Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire. Most notable was Porphyry's pupil Iamblichus, who taught and wrote (in Greek) in Syria in the early fourth century.³² Iamblichus emphasized practice in a way that Plotinus had not, perhaps at least in part because pagan practice was then under attack from the Christians.³³ In a text that much later became known as *Concerning Mysteries*,³⁴ he defended certain forms of theurgy ("god-working" rituals), while condemning others. Those who had achieved *homoiosis*, he considered, could indeed access and communicate divine knowledge; those who used other means, such as casting horoscopes, watching the flight paths of birds, or performing rituals designed to draw gods into statues, were either deluding themselves or at best making guesses based on clues. Dreams could also communicate the divine. Such communication—that is, prophecy—was not, however, the main point of ritual. The main point was that ritual could aid in the return of the soul. Religious music reminded the soul of the divine,³⁵ and "extended practice of prayer nurtures our Intelligence, enlarges very greatly our soul's receptivity to the gods . . . [and] accustoms [men's] eyes to the brightness of divine light."³⁶ This might be one way in which a state of "divine possession" might be reached, in which a person loses all consciousness of themselves, to the extent that they do not even react when burned or when "pierced with spits."³⁷ As we will see, Sufis, though unaware of Iamblichus's *Concerning Mysteries*, would agree regarding the access to divine knowledge given by *homoiosis*, and also regarding the impact of the extended practice of prayer, and in some cases also of music. Piercing with spits also appears among some Sufis.

The last significant pagan Neoplatonic philosopher, Proclus, taught and wrote in Athens in the fifth century.³⁸ His most important text, in terms of later impact, was his *Elements of Theology* (*Stoicheiosis theologike*), a systematic exposition of Neoplatonism followed by a discussion of the relations between the gods, Intelligences, souls, and lower grades of reality.³⁹ Proclus died in 485, by which time Christianity was becoming well established.

Christianity

The exact relationship between early Christian theology and philosophy has been hotly debated for many centuries. There is now much agreement that early Christian theologians

drew on late antique philosophy, as was inevitable, given the extent to which it permeated the surrounding intellectual world. For some later scholars, these borrowings mark a continuity: either the Hellenization of Christianity, or the impossibility of making a meaningful distinction between theology and philosophy in the first place, at least until the early modern period.⁴⁰ For others, Christianity and philosophy were fundamentally incompatible and thus opposed, and borrowings were only peripheral, consisting mainly of metaphors and comparisons. A compromise position holds that attitudes toward philosophy varied among Christian theologians, and that while a Christian “would never accept anything incompatible with what he had been taught as truth . . . he would accept that which he could recognize as being in accordance with that belief, as deepening and confirming it, and he would integrate that in his most intimate inner life.”⁴¹ This is probably true, and true of later theologians and philosophers, both Christian and Islamic, as well. What a theologian or philosopher had been taught as truth in the first place, however, is also subject to the same problem: it might be Hellenistic or it might be Christian (or Islamic), or some amalgam of the two.

Neoplatonic influences can thus be found in early Christianity, notably in the work of St. Augustine, who died in 430, and was one of the key early Christian theologians. Augustine was generally scathing in his criticism of the philosophers, whom he ridiculed as self-contradictory.⁴² He made an exception for Plato and those of his followers who understood that the final cause of existence was God, however.⁴³ He retained a residual admiration for Plotinus, whom he had studied before his conversion to Christianity in a Latin translation of the *Enneads* by Marius Victorinus.⁴⁴ He saw Plotinus as especially relevant to the first verses of the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.⁴⁵

In Augustine's view, Plotinus had understood this: namely, that human souls are created by light, and are then “intelligibly enlightened” by that light.⁴⁶ In fact, Augustine understood John and creation in a somewhat Neoplatonic sense, arguing in his Tractate on John that “the Word” should be understood as a design—in effect, a Form—and thus as not created, unchangeable, and eternal.⁴⁷ There are Neoplatonic influences here and in some other places, then, but Augustine was of course a Christian theologian. He used Varro's tripartite analysis of theology, which is one of the ways in which it remained widely known.⁴⁸

Two early Christians, however, might be called Christian Neoplatonists. One, Severinus Boethius, wrote in Latin, and died in northern Italy in 524. The other, Dionysius, wrote in Greek, and was in a sense a successor to Proclus, by whom he was influenced. He died some time before the end of the sixth century. Both would be of great importance in the development of Christian Neoplatonism in Paris in and after the thirteenth century.

Severinus Boethius

Severinus Boethius was one of the last members of the educated and cultured Roman elite. The son of a consul, he was fluent in Greek as well as in his native Latin, and was educated in philosophy, despite being at least a nominal Christian, as had by his time become the norm among the Roman upper class.⁴⁹ His major work, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (*De consolatio philosophiae*), claims to have been written while in prison and awaiting execution. It is divided into five books, the first two of which deal with fate, and which conclude that wealth, honors, power, glory, and pleasure—all of which Boethius had gained and then suddenly lost—are illusory, or “false happiness.” The third book advances the argument that true happiness lies not in these fleeting illusions, but rather in God, who is conceived of in Neoplatonic terms, and even referred to at one point as “the One” (*unus*).⁵⁰ The remaining two books then deal with the question of how adversity can be reconciled with this proposition and with the goodness of God, concluding that in fact evil is only apparent, as all providence is by definition good. When we speak colloquially of someone who has suffered some misfortune “taking it philosophically,” we are probably referring to Boethius.

The third book of *The Consolation of Philosophy* contains a hymn or prayer that helps clarify the Neoplatonic system, of which it is almost a summary.⁵¹ It is commonly understood as based on Plato’s *Timaeus*, which of course it also is, since Plato is central to Plotinus. Its emphases, however, are essentially Neoplatonic. Addressed to the Originator (*sator*) of earth and heaven, it starts with a definition of the One as first cause and as the same as beauty, thus conflating the One with the Intelligence:

No cause outside Yourself made you give shape
To fluid matter, for in You was set
The form of the ungrudging highest good.
From heavenly patterns You derive all things.
Yourself most beautiful, You likewise bear
In mind a world of beauty.⁵²

It then continues with a description of the position of the soul (*anima*) as between Intelligence and matter, and as tending to return whence it emanated:

The soul which stirs all things You intertwine
 In threefold nature as its middle part . . .
 The soul, thus split, then concentrates its course
 Within two orbits, as it journeys back.

The hymn ends with a description of the route that the soul may take back to the One:

Let my mind rise to your august abode
 And there, dear Lord, survey the source of good.
 The grant that, once I have attained the light,
 My inward eye I may direct on You.
 Disperse the fog and the encumbering weight
 Of this earth's bulk, and shine forth, clear and bright.

Boethius here echoes Plotinus: "he suddenly sees, not seeing how. The sight, filling the eyes with light, does not make him see another through itself, but the light itself is the sight seen." One wonders quite how Christian Boethius really was.⁵³

Dionysius

The second early Christian Neoplatonist, Dionysius, went to greater lengths to reconcile Neoplatonism with Christianity. Dionysius became a key reference for later Latin Neoplatonists. As Andrew Louth has argued, his focus was on the Christian scriptures, which he invariably cites as his primary source of authority.⁵⁴ Plotinus is never mentioned, and the Trinity is inserted into the overall Neoplatonic scheme, sometimes awkwardly, as when Dionysius writes that "the Father is the only source of that Godhead which in fact is beyond being and the Father is not a Son nor is the Son a Father."⁵⁵ The essentials of the chain of being, however, survive. Dionysius starts his treatise *On the Divine Names* (*Peri theion onomaton*) by making clear that the One is the "cause of all existence" and beyond understanding and description. He conceives of an Intelligence that emanates from the One, and even agrees with Plotinus about beauty, which he sees as a characteristic of the Intelligence.⁵⁶ Plotinus's Intelligence becomes Dionysius's "the Beautiful and the Good." For Dionysius, "all being derives from, exists in, and is returned toward the Beautiful and the Good," and therefore "all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good."⁵⁷

Dionysius also follows Plotinus in the stages in which he conceives of the return of the soul. For Plotinus, these were philosophy, and then purification, ascent within the Intelligence, and *homoiosis*. For Dionysius, words are initially needed because of the senses:

But when our souls are moved by intelligent energies in the direction of the things of the Intelligence then our senses and all that go with them are no longer needed. And the same happens with our intelligent powers which, when the soul becomes divinized, concentrate sightlessly and through an unknowing union on the rays of unapproachable light.⁵⁸

This is not so far from Plotinus's final "sight, filling the eyes with light." Dionysius also follows the late antique model in considering the return of the soul through Neoplatonic means as possible for some, but not all. All things long for the One. However, "the Intelligent and the rational long for [the One] by way of knowledge, the lower strata by way of perception."⁵⁹

On the Divine Names was one of five works of Dionysius that survived, and perhaps his most famous. Another was *On Secret Scripture* (*Peri mustikes thelogias*). This title was later translated into Latin as *On Mystical Theology* (*De mystica theologia*), and so gave rise to the sense in which "mystical" is now used, to indicate the general direction of Dionysius's thought, but for Dionysius the Greek word *mustikes* retained its original meaning of "secret" or "hidden," the sense in which it was also used by Augustine.⁶⁰

Later Latins

Dionysius shows that some interest in Neoplatonism survived in the Greek East—an interest that, in the view of Cornelis De Vogel, persisted through the centuries into the Russian Orthodox theology of our own day.⁶¹ After Boethius, however, direct knowledge of Plotinus and of Neoplatonism vanished from the Latin West. The Latin translation of Plotinus by Marius Victorinus that Augustine had read was lost.⁶² Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* remained popular, circulating both in Latin and in vernacular translations (including into Anglo-Saxon at the court of King Alfred, and then into English by Chaucer),⁶³ but his exposition of Neoplatonism seems not to have been noticed. It is short, not very systematic, and incidental to the book's main message. Neoplatonism is invisible in the Anglo-Saxon translation of the hymn quoted above, for example, which transforms threefold nature and the soul split between matter and Intelligence into an entirely different discussion of the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire.⁶⁴

Some of the works of Dionysius, however, were read in various Latin translations, especially after the ninth century, when the Carolingian Emperor Charles II assigned the task of translating Dionysius from Greek to Latin to an Irish scholar named John Scotus Eriugena. Eriugena read widely in the Greek texts he could find, and in addition to producing a translation of Dionysius, he wrote several works of his own, including *On the Division of Nature* (*Periphyseon*), in which he explained negative theology and developed a cosmology of Neoplatonic origin.⁶⁵

The works of Dionysius had by then gained considerably in authority as a result of the accidental conflation of the Dionysius who had actually written them with an earlier Dionysius—Dionysius the Areopagite, an Athenian judge who is mentioned in the New Testament as having been converted to Christianity by the preaching of Paul the Apostle.⁶⁶ They thus appeared to be the oldest Christian texts, other than the Bible itself,⁶⁷ and their author was known for many centuries as “Dionysius the Areopagite.” He is now referred to either as “pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” or as “Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite” in order to distinguish him from the earlier Dionysius, but will be referred to in this book simply as “Dionysius,” for the sake of brevity. Dionysius was for many centuries not read primarily for his Neoplatonism, but for what he could offer to controversies about such issues as ecclesiastical hierarchy, papal authority, and the value of allegory in theological argumentation.⁶⁸ Eriugena’s own *On the Division of Nature* was appreciated locally for its contributions to terminology, but its Neoplatonic aspects were generally ignored.⁶⁹

Although direct knowledge of Neoplatonism vanished from the West, then, Christianized traces of it remained, waiting to be reread by Eckhart and others. Knowledge of Neoplatonism survived in the Greek East, however, from where it was transmitted to Arab philosophers, and so passed to the Sufis and to Ibn Arabi and, also, to Eckhart.

Islamic Emanationism



THOUGH DIRECT KNOWLEDGE of Neoplatonism vanished in the Latin West with the death of Boethius in 524, it survived in the Greek East, which rather than suffering repeated and very destructive invasions by Goths, Vandals, and Huns like the West, suffered one single, less destructive invasion, by Arab Muslims. In 637, the Byzantine province of Syria was conquered by Arab armies, and in 750 became part of the stable, Arab-dominated Islamic empire known as the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasids' capital, Baghdad, grew rich and sophisticated. Its riches, like the riches of Rome before it, supported a number of accomplished, full-time scholars. Some of these Arabic-speaking scholars developed an interest in late antique philosophy. Not all of them were ethnic Arabs, but they will be referred to as Arabs since they worked in Arabic, just as Germans who worked in Latin will be referred to as Latins.

Among them was Yaqub al-Kindi, tutor to the son of Caliph al-Mutasim, who reigned from 833 to 844. Al-Kindi is traditionally regarded, in both the West and the East, as the father of Arab philosophy. His own philosophical works are very much in the late antique tradition. He does not seem to have known Greek, and so probably read Arabic translations of the works of the classical and late antique philosophers upon whom he drew. Among those philosophers was Plotinus; al-Kindi was in part responsible for an important work based on sections of the *Enneads*, that, according to its preface, was translated by a Syrian, Abd al-Masih al-Himsi, and then edited by al-Kindi.¹ The exact date of this translation and editing are unknown, so this book has assigned them, rather arbitrarily, to the start of the reign of the Caliph al-Mutasim, in 833. This date marks the start of the first major intercultural transfer that this book considers.

Al-Himsi's translation and al-Kindi's editing mark the beginning of an Arab Neoplatonism—an important stream within Arab philosophy. This Arab Neoplatonism gave Sufism its distinctive theological system, which reached one of

its classic formulations in the work of Ibn Arabi. Sufism, as this chapter will show, is not just Islamic Neoplatonism (although this is how it has been understood by some Western scholars). Neoplatonism, however, gave Sufism its main analytical framework. Without Arab Neoplatonism in the form of Arab philosophy and of access to the *Enneads*, Sufism would have been something different from what it became. Given this, we will now follow the development of Arab Neoplatonism until its incorporation into early Sufism.

ARAB NEOPLATONISM

The Arabic text resulting from the work of al-Himsi and al-Kindi differs in many ways from the Greek original on which it is based. It is longer, containing much that is in effect commentary on the original text, but is not indicated as such. At times it not only expands on the original text but actually changes it. It is a revised and expanded version of the Greek text rather than a translation, and thus it is “a work of original philosophy in its own right,” in the view of Peter Adamson.² The basic system of Plotinus, however, remains intact.

Quite who was responsible for the differences between the Arabic version of Plotinus and the Greek original is not known, but there are three obvious possibilities. One is al-Himsi. Another is al-Kindi, who may have taken a more or less literal translation and then expanded and modified it.³ The final possibility is that the differences were the work of a third person whose identity has been lost. Given this uncertainty, reference below will be made to “the Adaptor,” following the usage of Adamson.

The Arabic Plotinus

Before it became widely known, al-Himsi and al-Kindi’s Arabic version of Plotinus was somehow mutilated.⁴ There is no indication of how this happened, but it happened within one generation after the text’s translation and editing. When the text was recovered—and again there is no indication of how this happened—not only had it lost some sections and split into three separate texts but it had also lost its original attribution to Plotinus. Somehow, the longest of these three sections came to be attributed instead to Aristotle, under the title *The Theology of Aristotle*.⁵ This is the erroneous title under which this important text would be known for centuries; its true origin in the *Enneads* was not established until 1812.⁶ The next great Arab philosopher to use it, Alfarabi (Muhammad al-Farabi), only one generation after al-Kindi, did not doubt that the work was by Aristotle.⁷ One reason that Alfarabi and many philosophers after him failed to appreciate that the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* was not in fact by Aristotle was that they were reading not the original text, but rather al-Himsi’s and al-Kindi’s version of it, which used Aristotelian terminology and had also in some ways “Aristotelianized” Porphyry’s

text.⁸ Another reason is that, like the medieval European philosophers after them and the late antique philosophers before them, the Arab philosophers did not make the rigid distinction that is now routinely made between different philosophers.⁹ One confusing consequence of this misattribution is that for many centuries, in both the Arab and medieval Latin worlds, philosophers who considered themselves Aristotelians—and are so described by later writers—were often actually also Neoplatonists.

As well as the *Theology of Aristotle* and the other two works commonly classed as “the Arabic Plotinus,” the *Enneads* also appeared in another work misattributed to Aristotle: the *Discourse on the Pure Good* (*Kitab al-idah fi'l-khayr al-mahd* or *Kitab mahd al-khayr*). This is a relatively short work consisting of thirty-one propositions on causality, taken mostly from Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* (which originally consisted of 211 propositions),¹⁰ but with some sections taken from the *Enneads*.¹¹ The true authorship of most of the *Discourse on the Pure Good* was discovered earlier than was the true authorship of *Theology of Aristotle*, not in the nineteenth but in the thirteenth century, by Thomas Aquinas.¹²

The Theology of Aristotle consisted mostly of Enneads IV and V, which deal with the soul, the first cause, and the Intelligence.¹³ They discuss, then, the core of emanationism. Porphyry had reordered Plotinus’s teachings when editing them into the *Enneads*: chronologically, Ennead IV was Plotinus’s second text. *The Theology of Aristotle*, then, started more or less where Plotinus started, even if it did not start where Porphyry started.

Al-Himsi and al-Kindi faced three major challenges in rendering Plotinus, and other classical and late antique philosophy, into Arabic. One was the challenge of understanding the original texts, which are difficult. The second challenge was to develop a technical philosophic vocabulary in Arabic. Just as there are sometimes no terms for expressing some concepts key to classical and late antique philosophy in contemporary English, so there were sometimes no terms in ninth-century Arabic. The third challenge was to reconcile the system of the philosophers with a system in which a single God was maker of heaven and earth, as described in the Quran. For al-Kindi and those Muslims who came after him, the Quran was the revealed word of God, and thus by definition true, if sometimes difficult to understand and interpret. Philosophy that complemented, expanded, or interpreted the Quran was of great use and interest. Philosophy that contradicted the Quran was of no use or interest. As Cornelius De Vogel said of the early Christians, while a theologian “would never accept anything incompatible with what he had been taught as truth . . . he would accept that which he could recognize as being in accordance with that belief, as deepening and confirming it.”¹⁴

Neoplatonism and Islam

As we saw in the previous chapter, St. Augustine could support his residual Neoplatonism from the Bible only with difficulty. The Quran, however, contains much

more that is easily compatible with Neoplatonism than the Bible does, making Islamic Neoplatonism less forced than Christian Neoplatonism. This may be one reason why Islamic Neoplatonism has flourished more than Christian Neoplatonism. Crucial Neoplatonic terms like “the One” translate easily into Arabic. “The One” (*ahad*) is a term used in the Quran to describe God. Many other Neoplatonic conceptions are also easy compatible with the Quran. Chapter 112 of the Quran, for example, is one of the best known, and states:

He is Allah, the One
 Allah, the eternal and absolute
 He begets not, nor is he begotten
 And there is none comparable to Him.¹⁵

Plotinus would not have disagreed, though he might not have liked the idea of giving the One the name “Allah.”

It is accepted by both Western and Muslim scholars that the Quran spoke to the people of its time and place in the language of that time and place, and according to the understanding of that time and place, so one possible explanation of the apparent presence of Neoplatonism in the Quran is that there was some knowledge of Neoplatonism in the Arabian peninsular at the time. It has been shown that the Quran uses conceptions of time that are of Hellenistic origin,¹⁶ so it is not impossible that the Quran also uses other Hellenistic conceptions, including Neoplatonic ones. “The One” in chapter 112, then, may conceivably be referring to Neoplatonic usage.

Sometimes, however, the Quran provides no help for an Islamic Neoplatonist. There is no word in the Quran that obviously translates the philosophical sense of “being,” the Greek *to einai*, for example. An unknown translator or translators here created two Arabic neologisms: *ananiyya*, literally “I-ness,” and *huwiyya*, literally “he-ness.” These are used to translate *to einai*. There seems to be no difference in meaning between these two neologisms,¹⁷ so possibly one was the creation of one translator and the another the creation of another translator, and both then passed into currency simultaneously. Similarly, there is no word in the Quran that obviously translates the Greek *teleios*, “lacking nothing necessary to completeness,”¹⁸ perfected in the sense of having reached its *telos* or end-goal. Translators here used the existing Arabic words *tamm* (complete, finished) and *kamil* (complete, entire).¹⁹

Sometimes the Quran was not only of no help to the Arab translators and philosophers, but actually raised major problems. These were greatest when it came to Aristotle, whose proposition that matter (and thus the world) is eternal is incompatible with the Quran, which refers very frequently to the creation of the world and to the end of the world and the attendant judgment. This particular problem is not found with regard to Neoplatonic philosophy, however, since Neoplatonism does not consider the world to be eternal. Two of Plotinus’s propositions, though,

did present particular difficulties in relation to the Quran. One was that the One could not be described, which is the proposition at the heart of “negative theology.” This ran up against the problem that God is very frequently described in the Quran, which makes liberal use of such adjectives as “merciful,” “knowing,” and “powerful” to describe God. The other difficulty resulted from Plotinus’s proposition that matter emanates from the Intelligence, not from the One. Although God is referred to as “the One” in the Quran, He is more frequently referred to as “the Creator,” and it is stated explicitly and repeatedly that God created the heavens and the earth and individual souls.

The first problem, known as the problem of God’s attributes (*sifat*), caused considerable difficulty for early Islamic theology, with disagreement over whether attributes such as mercy and knowledge actually existed in God, or whether attributes such as “merciful” and “knowing” were simply adjectives that might be used to describe God.²⁰ The issue of the attributes was a major one, and has no real equivalent in Christian theology. The Adaptor of Plotinus into Arabic takes a third and distinct position, maintaining that the Intelligence has attributes, and God does not: God is “a thing with nothing in it.”²¹ This is a position that differs from that which in the end won general acceptance among Sunni Muslims, but does not flatly contradict the Quran.

However, the Adaptor of Plotinus could not solve the problem of whether Creation was the work of the One or of the Intelligence, and so did what others would do after him: he ignored the problem, tolerating the consequent ambiguity. He sometimes follows Plotinus in positing that the One creates through the intermediary of the Intelligence, also called the First Being,²² and he sometimes follows the Quran in positing that the One, called the First Being, creates without intermediary.²³ These two positions are, logically, mutually exclusive. This, however, does not seem to have worried the Adaptor unduly. Alternatively, perhaps there were two Adaptors.

The Adaptor, then, sometimes Islamizes the *Enneads*, and not only when this is unavoidable.²⁴ The bare statement of Plotinus that the soul “has many foreign things around it, and many things which it desires. It indulges in pleasure, and pleasure deceives it”²⁵ is thus expanded by the Adaptor into:

Base matters such as blameworthy longing and base pleasure have overcome [the soul], so it has abandoned its eternal things in order to attain, by abandoning them, the pleasures of this sensible [material] world, and it does not know that it has removed itself from the pleasure that is true pleasure.²⁶

Plotinus’s idea is thus expanded into a much more explicit statement that would not be out of place in a Friday sermon in a mosque today, especially one delivered by a Sufi preacher.

The Theology of Aristotle and the *Discourse on the Pure Good* are thus both Neoplatonic and Islamic. Much of the *Enneads* is translated into Arabic, using a new technical

terminology when necessary. Plotinus's system and teachings are explained, even when they potentially contradict the Quranic worldview. They are also sometimes adapted to Islam or expanded into an Islamic worldview. The production of *The Theology of Aristotle*, then, was truly an intercultural transfer, not just a translation.

Neoplatonism in Later Arab Philosophy

The Theology of Aristotle and Neoplatonism marked the philosophy of al-Kindi and the leading philosophers of the two succeeding generations, Alfarabi and Avicenna (al-Husayn ibn Sina). All three philosophers, who together form the heart of Arab philosophy between the ninth and eleventh centuries, read Aristotle and Plato. Alfarabi was deeply interested in Plato's political writings, arguing, like Plato, for a philosopher king, and wrote several important commentaries on Aristotle. All three also read Plotinus, though they did not realize it. Alfarabi took the *Theology of Aristotle* as his main source for Aristotle in *Harmonization of the two opinions of the two sages* (*Kitab al-jam' bayn rayay al-hakimayn*), his major attempt to reconcile—as he thought—Plato with Aristotle, which was of course actually in large part a reconciliation of Plato with Plotinus,²⁷ a rather easier task. He also seems to have drawn on a lost commentary by Plotinus's pupil and biographer Porphyry in his commentaries on Aristotle.²⁸ Avicenna wrote a number of commentaries on the *Theology of Aristotle*.²⁹

All three philosophers subscribe to an emanationist view of the return of the soul to the One. Al-Kindi followed the Neoplatonists in understanding God as the One, and individual souls as yearning to return to their origin and seeking to contemplate their Creator from the Intelligence,³⁰ with which Alfarabi agreed, also understanding God as the One, described as “First cause” and as “First being.”³¹ He described the soul that had succeeded in returning to its origin as the “perfected man” (*al-insan al-kamil*),³² “perfected” here having the sense of *teleios*, “achieved.” The phrase *al-insan al-kamil* later became one of the key phrases of Sufi theology. Avicenna, like al-Kindi, presented individual souls as yearning to return to their Creator—a yearning he described as *ishq* (passionate love),³³ another key phrase of Sufi theology.

The most significant distance between Plotinus and the three great Arab philosophers relates to the origins of the soul. As we have seen, for Plotinus the Intelligence emanated from the One, and the soul emanated from the Intelligence, a scheme that the Adaptor left in *The Theology of Aristotle*. In his own writings, al-Kindi followed the Quran rather than the Neoplatonic scheme, with individual souls being created without intermediary by God.³⁴ Alfarabi, however, followed the Neoplatonic system, arguing for emanation through the Intelligence, or rather the last of a series of Intelligences, called the Active Intelligence, a term taken from Aristotle.³⁵ Alfarabi differed from Plotinus in subdividing the Intelligence into ten levels, which he identified with ten stars and planets, following Ptolemy. This is the scheme that Avicenna adopted, adding to it an identification of Alfarabi's various Intelligences with various angels.³⁶ The result, then, is considerably

more complicated than Plotinus, but is still emanationist. And Arab philosophy, which we will see being transmitted into the Latin West in the next chapter, thus contained the most important elements of emanationism.

THE FIRST SUFIS

The emanationist scheme of Arab philosophy also appears in early Sufism. The origins of Sufism remain unclear, as only a fraction of the texts that are our source for the period and processes have been discovered, edited, and studied. They are also controversial, because of the implications that any account of Sufism's origins has for the legitimacy of Sufism, in both Islam and Western thought. Sufis generally argue for Islamic origins that legitimize Sufism, while the Islamic opponents of Sufism generally argue for non-Islamic origins that delegitimize Sufism. Ironically, as we will see in later chapters, some Western partisans of Sufism follow Islamic opponents of Sufism, as for them non-Islamic origins legitimize rather than delegitimize. The disagreement over Sufism's origins has been a major feature of Islamic history for almost as long as Sufism has existed, and became a feature of Western intellectual history soon after the West discovered the existence of Sufism, as we will see.

Sufis and some of their partisans generally see Sufism as deriving from the mystical experiences of the first Sufis, understood and interpreted in the light and terminology of Islam. Some of the opponents of the Sufis and some of the Western partisans of Sufism, in contrast, see Sufism as being inspired by other and older currents. More recent Western scholars have suggested Christian asceticism, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism. Other Westerners have suggested the original, "perennial" religion of humankind, a concept that will be encountered in later chapters. This chapter's argument—that the emanationist scheme appears in early Sufism—follows none of these lines exactly. It agrees that the mystical experiences of the first Sufis were of great importance, and that they were interpreted in the light and terminology of Islam—but *not only* in that light and *not only* using that terminology. Given the role played by interpretative schemes in helping to produce mystical experience, the Neoplatonic scheme may indeed have in part inspired Sufism, as asceticism may have, though not necessarily Christian asceticism—but only *in part*. The school known as Gnosticism is somewhat difficult to define, and so will not be considered in detail, but it may also have played a part parallel to that played by Neoplatonism.

Asceticism

Asceticism, which we last encountered amongst the followers of Plotinus, becomes visible in the Abbasid world before anything that is called Sufism becomes visible. Though thought by some modern scholars to have been inspired by early Christian models,³⁷ this asceticism need not be of Christian origin. Asceticism is a standard human religious practice.

Mainstream Islamic practice contains many ascetic elements; the month-long Ramadan fast, the prohibition on elaborate and showy clothing for men, and the obligation to give what can be significant sums in alms to the poor are all ascetic practices. There are also reports in the Hadith (the canonical reports of the sayings and doings of the Prophet and his closest followers) of voluntary asceticism going beyond that required by mainstream Islamic practice. To this extent, then, asceticism is part of Islam, going back to seventh-century Medina, and to the extent that asceticism later became part of Sufism, those Sufis who like to find the origin of Sufism in the times of the Prophet are historically justified.

An especially ascetic trend becomes visible in the Abbasid world slightly before Neoplatonic philosophy does, from the late eighth century, when some Muslims were evidently going far beyond the asceticism of mainstream Islamic practice, fasting often and eating little, denying themselves sleep, and living in voluntary poverty. A woman named Rabia al-Adawiyya is the most famous of these extreme ascetics.³⁸ Little is known of these early ascetics. Their lives and sayings were adopted by later Sufis as examples of Sufism as “a reality without a name,” but from what is known of them, no new name was actually needed. “Ascetic” is an adequate description.

Proto-Sufism

Shortly after this ascetic trend, there appears a trend that might be called “proto-Sufism,” because it involved religious practices that later become characteristic of Sufism, but lacks some characteristics of Sufism, including the term “Sufi.” The key person in this trend is Harith “al-Muhasibi,” a teacher in Baghdad who had been born some ten or twenty years before al-Kindi. The proto-Sufi trend, like the ascetic trend, predates the first appearance in Arabic of Neoplatonism.

Al-Muhasibi wrote on *muhāsaba al-nafs*, literally “the auditing of the soul,” often translated into English as “introspection.” *Al-nafs* is the soul in the sense of what Plotinus called the animal soul; the term is an ancient one, related to the Hebrew *nefesh*, which has a similar meaning and etymology. It is a key term in Sufism, and is often translated into English as “ego” in the sense of “egotistical.” Since “ego” can also be understood in a Freudian sense, however, and this sense is inappropriate, this book will use the Arabic term *nafs* instead of “ego.”

Al-Muhasibi made a distinction, central to later Sufism, between the heart (*qalb*) and the *nafs*, and saw the *nafs* as potentially blocking the heart’s access to God. This blocking could be prevented by using reason to keep careful watch over the *nafs* and its tricks, notably self-display, pride, vanity, and self-delusion.³⁹ Variations on this spiritual method, which has no obvious precedent in the antique or classical world, became part of the standard repertoire of Sufi practice. In addition, al-Muhasibi emphasized the importance of *taqwa*,⁴⁰ that is, God-fearingness, or “holy fear, and heavenly aspiring,”⁴¹ a virtue frequently mentioned in the Quran. The proto-Sufism of al-Muhasabi, then, owes nothing to Neoplatonism, but is not incompatible with it.

Bayazid al-Bistami and Sahl al-Tustari

It is only after the appearance of the ascetic trend and after al-Muhasibi that what seems to be Neoplatonism appears. Asceticism and proto-Sufism come together with Neoplatonism in the persons of Bayazid al-Bistami and Sahl al-Tustari, near contemporaries of al-Kindi, who might be described as the first true Sufis.

Al-Bistami is known to us only through his sayings and prayers.⁴² One of these uses the neologism *annaniyya*, which is also used in the Adaptor's version of the *Enneads*, and is distinctly emanationist. Al-Bistami prays:

Adorn me with Your unity
 And clothe me in Your Being (*annaniyya*)
 And raise me to Your Oneness
 So that when Your creatures behold me
 They may say that they behold You
 And that only You may be there
 Not I.⁴³

The second half of this prayer moves from the Being, presumably the Intelligence, to the One. It is philosophically and logically sound, but indisputably provocative in Islamic terms: those who behold al-Bistami behold God? Other sayings of al-Bistami are equally provocative, including "I am He [God]."⁴⁴ One is reminded of Plotinus's "It is they who should come to me, not I to them."

Somewhat more is known of al-Tustari, who was the first to describe a further central practice of Sufism, *dhikr*, and in whose writings emanationism becomes clearly visible. Little is known for certain about his early life,⁴⁵ but all accounts agree that he started as an extreme ascetic. His proto-Sufism is represented by his promotion of a religious practice that, even more than al-Muhasibi's introspection (*muhasaba*), later became central to Sufi practice: *dhikr* (literally, remembering), which we will encounter frequently in later chapters of this book. As "remembering," *dhikr* was a well-established Islamic concept. Various forms of the word's root are used 292 times in the Quran,⁴⁶ where it generally means something much like "being mindful of."⁴⁷ For al-Tustari, though, *dhikr* also meant the practice of repetitive prayer. One account, which may or may not be accurate, has al-Tustari learning this from an uncle as a child:

One day my uncle said to me, "Do you not remember God who created you?" I replied, "How shall I remember Him?" He told me, "When you change into your nightclothes, say three times in your heart without moving your tongue 'God is my witness.'" I did so for three days and then informed him that I had done so. He told me to say it seven times each night. I did so and informed him that I had done so. Then he told me to say it eleven times each night. I did so, and a sweetness

came upon my heart because of it . . . For years I did not cease to practice this, and I experienced a sweetness in my inmost being because of it.⁴⁸

This is how *dhikr* is understood to work.

Al-Tustari's emanationism is visible in his key work, his *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), an established genre quite separate from the philosophical treatises of al-Kindi, Alfarabi, and Avicenna. In principle a *tafsir* merely elucidates the meaning of the text of the Quran, but in practice a *tafsir* may do much more than that, and al-Tustari's *tafsir* was, among other things, an exposition—albeit not always a very systematic one⁴⁹—of an emanationist system. The terminology used is not on the whole philosophical, but the fundamental understandings of reality and of life that emerge are—with some important modifications—not very different from those of Plotinus.

As usual, the starting point is the One, from which emanates the Intelligence, and thus the soul. Much as Alfarabi complicated the original system of Plotinus by dividing the Intelligence into ten levels, al-Tustari introduced a series of emanations that resulted in a hierarchy of types of soul. Highest of all is the Prophet Muhammad, to whose soul al-Tustari assigned a role approximating that given by Plotinus to the Intelligence. Then come the other (lesser) prophets such as Adam and Jesus, and then after them are the other guides, who are identified elsewhere as the *awliya* (saints), and finally there are the ordinary souls, that is, the the common people, or *murids* (seekers).

A very famous passage runs as follows:

God Most High, when he wished to create Muhammad (God's blessings and peace upon him), manifested some of His light. When it attained the veil of majesty, it bowed down in prayer before God. God created from the prostration (*sajda*) a great column like a glass of light, as both his interior and exterior. In it is the essence of Muhammad (God's blessings and peace upon him). He stood in service before the Lord of the Two Worlds [God] for one thousand years . . . God Most High favored him with such a witness a thousand years before the beginning of creation.⁵⁰

The actual human Muhammad is created in a second stage. God created Adam, we are told, from the Muhammadan light, and then created Muhammad's body "from the clay of Adam."⁵¹ Other human beings are in a third, lower class, which is itself divided into two. All human being are "the progeny of Adam," but some are created from the light of Adam and some from the light of Muhammad.⁵²

Abu'l-Qasim al-Junayd

Al-Bistami and al-Tustari were arguably the first Sufis, but they were not called Sufis. The first group to whom this term was applied arose a little later, in Baghdad,⁵³ and included

Abu'l-Qasim al-Junayd, the intellectual and spiritual inheritor of both al-Muhasibi, who taught one of his uncles,⁵⁴ and of al-Tustari, some of whose followers moved to Baghdad and followed al-Junayd after al-Tustari's death in 896.⁵⁵ Al-Junayd and his fellow Sufis were ascetics, who wore patched garments of uncomfortable wool,⁵⁶ a variation on the Christian ascetic device of the hair shirt. The most likely etymology of the word "Sufi" derives from *suf* (wool); therefore, a Sufi was originally a "woolly one." Al-Junayd and his companions practiced *dhikr*, sometimes combined with other practices, including listening to devotional poetry and to music, and sometimes dancing, often in circular movements such as whirling or turning.⁵⁷

Like al-Bistami's and al-Tustari's, al-Junayd's system was also essentially emanationist. He defined the goal of Sufi practice as being the loss of individuality in order to reach *homoiosis*, which he called *fana* (literally, extinction), and which we will call "union." He saw this as a return to a primordial state of relations between the soul and the One. Someone who had achieved *fana*, after returning to individual self-consciousness, "becomes a pattern for his follow men."⁵⁸ This is the theological basis on which a Sufi shaykh becomes a teacher and guide, and agrees with the view of Iamblichus, that those who had achieved *homoiosis* could access and communicate divine knowledge.

Like Plato and Dionysius before him, al-Junayd understood union as something that was possible only for the few, to judge from a letter he wrote to another Sufi: "Be careful with the people. Always we devise some means of camouflaging our words, splitting them and discussing them between ourselves."⁵⁹ Secrecy, then, was a theme of early Sufism.

SUFI CLASSICS

From the ninth century until the present day, as Sufism has spread across the Muslim world, there has been considerably variety in the mix of the elements discussed above: namely, asceticism; spiritual practice such as *muhasaba* and *dhikr*; and emanationist systems drawing on Neoplatonic philosophy, often expressed in Quranic terminology. All Sufis have something of the practice of the ascetic and something of the goal of the Neoplatonic philosopher, but some have emphasized the practice more than the goal, and some have emphasized the goal more than the practice. Some have tended toward a discreet approach, and some toward a more spectacular one. Some have focused on veiling their writings from the many, while some have been quite open. Sufism, then, is not a single, invariable approach, but an umbrella that covers a variety of similar approaches.

Equally, from the ninth century until the present day, Sufism as a whole, and individual Sufis in particular, have been controversial. In early times, opposition came chiefly from certain theologians who objected to the Sufis' anti-rationalism, and from a few who accused the Sufis of sexual impropriety, given that some Sufis had female disciples,⁶⁰

thus producing contact between unmarried persons of different genders which some found scandalous. The most famous early controversy, however, had different causes. In 922, a Sufi by the name of Mansur al-Hallaj was executed for blasphemy, allegedly for arguing that the *hajj* pilgrimage in Mecca could be replaced by *hajj* around a model of the Kaaba in his own house. He was in fact executed for his political challenge to the oppressive Vizier (First Minister), Hamid ibn al-Abbas.⁶¹ Hallaj later became famous for having being executed after saying “I am Truth (*al-Haqq*),” i.e., “I am God” since “the Truth” (*al-Haqq*) is one of the names of God. This famous statement echoes al-Bistami’s “I am He” and even Plotinus’s “It is they who should come to me.” There is, however, no contemporary evidence that al-Hallaj actually spoke these famous words.⁶² Like many of the world’s best stories, it may be apocryphal.

The two most notable Sufis of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Muhammad al-Ghazali and Muhammad ibn Arabi (known as “Muhyi al-Din,” or Reviver of Religion), represent two common but different tendencies within Sufism. They are interesting for this reason. They will also be referred to during the remainder of this book.

Al-Ghazali, who was born and died in Khorasan (in present-day Iran), emphasized practice more than goal. He became the classic exponent of what may be termed “sharia-compliant” Sufism. Ibn Arabi, who was born in al-Andalus (in the Iberian peninsula) and died in Damascus, emphasized the goal more than the practice. Both, however, used emanationist systems. While the influence of Neoplatonism on earlier Sufis such as al-Tustari has to be deduced from their writings, because we know nothing of their sources, we do know that both al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi read and used *The Theology of Aristotle*.⁶³ Ibn Arabi also grew up in a time and place—thirteenth-century al-Andalus—where Neoplatonism was flourishing to a point where, as we will see in the next chapter, it was possible for some to conceive of it as an independent alternative to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

Al-Ghazali

One of al-Ghazali’s best known works is a monumental condemnation of philosophy in two parts: *The Aims of the Philosophers* (*Maqasid al-falasifa*) and *The Confusion of the Philosophers* (*Tahafut al-falasifa*). *The Aims of the Philosophers* sets forth a summary of the philosophers’ teachings, notably those of Alfarabi and Avicenna, while *The Confusion of the Philosophers* then analyzes and condemns them. Despite the use of “the Philosophers” in his title, however, what al-Ghazali was condemning was really rationalism more than philosophy. His central points were that the only real source of truth is revelation, not human reason, and that the only real goal is God.

More important than either of these two works was his *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihya ulum al-din*), which is perhaps the single most influential Sufi work ever written. It is massive, consisting of forty books arranged in four long volumes. These volumes deal first with religious practice, then with general behavior, then with vices, and finally with virtues. The volume on religious practice covers the standard practices

of Islam, as well as Sufi topics such as *dhikr*. The volume on general behavior covers most aspects of normal life, starting with eating and moving through marriage to earning a living and then on to topics such as travel; it also covers specifically Sufi topics such as retreat (*khalwa*). The volume on vices deals with such topics as envy, greed, and pride; it also covers self-deception. Finally, the volume on virtues deals with standard virtues such as steadfastness and thankfulness, and also with the Sufi technique of *muhasaba*.⁶⁴

The Revival of the Religious Sciences integrates Sufi practices into the standard practices of Islam, as found in the sharia. It gives priority to the standard practices, but often introduces Sufi emphases into its treatment of them. Its presentation is remarkably clear and systematic, as one might expect from an author trained in law, philosophy, and logic, as al-Ghazali was. This, together with its encyclopedic reach, is no doubt one reason for its enduring popularity. Another reason is probably that it shifts the emphasis from *what* should be done or not done (the concerns of the standard scholar of the sharia) to *why* particular things should be done or not done. Other such encyclopedic guides to life tend to focus on correct behavior is correct, without investigating why it matters. Al-Ghazali presents everything as a means to a single end.

Al-Ghazali makes a fundamental distinction between two branches of knowledge: “practical religion” (*muamalat*) and what he calls “disclosure” (*makashifa*) and glosses as “the esoteric” (*al-batin*).⁶⁵ He declares in the introduction to *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* that his aim is to cover practical religion, not the esoteric,⁶⁶ and he generally keeps to this aim. When he does not, however, his conception of the esoteric seems to conform to the emanationist system that became associated with Sufism in the days of al-Bistami and al-Tustari, whether or not al-Ghazali himself was a Neoplatonist.⁶⁷ “Disclosure,” writes al-Ghazali, is

a light which shines in the heart when it is cleansed and purified of its blameworthy qualities. Through this light is revealed . . . the meaning of meeting God and seeing His gracious face; the meaning of being close to Him and of occupying a place in His proximity; the meaning of attaining happiness through communion with the heavenly hosts and association with the angels and the prophets.⁶⁸

Such things are “are not recorded in books and are not discussed by him whom God has blessed with any of them except among his own circle of intimates who partake with him of them through discourses and secret communication.”⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali accordingly refuses to discuss them much further in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. He briefly alludes to disagreements about such things, including whether or not it is the case that “the limit to which our knowledge of God can reach is to admit the inability to know Him,”⁷⁰ something close to the familiar position that the One cannot be spoken of. In another and very short work, *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkat al-anwar*), which some believe was not actually intended for publication, al-Ghazali briefly goes further,

distinguishing explicitly between God and the One, accepting and using the system of Alfarabi and Avicenna.⁷¹

Elsewhere, al-Ghazali pauses to regret the “great harm” caused to “common folk” by reported sayings such as the “I am Truth” attributed to al-Hallaj, and similar sayings of al-Bistami. Al-Bistami, says al-Ghazali, cannot actually have said what he is purported to have said, and if he did, he was probably “repeating to himself words about God,” and these words should never have been taken as anything but a quotation.⁷² Such ideas “spread like fire” as they fascinate the ignorant, for whom they offer both an excuse to “desist from endeavor” and inflate the *nafs*. Such people then employ the technical vocabulary of Sufism, talking of stations (*maqam*) and states (*hal*), of the reality of which they know nothing.⁷³

For al-Ghazali, then, esoteric disclosure is dangerous for all but the few; and practical religious practice is the necessary first step or stage before the esoteric. Given that “rust resulting from the filth of this world [has] accumulated over the surface of the mirror of [the human] heart,” practical religion is needed “to remove from the surface of this mirror that filth which bars the knowing of God.”⁷⁴ Once that has been achieved, disclosure is possible.

Although *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* focuses on practice, not the goal, then, al-Ghazali’s understanding of the goal is occasionally visible, and when it is, it is emanationist. Some later and less widely read books ascribed to him, the authorship of which is disputed, do deal with the goal, despite the condemnation in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* of writing about such things. If these books are indeed by al-Ghazali, they certainly confirm that his understandings were Neoplatonic.⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali, however, was not only the classic exponent of Sharia-compliant Sufism, but also a classic exponent of the need to keep the esoteric secret.

Ibn Arabi

The only possible rival of al-Ghazali’s *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* as the most important and influential Sufi work ever written is the work of Ibn Arabi, who deals with goal more than practice. As Ian Richard Netton points out, there is something paradoxical about the work of Ibn Arabi: it is on the one hand extremely difficult, and on the other hand enduringly popular.⁷⁶ Perhaps this is because, despite its difficulty, it provides more scope for exploration by those seeking the One than is available anywhere else. As William Chittick says, the vast majority of Sufis have never read Ibn Arabi, and would not understand him if they did, since they lack the necessary conceptual training.⁷⁷ However, for those who did have something of that training, the language, concepts, and perspectives of Ibn Arabi have, since his death, provided the crucial framework for Sufi theology.

Ibn Arabi died in Damascus, but was born in al-Andalus. He thus belongs on the one hand to the general world of Sufism and philosophy that has already been explored, and

on the other hand also to the very particular world of Andalusī thought which, as we will see, also included Arab Jewish Neoplatonists.

Born in Murcia in 1165, Ibn Arabī left al-Andalus at the age of thirty, and spent twenty-six years traveling widely, until he finally settled in Damascus some time between 1221 and 1230. There he died in 1240, aged seventy-five. He was a prolific writer. His most famous work, *The Meccan Openings* (*Al-futūḥat al-Makkiyya*), deals with the “opening” of the door between the material world and the One.⁷⁸ It consists of six books divided into no less than 560 chapters, and it was written over the course of thirty years, starting in Mecca in 1201.⁷⁹ The books deal with knowledge of the One (*maʾarifa*), divine knowledge (*malumat*), and then various types of spiritual experience: the transient state (*ḥal*), the abode (*manzil*), the encounter (*munazal*), and, finally, the station (*maqam*). Equally famous is *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-ḥikam*), written in Damascus, and said to have been dictated by the Prophet. In addition, Ibn Arabī left some three or four hundred other texts.⁸⁰

Ibn Arabī drew on many sources, notably the Qurʾān and the Hadīth. As James W. Morris argues, however, his “actual use and understanding of those scriptural languages is inseparable from the elaborate corresponding terminologies of Islamic philosophy, science and theology.”⁸¹ Among his other sources were the emanationist Sufis al-Junayd, al-Bistāmī, al-Hallaj, and al-Ghazālī,⁸² as well as an Andalusī Neoplatonist, Ibn Masarra.⁸³ He had at his disposal not only the Arab philosophers, but also *The Theology of Aristotle*. Like the volume of his writings, the variety of his sources makes analysis difficult. As Ahmed Ateş notes, analysis is made even more difficult by the way in which Ibn Arabī “may use as interchangeable equivalents terms with different meanings taken from . . . varying sources.”⁸⁴

Ibn Arabī’s scheme was the familiar one of an unknowable One who is “neither the effect nor the cause of anything,”⁸⁵ sometimes called “the One” (*al-wahid*) but most often called “the necessary being” (*al-wujūd al-wajib*)⁸⁶ or “the nondelimited being” (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*).⁸⁷ The One can only be described by negatives.⁸⁸ Intelligence and soul are produced from the One by emanation, “explained,” according to Ateş, “in a very confused manner.”⁸⁹ The Intelligence is called both “intelligence” (*aql*) and the “Muhammādan reality” (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*), and is described in part in terms that go back to the philosophers of antiquity, though the geometric image used by Ibn Arabī is not the triangle but the rectangle, which may appear in material form as “a room, a bier, and a sheet of paper.” The Intelligence is produced through God’s manifestation through “His light,” and the soul links man to the Intelligence as the throne of God (*ʿarsh*) is linked to the footstool (*kursī*): here Ibn Arabī is switching, in characteristic fashion, from philosophical terminology to Qurʾānic imagery.⁹⁰ Ibn Arabī, like al-Tustarī, sees God as both One and Intelligence, a view in support of which he quotes from the Qurʾān: “There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the all-Hearing, the all-Seeing.”⁹¹

Some (but far from all) humans can make the journey back toward the One, a journey which divided into two stages: the journey back to junction with the Intelligence; and

then the journey toward the One, called the “journey in God,” the final goal of which can never be reached, as it is impossible to unite with that which one is already part of.⁹² The start of the journey is through ascetic practices: silence, withdrawal from society, fasting, and wakefulness. This, combined with purity of intention (*ikhlas*), leads first to love and then to passion (*ishq*), and so to God. Finally, the veil that hides God from humans is drawn aside, and the traveler achieves union (*wasl*).⁹³

The journey back is both extremely complex and extremely simple. It is complex because Ibn Arabi follows Alfarabi in dividing the Intelligence into multiple spheres, and follows Avicenna in associating those spheres with persons and qualities—not with angels as Avicenna did, but with prophets.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, the multiple spheres are alternatively mapped onto God’s ninety-nine names.⁹⁵ It is simple, however, because Ibn Arabi agrees with Plotinus in placing subsequent emanations *within* the One. “You are in the Garden [of heaven], transformed, in whatever state you happen to be, but you do not know you are in it, because you are veiled from it by the form in which it manifests itself to you.”⁹⁶ It is unclear how this characteristically Plotinian position reached Ibn Arabi. Thereafter, it remained part of Sufi theology.

The journey back is also a preparation for death. “The final outcome . . . is the return from the many to the One, for both the man of faith and the polytheist.” For the person of faith who returns to the One before death, death changes nothing: his or her soul is already with God, and all that death can mean is that his or her soul “is kept from governing this body that it used to govern.”⁹⁷ For the polytheist and the person who first encounters the One at death, however, “although the final outcome is also felicity, however that is only after the imposition of torments and afflictions with respect to the person who is punished for his sins.”⁹⁸

Ibn Arabi, then, is sometimes using terminology that is clearly Neoplatonic, as when the One gives rise to the Intelligence, and sometimes using terminology that is clearly Islamic or Quranic, as when the Intelligence becomes the Muhammadan reality and the soul becomes the footstool. The basic underlying system, however, derives from Plotinus through various layers of reinterpretation, both philosophical and Sufi, with additions appropriate for an Islamic context, such as the reconciliation of the Neoplatonic conception of the return to the One with the Islamic conception of death and judgment.

Ibn Tufayl

One last Sufi author needs to be considered before we move on: Muhammad ibn Tufayl, who was born in al-Andalus around the time of the death of al-Ghazali, and who may have influenced Ibn Arabi.⁹⁹ Ibn Tufayl does not have the status of either his predecessor or his successor, but is famous for one work, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, later the first Sufi work to become widely known in the West. This book is a basic course in Neoplatonic philosophy, cast within the framework of a tale which ends making much the point that al-Ghazali made: that certain truths are not for the common folk. It draws primarily

on al-Ghazali's *Niche of Lights* and on Avicenna, as Ibn Tufayl explains in his introduction, quoting in passing from al-Bistami and al-Hallaj.¹⁰⁰ It was the fruit of Ibn Tufayl's attempt to reconcile philosophy and religion, according to a biographer writing some fifty years after Ibn Tufayl's death.¹⁰¹ The *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* is now generally categorized as philosophical rather than Sufi, as it has generally been studied by scholars of philosophy rather than of Sufism.¹⁰² As we will see, however, it covers practice as well as theology.

Ibn Tufayl was born near Granada into a scholarly family in about 1116, and studied philosophy and medicine. He served as an official in the Almohad state of Caliph Yusuf I in northwest Africa,¹⁰³ and began to follow Sufi practices in Marakesh, the Almohad capital, where Sufism was even more influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy than in al-Andalus itself.¹⁰⁴ He had a distinguished career as court physician to the Caliph, a post he bequeathed upon his retirement to a younger philosopher, Averroës (Muhammad ibn Rushd). Like other courtier-scholars of the place and time, he was also a poet.¹⁰⁵

There is mention of a philosophical work by Ibn Tufayl on the *naḥs*,¹⁰⁶ but this did not survive, and Ibn Tufayl's philosophy is known only from his fictional biography of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, whose name, taken from a book of the same title by Avicenna, literally means "Alive son of Awake" (it sounds more or less like a normal name in Arabic). Hayy grows up from infancy to maturity alone on a small island, there being two alternative versions of how he comes to be there: either because he was the abandoned son of a princess who did not want her father to realize that she had given birth; or as a result of self-generation. After initially being reared by a female deer, Hayy works out for himself how to make clothing and weapons, how to provide himself with shelter and food, and how to use fire. He also works out (and this is what takes up most of the text) the scheme of emanation of Neoplatonic philosophy, starting with the animal soul and working slowly upwards, over a period of years, to the One.¹⁰⁷ As well as working out the Neoplatonic scheme, Hayy works out that his own individual soul should return to the One, and that this return is best achieved by separating himself from this world by ascetic practice, primarily fasting, and by turning,¹⁰⁸ a practice which was used by some early Sufis in Baghdad, was presumably also used by some Sufis who Ibn Tufayl knew, and is now characteristic of the Mevlevis and sometimes called "whirling." By these means, he attains union, described in a section drawing heavily on Avicenna and al-Ghazali.¹⁰⁹

These discoveries make up most of Ibn Tufayl's book. A shorter last section, however, tells a story of a somewhat different kind, making two points. On a nearby island live two friends, Salman and Absal.¹¹⁰ Salman, we are told, devotes himself to the exoteric sharia, while Absal devotes himself to more esoteric practice, although he still observes the sharia scrupulously as well.¹¹¹ Absal decides on a retreat, and can think of nowhere better to find solitude than a small nearby island. This is, of course, Hayy's island. The two men meet. Absal teaches Hayy to speak, and explains Islam to him. Hayy is entirely in agreement. His own conclusions (i.e., philosophy) and revelation agree,¹¹² the first of two points made in the closing section, though Hayy does not understand why in the

Quran the truth is veiled in parable, or why the sharia contains so many rules for dealing with material possessions.

Hayy and Absal then take a passing ship back to Absal's island. Hayy tries to teach the truths that he has worked out on his own island, but people understand only the basics, and their failure to understand the remainder makes them angry with him.¹¹³ Hayy now understands why the Quran clothes the truth in parable and why the sharia regulates the material, and tells everyone that perhaps they should follow the exoteric way after all. This is the second point made in the book's final section: namely, that the esoteric is not for the common people, or rather not for "cattle," as Ibn Tufayl calls them, borrowing a Quranic verse that originally referred to the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad, not to ordinary Muslims.¹¹⁴ Hayy and Absal then return to Hayy's island, where they live the remainder of their days.

The contents of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* are unremarkable. The framing story of the child growing to manhood on an island had been used before,¹¹⁵ the philosophy explained is not new, and the point that this philosophy agrees with revealed religion is stated more than shown. That the esoteric is not for the masses, the point with which the book ends, was also not a new idea. The book as a whole, however, deserves its fame. The tale itself is well told, and framing a philosophy course inside a tale makes it much easier reading. The course itself is very well done: clear, easily followed, and comprehensive. These are no mean achievements. *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* is one of the earliest works of popular philosophy, and may even be the most successful such work ever written. Its philosophy is Neoplatonic (though with some other additions), and the practice described—ascetic withdrawal and turning—is essentially Sufi, though admittedly one important element of Sufi practice is missing: Hayy follows no spiritual master.¹¹⁶

Sufi Organization

Although Hayy followed no spiritual master, most Sufis do. The standard Sufi organizational model came to emphasize the spiritual guide (*murshid*) or elder (*shaykh*), the oath of fealty (*baya*) to him, and his spiritual genealogy (*silsila*). The idea of a spiritual guide derives in part from Neoplatonism. As we have seen, Iamblichus and al-Junayd both understood the guide as one who, having achieved union with God, was able to guide others toward such union. The idea of the spiritual guide, however, also exists quite independently of Neoplatonism, being found in almost all religions. The same is true of all the other individual elements in the Sufi organizational model. The idea of an elder also exists quite independently: the same title as is used in Sufism, *shaykh*, is also used in Arabic for the master of a guild or the leader of a tribe. The *baya*, the oath of fealty that is sworn to a Sufi shaykh, is also sworn, albeit in a different way and for different purposes, to the shaykh of a tribe, or indeed to a king. Similarly, the spiritual genealogy in the form of the *silsila* (literally, chain) is unique to Sufism, but the basic idea of a list of people through which something has been transmitted is also found in the supporting

ascription (*isnad*) of a Hadith. The early history of a Hadith is documented in the form of a list of those through whom it was transmitted, a list normally ending with the name of the person who heard the Prophet say whatever is being reported in the Hadith. An *isnad* does exactly the same thing, and also normally ends in the Prophet, though it records and legitimizes the transmission of teaching in general, not of one particular teaching as is the case with a *silsila*. The elements of the Sufi organizational model, then, are all fairly standard when taken individually. It is when they are taken together that they become distinctive, and define the Sufi *tariqa* (order), the standard organizational form of Sufism.

The importance of the guide (*murshid*) or shaykh (the terms are often used interchangeably) in this organizational model places limits on the size of any *tariqa*, because some degree of personal contact between guide and guided (*murid*) or follower is required. Very large numbers of Sufis can follow a dead shaykh, in the sense of honoring his memory and teachings, but only a few hundred can normally follow a living shaykh. This is one reason why very many individual *tariqas* exist simultaneously. Another reason is that the death of a shaykh generally triggers a crisis, sometimes resolved when a successor is generally accepted by all the followers of the deceased shaykh, and sometimes resolved by a split in the following, by which one *tariqa* under one shaykh becomes two new *tariqas* under two new shaykhs. New *tariqas* are thus being born all the time, and old *tariqas* may, in time, die.¹¹⁷ Many living shaykhs may, however, follow the memory and teachings one dead shaykh, in which they are followed by their own followers. The Sufi organizational model is thus two-tier: at a grassroots level, a *tariqa* consists of a living shaykh and those individuals who have given him an oath of fealty; and at a conceptual level a *tariqa* consists of all those who follow the memory and teachings of a dead shaykh. A conceptual-level *tariqa*, then, includes a number of grassroots *tariqas*. The grassroots *tariqa* is the significant organizational unit; the conceptual-level *tariqa* is more of memory, teaching, and practice.

Sufism was institutionalized into *tariqas*, and was also institutionalized by receiving the support of the scholarly class (ulema) and the patronage of the rich and powerful. Islam, famously, has no priesthood. Any Muslim can lead the ritual prayer (*salat*), conduct a marriage or a funeral, or preach a sermon. Islam does, however, have religious experts, ranging from those who have learned to recite the Quran well while leading a prayer, or have studied enough to preach a good sermon, to those who have devoted their lives to the study of difficult exegetical or theological questions. These religious experts together form the scholarly class or ulema. It is not clear quite when members of the ulema started joining Sufi *tariqas*, and in some cases then started leading them, but it is clear that this happened, and that a Sufi establishment thus emerged to become part of the general religious establishment, alongside the ulema and a third group, the *sharifs*, or those who descended from the Prophet.

This Sufi establishment enjoyed the patronage of the rich and powerful, like other Islamic institutions such as the mosque, the school, and the hospital. This patronage

allowed some Sufi *tariqas* to acquire property: Sufi lodges (Arabic *ribat* or *zawiya*, Persian *khanqa*, Turkish *tekke*) were established, containing rooms for members of a *tariqa* to meet and cells for individual Sufis to stay in, perhaps for one night, perhaps for forty nights, or perhaps for extended periods.¹¹⁸ Charitable foundations (*waqf*) were set up to finance the maintenance of some of these lodges. The geography of the Muslim was also marked by the tombs of revered shaykhs, which became destinations for visitation and prayer. Stories of the miracles (*karamat*) worked through revered *shaykhs* became a literary genre in their own right.

3

Jewish and Christian Emanationism

ARAB PHILOSOPHY, AS we have seen, adapted Neoplatonism to monotheism and thus gave Sufism its distinctive theological framework, expounded in classic form by Ibn Arabi and in more easily comprehensible form by Ibn Tufayl. When that same Arab philosophy was read in Paris in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, one result was the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Christianity was not the only religion which was impacted by Arab Neoplatonism, however. A third monotheistic religion, Judaism, also encountered it, and the resulting Jewish Neoplatonism was one of the sources of the Christian Neoplatonism of Eckhart, along with Arab Neoplatonism and late antique Christian sources such as Dionysius. Neoplatonism also contributed an essential ingredient to the emergence of a Jewish parallel to Sufism: the Kabbalah. Finally, Sufism itself briefly appeared in a Jewish version in Egypt, though—unlike the Kabbalah—this Jewish Sufism did not survive.

JEWISH NEOPLATONISM

Jewish Neoplatonism is most closely associated with al-Andalus (in the Iberian peninsula), the homeland of Ibn Arabi. Al-Andalus was politically independent of the Abbasid Caliphate, but was part of the same intellectual world, sharing the same dominant language of Arabic, and the same dominant religion of Islam. Andalusi Jews were in many ways second-class citizens in comparison to Andalusi Muslims, but many were prosperous and successful nonetheless. Some of them combined the study of philosophy with other occupations, often medicine. These Jewish scholars were proficient in Arabic as well as in Hebrew,¹ and in cultural, intellectual, and linguistic terms can properly be described as Arab Jews.

Three Arab Jews whose names are well known among educated Jews today, if not among gentiles, lived in al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Two were poets as well as philosophers: Solomon ibn Gabirol (sometimes known in the West as Avicbron), and Judah Ha-Levi. The third was a great religious scholar and a towering figure in his community as well as a philosopher: Maimonides (Musa ibn Maymun). Maimonides was born in Cordoba, al-Andalus but moved to Cairo, where he became the political leader of Egypt's Jewish community. The thought of all three of these great Arab Jews was heavily indebted to the Neoplatonism that formed part of the elite culture in which they participated, but each reacted to it differently. While Ibn Gabirol was sometimes more of a Neoplatonist than a Jew, Ha-Levi preferred Judaism to Neoplatonism. Maimonides, finally, attempted to reconcile philosophy and Judaism.

After the death of Maimonides, his son Abraham ibn Musa not only defended his father's work, but also attempted to go further, by combining Sufism with Judaism to produce Egyptian Hasidism (not to be confused with the eighteenth-century Eastern European movement of the same name). Abraham argued that the Sufis remembered truths that were of Jewish origin but which the Jews themselves had forgotten. This is the earliest known example of a non-Muslim reception of Sufism, and also the earliest known example of the argument that Sufism is not actually Islamic, an argument that we will see becoming standard in the modern West.

The encounter of Neoplatonism with Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, then, produced Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Neoplatonism. It also led to Sufism in Islam and to the Kabbalah in Judaism, and the encounter of Sufism with Judaism then also produced Egyptian Hasidism. Logically, then, one might expect a Christian form of Sufism in this period, in addition to the Western forms of Sufism that did actually appear in the modern West. It is possible that there were, in fact, Christian forms of Sufism, perhaps including the Spanish practice of *recogimiento* (remembrance). The history of Spanish mysticism is complicated, however, and it was unfortunately impossible to research it adequately while preparing this book.

Ibn Gabirol

Solomon ibn Gabirol lived in the eleventh century. What is now considered his major philosophical work, *The Fountain of Life* (*Yanbu al-haya*),² was little known in Jewish circles. It was written in Arabic, and although it was translated into Latin (as *Fons Vitae*) in the twelfth century, a Hebrew translation had to wait until the twentieth century.³ Ibn Gabirol was a reader of *The Theology of Aristotle*,⁴ and *The Fountain of Life* has so little Jewish content that the fact that its author was a Jew escaped the many readers of the Latin translation until 1859.⁵ *The Fountain of Life* is an important work of philosophy, but is a work of philosophy written by a Jew, not a work of Jewish philosophy.

Though *The Fountain of Life* shows Ibn Gabriol to have been a competent philosopher, he is most famous for his poetry, which was written in Hebrew and clearly Jewish, but was also very Neoplatonic in tone and influence. He has been called “the new David,” that is, the poet thought to have produced the finest Hebrew verse since the Psalms.⁶ His greatest Hebrew poem, *Kingdom’s Crown* (*Keter malkhut*), was so widely appreciated that it became a standard part of the liturgy for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the holiest day of the Jewish liturgical calendar. It starts, after a short introduction, with the One:

Thou art One, the first of every number, and
 The foundation of every structure,
 Thou art One, and at the mystery of Thy Oneness the wise of heart are
 struck dumb,
 For they know not what it is.⁷

It soon moves on to the goal of the philosopher, alluding to the function of purifications (following Plotinus) on the path:

Thou art Light celestial, and the eyes of the pure shall behold Thee
 But the clouds of sin shall veil Thee from the eyes of the sinners.⁸

A point that was not made by Plotinus, but which was also made by some Islamic theologians, is also made: that all conceptions of the One are, ultimately, equally wrong, and equally right:

Thou art God, and all things formed are Thy servants and worshippers.
 Yet is not Thy glory diminished by reason of those that worship aught
 beside Thee,
 For the yearning of them all is to draw nigh Thee.⁹

This is an early form of a position that this book will term “universalism.”

Ibn Gabriol then moves through various spheres of Intelligence until *Kingdom’s Crown* reaches the throne, and then moves down again to consider the Soul.¹⁰ Unlike *The Fountain of Life*, then, *Kingdom’s Crown* is a work of specifically Jewish Neoplatonism, philosophical in inspiration, inspirational and liturgical in effect.

Judah Ha-Levi

Another celebrated poet was Judah Ha-Levi, born a generation after Ibn Gabriol, in the last quarter of the eleventh century. As a young man, Ha-Levi wrote highly

secular poetry on the fashionable Arab themes of love, wine, and beautiful gazelles.¹¹ At the end of his life, he focused more on religious topics, and wrote *A Defense and an Argument on Behalf of the Abased Religion* (*Kitab al-radd wa'l-dalil fi'l-din al-dhalil*), often called the *Kitab al-Khazari*. This work is counted by Michael Berger as one of the two most widely read and influential works in medieval Jewish thought.¹² The *Kitab al-Khazari* was written for educated Arab Jews such as himself: it was in Arabic, but used Hebrew script. It takes the form of a series of dialogues and monologues, set in the ninth century in the Khazar kingdom, a territory between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea that had once stretched south from the Don river (now in Russia) to the northern border of today's Azerbaijan. As Ha-Levi knew, King Bulan, a Turkic tribal ruler in this area, had converted to Judaism, in which he was followed by his subjects. This unusual move was in fact probably partly for political reasons, as the king was trying to maintain a neutral position between Muslim and Christian neighbors,¹³ but the king's politics was not what interested Ha-Levi. In the *Kitab al-Khazari*, the king has a dream in which he is warned by an angel that his behavior, as a follower of the pagan Khazar religion, is not pleasing to God. He therefore questions representatives of the major religions, finding their presentations inadequate until at last a Jewish rabbi convinces him. Most of the book consists of the speech of the Jewish rabbi in favor of Judaism. Before the rabbi, however, a Christian is questioned, and before him a Muslim, and before him—right at the beginning of the book—a philosopher.

Ha-Levi's philosopher provides a concise summary of what is essentially the emanationist system, though he does not always cast it in its most appealing light. The philosopher explains that God is actually the first cause, and that the earth exists as a result of a series of three emanations (presumably of the Intelligence, the Soul, and matter, though these are not named). Given that God is a remote first cause, He "does not know you, much less your thoughts and actions, nor does He listen to your prayers, or see your movements."¹⁴

A philosopher, it is explained, studies and trains to actualize his innate perfection. He understands that a "light of divine nature, called Active Intellect" is in him, and once he has reached perfection through purification, "the soul of the perfected man and that Intellect become One." Once this has happened to someone, they need not be "concerned about the revealed law that you follow, or your religion or your worship," though the king might want to choose a religion "for the management of your temperament, your house and the people of your country, if they agree to it."¹⁵ This utilitarian understanding of religion echoes Marcus Terentius Varro's views on the usefulness of "civic theology," and will be found again in eighteenth-century Europe.

The king accepts that this is convincing, but objects that "true visions are granted to persons who do not devote themselves to study or to the purification of their souls, whereas the opposite is the case with those who strive after these things."¹⁶ He then turns to the Muslim, the Christian, and, finally, the Jew. At the very end of the book, the Jew

comes back to the question of philosophy, which is again granted to be convincing in its own terms, and again condemned on empirical grounds: what are we to make of a philosopher who, “having arrived at the extreme limit of philosophic speculation, is stricken by melancholy or depression”?¹⁷ One wonders whether Ha-Levi himself had seen, or suffered, some personal tragedy that had convinced him of the futility of philosophy.

Ha-Levi’s presentation of Neoplatonic philosophy, in the early twelfth century, as an independent alternative to the three religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity may perhaps have been for rhetorical effect. It does not mean that anyone else actually saw it like that, though perhaps some Jews in al-Andalus did indeed see philosophy as an independent alternative to Judaism and Islam, one where Jews and Muslims could meet as equals—what Berger calls “a cosmopolitan relativism.”¹⁸ Whether or not this is true, Ha-Levi’s presentation of Neoplatonic philosophy shows quite how developed it had become in Ibn Arabi’s al-Andalus. It also provides an early (if fictional) instance of a phenomenon that we will see again in modern Europe, the taking of Neoplatonic and related systems not as supplements to religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, but as alternatives to them.

Maimonides

The greatest Jewish scholar to be influenced by philosophy, however, followed in the next generation: Musa ibn Maymun, known in the West as Maimonides, the author of the celebrated *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dalalat al-hairin*). This work (again, written in Arabic) is devoted to resolving the apparent contradictions between philosophy and Judaism, which might otherwise produce perplexity when truths established by philosophy seem to contradict those of scripture.¹⁹ It is the second work counted by Berger, along with the *Kitab al-Khazari*, among the two widely read and influential works in medieval Jewish thought.²⁰ Part exegesis (like al-Tustari’s *tafsir*) and part philosophical treatise, it is divided into three major sections: one dealing with the nature of God; one with the origins of the universe; and one with the God’s commandments to humanity, which are explained in terms of their function,²¹ in ways reminiscent of al-Ghazali. It is deliberately difficult, designed to be accessible only to those who were already well-educated in both philosophy and Judaism,²² presumably so as not to perplex those who were not already perplexed. It has also been argued that it was written on two levels: a surface level where its conclusions agreed with the views of the rabbis; and a deeper level where it agreed instead with the views of the philosophers.²³ In any event, it displays a thorough familiarity with ancient, Hellenistic, and Arab philosophy, especially Aristotle.

In resolving contradictions between the Torah and philosophy, Maimonides’s general approach is to stress the wider meaning of words. The Torah, he explains, is addressed to all. Not everyone can understand the mysteries and secrets of creation, so the Torah often uses metaphor. The account of the creation, for example, is not to be taken

literally.²⁴ When God says “Let us make man in our image,”²⁵ “image” refers to essence: it does not mean that man actually looks like God, or God like man. And when God made man, he did so through the agency of what philosophers call the Intelligence, which is termed “angels” in religious parlance. Later he refers specifically to the Active Intellect. God is the Ultimate Cause, and as such cannot be defined, save negatively.²⁶ The Torah teaches how perfection of mind may be achieved—a view which, as Herbert Davidson recognized, risks reducing it to “a propaedeutic for the study of philosophy.”²⁷ The commandments (*mitzvot*) of the halacha (Jewish sharia) are examined. Some, such as the prohibition on wearing garments of wool and linen woven together, are explained in terms of setting the Jews apart from pagans, whose priests (Maimonides supposed) once wore such garments. Others, such as the requirement for prayer, teach people to turn away from the world and focus on God. But the highest form of worship, Maimonides concludes, is “thought (*fikra*) unaccompanied by any act whatsoever.” Ultimately, “to keep silent is to praise [God].” Those who think or talk about God without philosophical understanding “are not truly talking about God and thinking about Him at all. For what they have in their imagination and talk about corresponds to nothing whatsoever that exists and is merely a figment of their imagination.”²⁸

Even though the *Guide for the Perplexed* succeeds in its objectives in resolving contradictions between the Torah and philosophy, it still left many perplexed. It was a controversial work,²⁹ and no less than eight commentaries were written on it during the thirteenth century.³⁰ In the view of Moshe Idel, its main impact was that it produced “an intellectual awakening that prompted scholars of opposing schools to sort out their ideas.”³¹

The Kabbalah

The Neoplatonism of Ibn Gabriol and Ha-Levi contributed to the development of what is in some ways a Jewish parallel to Sufism, the Kabbalah (literally, “receiving,” or “tradition”). The origins of the Kabbalah lie in southern France in the twelfth century, and then also in Girona, part of northern Iberia under Christian control.³² Rather as in Islam we find proto-Sufism before Neoplatonism, so in Judaism we find a form of proto-Kabbalah, the Merkabah tradition. This tradition, which appears in mature form after the third century, derives from interpretations of the Book of Ezekiel, with its apocalyptic visions of God riding in a chariot (*merkaba*). It developed a vision of ascent through seven heavens to a vision of the glory of God.³³ This vision does not seem to derive from late antique philosophy. The conception of the seven heavens is a very ancient one. It proved, however, easily compatible with emanationism.

The system of the early Kabbalists, as found in the *Book of Brilliance* (*Sefer ha-bahir*) and in the work of the Kabbalists of Provence, is emanationist. Creation is manifested through ten divine emanations, called *sefirot*, which constitute a cosmic tree.³⁴ The first verse of Genesis (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the

earth”) is understood as describing a process whereby the Intelligence emanated from the One (*ein sof*, “no end,” infinity) and, whereby the earth (*malchut*, the kingdom) finally emanated from the Intelligence, with a number of intermediate stages, *sefirot*, in between. *Ein sof* is, in standard fashion, seen both as unchanging and as beyond comprehension, and emanation is understood in terms of light. The return towards *ein sof* is achieved partly through prayer,³⁵ and partly through scrupulous observance of God’s commandments. The basic system of the Kabbalah, then, is much the same as the basic system of al-Tustari.

There is agreement that the early Kabbalah shows the impact of Neoplatonism, both among many modern scholars and among some Jewish scholars of the time. The thirteenth-century Kabbalist Azriel of Girona, for example, argued that philosophy and Kabbalah were essentially the same, though “the Philosophers did not give the appropriate names to the various parts [of reality]” because they did not know them, unlike the Kabbalists, who did know them.³⁶ Another thirteenth-century Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia, likewise argued that Kabbalah represented a compromise between philosophy and the Torah.³⁷ Though the influence of Neoplatonism is clear, however, the route of transmission is not. It might have been through *The Theology of Aristotle*, which was available in Hebrew translation, or it might have been by some other route. The sefirotic tree has been compared to the Tree of Being (*shajarat al-wujud*) of Ibn Arabi, and it has been suggested that the *Book of Splendor* (*Sefer ha-zohar*), a key early text, might have been written by an exile from al-Andalus, given that its Hebrew shows the influence of Arabic, and that there are a number of references to Sufi concepts.³⁸

The early Kabbalah, then, seems to bear the same relationship to Neoplatonism as early Sufism does. The Kabbalah is not just Jewish Neoplatonism, however, exactly as Sufism is not just Islamic Neoplatonism. There are clearly other ingredients in the origins of the Kabbalah, just as there are other ingredients in the origins of Sufism. The theology of the Kabbalah, however, is clearly indebted to Neoplatonism, just as the theology of Sufism is. The Kabbalah, though parallel to Sufism in some ways, differs in other ways. Most importantly, there is no echo in Sufism of the central Kabbalistic idea of a break in the divine system, or of the idea that human beings can, through scrupulous observance of God’s commandments, fix the divine break.³⁹

JEWISH SUFISM

Just as some Arab Jews were interested in philosophy, so some were interested in Sufism. The store (*geniza*) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, a trove of documents from the ninth century onwards that was excavated in 1896, contained several texts on Sufism, both in Arabic and in Hebrew transliteration, including al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi.⁴⁰ Sufi influences are clear in one Andalusí Jewish work: the *Duties of the Hearts* (*Faraid al-qulub*) of Bahya ibn Paquda. This explains the Sufi emanationist scheme of return to

the One through the standard spiritual stages.⁴¹ Ibn Paquda is one important source of the Neoplatonism of Ibn Gabirol's *Kingdom's Crown*.⁴²

The most important Jewish Sufi, however, was Abraham ibn Musa, the son of Maimonides. Like many other Jewish scholars and philosophers, Maimonides had also been a physician, and had served at the Ayyubid court in Cairo. He was also head of the Jewish community in Egypt (*rais al-yahud* or *nagid*). Abraham succeeded to this position upon the death of his father, when Abraham was eighteen years old.⁴³ Abraham defended the work and views of his father and also went further than him, attempting to reconcile Judaism not only with philosophy, but also with Sufism.

Abraham attempted to reconcile Judaism with Sufism partly through writing and partly through practical measures. His major work was the *Complete Guide for the Servants [of God]* (*Kifayat al-Abidin*) which some have compared to al-Ghazali's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, and which combined Judaism, something close to Sufism, and philosophy. As the section dealing with the mystic path has been lost, it is impossible to say quite how close to Sufi theology Abraham actually was.⁴⁴ As head of the Jewish community, he was also in a position to make changes at a practical level, and he and some others, identified as Hasidim (pietists), followed the standard Sufi practices of fasting, retreat (*khalwa*), and *dhikr*.⁴⁵ Furthermore, they also introduced some standard Islamic practices into prayer, including ablutions and prostration (*sujud*).⁴⁶

These efforts met with considerable criticism.⁴⁷ His defense echoed Azriel of Girona's argument that the philosophers were actually expressing the truths of Judaism, though they did not know the correct terms. The ways of "these Sufis of Islam," wrote Abraham, were "the ways of the early saints [*awliya*] of Israel" which were "not prevalent or little prevalent among our moderns." "The Sufis imitate the prophets [of Israel] and walk in their footsteps, not the prophets in theirs," he asserted.⁴⁸ Implicit in this argument is the idea that what appears to be Islamic in Sufi practice is in fact older than Islam (dating to the Jewish prophets), and that Sufism is thus a repository of ancient truth. Abraham did not make this argument explicitly, but as we will see, this is precisely the argument which later became a standard understanding of Sufism in the modern West. Ibrahim's phrase "Sufis of Islam [*al-mutasawwifin min al-islam*]" implies that there are Sufis who are not associated with Islam—an understanding that also later became standard in the West.

Abraham's modification of Jewish ritual might be compared with modifications made during the nineteenth century by Reform Jews, who introduced organs and pews and the use of local vernacular languages for prayer into German and American synagogues. Some of these nineteenth-century modifications were also justified on the grounds that they were, in fact, ancient practices.⁴⁹

Hasidism was continued after Abraham's death by his own son Obadiah, whose *The Treatise of the Pool* (*Al-maqalat al-hawdiyya*) echoes al-Ghazali.⁵⁰ Obadiah, however, died at thirty-five. After the death of his nephew David in about 1404, the family of Maimonides lost control of the post of head of the Jewish community, and from that

point on no more is heard of Egyptian Hasidism. The fact that Abraham's *Complete Guide* did not survive intact indicates that it was not widely valued.

One late survival of the Sufi influence on Judaism was the Hebrew translation of the *Duties of the Hearts* of Ibn Paquda, translated as *Sefer hovot ha-levavot*. This proved extremely popular with the Hasidim of eighteenth-century Eastern Europe, who reported the story of a Hasid who taught that the most important struggle was the struggle against the lower self, not the struggle fought in earthly battle. There were no Hasidim in eighteenth-century Poland with enough knowledge of Islam to recognize this story as a Hadith, and the exemplary Hasid as the Prophet Muhammad.⁵¹

LATIN EMANATIONISM

As we have seen, direct knowledge of Neoplatonism vanished from the Latin West with the death of Boethius in 524, though traces of Neoplatonism remained for any Latin who could recognize them in some writings of St. Augustine, in Boethius's *Consolations of Philosophy*, and in Latin translations of Dionysius (who was mistakenly thought to be Dionysius the Areopagite). Some direct knowledge of classical philosophy also remained, largely thanks to Boethius, who had begun preparing Latin translations of Aristotle and other key philosophers in the early sixth century—a project he never completed, as he was executed by the Ostrogothic King Theoderic.⁵² He presumably hoped to save philosophy from the general loss of knowledge of Greek that did in fact ensue, and for almost seven hundred years the texts that he had translated were the only works of Aristotle generally known in the Latin West.⁵³

Arab Philosophy in the Schools of Paris

During the thirteenth century, however, the Latin West saw a philosophical revival. This was part of a general growth of scholarship made possible by increasing political stability and growing wealth, which not only provided the necessary basis for scholarship, but also increased demand for it. The number of those studying the Arts of grammar and logic had increased during the second half of the twelfth century, in response to a growing demand for men who were trained not only in Latin but also in systematic analysis, itself a product of the increasing sophistication of European ecclesiastical and royal administrations.⁵⁴ The study of the Arts of grammar and logic normally began at fourteen or fifteen,⁵⁵ and was in theory preliminary to the more advanced study of law, theology, or medicine. It was also a route to a career in administration that promised honor and wealth, however, and in many cases the degree of Master of Arts marked the end, rather than the beginning, of education.⁵⁶

The growth in the study of Arts and the revival of philosophy were based in Paris, which had grown dramatically in size and amenities since the French royal administration had

been established there at the beginning of the twelfth century, and was celebrated for its abundance of food and wine.⁵⁷ Its schools were important partly because of this, and partly because the Paris bishopric had briefly lost effective control over the licensing of teaching, with the result that the number and variety of teaching masters in Paris became greater than anywhere else in Europe.⁵⁸ When some control was reestablished from 1215, the organizational model that emerged was one that is recognizable as that of the modern university, though the name “university” was then still applied to any guild, not only to academic guilds.⁵⁹ The standard practice of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was still to refer to “the schools.” The corresponding adjective, “scholastic,” had much the sense that “academic” has today. It was also possible to study Arts in the schools at Oxford and elsewhere, but while students and masters from Oxford went to Paris, as did students from as far away as Denmark,⁶⁰ few foreign students then went to Oxford.⁶¹

The expansion of the study of the Arts in Paris coincided with the expansion of the curriculum for logic. The study of logic began with an introductory text by Plotinus’s pupil Porphyry, the *Introduction (Isagoge)*, and then continued onto Aristotle’s *Categories (Kategoriai)*.⁶² These two works had been translated into Latin by Boethius, and unlike many other works, had never been lost. During the thirteenth century, other works by Aristotle were translated and studied. First came more texts on logic, and then texts dealing with philosophy, a topic that blended into logic, dealing as it did with questions of cause and effect, and of classification. By 1255, almost the whole of Aristotle’s work had been added to the Paris Arts syllabus.⁶³ The study of Arts, then, became increasingly the study of philosophy—of what is now called “scholastic philosophy,” the academic philosophy of the time.

In theory, Aristotle was central to scholastic philosophy, as he was to logic, and in the end the final conclusion of scholastic philosophy was the ascendance of Aristotle over Plato.⁶⁴ In practice, however, the rigid distinction that is now routinely made between different philosophers was largely absent, and philosophers other than Aristotle were also read. Sometimes this was accidental: as we have seen, the *Discourse on the Pure Good (Kitab al-idah fi’l-khayr al-mahd)*, which was derived mostly from Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* and partly from the *Enneads*, was misattributed to Aristotle, and this misattribution was retained when the text was translated into Latin as the *Book on Causes (Liber de causis)*. The *Book on Causes* was one of the texts placed on the Paris Arts syllabus in 1255;⁶⁵ over two hundred Latin manuscripts of it still survive, testifying to its popularity.⁶⁶ More often, the inclusion of other works was intentional. Many of the works of Alfarabi (al-Farabi) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) were translated and read, becoming known and celebrated under the Romanized versions of their names that we still use. Avicenna’s (Ibn Gabriol’s) *Fountain of Life* was also translated, as was Maimonides’s *Guide to the Perplexed*.

Scholastic philosophy, therefore, had more in common with Arab philosophy, and thus with Neoplatonism, than it did with Aristotle in the pure form in which we read

him today. In the view of John Marenbon, Arab and scholastic philosophy are essentially one.⁶⁷ This was not just because of the failure to make rigid distinctions between the thought of Aristotle and that of other philosophers. It was also because the Arab philosophers had already done the difficult work of adapting Aristotle (who was, after all, a pagan) for an audience that, unlike Aristotle, believed in a single God, almighty, maker of heaven and earth, a belief common to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.⁶⁸ In the end, of course, things fell into place, leaving the arrangements with which we are familiar today, whereby Aristotle is Aristotle, Plato is Plato, Christian theology is Christian theology, and Western philosophy is Western philosophy. This, however, took time.

The presence of Arab philosophy in the schools of Paris was partly a result of increased demand, and partly a result of increased supply. Just as political stability was returning to Europe with the beginnings of the re-establishment of central authority after many centuries of strife, central authority was collapsing in al-Andalus. After 1031, what had been the Caliphate of al-Andalus split into small statelets (*taifas*) centered on individual cities or even towns, subject to extreme political instability, though still maintaining a highly developed intellectual culture. In 1085, King Alfonso VI of Castile conquered Toledo, and the library of Toledo fell into Christian hands. The translation into Latin of important Arab texts found there, dealing with medicine, astronomy and astrology, and chemistry and alchemy, as well as with philosophy, was encouraged by Raimundo, the newly installed Bishop of Toledo.⁶⁹ It was a Toledo translator, Gerard of Cremona, who translated the *Discourse on the Pure Good* into Latin as the *Book on Causes*.⁷⁰ This and similar enterprises helped supply the scholars of Paris. The West's encounter with Arab Neoplatonism, then, was in part the result of the beginning of the dawn of modern Europe, but it was also in part the result of military conflict and of the dusk falling over one major Arab civilization.

Emanationism and Christianity

The Latin Christian scholars of Paris were initially faced with many of the same problems as the Arab Muslim scholars of Baghdad. First, they had to understand the difficult new texts that they had before them. Then they had to develop some new terms, though much of the necessary Latin vocabulary was already to be found in the translations of Aristotle by Boethius. Finally, they had to adjust their new texts to their established worldview, which of course derived not from the Quran, but from Catholic theology. Here, a new obstacle was raised by the doctrine of the Trinity, an obstacle already encountered by Dionysius in late antiquity. The One had to remain One while simultaneously being three.

A number of approaches to this challenge arose. At one extreme, some preferred to reject the new philosophy altogether; these were probably responsible for the initial bans on the teaching of philosophy in Paris in 1210 and 1215. At another extreme, a small faction, including most notably Siger of Brabant, seems to have accepted the system of

the classical, Neoplatonic and Arab philosophers to a degree that others found unacceptable.⁷¹ Quite what their conclusions were is not clear, as they are known mostly from various prohibitions on the teaching of particular propositions. A long and somewhat random list of these banned propositions was compiled in 1277 by the Archbishop of Paris. This list includes propositions of Aristotle's, such as the eternity of the world, to which Plotinus and the Arab philosophers had already provided acceptable alternatives. It also included Neoplatonic understandings of the One: for example that God is a remote cause rather than a proximate one and that nothing can be known about him save that he exists; and Neoplatonic understandings of the Intelligence, for example that it is not separate. Finally, it includes propositions that no known philosopher has ever advanced, such as that confession is only for appearances.⁷² It seems unlikely that these more curious propositions were actually being advanced in Paris; their presence on the list can be explained either as an attempt to blacken the other propositions and their proponents by association, or as the result of overenthusiastic interrogation, which will lead people to confess to almost anything, true or false.

The existence of this list of forbidden propositions points to one major difference between the Latin and the Arab reception of classical and late antique philosophy. While the Arab reception sometimes resulted in controversy directed at both philosophers (Jewish as well as Muslim) and Sufis, there was no disciplinary mechanism for controlling in any detail what was proposed, taught, written, or practiced. The execution of Hallaj was an isolated incident, and had more to do with his politics than his theology. The Catholic Church, however, possessed a variety of disciplinary mechanisms, which it used to protect what it understood as orthodoxy. One was the papal order to the Archbishop of Paris⁷³ which led to the composition of the list of forbidden propositions just considered. Another was the detailed regulation of teaching: in 1276 all private lessons were prohibited in Paris, with exceptions made only for the teaching of logic and grammar.⁷⁴ All teaching thus had to be done in public, so that forbidden propositions could no longer be easily advanced. These measures may have succeeded in reducing the spread of problematic ideas drawn from philosophy, but could not entirely eliminate it.

Meister Eckhart

Meister Eckhart, as we will see, was the most notable Christian emanationist of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He was far from being the only Latin to be influenced by Arab (Islamic and Jewish) Neoplatonism, however. Others, from Duns Scotus to Raymond Lull and from Albert the Great to Roger Bacon, were also so impacted, with Lull reading Ibn Arabi, and Bacon writing commentaries on the *Book on Causes*, as did Thomas Aquinas, the first scholar to realize that the work was in fact based on Proclus's *Elements of Theology*.⁷⁵ Eckhart, however, became famous because he transferred emanationism from scholastic philosophy into preaching, and followed the logic of emanationism to its logical conclusion—a conclusion that proved unacceptable to the

Catholic Church. Our knowledge of his life is somewhat patchy, but the main points and events are clear. Childhood and then studies were followed by a successful period as a Dominican administrator and high-profile scholar at the end of the thirteenth century and the start of the fourteenth century, from his late thirties to his early fifties. Then comes a period of relative obscurity, during which he wrote and preached, until 1325, when, at the age of about sixty-five, he was first accused of heresy. Within three years, by 1328, his teachings had been condemned as heretical and he had died, under unknown circumstances.

Life

Eckhart was German, born around 1260. He joined the Dominican Order in Erfurt, Thuringia, and therefore presumably studied at the Dominican's own teaching institution in Cologne. There is some evidence that he went to Paris to study Arts as a young man and then, around 1277, returned to Cologne, and then went back to Paris in 1293 or 1294, when he was in his thirties.⁷⁶ Shortly after his return to Germany, in 1296, his Dominican career took off when he received his first major appointment, as prior of Erfurt and vicar of Thuringia.⁷⁷ After returning to teach in Paris for the year 1302–03, he was promoted to the position of prior of the whole province of Saxony, to which in 1307 was added control of the province of Bohemia. In 1310, he was elected prior of Teutonia, the vast Dominican province then bounded by France to the west, Saxony to the south, and Scandinavia to the north, but for unknown reasons the supreme Dominican council in Italy did not confirm this appointment, and instead sent him back to Paris, where he taught again for two years, from 1311 to 1313.⁷⁸ At this point, his career faltered. After 1313 he held no more major posts, spending his time, it seems, in Germany, writing, teaching, and preaching, at one point in Strasbourg, where in 1319 a friendly priest warned him against preaching on topics that few could understand.⁷⁹ This period ends with the first accusations of heresy, in 1325.⁸⁰

Eckhart read widely. His single most important source was probably Thomas Aquinas. His Neoplatonic sources included Boethius and Dionysius, and he also referred to translations of several Arab philosophers. He made extensive use of Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, of Ibn Gabirol's *The Fountain of Life*, of Avicenna and Averroës, and also of the *Book on Causes*.⁸¹ He also relied upon the work of two near-contemporary German scholars, Albert the Great and Dietrich of Freiburg, both of whose works reflected their own readings of the *Book on Causes*, of Avicenna, and in the case of Albert, also of Alfarabi.⁸² In addition, his time in Paris exposed him to the new intellectual trends that had first emerged there.

Eckhart felt that he remained within the bounds of Christianity. In his Latin commentary on St. John's Gospel, he declares that his intention is the same in all his works, "to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two testaments maintain through the natural arguments of the philosophers." In this, he sees himself as following in the steps

of Augustine, who, as we have seen, also read the opening of St. John in Neoplatonic terms. He refers to Augustine's favorable references to Neoplatonism in the *Confessions* and the *City of God*.⁸³ Eckhart was also, of course, following in the steps of Maimonides, who sought to reconcile Judaism and philosophy, and of the unknown Arab Adaptor of the *Enneads*, who first sought to remove contradictions between Neoplatonism and Islam.

Preaching

The Dominicans were formally known as the Order of Preachers, however, and if Eckhart's intention in his scholarly Latin works was to explain the Christian faith through the arguments of the philosophers, as a preacher his primary interest was the salvation of souls. In his later German works, salvation is understood in largely Neoplatonic terms, echoing the path of Plotinus: "show[ing] the little value of the things that the soul now values . . . and teach[ing] and remind[ing] the soul of her origin and worth." It was Eckhart's preaching that evinced full-fledged emanationism, and marked the high point of the consequences of the Latin reception of Arab Neoplatonism.

Eckhart's emanationism is visible in *The Book of Divine Consolation* (*Das buoch der goetlichen trostung*), in which he describes how attachment to creation is what prevents the otherwise inevitable return of the Soul to the One, a return impelled by what Eckhart here calls "likeness" (*glíchnisse*):

If a man were able and knew how to make a goblet quite empty, and to keep it empty of everything that could fill it, even of air, doubtless the goblet would forego and forget all its nature, and its emptiness would lift it up into the sky. And so to be naked, poor, empty of all created things lifts the soul up to God . . . Likeness in all things, but more so and first of all in the divine nature, is the birth of the One (*das ein*) and the likeness of the One . . . it is the beginning and origin of flowing, fiery love. The One is the beginning without any beginning.⁸⁴

Eckhart elsewhere ascribes the return of the soul more explicitly to the fact that it emanates from the One, so that it and the One are naturally attracted to each other, as "everything longs to achieve its own natural place."⁸⁵ Those "who have wholly gone out of themselves" "live eternally with God, directly close to God . . . equal beside him," and these are those whom he calls the "just man" (*gerecht*),⁸⁶ approximately the perfected man of Sufism. The One is elsewhere called "a light that is uncreated and is not capable of creation,"⁸⁷ but is, for Eckhart as for earlier Neoplatonists, "without name . . . a denial of all names."⁸⁸ "Whatever fine names, whatever words we use, they are telling lies, for it is far above them,"⁸⁹ wrote Eckhart.

Eckhart is not always consistent in his terminology, or explicit about how he understands the relationship between the One and the Christian Trinity, but in general it

seems in his later German works that the Trinity takes the place of the Intelligence, with the Father as the One and either the Son, the Holy Spirit, or the Son and the Holy Spirit together flowing eternally from the Father.⁹⁰ “Flowing eternally” is one way of understanding emanation. In one sermon, creation flows out of God’s will,⁹¹ in another it is the Father who begot all created things,⁹² and in another the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are described as “the divine nature’s generative or fruitful qualities.”⁹³ On occasion, he makes a clear distinction between the One and God, saying, for example that God did not exist “before there were any creatures.” However, “when creatures . . . received their created being, then God . . . was ‘God’ in the creatures.” God is thus different from “the perfect end,”⁹⁴ that is, from the One. In another sermon, he calls the One the “naked God,” and says that the soul “wants nothing but its naked God, as his in himself. It is not content with the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁵

Detachment

In *On Detachment* (*Von abegescheidenheit*), Eckhart argues that detachment is “the greatest and best virtue with which man can most completely and closely be bound to God [*geväegen ze got*].”⁹⁶ Detachment is more important than any other virtue. In two sermons and in *On Detachment*, Eckhart suggests that the key virtue that produces detachment is humility.⁹⁷ “If a man humbles himself, God cannot withhold his own goodness but must come down and flow into the humbler man.”⁹⁸ Elsewhere in *On Detachment*, however, he stressed the superiority of detachment over humility, since “there may be humility without detachment,” while “there cannot be perfect detachment without perfect humility.”⁹⁹ Likewise, detachment is superior to love, despite what St. Paul said on the topic (“Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing”).¹⁰⁰ Love “compels me to love God, yet detachment compels God to love me.”¹⁰¹ Detachment is also superior to poverty, which may be divided between “external poverty, which is good and greatly to be esteemed,” and the more important “inward poverty” of a man who wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing, the state in which the soul was when it was one with God¹⁰²—that is, detachment.

How to achieve detachment, though, is not clear, and this is the single way in which Eckhart differs most from Sufis such as al-Ghazali and even Ibn Arabi. It might be thought that Eckhart focuses on the importance of detachment, rather than the means of achieving it, because the means could be taken for granted, but this is not the case. Detachment requires detachment even from the standard practices of Christianity. Eckhart condemns “those who are possessively attached to prayer, to fasting, to vigils and to all kinds of exterior (*äuserlicher*) exercises and penances,”¹⁰³ those who “present an outward picture that gives them the name of saints, but inside they are donkeys.”¹⁰⁴ In one of his most famous passages, Eckhart warned that, “Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden. But whoever seeks for

God without ways will find him as he is in himself.”¹⁰⁵ In another sermon, Eckhart says that the more one seeks God, the less one finds God, and “if you do not seek him, then you will find him.”¹⁰⁶ Going beyond even this, in two other sermons, in the context of the distinction between the One and God, Eckhart prays for God to make him free of God¹⁰⁷—that is, free of the human conception of God.

Eckhart ends one of these two the sermons by saying:

Whoever does not understand what I have said, let him not burden his heart with it; for as long as a man is not equal to this truth, he will not understand these words, for this is a truth beyond speculation that has come immediately from the heart of God.¹⁰⁸

However, Eckhart was wrong in two respects. Firstly, whether or not what he was preaching came from the heart of God, it did not do so in an immediate, unfiltered way, but rather was mediated by his readings. Secondly, it did matter if people did not understand what he said, as those who did not understand him included not only those to whom he preached, but also the Church authorities.

Despite Eckhart’s intentions, it is hardly surprising that a system which placed the One above God the Father, advanced by someone who described those deeply engaged in standard Catholic practices as “donkeys” and prayed for God to save him from God, should attract controversy. On certain occasions, Eckhart went so far as to seem to be actually courting condemnation, as when he compared himself both to God and to Jesus. Here Eckhart echoes both al-Bistami’s “I am He [God]” and Plotinus’s “It is they who should come to me, not I to them.” On one occasion, pursuing the major theme that the One is beyond description (but speaking of the One not as the One but as God), Eckhart preached that it is thus not possible to say that God is good. To this standard Neoplatonic point, he added the less standard point that it was, in contrast, possible to say that he, Eckhart, was good, and also possible to say that he, Eckhart, was better than God, since what is good can logically be better, while that which cannot be described as good cannot be described be better.¹⁰⁹ This is indeed logically true within the Neoplatonic system, but provocative nonetheless. On another occasion, pursuing another major theme, that “the Father gives birth to his Son without ceasing,” Eckhart added that the same applies to souls, so that not only Jesus is the son of God, but also human souls.¹¹⁰ Again, this is true in Neoplatonic terms, but again the subsequent use of Eckhart himself as an example was highly provocative: “Because the Father performs one [single] work,” preached Eckhart, “therefore his work is me, his Only-Begotten Son.”¹¹¹

Quite why Eckhart described himself publicly as God’s Only-Begotten Son and as better than God will probably never be known. On one occasion, in the *Counsels on Discernment* (*Rede der unterscheidung*), Eckhart referred to those who said that one should not teach great and exalted matters to the untaught (*ungelêrten*). “But if we are

not to teach people who have not been taught," he responded, "no one will ever be taught . . . If there is someone who misunderstands what I say, what is that to the man who says truly that which is true?"¹¹²

CONCLUSION TO PART I

With Eckhart's death in about 1328, the period that started with the translation of Plotinus into Arabic in about 833 also came to an end. This was the period during which the transfer of Neoplatonic emanationism from late antiquity into Islam, Judaism, and Christianity produced important consequences in both intellectual and religious life. In the intellectual life of the Abbasid Caliphate and of al-Andalus, Neoplatonism was reconciled with the doctrines of Islam, and so contributed to the development of Arab philosophy. In religious life, Arab philosophy and emanationism then contributed to the distinctive theology of Sufism, for which it is axiomatic that human souls share in the divine and can and should return to the divine. Subsequent intercultural transfers, into Judaism and then into Christianity, resulted in similar consequences. In al-Andalus, Jewish philosophy was not distinct from Islamic philosophy, and the fact that Ibn Gabirol was a Jew had no real significance for his philosophical work, but a reconciliation between philosophy and Judaism was still needed, and this is the task that Maimonides attempted. In religious life, the impact of Arab philosophy and of Sufism was felt in the development of the Kabbalah and of the Jewish Sufism of Abraham ibn Musa's Egyptian Hasidism. In the Latin world, Arab philosophy led to a philosophical and Neoplatonic revival, seen mostly in academic ("scholastic") philosophy, but also in the increasingly outrageous preaching of Meister Eckhart. After the death of Eckhart in about 1328, Sufism and Kabbalah and Christian mysticism developed independently, until a new period of intercultural transfer started again in 1480 with the first European account of Sufism.

Neoplatonism was not the only variety of late antique philosophy that was important between 833 and 1328, and classical philosophy was important as well. Neoplatonism was central to Arab philosophy, however, and Plotinus was central to Neoplatonism. The story that the first section of this book has told, then, really starts with the birth of Plotinus in 204, or perhaps the birth of Plato himself, around 428 B.C.

Plotinus, like Plato and Aristotle, distinguished between matter and form. He explained the existence of matter and of life in terms of a first cause he called the One, and the emanation from the One of the Intelligence, and from the Intelligence of the forms that result in matter, of the animal soul that results in life, and the rational soul that is exclusive to humans, and consists of the indivisible Universal Soul and of individual human souls. Individual human souls as a consequence seek to return to the Intelligence and thence to the One, aiming at *homoiosis to theo* or union, aided initially by philosophy and by purifications and virtues. Although the nature of these purifications for Plotinus

is uncertain, they may have included asceticism. Plotinus is important for the theory of emanationism, which was essentially the same for Ibn Arabi and Eckhart. Plotinus is not important for the practice designed to facilitate union.

After the end of antiquity, Neoplatonism largely vanished from the Latin West, surviving primarily in some interpretations of St. Augustine, in translations by Boethius, and in some works of Dionysius. It survived in the Greek East, however, and after the Byzantine province of Syria was absorbed into the Abbasid Caliphate, Plotinus was translated into Arabic, edited by the early Arab philosopher al-Kindi, and later read in the *Theology of Aristotle* and other texts that made up the Arabic Plotinus; however, no one after al-Kindi realized they were reading Plotinus until this was pointed out much later, in 1812. Emanationism was in some ways easy to combine with Islam, but there was still some conflicts between it and Islamic doctrine, which Alfarabi and Avicenna tried to minimize.

Neoplatonic emanationism formed a part of Sufism. It first appears in a prayer of Bayazid al-Bistami, and in the writings of Sahl al-Tustari, who was the first to describe the practice of *dhikr*. It passes into the first group to be called Sufis, Abu'l-Qasim al-Junayd and his followers. Sufism is not just Islamic Neoplatonism, however, as it also draws on Islam, asceticism, and practices such as *dhikr*. Emanationism is very visible, though, in the writings of Ibn Arabi and Ibn Tufayl, and al-Ghazali too was something of an emanationist, though he also warned of the need to keep the esoteric secret. Sufi theology also draws on concepts developed by the Arab philosophers, notably Alfarabi's concept of the perfected man (*al-insan al-kamil*) and Avicenna's idea of *ishq* (passionate love) to describe emanative pull.

It was not only the encounter between Neoplatonism and Islam that produced consequences in intellectual and in religious life, however. Similar consequences resulted in both Judaism and Christianity from the encounter with Arab philosophy and, in the case of Judaism, with Sufism.

The second intercultural transfer after the Islamic reception of late antique philosophy was into Judaism. This transfer had three consequences. One was the rise in interest in philosophy among educated Arab Jews, the extent of which is suggested by the quantity of Sufi texts found in the Cairo *geniza* trove, by the attempt of Maimonides to reconcile philosophy and Judaism, and by the elevation of philosophy to the rank of an alternative to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Judah Ha-Levi's fantasy the *Kitab al-Khazari*. It is reflected in the emanationism of *Kingdom's Crown* (*Keter malkhut*), the great poem of the philosopher Ibn Gabirol, the author of *The Fountain of Life*, an important work of philosophy by a Jew, but not a work of Jewish philosophy. The second consequence was the emergence of Kabbalah out of the Merkaba tradition, Neoplatonism, and other sources. The third consequence was the emergence of non-Islamic Sufism, that is, the Egyptian Hasidism of Maimonides's son Abraham ibn Musa.

The third intercultural transfer was from Arab Muslim and Jewish philosophy into Latin Christian philosophy. The first consequence was, again, felt among scholars. Many

Latin scholars were impacted by Arab philosophy. Meister Eckhart went beyond theory into practice, bringing emanationism into his preaching and reinterpreting salvation in terms of union with the One. In principle, he was trying to do no more than Maimonides, reconciling philosophy with revelation. In the event, he emphasized detachment (*abgescheidenheit*) as a means to union, including detachment from standard Christian practice. This, combined with statements that made sense in philosophical terms but appeared outrageous in a sermon, such as declaring himself the Only-Begotten son of God, led inevitably to his condemnation by Church authorities.

PART II

Imagining Sufism, 1480–1899



4

Dervishes



OTTOMAN SUFIS, WROTE Martin Luther in 1530, put Catholic monks to shame.¹ This was one reason why he recommended the *Treatise on the customs, conditions and wickedness of the Turks* (*Tractatus de moribus, conditionibus et nequitia Turcorum*), a detailed description of Ottoman society and religion first published in 1480. The new edition, for which Luther wrote the introduction, was one of many. Its author was then unknown, but has since been identified as George of Hungary, a young Dominican who was captured during the Ottoman conquest of Transylvania and sold into slavery in western Anatolia (now in Turkey). He became a Sufi in about 1443. He later repented of this, however, and returned to Europe, where he wrote his *Treatise* to warn others against the seductive powers of Sufism and Islamic society. He is the first Western Sufi who is known by name. There were certainly many others like him, that is, Christians who found themselves under Ottoman rule, and assimilated into Ottoman culture and religion. What was unusual about George of Hungary was not that he became a Sufi, but that he later returned to Christianity and Europe. That is why we know his name.

George's *Treatise on the Turks* contains the earliest known discussion in a Western printed work of Sufis and of dervishes, a term used for mendicant Sufis. It also includes the first translations of Sufi poetry, which George especially liked. The Western taste for Sufi poetry continued through Goethe until, in 1899, a writer in a New York literary journal complained of the Sufi verses of the *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* that "everybody is reciting it—even the boys are whistling it in the street."² Between 1480 and 1899, during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as well as enjoying Sufi poetry, Western scholars identified Sufism first as mysticism and then as perennial, esoteric, Deistic universalism. These Renaissance and Enlightenment understandings went on to structure the Sufism that eventually became established in the West in the early twentieth century, as we will see in the final sections of this book. What they have in common

is precisely what impelled Luther to write his introduction to the *Treatise on the Turks* in 1530: the relevance of Sufism to Western concerns.

The period between 1480 and 1899, most of which coincided with the period of Western history that is known as early modernity, was the period during which the fourth intercultural transfer considered in this book took place. It was a transfer from the Muslim world into the West, and had consequences only in intellectual life; it had no significant consequences for religious practice. The means of the transfer include personal contact, as in the case of George, and texts based on such contacts. There were also translations of texts from the Muslim world, one of the earliest of which will be encountered at the end of this chapter: a French adaptation of *The Uncovering of Ideas: On the Titles of Books and the Names of the Sciences* (*Kashf al-zunun an asami al-kutub wa'l-funun*) by the Ottoman scholar Katib Çelebi. This made available to Western readers understandings of Sufi topics that were in line with the views of the Islamic scholarship of the time.

ANGELS AND DEVIANTS

Western interest in Sufism during the early modern period was an aspect of the development of Western interest in the social and religious phenomena of the Muslim world, itself partly the fruit of increasing contact with the Ottoman Empire, and partly the fruit of the expansion of printing, which made possible the easier circulation of texts on topics of general interest. Printing with movable type was first developed by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century. What was at first a highly experimental technology then took some time to become routine. Printed books were initially few and expensive, but their price dropped and numbers increased as printing technology improved. It is estimated that the price of books declined by two thirds between 1450 and 1500, thereafter changing little in real terms until about 1800, when printing technology began to improve again.³ By 1500, printing workshops were to be found in all major European cities.⁴

The *Treatise on the Turks*, then, was one of the West's earliest printed books. It was joined during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by a number of other works on the Ottoman Turks and their customs, all of which contain at least some discussion of "dervishes," the Turkish term for a mendicant Sufi, derived from the Persian *darwish* (poor). These works all cover Islamic religious personnel, who are explained in terms familiar to Christian readers as "priests" and "monks." The "priests" were the ulema (scholars), and the "monks" were the Sufis. There are, of course, important differences between the ulema and Christian priests, since although both ulema and priests preach and teach, the ulema have no sacramental function comparable to that of a priest. In Christianity only a priest can normally celebrate mass or conduct a marriage, but in Islam any sane adult Muslim can lead the ritual prayer (*salat*) or witness a marriage. There are also

differences between a Sufi and a monk, because although both Sufis and monks both belong to orders and follow spiritual exercises, Sufis do not always abandon the world. Discussions in these early Western works were generally fairly short, and Sufi theology remained largely overlooked.

The early sixteenth century marked the apogee of the power of the Ottoman Empire, an empire which in terms of territorial extent and longevity ranks with the Roman Empire. In 1453 the Ottomans defeated the remains of the Byzantine Empire, conquering Constantinople (now Istanbul) and solidifying their control over Asia Minor. From that base, during the first twenty-five years of the sixteenth century, they defeated the Safavid rulers of Persia, whose capital they took, the Cairo-based Mamluke Sultanate, whose lands in the Levant and Egypt they took, and the Kingdom of Hungary, whose lands they also took. Both the Mamluke Sultanate and the Kingdom of Hungary were extinguished. In 1529, the year before Luther wrote his introduction to the *Treatise on the Turks*, the Ottomans attacked the Habsburg capital, Vienna. The Ottomans, then, were topical.

We now know that this would be the limit of Ottoman expansion, that Vienna never fell, and that within a century the tide would turn in favor of European power, but sixteenth-century Europeans had no way of knowing this. Under these circumstances, the shock was considerable when France entered into an alliance with the Ottomans against the Habsburgs in 1536. This alliance made sense for the French in the light of their own catastrophic defeat by the Habsburgs in 1525, and given the many valuable commercial advantages it offered them. It also gave French officials and scholars privileged access to the Ottoman world. Many early accounts of dervishes are therefore French, and France at first led the development of the scholarly study of the Muslim world. A need to address the shock caused in Europe by the Franco-Ottoman alliance explains why some early French works treat Islam so positively.

Ottoman Dervishes

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there emerged in the Muslim world groups of dervishes who lived in celibate poverty, subsisting off alms, and separating themselves from the general society, both by moving from place to place, and by their antinomian disregard for rules and conventions.⁵ They dressed differently from the general population and kept their hair differently, rather as modern Western antinomian groups such as punks do, but more dramatically. Their dress often consisted only of one or two animal skins, sometimes air-dried rather than tanned, and their standard hairstyle was to shave off all hair, including beards, eyebrows, and moustaches.⁶ Dervish dress generally involved a degree of nakedness that contravened religious norms as well as social ones. Some ascetic practices involved bodily mortification approaching self-mutilation, also rejected by religious norms. To what extent other

religious norms were contravened is unclear, but it seems that some dervishes ignored such standard Islamic practices as prayer and fasting, while some others ignored standard prohibitions on alcohol and even, perhaps, homosexual intercourse. Dervish use of narcotics such as hashish and opium also ignored religious norms, though the religious prohibition on hashish was less widely agreed on than was the religious prohibition on alcohol. This religious antinomianism was as far as it is possible to get from the theology of al-Ghazali.

Ottoman dervishes, like other Sufis, organized themselves into *tariqas*. Four of the most important *tariqas* were the Qalandars, the Haydaris, the Jamis, and the Bektashis. The origin of the name “Qalendar” is unknown. The Qalandars emerged in Khorasan (in present-day Iran) in the eleventh century, and spread westwards into Turkey in the thirteenth century.⁷ The Haydaris drew their name from Qutb al-Din Haydar, also of Khorasan, emerged in the thirteenth century, and specialized in the use of heavy iron collars and rings for mortification, and in the use of a ring inserted in the penis both for mortification and to enforce chastity.⁸ The Jamis drew their name from the twelfth-century Ahmad-i Jam, and differed from other dervishes in shaving beards but not hair, which they wore long.⁹ They were known for their skills as musicians and singers, for their devotion to Ali, and for their consumption of wine.¹⁰ The Bektashis were named after a Khorasani called Bektash, about whom little is known, and revered the twelve imams of the Shi’a, especially Ali.¹¹

Of these antinomian dervish *tariqas*, only the Bektashis survive today, and then only in particular areas, notably Albania. All, however, were present in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Turkey.¹²

George of Hungary

The earliest printed account of Sufism to be widely read in Europe was in George of Hungary’s *Treatise on the customs, conditions and wickedness of the Turks* of 1480.¹³ George was born in Romos, Transylvania (now in Romania but then in Hungary), and may have been of German origin.¹⁴ He joined the Dominican order, and was studying in Mühlbach (now Sebeş) when it was taken by the Ottoman army. He was captured, enslaved, and sold, first to a Turkish farmer and then to a second master, who treated him more kindly than the first. After twenty years in Turkey he left this second master, rejoined the Dominicans, and died in Rome in 1502.¹⁵ In his *Treatise* he explained that he had observed that Christians in Ottoman territories often converted to Islam, and that he had come very close to doing so himself. He therefore wished to investigate this phenomenon in order to prepare other Christians who might find themselves similarly tempted. He identified two varieties of reason for conversion: religious (which he calls “supernatural”), and non-religious (which he calls “natural”). The major religious reasons he identified were Islamic theology, the dervishes, and the saints. The major non-religious reasons he identified included admiration for Ottoman culture, Ottoman military and political

achievements, and the qualities of Ottoman women.¹⁶ One might expect a Christian apologist to demonstrate the illusory nature of Ottoman superiority in these respects by exposing Ottoman deficiencies, but this was not George's approach. Rather, he accepted the basic premise of Ottoman superiority, but argued that it was of diabolical origin. St. Augustine had warned against such illusions,¹⁷ he noted, and it was known that Satan could appear as an angel of light.¹⁸

Since George was not trying to expose Ottoman deficiencies, his account is generally factual, and where it departs from neutrality, it is more likely to praise the Ottomans than to condemn them. George was especially impressed by the restraint inherent in Ottoman social customs, especially that practiced by the rich and powerful. He was also impressed by Ottoman dervishes and their poetry.¹⁹ It was in fact the dervishes who had almost led him to convert to Islam, he wrote.²⁰ In fact, if one reads between the lines, he did actually convert. He admits to being deeply impressed by the dervishes he met and to then spending fifteen years living as a dervish, assimilated into Ottoman society to the point where he forgot how to speak his own mother tongue.²¹ Quite how he then found himself back among Western Christians is not known. It was in connection with the dervishes that George mentioned Satan's ability to appear as an angel of light, because the dervishes he had met were "so exemplary in all their words and actions and display so much piety in their manners and movements that they seemed to be not men but angels."²² He remained sufficiently impressed by dervish poetry to include two sample poems in his *Treatise on the Turks*, in Turkish and in Latin translation.²³ Their author has not been identified.²⁴ We will see below that another Ottoman slave of Western origin, who perhaps also became a dervish, also liked dervish poetry.

George makes a basic distinction between the ulema, whom he calls "priests" (*sacerdos*), dervishes (*dervischlar*),²⁵ whom he identifies as a type of monk (*religiosus*), and Sufis (*czofilar*), whom he identifies simply as being "dedicated to meditation and spiritual exercises."²⁶ His transcription follows Turkish in using the plural suffix *-lar*, and Hungarian orthography in using *cz* for *s*. He describes the dervishes as wandering ascetics, living in voluntary poverty, sometimes going naked save for a cover over their genitals, suffering extremes of heat and cold, perhaps fasting from speech, and perhaps loading themselves with chains or cutting themselves. Their bodies might thus be covered with scars. Some have visions, some have revelations, and some experience "supernatural ecstasies." Sufis, in contrast, are held in great respect as the successors of the prophets, "do not cease from continual prayer," and perform vigils. Dervishes perform *sema* (*czamach*),²⁷ the turning ("whirling") for which the Mevlevis are now best known, and Sufis perform *dhikr* (*czikir*).²⁸

Dervish Theology

George established a contrast between the dervishes and the letter of "the law" (sharia), and in so doing introduced into Western discourse the idea of Sufis and dervishes as rejecters of the law. He first notes in passing that dervishes do not care about the opinions

of others, and do not “observe the ceremonies of the law in prayers and ablutions and the like,” and then contradicts himself somewhat a few pages later, writing that dervishes “take the rites and ceremonies of the law in a spiritual sense,” which he himself liked, as it seemed more like Christianity than Islam.²⁹ He then later returns to the topic of “the law” in the context of a discussion on the means of salvation. Although the concept of salvation in Islam resembles the Christian concept, soteriology is a more important theological debate in Christianity than in Islam. Even so, George attributed soteriological positions from Christian theology to different Islamic groups. Firstly, he explained, the “priests” (ulema) believe that salvation is only possible through the law. Secondly, the dervishes reject the law and hold that what is needed for salvation is divine grace (*gratia dei*), which they call “rachmatallah” (*rahmat Allah*, divine mercy). Thirdly, the Sufis hold that what is needed is not the law or grace but good works (*meritum*, merit), which they call “pereketallah” (*barakat Allah*, divine grace). Fourthly, the Hurufis (*horifè*) hold that “everyone is saved by his [own] law, and every people or nation has been given a law by God through which it may be saved, and all laws are equally good to be followed, nor is any one to be preferred over another as if it were better than another.” In fact, explained George, he had once met a Hurufi in a church on the island of Chios who had crossed himself and sprinkled holy water, and had told him, “Your law is as good as ours.”³⁰

George became confused in attributing to these groups positions in a theological argument that they were not, in fact, engaged in. Essentially, he mixed up mercy, grace, and works. It is *baraka* (what he calls “pereketallah”) that corresponds to *gratia dei*, not “rachmatallah.” Also, the standard positions on salvation in Islam are not mutually exclusive: while the ulema do indeed stress the law, they also recognize the role of divine mercy, and while Sufis may stress the role of divine grace, they do not reject the law, and also recognize the role of divine mercy. George was right, however, that antinomian dervishes did to some extent reject the sharia, and he was close to being right about the Hurufis, a highly unusual group that started in Persia as a *tariqa* and developed into a millenarian sect. As George describes them, the Hurufis represent the approach to religion that was suggested by Ibn Gabirol and that this book calls “universalism,” and which will be encountered frequently in later centuries: the idea that truth can be found in all religions.

In reality, the Hurufis were not quite universalists. Their founder, Fadlallah Astarabadi, claimed special knowledge of certain Quranic *huruf* (letters), for which the *tariqa* was named.³¹ There are traces of the Jewish Merkaba tradition in this. He also saw himself as helping to complete the cycle of revelation that ran through the prophets and the saints to the day of judgment, and claimed knowledge of the esoteric (*batin*) meaning of all religious texts, not only the Quran. He thus drew on Jewish and Christian texts as well as Islamic ones, notably the eschatological Book of Revelation from the Christian Bible. He was executed in Azerbaijan in 1394.³² One of his leading followers, Ali al-A‘la, then preached Hurufism in Turkey, where he was executed in 1419.

Some Hurufis, however, took refuge in the Bektashi *tariqa*,³³ so it is quite possible that George did meet a Hurufi. The Hurufis as a whole, however, were more millenarian than universalist. The central point was that all religions met in Astarabadi, not that all religions were equally valid.

George says nothing else about dervish or Sufi theology. Although he refers to the ecstasies produced by *sema* and *dhikr*, he does not explain how Sufis understood them. There is no mention of return or of union. The implication is that Sufi theology did not play a major role for the fifteenth-century dervishes with whom he was in contact, in contrast to practice and poetry, both of which he learned and recorded in his *Treatise on the Turks*.

The Reception of the Treatise on the Turks

George's *Treatise on the Turks* was a great success. It circulated in manuscript and print in Latin, and then in German translation. There were twelve printings of the Latin original between 1481 and 1550, and eleven German translations between 1482 and 1531.³⁴ The *Treatise on the Turks* was the basis for the description of dervishes in the next widely read account of the Ottomans, *The manners, laws, and customs of all nations, collected from the best authors* (*Omnium gentium mores, leges & ritus ex multis clarissimis rerum scriptoribus*), published in 1520 by Johann Boemus, a German scholar of Hebrew. This was also a great success, with ten subsequent editions in Latin and multiple editions of translations into Italian, French, English, and Spanish.³⁵ After a discussion of Islamic "priests," Boemus mentions "monastic groups" (*secta religiosi*). He follows George closely, even writing that "so much religion do they show in word and deed, in manner and gesture, that they might be thought to be not men but angels."³⁶ In the absence of George's warning that what appears to be an angel may actually be a diabolic illusion, Boemus's apparent enthusiasm for Sufism appears inexplicable. Perhaps he was working in a hurry as he collected his account.

The *Treatise on the Turks* also attracted the attention of Martin Luther, who, as noted, wrote an enthusiastic introduction to a 1530 edition. He praised the author for writing "never out of hate, but out of love of the truth," and accepted his framing of Islam as an impressive religion that might easily tempt a Christian to convert, but drew a somewhat different conclusion than George. Rather than demonstrating the power of diabolic illusion, for Luther the contrast between Islam and the Catholic Church highlighted the many deficiencies of the Catholic Church, and consequently the need for reform. "Against the miracles and shows of abstinence and discipline of their monks (*religiosus*), our monks (*monachus*) are put to shame," wrote Luther.³⁷ The implication was not that Luther's readers should become Sufis, but rather that Christians should show more abstinence and discipline.

The *Treatise on the Turks* also attracted the attention of another early Protestant, Sebastian Franck, a German priest who had followed Luther's reformation out of the

Catholic Church, but had then arrived at a far more radical position than Luther. Franck was a Neoplatonist, with a theology that echoed that of Meister Eckhart, which had been transmitted to him in part through the work of Johannes Tauler,³⁸ and was fortified by direct readings of the Neoplatonists,³⁹ translations of whose works were by then available. Franck's positions were so radical that he often veiled them, despite which he attracted so much condemnation that at one point he was forced to work as a soap boiler. There is continuing controversy about what he actually believed. It seems that he had concluded that one of the most serious obstacles to the human response to the divine spark was the rites and rituals of the various rival churches.⁴⁰ What was needed was a new church, "an invisible spiritual church gathered in unity of sprit and faith amongst all peoples, and only through the eternal invisible word."⁴¹ Franck uses "invisible" to refer to the Forms, and by "eternal invisible word" he means that which has emanated from the divine essence, i.e. from the One.⁴² Franck, then, was what might be called "anti-denominational." He was also partly universalist. His concern that rites and rituals were an obstacle between humans and God echoed Eckhart, and his universalism echoed Ibn Gabirol.

Franck published two German translations of the *Treatise on the Turks*, one including Luther's introduction and an afterword of his own, and one in which he replaced Luther's introduction with his own. Like Luther, he was primarily interested in what the comparison with Islam could say about the state of the Christian Church. In his original afterword he argued that the devil was equally present in Islamic and Christian organized religion,⁴³ and in the introduction that replaced Luther's he drew attention to the multiplicity of forms of organized religion, Christian and Islamic, the implication being the need to replace them with an "invisible spiritual church."⁴⁴ As Geoffrey Dipple wrote of another work of Franck, his purpose was "to highlight the fallacy of all existing organized churches through an appeal to their mutual exclusivity and denunciations."⁴⁵

As a result of this anti-denominational agenda, Franck's translation shifts the emphasis on the diabolical that was present in George's Latin text. Praise of the Catholic Church is omitted. George's characterization of dervishes as "not men but angels," which Boemus repeated, and the warning that Satan can imitate an angel, which Boemus omitted, are condensed into a single statement that the dervishes resemble "more the devil incarnate himself than people." In the Augsburg edition of the translation, this point is illustrated by a woodcut of a Turk worshipping the devil, shown with four horns and taloned feet, surrounded by largely naked dervishes.⁴⁶ This identification of Sufism with the devil is ironic, given that Franck's own theology actually agreed in many ways with Sufi theology. There was no way that Franck could have known this, however, as George said nothing about Sufi theology.

Luther and Franck were both interested in Islam and Sufism, then, but in both cases the most important factor driving their understandings was their own theological positions. Luther wanted to contrast Sufis with Catholic monks to the disadvantage of the

Catholic monks, and Franck wanted to contrast his own invisible spiritual church with organized religion to the disadvantage of organized religion. As soon as Sufism came to the attention of the West, then, it was used as ammunition in internal, Western theological debates—a role it would continue to play over succeeding centuries.

THE VIEW FROM FRANCE

Franck's understanding of Sufism does not seem to have reached France or Britain, where German was not then widely read. The next account of Sufism after George and Boemus was by Antoine Geuffroy, published in 1542.⁴⁷ This account is in French, not Latin. Nothing is known about Geuffroy, although he identifies himself as a member of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, the "Knights Hospitalers,"⁴⁸ a Catholic military order which retreated to Cyprus and then Rhodes after the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1522 it then lost Rhodes to the Ottomans, retreating this time to Malta, where it would remain until evicted by Napoleon in 1798. As the Hospitalers were frequently and unsuccessfully at war with the Ottomans, one would hardly expect a Hospitaler to be pro-Ottoman, even a French Hospitaler after the Franco-Ottoman alliance of 1536. Geuffroy's book, however, makes the Turks as similar to the French as possible, even to the extent of claiming that "they say the Lord's Prayer as we do, translated into the Arabic language almost word for word" and that the Gospels are part of the Islamic scriptures, though the crucifixion has been omitted.⁴⁹ Neither of these statements are really true. Although the *Fatiha* in some ways resembles the Lord's Prayer in its sentiments and is indeed in Arabic, the actual texts of the two prayers are quite different. Similarly, although there are many Bible stories in the Quran, there are few from the Gospels, and all are in rather different versions. It is hard to escape the suspicion that there was never a Hospitaler called Geuffroy, and that the book was, in fact, French government propaganda.

When he came to Islam, Geuffroy followed George's classification and noted that as well as having "priests," the Turks also had "monastic orders" (*religions*)⁵⁰ that differ from each other in clothing and practices, "just like ours." He listed the Turkish "orders" as *derviz* (dervishes), *sophiz* (Sufis), *demscher* (dervishes), and *serifz* (Sharifs).⁵¹ That he lists dervishes twice with two different transcriptions of the same word underlines the derivative nature of his account, and the unusual transliteration of *demscher* seems to follow the erroneous printing of *dervischlar* as *dermschlar* in many editions of George. A Sharif is neither a dervish nor a Sufi, but rather a descendant of the Prophet, also known as a *sayyid*. By 1542 there were very many Sharifs, who organized themselves as a separate group within society, so Geuffroy was thus not entirely wrong in seeing them as a sort of religious order.

The next account, published eleven years later, in 1553, is also French and also distinctly pro-Ottoman, but reports antinomian practices. It is by Pierre Belon, a physician

and botanist who was attached to the French embassy to Istanbul in the 1540s.⁵² Given this official background, a generally pro-Ottoman stance might be expected. Belon likened the Turks not to the French but to the Romans, also a positive comparison.⁵³ He again identified dervishes as monks, and described them in terms of mendicancy, self-mortification, and antinomian dress. He described the dervishes' nakedness and suffering of extremes of heat and cold, and the scars from their self-inflicted wounds. This might strike the reader as unusual or repugnant, but Belon explained it as being not a modern phenomenon, but something mentioned by Plato, who attributed the apparent craziness and fury of such people to "ecstasy (*ecstasis*), that is to say the imaginations that come to them divinely in prophecy."⁵⁴

Belon was the first Western writer to wonder about the origins of Sufism, a question which later grew in importance. He approaches it through etymology, noting that the term dervish (*dervis*) is not so different from the term Druid (*druide*), "that is to say, the ancient Greek philosophers who were Athenian colonists and left Phocaea to come to Marseilles."⁵⁵ Marseilles was indeed founded by colonists from Phocaea (now Foça, Turkey), an Ionian city on the western coast of Anatolia, as Thucydides mentions.⁵⁶ The identification of Druids with Greek philosophers was an ancient one, going back to Strabo's *Geography* (*Geographika*) and Julius Caesar's *Gallie War* (*De bellum Gallico*), and Pliny had suggested that the word "Druid" derived from the Greek *drys*, oak.⁵⁷ The identification of Druids with dervishes, however, seems to have been the invention of Belon, who was perhaps tempted by the way that this identification allowed him to link dervishes with ancient philosophy and so support his comparison of the ecstasies of dervishes with those mentioned by Plato. Belon was in fact right to link Sufis to Greek philosophy, but he had had no way of knowing this.

Dervishes as Deviants

The most widely read work on the Turks and Islam of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages made into Turkey* (*Les navigations, peregrinations et voyages faicts en la Turquie*) of Nicolas de Nicolay, the French Geographer Royal, who had joined the French embassy to Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1551.⁵⁸ Nicolay's *Navigations* was published in 1577, almost a century after George's *Treatise on the Turks*, and took an anti-Ottoman line. It was illustrated with fine engravings, which no doubt contributed to its great success. It was translated into Latin, English, Italian, German, Dutch, and Spanish.⁵⁹ The original engravings were redone as wood-cuts in Antwerp, and those wood-cuts were then redone as new engravings in Venice. These engravings inspired nineteenth-century "Orientalist" painting, discussed in a later chapter, notably that of Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres.⁶⁰

Nicolay's discussion of dervishes in his *Navigations* draws chiefly on an earlier account by Giovanni Menavino, an Italian who had spent ten years as a slave at the Ottoman

court in Istanbul.⁶¹ Nicolay also takes some details from an account by Bartholomenis Georgewitz, another former slave. He alters Menavino's account, which is already more critical than the account of George, making it more dramatic and shocking.

Menavino had been captured at the age of twelve, en route from Genova to Venice,⁶² at a time when slave raids in and across the Mediterranean were still common.⁶³ He was fortunate enough to be bought by the Sultan's household, and spent ten years at the Ottoman court,⁶⁴ evidently learning Ottoman Turkish and possibly also learning Persian. Although he says nothing of this, he can be assumed to have converted to Islam, as that was the norm for the Sultan's household slaves. Like George before him, he had far better access to Turkish society than visiting French officials did.

Menavino's book, published in Italian in 1548, is well informed. It uses a different classification system from George's *Treatise on the Turks* and divides Turkish "priests" into two groups, one "important" and one secondary. His "important" group consisted of the ulema and the Sufis (*sophi*), about whom he says nothing save that they chant *laude* in mosques.⁶⁵ *Laude* were a form of vernacular sacred singing then very popular in Italy, so Menavino may be referring to *madih*, poems in praise of the Prophet often chanted by Sufis, or may be referring to the chanting of the *dhikr*. His secondary group of "priests" consists of Jamis (*giamailler*), Qalandars (*calender*), dervishes (*dervisi*), and Torlaks (*torlacchi*).⁶⁶ This is a strange classification, as the Jamis, Qalandars, and Torlaks would normally be considered dervishes, and the group that Menavino calls "dervishes" is evidently one particular dervish *tariqa*, the Bektashis, to judge from the detailed description he provides of their chief ceremony, later known as the *cem*.⁶⁷ One wonders whether Menavino himself had become a Bektashi, as his detailed knowledge of the Bektashis could hardly have been acquired by means other than participant observation, and the Bektashis were present at the Ottoman court.

Menavino initially introduces all four groups in negative terms, as those who prefer pleasure to work and live disordered lives given to gluttony, luxury, and sodomy, while giving the appearance of living honestly and religiously.⁶⁸ He then focuses his condemnation on the Torlaks, though there is perhaps a hint of homosexuality among the Jamis as well as among the Torlaks. "Torlak" is generally understood to be a slang term for Qalandar,⁶⁹ but Menavino distinguishes clearly between Qalandars, whom he claims are literate, and the Torlaks, whom he claims are illiterate, and dress differently.⁷⁰ The Jamis are well born, well educated, excellent craftsmen, and good musicians, and the Qalandars are inspired by Nesimi (Imad al-Din Nasimi), a Hurufi poet for whom Menavino expresses admiration, and who he says is sympathetic toward Christianity,⁷¹ which is indeed how some of his poems can be read.⁷² The "dervishes" (Bektashis) are "very merry people."⁷³ Their use of powdered hashish (*asseral*) to make them "intoxicated" (*imbriaco*) is noted but not condemned. Similarly, Qalandar use of a ring inserted in the penis is merely noted, and explained as ensuring chastity.⁷⁴

The Torlaks, however, are roundly condemned. They are alleged to use trickery to obtain great quantities of alms from innocent townsfolk, and then to laugh at the

simplicity of those they have deceived. They are also accused of sodomy. After consuming hashish, Menavino says, they lie on the ground, “as naked of clothes as they are of shame, using each other lustfully, like savage beasts.”⁷⁵ Menavino also makes occasional critical comments about other aspects of Ottoman civilization elsewhere in the book, but on the whole he describes Ottoman society dispassionately and accurately. This is not the case with Nicolay, who removes Menavino’s favorable comments on Nesimi, demotes the Jamis from being excellent craftsmen to being merely good craftsmen, and introduces the Bektashis not as merry but as “strange and bestial.”⁷⁶ Menavino’s hint of homosexual behavior among Jamis is made explicit,⁷⁷ and sodomy is ascribed not just to the Torlaks but also to the Bektashis, who are said also to engage in bestiality, and to be great thieves, killing without scruple those of any faith whom they meet on the highway.⁷⁸ While Menavino has the Bektashis using hashish as part of the celebration of the *cem*, Nicolay has them using it habitually. Rather than producing “intoxication” it makes them “by its violent operation” into “maniacs, enraged and out of their senses.”⁷⁹ Menavino has the Bektashis cutting themselves at the climax of the *cem*; Nicolay has them cutting themselves as a result of being made into violent maniacs by hashish.⁸⁰ Only Menavino’s description of the Torlaks is translated from Italian into French without significant modification,⁸¹ and that is the description that is already very negative.

Nicolay’s account was the most widely read of the period. It established an understanding of dervishes as deviants, an understanding to which there was some basis in truth, as some dervishes did then indeed engage in antinomian practices, but which was generalized and exaggerated. This reflected the fact Nicolay was reworking his sources, a process which allowed scope for the imagination. To some extent, his understanding of dervishes as deviants also reflected politics, as there were still tensions between the Ottomans and Europe, despite the French alliance. Most of all, however, it seems to have reflected simple sensationalism.

Nicolay’s understanding of dervishes continued during the seventeenth century in similarly derivative and sensationalist accounts. It was followed, for example, by Guillet de la Guilletière, who referred to their “frauds” in his 1676 account of a visit to Athens,⁸² an account that was itself a fraud, as Guilletière had not actually been in Athens.⁸³ It was also followed by Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, who in 1680 told the story of an apparently pious dervish in Istanbul who obtained permission to conduct a nightly vigil in a mosque, but turned out only to want to drink the olive oil from the mosque lamps, and was finally caught.⁸⁴

SUFISM AS MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

During the sixteenth century, the European study of the Muslim world was in its infancy, carried out mostly by amateurs whose linguistic knowledge and experience

of the Muslim world was limited. The exceptions were George and Menavino, whose experience and linguistic knowledge were excellent, but their work received less attention from the general public as time passed, if only because it was in Latin, German, and Italian rather than French, and had no splendid illustrations. Though the *Treatise on the Turks* was referred to occasionally by scholars over succeeding centuries, it was not republished after 1596⁸⁵ until a new edition appeared in 1993.⁸⁶ During the seventeenth century, knowledge and teaching of Arabic advanced, as diplomatic and military contacts with the Ottomans produced a need for new linguistic, political, and cultural expertise. This added a new dimension to the Arabic scholarship that had existed only patchily in the Latin world since the twelfth century. It also coincided with a period of new interest in the developments of Christian emanationism, which had become known as “mystical theology” and as “Quietism.” The result was the identification of Sufism as “mystical theology.”

The term “mystical theology” derives ultimately from Dionysius’s *On Secret Scripture* (*Peri mustikes theologias*) which, as we have seen, was translated into Latin as *On Mystical Theology* (*De mystica theologia*), and on which a major commentary was written by Albert the Great. This may have helped the transformation in meaning of the term from its original significance of “secret” to its modern sense, which became established during the seventeenth century. “Mystical theology” designated not theology in the sense of doctrine, but practice:⁸⁷ contemplative prayer aiming at union, to which other forms of spiritual exercise were preliminary.⁸⁸

Initially, the Catholic Church welcomed the development of mystical theology, and two sixteenth-century mystics, St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross, were much celebrated. During the late seventeenth century, however, as mystical theology spread among the laity, it became suspect, and gave rise to two high-profile splits within the Church. The first was in Italy, where the prominent theologian and mystic Miguel de Molinos was arrested in 1685 and saw his propositions condemned. The second was in France, where the mystic Jeanne-Marie Guyon was arrested in 1688, and the propositions of her close associate Bishop François Fénelon were condemned in 1699.⁸⁹ The followers of Molinos became known as the “Quietists,” and the followers of Guyon and Fénelon were known as “illuminists” or as “mystics.”

Molinos, in common with other seventeenth-century exponents of mystical theology, devoted little time and attention to emanation. Like other such works of the period, his best known work, the *Spiritual Guide* (*Guida spirituale*), is a practical manual, not a work of philosophy.⁹⁰ Emanationism, however, underlies the exercises he promotes, as it does that of other manuals of mystical theology.

The identification of Sufism as mystical theology was first made in 1674 by the French Arabist François Pétis de la Croix.⁹¹ As Pétis de la Croix does not give his sources, it is not clear on what basis he reached this conclusion. The same identification was then made in the 1680s or 1690s by another French Arabist, Barthélemy d’Herbelot de Molainville, in his *Oriental Library* (*Bibliothèque orientale*).⁹² This

posthumous encyclopedic work, containing some eight thousand articles, was based on an even longer Ottoman work, *The Uncovering of Ideas: On the Titles of Books and the Names of the Sciences* (*Kashf al-zunun an asami al-kutub wa-l-funun*) by Katib Çelebi, and so had both excellent coverage and a solid basis in Ottoman scholarship. It became a standard reference in later centuries, being used not only by French writers such as Voltaire, but also by English writers including Gibbon, Byron, Beckford, and Southey.⁹³

Pétis de la Croix does not say what he means by “mystical theology,” but Herbelot does, in the context of a discussion of the famous and controversial early Sufi, Mansur al-Hallaj. Sufi mystical theology, according to Herbelot, is “the intimate union with the Divine in the heart of man detached from love for things of the earth, and transported beyond himself.”⁹⁴ This is a reasonable summary of the Sufi understanding of the Sufi path, which Herbelot defines elsewhere as “the science of raising man from the purely human state to that of felicity, passing degree by degree to the highest perfection of which he is by his nature possible.”⁹⁵ For Herbelot too, then, “mystical theology” describes not doctrine but practice. Herbelot not only correctly explains the essence of Sufi theology, but also provides a correction to the understanding of dervishes as deviants in his treatment of antinomian poetry. He quotes Hafiz, “Give me not the cup until I have torn from my breast the blue robe,” and explains that the wine in the cup is to be understood as divine love and the blue robe as earthly hypocrisy.⁹⁶

Herbelot also notes the possible derivation of “Sufi” from the Greek *sophos*,⁹⁷ following the Dutch scholar Jacobus Golius, who suggested this etymology in the dictionary he published in 1653.⁹⁸ The etymology is also almost certainly wrong,⁹⁹ but is more plausible than the derivation of “dervish” from “Druid,” and served to represent the hypothesis of Sufism’s ancient Greek origins. Although almost certainly wrong, it is still sometimes encountered today.

In contrast to sixteenth-century understandings of dervishes as devils or deviants, then, the best scholars of the seventeenth-century had, in effect, identified Sufism’s Neoplatonic roots. The story of the Western reception of Sufism, then, might almost have stopped in 1697 with the publication of Herbelot’s *Oriental Dictionary*, which does not fundamentally disagree with its contemporary successor, the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

Deism and Pantheism



THE FIRST SUFI text ever published in Europe was the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* by Ibn Tufayl, translated into Latin in 1671 as *The Self-taught Philosopher* (*Philosophus autodidactus*). This Latin edition was then translated into English in 1686, and since then the book has been translated and re-translated so many times that it may be the most widely read work of Arab origin in the West, other than the *The Thousand and One Nights*.¹ The *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was not identified as a Sufi text, however. Although some did identify it as mystical, most understood it as Deist, and this was the reason for its popularity. Deism had emerged earlier in the seventeenth century as a new understanding of religion that rejected many of the details of Christianity, though it retained such basic points as the existence of God and judgment by that God. In 1670, Baruch Spinoza offered its most radical expression, called “Spinozism”; this view was so radical that the euphemism “Pantheism” was coined to disguise it.

The translation of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was an instance of a new kind of intercultural transfer. Earlier understandings of dervishes as deviants had served the purposes of their Western proponents, but nevertheless had some basis in fact, as some dervishes were indeed antinomian. Understandings of Sufism as mysticism were also based in fact: although there was more to Sufism than mysticism, there was indeed mysticism in Sufism. The understanding of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deism, however, had little justification. Ibn Tufayl could hardly have been a Deist, as Deism did not exist during his lifetime, and in fact his views were very different from those of the Deists. One consequence for the West of the translation of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, then, was to add support to a theology—Deism—to which no Sufi had ever actually subscribed.

The understanding of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deism had no immediate consequence for Western Sufism. When Western Sufism was established in the modern period, however, Deism was one of the bases on which it was established. It was also established on

the basis of four other concepts that developed in much the same intellectual milieu as Deism did. One was Spinozism (or Pantheism). Another was universalism, already prefigured in George of Hungary's understanding of the Hurufis and in Sebastian Franck's anti-denominationalism. The remaining two were anti-exotericism (a Pantheist form of esotericism) and the *prisca theologia* (ancient theology), best known in its slightly modified later form, perennialism, defined in the introduction to this book as "the idea that the secret, esoteric core [of religion] is very ancient, and can be found in the remote past."² Perennialism has something in common with universalism, as we will see, but there are also differences between the two concepts that had important consequences in the twentieth century. This chapter will follow the development of these ideas, as well as the identification of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deist.

The origins of Spinoza's thought have been much debated, and remain unclear. The origins of Deism are easier to identify, and include the fifteenth-century Florentine Neoplatonic revival of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Their Neoplatonism is also the immediate origin of the concept of the *prisca theologia*. This chapter will therefore go back in time to fifteenth-century Florence, returning to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries via the work of Guillaume Postel, Europe's first professor of Arabic, and a major proponent of universalism. The only Sufi who will be encountered along the way is Ibn Tufayl, but the origins and nature of the perennialism, anti-exotericism, Deism, and universalism that structured Western Sufism in the early twentieth century will become clear.

THE PRISCA THEOLOGIA IN THE RENAISSANCE

The idea of an ultimate, revealed truth known at the beginning of time and handed down from age to age was not new. In some ways, it was just a variation on the standard sacred history of the Jews. As Wouter Hanegraaff has shown, it was also a commonplace of early Christian theologians, who needed to defend Christianity from the charge of inferiority to respected, ancient wisdom, and who therefore constructed histories that placed ancient philosophy in a suitable relation to Christianity by arguing that Plato and Aristotle had taken their wisdom from Moses.³ In the second century, Clement of Alexandria inserted Egyptians, Chaldaeans, Druids, Celts, Samanaeans, Magi, and Indians between Moses and the Greeks.⁴ St. Justin Martyr extended Christianity backwards in time, arguing that "Christ is the first-born of God, being the logos in which the whole race of human beings shares. And those who lived with the logos are Christians, even if they were called atheists, such as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and those similar to them."⁵

Later, during the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon traced the origins of philosophy from God to Noah, and from there through the Chaldeans to Egypt, and so on to Aristotle.⁶ Bacon ascribed this view to Aristotle, and quoted St. Augustine in its

support,⁷ which was stretching Augustine's own views somewhat. He was also wrong to cite Aristotle, as the work which he took to be by Aristotle, the *Secret of Secrets* (*Secretum secretorum*), was actually of Arab origin.⁸ One of the differences between Bacon's scheme and standard sacred history was that Bacon saw a secret transmission of philosophy in parallel to the well-known transmission of religion. He did not use the terms "esoteric" and "exoteric," but when that pair of terms did come into use, it would describe very well the parallel transmissions that Bacon envisaged.

Florentine Neoplatonism

The more developed form of the idea of an ancient and ultimate revealed truth was the work of Neoplatonists in Florence during the Renaissance, sometimes called "Hermetic" because of their supposed emphasis on the work of Hermes Trismegistus, originally thought to be contemporary with Moses, but in later centuries discovered to be contemporary with early Christianity. While the Florentine Neoplatonists were interested in Hermes, however, they were in no sense reliant on him, as Hanegraaff has shown.⁹ The "grand narrative" of "Hermeticism" and "Hermetic Neoplatonism" is, despite this, well established. Hanegraaff considers "Renaissance Platonism" as an alternative term, but rejects it, as it implies a focus on philosophy rather than religion, and so suggests "Platonic Orientalism."¹⁰ Given the importance of Plotinus, however, this book will refer to "Florentine Neoplatonism."

The story of Florentine Neoplatonism is commonly begun in 1438 with the Council of Florence, a failed attempt to reunite Western and Eastern Christianity which was attended by the Byzantine philosopher Georgios Gemistos Plethon. Plethon was a notable Neoplatonist. He was later suspected by his one-time pupil and then long-time opponent, Georgios Kourtesios Scholarios, of actually abandoning Christianity for Hellenism. Scholarios was also a philosopher, and in 1454 became the first Ottoman-appointed Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, as Gennadius II. If his charge of apostasy against Plethon was justified, it would make Plethon the world's first proper Neopagan. But it may not be justified, as it rests largely on a single text, the *Book of Laws* (*Nomoi*), which we know only from the account of Scholarios, who destroyed it.¹¹ An objective assessment of the *Book of Laws* is thus impossible.

Plethon's eloquent expositions of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy in Florence are credited with having inspired Cosimo de' Medici to fund the revival of Platonic studies that was led by Marsilio Ficino.¹² This development initiated the process whereby the fourteenth-century dominance of Aristotelian philosophy in Western universities was challenged by scholars outside the universities,¹³ and whereby the Latin West learned of the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy which had survived largely intact in the Greek East. This process may have been assisted by the arrival in the West of Byzantine scholars as refugees after the conquest of the last Byzantine stronghold, Constantinople (now Istanbul), by the Ottomans in 1453.

The French scholar Henry Corbin has argued for an Islamic influence on Plethon. Some contemporary scholars have accepted this argument,¹⁴ but the Islamic influence is still unproven, and Plethon's work can easily be explained without reference to it. In fact, Plethon really reflects the end of Arab influence on Latin Neoplatonism. After Plethon, Western scholars worked increasingly from Greek texts,¹⁵ and the Arab philosophy that once had such a dramatic impact on the Latin world gradually faded into unimportance in the West.

The greatest Florentine Platonist was Marsilio Ficino, appointed by Cosimo to translate Plato and other interesting texts into Latin. Ficino, like many other Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophers before him, was concerned to demonstrate the compatibility of Greek philosophy with Christian theology, which he did in his 1482 *Platonic Theology* (*Theologia Platonica*). He was also interested in other sources of ancient wisdom, especially Plotinus, whose work he saw as the purest expression of ancient philosophy, which he thought earlier philosophers had veiled in symbolism and fable, and also as a reformulation of the great truths contained in St. John and Dionysius.¹⁶ For Ficino, Plotinus united Greek philosophy and Christian theology.

Ficino was notable for promoting the idea of the *prisca theologia* that was transmitted from early antiquity through a chain of sages, including Hermes, to Plato and Plotinus.¹⁷ The replacement of Noah, the starting point of Bacon's chain, with Zoroaster reflects the influence of Plethon,¹⁸ and the replacement of Bacon's Aristotle at the end of the chain with Plato and Plotinus reflects improved understanding of classical and late antique philosophy: while in Bacon's time Neoplatonic philosophy might still be easily mistaken for Aristotle, Ficino had access to the original texts of the Neoplatonists, in their original language, with their original attributions, and did not make this mistake.

Ficino was not interested in Jewish or Islamic sources, and the intercultural transfer relevant to his work was from Byzantium. In contrast, Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, a wealthy young scholar born into a noble family from near Modena, also drew on the Kabbalah, and on Hebrew translations of Arab philosophical texts. Pico studied at Bologna and other Italian universities, and then at Paris, before moving to Florence and working there with Jochanan Alemanno, a Jewish scholar familiar with Kabbalah and with both Jewish and Muslim Arab Neoplatonism.¹⁹ He then played a key role in adjusting Kabbalah to fit Christian doctrine, notably by identifying the first three *sefirot* (emanations) with the Trinity.²⁰

Pico's most famous work is his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*Oratio de hominis dignitate*), the title later given to his discussion of a set of propositions prepared for a disputation that never took place, as a number of the propositions were judged heretical in advance. The influence of Pico's *Oration* has been found by later scholars in places as varied as seventeenth-century French humanism²¹ and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.²² It argues for the dignity of some, but not of all. Those who remain slaves to their senses are no more than brutes. The philosopher, in contrast, is more a celestial than a terrestrial animal, and the "pure contemplator" is neither terrestrial nor celestial but "divinity

(*numen*) clothed in human flesh.”²³ The familiar emanationist scheme may be discerned. As Fabrizio Lelli has shown, both Alemanno and Pico were Neoplatonists, accepting the crucial Neoplatonic system of the return of the soul through the Intelligence to the One, though Pico thought this could be achieved through Christ’s grace, which of course Alemanno, as a Jew, did not.²⁴

The *Oration* is a hymn to philosophy. Its key authorities are the philosophers, and at one point Pico gives a long list of those he respects, starting with Plato and Aristotle, and passing through Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, Alfarabi and Avicenna, to Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great.²⁵ Boethius is also mentioned.²⁶ To these sources, he explains, he has added the teachings of Hermes, the Chaldeans and Pythagoras, and the Kabbalah, described as the “secret theology of the Jews” (*Hebreorum theologia secretior*).²⁷ Hermes is referred to six times, Pythagoras and the Kabbalah are cited twelve times each, the Chaldeans are cited sixteen times, and the word “philosophy” is used sixty-two times.

As was first suggested by Eugenio Anagnine in 1937,²⁸ what Florentine Neoplatonism took to be the *prisca theologia* was actually mostly Neoplatonism. The Kabbalah played an important part in this intercultural transfer, since, as William Bouwsma has argued, the Kabbalah “introduced many of the conceptions of hellenistic thought, attractive but previously suspect, under the respectable auspices of sacred tradition.”²⁹

The Florentine Neoplatonists marked a high point of Neoplatonism’s influence in the West. Subsequently, the influence of Neoplatonism declined. In 1594 the Counter-Reformation philosopher Giovan Battista Crispo published *On the Need to Read Plato Cautiously* (*De Platone cauto legendo*), attacking the Florentine Neoplatonists’ reading of Plato, and distinguishing Neoplatonism from original Platonism.³⁰ Similar arguments were made by Jacob Thomasius in 1665, and then in 1699 and 1710 by two German Protestant theologians, Ehregott Daniel Colberg and Friedrich Christian Bücher. This and related German scholarship, notably the work of Johann Jacob Brucker, began the process of establishing the standard history of philosophy as we know it today, and as was drawn on by Diderot for his *Encyclopedia* (*Encyclopédie*) after 1751. From then onwards, Neoplatonism fell out of the main Western philosophical canon.³¹

UNIVERSALISM: GUILLAUME POSTEL AND THE JESUITS

The concept of the *prisca theologia* was of a hidden revealed truth preceding the Christian and Jewish revelations that was ultimately compatible with the Christian revelation, and in fact with the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The Catholic faith, at least in theory, continued to reign supreme. The *prisca theologia* and perennialism extended truth backwards in time, but did not extend it laterally. A related but different concept, however, extended truth laterally, finding it not only in Catholic Christianity, but also in other religions. This concept, which this book calls “universalism,” was to prove of enormous

importance in the religious history of the West, and also for the later development of Western Sufism. It is present in Ibn Gabirol, George, and Franck, and is then articulated in the work of a sixteenth-century French Neoplatonist who drew on the Florentine Neoplatonists, Guillaume Postel. It is also visible in the work of an Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, who was not a Neoplatonist, but who found in universalism a solution to the practical problem of how to understand Chinese religion.

Guillaume Postel

Guillaume Postel was French, and started his career at the University of Paris as the servant of a Spanish scholar, Juan de Gelida. He became a Master of Arts, learned Greek, and was set by his master to translating Greek philosophical texts.³² He also picked up Spanish and Portuguese, taught himself Hebrew, and made a start on Arabic using a polyglot psalter which had parallel texts in Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, Arabic, and Latin.³³ When he was twenty-six, these achievements earned him a place with the French embassy of 1536 to the Ottoman court. While in Istanbul, he employed a Christian Arabic teacher who told him that there were many Christians in the Ottoman lands who wished only for an Arabic translation of the Gospels.³⁴ This was the immediate origin of a task that occupied Postel for many years: the production and printing of translations of the Gospels in Arabic and Syriac (which was then still read and spoken by some Christians), and the conversion of Ottoman Muslims to Christianity.

On his return to France in 1538, Postel was appointed lecturer at the newly founded Royal College (*Collège royal*, now the *Collège de France*) to teach Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic.³⁵ This made him the first professor of Arabic in Western history. As well as an Arabic grammar, he published a pioneering work of comparative linguistics which sought to show that all languages, including French, derived from Hebrew,³⁶ making Hebrew in effect a sort of *prisca lingua* (a term he did not actually use). He lost his post, however, after only four years, partly because he backed the losing side in a court intrigue, and partly, it seems, because of haranguing King Francis I, either on the need for France to train Arabic-speaking missionaries to convert Ottoman Muslims,³⁷ or on the need for the king to reform his kingdom as a preliminary to becoming the royal leader of a "Universal Restoration."³⁸ The king is reported to have commented "I thought him wiser than he is."³⁹

"Universal Restoration" was a standard, if advanced, issue in Christian theology at the time, and was understood in various ways. For Postel, it meant the return from the post-Adamic fallen world to Adamic perfection, the dawning of a sort of new age. Postel's contribution to the understanding of Restoration was to link this idea with the idea of the *prisca theologia* as developed by Ficino, Alemanno, and Pico. For Postel, the reunification of religions was both necessary for Restoration to occur, and a major part of Restoration, since the original unity of revelation was one major characteristic of the Adamic period.⁴⁰ This was to remain a major theme in Postel's thought, and was the origin of his universalism.

After his dismissal as a royal lecturer, Postel wrote his first major work on comparative religion and philosophy, *Concord of the Earth* (*De orbis terrae concordia*). This long work (447 pages of close type in the 1544 edition) was divided into four sections. The first sought to prove the truth of Christianity on the basis of philosophy, the second to disprove the claims of Islam, the third to list (relatively briefly) the propositions allegedly accepted by all faiths, and the fourth to discuss the organization of missionary work in the Muslim world.⁴¹ It was, then, a product of Postel's mission to convert Ottoman Muslims to Christianity, but foreshadowed his later, more universalist, approach in its list of propositions common to all faiths.

Chapter three of Postel's *Concord of the Earth* deals with the Trinity, starting with five standard proofs, moving on to philosophical proofs, and ending with the proofs of the Kabbalah and Talmud. The first philosopher interpreted is Aristotle, who is said to have understood that the universe existed in three dimensions; then Pythagoras, who also used a three-fold division (beginning, middle, and end); and then he examines other philosophers who are said to have taught this same Trinitarian truth following their master Zoroaster: "Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Maximus, Amelius, Iamblichus." Postel seems to have derived his version of the Neoplatonic scheme directly, as well as through the Christian Kabbalah of Pico, whom he cites.⁴² The reference to Zoroaster echoes Ficino. Postel's *Concord of the Earth*, then, builds partly on Pico's Christian Kabbalah, partly on the Kabbalah itself (which Postel read in the Hebrew original),⁴³ and partly on the original Neoplatonists.

Postel then moved to Rome, where he was ordained as a priest and joined the Society of Jesus, the newly established Jesuit order, whose founding members, including Ignatius Loyola, he had known as a student in Paris. The Jesuits, however, became concerned about Postel's increasingly unorthodox theology, and in 1545 expelled him from their order. He then moved on to Venice, where, while working as a chaplain at the hospital of St. John and St. Paul, he deepened his study of Kabbalah, translated the *Book of Splendor* (*Sefer ha-zohar*), and wrote his most important works, including what was in effect a revised version of the *Concord of the Earth*, the *Panthenosia* [*General theory*]: *The Unification of all Differences about Eternal truth and its Various Appearances* (*Panthenosia: Compositio omnium dissidiorum circa aeternam veritatem aut verisimilitudinem versantium*), which he was cautious enough to publish under a pseudonym.⁴⁴

The *Panthenosia*, in contrast to the earlier *Concord*, is less critical of Islam, accepting Islam's own claim to be a revival of the primordial (*hanif*) religion of Abraham, which Postel understands as "the law of nature," in contrast to Judaism as the written law and Christianity as the law of grace. "All," asserted Postel, "seek the same Jesus, even though they claim it is not the same."⁴⁵ Ibn Gabirol had made much the same point. As Postel explained in an unpublished commentary on the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, Muslims, Christians, and Jews were all missing one crucial aspect of Jesus: that he was created before time as the "tree" of all Intelligences, that is to say the origin of all Intelligences.⁴⁶ Christ is here given exactly the cosmic function that we earlier saw al-Tustari giving the Prophet

Muhammad; the scheme is the Neoplatonic scheme of the Christian Kabbala, where God is the One and Christ the first Intelligence. Postel thus follows Franck in finding Neoplatonic unity in different religions. This, he wrote, was the understanding of Jesus that he aimed to promote in the *Panthenosia*,⁴⁷ thus contributing to the Universal Restoration and to a fourth, new age.

There is some disagreement among modern scholars as to Postel's sources. There is general agreement that the Kabbalah is of prime importance. Bouwsma, however, raises the possibility that Postel was also drawing on Arab sources, pointing out that he did not generally cite such sources, but that sometimes it was clear that he was using them.⁴⁸ Whether or not Postel was aware that emanationism was also to be found in Arab sources, he made no connection between Neoplatonism and Sufism in his *On the Community of the Turks* (*De la republique des Turcs*), an account of Turkish society printed in 1560.⁴⁹

The *Panthenosia* did not have the impact that Postel hoped for. In 1555, when he was forty-five, the Inquisition first placed his works on the Index of Prohibited Books, and then found him to be insane.⁵⁰ He had become convinced in 1547 that Mother Jeanne, the patron of the hospital in Venice where he was a chaplain, was a prophet, incarnating the Intelligence of Jesus.⁵¹ After Jeanne's death, Postel became convinced that Jeanne was the new Eve and he was himself her eldest son, inhabited by her "spiritual substance" to the point where it was she who was living in him, not he himself.⁵² This and other related ideas were explained in 1553 in a short book he wrote in French, in which he also argued for the transmigration of souls.⁵³ It is hardly surprising that the Inquisition intervened. Postel spent four years in prison in Italy, four years sometimes at liberty and sometimes under arrest in France, and then eighteen years in increasingly gentle confinement at the monastery of St. Martin des Champs in Paris, where he died in 1581.⁵⁴

Matteo Ricci

Universalism was not found only in Postel's *Panthenosia*, but also in the work of an Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci. A Catholic mission to East Asia was started, a few years after Postel's expulsion from the Jesuit order, by Ignatius Loyola's close companion Francis Xavier, who landed in Japan in 1549. Xavier and his Japanese-born translator faced the problem of how to render Christian concepts in Japanese, and ended up using Buddhist terminology, with the result that they were welcomed by the Buddhist priests, who failed to understand that the Jesuits' message was fundamentally different from their own. This setback spurred the Jesuits to engage in a systematic study of Japanese religion, later extended to include Chinese religion.⁵⁵ One leading Jesuit student of Chinese religion, Ricci, specialized in Confucianism, and became convinced that the original belief system of the Chinese was compatible with Christianity. "They recognized and worshipped one supreme being who they called the King of Heaven," wrote Ricci in his diary in about 1594. "They also taught that the light of reason came from heaven and that

the dictates of reason should be hearkened to in every human action.⁵⁶ Given this, Ricci believed, Christianity could complement, rather than replace, Chinese beliefs.

Ricci's position was challenged, first by his Jesuit colleague João Rodrigues, who argued that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were all fundamentally atheistic because they excluded creation, Divine providence, and judgment,⁵⁷ and then by other Catholic orders. This resulted in the "Chinese Rights Controversy" (*Querelle des rites*) of 1645–1742, so called because it centered on whether or not Confucian rites were acceptable in Christians. During this, those taking versions of Ricci's position and holding that the rites were acceptable were finally defeated by those taking versions of Rodrigues's position and holding that the rites were not acceptable. It became established that divine revelation was limited to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Rodrigues had earlier argued that Chinese religion derived from Abraham via Noah's son Ham,⁵⁸ who was indirectly cursed by Noah for monstrous crimes of uncertain nature.

The semi-perennialist, quasi-universalism of Ricci, then, in the end fared no better within the Catholic Church than did the Neoplatonic universalism of Postel. Universalism, however, would still survive and prosper outside the Church.

DEISM DEMONSTRATED BY ARAB AND TURK

The central idea of Deism is that it is possible to determine certain important truths by reason alone, that is to say, without the aid of revelation. The classic list of these truths is to be found in a 1624 work by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *On Truth, as It Is Distinguished from Revelation, the Probable, the Possible, and the False* (*De Veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso*). Cherbury was a former British ambassador to France who had been in contact with advanced French opinion while in Paris, though it is not quite clear precisely what opinion. Herbert does not give his sources in his own work, making them hard to establish.⁵⁹ Ronald Bedford, however, has noted similarities between Herbert and Postel.⁶⁰ Postel, it will be remembered, had composed a list of truths he believed were accepted by all faiths.

Deism was not a coherent movement. It was so radical that the term "Deist" was generally used as an accusation against a writer of whom one did not approve, not as a label one applied to oneself. Writers who we understand as Deists on the basis of their opinions might thus attack what they termed "Deism," so as to ensure that they themselves were not accused of being Deists. In some ways, the Deists were united more by what they did not believe ("the so-called truths of revealed religion," as we will see John Toland referring to them) than by what they did believe. Even so, Deism can be seen to have its canonical texts, of which Herbert's *On Truth* was the first. His truths are of a commonsensical rather than Neoplatonic variety, the first of them being that there is a supreme God. The others are that God should be worshiped, that one should live virtuously, that one should repent, and that one will

be rewarded or punished after death.⁶¹ They did not include the Trinity, with which we have seen earlier generations of Christian philosophers struggling. Postel's list of common truths is longer and less elegant than Herbert's, but there is at the very least a family resemblance.

Emphasis on such simple, indisputable truths had an obvious appeal in an age of religious warfare, and in an England recently rent by the sectarian disputes of the Commonwealth.⁶² It also appealed as a response to what Richard Popkin has called a "skeptical crisis" resulting from the growing availability of information about both the chronology of human history and the variety of human religions.⁶³ Popkin's seventeenth-century "skeptical crisis" is an early echo of Peter Berger's "heretical imperative." Berger uses "heretical" in the sense of its lexical root, *haireisthai* (to choose), and his idea is that while there is no real choice for those who know only one version of something, multiple versions make choice imperative.⁶⁴ Berger did not locate this phenomenon in the seventeenth century, but that is when his imperative started, as Jonathan Irvine Israel has shown.⁶⁵ At first it affected only a small number of intellectuals, linked by private correspondence, who only occasionally dared to publish their conclusions. In this it resembled Florentine Neoplatonism. Unlike Florentine Neoplatonism, it later became very widespread.

The relationship between reason and revelation is a fundamental philosophical problem that occupied Muslim scholars before Ibn Tufayl, and became particularly acute for Christian scholars in seventeenth-century England. One possible position, expressed by John Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), is that "reason is the proper judge, and revelation . . . cannot . . . invalidate its decrees." This can lead, as Margaret Jacob has argued, to two conclusions. The conclusion reached by Locke himself in his *The Reasonableness of Christianity* in 1695 was that "revelation is of necessity reasonable," a position that leaves revelation more or less intact. The conclusion reached by Locke's former friend John Toland in *Christianity not Mysterious* in 1696 was the opposite one, that "if the so-called truths of revealed religion contradict reason, then they are simply untrue,"⁶⁶ a position that potentially leaves little of revelation intact. Although both these positions are sometimes described as "Deist," a useful distinction can be made—following Popkin—between "Theism" as the position of Locke and of others who emphasize the origin of religion in revelation, and "Deism" as the position of Toland and others who emphasize reason rather than revelation.⁶⁷ On this basis, Ernst Troeltsch's classification of Franck as a Theist⁶⁸ is justified, if a little anachronistic.

Theism's emphasis on divine revelation as the source of basic points common to all religions might logically imply a number of independent revelations, but might also imply a single original revelation that has subsequently been embellished and confused. This second understanding was popular among eighteenth-century Theists, and was that of Sir Isaac Newton, who identified the original revelation with the religion of Noah, and with the *prisca theologia*.⁶⁹

Sufism as Deism

The first Sufi text to be understood as Deist was the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. For Ibn Tufayl, as we have seen, the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was primarily about Neoplatonic philosophy and its congruence with the sharia, a second point being that philosophy was not for the common people or “cattle.” Secondly, the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is a Sufi work as well as a Neoplatonic one, as it refers to Sufi practice, not just to Neoplatonic Sufi theology. For many seventeenth-century Europeans, however, the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was about the congruence of reason and religion, not philosophy and religion.

The first translation of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was published in 1671 by Edward Pococke, Jr., on the basis of a manuscript that had been acquired in Aleppo, Syria, by his father, Edward Pococke, Sr., Oxford University’s first professor of Arabic. It created a sensation across Europe.⁷⁰ This was partly because of the story Ibn Tufayl had used as his frame, which helped inspire Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, first published in 1719. It was also because, in the words of George Ashwell, a Deist translator of Pococke’s Latin into English,

Some very ingenious and learned Men . . . have endeavoured to demonstrate the main fundamental Truths of Religion by the Light of Humane Reason, and the Principles of Natural Theology, which are generally acknowledged by mankind, though much differing in other points . . . Yet . . . the Discourses of these learned Men... are too subtle, sublime, and metaphysical for common understandings . . . Whereas this Author [Ibn Tufayl] proceeds by such gentle steps, in an easie and familiar way of reasoning, which is obvious to every ones apprehension, that He leads his Reader insensibly onward, without any toilsom labour, or perplexing of his Brains, in the search of the Truth, till He have brought him, before he is aware, unto the end of his journey.⁷¹

Not all understood the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deist, however. The English Arabist Simon Ockley provided a new translation directly from Arabic partly in an attempt to combat this view, appending to his translation an essay in which he reasserted the primacy of Christian doctrine and identified Ibn Tufayl as a mystic rather than a Deist, similar to “the Quietists and other Mysticks and Enthusasists in our own times,”⁷² “Quietists” being a term used to describe the followers of Miguel de Molinos,⁷³ and “Enthusiasts” being people who thought they were possessed by the divine (*entheos*). Ockley also correctly identified the philosophy of the Ibn Tufayl as Greek, if (wrongly) as Aristotelian.⁷⁴

Ockley was not the only person to challenge the view of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deism. Some Quakers, notably George Keith, whose translation preceded that of Ashwell, also identified Neoplatonism. For Keith, the book demonstrated “the conjunction of the mind of man with the supreme Intellect, after the mind is purified from its corruptions and is separated from all bodily images, and is gathered into a profound

stillness.”⁷⁵ Within fifty years, the identification of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as mystical had become widespread enough to be how the editor of a 1757 edition of the letters of Alexander Pope glossed a passing reference to it.⁷⁶ The original understanding of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deism, however, also remained.

The Turkish Spy

The *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was not the only instance of Deism being found in an Islamic work. One of the most popular works of fiction of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was Giovanni Paolo Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy Who liv’d Five and Forty Years undiscover’d at Paris*, published in the 1680s in Italian, French, and English.⁷⁷ There are eight volumes of *Letters*, mixing politics and history with religious speculation and social criticism, and they take full advantage of their fictional narrator’s Ottoman identity to express sentiments that would have been scandalous in the mouth of a Christian, a formula that Montesquieu borrowed in 1721 for his *Persian Letters* (*Lettres persanes*).

Mahmut, the fictional Turkish spy, has to live as a Christian in Paris. He is thus necessarily relaxed about Islamic practice, and becomes increasingly relaxed about doctrine, too. In fact, it is evident that Marana is a Deist, and Mahmut writes increasingly approvingly of Deism, finally identifying the tenth-century Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa) as an Islamic equivalent. The Deists, he says, “canvass the Books of Moses, and the Hebrew Prophets, the Gospel of Jesus the Son of Mary, and the Alcoran of Mahomet our holy Law-giver; chusing what is agreeable to Reason, and rejecting the rest as fabulous.” The Brethren of Purity, he says, did something similar, holding that “the Mussulman Religion was corrupted and alienated from its first Institution, having imbibed many Errors; and that there was no Way to restore it to its Primitive Purity, but by joining to it the Philosophy of the Antients. In a Word, they endeavour’d to reform whatever was amiss in the Doctrines and Manners of the Faithful, by reducing both to the Standard of Reason.”⁷⁸

Marana, then, has Mahmut equate philosophy and reason, as many supposed that Ibn Tufayl did. He also understands the Deists as universalists, drawing on all religions, and the Brethren of Purity as perennialists as well as Deists, drawing on the ancients. Marana’s source for this remarkable conflation is unfortunately unknown, and it is not even clear how he knew of the Brethren of Purity. They are mentioned in Barthélemy d’Herbelot de Molainville’s *Oriental Library* (*Bibliothèque orientale*), but only briefly,⁷⁹ and without any basis for identifying them as Deists. A manuscript of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa*) was also bought in Aleppo by Pococke, but there seems to have been no printed translation into any European language until the nineteenth century, though there were some partial translations into Latin from earlier centuries, which remained in manuscript.⁸⁰ In reality, of course, the philosophy

that inspired and informed the *Epistles* was not Enlightenment reason, but Ismaili Neoplatonism.⁸¹

PANTHEISM AND ANTI-EXOTERICISM

What Israel called “the Radical Enlightenment” started in England with Deism and then received and used the work of the Amsterdam-based philosopher Baruch Spinoza. This was sometimes known at the time as “Spinozism” and sometimes as “Pantheism.” Although only the term “Pantheism” has survived, the term “Spinozism” was more used at the time, and was more accurate.

Baruch Spinoza

Spinoza was born into a Portuguese-speaking family in Amsterdam’s Jewish community, but learned Latin as well as Hebrew, and was profoundly influenced as a young man by the philosophy of Descartes. In 1655, partly under the influence of Descartes and partly, perhaps, because of the failure of the trading business he had inherited from his father, he ceased to observe Jewish practice, publicly condemned the key tenets of Judaism, and was expelled from the Jewish community as a result.⁸² He never became a Christian, and was thus the first modern European to publicly belong to no religion at all. This alone might have made him famous, and his radically anti-religious views made him more famous still. His *Political-Theological Treatise* (*Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus*) of 1670 was widely condemned, but spoke to the spirit of some sections of European intellectual life of the time. Although banned, it was a great success, reprinted in disguise with fake title pages which misidentified it, for example, as a medical text on surgery.⁸³ It was presumably known in England soon after publication, and became widely known after an English translation was published in 1689.⁸⁴

Spinoza is remembered today as a philosopher, and some of his works do indeed engage in the ancient discussion of the relationship between God and creation, coming to the conclusion that God and creation are co-existent with each other,⁸⁵ a view not so different from that of some Neoplatonists. The conclusions that Spinoza drew from this, however, are very different than those drawn by the Neoplatonists: namely, that “causality and creation are inherent in, and not external to, [the] one substance”⁸⁶ that is both God and nature, and that divine providence is “nothing but the striving we find both in Nature as a whole and in particular things, tending to maintain and preserve their being.”⁸⁷ These conclusions are found especially in his *Political-Theological Treatise*, which is a work aimed at the general public, not at philosophers.

The *Political-Theological Treatise* starts with a discussion of the nature of prophecy and of prophets, appearing to treat its topics with the respect that they were then normally

accorded, but coming almost without warning to some truly novel conclusions. Spinoza demonstrates that what distinguishes prophets from other human beings is not that they have any greater understanding, but that they have more imagination. Prophets are in fact often ignorant of basic things, and disagree with each other. The revelations of Moses were all “accommodated to such opinions as he himself entertained,” as were the revelations of other prophets. Given this, “we are never to look to the prophets for information either on natural or spiritual subjects.” In fact, the “decree and direction of God” is the same as “laws of nature.”⁸⁸ Spinoza then proceeds to demonstrate at some length the unreliability of the texts of the Scriptures and their general lack of any special status. After dealing with the Christian apostles much as he did with the Hebrew prophets, he concludes that what the Scriptures require is very simple: that we love our neighbor, that we recognize that God is “all righteous and all merciful,” and that we avoid “licentiousness” and live a good life. In fact, all this is so simple that Spinoza “wonder[s] at the ingenuity of those . . . who see such deep mysteries in Scripture that no human tongue is competent to explain them; and who have . . . introduced so much philosophical speculation into religion that the Church assumes the aspect of an academy, and religion that of a science, or rather of a controversy.” Spinoza then moves on to political topics, and ends with a plea for liberty, especially liberty of thought, as “the end and aim of the state is liberty.”⁸⁹

Spinoza, then, was a radical Deist as well as a philosopher. Whether the philosophy drove the Deism or the Deism drove the philosophy is a question beyond the scope of this book. Spinoza never actually denies the existence of God, and merely maintains that God’s essential commands, as knowable by reason, are identical with those known by revelation. His list of those commands, however, is shorter even than Herbert’s. Spinoza is also radical in the scope of his attack on revealed religion, and in his political ideas: his plea for liberty would attract general agreement in the West today, or even at some points during the American or French revolution, but was truly radical in 1670.

John Toland

The influence of Spinoza is visible in one of Deism’s other canonical works, *Christianity not Mysterious*, by John Toland. Toland was considered a Spinozist by many of his contemporaries, especially outside England, though he himself denied this, claiming to be convinced that “the whole system of Spinoza is not only false, but also precarious and without any sort of foundation.”⁹⁰ As has been noted, Deists often attacked Deism to avoid the charge of being Deists, so there is no reason why Toland should not include a *pro forma* attack on Spinoza even if he was a Spinozist, which he evidently was. In fact, after coining the term “pantheist” in 1705 as an alternative to the term “Spinozist” to describe the conviction that God and Nature are one,⁹¹ he applied the term to himself.⁹² The term “pantheist” passed into general use, normally in this sense, though sometimes becoming confused, after the early nineteenth century, with “polytheist.”⁹³ One thing

that Spinoza was not, of course, was a polytheist. Toland, on the other hand, may have been, at least in some sense. As a young man he distributed manuscript copies of his own translation of Giordano Bruno's *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (*Spaccio della bestia trionfale*), a work which praises ancient Egyptian religion and condemns Christianity.⁹⁴

Christianity not Mysteriorious was Toland's first book, published in 1696, six years after the English translation of Spinoza's *Political-Theological Treatise*, and remains his best known work. It is in part a response to Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*,⁹⁵ in which Locke argues for a Theist rather than a Deist position. For Locke, Christianity is reasonable in the sense that it can be comprehended by reason, not in the sense that it can be proven by reason. Locke argues, in fact, that "it would be presumptuous to reject a doctrine simply because we cannot fully comprehend it," and on this basis argues for Christ as savior.⁹⁶ Locke is thus making the standard distinction between knowledge and faith, which Toland rejects.

For Toland, faith is knowledge. *Christianity not Mysteriorious* appears at first sight to be a defense of Christianity, rather as the true purpose of Spinoza's *Political-Theological Treatise* is not immediately obvious, but it is in fact an attack on the self-appointed interpreters of Christianity and the "mysteries" that they promote,⁹⁷ an attack that we have also seen Spinoza pressing home. They "gravely tell us, we must adore what we cannot comprehend: And yet some of 'em press their dubious Comments upon the rest of Mankind with more Assurance and Heat, than could be tolerably justify'd, tho we should grant them to be absolutely infallible." Which they clearly are not—and if any proof is needed, it is that they disagree with each other, so that "if you be Orthodox to those, you are a Heretick to these."⁹⁸ Christianity, then, is not mysterious. The mysteries that Locke defends should be forgotten. Quite which parts of Christianity are in accordance with reason and which parts are mysteries to be discarded is not specified. Even so, the book was condemned by the Irish Parliament and sentenced to be burned, and Toland escaped arrest only by fleeing to English jurisdiction.⁹⁹

After leaving Ireland, Toland wrote mostly on political topics, including pleas for the toleration of Jews and dissenters.¹⁰⁰ Toleration, of course, follows naturally from both universalism and anti-clericalism. He returned to religious topics in 1704 with his *Letters to Serena*, in which he argued (against his former friend Leibniz, who had by then decided that he was more of a controversialist than a true philosopher)¹⁰¹ that there was no proof of the existence of an immortal soul.¹⁰² After a few more short works on religious topics, in 1718 he published *Nazarenus, Or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. In *Nazarenus*, what Toland terms "the Original Plan of Christianity" is remarkably close to the standard truths of Deism, not including such propositions as the divinity of Christ. A "Mahometan Christian" is thus really a Muslim Deist. In this Toland is echoing Leibniz, who in 1706 wrote in a letter of his conviction that Islam was "a variety of Deism joined with belief in certain events and the observation of certain practices."¹⁰³

Toland argues that original Christianity was practiced by Jewish Christians (“Nazarenes”), Muslims, and the Irish before the coming of Roman Catholicism.¹⁰⁴ He supports his argument from a number of sources, including the so-called Gospel of Barnabas, which he had been lent in Amsterdam by the adjutant of the Austrian statesman Prince Eugene of Savoy.¹⁰⁵ The Gospel of Barnabas is a rare apocryphal Gospel that may be of originally Christian origin, but contains important elements that are clearly of Islamic origin, as they adjust the standard Christian account of Jesus to fit the standard Islamic account, according to which Jesus was not divine but a prophet, was never crucified (and so not resurrected), and foresaw the coming of a greater prophet, Muhammad. It is thus primarily an anti-Christian work. It could, however, be used to support Toland’s Deistic theses, making Muslims into unitarians,¹⁰⁶ if not precisely Deists.

Anti-exotericism

In 1720, Toland published the book that named an idea that would be of central importance for much later Western Sufism. The book was *Clidophorus, Or of the Exoteric and Esoteric Philosophy*. The argument is given in an extended subtitle on the frontispiece:

That is, of the External and Internal Doctrine of the Ancients, the one open and public, accommodated to popular prejudices and the Religions establish’d by law; the other private and secret, wherein, to the few capable and discrete, was taught the real Truth stript of all disguises.¹⁰⁷

Clidophorus takes the pair of “esoteric” and “exoteric,” which had been little used before,¹⁰⁸ and gives it approximately its modern sense, with “esoteric” taking the meaning of “internal, secret and true,” and “exoteric” taking the meaning of “external, public, and ‘accommodated to popular prejudices and the Religions establish’d by law,’” and thus, by implication, less true, or perhaps even false.

The distinction between “internal and secret” and “external and public” was not new, as Toland went to some lengths to demonstrate in *Clidophorus*. Among the many historical examples he gave was the distinction made by Marcus Terentius Varro in the first century B.C. between natural theology (esoteric) and civic theology (exoteric).¹⁰⁹ The distinction also corresponds to the standard Islamic distinction between the *batin* (esoteric) and *zahir* (exoteric) which we saw al-Ghazali using. More recently, sixteenth-century Jesuit missionaries had distinguished “inner” teachings destined for the clergy from “outer” teachings intended for the common people in their analyses of East Asian religion.¹¹⁰ Many similar examples can be found.

What was new about Toland’s distinction was the terms he used, the association he established between the “exoteric” and the less true or false, and what he thought the “esoteric” and true consisted of. For Varro in the first century B.C., exoteric religion or

“civic theology” was of great importance and its decline was reflected in the decline of the Roman state and people.¹¹¹ For al-Ghazali, exoteric religion (*zahir*) was of supreme importance, and one of the main reasons why the esoteric (*batin*) had to be kept secret was that the common people, not understanding it, might easily be distracted from the exoteric. Maimonides seems to have shared al-Ghazali’s view almost exactly. For Toland, in contrast, exoteric religion was one way in which those in power in the state controlled and manipulated the people, inventing “mysteries” to this end.¹¹² And for Toland, also in contrast, the esoteric truth was Deistic philosophy, which he identified as the *prisca theologia* of Moses.¹¹³ Deistic philosophy thus replaced the emanationist *batin* of al-Ghazali.

Toland’s introduction of the term “esoteric” was so successful that it and the related term “esotericism” have since been used in a wide variety of ways. The phrase “Esoteric doctrines” may put the emphasis on the “esoteric” or on the “doctrines.” If the emphasis is on the “esoteric,” the point is about secrecy. If the emphasis is on the “doctrines,” the point is about particular doctrines.

These two points will often be made together, but can also be made separately. In *Clidophorus*, Toland was focusing on the point that doctrines of one sort or another are or were secret, that a distinction has historically been made between esoteric and exoteric ideas or doctrines, and that esoteric ideas and doctrines have often been deliberately concealed. This argument has been made repeatedly, most recently by Arthur M. Melzer in his *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing*,¹¹⁴ although, unlike Toland, Melzer makes no claims for the greater truth of the doctrines that have been concealed. This argument will be termed “anti-exotericism,” defined in the introduction to this book as “the idea that religions can be divided between a public, exoteric form and a secret, esoteric core, and that what is valuable is the secret esoteric core, not the exoteric form.”

Toland was not interested in Sufism. As we will now see, however, others applied his pair of esoteric and exoteric to Sufism. In asserting that doctrines of one sort or another were kept secret by Sufis and within Sufism, they were anti-exotericists. The specific doctrines that they identified as having been kept secret were, they held, esoteric doctrines. This was the central mechanism whereby the Renaissance and Enlightenment dream of a pure, simple, and true religion was inserted into the Western understanding of Sufism.

6

Universalist Sufism

IN 1743, THE English journalist Ephraim Chambers identified Sufis as Spinozists and Pantheists, an identification that Voltaire accepted and repeated in *Candide* in 1759. An understanding of Sufi theology as esoteric was then added to this conception, resulting in the description of Sufism as esoteric Pantheism in 1758 and 1767. Esoteric Pantheism then became reconceived as perennial, esoteric Deism (or Theism) under the influence of Sir William Jones, the founder of the first learned society for the study of Asia, and the emphasis on perennialism was then replaced with an emphasis on universalism by another early British Orientalist, Lieutenant James Graham. Jones's and Graham's understanding of Sufism as perennial, esoteric, Deistic universalism was demolished by the following generation of Orientalist scholars, and thereafter forgotten by scholarship; nevertheless, that early understanding remained the standard reference of many general readers until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The establishment of the Jones and Graham conception of Sufism was key to the subsequent establishment of Western Sufism. It resulted partly from the interplay of their own contacts with the Muslim world and the Enlightenment concepts developed in the previous chapter, and partly from a new intercultural transfer: Jones's reading of the *Dabistan-i madhahib* (*School of Sects*), a text in Persian of unknown authorship that closely followed the understandings of religion that Jones had also encountered in the Scottish scholar Sir Andrew Ramsay's *Discourse on Mythology* (1728). The *Dabistan* identifies Sufis as universalist philosophers, a position that Jones later himself adopted.

SUFISM AS ESOTERIC PANTHEISM

The understanding of Sufism as esoteric Pantheism originates with an encyclopedia entry by the French Protestant scholar Pierre Bayle in 1702, develops through a subsequent encyclopedia entry by the English journalist Ephraim Chambers in 1743, appears in Voltaire's *Candide* in 1759, and then reaches its fullest form in two more encyclopedia entries, in 1758 and 1767, both of which incorporate John Toland's anti-exotericism, assigning esoteric truth to the Sufis.

Pierre Bayle

The first encyclopedia entry appears in the 1702 *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (*Dictionnaire historique et critique*) of the French Protestant scholar Pierre Bayle, which was available in English translation after 1709.¹ In this, Bayle describes Baruch Spinoza as an atheist and his *Political-Theological Treatise* (*Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus*) as “pernicious and detestable,” and argues that the basis of his system is common to “several other philosophers, ancient and modern, European and Oriental.” Bayle then gives as examples Buddhism (Foe Kiao, i.e., *fōjiào*), which he discusses at length, and two Islamic sects which he merely mentions: the Ahl al-Haqq (Ehl Ektahkik, People of Truth) and the Zindiqs.² The Ahl al-Haqq are an unusual Shia group that emerged in southern Kurdistan in the fifteenth or sixteenth century and, so far as can be seen, did not actually subscribe to any system similar to Spinoza's, since their most distinctive belief is in a series of divine incarnations, of which Ali was the second.³ The reference to Zindiqs is hard to interpret, since the Arabic word *zindiq* simply means “heretic.” Even so, Bayle's “several other philosophers” were responsible for creating what Pierre-François Moreau calls “a kind of pan-Spinozism” that transformed Spinoza's philosophy into a “transhistorical conceptual category.” Bayle's account of Spinozism, in the view of Moreau, became even better known than Spinoza's own works.⁴

The identification of the Ahl al-Haqq and the Zindiqs as Spinozists appears in other works, following Bayle.⁵ Then, somehow, the Buddhists and the Zindiqs are joined by the Sufis, in an English work of 1743, the second edition of the *Cyclopædia* of Ephraim Chambers, which defines “Spinozism” as “atheism and pantheism proposed after the manner of Spinoza,” and notes that similar views were held in the past by the Zindiqs and by “the sect of . . . the Soufi in Persia.”⁶ Where Chambers took this from is unclear, but his source can be dated to the 1730s, as the original first edition of his *Cyclopædia*, published in 1728, did not mention either Zindiqs or Sufis in its entry on Spinozism.⁷ Chambers does not make the connection between “the Soufi” and dervishes, who, in a separate entry, he merely describes, in sixteenth-century fashion, as deviants.⁸

The connection between Spinozist Sufis and dervishes was made by Voltaire, who may well have read Chambers's *Cyclopædia*, as his English was fluent. In *Candide*, Voltaire places Spinoza's view of God in the mouth of a dervish whom Candide and his tutor Pangloss question in Istanbul. This dervish is a famous man who "was known as the best philosopher of Turkey." He understands God as aloof, and infinitely remote. Questioned about human suffering, the dervish asks tersely whether the sultan, when he sends a ship to Egypt, is worried about the comfort of the ship's mice, and advises Pangloss and company to desist from their enquiries.⁹ The conception of an infinitely remote God is characteristic of Spinoza. It is unclear whether or not Voltaire himself understood God in such a fashion, given his certainty about the social usefulness of religion. "I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God," Voltaire famously wrote, "and I think I shall then be robbed and cuckolded less often."¹⁰ Voltaire is here echoing Toland, to comic effect. Much the same sentiment was also expressed by Samuel Johnson, who famously said of an acquaintance, "If he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, sir, when he leaves our houses let us count our spoons."¹¹

François-Marie de Marsy

A more developed understanding of Sufism as Spinozism is then found in 1758 in an encyclopedic work in French, *A Modern History of the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Persians, Turks, Russians, etc. (Historire Moderne des Chinois, des Japonois, des Indiens, des Persans, des Turcs, des Russiens, &c)* by François-Marie de Marsy, a former Jesuit,¹² who mostly published poetry and history, but who was also inspired by Bayle.¹³ In his entry on Sufism, Marsy compares the Sufis' conception of God as "Universal Being" (*Etre universel*) with the God of Spinoza.¹⁴ The Sufis, Marsy explains, echoing Toland, believe that exoteric religion¹⁵ serves to "calm the concerns of the people, and to maintain the spirit of peace and unity in society," and that it is therefore best to leave people to their errors rather than objecting too strongly to "received opinion." They interpret the Quran "allegorically," and hold that the precepts of external religion (*le culte extérieur*) should be treated in the same fashion, but so as not to "trouble public order" they observe purifications and other rites publicly. They do not "condemn any religion, and see all people as the children of a common father, and the subjects of a single sovereign."¹⁶

Marsy adds to this description of Sufis a description of their activities which could have come from any of the sources we have previously discussed, perhaps even from George of Hungary. Sufis claim to communicate with the Universal Being in "the most intimate union," and to this end "excite themselves to enthusiasm during their assemblies." They dance in circles crying "Hu, hu," which Marsy translates as "the self-existing Being," and collapse in a faint, which they believe to be ecstasy.

They also practice “many rigorous fasts,” including one of forty days, spent in prayer in a cell.¹⁷

Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy

Marsy’s understanding of Sufism soon became generally accepted. It was followed closely, for example, by a 1767 encyclopedia, *A Curious and Interesting Compilation* (*Mélanges intéressans et curieux*) by Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy. This also goes a little further than Marsy, presenting Sufism as a non-Islamic religion found in Persia, first established under the Caliphate of al-Mamun, who encouraged a taste for philosophy among his subjects.¹⁸ The God of the Sufis is again compared to the God of Spinoza, but with more details, suggesting a greater knowledge of Neoplatonism: “one single infinite, invisible being . . . of which everything that exists is an emanation and a modification.” The article’s main Sufi practices followed Marsy: “various most rigorous fasts, during which they are perpetually in prayer, sleep only a few hours, and take only very little sustenance every twenty four hours.” Again, Sufis are said to “excite themselves to enthusiasm by dancing in circles . . . The faintness which follows this violent exercise passes for a mystical ecstasy during which they claim to communicate intimately with God.”¹⁹ Again, it is mentioned that Sufis are tolerant. It is stated that the Sufis consider that as

true religion has as its principal aim the maintenance of peace and unity in society, one should not startle the people by rising with too much heat against received opinions, that it is better to leave them their errors than to draw them from them at the expense of their peace. So as not to trouble public order, they observe the purifications and other points of discipline prescribed by the Alcoran, the mysteries of which appear to them in an allegorical sense, which is the only one they accept. They do not condemn any religion, and their maxim is to regard all men as children of a common father and the subjects of the same Prince.²⁰

Bayle, then, transformed Spinoza’s Pantheism into a “transhistorical category” that included ancient philosophers, Buddhists, and unspecified Muslim *zindiqs*, and Chambers then included Sufis in this category. Voltaire identified Sufis and dervishes, and Marsy and Rousselot de Surgy then developed this understanding at more length, creating the idea of Sufis as esoteric Pantheists in Islamic garb—an idea that would guide the subsequent Western reception of Sufism for at least two centuries, continuing in the present day. In fact, though Neoplatonism and Spinozan Pantheism do have something in common in their premises and method, they come to almost opposite conclusions. For Spinoza, given that God and nature are coextensive, God can in the last resort be ignored. For Neoplatonists, it is nature that should be ignored, not God.

PERENNIALISM AND UNIVERSALISM IN INDIA

Jones and Graham belonged to a new stage in the history of relations between the West and the Muslim world: the era of colonialism. There are many definitions of colonialism, none of which distinguish clearly between the two main forms of conquest and occupation, one involving ethnic transformation and one not involving it. The earliest European conquests involved ethnic transformation. The Spanish conquest of al-Andalus led to the destruction of the existing culture there. Within little more than a century after the fall of the last Muslim kingdom, Granada, the Arabic language, Islam, and Judaism had all vanished from Spain. The preservation and translation of certain important texts was the exception rather than the rule. Similarly, the Americas became almost universally Christian, with Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French almost entirely replacing earlier languages in general use.

An alternative form of conquest, however, was practiced in Southeast Asia, where European expansion started in 1511 with the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, and in Africa, where the Portuguese founded Luanda in 1576. In this form of colonialism, the original peoples survived, as did the original languages, religions, and cultures. This form of colonialism became increasingly standard from the seventeenth century onwards, as first the Dutch replaced the Portuguese and Spanish as Europe's main colonial power, and then the French and British replaced the Dutch. This was the type of colonialism practiced by Britain in India. The majority of the population of India, where Britain had effectively excluded France by 1761, survived, as did their original languages and religions. As a result, British colonial officials were obliged to learn the languages and customs of the peoples they administered. This resulted in a closer encounter with Sufism than ever before.

Although Britain's East India Company had controlled small territories in India since the 1680s, it was not until 1773 that formal British administration was established, when the British Parliament's "Regulating Act" asserted government control over the administrative activities of the East India Company. The Regulating Act provided for the appointment of a Governor-General and for the establishment of a supreme court at Calcutta (now Kolkata). One of the judges appointed to this court was Sir William Jones.

Sir William Jones

Sir William Jones was a talented Welsh scholar of Persian and Arabic who had turned to a career in law after failing to gain a suitable academic appointment.²¹ He arrived in Calcutta in 1783, and set to acquiring an understanding of both Islamic and Hindu law, which he had to apply alongside British law in cases involving Muslims or Hindus.²² A year after his arrival, in 1784, he founded the Asiatick Society of Bengal, a learned society on the model of the Royal Society of London. The Asiatick Society published a scholarly journal, *Asiatick Researches*, again on the model established by the Royal Society, which had begun publishing its *Philosophical Transactions* in 1665.

Jones and his colleagues in the Asiatick Society made extraordinary progress in a wide variety of fields, from linguistics and history to geology and biology. Jones himself was most famous for his work in linguistics, establishing the basic idea of an Indo-European language group that remains generally accepted to this day. He was also famous for his poetry and for his work on comparative religion, which attempted to reconstruct a genealogy of religions rather as he had reconstructed a genealogy of languages. The first issue of *Asiatick Researches* carried an article “On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India,” in which Jones identified common points in Greek, Roman, and Hindu polytheism, and argued that all these were degenerations of an original pure monotheism, “the rational adoration of the only true God.”²³ The article, then, is perennialist and universalist on a Theist basis, and shows the general influence of the understandings of religion that I considered in the previous chapter. Jones had read the Jacobite Scottish scholar Sir Andrew Ramsay,²⁴ whose *Discourse on Mythology* (*Un discours sur la mythologie*) is framed as a refutation of Bayle’s “Pan-Spinozism,”²⁵ but is in effect a manifesto of Theistic perennialist universalism, and even incorporates a version of Toland’s anti-exotericism.²⁶ Ramsay, who lived much of his life in France after being converted to Catholicism by Bishop François Fénelon (the associate of the mystic Jeanne-Marie Guyon), evidently did not confine his reading to pious Catholic works.

Ramsay’s *Discourse on Mythology* argues (against Bayle) that all ancient religions had the concept of “a Supreme Divinity, distinct and separate from matter” (and thus differing from Spinoza’s conception), and that while their conceptions of that Supreme Divinity differed, this does not make them atheists, as “true Atheism consists in denying that there is a sovereign intelligence that produced the world by its power, and governs it by its wisdom.” Spinoza, then, was a true atheist, but the followers of the ancient religions were not. Ramsay concludes that the “principal truths” common to all philosophies and religions are that God is good and that evil is of human origin, that life is a test and a cure for human corruption, that the Divinity “joined itself to human nature to expiate moral evil by its sacrifice,” and that “these truths have been transmitted to us from century to century since the flood by a universal tradition.”²⁷ Ramsay’s third principal truth, the sacrifice of God-made-man, is specifically Christian, but appears to have been added as camouflage, since no real attention is paid to this truth. The sequence of transmission of Ramsay’s “universal tradition” more or less follows Marsilio Ficino. It starts with ancient Persian philosophers, continues through Egypt to Hermes Trismegistus, and thence to Ancient Greece and Rome, passing through the great Greek philosophers and ending with Proclus.²⁸

Jones initially followed the model presented in Ramsay, but with India inserted between Persia and Egypt. Jones’s conviction was strengthened by his reading of classical Hindu texts such as the *Yoga-Vasistha* (*Teachings of Vasistha*) and the *Bhagavata Purana* (*Divine-Eternal Tales of the Supreme Lord*).²⁹ These reminded him so much of Platonism (by which he may well have meant Neoplatonism) that he wrote to a friend that it seemed to him that “Plato drew many of his notions (through Egypt, where he resided for some time) from the sages of Hindustán.”³⁰

THE *DABISTAN* AND AFTER

Jones's final reconstruction of the "universal tradition" depended on an extremely unusual Persian text, the *Dabistan-i madhahib* (*School of Sects*), which he read in 1787. The authorship of the *Dabistan* is unknown, but it was composed during the second half of the seventeenth century, to judge from autobiographical dates and references given by the author in the text. The *Dabistan* is a comprehensive survey of the sects and religions of the time and of previous ages, and resembles the familiar genre of the biographical dictionary, recording the lives and miracles of saintly personages. It is remarkable, however, for the extent to which it is based on its author's own travels and experiences, for being so comprehensive, for being generally nonjudgmental, and—most of all—for the religious position of its author. While it is not entirely clear what sect or religion he followed, it is clear that he did not follow Sunni or Shia Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, or Christianity, all of which are at one point or another subject to some degree of criticism.³¹ It has been suggested that the author of the *Dabistan* may have been a heterodox Zoroastrian,³² and the basic framework of the *Dabistan's* history may indeed derive from the Zoroastrian tradition.³³ Alternatively, the author of the *Dabistan* may have been a follower of the short-lived new religion introduced by the Emperor Akbar during the 1580s, the Din-i illahi (Divine religion). The Din-i illahi is reported but not criticized, and is the final religion to be discussed in the book.

To what extent the Din-i illahi was a serious attempt at a new religion is disputed. It is clear that Akbar, though a Muslim ruler, developed a universalist religious policy that stressed the inclusion of Hindus, not only abolishing the poll tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*) in 1579, but also taking Hindu wives and practicing some Hindu rituals.³⁴ Akbar also encouraged inter-religious dialogue, establishing a House of Worship (Ibadat khana) to host discussions between Sunni and Shia Muslims and Hindus, and also with Christians. Jesuit missionaries were welcomed at Akbar's court, partly for diplomatic reasons.³⁵ Akbar was also interested in Sufism, especially in the work of Ibn Arabi, and in Neoplatonic philosophy.³⁶ All these themes appear in the *Dabistan*.

Jones found the *Dabistan* fascinating.³⁷ This is understandable, as it is extraordinarily wide-ranging and uses anecdote very effectively. He adopted its religious chronology, which started with ancient Persian religion, passing through Zoroastrianism to Hinduism, and thence arriving at Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. After Islam come a number of unusual Islamic religious movements, most notably the Din-i illahi. Most importantly for our purposes, Jones also accepted the *Dabistan's* universalist presentation of Sufism.

Sufis are presented in the *Dabistan* as akin to ancient philosophers, scattered "among all the nations of the world,"³⁸ by which the *Dabistan* seems to have meant primarily Persia and India. The *Dabistan* connects Sufism not only with philosophy and ancient Persian religion, but also with a supra-confessional universalism. Philosophy is presented in familiar emanationist terms. God acts through a "first intellect,"

creating individual souls through a series of intermediary intelligences: “When the soul realizes . . . the condition of its primitive origin, it obtains emancipation from the bodily bonds, and joins the intelligences and spirits . . . In this state it is possible to behold the face of God.”³⁹ This is a system with which the Sufis agree, states the *Dabistan*, giving the examples of Muhammad Lahiji, a Sufi Neoplatonist, a 1474 commentary on *The Rose Garden of the Secret* (*Gulshan-i raz*) of Mahmud Shabistari, and the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa),⁴⁰ who as we have seen were actually Ismaili Neoplatonists rather than Sufis. The *Dabistan* is not always entirely accurate, here or elsewhere.

Sufis are also presented as supra-confessional. At the end of a long section discussing antinomian Hindu holy men who ate cow meat, prayed in mosques, or consorted with Muslims—the sort of behavior that the Emperor Akbar seems to have wanted to encourage—the *Dabistan* remarks that, “The Sufi is by no necessity bound to a creed; no faith nor religion fetters his choice; he befriends the idol and the temple of the idol, and is no stranger to the mosque.”⁴¹ While this is not generally true, it has occasionally been true in Indian contexts, as we will see in a later chapter. One example is given in the *Dabistan*: a Qadiri Sufi by the name of Sabjani, a devoted reader of Ibn Arabi, is said to have lived in the fashion of Hindu holy men after attaining union, with no clothing save for a cover over his genitals and no food other than small amounts of fruits and vegetables, which he was given as alms. Sabjani, who the author of the *Dabistan* reports having met in 1636, visited both temples and mosques, performing the appropriate rites in each of these, and never abused anyone’s faith, nor preferred one faith to another.⁴²

The *Dabistan* is inconsistent in its view of the relationship between Sufism and the sharia. At one point, in a discussion of Islamic philosophers, it distinguishes between Mutashariun (legists), who follow the sharia, and Ishraqis (illuminationists), who do not.⁴³ It is true that the Mutashariun follow the sharia, as that is what the (somewhat unusual) term means lexically, but it is not true that the Ishraqis do not follow the sharia. The Ishraqis are Persian Sufis following the teachings of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, and usually do observe the sharia. At another point, the *Dabistan* appears to divide Sufis into five groups, only one of which follows the sharia, and then only because they believe that the laws of the prophets are for the good of the people and maintain order.⁴⁴ Only one of the five groups listed can be identified, however, and they were not particularly Sufi.⁴⁵ It seems, then, that this list is not actually an analysis of Sufism, but rather a list of possible approaches to the sharia.

Sufism as Persian Theism

The *Dabistan*, then, fits both the universalist views of the Emperor Akbar and the universalist religious views that had been developing in Europe during much the same period. The fit between these two views is extraordinarily close, but the *Dabistan* seems to be a genuine Persian text, and in terms of chronology precedes Spinoza, rather than

succeeds him. It is hardly surprising that Jones welcomed the understandings of the *Dabistan* as he did.

In a lecture delivered in 1789, two years after his discovery of the *Dabistan*, Jones followed the *Dabistan* in presenting Sufism as the contemporary form of “that metaphysical theology which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into Greece, and prevails even now,”⁴⁶ a metaphysical theology that he identified with “the primeval religion of *Iràn*,” which he understood as “the oldest (and it may justly be called the noblest) of all religions,” a “pure and sublime” system that he described, paraphrasing Sir Isaac Newton, as:

A firm belief that one Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by his providence; a pious fear, love, and adoration of him; a due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species; and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation.⁴⁷

The conception of “primeval religion” of Jones and Newton is clearly Theistic, making the Sufis Theists by implication. In an essay published in the same year “On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus,” Jones was more explicit, writing that the primeval religion had “prevailed from time immemorial in Asia; particularly among the Persian theists, both ancient Húshangis and modern Súfis.”⁴⁸ Sufis, then, are Persian Theists. The mention of the Hushangis, incidentally, confirms the *Dabistan* as Jones’s source, as the Hushangis are not well known (or even easy to identify), but are mentioned in the *Dabistan* as sharing the system of Sufi philosophy, and as being universalists.⁴⁹

After Jones

The understanding of Sufism established by Jones became, for a time, the accepted orthodoxy of the emerging science of Orientalism. It was repeated in the first full discussion of Sufism to be published in English: an 1819 thirty-page article by a military scholar, Lieutenant James Graham, written at the request of a military diplomat, Major-General Sir John Malcolm,⁵⁰ who used the unpublished paper on which Graham’s article was based in his own widely read *History of Persia* (1815). It was then challenged by the German scholar August Tholuck and by the French scholar Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, as we will see, and soon fell out of scholarly favor. It still remained popular in other circles, however.

Graham was a scholar of the generation following Jones, a linguist attached to the Bombay Native Infantry. His article was published in the *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, a periodical printed in London as well as India that had a wide circulation. It is a much more detailed treatment of Sufism, which Graham understands as a form of “mysticism or quietism,”⁵¹ going into considerable and generally accurate detail on Sufi understandings of the mystic path, its states and stages. It presents Sufi theology

as esoteric, and Sufis as opposed to external practice. Graham does not trace a line of descent as Jones did, but mentions the agreement between the Sufi scheme of emanation and Greek philosophy, especially Plotinus.⁵² He also draws attention to parallels between Sufi and Hindu understandings. The term “Theist” was passing out of currency by 1819,⁵³ and Jones does not use it of Sufis as a whole, though he does compare them to “the present free-thinker or modern philosopher of Europe.”⁵⁴

One of the first points that Graham makes is that “any person, or a person of any religion or sect, may be a *Sûfi*.”⁵⁵ This is the clearest statement of Sufism’s supra-confessional universalism yet made. He then asserts that a Sufi is interested only in “mental or spiritual worship,” and so rejects “the practical mode of worship, ceremonies, &c.” and “disregards and disclaims all ordinances and outward forms, of what sect or religion soever; such as observances of feasts, fasts, stated periods of prayer . . . ablutions, pilgrimages and such-like other rites.” Sufism rejects “exoteric doctrine, and embraces the esoteric.” Sufis, however, regard exoteric religion as “a very salutary ordinance, as a restraint on the minds of the vulgar” and consider that teaching esoteric mystical doctrine to the wrong people would result in “all manner of licentiousness and contempt for every sort of religion.”⁵⁶

In support of his analysis, Graham quotes poetry, mostly verses attributed to Kabir, a fifteenth-century Indian mystic whose perspective is similar to that of Sabjani in the *Dabistan*, whom he identifies as a Theist.⁵⁷ He also quotes what would become well-known lines, attributed to Rumi (but actually by a later poet):⁵⁸

What advice, O Mussulmans? As I don’t know myself;

I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor am I a fire-worshipper nor Mussulman.⁵⁹

The understanding of Sufism established by Graham is found again in a long discussion of Sufism in Malcolm’s *History of Persia*. Malcolm, who had visited Persia three times as ambassador from the government of India, also drew on discussions with Agha Muhammed Ali, a senior member of the Persian ulema and a confirmed opponent of Sufism. Malcolm cites and acknowledges Graham,⁶⁰ but not Jones. He notes the similarities between “Soofee doctrine” and that “found in the most splendid theories of the ancient schools of Greece,” but does not mention Theism in connection with Sufism, though he does refer in passing, in another context, to “that pure Deism on which the Mahommedan religion is professedly grounded.”⁶¹

Malcolm himself does not seem very sympathetic to Deism, and when he compared Sufi doctrine to that “of the modern philosophers of Europe,”⁶² he may have been referring to Spinoza, which might help explain his antipathy. Malcolm is not at all sympathetic to Sufism either, as Sufis’ “free opinions on [Islam’s] dogmas [and] contempt for its forms, and their claim to an immediate communion with the Deity, are all calculated to subvert that belief for which they outwardly profess their respect.”⁶³ Malcolm, then, agrees with Graham that Sufism is universalist and opposed to external practice. That

Malcolm regarded these characteristics in a negative light did not necessarily mean that all his readers shared his evaluation, of course.

Although the analyses of Jones and Graham formed a temporary consensus, they were soon challenged. In 1821, Silvestre de Sacy wrote dismissively of the work of Jones, noting that it had “obtained, for a few years, a sort of vogue, at a time when it was fashionable to regard contemporary civilization as no more than the debris of a very ancient civilization, and when everyone was finding an Atlantis.”⁶⁴ In the same year an exhaustive and much more accurate work on Sufism was published in Berlin by Tholuck, and this dismissed the possibility of a Greek or Hindu origin of Sufism.⁶⁵ Despite this, the “vogue” for the Jones and Graham understanding of Sufism continued. At the level of popular culture, one indication of the influence of this understanding is the gloss of “Sufi” as “free-thinker” in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* in 1900,⁶⁶ a gloss which was probably taken directly from Graham.

That the Jones and Graham understanding of Sufism survived for so long partly reflects the fact that Tholuck wrote in Latin, which was by then little read, save by scholars. It also partly reflects the fact that as scholarship advanced and became more professional, a divide developed between scholarly and non-scholarly publications. Jones’s *Asiatick Researches* was widely read in Europe’s intellectual circles. Its descendant today, the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, publishes interesting and important articles, but is read almost exclusively by area-studies specialists. Beyond this, the longevity of the Jones and Graham understanding of Sufism also reflects the interests and needs of the Western public.

Dervishes Epicurean and Fanatical



IN 1859, A little-known English poet and translator, Edward FitzGerald, published *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a collection of quatrains (*rubai*, plural *rubaiyyat*) attributed to the eleventh-century Persian Neoplatonist scholar Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Khayyami. At first his translation, which had been rejected by *Fraser's Magazine*, attracted little attention. Eventually public interest grew, and by the end of the nineteenth century *The Rubáiyát* had become one of the most widely read poems of the age. According to a writer in a New York literary journal in 1899, "Everybody is reciting it—even the boys are whistling it in the street."¹

The Rubáiyát was the successor to the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, which, as we have seen, was published in 1671 and was also widely read. As there was disagreement after 1671 over whether the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was Neoplatonic or Deist, so there was also disagreement after 1859 about *The Rubáiyát*. No one in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century West had noticed that the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was a Sufi work, but nineteenth-century commentators did notice the Sufi nature of *The Rubáiyát*. Not all agreed that it was a mystical work, however; FitzGerald himself was one of those who insisted that Omar Khayyam was an Epicurean.

Just as the Deism that was read into the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflected the concerns of the period, so the Epicureanism that was read into *The Rubáiyát* reflected the concerns of the late nineteenth century—a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization, increasing prosperity, mass literacy, Darwin, new luxuries, and new hardships. The reading of the *The Rubáiyát* also reflected the understanding of dervishes as deviant, or at least as exotic and hedonistic, which had developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of their portrayal in verse, fiction, painting, and drama. This understanding culminated in 1871 in the

foundation in America of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, an organization of allegedly Sufi provenance that was in fact a Masonic drinking club, though in recent decades the Shriners (as they are now known) have emphasized charitable activities more than entertainment.

In parallel to this vaudeville understanding of Sufism arose a very different understanding of Sufism as fanatical, an understanding resulting from Sufi involvement in popular resistance to European colonialism. This contrasting understanding will be considered at the end of this chapter.

The whistling of the *The Rubā'iyāt* marks the end of the period of imagining Sufism that started with the *Treatise on the Turks* of George of Hungary in 1480. It is the last major transfer of a Sufi text from the Muslim world into a West in which there were no actual Sufis.

DERVISHES IN DRAMA, PAINTING, AND VERSE

By 1869 the word “dervish” had become so well-known in English that it could be included without gloss in a passage in a textbook for learning German.² This reflected the frequent appearances of dervishes in literature and painting, generally as stock characters performing functions that had little or no connection with Sufism. Occasionally, however, entertainment blended into something more serious in the hands of certain authors, playwrights, and poets. Nineteenth-century fictional dervishes, then, sometimes had serious significance.

The later popularity of the “Oriental tale” was prefigured by Paolo Marana’s *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, published in the 1680s and discussed in an earlier chapter. Even more successful than the *Letters* was *The Thousand and One Nights* (*Les mille et une nuits*), a loose translation and development of a collection of Arabic folktales published by Antoine Galland between 1704 and 1717. *The Thousand and One Nights* was quickly translated into other European languages and became very widely known. These tales have more princesses than dervishes, but still have a number of dervishes, who thus became familiar to the increasingly wide Western reading public. They are generally incidental to stories involving thwarted love and ingenious stratagems. One dervish, for example, is thrown down a well by a jealous enemy, but is rescued by the jinn (demons), who tell him how to cure a princess, whom he then marries and whose father he finally succeeds as sultan. Elsewhere, a prince disguises himself as a dervish to pursue a princess, and a real dervish helps another prince with a quest.³ Although readers of *The Thousand and One Nights* became aware that dervishes existed, then, they had little opportunity to learn what a dervish actually was.

From the pages of *The Thousand and One Nights*, dervishes moved onto the stage. The French playwright Germain-François Poullain de Saint-Foix wrote a short comedy entitled *The Dervish* (*Le derviche*) that was first performed in 1755. In this play, some

male travellers are wrecked on a desert island, which turns out to be inhabited only by the widow of a slave trader and a number of sixteen-year-old girls. One traveller tries to secure the girls for himself by telling his companions that the island is inhabited by man-eating monsters. When his companions fail to believe this, he puts on the dress of a dervish and declares that he is withdrawing from the world. The play then closes with the slave trader's widow telling the audience that "a Turk only renounces wives of his own when he can rely on having those of other men."⁴

This story may not seem very amusing today, but it was found amusing enough at the time to be translated into German, in 1764.⁵ It may have helped inspire a German play by the same title, *The Dervish* (*Der Derwisch*) by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, best known for his *Sturm und Drang* (*Storm and Stress*), which gave its name to an entire proto-Romantic movement in German literature and music. In Klinger's *The Dervish*, a young woman is courted by a dervish who wants to take her home to the Ganges, but he finds her with another man, and beheads her and him. When the other man turns out to be the young woman's brother, the dervish uses his magical powers to sew both heads back on again, but in his haste sews the wrong heads back on the wrong bodies.⁶

An apparently more serious treatment of a dervish is found in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* (*Nathan der Weise*), published in 1779 and first performed in 1783. This play is a classic of universalism, remembered today as an eloquent plea for tolerance. It bases its argument on an understanding of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as poor remnants of a lost original faith. *Nathan* makes this point with a retelling of Boccaccio's parable of the three rings,⁷ which itself draws on earlier sources. A father has one precious ring and three sons, representing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He makes two copies of the original ring to keep all the sons happy, with the result that no one can then tell which is the "real" ring. In Lessing's version, a judge tells the three sons, all vying for possession of the "real" ring, that none of the three rings is real, and that the real ring has perhaps been lost.⁸ Lessing here appears more a Spinozist than a Deist.

The dervish in *Nathan* is a paragon of supra-religious tolerance, as is the other main Muslim character, the Sultan Saladin (Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi). This tolerance does not derive from Sufism, however. All the characters in the play are or become remarkably tolerant, save for the play's villain, the Christian Patriarch of Jerusalem. Furthermore, it seems that Lessing's dervish was not even Muslim. The dervish at one point refers to being with "his" "Ghebers."⁹ The word "gheber" is derived via the French *guèbre*, from the Persian *gabr*, and is a generic term for an idolater that can refer specifically to a Parsi (Indian Zoroastrian). Lessing seems here to be drawing on a text by the French writer Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy in which dervishes are, inexplicably, described in passing as "Ghebers [*Guebres*], or Parsis."¹⁰ He has evidently not made the connection between dervishes, Sufism, and universalism.

Dervishes also appear as stock characters in Orientalist painting. When the French diplomat Charles de Ferriol arrived in Istanbul in 1699, he invited the Flemish artist

Jean-Baptiste Vanmour to join him and paint court officials and other local characters. Vanmour's paintings were then engraved and published in 1714 as a *Collection of One Hundred Prints Representing the Various Nations of the Levant* (*Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant*), and fuelled a fashion for Turkish styles in clothing, theatre, and dress.¹¹ The *Ferriol Collection*, as it became known, included the dervish whose picture appears on the dust jacket of this book, which is probably the earliest Western image of a dervish to be painted from the life. Ferriol's example was followed by others, including the British diplomat Stratford Canning, who in 1808 commissioned a Greek artist to follow his visits and record them in a series of paintings. These feature two "howling dervishes," a "wandering dervish," and a "whirling dervish"—the three main categories of Sufi in the nineteenth-century British imagination, corresponding to members of the Rifai, Bektashi, and Mevlevi *tariqas*. Two dervishes likewise feature among the sixty plates in an 1814 volume, *Picturesque Representations of the Dress and Manners of the Turks*, in this case a "whirling dervish" and a "Syrian" dervish. Each plate has a one-page description, none very informative; the volume is really no more than a collection of curiosities.¹²

Dervishes reappear occasionally in Orientalist art throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, invariably as exotic curiosities. In 1895, the celebrated French Orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gérôme created what is probably the best known dervish painting, *Whirling Dervishes* (*Derviches tourneurs*). Despite its name, this painting features only one dervish, who looks more like a flamenco dancer than a Mevlevi, and is whirling before an appreciative audience that includes a largely naked black slave. The composition closely resembles Gérôme's *Snake Charmer* (*Charmeur de serpent*) of 1870, where the central figure is a naked boy.¹³ Finally, in 1906, the English illustrator Warwick Goble drew a dervish who appeared spiritual, rather than merely exotic.¹⁴

Sufi Poetry

More important than drama or painting was poetry, where there was also great enthusiasm for the Oriental genre. The two Westerners who wrote of their experiences as Ottoman slaves in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, George of Hungary and Giovanni Menavino, both appreciated Sufi poetry, and this appreciation became more general during the nineteenth century. One reason for this was a feeling that "the classical mythology and its associated themes, which had inspired English poets since the Renaissance, were now worn threadbare."¹⁵ As Samuel Johnson remarked, "the attention naturally retires from a new tale of Venus, Diana, and Minerva."¹⁶ "Our European poetry," Sir William Jones had written a few years before, "has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables."¹⁷ Something new was needed, then, and that something was provided by the growing availability of translations of classical Oriental poetry into European languages, for example by Jones.

To quote *The American Monthly Magazine*, “nothing could be better fitted to attract than the simplicity and warmth of the Oriental style, and the brilliant freshness of its imagery.” “A poetry which appeals to the passions will at all times be popular,” and “the Asiatic tinge of voluptuousness and sensuality, softened and etherialized by the influence of a delicate imagination, was peculiarly calculated to strike and captivate, after the frigidity of the French, the wildness of the German, and the coarseness of the Scotch styles.”¹⁸

Jones was best known for his *Hymn to Nārāyena*¹⁹ and his translation and stage adaptation of the *Shakuntala*, the epic tale from the *Mahabharata* of a half-divine heroine who marries a king, is forgotten by him as the result of a curse, but finally remembered and reunited with him. *Shakuntala*, which Jones suggested was written by an Indian Shakespeare, made a tremendous impression on the literary world of the time. It was immediately welcomed by Mary Wollstonecraft, and then, in German translation, by Johann Gottfried von Herder, who found it “a drama which can equal any drama,” and by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who later recalled the tremendous impact the work had had on him. Alphonse de Lamartine found in it “the threefold genius of Homer, Theocritus and Tasso combined in a single poem,” and Franz Schubert started (but did not finish) an operatic version.²⁰

Jones published a collection of *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages* in 1772, including one poem by the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz, who wrote in the same mystical, lyrical tradition as the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Rumi, but was generally thought in Persia to have exceeded even Rumi in his achievements. The translation, however, represents the eighteenth-century English lyricism of Jones as much as it does the fourteenth-century mystical lyricism of Hafiz. The Persian original of the opening couplet of “A Persian Song of Hafiz” uses fifteen words, while Jones’s translation uses thirty-eight words. A somewhat literal translation of the original would be:

My Shiraz Turk if she but deign
To take my heart into her hand,
I’ll barter for her Hindu mole
Bukhara, yea, and Samarkand.²¹

This is rendered by Jones as:

Sweet maid, if thou would’st charm my sight,
And bid these arms thy neck infold;
That rosy cheek, that lily hand,
Would give thy poet more delight
Than all Bocara’s vaunted gold,
Than all the gems of Samarcand.

As Vivian de Sola Pinto notes, this is “an English lyric with a very pleasing and unusual movement, conveying a sense of exotic charm and mystery largely by means of the adroit use of Oriental proper names.”²² All it really has in common with the original is those names and the idea that love is worth more than riches. Not only has a Hindu mole become a rosy cheek and a lily hand, but gold and gems have appeared from nowhere, as have the poet and his hope of delight.

Even though the translations of Jones did not serve as a route for the transmission of Sufi theology, they did perhaps help transmit something similar. Pinto commented in 1946 on the influence that Jones had on Shelley, ascribing Shelley’s transition “from the atheistic materialism of his earthly writings to the mystical pantheism of his mature works” to this influence, and seeing the influence of the Vedas behind Shelley’s “Adonais.”²³ Whether the influence was that of the Vedas or of something else, some Shelley captures Sufism’s Neoplatonic view very nicely. In his *Elegy on the Death of John Keats* he wrote:

Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
 Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
 A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
 Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
 Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.
 Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
 He hath awakened from the dream of life—
 ‘Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
 . . .
 He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,
 Can touch him not and torture not again.²⁴

Although Jones was the first scholar to produce translations of Persian verse for the general public, German scholars soon overtook British and French scholars in this regard. Hafiz was translated by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall in 1812–13, and his poems were identified as Sufi poems,²⁵ in which Hammer-Purgstall was only partly right. As has been noted, Hafiz wrote in a mystical, lyrical tradition, but that does not mean that he himself intended mystical meanings. This translation was followed by Friedrich Rückert’s translations of Rumi, forty-two of whose poems appeared in 1821 in Rückert’s *Ladies’ Pocket-book* (*Taschenbuch für Damen*).²⁶

In an obituary of Rückert in 1860, Richard Gosche, a German professor of Oriental philology, noted that no one save he and “Goethe with his *Diwan* . . . has had such an enduring impact on the lay masses with regard to Oriental literature.”²⁷ The *Diwan* was

the *West-Eastern Divan* (*West-oestlicher Diwan*) of 1819, which was inspired by the translations of Hammer-Purgstall. It consisted of Goethe's own verse, frequently acknowledging Hafiz, and of long explanatory notes, running to three hundred small-format pages in the first edition.

Goethe did not accept Hammer-Purgstall's understanding of Hafiz as a Sufi, noting that his poetry "participates in the abundance of the worldly [while] looking from afar upon the mysteries of the Godhead," in the end "rejecting both sensuality and religiosity." A poet does not need to practice or believe everything he writes about, wrote Goethe, any more than a teller of fairy tales needs to believe in magic.²⁸ Neither is Goethe's own Hafiz-inspired poetry especially Sufi. It refers to love and wine after the fashion of Hafiz, but while in Persian poetry love and wine are always at least potential symbols for divine love and union with the divine, Goethe's love and wine are definitely not divine. The love, in fact, refers at least in part to Marianne von Willemer, the young wife of Goethe's friend Johann Jakob von Willemer,²⁹ and the wine is distinctly alcoholic:

We must all be drunk!
 Youth is drunkenness without wine;
 Should Age drink itself back to Youth,
 That is a wonderful thing,
 For worry troubles dear life
 And bunches [of grapes] destroy worry.

It can no longer be disputed,
 Wine is sternly prohibited.
 Should it then be drunk,
 Drink only of the very best!
 Else you're a double heretic
 In damnation and from [poor] juice.³⁰

Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, then, may indeed have had "an enduring impact on the lay masses," but it revealed little more about Sufi theology than did eighteenth-century plays about dervishes.

Vaudeville Dervishes

Subsequent dervishes in fiction and verse were all of the same kind. A dervish provided a "narcotic powder" in William Beckford's *Vathek* in 1786,³¹ and while there were no dervishes in the first edition of Byron's *The Giaour* in 1813, a passing reference to one was added in the 1814 edition, in the mention of an abandoned house that was no longer

visited by the “weary stranger” or the “wandering Dervise.”³² In Byron’s *The Corsair* of 1814, the hero disguises himself as a dervish to gain entry to his enemy’s camp,³³ and in Walter Scott’s *The Talisman* of 1825, an assassin disguises himself as a dervish and tries to kill King Richard the Lionheart.³⁴ A dervish disguise also features in *The Rose of Persia*, an 1899 comic opera by Basil Hood and Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. This includes a “Dervish Quartet,” which starts:

I’m the Sultan’s vigilant Vizier,
 Who lets the Sultan know the coast is clear,
 When he (the Sultan) takes a private stroll;
 Assuming such an assuming rôle
 As Dervish!³⁵

The idea of dervish as disguise lasts at least until 1915, when Oscar Wilde has a fisherman’s soul disguise itself as a dervish.³⁶ Similar examples could be drawn from the literature of languages other than English, especially French.

What may be called the vaudeville understanding of Sufism was the origin of the foundation myth of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.³⁷ During the second half of the nineteenth century, Freemasonry became increasingly popular in the United States, as it did in Europe. Freemasonry is partly about ritual, symbolism, and charity, but it is also partly about sociability and even entertainment. As the temperance movement gained strength in the US, alcohol began to disappear from Masonic banquets.³⁸ As a result of this two masons, Walter Fleming and William J. Florence, decided in 1871 to establish a parallel organization,³⁹ from which alcohol was not excluded, dedicated primarily to fun. Florence was by profession a comic actor, and his and Fleming’s organization was inspired by vaudeville. It was named the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, soon generally shortened to “Shriners.” Its members were given absurd titles such as Shaykh, Illustrious Potentate, and Noble,⁴⁰ and absurd headgear—a fez decorated with rhinestones. The fez was then the standard head covering of men in the Ottoman Empire, and was therefore also shorthand for an Oriental in vaudeville. To this were added some absurd rituals, compared by the Masonic historian Christopher Hodapp to college fraternity hazing rituals.⁴¹ Local branches were called “temples,” and given names such as “Mecca” or “Islam.”

The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine was also given a foundation myth, which circulated in several versions. One of these, found for example in an 1894 official history of the Shriners, was that Florence was initiated in France and Algeria into the Bektashi *tariqa*.⁴² It then goes on to describe the Shriners as a worldwide order of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, tolerant and requiring only belief in a Supreme Being (like American masonry), and builds a fictional history of the Shriners on a reasonably accurate history of Sufism.⁴³ There is no evidence of any actual contact between Florence and the Bektashis, and the story was probably inspired by a report

published in many American newspapers in the 1850s that identified the Bektashis as Freemasons.⁴⁴ This report had some basis in fact, as Freemasonry was then spreading in the Ottoman Empire, and some Bektashis were also Freemasons, and themselves saw parallels between the Bektashiyya and Freemasonry.⁴⁵

The Shriners' association with Sufism was limited to their foundation myth, and the public mourning of the death of the Emir Abd-el-Kader, who is discussed below, in 1883.⁴⁶ There are occasional references to "zikers" as part of the Shriners' rituals,⁴⁷ but so far as can be determined these rituals contained no Sufi elements. They are based on standard Masonic rituals, with the addition of occasional references to the Prophet Muhammad and the desert, and some dramatic and comic elements.⁴⁸

The Shriners grew to become one of the largest movements of their kind in the United States, second only in size to the Freemasons themselves and to the two largest fraternal orders, the Loyal Order of Moose and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. In 1988 the Shriners had some 800,000 members⁴⁹ and a string of charitable hospitals dedicated to treating children with orthopedic and other special healthcare needs. Sufism vanished from the standard version of the Shriner foundation myth, which was often traced back to the establishment in Mecca in 656 of a secret order dedicated to "dispense justice and execute punishment upon criminals who escaped their just deserts . . . and also to promote religious toleration among cultured men of all nations"⁵⁰ and eventually became nothing more than an "Arabian-themed party" in France in 1870.⁵¹ The Bektashiyya was entirely forgotten. Arab and Islamic elements were increasingly de-emphasized. By the 1990s, "Ancient Arabic Order" had vanished from the Shriners' official name,⁵² and they became merely "The Shrine" and then "Shriners International." In 2002, in the aftermath of 9/11, the "Islam Temple" of San Francisco, chartered under that name in 1883, became merely the "Asiya Shriners."⁵³ The fez, however, has survived.

THE RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM

It was against this background that Edward FitzGerald published *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* in 1859. He was not the first to translate Khayyam. One quatrain was published in 1816 by Hammer-Purgstall,⁵⁴ and a few translations of selected quatrains appeared in German, French, and English sporadically during the 1820s, 1840s, and 1850s,⁵⁵ without attracting much attention. Edward Byles Cowell, a well-regarded English translator of Hafiz and professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge, then suggested the translation of Khayyam to his friend Edward FitzGerald, a wealthy and somewhat eccentric English gentleman who had previously published some unremarkable translations of Pedro Calderón de la Barca from Spanish and of Jami from Persian, which he was learning with Cowell. Cowell provided FitzGerald with a manuscript of Khayyam.⁵⁶

FitzGerald's English translation likewise attracted little attention at first. As mentioned, it was initially rejected by *Fraser's Magazine*. It was then published privately

in 250 copies in 1859. It was remaindered, but then noticed in 1862 by a friend of the Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who passed it to Rossetti, who passed it to the poet and playwright Algernon Swinburne, and it thus became known and admired among the Pre-Raphaelites. Building on this, a second, revised edition was produced in 1868, but still in a small print run. It was not until a favorable notice in *The North American Review* in 1869 that interest began to grow, first in the US and then in England.⁵⁷ Sales finally took off in the late 1880s and 1890s, often in pirate editions.⁵⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, *The Rubáiyát* had become one of the two or three best known and most popular poems of the time. In 1929, Ambrose Potter counted 410 separate editions and reprints in English, together with translations into many languages. One indication of *The Rubáiyát*'s extraordinary international impact is that it was translated not just into major languages such as German and French, but also into minority languages such as Basque, Catalan, and Gaelic,⁵⁹ whose speakers could all have read it in another language. Another is that it was used to promote consumer goods, from chocolates to cigarettes, notably American Tobacco's premium brand, Omar.⁶⁰ Omar Khayyam Clubs were established in England and America as dining clubs for literary gentlemen. In 1899, a young Isadora Duncan danced "Omar," first in Newport, Rhode Island and then in New York.⁶¹

It has frequently been observed that *The Rubáiyát* spoke to the spirit of its times. This point was made by the poet Charles Eliot Norton in the article in *The North American Review* that originally drew attention to *The Rubáiyát* in the United States. "The prevailing traits of the genius of Omar Khayyám," wrote Norton, "are so coincident with certain characteristics of the spiritual temper of our own generation, that it is hardly surprising that his poetry. . . is beginning to excite the interest it deserves."⁶² More recently, Marta Simidchieva has argued that the poem addressed a general religious crisis brought on by the discoveries of natural science typified by Darwin's work, by the impact of Higher Biblical Criticism, and by the general fragmentation of religious authority.⁶³ This is no doubt true, though Simidchieva's list of causes of the nineteenth-century general religious crisis could be longer. One could reasonably argue that the nineteenth century was probably the most dramatic period of change in the history of humanity.

If it is clear that *The Rubáiyát* spoke to the spiritual temper of the late nineteenth century, it is less clear just what *The Rubáiyát* was saying, and to what extent that message came from Khayyam, or from FitzGerald. As John Hay, the American ambassador to the United Kingdom, asked in a famous address to the London Omar Khayyam Club in 1897,

Was it, in fact, a reproduction of an antique song, or the mystification of a great modern, careless of fame and scornful of his time? Could it be possible that in the Eleventh Century, so far away as Khorassan, so accomplished a man of letters lived, with such distinction, such breadth, such insight, such calm disillusion,

such cheerful and jocund despair? Was this “Weltschmerz,” which we thought a malady of our day, endemic in Persia in 1100?⁶⁴

Hay concluded that FitzGerald was “a twin-brother in the spirit” to Khayyam.⁶⁵ In fact, *The Rubáiyát* probably owed more to FitzGerald than to Khayyam, since FitzGerald’s translation was loose to the point where it was hardly even a translation, as FitzGerald himself recognized when he replaced the words “translated into English verse,” which appeared on the frontispiece of the first edition, with “rendered into English verse” for the second edition. Starting with Edward Heron-Allen in 1898, various scholars have tried to match FitzGerald’s quatrains to the originals, generally succeeding in matching no more than half.⁶⁶ As Clive Wilmer has argued, it was characteristically Victorian to draw on and use the medieval and the Oriental, not just to copy it. Wilmer advances as examples the “gothic” architecture of St. Pancras railway station in London, the fabrics of William Morris, and *The Rubáiyát*, which draws on both the medieval and the Oriental,⁶⁷ going beyond merely copying them.

The question of precisely what *The Rubáiyát* was saying is complicated by the fact that FitzGerald and Khayyam were probably saying different things. In fact, even Khayyam was saying different things, as there were many Khayyams. The original Khayyam was best known in his own lifetime as an astronomer and mathematician, though he also wrote philosophy and poetry, as was normal for a scholar of his time. Over the centuries after his death, the body of poetry attributed to him grew considerably in quantity. An original corpus perhaps as small as twenty-five quatrains grew to over five hundred.⁶⁸ Inevitably, then, although the quatrains ascribed to Khayyam all have something in common, they also vary considerably.

FitzGerald himself was adamant that Khayyam was an Epicurean. In his introduction to the first edition of *The Rubáiyát* he identified Khayyam as such, as one who “having failed . . . of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but This, . . . set about making the most of it; preferring rather to soothe the Soul through the Senses into Acquiescence with Things as they were, than to perplex it with vain mortifications after what they *might be*.”⁶⁹ Others, however, were not so sure. The French scholar Jean-Baptiste Nicolas, who in 1867 published a scholarly French prose translation of Khayyam with an accompanying Persian text, asserted that Khayyam was also a Sufi, “a mystic poet, a philosopher both skeptical and fatalist.”⁷⁰ FitzGerald did not entirely disagree in his first edition, but then devoted several pages in the introduction to his second edition to refuting Nicolas. According to FitzGerald, Khayyam was “especially hated and dreaded by the Súfis . . . whose Faith amounts to little more than his own when stript of the Mysticism and formal Compliment to Islamism which Omar would not hide under.”⁷¹

The problem of whether Khayyam was Epicurean or Sufi was noted by Norton in his 1869 article. “Many of [the] quatrains, as the English translator admits, seem

unaccountable unless mystically interpreted,” wrote Norton, “but many more as unaccountable unless literally. May it not be that there are two sides to Omar’s shield,—one of mystic gold, the other of plain silver?”⁷² The truth is that some of the final Khayyam corpus was indeed mystical, and some was indeed Epicurean. The parts of the corpus written by Khayyam himself were probably mystical, as in his philosophy Khayyam followed in the Neoplatonic tradition. In his *On being and obligation* (*Risala al-kawn wa’l-taklif*) he understands God as ultimate cause and describes the chain of emanation, which he examines in more detail in his *On the Principles of Being* (*Risala fi kulliyat al-wujud*). In this work he also distinguishes different branches of knowledge, and concludes—with al-Ghazali—that the rank of the Sufis is higher than that of the scholars and philosophers.⁷³

What Khayyam himself thought, however, was overlaid first by the views of other Persian poets whose writings became part of his corpus, and then by the views and intentions of FitzGerald. A further layer was then added by the reader. The importance of this layer is illustrated by Simidchieva, whose views on the nineteenth-century religious crisis have already been referred to. She finds agnosticism in one famous quatrain:

There was the Door to which I found no Key:
 There was the Veil through which I might not see:
 Some little talk awhile of *me* and *thee*
 There was—and then no more of *thee* and *me*.⁷⁴

She correctly identifies this quatrain as reflecting Sufi doctrine, but reads the last line as an “unmistakable reference to the finality of corporeal, physical death,”⁷⁵ while a more obvious reading is that it refers to mystic union, when the distinction between “thee” and “me”—that is, between the One and the seeker—is erased. This reading is more obvious, however, to those who are familiar with Sufi theology. There is no way of ascertaining whether it was obvious to FitzGerald, and if it was not obvious to Simidchieva, a thoughtful scholar, it was probably lost on most readers of *The Rubáiyát*.

The Rubáiyát, then, contains some of the Neoplatonism of Arab philosophy, some of the Sufism of Khayyam, some of the Epicureanism of later poets, much of the Epicureanism of FitzGerald, and what Clive Wilmer calls “the doubts and desires of his mid-Victorian readership.”⁷⁶ It is, then, both Sufi and hedonistic. And this may be part of the secret of its success: that, like the classic Sufi poetry of Islam, it contained a rich variety of possibilities that were logically mutually exclusive, since death can hardly be both final extinction and a return to the One, but which coexisted happily in poetic suspension, allowing readers—whether they realized this or not—to have their cake and eat it. The tension between the Epicurean and the mystical is what made it a great poem. A simple statement of the finality of physical death would hardly have merited 410 editions. As Iran Hassani Jewett said of the even more varied Persian Khayyam corpus,

“His changes of mood are one reason for his popularity, for every man can find a corroboration of his own state of mind in Omar.”⁷⁷

FIGHTING DERVISHES

Parallel to the vaudeville, Epicurean, and mystical understandings of the nineteenth century there also developed a fourth, very different understanding of dervishes, as fanatics. This resulted from Sufi involvement in popular resistance to European colonialism, exemplified by the Emir Abd-el-Kader, whose death in Damascus was mourned by the Shriners in the United States. It is not clear whether or not the Shriners realized that Abd-el-Kader was a Sufi; they probably knew him merely as a noble Arab Freemason. The connection between Sufism and Abd-el-Kader and other Sufi resistance leaders was not always appreciated. It was only after “the dervishes” in the Sudan defeated and killed one of Britain’s great imperial heroes, General Charles Gordon, in 1885 that the idea of dervishes as fanatical warriors became well established. That this idea was long lasting is suggested by the decision in 2003 of the creators of the Star Wars Roleplaying Game to introduce “Seyugi Dervishes,” an order of assassins from the planet Recopia.⁷⁸ It may also explain why the term “Sufi” began to replace the term “dervish” in Western languages, as “dervish” had acquired a meaning similar to that attaching today to the term “jihadi.”

European expansion had started in the Americas and in Southeast Asia in the early sixteenth century, and then continued in India in the late seventeenth century and the Caucasus in the eighteenth century, as Russia expanded south into Ottoman territories. It continued during the nineteenth century with French and British expansion into Ottoman territories in the north of Africa. Russian, French, and British armies found it easier to defeat Ottoman armies in battle than to subdue the local populations, whose resistance was often led by Sufis. The defeat of the Ottoman armies removed state institutions, leaving only nonstate institutions. Sufi orders were among the most important nonstate institutions everywhere in the Muslim world, and their leaders were widely respected. It was often Sufis, then, who emerged as the leaders of popular resistance. This led to two new understandings of Sufism: of dervishes as fanatical warriors, and of the related Sufism as “Neo-Sufism.”

The first and most famous of the Sufi resistance leaders was the Emir Abd-el-Kader (Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi), the son of Muhyi al-Din ibn Mustafa, a Qadiri shaykh in Mascara (now in western Algeria) whose parents had named him after Ibn Arabi. Muhyi al-Din agreed to lead the local resistance against the French invasion of 1830, and appointed his son Abd-el-Kader as military commander. Abd-el-Kader was successful enough to establish a short-lived state, the Emirate of Mascara, which was initially recognized by the French. The French then decided to complete the occupation of Algeria,

however, and Mascara fell in 1846. Abd-el-Kader was taken into French custody, but treated with respect.⁷⁹ He and some of his followers were initially interned in France, and then released. He moved to Damascus, where he returned to the career as a Sufi scholar for which he had been preparing at the time of the French invasion of Algeria, focusing on the study of Ibn Arabi and taking no part in regional or local politics save in 1860, when he and his followers intervened in local inter-confessional rioting to protect many Syrian Christians.⁸⁰ After this, he became a hero in France, as a gallant leader of his own people and as a gallant protector of others. Among the honors heaped on him was the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor and membership of a Masonic lodge in Alexandria.⁸¹ He was the subject of the poem with which Arthur Rimbaud won a competition at the age of 15, and even found his way into French schoolbooks.⁸² There was, of course, something self-serving about this French admiration for a vanquished enemy, which indirectly emphasized the glory of the French victory and helped legitimize French control over Algeria.

It was generally mentioned in nineteenth-century Western accounts of Abd-el-Kader that he was the son of a *marabout* (*murabit*) a term used in northwest Africa to denote a Sufi shaykh or a dervish. The importance of this status in explaining his successful leadership of a very diverse following, however, was not noted. Nor was it normally explained what a *marabout* was. The term was often simply glossed as “priest,” if glossed at all,⁸³ a gloss even less accurate than the sixteenth-century habit of glossing a dervish as a “monk.” Although the leading French reference work of the time, the *Grand Universal Dictionary of the Nineteenth Century* (*Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*) of Pierre Larousse, noted in 1873 that a *marabout* was not a priest but a member of a religious community, of which the “derkaouis” (Darqawi *tariqa*) were given as an example, the term was not linked with either the older term *derviche* or the newer term *soufi*, and the Darqawis were instead compared to the Freemasons, and said to be actually more interested in politics than in religion.⁸⁴ Abd-el-Kader, then, was the first Sufi to become a household name in the West, even before Omar Khayyam, but he was not generally identified as a Sufi.

A very similar story to that of Abd-el-Kader was playing out at almost the same time some three thousand miles to the east, in the Caucasus, where two Naqshbandi Sufis from Daghestan, Ghazi Muhammad and Imam Shamil (Samuil), launched what the Russians called the Murid War of 1830–59 and established the Imamate of the Caucasus, a short-lived state similar to the Emirate of Mascara. This was conquered by the Russians in 1859. The Russians, perhaps inspired by the example of French treatment of Abd-el-Kader, gave Imam Shamil an honorable retirement in Russia (Ghazi Muhammad had already died).⁸⁵

The followers of Ghazi Muhammad and Imam Shamil were known to the Russians as *murids*, the standard term for a Sufi disciple, and their movement thus became known as “Muridism.” This was understood by some as a new doctrine or ideology, a mixture of xenophobia and reformism, perhaps spread by Persian spies. This understanding was popularized in the West by a conservative Prussian official, August Baron von

Haxthausen, who investigated Muridism during a mission to Russia, and wrote that while it did have some connection to Sufism, it was actually “a politico-religious party” dedicated to “a bloody and relentless war, and ardent, inextinguishable hate.”⁸⁶ This view defined Muridism in terms of its consequences, not its origins. Others, however, found no trace of any distinct politico-religious party, and therefore concluded that Muridism was “in fact, nothing other than an ordinary Sufi *tariqa*,” the judgment of the standard Russian encyclopedia of the late nineteenth century, the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary* (*Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar’ Brokgauza i Yefrona*),⁸⁷ and of some scholars outside Russia.⁸⁸ This view transformed all the followers of Ghazi Muhammad and Imam Shamil into Sufis, which was not the case either.⁸⁹ Someone who follows a Sufi shaykh in *dhikr* is probably a Sufi, but someone who follows a Sufi shaykh into battle need not be a Sufi, and someone who merely accepts the rule of someone who happens to be Sufi shaykh is probably not a Sufi. A third view, followed by *The New American Cyclopaedia* of 1869, combined both alternatives. Muridism was described as a “system of fervid mysticism, founded on Soofeeism,” which “united the native tribes . . . in common hatred against the northern infidels” and was “rendered more intense and effective by the earnest profesion of the Koran.”⁹⁰

The Murids were the subject of a novel by one of Russia’s greatest writers, Leo Tolstoy, which presents them not as Sufis but as “Tatars,” the generic Russian term for Muslims, and as “highlanders” (*gortsami*). Tolstoy’s last novel, *Hadji Murad* (*Khadzhi-Murat*), tells the story of Murad, who defected from Shamil’s forces to the Russians, returned to Shamil’s territory to rescue his family, but was caught and finally executed. Tolstoy is not interested in the origins of Muridism, but gives in passing an account that corresponds with that of Haxthausen.⁹¹ As Tatars, Tolstoy’s Murids pray, are concerned with honor and revenge, and are cruel.⁹² There is little in *Hadji Murad* that goes beyond these stereotypes. As Nancy Dworsky points out, one of the major functions of Tolstoy’s portrayal of Shamil is to allow him to show the Russian Tsar as fundamentally no better than a Tatar, despite the veneer of civilization.⁹³ Following in the tradition established by Martin Luther, Tolstoy was more interested in using Sufis to make points about the West than in the Sufis themselves. Rather as Abd-el-Kader became a household name in the West without being identified as a Sufi, then, Shamil and other Sufi characters in *Hadji Murad* were not identified as Sufis either.

A clear connection between Sufism and revolt was first made in the case of Muhammad Ahmad, a Sammani shaykh who started a rebellion in the Sudan in 1881.⁹⁴ He defeated the Egyptian army of occupation and killed its British commander, General Charles Gordon, in 1885, which caused a sensation in Britain, where Gordon had been a national hero since his part in putting down the Taiping Rebellion in China in 1862–64. Muhammad Ahmad then died himself, probably of typhus, and his successor Abdullahi ruled the Sudan until his own defeat by an Anglo-Egyptian force under British command in 1898. On this occasion, no honorable retirement was available: Abdullahi was killed during an engagement with a British unit.

Muhammad Ahmad's followers were initially known in the Sudan and by the British as "dervishes" (*darawish*). This term was replaced in the Sudan by *ansar* (helpers), a term generally used to indicate the supporters of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, but the term "dervish" remained in use in the West, even though the term *ansar* is used in 1891 in one of the earliest accounts of Muhammad Ahmad's revolt, *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*, by Major Reginald Wingate, director of Egyptian Military Intelligence.⁹⁵ Wingate reverted to "dervish" in 1892 in *Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, 1882–1892*, which he ghostwrote on behalf of a formerly captive missionary, Joseph Ohrwalder, and which emphasized atrocity stories,⁹⁶ evidently intended to support Wingate's arguments for British intervention in the Sudan.⁹⁷ "Dervish" also appears in the title of what was to prove the bestselling book on Muhammad Ahmad's revolt, published in 1896, *Fire and Sword in the Sudan: A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes, 1879–1895* by the former governor of the Sudanese province of Darfur, Rudolph von Slatin, even though the text of the book generally prefers the more neutral "Mahdist."

Although Wingate was also involved in producing Slatin's book,⁹⁸ it does not repeat the atrocity stories from Ohrwalder's book, though it does make liberal use of the words "death" and "fanatic," and in its last chapter twice refers to the Mahdists as "fanatical barbarians."⁹⁹ *Fire and Sword in the Sudan* instead provides a dramatic story, as Slatin first converts to Islam to improve the morale of the Egyptian forces under his command in the fight against Muhammad Ahmad's dervishes, and then converts to Mahdism after surrendering to them, pledges fealty to Muhammad Ahmad, and becomes a soldier in the bodyguard of Muhammad Ahmad's successor Abdullahi. Finally, he escapes and returns to safety in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ This extraordinary story helps account for the book's success.

Readers of Ohrwalder's and Slatin's books, then, would inevitably have concluded that a Mahdist was a dervish, and that a dervish was a fanatic. To what extent they would have understood that a dervish was a Sufi would depend on which book they read, and how carefully they read it. Muhammad Ahmad's Sufi background was ignored in Wingate's book, which focused instead on Islamic conceptions of the final days and of the Mahdi, the Rightly Guided one, whose role resembles that of the Messiah in Judaism.¹⁰¹ In this Wingate was right; although Muhammad Ahmad had indeed started as a Sufi shaykh, it was as the Mahdi rather than as a Sufi shaykh that he had launched his rebellion. Ohrwalder's book both ignores Sufism and fails to explain conceptions of the Mahdi.¹⁰² Slatin, in contrast, paid less attention to Mahdism and more to Muhammad Ahmad's origins as a Samani shaykh.¹⁰³

Slatin's conversion is the first we have encountered since the presumed conversions of George of Hungary and of Giovanni Menavino, the early sixteenth-century Italian slave in the Ottoman Sultan's household. It is curious indeed, and presented very casually in *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*: "after a few minutes' deliberation I resolved to present myself to the troops the following morning as a Mohammedan. I was perfectly well

aware that in taking this step I should be placing myself in a curious position, [but] . . . the simple fact was that I had not been sent to the Sudan as a missionary.”¹⁰⁴ Following these few minutes’ deliberation, Slatin spent thirteen years as a practicing Muslim named Abd al-Qadir, praying the ritual prayers (*salat*), following the quasi-Sufi litany (*ratib*) of the Mahdists, and fasting during Ramadan.¹⁰⁵ He married a second wife, in addition to the wife he had brought with him from Darfur, marriages that he does not mention in his book. He then returned to the company of Westerners in Egypt, forgetting all about Islam and about his Muslim wives, one of whom was pregnant when he left her.¹⁰⁶ The explanation offered by his biographer, Richard Hill—“a lack of religious zeal of any kind”¹⁰⁷—does not seem entirely satisfactory.

Just as the Emirate of Mascara and the Imamate of the Caucasus finally fell, so did the so-called Mahdist State in the Sudan. A joint British-Egyptian force under British command, accompanied by various war correspondents, invaded the Sudan in 1896 and reached Khartoum’s twin city, Omdurman, in 1898. Here one of the most unequal battles of the age took place, as lightly armed dervishes attacked heavily armed British troops, who also enjoyed the advantage of holding the higher ground. The British suffered 49 dead and 382 wounded, against an estimate of 11,000 dead and 16,000 wounded dervishes.¹⁰⁸ One of the war correspondents present, Winston Churchill, then twenty-three years old, objected in his account of the battle to the widespread understanding of the dervish advance into British fire as “mad fanaticism”:

Why should we regard as madness in the savage what would be sublime in civilized men? For I hope that if evil days should come upon our own country, and the last army which a collapsing Empire could interpose between London and the invader were dissolving in rout and ruin, that there would be some—even in these modern days—who would not care to accustom themselves to a new order of things and tamely survive the disaster.¹⁰⁹

The year 1898 did not mark the end of the phenomenon of dervish resistance. A Somali Sufi shaykh of the Salihyaa *tariqa*, Muhammad Abdille Hasan, launched another revolt against the British in 1899, establishing yet another short-lived state, this time known in the West as the “Dervish State.”¹¹⁰ It fell in 1920 when Churchill, who had moved from journalism into politics and was then the British Secretary of State for War, approved the use of aircraft to bomb the Somali dervishes into submission, a strategy that proved effective.¹¹¹ In 1906, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Idrisi, an Ahmadi shaykh in Sabya, Asir (now in Saudi Arabia) led the resistance against Ottoman troops, and after the start of the First World War received support from the Ottoman Empire’s enemy, Britain. The Emirate of Asir became an internationally recognized state after the end of the war, but was then annexed by Saudi Arabia in 1934.¹¹² In 1911, a Sufi shaykh in Cyrenaica (now eastern Libya), Ahmad al-Sharif al-Senussi (Sanusi), led resistance against the Italian invasion and received support during the First World War from Italy’s enemy Germany,

but was then defeated by Germany's enemy Britain.¹¹³ Ahmad al-Sharif's forces were generally referred to in the West simply as "the Senussi," though the phrases "Senussi dervishes," "Senussi order," and "Senussi confraternity" were also used. In this case, the resulting state was longer lived, as Italy fought on the German side during the Second World War and so at the end of that war lost control of Libya, where a kingdom was established in 1951 under Ahmad al-Sharif's cousin Idris al-Senussi. It was King Idris who was deposed by Colonel Muammar Gadhafi's military coup of 1969.

As well as establishing an understanding of dervishes as fanatical warriors, these Sufi-led resistance movements also helped establish the idea of a novel phenomenon, labeled "Neo-Sufism" by Western scholars during the 1970s, which was understood to be unusually militant,¹¹⁴ a form of Sufism "stripped of its ecstatic and metaphysical character and content" that instead focused on "the socio-moral reconstruction of Muslim society."¹¹⁵ The basic idea of Neo-Sufism was much the basic idea of Muridism as defined by the *The New American Cyclopaedia* one hundred years before, and gained some currency, especially since connections could be demonstrated between some of the *tariqas* involved. Muhammad Abdille Hasan's Salihyya derived ultimately from the Moroccan Sufi Ahmad ibn Idris, who was also the shaykh of Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi's grandfather, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Senussi,¹¹⁶ and Muhammad ibn Ali al-Idrisi was descended from Ahmad ibn Idris and had spent time with the Sanusi *tariqa*.¹¹⁷ Later scholarship, however, showed that there was actually nothing very "neo-" about the *tariqas* labeled as "Neo-Sufi."¹¹⁸ The explanation of their revolts was the same as the explanation of the Daghestani resistance: that people often resist foreign occupation, and that in the nineteenth-century Muslim world, Sufi shaykhs were often the obvious leaders of popular resistance. Once this has happened, Sufism provides extra legitimacy for a commander, and helps improve morale among his followers.

CONCLUSION TO PART II

The first series of intercultural transfers examined by this book, which culminated in the condemnation for heresy and death of Meister Eckhart in about 1328, ended with a transfer to the West of the emanationist basis of Sufi theology, not of actual Sufism. The next transfer, which started with George of Hungary's publication of his *Treatise on the customs, conditions and wickedness of the Turks* in 1480 and ended with the height of the popularity of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* in 1899, was a transfer of actual Sufism: texts based on direct contact, and texts and poetry produced by Sufis. It then developed in the West though successive imaginings of Sufis and Sufism. George's dervishes as angels, or rather as diabolical illusions appearing to be angels, though briefly reinforced by the idea of dervishes as monks "just like ours" that was promoted by French propaganda in the aftermath of the Franco-Ottoman alliance of 1536, was soon succeeded by the deviant, antinomian dervishes of the sensationalist *Navigations*,

Peregrinations and Voyages made into Turkey of Nicolas de Nicolay, users of hashish and practitioners of sodomy. This sensationalist understanding of Sufism reappears in 1755 in *The Dervish* of Poullain de Saint-Foix, with a pseudo-dervish who lusts after sixteen-year-old-girls, and in 1786 in Beckford's *Vathek*, with a dervish who provides a "narcotic powder." It hovers somewhere in the background of Goethe's wine as "a wonderful thing" for "Age [to] drink itself back to Youth," and of the Epicureanism found in *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

When attention turned from accounts of Sufis in the sixteenth century to readings of original texts in the seventeenth century, the result was an understanding of Sufism as "mystic theology" by Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville and other early Orientalist scholars—a view that was fundamentally in agreement with the understanding of Sufi theology of many scholars today. When the first ever translation of a Sufi text, the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* of Ibn Tufayl, was published in Europe in 1671, some scholars correctly identified it as mystical. A more popular view, however, was that it exemplified Deism, and this is the view that accounted for the text's remarkable popularity. Deism, as noted, owes something to the Florentine Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, the source of the idea of the *prisca theologia* that later became known as perennialism. It may also owe something to the universalism of Guillaume Postel, who drew on both Neoplatonism and the idea of the *prisca theologia*.

The eighteenth-century West not only understood the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as Deism, but also understood Sufism as "Pantheism," another radical theology of the Enlightenment. Pantheism was Spinozism by another name, and Voltaire puts it in the mouth of a dervish in *Candide* in 1759. The term was coined by John Toland, an English writer who is most often seen as a Deist, but was more of a Spinozist. Toland was a universalist and a perennialist, and developed anti-exotericism (the idea of a fundamental distinction between esoteric doctrine and exoteric religion), which was applied to Sufism by François-Marie de Marsy in 1758 and developed by James Graham in 1819. Graham joined Sir William Jones as a standard scholarly authority on Sufism, a position from which both were soon deposed by scholars such as August Tholuck and Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, but even so remained a standard reference for nonspecialists. Perennialism, pantheism, anti-exotericism, and universalism thus all remained to structure Sufism when it finally became established in the West. Dervishes as fanatical warriors did not fit comfortably with these understandings, and so that conception was quickly mostly forgotten.

PART III

The Establishment of Sufism in the West, 1910–1933



Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and Sufism



IN ABOUT 1906, a Swedish painter who had converted to Islam and moved to Egypt, Ivan Aguéli, joined a Sufi *tariqa* in Cairo. In 1910 or 1911, he transmitted his initiation into this *tariqa* to a French occultist, René Guénon, in Paris. Guénon later died a Sufi and a Muslim in Cairo, leaving behind a body of “Traditionalist” writings on the basis of which a number of Western *tariqas* have since been founded, of which the most important was established in 1933. Anyone who has done any serious reading on Sufism in a Western language has almost certainly read works by Traditionalist Sufis, knowingly or not. One year after Aguéli initiated Guénon in Paris, an Indian musician on a tour of America, Inayat Khan, initiated a Californian occultist, Ada Martin, into Sufism in San Francisco. From this start developed the Sufi Movement, on which basis a number of Western Sufi groups have since developed. Also in 1911, a Russian journalist with an interest in the occult, Peter Ouspensky, published a book entitled *Tertium Organum* which, though it barely mentions Sufism, provided a third basis on which another set of Sufi groups would later be established. These, too, still exist today.

The years 1910 to 1911, then, mark a turning point in the history of Western Sufism. Aguéli, Khan, and Ouspensky did not know of each other’s existence, but nonetheless they had two things in common. One was that they were active just before the outbreak of the First World War, which meant that the processes they started were poised to develop further in the new West that emerged after the end of that war. The other thing that they had in common was that they were all connected to the Theosophical Society, a late nineteenth-century movement of American origin that had no great interest in Sufism or Islam, but even so, was crucial to the later establishment of Sufism in the West. The Theosophical Society drew on and developed the perennialism and anti-exotericism that were discussed in the previous section of this book. It also added two

new and important ingredients: the idea of the Mahatmas as hidden masters; and anti-dogmatism. The Theosophical Society was not particularly universalist, however, and emanationism and universalism descended to twentieth-century Western Sufis by other routes. One of these was the New England Transcendentalists, Neoplatonists who are also considered in this chapter.

The intercultural transfers that started the establishment of Sufism in the West were primarily in the form of individual contact, which built on the understandings of Sufi theology as perennial, esoteric universalism that had become established during the early modern period. This chapter considers the contact with Egyptian Sufism of Ivan Aguéli. Other contacts are considered in later chapters: the contact with the West of an Indian Sufi, Inayat Khan, and the contact with the Algerian Sufism of Guénon's follower, Frithjof Schuon.

The nineteenth century was a time of religious and spiritual innovation in the West, especially in the United States, where the start of the century saw the Second Great Awakening, a loose popular movement that gave rise to numerous new religious groups. The First Great Awakening of 1730–50 was in comparison a small affair. The new religious groups that emerged from the Second Great Awakening included the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, founded by Joseph Smith in 1829–30, and now generally known as the Mormon Church after the title of its sacred text, *The Book of Mormon*. Smith's followers believed that the English text of this book is Smith's translation of a text recorded in "Reformed Egyptian" on golden plates, and made available to Smith by the angel Moroni. The Second Great Awakening largely dispensed with the structures and many of the teachings of the major Christian churches that had dominated the religious life of the West since the end of the Roman Empire, but was not universalist: it kept within the basic framework of the Christian narrative, even when this was somewhat extended, as by the Mormons. Neither Sufism nor any other non-Christian system play any significant part in the Second Great Awakening.

The Second Great Awakening was succeeded by Spiritualism, its "late-coming child."¹ Spiritualism went further than the Second Great Awakening and sought to explore the transcendent directly, dispensing with the basic framework of the Christian narrative, though it did not explicitly challenge it. Many Spiritualists focused on establishing communication with the recently dead during *séances*, activities that now seem marginal and even comic, but which were taken very seriously at the time. The first president of the Society for Psychical Research, a British organization established to investigate Spiritualist phenomena, was Henry Sidgwick, professor of philosophy at Cambridge. He was succeeded by a professor of physics, and then by Arthur Balfour, a politician who later became the British prime minister, and by William James, professor of philosophy at Harvard.² These were not marginal figures. A number of Spiritualist journals flourished, providing some structure to an otherwise loose movement. Spiritualism was the milieu from which Mary Baker Eddy emerged in 1874 with the publication of *Science and Health*, later the key text of the Christian Science Church. Hindu influences, probably

transmitted through the Transcendentalists, have been detected in Eddy's work, but Spiritualism was still not particularly universalist, and Sufism played no significant part in it.

After Spiritualism came Theosophy, which not only dispensed entirely with the Christian narrative, but also turned to non-Western religions. While Spiritualism had been a diffuse movement, Theosophy was based around the Theosophical Society, established in New York by Helena Blavatsky in 1875, the year after the publication of Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health*. The key texts of Theosophy are Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877), and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). These drew on both antique Western sources and non-Western sources, mostly Hindu and Buddhist. The Theosophical Society is one of the major reasons that yoga became as Western as apple pie, and that karma became a concept more familiar to most Westerners than incarnation. It was perennialist, but not especially universalist. It emphasized the idea of the hidden masters, a development of the hidden but accessible spirits of Spiritualism.

The Theosophical Society dominated the alternative religiosity of the late nineteenth century. It might have grown to the size and significance of the Mormon Church or the Christian Science Church, though in the event it did not. However, it did have a direct impact on almost everything that succeeded it, including Western Sufism. There were also other, smaller religious movements that had a direct impact on Western Sufism, however, and it is with those that this chapter will start.

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND THE MISSOURI PLATONISTS

The Second Great Awakening, Spiritualism, and Theosophy were large-scale movements, characteristic of the increasingly mass society of nineteenth-century America. New England Transcendentalism, in contrast, was a small intellectual movement, reminiscent of European Deism, from which it partly descended. Among its successors were the Missouri Platonists, also a small intellectual movement. Both the Transcendentalists and the Missouri Platonists were Neoplatonists, and both were universalists. Neoplatonism was more important to them than Sufism, but both included Sufism in their universalism.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The early nineteenth-century translations of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall that inspired Goethe were also read on the other side of the Atlantic, notably by Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the leading Transcendentalists.³ Like Goethe, Emerson addressed a poem to a Persian poet, but his poem was to Saadi, not to Hafiz. He refused "to make mystical divinity out of . . . the erotic and bacchanalian songs of Hafiz," who he held to be the "prince of Persian poets," not for his philosophy but for his "fluent mind" and his "intellectual liberty."⁴

Emerson's understanding of Persian poetry was very different from Goethe's, and not only in that he distanced himself somewhat from Hafiz. This was partly because Emerson was a Neoplatonist, drawing on a local New England tradition that itself derived from seventeenth-century Britain.⁵ One of his early inspirations had been the work of Emmanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century Swedish mystical writer who drew on the Florentine Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino and on the original Neoplatonism of Plotinus.⁶ As a Neoplatonist, Emerson recognized and appreciated the Neoplatonism in the Persian poetry that he read, which Goethe did not. Emerson's readings also differed from Goethe's because he was a former Unitarian minister who had left the Unitarian Church, but had not abandoned the search for the divine.

The Unitarian Church was America's most Deistic church. In the words of the Unitarian theologian William Ellery Channing, it "began as a protest against the rejection of reason, against mental slavery."⁷ It replaced Calvinist doctrine with an emphasis on natural religion, and rejected the idea of the trinity, insisting instead on the unity of God. It thus also rejected the divinity of Christ, though not his role in the Christian narrative of salvation. Emerson came to dislike Unitarian orthodoxy, however, finding it "cold and cheerless, the mere creature of understanding."⁸ In 1832 he left the Unitarian ministry to search for a personal experience of God. Emerson typifies the way in which, once the structures of Christianity that had sustained the Latin West for more than a millennium had collapsed or been demolished between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, some still dreamed of an alternative religion, pure and simple and true.

After a European tour during which he met Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Thomas Carlyle, Emerson returned to America, and in 1836 he published *Nature*, a call for "a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of [foregoing generations]."⁹ By "nature" he meant creation, understood in Neoplatonic terms, and his book starts with a quotation from Plotinus, "Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul,"¹⁰ that is to say, an emanation of the Intelligence. Beauty, the next topic to be investigated by Emerson, is also understood in terms that show the influence of Neoplatonism. Beauty is an "expression of the final cause of Nature," found in "natural forms" as virtue, and as art, the human attempt to reproduce nature. Behind beauty is spirit, the universal essence, the Supreme Being, which, "present to the soul of man," "one and not compound," "does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us." "The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious." Thus "we are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God."¹¹

All this is entirely Neoplatonic. Stanley Brodwin argued in 1974, however, that while Emerson follows the Neoplatonists quite closely, he also differs from them because his end was beauty, not union.¹² Emerson differs from other Neoplatonists in the emphasis he places on the presence of the One in nature and the need not to be strangers in nature, which ultimately makes nature an end in itself, rather than the obstacle that it had been

for Plotinus and most subsequent Neoplatonists. Emerson's nature becomes somehow divine, in a way that is familiar in our own age, but not in earlier ages. With Emerson, then, there begins the development of a new type of Neoplatonism.

Emerson's recognition of the Neoplatonism in Persian poetry is visible in an 1858 essay in which he quotes at some length from his own translation from the German of the climax of the *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-tayr*) of Farid al-Din Attar. Attar was a contemporary of Ibn Tufayl, though living in Nishapur (now in Iran) in the far east of the Muslim world, rather than in Ibn Tufayl's far west. Attar's poem, like Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is a Sufi parable. Many birds set out in search of their king. Many fail on the way. A few survivors finally arrive at their destination, their bodies annihilated, "by the light ensouled," to find that they see only themselves, reflected. In Emerson's version,

Who comes to Him sees himself therein,
Sees body and soul, and soul and body.¹³

Thus, says Emerson without further explanation, we find "a proof of the identity of mysticism in all periods."¹⁴ What Emerson had actually found, of course, was Attar's Neoplatonism.

Emerson was not just a Neoplatonist but also a Pantheist, a term he used in a special sense. He felt that "we accept the religions and politics into which we fall [through birth]; and it is only a few delicate spirits who are sufficient to see that the whole web of convention is the imbecility of those whom it entangles."¹⁵ There is much of Spinoza in this view, and Emerson also favored Spinoza's view of Jesus as one prophet among others, although a special one. The Pantheists, in Emerson's view, hold that "quantity, number, time, place, all belong to matter" and take as their "point of departure" "a One,—the Essence of all things,—eternal, immutable, indivisible . . . existing in its wholeness and entirety in each and every point of space, at any and every moment of time." For the Pantheists, Christ is "to other religious teachers—to Moses, Zoroaster, Socrates, Confucius—what Shakespeare is to other poets."¹⁶ This matches the Pantheism of John Toland, save in the addition of the Neoplatonic One, in whom Toland was not interested. Emerson's Pantheism, then, is Neoplatonic Pantheism, not just Spinozist Pantheism.

Emerson did not actually declare himself a Neoplatonic Pantheist. He noted almost sadly that while Pantheism is very inspiring "when stated in glowing poetic language" it has no real prospect of becoming "the popular faith," as it is "too refined for the uneducated laboring classes, and too subtle and evanescent for the matter-of-fact business men," and does not claim to be essential for salvation.¹⁷ Even so, Neoplatonic Pantheism does seem to be the system to which Emerson subscribed. He was also a universalist. The "universal mind," he explained in another context, "is one central fire, which flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily; and now, out of the throat of Vesuvius, illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams

out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which illumines all men.”¹⁸ Care, however, must be taken in identifying Emerson as a universalist, because in his own day that term was used to indicate something different—namely, the idea of universal salvation, without damnation. This was the sense in which the Universalist Church, which combined with the Unitarian Church in 1961,¹⁹ was universalist.

Emerson’s understanding of the theology of Persian poetry was also found at the end of the century in Walt Whitman, who was influenced by Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Whitman’s late 1891 poem “A Persian Lesson” may also draw indirectly on Sir John Malcolm, and thus on the understandings of Sir William Jones and James Graham.²⁰ In “A Persian Lesson,” The “o’erarching and last lesson” of “the grey-beard sufi” is that

Allah is all, all, all—is immanent in every life and object,
May-be at many and many-a-more removes—yet Allah, Allah, Allah is there.

...

“It is the central urge in every atom,
(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)
To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,
Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception.”²¹

For Whitman, then, Sufism was Neoplatonic Pantheism.

Thomas Moore Johnson and The Platonist

Similar understandings are also found in the work of a Neoplatonist less famous than Emerson and Whitman: Thomas Moore Johnson, publisher and sponsor of *The Platonist* during the 1880s.²² Johnson was “the Sage of Osceola,” a small town in Missouri that never really recovered from having been burned to the ground during the Civil War. He worked as a lawyer, but may have lived off money inherited from his father, a US and then a Confederate senator. *The Platonist*, he declared, was dedicated to being “a candid, bold, and fearless exponent of the Platonic Philosophy,” which “recognizes the essential immortality and divinity of the human soul, and posits its highest happiness as an approximation to, and union with, the Absolute One.”²³ Like Emerson, Johnson dreamed of an alternative religion, pure and simple and true.

The Platonist was published irregularly between 1881 and 1888, during which time the slogan on its masthead developed. In 1881, it started with “Platonism is immortal because its principles are immortal in the human intellect and heart.”²⁴ In 1884, the statement that “Esoteric Christianity is identical with true Philosophy” was added to this,²⁵ a statement perhaps inspired by the phrase “esoteric Buddhism” to describe Theosophy, which became popular after 1883.²⁶ This second statement was modified in about 1886 to “The

esoteric doctrine of all religions and philosophies is identical."²⁷ Johnson's Platonism, then, was universalist as well as anti-exoteric.

Johnson's interest in Neoplatonism derived partly from Emerson, whose essay "Intellect" he had read while a law student at the University of Notre Dame, and also from his readings of Thomas Taylor's translation of the *Chaldean Oracles*.²⁸ He became a talented amateur scholar of Plato and the Neoplatonists, publishing new translations of his own. This was not entirely unusual at the time, since, as Cathy Gutierrez has noted, Transcendentalist Neoplatonism spread an interest in Platonism quite widely, so that "Platonic and Neoplatonic ladders of ascent proliferated in middle-class American thought," especially after Bohn's Library began to publish new translations of Platonic and Neoplatonic texts in 1848.²⁹ A Plato Club was founded in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1865, later becoming known as the American Akadêmê.³⁰ From 1879 to 1888, the Transcendentalist A. Bronson Alcott, "the Sage of Concord" (and father of Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little Women*), organized a philosophical summer school held annually in Concord, Massachusetts.³¹ This was attended by some members of the American Akadêmê,³² and reported in *The Platonist*,³³ which printed some of its proceedings.

The Platonist mostly reprinted earlier translations of the Neoplatonists, often by Thomas Taylor, as well as publishing some new translations and related articles. It focused on late antiquity, but also moved beyond this period into al-Andalus, reprinting Simon Ockley's translation of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in its fifth issue, and publishing a new translation (from French) of the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Bajja's *Rule of the Solitary* (*Tadbir al-mutawabhid*) in its twelfth issue.³⁴ These works were identified as philosophy, not as Sufism, but there was some awareness of the connection between Sufism and Platonism. The January 1884 meeting of the American Akadêmê opened with a recitation of "The Sayings of Rabia," a poem on the great Sufi Rabia al-Adawiyya by the English poet and politician Richard Monckton Milnes.³⁵

The World's Parliament of Religions

Universalism was not limited to Emerson and the Transcendentalists, Whitman, Johnson and *The Platonist*. It was embedded in the spirit of the times, especially after the World's Parliament of Religions that was held in Chicago in 1893 in conjunction with the World's Fair of that year, as part of the World's Congress Auxiliary, along with several other congresses, most notably the Congress of Women.³⁶ The World's Parliament of Religions was not intended as a universalist event,³⁷ but it treated all speakers and religions with respect, as it was a principle of the World's Congress Auxiliary that "speakers were asked not to attack the views of others, but to set forth with as much cogency as possible the merits of their own."³⁸

The proceedings of the World's Parliament of Religions were widely reported in the newspapers, and it represented a turning point in American attitudes, popularizing the

view that there was value in all religions.³⁹ It also led to the arrival in the US of a number of religious teachers, some of whom remained in the country. There were no Sufis, however, as the Ottoman government, which might otherwise have sent someone to talk on Sufism, was among those that boycotted the event.⁴⁰ Islam was represented only by a friend of Johnson's, Alexander Russell Webb,⁴¹ one of the earliest Americans to publicly convert to Islam.⁴²

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND CARL-HENRIK BJERREGAARD

The Theosophical Society, as Stephen Prothero has argued, can be understood as a development of Spiritualism.⁴³ Some of its activities resembled Spiritualist *séances*, and one of its two leading figures, the New York journalist and lawyer Henry Steel Olcott, had written extensively on Spiritualism earlier in his career.⁴⁴ The background of the other leading figure, Helena Blavatsky, remains obscure. She was of German-Russian origin, having been born in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine) to Captain Peter von Hahn and his wife Helena, a well-connected novelist. Blavatsky had left Russia as a young woman to escape from her brief marriage to a provincial administrator, Nikifor Blavatsky.

There are many stories about Blavatsky's activities between leaving Russia in 1849 and moving into a cheap boardinghouse in New York in 1873, but these are often fanciful and cannot be confirmed. None offer an explanation of the impact that she had on Olcott. Soon after meeting her, Olcott wrote in *The Spiritual Scientist* of the need to replace the "mediums" of Spiritualism, who worked in the dark and experienced phenomena that they did not understand, with "adepts," who had been initiated into ancient mysteries, possessed esoteric knowledge, and might actually *control* occult forces. He evidently had Blavatsky in mind. The original mission of the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, was the scientific investigation of what lay behind Spiritualist phenomena, as well as providing "neutral ground" on which science and religion could meet.⁴⁵ The possible conflict between science and religion concerned many Westerners of the time. In its first objective, it closely resembled the Society for Psychical Research, but it would develop in a very different direction.

Dedication to scientific experimentation implied an opposition to "mere passive and credulous acceptance of enforced dogma," and anti-dogmatism became one of the major new principles promoted by the Theosophical Society. Blavatsky stressed in 1879 that "the Society, as a body, has no creed, as creeds are but the shells around spiritual knowledge." It became one of the guiding principles of the Theosophical Society that "the Society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate."⁴⁶ In practice, of course, the Theosophical Society did have teachings, which it called "doctrine," and doctrine is hard to distinguish from dogma, save that "being dogmatic" is never a good thing. Anti-dogmatism, however, became a Theosophical principle, and thence passed into some varieties of Western Sufism.

The Theosophical Society and the Orient

The Theosophical Society soon turned sharply toward the Orient. This turn may have been partly inspired by Emerson, who in Prothero's view was a major influence on Olcott.⁴⁷ Its immediate occasion was a correspondence that developed between Olcott and Thackersey Moolji, the wealthy Indian owner of Hindoostan Mills in Bombay (now Mumbai) and a member of the Arya Samaj (Noble Society), an organization that had been established in Bombay in 1875 for the reform and revival of Hinduism. The Arya Samaj was one of a number of organizations that were founded in response to the need to accommodate Hinduism to the conditions of the time. This need was felt in all religions; it was not only the West that went through a religious crisis during the nineteenth century. Correspondence with Moolji and then with Harichand Chintamani, the president of the Bombay Arya Samaj, led Olcott to the view that the objectives of the Arya Samaj were broadly the same as those of the Theosophical Society, and thus to the temporary merging of the Theosophical Society into the Arya Samaj as "the Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj."⁴⁸ It also led to Olcott and Blavatsky travelling to Bombay in 1879.⁴⁹

It soon became clear that the differences between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj were irreconcilable, and personal conflicts also developed. The two organizations split, and the Arya Samaj began to criticize the Theosophical Society.⁵⁰ Olcott and Blavatsky had by then made other useful contacts in South Asia, however, and in 1880 they visited Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where they both publicly converted to Buddhism.⁵¹ The Theosophical Society then moved its headquarters across India from Bombay to Adyar, Madras (now Chennai), and continued to grow over the following years. This success was partly due to the way in which the Theosophical Society provided answers to topical questions, for example by presenting the concept of karma as an alternative to eternal damnation, a concept with which many Westerners were increasingly uncomfortable.⁵² It also owed much to the successful combination of Olcott's organizational skills with Blavatsky's writings and persona.⁵³

The success of the Theosophical Society may also have owed something to the dramatic supernatural phenomena that sometimes accompanied Blavatsky,⁵⁴ and to the legitimacy given to her and her teachings by letters said to have been received from a series of "esoteric teachers," that is, Mahatmas (great souls) who belonged to a hidden brotherhood in Tibet,⁵⁵ of whom the chief was named Koot Hoomi.⁵⁶ Koot Hoomi wrote a number of letters to two leading Theosophists, Alfred P. Sinnett and Allan Hume, sometimes transmitting teachings on occult topics, and sometimes commenting on the day-to-day affairs of the Theosophical Society and its members.⁵⁷ Some of these letters materialized in closed cabinets⁵⁸ and some arrived by more ordinary means, and individual Mahatmas also sometimes manifested their astral bodies, during what were, in effect, Spiritualist *séances*.⁵⁹ The Mahatmas' letters are in some ways the Theosophical equivalent of the golden plates of the Mormons. The Mahatmas themselves echo other

myths of hidden masters such as the Illuminati, themselves contemporary versions of mythical ancient masters such as the Chaldean sages.

It is not clear to what extent the Mahatmas and their letters contributed to the success of the Theosophical Society and to what extent the success of the Theosophical Society ensured that the Mahatmas and their letters were taken seriously, which otherwise they might not have been. In the long term they proved a liability, when in 1884 a close associate of Blavatsky, Emma Coulomb, broke with Blavatsky and denounced her in the Indian press for producing apparently supernatural phenomena, including the Mahatmas' letters, by artificial means.⁶⁰ This led to an investigation by the Society for Psychical Research, which concluded that Coulomb's accusations were justified, that Blavatsky herself had written the Mahatmas' letters,⁶¹ and that she was an "imposter."⁶² The Theosophical Society survived these difficulties, however, just as the Mormons survived critics who questioned the existence of their golden plates and objected that there had never been any such language as "Reformed Egyptian." It remained the West's most important new religious movement until 1929, when a crisis resulted from the refusal of Jiddu Krishnamurti to take on the role of World Teacher, for which he had been prepared by Blavatsky's successor, Annie Besant (we will return to Krishnamurti in a later chapter).

The Theosophical Society and Sufism

The mature Theosophical narrative emphasized Hinduism and Buddhism to the exclusion of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and therefore also to the exclusion of Sufism. Hinduism, or rather the Vedanta, was taken as the original source of religious truth, following the perennialist narrative established by Sir William Jones. Contemporary Hinduism, however, was understood as a degeneration of original Vedanta Hinduism, a position that the Arya Samaj and other reforming Hindus also took. Buddhism, by contrast, was understood as a purer version of original Vedanta Hinduism by the Theosophists,⁶³ but not, of course, by the Arya Samaj. When contemporary Buddhism differed from Theosophical conceptions, this was ascribed to degenerations in Buddhism. As Mark Bevir has argued, the concept of esoteric truth allowed the Theosophists to ignore whatever aspects of exoteric religion they wished to ignore.⁶⁴

The resulting Theosophical doctrine was known as the Secret Doctrine, although it was not actually kept secret; rather, it was presented as "the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy." It was also presented as not belonging to "the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, neither to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism nor Christianity exclusively. The Secret Doctrine is the essence of all these."⁶⁵ From a historical perspective, it was an amalgam of Hinduism and Buddhism sprinkled with certain Western conceptions, adjusted to the needs of the times, such as the need for a resolution of the apparent conflict between science and religion. In this it does not differ from most reformulations of religious traditions, which commonly borrow from other systems, and must address the needs of the times if they are to gain popularity.

Given that the Theosophists emphasized Vedanata Hinduism because of its antiquity and resulting closeness to perennial truth, later religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were of no particular interest, despite the universalism implicit in the conceptualization of the Secret Doctrine as the essence of all religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are thus rarely referred to by the Theosophists—and Sufism, too, was of little interest. The Theosophists' lack of interest in Sufism, then, was the consequence of their central perennialist narrative, which in practice trounced their universalism.

There were, however, occasional exceptions to the Theosophists' lack of interest in Sufism. Blavatsky mentioned Sufism in her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), in the context of a discussion of the origins of Christianity. After tracing the transmission of "the philosophy of the old secret doctrine" through Egypt to "the Magi . . . the Pythagoreans, the Sufis, and the Rishis of Kashmir," she quoted the Cambridge scholar Charles King to the effect that "The Sufi doctrine involved the grand idea of one universal creed which could be secretly held under any profession of an outward faith; and in fact took virtually the same view of religious systems as that in which the ancient philosophers had regarded such matters."⁶⁶ King does not give his sources for this view of Sufi theology as perennial, esoteric universalism,⁶⁷ but he is evidently following Jones and Graham. An abridged version of Graham's key "Treatise on Sufism" was, in fact, later published in one of the Theosophical Society's main journals, *The Theosophist*.⁶⁸ Alexander Wilder, a Theosophist who had helped Blavatsky prepare *Isis Unveiled* for publication,⁶⁹ discussed Sufism in passing in an article on Mazdeanism in the *Journal of the American Akadêmê*. He referred not only to the book by King that Blavatsky had used, but also to the original discourse in which Jones had identified Sufism as the "the primeval religion of Irân," and compared it with Sir Isaac Newton's understanding of Deism.⁷⁰ To the extent that the leading Theosophists were interested in Sufism, then, their understanding was much that of Jones and Graham.

Three more Theosophists had a significant interest in Sufism. One was Thomas Moore Johnson, the editor of *The Platonist*. Another was Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard, a librarian in New York who wrote on Sufism in *The Platonist* and elsewhere, and later played a small but key role in the establishment of the West's first major Sufi organization, the Sufi Movement (which will be discussed in a later chapter). The third was Ivan Aguéli, a Swedish painter who wrote on Sufism in French, himself converted to Islam and joined a Sufi *tariqa*, and was the first Westerner ever to "transmit" a Sufi "initiation" to another Westerner, René Guénon, who then played an important role in the establishment of another of the West's first major Sufi groups, the Traditionalist movement.

The Sufic Circle and the Order of Sufis

Blavatsky's collaborator Wilder was a friend of Johnson's, and a frequent contributor to *The Platonist*.⁷¹ Through Wilder, Johnson became involved in occult orders, in addition

to writing about Neoplatonism. He joined the American Board of Control of the Theosophical Society and the American branch of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, of which he became president.⁷² The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor was an order influenced by the writings of the French occultist Eliphas Lévi, the American occultist Paschal Beverly Randolph, and some other less famous occultists, and was joined by a number of Theosophists.⁷³ It generally focused on Western sources, in contrast to the Theosophical Society's focus on Vedanta Hinduism and Buddhism.

Johnson moved beyond Western sources in 1887 when he established the Sufic Circle.⁷⁴ Very little is known of this group; indeed, its existence was discovered only very recently by Patrick Bowen. Its foundation is recorded in a letter from Johnson to an unidentified recipient, which gives the Circle's purposes as "the systematic study of Sufism, the practical application and realization of its teachings, and the dissemination of its precepts and doctrines."⁷⁵ There is no direct indication of how Johnson understood Sufism, but his other interests suggest that he understood it as Neoplatonism. There is also no indication of what, if anything, the Sufic Circle did to achieve "the practical application and realization of [Sufi] teachings," and it seems to have done nothing toward "the dissemination of Sufi precepts and doctrines," as it was barely known. However, a related body called the Order of Sufis was reported in 1896 by S. C. Gould, who was one of the founding members of the Sufic Circle. Gould noted that the Order of Sufis had representatives in New York and Missouri, and represented "the Sufistic and Unitarian philosophy of the Persians."⁷⁶ A later version of this report ended by referring those who sought further information to Johnson, to Gould himself, or to Bjerregaard in New York.⁷⁷

A Theosophical Reading of the Rubá'īyyat

The most important American Theosophical writer on Sufism was Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard. Bjerregaard was born in Fredericia, a small town in Jutland, Denmark, where his father was rector of Fredericia College. He studied theology at the University of Copenhagen on two occasions, but never graduated. He worked as a private tutor in Germany and Russia, and served as an officer in the Danish army.⁷⁸ He developed an interest in "Oriental religion" while garrisoned in Fredericia in the late 1860s.⁷⁹ He then left Denmark in 1873 to avoid arrest⁸⁰—for what alleged offense is unclear—and landed in the United States, where he worked in a factory for some years while learning English. Then, in 1879, he was employed as an assistant librarian at the Astor Library in New York, where he was appointed librarian in 1882⁸¹ (the Astor was one of the three libraries that merged in 1895 to form the New York Public Library).

In 1886, Bjerregaard was one of the earliest contributors to *The Path*, another Theosophical journal; he published his first article on Sufism in its second number, continued in five more parts over the five following numbers, and then completed it in *The Platonist*.⁸² In these articles, Bjerregaard gave a brief and generally accurate account of

Sufism on the basis of the main secondary sources then available in English, German, and French, including Graham and Malcolm, mixed with references to the *Dabistan* and extensive quotation from Sufi poets, starting with Jami, Nizami, and Shems of Tabriz, and then moving on to Omar Khayyam.⁸³

Bjerregaard portrayed Sufism as universalist and anti-dogmatic, as “Theosophy from the standpoint of Mohammedanism,” a universal “religion of the heart . . . opposed to formalism and ritualism” for which external religions were no more than “stepping stones to realities.” According to Bjerregaard, Sufis consider the religion of Islam “more useful than others” as a stepping stone, but no more. For this, Bjerregaard cites Graham’s “Treatise on Sufism.” He also argued that Sufism could be understood as “neither a philosophical system nor the creed of a religious sect, but simply a way of living,” a view that he ascribed to the German scholar Franz August Schmölders.⁸⁴ This is a slight but significant misreading of Schmölders, who actually wrote that if one were to define Sufism, it should not be defined as a philosophical system or a religious sect, but rather as “*a way of living*, a sort of monastic order” (emphasis in original)⁸⁵—by which words Schmölders is presumably trying to translate *tariqa*, which has both meanings inherent in it. Bjerregaard also noted that there was discussion concerning the extent to which Sufism had drawn on the Vedanta and on Plato, but considered himself that “the similarity is to be accounted for by the universality of truth.”⁸⁶ Four elements of Bjerregaard’s presentation of Sufism in *The Path* and *The Platonist* would become reality when Sufism was established in the West: Sufism as the “religion of the heart,” as a “way of living,” as “opposed to formalism and ritualism,” and as separate from Islam.

Over the following ten years, Bjerregaard’s understanding of Sufism developed. In the late 1890s, he had become a popular lecturer on mysticism, especially at the Green Acre Conferences held from 1894 at Eliot, Maine,⁸⁷ a center for progressive spiritual and political causes where both Swami Vivekananda (the Hindu guru who introduced yoga to America) and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (son of Bahá’u’lláh of the Bahá’í Faith) lectured and stayed, and where a Japanese government delegation stopped after signing the 1905 Portsmouth Treaty which ended the Russo-Japanese War.⁸⁸ By 1896, Bjerregaard’s understanding of mysticism had become much more Neoplatonic than it had been in 1886. This change presumably was due to Johnson’s influence, and also perhaps to Bjerregaard’s involvement with Johnson’s Order of Sufis. In 1896, Bjerregaard argued that Sufism had taken most of its teachings from Plotinus, and cited Meister Eckhart and Dionysius together with Rumi. For philosophy he advised his readers to go to Dionysius, “but if you want poetry as a guide to Mysticism go to the Sufis.”⁸⁹

In 1902, Bjerregaard himself turned poetry into a guide when he took advantage of the expiration of the copyright of *The Rubáiyát* to publish an ornate limited edition, *Sufi Interpretations of the Quatrains of Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald*. This placed Fitzgerald’s quatrains on pages headed “Thus sang Fitzgerald” facing pages headed “Thus spake Omar, the Sufi.” Bjerregaard’s Sufi interpretations were, as he explained in a brief introductory note, not always those of a Muslim, as “a Sufi is simply a Mystic in Mohammedan

garb.⁹⁰ They take their point of departure in FitzGerald's text, and develop ideas from Bjerregaard's 1896 lectures.

IVAN AGUÉLI, THE WESTERN SUFI

As Bjerregaard was the most important American Theosophical writer on Sufism, so Ivan Aguéli was the most important European Theosophical writer on Sufism. In addition, as Johnson founded a Sufic Circle in the US, so Aguéli initiated some others in his own circle in Europe into Sufism. Aguéli, as we will see, converted to Islam first, and became a Sufi some years later. This is the opposite of the pattern that later became the norm, following which Westerners convert to Islam because they have become Sufis, which was also the sequence followed by George of Hungary in the fifteenth century.

Aguéli was not the only Westerner to become a Sufi in the Muslim world at the turn of the nineteenth century. There was also the journalist and adventurer Isabelle Eberhardt, who joined the Rahmaniyya *tariqa* in Algeria in 1899 or 1900,⁹¹ and the French Orientalist painter Etienne Dinet, who also joined the Rahmaniyya, in 1913.⁹² There were probably others too. Eberhardt was famous for her journalism and Dinet for his painting, and their lives are therefore documented. If Westerners who were not famous joined Sufi *tariqas* in the Muslim world, this would not normally be recorded. Aguéli, however, is the most important of the Westerners who became Sufis in this period, because of his writings on Sufism, and because of his connection to René Guénon, who he initiated into Sufism, and so provided one of the bases on which Sufism would later become established in the West. Aguéli's eventful career also illustrates the way in which avant-garde artistic, political, social, and religious views and milieus intermingled in late nineteenth-century Paris. Just as religious and political radicalism came together for Spinoza, they also came together for Aguéli. Further, it also illustrates how European states sometimes promote Sufism for their own purposes—a phenomenon which has become widespread in the aftermath of 9/11, but has a longer history than is often thought.

Aguéli was born John Agelii in Sala, a small town in central Sweden, in 1869, the son of a veterinarian. At the age of twenty, as an aspiring painter evidently inspired by Russian literature, he adopted a Russian version of his name, signing his paintings "Ivan Aguély."⁹³ In later years, the spellings "Aguély" and "Aguéli" alternated, with "Aguéli" finally becoming standard. After learning to paint in Sweden, he moved to Paris to study art in 1890. Like Emerson, he read Swedenborg. He was introduced to the Theosophical Society in Paris by his art teacher, Emile Bernard. By 1891 he had developed an interest in Islam, to judge from the books he borrowed from the Swedish Royal Library on a visit to Stockholm in that year, which included the Quran as well as Baudelaire and a book about travels in Indochina (now Vietnam) and Cambodia. In 1893, back in Paris, he was reading about ancient non-European art, Indian and East Asian as well as Islamic, and about mysticism, especially Swedenborg, Buddhism, and ancient Egypt. He was also learning Hebrew, and planning a trip to the Orient, to Algeria, Egypt, or India.⁹⁴

Aguéli made friends in Paris's far-left anarchist community, and saw anarchism as "a sunset and a dawn at the same time . . . a pale glow, perhaps, but one that brings the first rays of the new sun."⁹⁵ Some anarchists were conducting a terrorist bombing campaign in Paris that attracted support in progressive artistic circles. The poet Laurent Tailhade, for example, asked, "What does it matter if insignificant lives are lost, as long as the gesture is beautiful (*si le geste est beau*)?"⁹⁶ Aguéli, likewise, wrote in a letter to his brother of "the dynamiter's magnificent, aware, calm heroism; the revenge of the cultural victim."⁹⁷ He was arrested in 1894 in the aftermath of a series of bombings in Paris, and tried with others in the "Trial of the Thirty" (*Le procès des trente*). The chief defendant was the anarchist art critic Félix Fénéon, a friend of Aguéli's,⁹⁸ who was charged with planting a bomb at the Foyot Restaurant which had injured four people. The police had found explosives in Fénéon's apartment, but the prosecution was unable to prove its case, and Fénéon defended himself with great wit, winning much public sympathy (the poet Tailhade was not among those on trial because, ironically, he had been dining at the Foyot at the time of the bombing and was among those injured—he lost an eye).⁹⁹

Aguéli was not charged with involvement in the bombing of the Foyot, but as a member of a wider anarchist conspiracy, especially for his connections with the editor of the hardline anarchist magazine *L'En-dehors* (*The Outside*),¹⁰⁰ in which his close friend and patron, the feminist and animal-rights activist Marie Huot, had published, as had Fénéon and other anarchists including Errico Malatesta,¹⁰¹ the Italian who is sometimes credited with the invention of the modern theory of terrorism. Aguéli, like all the others charged in the Trial of the Thirty, was acquitted.¹⁰²

While in prison awaiting trial, Aguéli had been learning Arabic and continuing his study of mysticism; he asked a friend to try to find him the works of Dionysius.¹⁰³ On his release he went to Egypt. He lived first in a small village near Alexandria, and then in al-Marg, a mostly Christian village just outside Cairo, painting and improving his Arabic. He took to Egypt enthusiastically. "I have never in all my life seen more peaceful people," he wrote to his mother. "Their faces bear the mark of peace and inner light that does one good to see."¹⁰⁴

Abd al-Hadi

After his return to France, at some point between 1895 and 1899, under circumstances that his biographer Axel Gauffin was unable to discover, Aguéli converted to Islam,¹⁰⁵ which he then still knew relatively little about.¹⁰⁶ In 1899, when he visited Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the first references to Islam appear in his letters, as he tells how he approached members of Ceylon's Muslim community, hoping to be accepted and perhaps to be allowed to study at a *madrasa* (traditional school).¹⁰⁷

Aguéli found himself welcomed by Ceylon's Muslim community. He also found that many of his new Muslim friends were Sufis, "among [whom] there are some really remarkable intellects,"¹⁰⁸ however, he did not write anything else about Sufism until some years

later. One person who did not then know of his conversion was his mother, to whom he wrote cautiously only that he was “living with Muslims,” who were “the best people in India.” They had the same God as the Christians and Jews, he explained, and “worship him in a worthier way.” Swedenborg had great respect for the Muslims, he added.¹⁰⁹

There are various ways of being Muslim. A devout Muslim in the Muslim world is Muslim in theology, practice, and identity. Aguéli clearly adopted an Islamic identity in Ceylon, using the name Abd al-Hadi and dressing as a Muslim, generally in Moroccan style.¹¹⁰ It is not clear to what extent he practiced Islam on a daily basis, however. There are no references to the ritual prayer (*salat*) or to fasting during Ramadan in his correspondence, whereas there are references to visiting mosques to meet people, which might mean that he did not follow daily Islamic practice. Alternatively, it might mean that he did not mention matters that he thought his European correspondents would not understand. His biographer records that on one occasion he got extremely drunk in Cairo, and remarks that he found no other evidence of “alcohol abuse.”¹¹¹ This might suggest that Aguéli did occasionally drink alcohol, though not to excess. Alternatively, Aguéli might only have disregarded the sharia’s prohibition of alcohol on one or two occasions. For many years after his conversion, Aguéli painted only landscapes, which are unproblematic under most interpretations of the sharia, and for some years he gave up painting altogether. From 1911, however, he began to paint human figures, which many interpretations of the sharia forbid, and also female nudes, which all known interpretations of the sharia forbid as a male may only see a mature female naked if he is married to her.¹¹² In this respect, at least, Aguéli chose art over Islam.

Aguéli returned from Ceylon to France via Madras. A friend of a friend from Ceylon had provided an introduction to Olcott, whom he visited several times; Aguéli also read extensively in the Theosophists’ Adyar library.¹¹³ Shortly after his return to France, he was again arrested, and charged with wounding a Spanish *banderillero* (bullfighter), Ramón Laborda. In the company of Huot, who was secretary of the Anti-Vivisectionist League, Aguéli had shot Laborda twice with an unlicensed revolver as he arrived at a bullfight. Laborda survived, and after a press campaign in Aguéli’s favor and against bullfighting, Aguéli was sentenced only to pay a fine of 200 francs (about \$1,000 today), on grounds of “extenuating circumstances” and because it could not be proved that he had aimed at Laborda personally.¹¹⁴ This extraordinarily light sentence for what might easily have been considered attempted murder was a textbook case of how “propaganda of the deed” is meant to work, by promoting public sympathy against the law and in favor of a “progressive” cause.

Aguéli and Insabato

A year or two after this, Aguéli met Enrico Insabato, an Italian studying at the Institute for Colonial Medicine in Paris.¹¹⁵ Insabato appeared to be an anarchist, but was in fact probably an undeclared agent for the Italian government.¹¹⁶ He took Aguéli with him

in 1902 when he moved to Egypt. In Cairo, Aguéli worked for Insabato for several years on two newspapers, earning a steady salary for the first time in his life. He seems to have been Insabato's expert on local affairs. There is no indication that Insabato knew Arabic, while Aguéli's Arabic was soon very good.¹¹⁷ The first of Insabato's newspapers, *Il Commercio Italiano* (*Italian Commerce*), ran from 1902 to 1904, was published in Italian, and dealt primarily with commercial matters. The second, *Il Convito/Al-Nadi* (*The Caller*), ran from 1904 and was published initially in Italian and Arabic, and then in Italian, Arabic, and Turkish. It dealt with political and religious issues, and was aimed at readers throughout the Middle East, with a print run of 5,000 copies,¹¹⁸ which was significant at the time, as Arabic newspapers then generally had relatively small circulations.

It can be assumed that these newspapers were paid for by the Italian government, as Insabato was a strong supporter of Italy's colonial policy. This aimed at redressing the imbalance between Italy, which had no Arab colonies, and France and Britain, which had several. The Italian target was the Ottoman provinces of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (now Libya), which Italy invaded in 1911. This invasion was preceded by the careful cultivation of good relations with local Arab leaders, especially senior Sufis, who were politically important.¹¹⁹ The hope was that Italy would be welcomed as a liberator from the Ottomans. In the event, this strategy failed, as local Arab leaders strongly resisted Italian occupation, and the Sanusi *tariqa* led the jihad against the Italians, as noted in an earlier chapter. Insabato was recalled to Italy in 1912.¹²⁰ With hindsight, the Italian strategy is easy to condemn as naive. At the time, however, it might have looked promising.

Insabato's mission was evidently to promote the image of Italy as a friend of Islam, in contrast to the French and British on the one hand and to the Ottomans on the other. He sometimes advanced this mission through practical means, cultivating Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian students in Cairo, where many were studying Islam at the Azhar, and attempting to obtain permission to build dormitories for them. He tried to build a mosque in Rome, and an Italian mosque in Cairo, succeeding only in the latter objective.¹²¹ He also advanced his mission through *Al-Nadi*, which consistently presented Italy as the friend of Islam, praised Sufism, and criticized French and British policy. It also criticized the Ottoman government for replacing Sharia with Western-style statute law, while promoting the Ottoman caliph as the religious leader of the Muslims.¹²² It emphasized the sharia and Sufism and attacked reformers, whether political reformers, who tended to be anti-sharia, or religious reformers, who tended to be anti-Sufi. In supporting the sharia, it also praised the *madbhabs* (established traditions of interpretation of the sharia) and stressed their pluralistic tolerance.¹²³

The hostility of political and religious reformers in the Muslim world to the sharia and to Sufism was a new phenomenon that considerably complicated the position of devout Muslims and Sufis. The hostility to the sharia of political reformers stemmed from their desire for a legal system that was compatible with Western commercial and administrative norms, which they considered beneficial for both economic development

and good governance. Political reformers also tended to accept certain Western criticisms of Muslim society, which, for example, blamed Islam for the Oriental fatalism that they contrasted with Western dynamism.

The hostility of religious reformers to Sufism arose through more complex mechanisms. Just as the Western understanding of religion changed over successive centuries in response to a variety of stimuli, producing such responses as Deism and the Second Great Awakening, so similar stimuli, arriving over decades rather than centuries, produced similar responses in the Muslim world. A form of Deism emerged in India, as we will see, though it was more prevalent among Hindus than Muslims. The closest the Arab world came to Deism was modernism, which was almost as hostile to established Islamic religious authority as Western Deism had been to Christian religious authority. Modernists saw Sufism as irrational and superstitious. The leading Egyptian modernist, Muhammad Abduh, stressed the compatibility of Islam with science and allocated to Sufism the obscurantist role played by the medieval Catholic Church in nineteenth-century Western understandings of European history.¹²⁴ At about the same time and for similar reasons, the Jewish modernists of the Haskala were also rejecting the Kabbalah.¹²⁵

One of the leading Egyptian contributors to *Al-Nadi* on matters of the sharia and of Sufism was Abd al-Rahman Illaysh, who had inherited leadership of a *tariqa*, the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya, from his father, Muhamamd Illaysh, a respected Islamic scholar who had sided with the rebels during the Urabi Revolt of 1879–82, and had died in prison after British intervention had led to that revolt's suppression.¹²⁶ Abd al-Rahman Illaysh was among those exiled after the end of the Urabi Revolt, and had subsequently been imprisoned for political reasons by the Ottomans.¹²⁷ He was thus politically opposed to both the British and the Ottomans, a position that fitted neatly with the line of *Al-Nadi*. To what extent he was active as a Sufi is unclear, as the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya is reported to have ceased operating during his lifetime,¹²⁸ but he was certainly knowledgeable about Sufism, and especially about Ibn Arabi, whose work he wrote about extensively in his articles for *Al-Nadi*.¹²⁹ Aguéli wrote in *Al-Nadi* along the same lines as Illaysh, in favor of Islam, Sufism, and Ibn Arabi.¹³⁰

The motives of Insabato and of Illaysh for promoting Sufism are clear; Aguéli's motives are less clear. One of his motives for joining Insabato may have been financial, but a more important motive was probably what seemed like an opportunity to advance the interests of Islam. Aguéli was at this time developing a general plan for awakening sympathy for Islam in Europe, using all those with anti-colonial, anti-clerical, and anti-establishment positions, including anarchists. The Theosophists could also be useful, he thought, since although they were "very far from Islam," they were against racial prejudice, and they taught people to love the Orient. Sympathy for Islam might also be increased by organizing translations, especially of Sufi and mystic works, "as that is where we meet our friends."¹³¹ Aguéli does not seem to have realized that he was also advancing Italian colonial interests, though some others at the time did identify

Al-Nadi and Insabato as representing Italian rather than Islamic interests, including Rashid Rida, whose *Al-Manar* (*The Lighthouse*) was the leading modernist journal of the time.¹³²

Illyash was evidently responsible for introducing Aguéli to the work of Ibn Arabi, which Aguéli read with enthusiasm, finding close agreement between it and Swedenborg. Once again, much of the agreement derived from the common heritage of Neoplatonism. Aguéli prepared some translations of Ibn Arabi into French.¹³³ At some point—various dates are given—he joined Illyash’s Shadhiliyya Arabiyya.¹³⁴

Quite what this meant is not clear. As has been noted, the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya seems to have ceased operating as a *tariqa*. There is nothing in Aguéli’s later writings that suggests that he followed Illyash as *murshid* (guide), and while he later wrote at length about Sufi theology and Ibn Arabi, he said almost nothing about Sufi practice. On one occasion he referred to “practical dervishism” in a note, but then discussed invocation rather than any of the other aspects of Sufi practice.¹³⁵ On another occasion he seemed to dismiss Sufi practice as “sentimental pedagogy,” referring those who were interested in it to the books of the Shadhiliyya, Qadiriyya, or Naqshbandiyya.¹³⁶ None of these, of course, were available in any European language at the time.

The Universal Gnostic Church

In December 1907, after the discovery by the Egyptian police of some compromising papers, Insabato was forced to leave Egypt, and Aguéli’s involvement with *Al-Nadi* came to an end. After an unsuccessful attempt to find alternative employment and the exploration of alternative projects, including marriage to an Ethiopian, Aguéli left Egypt for Paris.¹³⁷ In Paris, he met Count Albert-Eugène de Pouvoirville, a writer on East Asian affairs and translator into French of the *Tao Te Ching*.¹³⁸ Rather as Aguéli had spent several years in Egypt, Pouvoirville had spent several years in Indochina (now Vietnam).¹³⁹ In Paris, he was a member of a small occultist group that had recently split off from the Martinist Order, a French rival of the Theosophical Society founded in 1890 by a former Theosophist, “Papus,” Gérard Encausse,¹⁴⁰ whom Aguéli had been reading with approval in 1894.¹⁴¹ Pouvoirville and some other former Martinists had joined the Universal Gnostic Church, a group founded in 1888 that looked to the Western occult tradition¹⁴² rather than to the Vedanta Hinduism that the Theosophists emphasized. Starting in December 1910, Aguéli published a series of articles on Sufism and a number of translations of classic Sufi works, mostly in the tradition of Ibn Arabi,¹⁴³ in the journal of the Universal Gnostic Church, *La gnose* (*Gnosis*).

Aguéli’s articles and translations established an understanding of Sufism that later proved influential in Europe, just as Bjerregaard’s articles proved influential in America and England. They rejected certain details of the Theosophical understanding of religions, most importantly the emphasis on Vedanta Hinduism, while maintaining a general perennialist framework. Aguéli used Ibn Arabi as his standard authority for Sufism,

establishing him in a position that he retains in the West until this day. Aguéli also cites other great Sufis and a few famous Hadith, but—surprisingly for a Muslim—no Quranic passages. His treatment of Sufism is also important for what it leaves out: the Quran, and Sufi practice.

Aguéli's understanding of Sufism corresponded to the basic emanationist scheme. The multiplicity of existence is an illusion, and "the identity of the me and the non-me is the Great Truth" that leads to union, to "the transformation of personal reality into human universalism or prophetic reality."¹⁴⁴ In emphasizing this point he even goes so far as to argue that "altruism" is an empty term, as there is no other to be altruistic to. When there is a murder, each of us is the murderer and the victim at the same time.¹⁴⁵ Aguéli is here approaching the rhetoric of Meister Eckhart.

Aguéli's articles in *La gnose* also retain some of the emphases of *Al-Nadi*. He is consistently positive about Islam, which he advocates as a better religion than any other. In some ways it resembles Brahmanism, but unlike Brahmanism it is universal.¹⁴⁶ The unfortunate state of the Muslim world was not the fault of Islamic fatalism, as some critics of Islam alleged, but rather of despotic government and "ethnic heterogeneity."¹⁴⁷ The objective of Sufism, *fana* (union), is experienced in this world as "tolerance, impartiality, disinterest, detachment, self-sacrifice, self-discipline and active fatalism,"¹⁴⁸ "active fatalism" being acceptance of God's will,¹⁴⁹ not the passive fatalism which Islam was accused of encouraging.

An article published in *Al-Nadi* in 1907 suggests that Aguéli then still understood Sufism, which he echoed Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* in describing as the "secret doctrine of Islam," as compatible with Theosophy, which he presented favorably.¹⁵⁰ By 1911, however, he had changed his mind, rejecting many Theosophical principles. He thus describes the Mahatmas as "imaginary" and rejects the possibility of any "historical filiation" between Islamic and Chinese mysticism.¹⁵¹ Although he is occasionally inconsistent,¹⁵² Aguéli rejects Theosophical perennialism, replacing it with universalism. Islamic and Chinese mysticism may have no "historical filiation," but they are remarkably similar, and most of Aguéli's articles are dedicated to exploring those similarities, and to explaining Sufi theology in a comparative framework. Here he acknowledges Pouvourville's work on Taoism.¹⁵³ He makes occasional comparative references to other religions, especially to Swedenborg,¹⁵⁴ to Kabbalah, and to yoga, comparing *dhikr* to hatha yoga in passing.¹⁵⁵ He stresses the essential agreement between Ibn Arabi, Swedenborg, and Lao Tzu,¹⁵⁶ which he ascribes not to a common perennial origin, but to the way that all three have "reached the same depths of human knowledge."¹⁵⁷

Despite describing the Mahatmas as imaginary, Aguéli retained the Theosophical idea of hidden masters. Following an eleventh-century text that stressed the preeminence of the Malamatis (an early Sufi group from Khorasan), parts of which he translated for *La Gnose*,¹⁵⁸ Aguéli identified the Malamatis as like the Mahatmas and as Islam's "great initiates,"¹⁵⁹ a phrase taken from the title of *The Great Initiates* (*Les grands initiés*), the

bestselling book by the Theosophist Édouard Schuré that traces “the esoteric doctrine” from Rama through Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato to Jesus, and shows the influence of Antoine Fabre d’Olivet as well as of Blavatsky and Theosophy. Aguéli ascribed the decline of the Muslim world to the fall of the Malamatis.¹⁶⁰ He believed, however, that some Malamatis remained in hiding,¹⁶¹ and implied that their reappearance was to be hoped for and expected.¹⁶² This is a thoroughly Theosophical position.

As well as introducing his understandings of Sufism and the idea of Ibn Arabi as standard references in French circles, Aguéli also introduced Sufism to René Guénon, then one of two editors of *La gnose* and later, as we will see, a key figure in the development of Western Sufism. Guénon was, like Pouvoirville, a former Martinist and a member of the Universal Gnostic Church. His primary interest was in Vedanta Hinduism, on which he presented a dissertation to the Sorbonne in 1920.¹⁶³ This dissertation was rejected as unscholarly,¹⁶⁴ but was then published in 1921, and became very successful in the French alternative-religious milieu. It has since been translated into many languages.

Though primarily interested in Vedanta Hinduism, Guénon was among those “initiated” into the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya by Aguéli in 1910 or 1911. This has since been taken by many to mark Guénon’s conversion to Islam, but there is in fact no evidence of Guénon practicing Islam or adopting a Muslim identity before the 1930s.¹⁶⁵ He continued to belong to the Universal Gnostic Church until it was disbanded in 1917, to attend Catholic mass with his wife,¹⁶⁶ and to write on Hinduism, not Islam. At the same time as Aguéli initiated Guénon into the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya, he and Guénon were also initiated into an unidentified Taoist order by Pouvoirville.¹⁶⁷ Guénon, in return, gave Aguéli and Pouvoirville Masonic initiations. The Gnostics evidently understood all these as being compatible with each other, and with Gnostic universalism as well. There is no evidence of “practical dervishism.” Sufis in the Muslim world commonly distinguish between taking a *tariqa* for guidance (*irshad*) and taking a *tariqa* for its blessings (*baraka*). Guénon can only have taken the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya for its blessings, as there was no guidance available. Sufis in the Muslim world normally take one *tariqa* for guidance, and may then take others for blessings, but the *tariqa* for guidance takes priority over *tariqas* for blessings, rather as a first university degree takes precedence over later honorary degrees.

Aguéli returned to Sweden and painting in late 1911 and then to Egypt in 1913, where he was at the start of the First World War. Sweden remained neutral, but the British military authorities, who took control of Egypt during the War, suspected Aguéli of contacts with pro-Ottoman circles and expelled him in 1916. He took a ship to Barcelona in neutral Spain, where, in 1917, increasingly deaf, he was run over by a train.¹⁶⁸ His paintings were rescued by Prince Eugen, an artist and younger brother of the King of Sweden, and are now exhibited in various Swedish galleries.¹⁶⁹ His understanding of Sufism, developed by Guénon, became widely influential, as will be seen.

9

Toward the One

INAYAT KHAN AND THE SUFI MOVEMENT



THE EARLIEST STEP in the establishment of Western Sufism was the initiation of René Guénon by Ivan Aguéli in Paris. The next step, occurring almost immediately afterwards, was the initiation of a Californian occultist, Ada Martin, by Inayat Khan in San Francisco. Aguéli's initiation of Guénon started a process that led to the establishment by others of a number of Sufi *tariqas* which reflected the understandings of Aguéli and Guénon. Inayat, in contrast, established the Sufi Movement himself. It spread widely across the West during the interwar period, and reflected the understandings of Inayat and of his senior followers, many of whom were former Theosophists. The Sufism of the Sufi Movement thus combined Islam, emanationism, and anti-exoteric universalism. Although Inayat died unexpectedly in 1927, this understanding of Sufism had by then been solidly institutionalized in the Sufi Movement, which still exists today, both in its original form and in a number of groups that split off it, mostly after the Second World War. The Sufi Movement was the most influential Western Sufi group of the first half of the twentieth century.

Ironically, the interwar period, during which Sufism became established in the West, was the start of the most difficult period in the history of Sufism in the Muslim world. Modernist anti-Sufi views became standard among the nationalist reformers who rose to prominence in the aftermath of the First World War. In the modernizing Turkish Republic which emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, Sufism was banned by law in 1925, and the property and other assets of the *tariqas* were seized by the state. While there was no real equivalent of the Second Great Awakening in the Muslim world, a puritan revivalist movement known as Wahhabism (now also called Salafism) emerged in the Arabian peninsula and was notable both for its fervor and for its intolerance.

Wahhabism deemed Sufism heterodox in the extreme. When the entire Arabian peninsula was conquered by a Wahhabi prince, also in 1925, Sufism was banned there too, and Sufi activities continued only underground, carefully concealed in private houses.¹

Sufism was banned only in Turkey and in the Arabian peninsula, where the territories conquered in 1925 became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Sufis in other countries, however, still suffered from the hostility of the modernists and their followers on the one hand, and from the attacks of the Wahhabis and their sympathizers on the other hand, compounded in some cases by the suspicions of colonial authorities, who remembered the Sufi-led resistance movements of the late nineteenth century.

Though the interwar period was a bad time for Sufism in the Muslim world, it was a good time for Sufism in the West. The First World War was a traumatic experience for the Western world. The period following it saw the emergence of a variety of alternative and experimental groups and ideas, in politics, art, sociology, psychology, and religion. Some alternative and experimental religious groups were memorably described by the British writer Rom Landau in 1938 in his best-selling *God is my Adventure*. “After the war of 1914–18,” wrote Landau in his Introduction, “wherever I went, no matter whether in England, on the Continent, in America or the Far East, conversation was likely to turn to supernatural subjects. It looked as though many people were feeling that their daily lives were only an illusion, and that somehow there must somewhere be a greater reality.”² There was also a widespread feeling of approaching doom or, for some, salvation. This interwar millenarianism is evidenced both by books such as Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, and by many of the religious groups of the period.

Landau’s book deals with ten interwar religious teachers, including three German poets who are no longer remembered. There are also two Indians, two Russians, an Austrian, an American, and a Welshman. Only the American and the Welshman were Christian. All the others emerged in one way or another from the Theosophical milieu: the Austrian Rudolf Steiner; the Indians Jiddu Krishnamurti and Meher Baba; and the Russians Peter Ouspensky and George Gurdjieff. None of Landau’s ten can be described as a Sufi, but both Meher Baba and Gurdjieff had Sufi elements in their backgrounds, as we will see, and followers of both accepted the “Sufi” label after the Second World War, as did followers of Ouspensky. Landau missed the two important interwar religious teachers who were most closely associated with Sufism, however. One of these, Inayat Khan, was Indian, and the other, René Guénon, was French. Both also had a connection to the Theosophical milieu. This chapter will discuss Inayat, and the next chapter will discuss Gurdjieff and Guénon and his followers. Meher Baba will be covered in a later chapter.

INAYAT KHAN VISITS AMERICA

The single most important figure in the establishment of Western Sufism was Inayat Khan, an Indian Muslim born in 1882 in Baroda (now Vadodara) in western India,

some 250 miles north of Bombay (now Mumbai). Baroda was then the wealthy capital of an independent princely state, ruled by a Hindu maharajah under British suzerainty, and Inayat's grandfather was the maharajah's court musician, and the founder of the Baroda academy of music. Inayat's uncle, Ala al-Din, had traveled to England and studied at the Royal College of Music, and on his return to Baroda taught at his father's academy and introduced the waltzes of Johann Strauss at court.³ Inayat's family, then, was well-established, steeped in the Indian musical tradition, and also somewhat cosmopolitan. Inayat followed family tradition in training as a musician. At the age of twenty-one, in 1903, he left Baroda for Hyderabad, another independent princely state, in southern India. There he joined and followed the Chishti *tariqa*,⁴ one of India's largest and most important. He then moved to Calcutta (now Kolkata) in eastern India, where he recorded for the Gramophone Company,⁵ and toured regionally in Burma (now Myanmar) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).⁶ By 1907 he had decided on a world tour,⁷ and in 1910, at the age of twenty-eight, he sailed for America, via Naples, along with his brother and a cousin, both also musicians.⁸

One reason that Inayat decided to start his world tour in the US was that a friend from Baroda, Thakorlal Ranchhodlal Pandya, was working on a PhD at Columbia University.⁹ Inayat and his companions performed at a concert in New York which was organized by a Columbia music professor, and there met America's most celebrated Oriental dancer of the time, Ruth St. Denis.¹⁰ St. Denis had launched her solo career in 1906 with a successful performance of *Radha: A Hindoo Temple Dance*,¹¹ in which she danced the central role of the eponymous goddess and consort of Krishna, Radha. *Radha's* Oriental atmosphere started even in the theater foyer, which was filled with incense and featured genuine East Indians¹² (as South Asians were then known, to distinguish them from American Indians and West Indians). St. Denis engaged Inayat and his party to accompany her on a national tour,¹³ and they performed as the backing group for her *Nautch Girl* dance in Salt Lake City in March 1911¹⁴ and then in Seattle in May,¹⁵ styling themselves the Royal Musicians of Hindustan.¹⁶ They also performed independently in Berkeley in April 1911¹⁷ and in New York in 1912, where they featured at a grand charity gala organized by the New York Association for the Blind.¹⁸

Inayat, however, was not only interested in music. In January 1911, before leaving on his tour with St. Denis, he told a reporter from the New York *Sun* that his "purpose [was] to benefit the world by presenting the hidden treasures and mysteries of India, also particularly to show people how to use music for the realization of the soul, which is the real motor of life." Although he himself was a Muslim, Inayat told *The Sun*, "in my philosophy I am broad. I am a student of Suphism [*sic*], which was invented by the prophet Mohammed himself. It is a higher philosophy, similar to that taught by all the prophets and by Buddha."¹⁹

California

While in California in 1911, Inayat lectured at the landmark Hindu Temple at 2963 Webster Street, San Francisco, built by the Vedanta Society in 1905 in an exuberant, many-domed style.²⁰ The Vedanta Society (now the Vedanta Society of Northern California) owed its foundation to Swami Vivekananda, who had arrived in America in 1893 for the World's Parliament of Religions, and in 1911 was run by Swami Trigunatita, a Bengali follower of Vivekananda who had been in San Francisco since 1903 and who generally emphasized the universalism of Hinduism. This was partly a response to incidents of race-based hostility toward Indians in California,²¹ partly a reflection of the universalist spirit of the times, and partly a reflection of Deistic, Theosophical, and universalist currents then present in India. He followed Sir William Jones in maintaining that Hinduism was the original religion of mankind, and that the Indians were the original Aryans.²² As such, they were, in the most important sense, white:

when the idea of white is practically applied to the inner life of man (and not simply to the skin), it becomes a sign to represent such a race of mankind in whom there is no more distinction of colors and creeds; in whom all the latent differences between nationalities and religions, have already vanished; in whom all brethren, no matter to what nationality, to what caste or color, to what thought or culture, they belong, are really one.²³

In line with this universalism, Trigunatita laid out the “chapel” of the temple to resemble a Protestant church, complete with a portrait of Jesus, “in His yoga posture.” Trigunatita instituted acts of worship called “vespers” that followed the Protestant model, with a sermon, prayers, and singing. Less American, more Hindu rituals were carried out elsewhere, but with only the most advanced disciples.²⁴

Inayat spoke on Indian music in his 1911 lecture at the Vedanta Society,²⁵ where he was evidently welcomed as an Indian, even though he was not a Hindu. It was here that he acquired his first Sufi disciple, Ada Martin, born Ada Ginsberg, a Jewish member of the Martinist Order.²⁶ She contacted Inayat after the lecture, and was initiated by him as a Sufi, taking the Islamic name Rabia, in honor of Sufism's earliest and greatest female saint, Rabia al-Adawiyya.²⁷

A series of notes by Rabia Martin strongly suggest that, despite Inayat's declaration to *The Sun* that Sufism was a “higher philosophy, similar to that taught by all the prophets and by Buddha,” he was in 1911 trying to teach her a version of Sufism that was essentially the same as the Sufism that he had learned in India. The practice described in these notes includes repeating the declaration of faith (*shahada*) that marks conversion to Islam, the performance of the Islamic ritual prayer (*salat*), and abstention from pork.²⁸ Anyone following these instructions would be, in effect, a practicing Muslim. Beyond this, the

notes prescribe and describe two standard Sufi practices: the recitation of a litany (*wird*); and the performance of contemplation (*muraqaba*).²⁹ All these practices are described with minor errors, as if Martin had been taking notes during an oral presentation that she had not fully understood. Islamic terms are also glossed with non-Islamic terms that Martin was presumably more familiar with. The ritual prayer is thus glossed as “the greatest yoga.”³⁰ In 1911, then, Inayat was teaching standard Islamic Sufism, not the universalist Sufism for which he later became known.

After Inayat traveled back to New York he remained in touch with Martin, who over the following years established a Western Sufi organization under his auspices, initially called the Chistie [*sic*] Branch of the Sufic Order of America.³¹ From 1912 she held weekly lectures at what she called a Sufic Temple,³² and in 1918 she opened a School of Philosophy and Mysticism in San Francisco, and a rural retreat, named Kaaba Allah, in Fairfax, a small town twenty miles north of San Francisco.³³ Her order subsequently developed somewhat differently than the main organization later established and controlled by Inayat himself.

New York

On his return to New York, as well as performing at the New York Association for the Blind’s charity gala, Inayat made contacts in Theosophical and Spiritualist circles. Among these contacts was a cousin of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science Church, Ora Ray Baker,³⁴ who later became his wife. Another contact was Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard, contributor to *The Path* and *The Platonist* on Sufism and author of *Sufi Interpretations of the Quatrains of Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald*. Inayat records in his autobiography that Bjerregaard helped him to read about Sufism in the Astor Library in New York.³⁵ The Astor Library, where Bjerregaard was formerly the librarian, had in fact by then been incorporated into the recently established New York Public Library (NYPL), so it must have been at the NYPL that Inayat did his reading. The Oriental collection of the NYPL was then very limited, and focused mostly on China and Japan.³⁶ Inayat may have been reading the few Arabic works that the NYPL held, or he may have been reading in the larger collection of Western works. These included Bjerregaard’s own Theosophically oriented work on Sufism, and older texts such as James Graham’s classic *Treatise on Sufism* and Edward Henry Palmer’s *Oriental Mysticism*, which present the understanding of Sufism as esoteric universalism, as well as more recent works by leading Western scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher, Theodor Nöldeke, and Reynold A. Nicholson.³⁷

These later scholars’ understanding of Sufism was based on the methods of modern scholarship, and so was little influenced by systems such as Deism or Theosophy. The work of Goldziher and Nöldeke, however, was in German, which Bjerregaard read, but Inayat did not. In 1912, the NYPL held only one modern scholarly work on Sufism in

English, a 1906 article on “the Origin and Development of Sufism” by Nicholson,³⁸ then a recently appointed lecturer at Cambridge, and later professor of Arabic there and one of Europe’s greatest modern scholars of Sufism. Nicholson’s account of the origins of Sufism is very close to that presented in earlier chapters of this book, starting with asceticism and moving through Neoplatonism and the *Theology of Aristotle* to organization and dissemination.³⁹ Nicholson does not mention Sir William Jones or perennialism by name, but he considers and rejects the accounts of Sufism as derived from Vedanta and Persia, on the grounds that while there may indeed be similarities, no adequate historical connection can be demonstrated.⁴⁰ In this, of course, he is quite right. Nicholson differs from this book’s account of the origins of Sufism, which draws on a further century of scholarship, only in details.⁴¹ His article, then, was remarkably accurate and informative for its time.⁴²

It is not known whether Inayat read Nicholson’s article. Even if he did, it could easily have been understood as representing a dissenting minority view, not the consensus view. That consensus may appear incorrect today, and Nicholson may appear to have got it right, but this is not how it would have appeared to Inayat in 1912. At any rate, as we will see, his lectures and writings followed the older understandings of Jones and Graham, which fitted with the Theosophy of the time, not the understanding of Nicholson, which did not. He must already have had some familiarity with the Western conceptions of the time in 1911, when he compared Sufism to philosophy and Buddhism in his interview with the *Sun*, but his reading in the NYPL must have provided a fuller understanding of popular Western understandings of Sufism.

Western writings on Sufism were not Inayat’s only source, however. He also had firsthand knowledge of Sufism from Baroda and, especially, from Hyderabad, where he had met and studied with a Sufi scholar, Abu Hashim Madani.⁴³ Little is known of Madani, who was not a prominent Sufi, save that he was connected with the Chishti *tariqa*, one of India’s largest. Inayat, then, can be assumed to have learned mainstream Chishti Sufism from Madani. In addition to this, he may also have been in contact with some of the Deistic, Theosophical, and universalist currents then present in India.⁴⁴ These currents were reflected in the positions of Swami Trigunatita. Inayat’s autobiography records him visiting Hindu gurus as well as Sufi saints before leaving for the United States,⁴⁵ behavior which would have been less unusual in the pluralistic atmosphere of nineteenth-century India than elsewhere in the Muslim world. His biography also records a charge reportedly given to him by Madani on his deathbed, which became the “foundation myth” of the Sufi Movement: “Fare forth into the world, my child, and harmonize the East and West with the harmony of thy music. Spread the wisdom of Sufism abroad, for to this end art thou gifted by Allah, the most Merciful and Compassionate.”⁴⁶ The significance of this command is heightened by the use of language that echoes the English of the standard translations of the Bible then in use.

Europe

In 1912, Inayat and his companions resumed their world tour, leaving America for Europe, taking with them his younger brother, who had recently arrived from India. In Europe as in America, Inayat and his three relations focused on music, while Inayat himself also occasionally lectured on Sufism. The group started in England, where Inayat gave a lecture at the Indian Club but did not perform, and then moved on to France, where he did perform, though not with as much success as in America, and met other musicians, including the composer Claude Debussy.

From France the group went on to Russia, where Inayat was received more enthusiastically than in England or France, and started work on a musical play entitled *Shiva*, arranging the score with the composer Sergei Tolstoy, son of the writer Leo Tolstoy.⁴⁷ Inayat's first child, a girl named Noor, was born in Moscow in January 1914.⁴⁸ Inayat might have remained in Russia, which he liked and where he felt at home,⁴⁹ had the First World War not made that impossible.

THE SUFI MESSAGE IS SPREAD

Although Inayat's public activities were still focused on music, he wrote his first book, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, during this period. This short text was written in English, first published in French translation in Paris in 1913, and then published in Russian translation in 1914. The English original was published in London by the Theosophical Publishing House, also in 1914. This, like the French edition, bears on its cover the winged heart symbol that became the logo of the Sufi Movement, and seems to be based on a similar design used by the Theosophical Society,⁵⁰ which was itself evidently derived from the Ancient Egyptian "winged sun" symbol.

A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty resembles the teachings Inayat transmitted to Martin in presenting a version of Sufism that was essentially the same as the Sufism that he would have known from India, but was also compatible with the understandings of Graham and Bjerregaard. It starts with an emanationist description of God as ultimate cause, from which it derives the human need to worship God, as God is reality and the world is illusion. Thus "the wise man, by studying Nature enters into the unity through its variety, and realises the personality of Allah by sacrificing that of his own."⁵¹ The style is perhaps not easy to follow, but the meaning is clear, at least for a reader who already knows the emanationist scheme. Unity is achieved by a series of steps that starts with ritual prayer (*salat*, for which Inayat uses the Persian and Urdu word *namaz*), passes through *dhikr*, and culminates in the three stages of *fana* (union).⁵² It is not stated explicitly that the ritual prayer is Islamic, but elsewhere Islamic orthodoxy is asserted. "Allah" is used as the name of God. All prophets are sent by God, and Muhammad is the last prophet.⁵³

This essentially Islamic message, however, is partly presented in universalist and anti-dogmatic terms. The book opens with the words “Beloved ones of Allah, you may belong to any race, cast, creed, or nation, still you are all impartially beloved by Allah.”⁵⁴ It is explained that all religions are essentially one, not just in the Islamic sense that all prophets come from God, but in the sense that the prophets have always covered truth with a turban and a robe, the turban being “Mysticism” and the robe being “made of morality, which is called Religion.”⁵⁵ Inayat is here closer to John Toland’s anti-exotericism than to mainstream Islam. Given this, “Sufis have no prejudice towards any prophets and masters,” though “Mohammed’s teachings are studied and followed by the orthodox, as religion, and by the deep thinkers, as a philosophy.”⁵⁶ In one sense, Sufism had no “first exponent or a historical origin,” as it was part of human nature to seek “divine wisdom.”⁵⁷ In another sense, though, Sufism did have a historical origin, as one of three main “philosophical schools,” along with Vedantism and Buddhism. As a philosophical school, it descended through the prophets: “Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah and others, Zarathushtra, Christ, Muhammad.”⁵⁸ Sufism is “the pure essence of all religions and philosophies”—which echoes the terms in which Blavatsky described her Secret Doctrine—and “there have been Sufis at all periods of human history,” following different religions. Through the ages, Sufis “have concealed their beliefs from the multitude, and have pursued in secret their way of attainment to the highest bliss.”⁵⁹ Here Inayat decisively abandons the mainstream Islamic understanding of Sufism for the Western understanding of esoteric universalism. Elsewhere, however, he is more cautious, asserting that “the idea that Sufism sprang from Islam or from any other religion, is not necessarily true,”⁶⁰ rather than actually denying it. Being not necessarily true is different from being false.

The Sufi Movement

Inayat and his relatives were in France at a conference when the First World War started, cutting them off from Russia. As Indians, they were British subjects, and they left France for Britain, where they spent the remainder of the war. They might have returned to India, but did not. There was evidently little demand for Indian music in wartime Britain, and Inayat and his relations performed only occasionally. Conditions were difficult, and money was evidently short, as Inayat at one point in 1915 was offering language lessons.⁶¹

Despite these difficulties, it was during the First World War that Inayat and some British followers laid the foundations of what would become the Sufi Movement. As has been noted, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* was published by the Theosophical Publishing Society in 1914. In February 1915, Inayat began a series of twelve lectures on Sufism at the Royal Asiatic Society,⁶² the London branch of the Asiatic Society founded by Sir William Jones in 1784. A Sufi Publishing Society was formed in 1915, and a quarterly magazine, *The Sufi*, was started.⁶³

In 1919, the Sufi Publishing Society published a revised edition of Bjerregaard's *Sufi Interpretations of the Quatrains of Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald* in a cover identical to that of *A Sufi Message*, and *The Diwan of Inayat Khan*. The revisions to Bjerregaard's *Sufi Interpretations* show the influence of Inayat: it is definitely more Islamic in its interpretations than the first edition was. Some time after 1915, however, a disagreement developed in the United States between Bjerregaard and Martin, and there is no further mention of Bjerregaard in connection with Inayat.⁶⁴ Bjerregaard published no further books, and instead took up painting. He died in 1922.

The Diwan of Inayat Khan is more lyrical and subjective than strictly Islamic, being the fruit of cooperation between Inayat and Jessie Duncan Westbrook, a British poet and the wife of a Theosophist.⁶⁵ Westbrook had previously published a translation of some of the seventeenth-century Persian poems attributed to the Indian princess Zib al-Nisa Makhfi, translated with the help of an unidentified Indian.⁶⁶ Her verse renderings of Inayat's message are less successful than her renderings of Zib al-Nisa, and sometimes closely echo Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát*:

Give me a cup, O Saki, of thy Wine
 Rose-red and sparking; with thy voice divine
 Sing me the Song of Life. O, from thy face
 Uplift the veil, that I may see thy grace,
 Thy lips of ruby-red that I may kiss,
 And, swooning in the ocean of my bliss,
 Forget that thou and I are separate.⁶⁷

Organization

A formal Sufi organization was established between 1915 and 1917, as Inayat felt that "in the absence of an organization there was nothing to keep [those who were interested in his message] together, so disappointed many dropped away and became scattered. You cannot collect flowers without a basket."⁶⁸ This organization was called "the Sufi Order," not "the Chisti Order," as would have been normal in the Muslim world. Perhaps Inayat felt that a descriptor such as "Chisti" was not compatible with the more universalistic understanding of Sufism expressed in *A Sufi Message*.

By 1918 the Sufi Order had branches in London and five English provincial cities. As Zia Inayat-Khan has shown, this expansion took place mostly through Theosophical channels.⁶⁹ It also reflected Inayat's success as a lecturer. If he followed the advice that he on one occasion gave to Martin, as seems likely, he did not plan his lectures in advance, but started by picturing to himself the figure of the Prophet and then simply let the lecture come of itself, being careful never to say what he did not feel, and never just to say what he thought his audience wanted to hear. He was also careful not to use the word "Sufism" too much, never to challenge or claim superiority to any other "teaching, or

belief, or system people have adopted,” and not to “restrict Sufism to any belief, faith, community.”⁷⁰

Some of Inayat’s followers were well connected in English society. From about 1916 his most prominent follower was Lucy Goodenough, the daughter of Lieutenant-General Sir William Howley Goodenough, who sponsored Inayat in London society, introducing him to such luminaries as the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges and the novelist Edith Ellis, the lesbian wife of the sexologist Havelock Ellis.⁷¹ Goodenough and other followers also collected money to support Inayat.⁷² His most important backer at this time was Margaret Skinner, a rich mill owner who rented for him a large house in central London at 29 Gordon Square (now part of University College London). In 1920, however, after the official opening of a *khanka* (lodge) at Gordon Square had been reported in *The Times*,⁷³ the relationship between Inayat and Skinner collapsed, leaving Inayat with a debt for unpaid rent for Gordon Square.⁷⁴ This may have been the cause of the sudden departure of the family and of some leading followers, including Goodenough, for France.

France

France became Inayat’s permanent home, first in Tremblaye, then in Wissous, and finally in Suresnes, where some of Inayat’s descendants still live. These are all villages on the outskirts of Paris (Wissous is now submerged under Charles de Gaulle Airport). Wissous and Suresnes were the sites of successful summer schools, the first of which was held in 1921, which from 1922 ran for three months between June and September.⁷⁵ Numbers in the annual summer-school group photograph increased steadily from thirty-seven in 1922 to eighty in 1926,⁷⁶ with total numbers exceeding that, as not all who attended at one point or another would have been present on the day that the photograph was taken. From 1922 a September school was also held in the Netherlands, at the then-fashionable seaside resort of Katwijk-aan-See.⁷⁷

Branches of the Sufi Movement, as it became known after a reorganization in 1932, were established in many countries. As in England, Inayat’s leading followers came from among the wealthy. The Swiss and Dutch branches were headed by barons: the Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken in the Netherlands and the Baron von Graffenried in Switzerland. Tuyll’s seaside villa was the site for the September school of the Sufi Movement.⁷⁸ The Netherlands branch was especially important, being not only well connected, but also generously financed. A rich Dutch follower and former Theosophist, Mrs. Egeling, provided the funds for the purchase of the house in Suresnes inhabited by Inayat and his family,⁷⁹ and other wealthy followers contributed funds that made it possible for a foundation to buy nearby land and buildings used for the summer school.⁸⁰ There were also branches in Belgium, Germany, Norway, the United States, and Brazil.⁸¹

The activities of the Sufi Movement split into two streams, rather like those of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, and presumably for similar reasons. On the one

hand, after 1921 there were ceremonies called “Universal Worship,” organized by Sophia Saintsbury-Green, a former Theosophist and one-time associate of Annie Besant, Helena Blavatsky’s successor.⁸² These followed the basic model of a Protestant church service and resembled the Vedanta Society’s “vespers” both in the use of a Protestant model, and in the emphasis on universalism. They also corresponded to the Theosophical objective of forming a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. They were conducted by the “Church of All,” and involved readings from Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts, to which readings from the works of Inayat were later added.⁸³ They proved enduringly popular in England and, especially, in the Netherlands.⁸⁴

Universal Worship

Universal Worship opened with a short invocation that has since become the signature prayer of the Sufi Movement:

Toward the One,
The perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,
The Only Being,
United with all the Illuminated Souls
Who form the embodiment of the Master, The Spirit of Guidance.⁸⁵

The first four lines of this prayer are standard emanationism. The One is, of course, the Only Being, and any soul that becomes united with the One is by definition illuminated. The last line is more complicated. The Spirit of Guidance is defined in Inayat’s *The Way of Illumination* as an innate human faculty through which the Master may “guide man onwards towards divine perfection,” and the Master is defined as “the guiding spirit of all souls” and as “the medium through which God chooses to impart His knowledge to the world” who is “a man in the eyes of the world, but God in his consciousness.” Past human forms of the Master include “Shiva, Buddha, Rama, Krishna on the one side, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad on the other; and many more, known or unknown to history, always one and the same person.”⁸⁶ This list approximates that of Édouard Schuré in *The Great Initiates* (*Les grands initiés*). The “embodiment of the Master” that is formed of “all the Illuminated Souls,” then, is evidently that part which is “God in his consciousness.”⁸⁷

“Towards the One” is followed by two other prayers, called “Saum” and “Salat.” These titles are a play on words, both Islamic and English. *Saum* is fasting, but a “psalm” is also a prayer. *Salat* is the ritual prayer (*namaz*), but a “salute” or a “salutation” is also a greeting.⁸⁸ There is no fasting involved in the “Saum” of Universal Worship, however, and no ritual prayer in the “Salat.” There are, however, definite echoes of the *salat* in the “Saum.” The text of the “Saum” echoes the Fatiha, the Quranic verse used at the start of *salat*, as is shown in Table 9.1. And the “Saum” is accompanied by movements of the hands and arms that strongly echo the opening movements of *salat*.⁸⁹

TABLE 9.1

Comparison of Saum and Fatiha	
Saum	Fatiha
	1 ...
1 Praise be to Thee, Most Supreme God,	2 Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds,
2–5 ...	
6 Most Merciful and Compassionate God,	3 The Compassionate, the Merciful,
7 The Idealized Lord of the whole humanity,	4 Ruler of the Day of Reckoning.
8 Thee only do we worship, And towards Thee alone do we aspire.	5 Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.
9–16 ...	
17 And guide us on the path of Thine own goodness.	6 Guide us on the straight path,
	7 ...
20 Amin	Amin

“Salat,” in contrast, is both emanationist and universalist. It starts:

Most gracious Lord, Master, Messiah, and Saviour of Humanity,
 We greet Thee in all humility.
 Thou art the first cause and the last effect,
 The Divine Light and the Spirit of Guidance, Alpha and Omega.
 Thy light is in all forms...
 Allow us to recognize Thee In all Thy holy names and forms;
 As Rama, as Krishna, as Shiva, as Buddha;
 Let us know Thee as Abraham, as Solomon, as Zarathustra, as Moses, as Jesus, as
 Mohammed.

The Esoteric School

On the other hand, for advanced followers, there was something much closer to regular Sufism, later known as the Esoteric School of Inner Culture.⁹⁰ The teachings of the Esoteric School were formalized between 1924 and 1926 into a series of papers

entitled (in Sanskrit) Gathas (verses), Gitas (songs), Sangathas (recitals), and Sangitas (choruses), compiled by followers from Inayat's lectures.⁹¹ The intermediary series of Sangathas maintains the focus on Islamic Sufism—on the ritual prayer, contemplation (*muraqaba*), and *dhikr*⁹²—that was found in Inayat's teachings to Martin and in *A Sufi Message*. The most advanced series of papers, the Sangitas, intended only for the leaders of the Sufi Movement, contain practical advice on spiritual direction that corresponds with the practice of many Sufi shaykhs, and probably of other spiritual teachers as well. The teacher is advised, for example, that when he "finds that the mureed [follower] is wrong he will not tell him that he is wrong, but will show him what is right. If the mureed is awakened enough to realize the difference by comparison he will be helped, and if he cannot realize it he is not ready for that conception which the teacher thinks right."⁹³ Other advice is compatible with the practices of Islamic Sufism and is generally expressed in Sufi terms, though there are occasional references to Hinduism or Christianity for comparative purposes.

The Esoteric School's series of papers represented an attempt to institutionalize Sufi practice—an attempt that was accompanied by the introduction of a system of grades consisting of four circles, each of which had three ranks.⁹⁴ This system corresponded with the series of papers, so that those at the Elementary level of the Study Circle read the first Gatha, those at the Initiate level of the Advanced Circle read the third Gita, those at the Talib level of the Inner Circle read the first Sangatha, and those at the Murshid level of the Higher Circle read the second Sangita. The highest grade in the Higher Circle was Pir-o-Murshid, held by Inayat himself. The circulation of papers above the Gatha level was controlled, and remains controlled today, though some selections were published in 1996 by Inayat's younger son Hidayat.⁹⁵

The names of some of these grades followed Sufi terminology, and the idea of different levels of understanding is a standard one in Islamic Sufism. No *tariqa* in the Muslim world, however, has followed such a formal, detailed, or rigid scheme. Inayat's scheme corresponded, rather, to contemporary Western organizational models.⁹⁶ It may also have been modeled on other occultist societies of the time, all of which were ultimately inspired by Masonic models.

Sufism, Both Universal and Islamic

Between the universalism of the Church of All, from which Sufism and Islam are largely absent, and the institutionalized Sufism of the Esoteric School, lay the universal Sufism of Inayat's lectures and writings. These generally presented the basic ideas of Islamic Sufism in non-Islamic garb. In his posthumous *Art of Being and Becoming*, Inayat speaks of the need to subdue the *nafs* (ego) in order to achieve *fana* in terms of the development of "personality."⁹⁷ *Fana* is described as follows: "In that moment of supreme exaltation one is not only united with the source of all beings, but dissolved in it." The path to this is the attainment of purity. One variety of purity is to "mak[e] the heart free from all impressions that . . .

are foreign to one's nature." However, what is "against one's nature" has previously been defined by Inayat as "a fault," and one example of such a fault is "every rising wave of passion [which inevitably] carries away one's reason."⁹⁸ Similarly, Inayat says that a greater variety of purity is "to keep one's mind away from all but God. Then all one thinks about, all that one sees and admires, all that one touches and perceives, is God." This leads to "freedom from the thought of oneself, . . . of one's limited self."⁹⁹

This is classic Sufism. It is presented, however, in terms that can appeal to the non-Muslim (references to the Bible outnumber references to the Quran) and also to inter-war religious individualists. "Personality" is used as an alternative to the older concept of "soul" (much like others used "consciousness," as we will see in a later chapter), though Inayat also continued to refer to the "soul." He contrasts his understanding of purity, "the exaltation of the spirit," with the "manmade purity" that may come from the "rigid principles" of "the churches, the religions, national and social laws."¹⁰⁰

In his autobiography, Inayat explained these adjustments:

Western nature is self-assertive and demanding. That is why spiritual attainment becomes difficult for the people in the West, as it is only attained by self-effacement and self-denial. The idea of crushing the I, to become selfless, to become indifferent to the life around one, . . . to feel that one must lose oneself in God and to think that this individuality is an illusion... these things frighten many from a deeper understanding of the philosophical thought of the East. Therefore those who have worked in the West in spreading the spiritual thought have to keep back many deep ideas of philosophy in order to cope with the people.¹⁰¹

He also noted the problems raised by the Western "prejudice against Islam." As a result, even "a Western person of good intention who has given up all prejudices against other religions and is trying to overlook all he has heard against Islam, cannot very well comprehend the ideas of the Quran as they are put. For he wants the ideas to fit in with the standard of the day and to be expressed in the language of the present time."¹⁰²

The practice of Inayat's followers was less Sufi-based than Inayat's teachings, however, presumably because standard Sufi practice involved too much Islam, and if Sufism was not a religion and was above and beyond all religions, there was no need to abandon one's previous religion. In the view of Inayat's nephew Mahmood Khan, what happened was that

The practice of Sufism moved from a virtually non-existent circle of full adepts to a far wider circle of affiliated adherents: an extending outer circle in which all manner of adventitious elements, products of mureeds' [followers'] enthusiasms, came into play ever more.¹⁰³

Inayat's grandson, Zia Inayat-Khan, has a slightly different perspective. In his view, what happened was that as the Sufi Movement grew bigger, the influence of Inayat

himself declined, and the emphasis thus shifted to “books and papers” and hierarchical organization.¹⁰⁴

By 1924, there were ambitions for even greater expansion,¹⁰⁵ and also for a temple, perhaps the first of a series.¹⁰⁶ The Sufi Movement was headquartered in Geneva, along with the League of Nations, and was beginning to see itself in global terms. Some followers had come to see Inayat as more than a Sufi teacher, as a prophet or even as a divine being himself.¹⁰⁷ Sufis in the Muslim world often see their shaykh as a “pole” (*qutb*) or axis, exercising cosmic functions. Many of Inayat’s followers, however, were probably inspired by the Theosophical concept of the coming “World Teacher,” emphasized by Besant, who had focused on the World Teacher’s role in bringing a new dispensation, and who in 1909 had announced that she had identified the future World Teacher in the form of Jiddu Krishnamurti, a fourteen-year-old Indian boy, who features in Landau’s book. Inayat had ridiculed the idea of the World Teacher in *The Sufi* in 1918 and 1920, but at least some of his followers, including Besant’s former associate Saintsbury-Green,¹⁰⁸ were later convinced that he (and not Krishnamurti) was the coming World Teacher. Others referred to him as Christ.¹⁰⁹

In 1929, the thirty-four-year old Krishnamurti announced that he was not, after all, the World Teacher. The year 1929 marks the maximum expansion of the Theosophical Society. Likewise, the interwar expansion of the Sufi Movement was ended at its peak by the unexpected death of Inayat in 1927, while on a return visit to India, at only age forty-four.¹¹⁰

THE CONTINUATION OF THE SUFI MOVEMENT

The Sufi Movement was carried on after Inayat’s death by his brothers, who relied heavily on the institutional structures and property which they had inherited. Numbers in the annual summer-school group photograph declined somewhat, from seventy-seven in 1928 to fifty-four in 1937.¹¹¹ The Sufi Movement still exists today, though other groups that derived from it became more important than the “official” Sufi Movement during the 1960s and 1970s, as a later chapter will show.

During the 1920s and 1930s there were very few Muslims in the West, and the Sufi Movement attracted little notice among them. There were, however, exceptions, who pointed out that Sufism in the Muslim world was something other than the Sufism that the Sufi Movement was promoting. One was Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, the author of *Said the Fisherman* and other successful novels, who had become convinced of the truth of Islam while traveling in the Arab world during the 1890s and had finally converted to Islam in 1917.¹¹² Pickthall was at first an honorary member of the Sufi Movement, but eventually became concerned that it did not accept the Quran as God’s final revelation, and withdrew from it.¹¹³ Another critic of the Sufi Movement was Ikbāl Ali Shah, an Indian Muslim who had moved to Edinburgh in 1914 to study medicine, but had married a Scottish woman and moved to London, where he met Inayat.¹¹⁴ In 1933, after Inayat’s death, he published a book titled *Islamic Sufism*, which directly

attacked the universalist conception of Sufism that the Sufi Movement was promoting. "A Sufi must of necessity be a Moslem," wrote Shah, and Sufism should not be confused with "such non-Islamic movements which due to utter ignorance are styled Sufism."¹¹⁵

The Sufi Movement never attained the size or importance for which some evidently hoped. Rather as the Theosophical Society might have grown to the size of the Mormon Church but did not, so the Sufi Movement and the Church of All might have grown to the size of the Theosophical Society, but did not. This was partly because of the early death of Inayat, who evidently had a charisma that his brothers lacked. Inayat's attempts to institutionalize his teachings was at best only partially successful. It may also have been because the Sufi Movement, as it grew, moved increasingly in the direction of the Church of All and away from its roots in Western and Islamic understandings of Sufism. The universalism of the Church of All had only limited power. As the Sufi Movement grew, the role played by Inayat himself became relatively less important. In 1925 there was even a move to reduce his power in the administration of the Sufi Movement in favor of the Movement's Council, where the Movement's leading followers held seats.¹¹⁶ This was one reason why he left Europe for the US and then India.¹¹⁷

Even though the Sufi Movement never attained the size or importance for which some hoped, Inayat and his followers firmly established Western Sufism. Their universalist understanding of Sufism, consonant to some extent with Indian experiences but also derived from the Western understandings of Sufism traced here, as found in the NYPL in 1912 and as reinforced by the former Theosophists among Inayat's followers, became well established.

The question remains, then, of what Inayat himself actually believed. It is likely that his ideas developed with time. In America in 1911, he was a musician who was happy to talk about Sufism to those who were interested, and to give the Chishti order to an enthusiastic Jewish woman from San Francisco, at the same time encouraging her to practice Islam, if not to change her public religious identity. In Europe in the 1920s he was a successful spiritual teacher with a wealth of knowledge and experience, as the Sangathas and Sangithas make clear. He had concluded earlier on, correctly, that if he tried to preach Islam to Westerners he would get nowhere, and that people would only listen to his Sufi message if he universalized it. Perhaps his final view, though, was emanationist universalism. According to a Sangita destined only for his most senior followers:

Religion is as a shade over the light which is truth. If it were not for the shade the light would blind the eyes of the awakening souls; only when they are fully awake can they face the light without the protection of this shade. In every age some form of covering has been necessary, and it is also necessary today. The shades may vary in form, color, and size, but the Light they cover is One without a second, eternal in the Heavens, from everlasting to everlasting.¹¹⁸

Tradition and Consciousness

INAYAT KHAN'S SUFI Movement was the most important Western Sufi group of the interwar period. There were, however, two other groups that were of fundamental importance for the later history of Western Sufism: one led by René Guénon and based around the concept of tradition; and one led by George Gurdjieff and based around the concept of consciousness. As Kocku von Stuckrad has noted, one of the key developments of the twentieth century has been the gradual replacement of a focus on the soul with a focus on consciousness.¹ Gurdjieff was a leader in this development.

Neither Guénon nor Gurdjieff described their groups as Sufi, but both had Sufi elements in their backgrounds. After about 1930, Guénon did begin to identify himself as a Sufi, and this was an important signal for his following. In subsequent years, his writings brought many Westerners to Sufism and Islam, even though they deal mostly with Hinduism. One person whom they brought to Sufism was a Swiss commercial artist, Frithjof Schuon, who established a branch of a major Algerian *tariqa*, the Alawiyya, in Switzerland in 1933. This was the second significant Western Sufi group after Khan's Sufi Movement, and the first to resemble a *tariqa* in the Muslim world.

Although Gurdjieff never identified himself as a Sufi, he was nevertheless identified as a Sufi by some of his followers after his death in 1949. As we will see in later chapters, a branch of the Gurdjieff movement under a British scientist, John G. Bennett, followed three different Sufis: an Indonesian, Muhammad Subuh; then an Englishman, Idries Shah; and finally a Turk, Hasan Lütü Şuğud. Just as Guénon's writings about tradition were important for Sufism in the West, so were Gurdjieff's writings about consciousness. Shah, whose writings reflected Gurdjieff, was the second major Western Sufi writer after Inayat Khan.

This chapter follows Guénon and Schuon, and then Gurdjieff and Bennett, only until the Second World War (the postwar period will be discussed in later chapters). Guénon

and Schuon will be treated more briefly than Gurdjieff and Bennett, as I have already written another book on them and the other Traditionalists,² to which the reader, if interested, is referred.

RENÉ GUÉNON AND THE TRADITIONALISTS

René Guénon was born in the small Loire city of Blois, France in 1886, and joined the quasi-Theosophical Martinist Order as a student in Paris in 1906.³ He left the Martinists for the Universal Gnostic Church in 1909,⁴ and was still a member of that group when he was initiated into the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya by Ivan Aguéli in 1910. As has been noted, there are no indications that he followed Islamic or Sufi practice after this initiation, but there is some discussion of what he called “Islamic esotericism” in his first major book, *The General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (*Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*), published in 1921.⁵ The focus of this book, however, is on Hinduism, or more specifically on Vedanta, as its title indicates.

The General Introduction's focus on Vedanta is of Theosophical origin, as is its perennialism and its anti-exotericism. By 1921, however, Guénon had become a major critic of the Theosophical Society, publishing a series of well-informed articles on the “pseudo-religion” of what he called “Theosophism” in *The Review of Philosophy* (*Revue de philosophie*), a journal published by the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris). Guénon firmly rejected such Theosophical conceptions as the Mahatmas and the World Teacher,⁶ but he did not object to other aspects of the Theosophical scheme.

Guénon also added an important new element to the understanding of Oriental religion: namely, a rigid distinction between the Orient, where understanding of the “primordial tradition” remained intact; and the Occident, where that understanding had been lost at the Renaissance, replaced by a focus on the Greek and the Latin, and then by a misplaced belief in the illusions of evolution and progress.⁷ In fact, the West's purely material progress was at the expense of regression in other areas, and the West was heading inevitably for “chaos and dissolution,” from which it might be partly saved by an understanding of Oriental metaphysics.⁸ The idea of the coming end of Western civilization was widespread in the period after the First World War, but in this case Guénon was especially echoing Count Albert-Eugène de Pouvoirville, the member of the Universal Gnostic Church whose writings on Taoism had so impressed Aguéli. Pouvoirville had written in 1906 of the need for the West to secure itself from destruction by making use of the spiritual resources of the Orient,⁹ a view with which Guénon evidently agreed. The idea of modernity as the *kali yuga*—that is, the fourth and final age of Hindu sacred time—became a hallmark of Traditionalism.

The General Introduction laid the foundations for what would become known as Traditionalism, a title that refers to Guénon's use of the phrase “primordial tradition,”

and also to the title of the journal that after 1928 provided a focus for his growing following, *Traditional Studies* (*Études Traditionnelles*).¹⁰ Traditionalism is also sometimes known as Perennialism, which in this context means much the same thing, as Guénon's primordial tradition is much the same as the *prisca theologia* of the Florentine Neoplatonists. Guénonian Perennialism is distinct from other varieties of perennialism, however, in its condemnation of Western modernity and its expectation of chaos and dissolution. While Blavatsky's Theosophy was essentially optimistic, Guénon's Traditionalism is essentially pessimistic. In its treatment of modernity, it partly prefigures postmodernism.

Guénon's Traditionalism has a complex relationship with emanationism. On the one hand, his condemnation of the Occident included a comprehensive condemnation of classical Greek philosophy, including such key philosophical ideas as the distinction between the intelligible and sensible worlds. Guénon's metaphysical scheme is instead taken from the Hindu scheme of Brahman and the three forms (*trimurti*).¹¹ Even so, Guénon is sometimes emanationist, intentionally or not. After condemning dualist distinctions between "subjective" and "objective" and between intelligible and sensible worlds he concludes, "as the Arabs say, 'existence is one,' and everything it contains is nothing but the manifestation, in multiple modes, of one and the same principle, which is the universal Being."¹² Guénon is evidently referring here to Ibn Arabi's insistence on the unity of being (*wahda al-wujud*), which is itself emanationist, and his concept of "universal Being" can only be reconciled with Hindu conceptions with some difficulty.

The Traditionalist movement of the late 1920s and 1930s was more or less coterminous with the readership of *Traditional Studies* and was mostly French. *Traditional Studies* did, however, have some non-French readers, including most notably the Ceylonese-American art expert Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Romanian student of religion Mircea Eliade (later a very influential professor at the University of Chicago), and the Italian Neopagan political theorist Baron Julius Evola, later one of the key thinkers of the New Right.¹³ Within France, the early Traditionalists included the Cubist Albert Gleizes, the Surrealist André Breton, and the poet René Daumal. André Gide was also a reader of Guénon, though he was not persuaded to adopt Guénon's positions.¹⁴ There were of course also other, less famous readers.

The early Traditionalist movement was purely intellectual, devoted to the study and understanding of Oriental metaphysics, not to any particular practice. This changed after 1930, when Guénon moved from Paris to Cairo. The move to Cairo does not seem to have been premeditated; Guénon simply accompanied a friend on a visit to Egypt at a point when the death of his wife and the loss of his job had weakened his ties to France. Once in Cairo, however, Guénon stayed, finally marrying an Egyptian woman. He died in Cairo in 1951, leaving three children. During his years in Cairo, Guénon followed Islamic practice, joined the Hamdiyya Shadhiliyya *tariqa*, and wrote about the need to follow a valid esoteric practice within an orthodox exoteric framework, which is what he understood himself as doing.¹⁵ This led many other Traditionalists to follow his example.

None of the early Traditionalists mentioned above followed Guénon into Islam and Sufism. Many younger readers of Guénon's work, however, wrote to him asking for advice, and in his replies Guénon generally recommended either Sufism or Freemasonry. A Traditionalist masonic lodge was established in Paris.¹⁶ Among those who chose Sufism was Frithjof Schuon, a young commercial artist who later established a major Traditionalist *tariqa* in the West, first in Europe, and then in the United States.

Frithjof Schuon

Frithjof Schuon was born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1907, the son of a German father (a musician) and a French mother. After his father's early death, his mother took him and his brother to live in France, where Schuon was working when he discovered the work of Guénon.

When he was sixteen, a friend gave him a copy of Guénon's *Orient and Occident*; reading it was a life-changing event for him, as it was for many others. He wrote to Guénon, who recommended Sufism. After some hesitation, Schuon converted to Islam, and in 1932 traveled to Mostaganem, Algeria, to meet one of the best-known Sufi shaykhs of the time, Ahmad al-Alawi. Schuon joined al-Alawi's *tariqa*, the Alawiyya, and spent three months at the Alawi *zawiya* (lodge).¹⁷ While Aguéli does not seem to have followed his Egyptian *tariqa*, the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya, for *irshad* (guidance), Schuon did follow the Alawiyya for *irshad*, though for a shorter period than would be normal for a Sufi in the Muslim world. Schuon then returned to Europe and to Basel, where he established a branch of the Alawiyya. The first Swiss Alawis were other readers of Guénon, including some of Schuon's friends from school.¹⁸

Schuon's Alawiyya was the first Western Sufi group to follow Islamic and Sufi practice. The Alawis performed the ritual prayer (*salat*) and observed many provisions of the sharia. They held a regular *dhikr*.¹⁹ They did not adopt Muslim public identities, which one Swiss Alawi later remarked would have been unthinkable in the Switzerland of the 1930s,²⁰ but they were Muslim in their practice. They differed, then, from the members of Inayat Khan's Sufi Movement, none of whom followed Islamic practice, except incidentally. They also differed from Sufis in the Muslim world, however, because while their practice was Islamic, their theology was not. Their ultimate point of reference was not the Quran and the Hadith, but rather the esoteric primordial tradition, as interpreted in the works of Guénon and other Traditionalists. One possible consequence of this was universalism. Traditionalist perennialism, like Theosophical perennialism, was not necessarily universalist. Schuon, however, was a universalist. He saw no problem with purchasing a statue of the Virgin Mary that he found particularly beautiful, or in carrying a copy of the Bhagavad Gita for the power of its blessing,²¹ things which no Muslim in the Muslim world would normally have done.

Schuon's Alawiyya grew during the 1930s, as Guénon referred his correspondents to Sufism and recommended that they contact Schuon. By the start of the Second World

War, it had branches in Paris and Amiens, France, as well as in Basel.²² The development of these and other branches in the postwar period will be considered in a subsequent chapter.

GEORGE GURDJIEFF AND CONSCIOUSNESS

George Gurdjieff was born Georgiy Ivanovich Gurdzhiev into an Armenian-speaking family of Caucasus Greeks in Alexandropol (now Gyumri), Armenia (then in the Russian Empire), in the late 1860s. His origins were humble, and his Russian accented and often incorrect.²³ His early years are known only from his own later accounts, most of which are highly imaginative, but a sober account from 1933 has him traveling widely as a young man, working in a variety of trades,²⁴ probably in Russian Central Asia and Northeastern Afghanistan.²⁵ He also read deeply about “supernatural science,” especially hypnotism,²⁶ and spent some years as a practicing hypnotist and healer, before establishing himself in Russian Theosophical and Spiritualist circles between 1899 and 1903.²⁷

Gurdjieff’s followers generally understand his teaching as a survival of perennial wisdom, though they do not use that term. They believe that Gurdjieff acquired this wisdom as a young man during his travels, as recorded in his *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, a book that was made into a film by the British director and Gurdjieffian Peter Brook in 1979.²⁸ Much of this movie was filmed in Afghanistan, where part of the book itself was set. Several episodes in the book involve Sufis, notably those of the “Sarmoung Order,” said to have been founded in Babylon in 2500 BC, revealed in the modern world by a character called Bogga-Eddin.²⁹ For many Gurdjieffians, the Sarmoung Order is real, and the major source of the Gurdjieff teaching. There is, however, no evidence from outside Gurdjieffian circles that the Sarmoung or any *tariqa* like it ever existed. The Sarmoung echoes Blavatsky’s mythical Mahatmas.

Peter Ouspensky

The identifiable sources of the Gurdjieff teaching are not Central Asian but Western, and are primarily Theosophy and early psychology. The most important account of Gurdjieff’s early teachings is provided by Peter Ouspensky (Pyotr Dem’yanovich Uspenskiy), a Russian journalist who met Gurdjieff in 1915, when he had been in Moscow for about three years. Ouspensky presents himself in his book *In Search of the Miraculous* as merely asking questions that Gurdjieff then answered, but he was in fact by far the better known, better educated, better read, and more articulate of the two men. He had been close to the Russian Theosophical Society since 1907, and like Ivan Aguéli had spent time at the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar, Madras (now Chennai).³⁰

Ouspensky's best-known book in 1915 was *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (*Tertium Organum: klyuch k zagadkam mira*), first published in 1911. Gurdjieff had read *Tertium Organum* before he met Ouspensky,³¹ and many of the ideas in *Tertium Organum* reappear in *In Search of the Miraculous* and thence in the mature Gurdjieff teaching. One follower of the Gurdjieff teaching from the 1920s wrote not of the Gurdjieff teaching but of "the Ouspensky-Gurdjieff doctrine,"³² and the so-called "Gurdjieff teaching" is probably at least as much Ouspensky's as Gurdjieff's. It was Ouspensky who established and developed the first major Gurdjieffian group, in wartime Petrograd (now St. Petersburg),³³ and after the Russian Revolution it was again Ouspensky who established and developed the group in London that would include many of the individuals who traveled to Paris to join Gurdjieff's own group there.³⁴

Tertium Organum, as its English translator remarked, might equally have been titled "A Study in Consciousness."³⁵ It combines scientific speculations concerning the fourth dimension and human psychology with Theosophy and classic anti-exotericism, passing from Annie Besant's understanding of Hinduism to Plotinus via mainstream scholars such as Max Müller and William James.³⁶

William James is best known today for his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a book on which Ouspensky drew heavily in *Tertium Organum*, but he was primarily a philosopher and a psychologist (he taught psychology at Harvard). Ouspensky draws on James's *The Principles of Psychology* for his treatment of consciousness. He follows James in distinguishing between reflex, instinctive, rational, and automatic acts,³⁷ and in defining automatic acts as those that "because of frequent repetitions . . . have become habitual and are performed unconsciously."³⁸ He goes on to draw a conclusion that James does not draw:³⁹ namely, that for automatic and other actions that are "created and determined by his impressions of the outside world . . . man . . . is, in substance, an automaton, unconscious or conscious of his actions."⁴⁰ He then takes this observation further, following Besant's understanding of Hinduism in arguing that there are four states of consciousness: sleep, dream, waking, and "absolute consciousness," which he identifies with "illumination" or "mystical states of consciousness," which this book has termed "union." Illumination is a "higher logic," higher than the deductive logic of Aristotle's *organon* (instrument) and the inductive logic or scientific method of Francis Bacon's 1620 *Novum Organum* (new instrument). Illumination is the *tertium organum*, the third instrument, though actually prior to the other two as well as superior to them.⁴¹ Hence the title of the book in which Ouspensky expounds his own understanding of consciousness, formed of a synthesis of the psychology of William James and the Theosophy of Annie Besant.

By his own account, Ouspensky experienced union at least three times, once on the Sea of Marmora in Turkey in 1908, once (less overwhelmingly) on the Gulf of Finland in 1910, and once at a Buddhist shrine near Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1913.⁴² In 1908 he felt that he entered into the waves of the Sea of Marmora and "became all," and experienced "an instant of unusual freedom, joy and expansion . . . so powerful, so

bright and so unusual that I was afraid to move and waited for it to recur.”⁴³ Ouspensky, then, was among those who knew the mystical experience.

According to Ouspensky’s account in *In Search of the Miraculous*, one of the first and most important things that Gurdjieff stressed was that people are essentially machines. Generally, things happen *to* people; people do not actually *do* things themselves.⁴⁴ Ouspensky quotes Gurdjieff as saying that “a modern man lives in sleep, in sleep he is born and in sleep he dies.” Put differently, people are in prison, though they do not know it. People can, however, escape this prison through struggle. The physical body is an automaton, but people can potentially acquire astral, spiritual, and divine bodies. To do this, people may follow the way of the fakir, the way of the monk, the way of the yogi, or a fourth way, which combines the other three ways in “a whole parallel series of physical, mental, and emotional exercises.”⁴⁵ What these exercises were emerged only later; meetings of the Gurdjieff groups at that time focused on discussions.⁴⁶ All this is fully compatible with what Ouspensky had been arguing in *Tertium Organum*, with the use of some Theosophical terminology. Man as automaton and as reacting rather than originating follows *Tertium Organum* and, ultimately, William James. Man as asleep follows both Besant and *Tertium Organum*. Astral, spiritual, and divine bodies are Theosophical (and not found in *Tertium Organum*).

Ouspensky’s Gurdjieff was also emanationist, as was Ouspensky himself in *Tertium Organum*, where he agreed with Plotinus on the “raying out of all orders of existence, an external emanation from the ineffable One.”⁴⁷ As Ouspensky’s Gurdjieff puts it, “the ray of creation begins with the Absolute.”⁴⁸ However, while for a Neoplatonist it would seem obvious that the process of waking from sleep and acquiring astral and spiritual bodies should lead to the Absolute and union with the One, this was not Gurdjieff’s conclusion. For Ouspensky, mystical union “represent[s] the psychological fact of the expansion of consciousness, such an expansion that the consciousness absorbs itself in the all.”⁴⁹ The emphasis is on the consciousness, not on the soul or the One. Ouspensky made clear his rejection of the “devotional” or “religious” path,⁵⁰ though not the reasons for this rejection, which he seems to have considered self-explanatory. Gurdjieff seems, if anything, even less interested in God than Ouspensky. God and the One, central in earlier Neoplatonism of all varieties, begin to disappear in *Tertium Organum* and vanish almost entirely in the Gurdjieff teaching. This is one important way in which the Gurdjieff teaching is distinctive, and also distinctively of the twentieth century. By the second half of the twentieth century, “the expansion of consciousness” would be the new standard, and the union of the soul with the One would become marginal. Gurdjieff was a pioneer in this transformation.

The Work

Gurdjieff was also a pioneer in the development of a new practice to accompany his theology—or, perhaps “psychology” would be a better term. The “parallel series of

physical, mental, and emotional exercises” that became known as “the Work” make up the practice of the Gurdjieff movement. They developed not in Moscow and Petrograd, but in the Caucasus after the Russian Revolution, first in the Russian town of Essentuki (now Yessentuki) and then in the Georgian city of Tiflis (now Tbilisi), where Gurdjieff and some of his followers took refuge from the Bolsheviks to the north and the Turks to the south-west. The most distinctive exercises were physical, initially known as “quick yoga” or “sacred gymnastics,”⁵¹ and later known as “the Movements.” The mature form of these exercises was partly inspired by the *sema* of the Mevlevi *tariqa*, an unusual form of *dhikr* that involves turning (known as “whirling”). There was also exhausting manual labor sometimes called “super-effort,”⁵² and emotional exercises that had no name, which will be referred to in this book as “discomfiture.”

“Sacred gymnastics” were presented as something that Gurdjieff had learned in the Orient, but they were not something Gurdjieff received fully formed; rather, they developed over time. They were at first generally silent exercises drawing on classic yoga, but went beyond this to become complex gymnastic movements that were designed to change “automatic” postures and movements as a means to changing “automatic” thoughts and feelings.⁵³ Music was then added to these exercises music by the Russian composer Thomas de Hartmann,⁵⁴ and choreography was added by the Swiss dance teacher Jeanne de Salzmann. The choreography drew on the “Eurhythmics” of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, a method that is still used today for teaching music and rhythm, combining music with consciously improvised movement. Finally, during the early 1920s, elements derived from the Mevlevi *sema*, which Gurdjieff and Hartmann had observed in Istanbul, were added.⁵⁵ The result was something of extraordinary difficulty for the performer.⁵⁶ It also had a strange beauty and was sometimes performed for the public as a sort of ballet. A variety of Movements are performed in the closing scenes of the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.⁵⁷

Gurdjieff’s emotional exercises do not have a name or an obvious origin, though James Webb has pointed to one parallel.⁵⁸ They were, in essence, the production of discomfiture. Ouspensky noted this in Petrograd, in the way that Gurdjieff would say one thing one day, and then say quite the opposite the next day.⁵⁹ In this respect, Gurdjieff was not only anti-dogmatic in principle, but also in practice. In a later period, Gurdjieff would say, when given a coffee, “Thank you. Thank you. You so *very* kind.” And then he would add, after a pause and in a cooler tone, “Sometimes.”⁶⁰ This was a mild example of Gurdjieff’s method: there are many reports of him treating followers in ways that appear distinctly cruel. Discomfiture could also be antinomian. Daly King, who at one point ran a Gurdjieff group in New York, would give his own followers such tasks as singing loudly on a crowded bus, or eating a meal in an expensive restaurant without bringing any way of paying for it.⁶¹

Although this cannot be confirmed, three possible origins of Gurdjieffian discomfiture suggest themselves. One is theoretical: the idea of man as an automaton, unconscious of his actions. Discomfiture breaks this state, as does the “Stop” exercise, a distinctive exercise of the Gurdjieff Work. The essence of this is that at an unexpected point the

person in charge of a group says “stop,” and everyone instantly freezes in whatever activity or position they are engaged in.⁶² A second possible source is experience: “super-effort” developed under the strenuous conditions of revolutionary disorder in Essentuki and Tiflis, and may have been originally inspired by the extraordinary efforts that were required to survive under those conditions. A third possible source is the classic and widely found master–disciple relationship. “So *very* kind . . . Sometimes” is reminiscent of the way in which some Sufi shaykhs will tease their followers, encouraging the *nafs* to inflate, only to deflate it.

The Institute

In Essentuki, as in Moscow and Petrograd, Gurdjieff’s following was informal. It became more formal in Tiflis, where Gurdjieff announced the opening of a school, grandly entitled the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, a name that he used again later in Istanbul, London, and finally Paris. In Tiflis the Institute attracted few pupils, however, and soon stopped operating.⁶³ In the face of the southerly advance of the Bolsheviks, who took Tiflis in early 1921, Gurdjieff and his followers crossed the Black Sea to join other Russian refugees in Istanbul, then under Allied occupation. The group did in Istanbul what it had done in Tiflis, and Gurdjieff reopened his Institute, though only for a few months.⁶⁴ The group performed their Movements and some “Eastern dances” in 1921 at the Apollon Theater in Kadıköy, attracting both favorable and hostile responses.⁶⁵

In 1921, as the Turkish War of Independence spread, the Gurdjieff group moved to Europe. Gurdjieff tried and failed to reopen his Institute in both Germany, where some of his followers had lived before the war, and London, where Ouspensky had established himself and acquired a following (initially assisted financially by Lilian, Lady Rothermere, the wife of a newspaper tycoon, who had been impressed by *Tertium Organum*).⁶⁶ He then moved to Paris, where he did reopen his Institute, at Le Prieuré, a large house on the site of a former Carmelite priory in Fontainebleau, a town just outside Paris. Ouspensky remained in London.

Visitors to Le Prieuré practiced the Movements and the “Stop” exercise, were frequently discomforted, and engaged in “super-effort,” intensive manual labor around the estate, combined with little sleep.⁶⁷ Asceticism, then, was part of the program. This program was also called “Conscious Labor and Intentional Suffering.”⁶⁸ A skeptical observer in 1923 reported the residents as sleep-deprived and nervous, the English even more confused than the Russians, as Gurdjieff spoke only in Russian.⁶⁹ An enthusiastic participant, however, remembered “the sense of expectancy and wonder with which we awaited each new theme of work given out by Gurdjieff.” There was “an extraordinary state of tension, in which people were stripped of all the psychological protections by which we live in our usual world. Some people went mad. There were even suicides. Many gave up in despair.”⁷⁰ People were awake, not living in a sleep state like automatons.

The Institute's programs ceased in 1924, following an automobile accident in which Gurdjieff was injured. Le Prieuré continued for another nine years to house Gurdjieff and a number of followers who carried on in a reduced way with Movements and Work, but money began to run out.⁷¹ Even so, Gurdjieff became established as one of the leading spiritual teachers of the interwar West, popular especially among British and American artists and writers. This owed much to the efforts of the celebrated British journalist, socialist, and former Theosophist Alfred Richard Orage, who had been the editor of *The New Age*, a progressive literary review that he had established with the help of the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw,⁷² and which published such authors as Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, Katherine Mansfield, Ezra Pound, and H. G. Wells. It was through Orage that Mansfield met Gurdjieff and moved to Fontainebleau, where she died of tuberculosis in 1923, aged thirty-four.

Orage visited New York with Gurdjieff in 1924, and remained there as Gurdjieff's American representative. Many celebrated American literary and artistic figures found Gurdjieff through Orage. They included Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect; Jean Toomer, the modernist poet and novelist of the "Harlem Renaissance;" and Margaret Anderson,⁷³ editor (with Ezra Pound) of *The Little Review*, the American equivalent of Orage's *The New Age*, which had published James Joyce's *Ulysses*, as well as Wyndham Lewis, W. B. Yeats, Gertrude Stein, and T. S. Eliot.⁷⁴ Not everyone shared Anderson's enthusiasm for Gurdjieff, however. Wyndham Lewis described him as "the Levantine psychic shark."⁷⁵

At the time of his death in 1949, Gurdjieff had established a substantial following which understood Sufism as one major source of the teaching and practice that they followed. In fact, there was almost no Sufism in the Gurdjieff teaching, and very little in the Gurdjieff practice, but this was not generally recognized. Instead, Gurdjieff's followers understood Sufism as he had presented it to them, as "fragments of [ancient] knowledge remained intact and passed from generation to generation through a very limited number of initiated beings."⁷⁶ These initiated beings, inhabiting the hidden monastery of the Sarmoung order, are Gurdjieff's version of Blavatsky's Mahatmas and of Besant's Ascended Masters.

THE EARLY YEARS OF JOHN G. BENNETT

One of those who shared the general view that Sufism was a major source of the Gurdjieff movement was John G. Bennett, who had first encountered Gurdjieff in a Muslim context, if not exactly a Sufi one. Bennett was born in London in 1897, and like other young men of his age, joined the army during the First World War. He was wounded in France, and while in the hospital, apparently in a coma, had the first of a number of out-of-body experiences. While convalescing, he took a Turkish language course, and was then sent to Istanbul in the British army of occupation. He soon improved his Turkish to the

point where he was transferred to Military Intelligence, and then impressed his superiors enough to be appointed head of British Military Intelligence in Istanbul. One of the tasks of Military Intelligence was to monitor the Sufi *tariqas*, and this brought the young Bennett into contact with the Mevlevi and Rifai *tariqas*. He also met various prominent Ottoman figures, including Prince Mehmet Sabahattin, a junior member of the Ottoman royal family with a radical political background and an interest in Theosophy. Sabahattin introduced Bennett to *The Great Initiates* (*Les grands initiés*) of Édouard Schuré.⁷⁷ He also introduced Bennett to his future wife, through whom he met Ouspensky, and to Gurdjieff.⁷⁸

Neither Ouspensky nor Gurdjieff became important to Bennett at the time, as he was focused more on intelligence matters than on spiritual ones, but after he left the army in 1921, he attended Ouspensky's gatherings in London. He found that the Gurdjieff Work, though hard, produced astonishing results. He spent much of 1923 with Gurdjieff at Le Prieuré in Fontainebleau.⁷⁹ After returning to England he followed Ouspensky's teaching, which included a slightly modified form of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"),⁸⁰ a repetitive prayer often used by Orthodox Christians in a way similar to the Sufi *wird*. Bennett worked diligently at the Jesus Prayer until he could repeat it constantly in both Greek and Latin at two different levels following two different rhythms—a remarkable achievement.⁸¹

In 1929, following a brief dispute with Ouspensky, Bennett began to teach the Gurdjieff method to some pupils of his own in London, and continued to do so during the Second World War, after Ouspensky had left England (which he thought was doomed to fall to the Bolsheviks) for the US.⁸² Then, in 1944, he had his first full mystical experience. After struggling with a number of difficult and pressing matters, Bennett suddenly decided to accept whatever was God's will, and

with the incredible speed of conscious vision that leaves thought limping lamely far behind, I saw the future: not one future, but all possible futures . . . present to me in the merest moment of time. And I accepted it all. Whichever the future God might send, I was ready to follow it without question. In the same moment that I made the decision, I was flooded through and through with love. I said aloud: "Jesus!" Jesus was everywhere. Each new-born spring leaf on the willow trees was full of Jesus, and so were the great oak trees, still bare of green. The spiders' webs glistened under the morning dew. The eastern sky glowed with the coming sun. Jesus was everywhere, filling all with love. I knew that Jesus is God's love.⁸³

This was followed by a second such experience in 1950, during which Bennett "became aware of Eternity . . . a timeless event." Through this, "all the mysteries of the Christian creed, and not those of Christianity alone, but of all that has been revealed to men through the ages, became one clear consistent truth."⁸⁴

The Neoplatonic understanding of God as the One that began to disappear with Ouspensky vanished altogether with Bennett:

God was not for me the Absolute of the philosophers, nor the Brahman of the Vedanta. I was always on the watch to put away any tendencies I might find in myself either towards Pantheism or towards Monism. But if I were not to fall into the naive anthropomorphism or common religious beliefs, I must hold on to the notion of God as pure Will.⁸⁵

Bennett's later involvement with Western Sufism is considered in later chapters.

CONCLUSION TO PART III

The establishment of Western Sufism built on two nineteenth-century movements, Transcendentalism and Theosophy, which developed the emanationism, perennialism, universalism, and anti-exotericism we have seen emerging in the previous section of this book, and in the case of Theosophy added the new ingredients of the hidden masters and of anti-dogmatism. With the establishment of Western Sufism, the Renaissance and Enlightenment dream of a pure, simple, and true religion became reality.

Transcendentalism was a New England phenomenon, the concern of a small group of intellectuals, but had a wider impact through their publications. Ralph Waldo Emerson became and remains one of the great names in American literature. Theosophy, in contrast, was a global phenomenon, with a presence in America, Europe, and South Asia. It followed on the two great religious movements of nineteenth-century America, the Great Awakening and Spiritualism. The Great Awakening dispensed with some aspects of Christianity, but retained the basic Christian narrative. It gave rise to the Mormon Church, with its foundation myth of golden plates delivered by the angel Moroni. Spiritualism dispensed with the Christian narrative, and aimed at accessing the transcendent directly. It gave rise to Christian Science, and also to Theosophy, which retained the Spiritualist interest in *séances* and echoed the Mormon foundation myth. It opened a new phase in the religious history of the West, as it not only dispensed with the Christian narrative, but replaced it with a perennialist narrative that was approximately that of Sir William Jones. The Theosophical Society drew especially on Vedanta and Buddhism to produce "esoteric Buddhism" and the "Secret Doctrine."

Emerson was not a Sufi, but as a universalist Neoplatonist he appreciated the Neoplatonic content of Persian poetry, and promoted this understanding. One of those who were led by Emerson to Neoplatonism was Thomas Moore Johnson, owner and editor of *The Platonist*, a journal that published some translations of Arab Neoplatonism, and also some articles on Sufism by Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard, who also wrote on Sufism in a Theosophical journal, *The Path*. Bjerregaard was a member of the Order of Sufis, an organization that was

probably a development of Johnson's Sufic Circle, and thus the first Western Sufi group. Nothing, however, is known of its activities, so it can not have been influential.

Bjerregaard argued that Sufism was "Theosophy from the standpoint of Mohammedanism," a universal "religion of the heart," and "simply a way of living." He transmitted these understandings to Inayat Khan, a young Indian musician on an American tour, who he introduced to the classic Western works on Sufism that were then held by the New York Public Library.

While Johnson established the first Western Sufi group, the first Western Sufi was Ivan Aguéli, a political and religious radical who converted to Islam, adopted a Muslim public identity, and worked at a Cairo newspaper that emphasized sharia and Sufism and attacked reformers, both anti-sharia political reformers and anti-Sufi religious reformers. As Aguéli may never have realized, behind this agenda lay the colonial strategy, and the money, of the Italian government. Aguéli joined the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya *tariqa* of Abd al-Rahman Illaysh, but does not seem to have followed Illaysh as *murshid*, as the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya was possibly no longer an active *tariqa*. On his return to Paris, Aguéli initiated René Guénon, a former Martinist (and so part of the wider Theosophical milieu) and the co-editor of the journal *La Gnose*, into the Shadhiliyya Arabiyya, the first known transmission of a *tariqa* from one Westerner to another. Guénon did not at that point adopt a Muslim identity or Sufi or Islamic practice, however.

Aguéli's articles in *La Gnose* established Ibn Arabi as a standard reference, and he at first agreed with Bjerregaard in seeing Sufism as Islamic theosophy, or rather as the "secret doctrine of Islam." He portrayed Sufism in universalist fashion, stressing parallels with Taoism, Swedenborg, Kabbalah, and yoga. He later rejected Blavatsky's Mahatmas as imaginary, and replaced them with the Sufi Malamatis as Islam's hidden masters.

Though Aguéli was the first Western Sufi to transmit a Sufi *tariqa* in the West, the first significant Western Sufi organization in the West was established in 1915 by Inayat Khan, the Indian musician whom Bjerregaard had met in New York. Khan's first disciple was Ada Martin in San Francisco, like Guénon a former Martinist, and subsequently the leader of the Sufic Order of America. Khan thereafter moved to Europe, however, and his Sufi Movement was based first in London and then in Paris, with a second base in the Netherlands, and headquarters in Switzerland.

The teaching of the Sufi Movement was emanationist, anti-exoteric, and universalist, following Transcendentalist and Theosophical understandings, as was probably inevitable, given the influence within it of former Theosophists. Classic Sufism and Islam were also present, however, though generally not overtly. Islam was also present in the practice of the Church of All, though only in small ways that only a Muslim would notice. Classic Sufism was also present in the Esoteric School. The hidden nature of Islam and Sufism resulted partly from Khan's awareness of Western "prejudice against Islam," partly from the impact of Theosophical influences inside the Sufi Movement, and partly, perhaps, from anti-exotericism. The Sufi Movement, then, was Sufi in terms of the Muslim world in some ways, but in other ways was not Sufi in these terms.

Khan died in 1927. In 1933, a new Sufi group was established in the West by Frithjof Schuon, who had joined the Alawiyya *tariqa* in Algeria, partly as a result of reading the work of Guénon, and partly following the example of Guénon, who lived as a Muslim and a Sufi after moving to Cairo in 1930. The work of Guénon dealt with Vedanta more than Sufism, but also touched on Sufism in passing. Its treatment of Sufism showed the immediate influence of Aguéli and the more distant influence of Theosophy, which gave Guénon's Traditionalism its perennialism, its anti-exotericism, and its focus on Hinduism. To this Guénon added anti-modernism. He rejected the Mahatmas and, unlike Aguéli, did not replace them. He was in principle anti-Platonic, but even so sometimes came close to emanationism.

The theology of Schuon's Alawiyya was Traditionalist rather than Sufi, and the public identities of its members was not Muslim. The practice of the Alawiyya, however, was in many ways Islamic and Sufi, and so the Alawiyya became the first Western Sufi group to be recognizably Sufi in the standard terms of the Muslim world. Schuon himself, however, remained a universalist.

The final interwar group that was in some sense Sufi was the Gurdjieff movement. The equivalents of the Mahatmas for this group were Central Asian Sufis, the Sarmoung. There was no Islam or Sufism in the teachings of the Gurdjieff movement, however, which derived partly from Theosophy and partly from the psychology of William James. There was also no Islam in the practice of the Gurdjieff movement, and no Sufism either, save for some elements of the Mevlevi *sema* in the Gurdjieff movements. The Dalcroze Method (Eurhythmics) was more important than the Mevlevis, however.

Although the Gurdjieff movement was not a Sufi group in any real sense, it was understood as Sufi by some, most importantly by John G. Bennett. It would thus later come to embody, for some in the West, a new understanding of what Sufism was, connected to the other two major understandings, of Inayat Khan's Sufi Movement and of Frithjof Schuon's Traditionalist Alawiyya, by a common origin in Theosophy.

The Gurdjieff movement stands out for its lack of any real connection with Sufism and also for the way in which it displaced the soul, which it replaced with consciousness, and union, which it replaced with the expansion of consciousness. Something of the means for reaching the absolute that we have seen in every system since Plotinus remained, but the goal of those means vanished. In the view of an early Gurdjieffian, the Jungian psychologist James Carruthers Young, writing in 1927, the Gurdjieff practice, in which he participated both in London and at Fontainebleau, worked. It developed the will, and changed consciousness. It showed that, with persistence, mechanism can be overcome. But "whether there is any ultimate value in that particular form of achievement is open to question . . . The principle holds good that the soul must experience itself in new ways in order to grow [but] it is needless to say that the new ways must be significant, and not trivial."⁸⁶

PART IV

The Development of Sufism in the New Age



II

Polarization



DURING THE FIRST half of the twentieth century, especially between 1910 and 1933, Western Sufism was established in the form of Inayat Khan's Sufi Movement, Frithjof Schuon's Traditionalist Alawiyya, and the Gurdjieff movement. During the second half of the twentieth century, Western Sufism developed further, initially on the basis of these pre-existing groups, and then on different bases, as new varieties of Sufism established themselves in a West that was experiencing mass immigration from the Muslim world. The first group to establish itself on new bases was an English branch of the Moroccan Darqawiyya *tariqa*, in 1968.

The first major development in Western Sufism in the second half of the twentieth century was polarization, as some interwar Sufi groups became more Islamic, and some less, reflecting the tension between Islam and universalism that is inherent in much Western Sufism. Then came the writings of Idries Shah, whose books spread a new understanding of Sufism, based partly on Gurdjieff and partly on the retelling of classic tales from the Muslim world. They sold well during the period that many saw as the dawn of a new age, a period which some Sufi groups ignored, but which sections of the Sufi Movement embraced. Then in 1968 came the establishment of the Darqawiyya in England, a new type of Western Sufism that did not derive in any way from the Sufi Movement, Traditionalism, Gurdjieff, or even early modern Europe. The establishment of the Darqawiyya opened a new phase in the history of Western Sufism, and it is the last *tariqa* that this book will consider.

This chapter deals with postwar polarization, which started in 1950 when the Paris branch of the Alawiyya separated itself from Schuon, concerned that he was moving too far from Islam. It continued in 1952, when the Californian branch of the Sufi Movement accepted the leadership of Meher Baba, an Indian *avatar* (incarnation of the Divine) who

was one of the religious leaders covered by Rom Landau in *God is my Adventure* in 1938, but who did not identify himself as a Sufi until the 1940s. In 1956, the English branch of the Gurdjieff movement run by John G. Bennett accepted the leadership of Muhammad Subuh, an Indonesian guru, even though Bennett had briefly followed Islamic practice and a Turkish shaykh, Emin Chikhou, in Syria. Then, in 1959, Frithjof Schuon traveled to America and was adopted into the Oglala Sioux, a Native American tribe known for its dramatic ritual, the Sun Dance. This was part of a process whereby Schuon's *tariqa* became separated from the Algerian leadership of the Alawiyya, and which culminated in the de facto division of his following into more Islamic and less Islamic streams.

The arrival of Meher Baba, Muhammad Subuh, and the Oglala Sioux during the 1950s marked a hiatus in the development of Sufism in the West. Like the interwar Sufi groups that preceded them, the movements of Meher Baba and Muhammad Subuh had a connection with the Theosophical Society, but this connection was weaker than it had been for earlier groups. Both were universalist, drawing on two different universalist traditions that had developed in their countries of origin. Neither was especially Sufi. Meher self-identified as a Sufi, but there was little Sufi content in his teaching or practice. Muhammad Subuh, in contrast, did not self-identify as a Sufi, but there was much that was Sufi about his teaching and, perhaps, something that was Sufi about his practice. There was nothing Sufi about the Oglala Sioux. With Meher Baba, Muhammad Subuh, and the Oglala Sioux, then, part of Western Sufism began to resolve the tension between Islam and universalism by moving toward universalism.

TOWARD ISLAM

The first step in the polarization of Western Sufism was the move toward Islam of the Paris branch of the Alawiyya in 1950. The leader of this branch, the former Romanian diplomat Michel Vâlsan, became increasingly concerned that Schuon was taking the Alawiyya too far from Islamic norms—for example, in not observing the Ramadan fast.¹ Vâlsan's Paris branch had in practice been independent of Schuon during the Second World War, as travel between German-occupied France and neutral Switzerland, where Schuon spent most of the war, was impossible. From 1950 until his death in 1974, Vâlsan led a small group of Parisian Sufis that was close to the growing community of French Muslims of North African origin, some of whom attended his *dhikr*. It seems they developed a good relationship, given that Vâlsan married the daughter of the imam of the Paris Mosque,² which had been opened in 1926 in recognition of the position of Paris as the capital of an empire with a large Muslim population.

Vâlsan's Alawiyya generally kept to itself, ignoring developments elsewhere in Western Sufism. Vâlsan published not on Vedanata or Tradition but on Ibn Arabi, as did some of his followers. Three followers or children of followers became prominent in French academia during and after the 1980s, and were known especially for their work on Ibn Arabi

and on classical Islamic Sufism.³ These men were generally respected for their scholarship, and emphasized their identities as scholars rather than as Sufis or Muslims, which other French academics respected. All three knew the work of René Guénon, but for none of them was it a primary reference. Vâlsan's branch of the Alawiyya, then, started as a branch of Traditionalist Sufism, but then merged into general Islamic Sufism. All that now really distinguishes those connected to it from Sufis in the Muslim world is that they are often also members of the French intellectual and cultural establishment.

At about the same time, another follower of Guénon, Roger Maridort, was refused admission to the Alawiyya by Vâlsan because he lived with a woman to whom he was not married; Maridort was therefore encouraged by Guénon to establish his own *tariqa*, a branch of the Darqawiyya, which he did. When a breach opened between Schuon and Guénon shortly before Guénon's death in 1951,⁴ Maridort in effect became Guénon's representative, editing *Traditional Studies* (*Études Traditionnelles*) for many years. Little is known of the functioning of his order, which moved from Paris to Turin, Italy in 1961.⁵ It seems, however, to have been closely aligned with orthodox Islamic tenets.

REORIENTATION WITH MEHER BABA

The second step in the polarization of Western Sufism was the transfer of the Californian branch of the Sufi Movement to Meher Baba (Father Meher). Meher was born Merwan Shehriarji in 1894 in Pune, Bombay Presidency (today western Maharashtra), India, into a Zoroastrian family that had fled difficult conditions in Persia (now Iran) for easier conditions in India.⁶ India was an obvious destination for a Persian Zoroastrian, as India's small Zoroastrian minority of 90,000 persons,⁷ known as Parsis and based in Bombay (now Mumbai), were India's richest and most Westernized ethnic community, generally speaking English and often feeling closer to the British than to other Indians.⁸ Meher's father moved first to Bombay and then to Pune, some eighty miles from Bombay, where he established himself and his family in what seems to have been reasonable comfort, supported by a cafe and later by a bar selling toddy, a local palm wine.⁹ Meher was educated at English-language schools, including St. Vincent's, a Jesuit-run high school where he developed a love for the poetry of Shakespeare and Shelley.¹⁰ He wrote fluent English,¹¹ and also spoke Persian, Gujarati, Urdu, and Hindi. As a young man, he composed poetry in Persian, often on mystical themes.¹²

Meher's first mystical experience occurred, spontaneously and unexpectedly, when he was eighteen, while he was sitting outside his parents' house.¹³ He then met Baba Jan, a female Muslim saint identified as a *qutb* (pillar), the highest rank in the Sufi hierarchy of saints. At her hands he experienced full "God-realization" one year later, in 1913.¹⁴ It took him some months to recover from this experience, and when he did, he set off to visit other saints in the area, two of whom were Hindu, one of whom, Taj al-Din Baba, was Muslim, and one of whom was both Hindu and Muslim.¹⁵

To be both Hindu and Muslim makes little sense in terms of mainstream Islamic theology, but was not uncommon among Indian saints, as we saw reported in the *Dabistan* in an earlier chapter. The saint who Meher visited, Sai Baba (Holy Father), arrived in the village of Shirdi in the Ahmednagar district of the Bombay Presidency in the 1850s, and spent the rest of his life there, sitting under a tree, begging, and sleeping in a dilapidated mosque. He died in 1918, and has since become one of the most revered religious figures in India. His geographical and confessional origins, however, remain as unknown as his original name. In Shirdi, he followed both Hindu and Islamic practice, maintaining a *dhuni*, the Hindu sacred fire in a cleft, reciting Islamic poems in Persian and Arabic, and repeating “Allah malik” (God is the King), an Islamic formula. As his fame and stories of his miracles spread, Muslims came to visit him for *baraka* (blessings), and Hindus came to worship him as an *avatar*, the two activities generally proceeding peacefully enough in parallel, though some Muslims did object to Hindu worship occurring in a mosque.¹⁶ Meher visited Sai Baba in about 1915,¹⁷ and Sai Baba became the most important of the five “perfect masters” to whom he later traced his spiritual heritage. Two and a half of these were Hindu, and two and a half were Muslim. The Muslims were all Sufis, not in the sense of belonging to established *tariqas*, but in the sense of using Sufi terminology and categories.

In addition to these “perfect masters,” Meher had other sources of religious understanding, though these are not included in standard biographical accounts. One was the Ilm-i Khshnum (The science of ecstasy), a nineteenth-century Parsi mystical movement that was in part a reaction to the somewhat dry “Protestantized Zoroastrianism” that had developed alongside the Parsis’ increasing self-identification with the British, and as a solution to standard nineteenth-century challenges to Parsi beliefs. Protestantized Zoroastrianism understands itself as non-ritualistic, rational, ethical, and in harmony with modern science. It became short on ritual practice, however, and could be seen as “rather sterile,” in the view of Tanya Luhrmann. Ilm-i Khshnum also reflects the influence of Henry Olcott and the Theosophical Society, as Luhrmann shows. Fully one half of the founding members of the Bombay Theosophical Society were Parsis. Ilm-i Khshnum is thus concerned with the union of the soul with God, and with multiple intelligences,¹⁸ neither of which are obviously present in the surviving foundational texts of Zoroastrianism, and both of which reflect emanationism. When Meher opened a free boarding school for boys of all religious confessions called Meher Ashram outside Ahmednagar, a text identified as the *Ilm-i Khshnum* was on the curriculum.¹⁹ Meher at least approved of the Ilm-i Khshnum movement, then.

A second possible source of Meher’s religious understanding may have been the universalism of the Prarthana Samaj (Prayer Society), a Hindu reform society similar to the Arya Samaj (Noble Society) that had welcomed Olcott and Blavatsky in 1879. The Prarthana Samaj not only rejected caste distinctions, as did many other progressive Hindu movements of the time, but also took a stance against confessional boundaries, using Christian and Buddhist scriptures as well as Hindu ones in its weekly prayer

meetings, which it held on Sundays.²⁰ It had a branch in Ahmednagar, where the Meher Ashram was located, and one of its leading members established the Ahmednagar Education Society High School,²¹ the principal of which became the principal of the Meher Ashram school.²² The boys at Meher Ashram not only studied together without “pride of caste or community” but chanted together “a couplet which contains the different names of God recognized by every great creed.”²³ This resembles the practice of the Prarthana Samaj. The Prarthana Samaj was never close to the Theosophical Society,²⁴ and its universalism may have been a pragmatic response to the multiple divisions of caste and confession that seemed increasingly problematic to some nineteenth-century social reformers.

From his base in Ahmednagar, Meher built up a respectable following. He followed ascetic practices such as fasting and retreat,²⁵ and also fasting from speech. He stopped speaking in 1925,²⁶ initially for a limited period, but this period was extended, and he never spoke again. Instead he communicated in writing, first on paper, then through the use of an alphabet board, and finally through gestures. He presented himself in universalist terms, stating that he “belong[ed] to no religion in particular, and yet to every religion,” but his terminology was generally Hindu, and he identified himself as a *sadguru* (enlightened teacher) and an *avatar*.²⁷

Meher’s following included some English residents of India, and in 1931 he visited England.²⁸ He then toured America in 1932, where his visit was covered by the press, often in jovial tones. He visited various Hollywood studios, attended a dinner hosted by the actress Tallulah Bankhead, and also an event with some one thousand attendees at the then-fashionable Knickerbocker Hotel in Los Angeles.²⁹

Although Meher was an anti-dogmatist and claimed to have come to the West “not to teach but to awaken,”³⁰ in practice he did have teachings, which dealt mostly with realization within an emanationist scheme, occasionally emphasizing karma and promising a future great “spiritual push.”³¹ To this was added a message of religious unity, arguing that all religions were “in essence” the same and that he would “bring them together like beads on one string” and thus form “a lasting union of all existing races and religions into a harmonious whole.”³² He also engaged with the millenarian spirit of the times, announcing that the world was passing through the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one. “Spirituality,” he explained, “recedes until it almost sinks into insignificance; religion, or rather the outward form of it, becomes like a dry crust, ready to crumble at any moment, and world conditions reach a climax. It is at this critical juncture that an Avatar appears.”³³ Difficult ascetic practices similar to those Meher himself followed were assigned to some of his closest followers,³⁴ but for most of his followers he simply recommended detachment, that is, to “be *in* the world, but not *of* it.”³⁵

In 1942, Rabia Martin, the first Westerner to be initiated into Sufism by Inayat Khan in 1911, met two American followers of Meher, Elizabeth C. Patterson and Princess Norina Matchabelli,³⁶ an Italian actress who had married a Georgian prince and emigrated to America, where she and her husband had established the perfume that still

bears their name. Martin had been searching for a replacement for Inayat Khan since his death in 1927, and inclined increasingly to the idea that Meher might be the *qutb* for whom she was looking.³⁷ His emanationism and his universalism echoed that of Inayat Khan. Although his self-presentation and terminology were more Hindu than Sufi, he also had a Sufi pedigree through his realization at the hands of Babajan and subsequent reception by Taj al-Din Baba and by the partly Muslim Sai Baba, and his senior followers also made occasional references to Sufism.³⁸

After Martin's own death in 1947, her successor Ivy Duce traveled to India to visit Meher. He re-appointed her as head of the American Sufi Order, and an Indian Muslim follower of his, Abdul Ghani Munsiff, assisted her in transforming her Sufi Order, replacing the terminology of Sufism with that of Vedanta, and replacing the practice Martin had taken from Inayat Khan, which Munsiff condemned for its "ritualistic tendencies," with meditating on "the greatest Sufi of the time," i.e. Meher.³⁹ In 1952, Duce's Sufi Order became "Sufism Reoriented"; it had a formal charter signed by Meher, which emphasized that, "Sufism is mainly based on a definite acceptance of a God-realized master and complete adherence to His guidance."⁴⁰ A capital "H" was used for "His," following the practice of Meher's English and American followers, who sometimes translated *avatar* into English as "messiah,"⁴¹ compared Meher with Jesus, and thus gave "Him" the capitalized pronoun reserved in English for God.

The majority of Martin's followers seem to have accepted these changes, and Meher's Western following later grew dramatically, expanding to include such countercultural icons as Pete Townsend of the rock band The Who.⁴² Sufism Reoriented still exists today, based in Walnut Creek, California, a few miles east of Berkeley, where it runs a successful preschool and an elementary school.⁴³ It is now more part of the Meher Baba movement than the Western Sufi milieu.

The transfer of the Californian branch of the Sufi Movement from the successors of Inayat Khan to Meher Baba meant a change from the Sufi Movement's Sufism—which had retained much that was Islamic and Sufi despite its universalist packaging and Theosophical influences—to Meher's predominantly Hindu universalism. What the two have in common is emanationism, universalism, anti-dogmatism, and a strong connection with India. The implication, then, is that what was of paramount importance to Ivy Duce and most of her followers were these factors, not Sufism.

THE TRAVELS OF JOHN G. BENNETT

The third step in the polarization of Western Sufism was a temporary move toward Islam by John G. Bennett. Bennett, as we have seen, met Gurdjieff in Istanbul and then followed Peter Ouspensky in London, leading to his own full mystical experience in 1944. He started leading his own Gurdjieff group in 1941, at Coombe Springs, a once-grand house just outside London. This was the wartime headquarters of

the British Coal Utilization Research Association (BCURA), which Bennett directed. After leaving the army, and after some fruitless attempts to recover some assets of the deposed Ottoman royal family,⁴⁴ Bennett had become a partner in a Greek coal mine, which led to a new career in coal. He was director of the BCURA from 1934 until the end of the Second World War, when he moved to private industry, working with a new form of carbon that he and his associates had invented, Delanium.⁴⁵

In 1941, the BCURA acquired temporary wartime premises at Coombe Springs. This site had large but neglected gardens that needed volunteers to restore them to some sort of order. Bennett thus arranged weekend volunteer work in the gardens, in effect a weekend version of Gurdjieff's Le Prieuré.⁴⁶ When the BCURA moved out of its temporary premises at the end of the war, Bennett established an institute, named comprehensively as the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences, and in 1946 this institute took over the grounds of Coombe Springs, which became a full-time English recreation of Gurdjieff's institute.⁴⁷ Descriptions of Bennett at Coombe Springs in the early 1950s echo descriptions of Gurdjieff at Le Prieuré in 1923, with "Conscious Labour and Intentional Suffering,"⁴⁸ and Bennett performing "discomfitures" quite as startling as Gurdjieff's.⁴⁹ After the death of Ouspensky and then of Gurdjieff, Bennett became one of the major representatives of the Gurdjieff tradition in England, and the number of visitors to Coombe Springs increased. By 1957, Bennett counted more than five hundred followers.⁵⁰

In 1950, Bennett's career in coal was abruptly ended by an espionage scare. Coal research was an aspect of energy research, and energy research included atomic energy and thus weapons. Bennett had a Communist on his staff, and was himself rumored to have Russian connections (Ouspensky and Gurdjieff).⁵¹ There may also have been other factors that he did not report in his autobiography. Bennett, then in his early fifties, found himself with no further employment in his field of expertise. Rather as Rabia Martin had looked for a replacement for Inayat Khan, he began to search for "the Sources from which Gurdjieff had received his inspiration."⁵²

Emin Chikhou

The starting point of Bennett's search was the Middle East. He contacted a Jordanian friend from his Istanbul days, who recommended a Turkish-speaking Naqshbandi Sufi scholar in Damascus named Emin Chikhou (Muhammad Amin Shaykhu). In 1953 and again in 1955, Bennett traveled to Damascus. He met various Sufis, including Chikhou and another Turkish-speaking Naqshbandi shaykh, Abdallah Daghestani. Under their guidance and in the company of their followers, he began Sufi and Islamic practice, praying the ritual prayers (*salat*), doing private and communal *dhikr*, and living a simple life among other Sufis, both in Damascus and in Adana, Turkey.⁵³ He did follow pious Islamic custom by growing a beard, but otherwise he attempted to maintain his Christian identity. When Daghestani told him to use the phrase "la ilaha ill'Allah"

(there is no god but God), for example, Bennett reminded him that he was Christian. Daghestani responded that this was not important, that the phrase was “as much Christian as Muslim, for the foundation of all religion is that man should not follow his own will, but the Will of God.”⁵⁴ Bennett’s appearance, company, and behavior all gave support to the rumor that he was not only Muslim but even a saint, however, and after a while he found strangers in the mosque touching him for his *baraka* (blessings), which, he wrote, he found intensely embarrassing.⁵⁵

Bennett does not explain in his autobiography why he did not remain a regular Turkish Sufi, either in Turkey or in England. He writes, however, that during this period he almost forgot about his responsibilities in England, his followers at Coombe Springs, and an elderly wife who required constant care as the result of a stroke.⁵⁶ The implication is that although he almost forgot about them, he did not actually forget about them, and that this is one reason why he ultimately returned to England. Another is that although he found Chikhov extremely impressive, he felt that he would not be able to find through him “the ancient Sufi tradition which has undoubtedly been preserved in South-west and Central Asia,”⁵⁷ that is, the sources of Gurdjieff. Bennett was looking not for a great Sufi shaykh, but for a Sufi shaykh after the model of Gurdjieff, and thus ultimately (though he did not know it) after the model of Theosophy.

A further reason for Bennett’s move away from Turkish Sufism was a differences in his and Chikhov’s conceptions of the new age. Bennett felt that a “new epoch” was about to start.⁵⁸ So did Chikhov, but Chikhov understood the change of epochs in terms of classic Islamic eschatology. For Chikhov, the coming new epoch was the Last Days, and the key event in these was the return of the Prophet Jesus, an event which he greatly emphasized. Bennett found he simply could not accept this, and thus he found it difficult to respect Chikhov’s positions and opinions.⁵⁹

It seems likely that the other Naqshbandi shaykh who Bennett spent time with in Damascus, Daghestani, shared Chikhov’s views on epochal change. We have no direct evidence of this, but a follower of Daghestani, Mehmet Nazim Adil, who later became one of the leading Sufi shaykhs of the second half of the twentieth century, placed great emphasis on the coming of the Last Days, and thus on the return of the Prophet Jesus and the coming of the Mahdi (messiah), and claimed he had learned this from Daghestani.⁶⁰

Daghestani impressed Bennett by telling him that he had three messages for him. One was that he should not worry too much about his stroke-afflicted wife, as she was in God’s care. Another was that he should follow his own way at Coombe Springs rather than following others. The third was that he should prepare to receive a new messenger who had been sent by God in response to the evils of the time and was already on earth.⁶¹ To whom Daghestani was referring is unclear, but it seems likely that he was referring to the Mahdi. This is not, however, how Bennett understood him. Bennett instead returned to England expecting the arrival of an unidentified teacher, perhaps an emissary from the sources of Gurdjieff’s teachings, in which he was also encouraged by

the prediction of Gurdjieff himself, made to Bennett in Paris shortly before his death, that another would come to complete his work.⁶² The first person Bennett took as the expected teacher was Pak Subuh, a fourth first step in the polarization of Western Sufism, this time away from Islam.

Pak Subuh

There are similarities between Meher and Pak Subuh (Mr. Subuh), also known as “Bapak” (Father), an Indonesian title that parallels the “Baba” in “Meher Baba.” Subuh was born Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwijoyo in 1901 in Kedungjati, a village in central Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). He attended a Dutch school in the local town of Ambarawa, and then worked as a bookkeeper for the municipal government in Semarang, the largest city in the region. He joined the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, and followed another unidentified *kiai* (teacher) as well as his Naqshbandi shaykh.⁶³ The standard account of his life derives his legitimacy not from these teachers, but from a mystical experience in 1925, when “a ball of radiant white light” descended from above and entered his head. At first, his body shook, but then, after he got home and lay down and surrendered to God, he “saw [his] whole being filled with light.”⁶⁴ Beyond this, there is no information about his early life or possible influences on him.

Although Subuh gained a few followers from 1932, it was not until 1946 that his following became significant, when he moved to the southern Javan city of Yogyakarta and founded a movement known as Susila Budhi Dharma (approximately, Ethics, Wisdom, Right way),⁶⁵ generally shortened to Subud (Su-Bu-D) and understood as signifying “right living according to the Will of God . . . the force residing in the inner nature of man . . . [and] surrender and sincere acceptance of the Will of God.”⁶⁶

Subud was part of the Indonesian phenomenon of *kebatinan* (esotericism), which arose at the start of the twentieth century and grew dramatically in the late 1940s and 1950s, after Indonesian independence.⁶⁷ *Kebatinan* groups were understood by many as a distinctly Indonesian and non-Islamic phenomenon (an interpretation promoted among Western scholars by the work of Clifford Geertz);⁶⁸ this understanding helps explain why *kebatinan* groups were tolerated, and perhaps even promoted, by the nationalist and secularist Indonesian government of the period.⁶⁹ The Indonesian and non-Islamic nature of *kebatinan*, however, may well have been exaggerated. Even the word *kebatinan* is of Arabic and Islamic origin, formed of the Arabic adjective *batin* (esoteric) with the Indonesian *ke-* prefix and *-an* suffix to mean *batin*-ism—that is to say, esotericism. Many *kebatinan* practices that have been identified as non-Islamic, and therefore Indonesian, are actually found throughout the Muslim world and are non-Islamic only according to the narrow understanding of Islam of modernist reformers.

The theology of many *kebatinan* groups shows Sufi origins. The Paguyuban Sumarah (Society of Self-surrenderers) emphasized surrender to God as a means to achieving unity with the absolute essence, following a process that starts with *dhikr*.⁷⁰ The Paguyuban

Ngesti Tunggal (Society of Searchers for the One) understood “the One” in standard Neoplatonic terms and referred to the intermediate emanation of the Muhammadan light.⁷¹ *Kebatinan* is, then, sometimes closely related to Sufism.

Kebatinan also has a connection with Theosophy. The Theosophical Society was extraordinarily successful in the Dutch East Indies, to the extent that, by 1930, one out of every two hundred members of the entire Dutch resident population belonged to it.⁷² There were also many Indonesian members of the Society, and though they were few in absolute terms, they were influential. The Theosophical Society played a role in the growth of the *kebatinan* movement at the start of the twentieth century,⁷³ and the Theosophical connection remained in the 1950s and 1960s, with one *kebatinan* group, the Budi Setia, considering its formal transformation into a Theosophical lodge. It had been founded in 1949 by two senior police officers, one Dutch and one Indonesian, and both Theosophists.⁷⁴

Subud, then, was part of a phenomenon that included both Sufi and Theosophical influences. It was itself both universalist and anti-dogmatic. Subud claimed that Subud had “no holy book, no teaching. No sacred formulas” and was for “the whole of mankind in every religion.”⁷⁵ It did, however, inevitably have some teachings, and its central teaching was that surrender to God, at the hands of one who has experienced God, leads to “opening” to God. This basic point is compatible with Sufi understandings, as is the case with other *kebatinan* groups. Subud also understood the self in standard Sufi terms (as *ruh*, *nafs*, and *qalb*), and divided the soul in standard Neoplatonic terms into material, vegetable, animal, and human.⁷⁶

The central practice of Subud, *latihan kejiwaan* (psychological practice), however, does not have any obvious Sufi origin. It is a form of silent mediation broadly similar to that practiced in some other *kebatinan* groups, and also in other contexts in Indonesia.⁷⁷ During the “*latihan*” (practice), as it became known in the West, people stand together in a closed room with their eyes shut and surrender to God, assisted by a “helper” who has already been “opened.” At first, some people experience nothing, and some people experience “opening,” which different people describe differently, but which all agree is extraordinary. One English participant, who experienced nothing during his first *latihan*, found on a subsequent occasion that

at once a great force was rained down in and around me. My back was bent back and then forward and back again very quickly, so strongly that I lost my balance and fell to the floor. As I lay there I could feel this force surge and sway through my body. I believe that I laughed. All my former fears instantly evaporated.

When the *latihan* came to an end, I went up to the main house and joined some of the others for a cup of tea in the kitchen. I could still feel in myself the presence of vital energy and I felt elated and yet detached. But within I was deliriously happy.⁷⁸

This description is not representative of others in all its details, but violent physical movements and a feeling of detachment and elation were often reported. It echoes the phenomenon of *jadhbb* (attraction), the temporary state of ecstasy experienced by some during *dhikr*. Otherwise, the *latihan* is not particularly Sufi in its characteristics, as there was no circle, no regular movements, and no chanting, though sometimes some helpers did chant as one would in *dhikr*. The framework in which it was placed—a group led by a respected figure who also teaches—does correspond to the Sufi norm, however, and Subuh's first followers had, in fact, been Naqshbandi Sufis. Subuh evidently recognized this, distinguishing his group from a Sufi *tariqa* on the basis that the practices of a *tariqa* derive from the founder of that order, while the practices of Subud came directly from God.⁷⁹ This is hardly an absolute distinction, however, as Sufi shaykhs may also claim contact with God.

Bennett and Subud

During the years when Subud was expanding in Java and then spreading to Tokyo and Hong Kong,⁸⁰ Bennett was leading his Gurdjieff group at Coombe Springs. Then, after he had returned to England from the Middle East and was expecting the arrival of an unidentified teacher, as discussed earlier in this chapter, he was contacted by an Indonesian-speaking, Anglo-Egyptian Muslim of Jewish origin named Husein Rofé, who persuaded him to try the *latihan*. Bennett was “deeply impressed” with the experience. During the *latihan*, he had been “aware of an almost unbroken consciousness, free from all mental activity and yet intensely alive and blissful.” Rofé then announced that Pak Subuh was coming to England, and suggested that he should stay at Coombe Springs. Slightly reluctantly, Bennett agreed. Immediately on his arrival, in 1956, Subuh conducted a *latihan*. Within a month, some four hundred people had taken the *latihan*, of whom many had been “opened.”⁸¹

Bennett and the Coombe Springs community provided the infrastructure for Subud's subsequent expansion across England, Europe, the US, and Australia. Coombe Springs fed and housed visitors, answered letters, and provided financial support.⁸² Bennett and others from Coombe Springs traveled the world lecturing on Subud and performing *latihans*. Bennett also wrote two books on Subud: the bestselling *Concerning Subud* and then *Christian Mysticism and Subud*. This support was one reason for Subud's success. Another was the publicity attendant on the apparently miraculous cure by *latihan* of Eva Bartok, a movie actress and a follower of Bennett. Bartok had simultaneously become seriously ill, and pregnant by a man whose name she would not disclose, and had been advised to have an operation that would save her life but would kill her unborn child. Bartok recovered after a *latihan*, and her daughter Deana was born safely. This provided much copy for the popular press, and generated considerable interest in Subud.⁸³ Most importantly of all, however, was the impact of the *latihan* itself. Many people found

themselves “opened,” and consequently joined the Subud community, returning for more *latihans*.

The transfer of the Coombe Springs community to Subuh meant a change from the Gurdjieff movement—which as we have seen was understood to be of Sufi origin, but actually had little about it that was Sufi—to Subuh’s partly Sufi theology, rather than to the classic Sufism of Chickhou. What the Gurdjieff movement and Subuh had in common was, again, universalism and anti-dogmatism, two of the characteristics that the Sufi Movement also had in common with the Meher Baba movement. While there was perhaps an element of universalism in Daghestani’s discussions with Bennett, neither Chickhou nor Daghestani were anti-dogmatic. The implication, then, is that what was of paramount importance for Bennett and most of his followers was, once again, universalism and anti-dogmatism.

The transfer of the Californian branch of the Sufi Movement to Meher was permanent, but the transfer of the Coombe Springs community to Subuh was not. It became apparent that there were problems. For one thing, it was unclear who was in charge—Subuh or Bennett. Not all who had been following the Gurdjieff work joined Subud, and not all who joined Subud had an interest in the Gurdjieff work. Subuh himself seemed to have no interest at all in the system of Gurdjieff.⁸⁴ More fundamentally, the two systems did not combine well. In *Concerning Subud*, Bennett wrote that while there was no “exclusive connection between Gurdjieff and Subud,” he had not “encountered any experience in Subud that [he] could not understand better with the help of Gurdjieff’s system, and . . . all that Gurdjieff showed to be necessary for the development of man becomes possible and sometimes even easy with the help of Subud.”⁸⁵ Subud, he implied, was the response to the current “crisis in human affairs,” full of “expansive power” at the start of a “new epoch.”⁸⁶ However, many felt that Bennett could not really explain what was happening in the *latihan*. Others found a fundamental contradiction: “all Gurdjieff’s methods and his movements had a character of control, of decision, of deliberation, whereas the Subud *latihan* seemed to be the very antithesis of this,” wrote one confused participant.⁸⁷ Bennett later made a similar point: “in Gurdjieff’s exercises, there is a result to be achieved, a predetermined state to be reached by an intentional act of will. Here all was spontaneous.”⁸⁸

Bennett’s enthusiasm for Subud gradually cooled. In late 1960–61 he and a group of forty or fifty followers quietly restarted the Gurdjieff work at Coombe Springs. When this became known, a split developed between Bennett and the more dedicated followers of Subud.⁸⁹ After 1961, Subud developed without further help from Bennett or Coombe Springs. After the death of Subuh in 1987, it was led by his daughter, Ibu Rahayu. In 2003 it was estimated to have a worldwide membership of 10,000.⁹⁰ In America, however, the peak average age of the membership was estimated in 2012 to be sixty-seven,⁹¹ indicating that it had ceased to expand some years before and had entered a process of decline.

Bennett after Subud

Pak Subuh was the first person whom Bennett took for the new messenger predicted by Gurdjieff and Daghestani. The second was Idries Shah, who is the subject of the following chapter. Between Subuh and Shah, however, came a brief period during which, evidently feeling that he had been tricked into practicing Sufism against his wishes, Bennett converted to Catholicism. This conversion fits uncomfortably with the rest of his biography, but reminds us that Westerners involved with alternative religiosities, such as the Gurdjieff method and Sufism, were still living in a world where the old Christian churches remained active, and could sometimes be influential.

In 1961, Bennett reassessed his earlier view of Subud, coming to the conclusion (in a paper he never published) that it was not true that Subud had no doctrine, and that in fact its doctrine was basically Sufi and Islamic,⁹² a conclusion with which I agree. Bennett also suggested that the *latihan* derived from the *dhikr*,⁹³ in which he may have been right, but may also have been mistaken. He supported his analysis with lengthy quotations from introductory works on Sufism by Western scholars, notably *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* by Arthur J. Arberry, which was then the best recent book on the topic, and from *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* by R. A. Nicholson, the author of the 1906 article in the New York Public Library discussed in an earlier chapter. This reliance on introductory works suggests that, despite his fluent Turkish and his discussions with Sufis in the Middle East, he had not previously read the classic Sufi texts himself. This may explain why he had not spotted the strong Sufi influences in Subuh's teachings before 1961.

Bennett concluded that while Subud would tend to lead a person who has no religious belief into Sufism "by a gradual and almost unconscious process," a Christian would sooner or later have to ask to what extent Subud is compatible with Christianity, and would then come up against the problem that while there are many parallels between Islamic and Christian mysticism, there are also fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity, most notably over incarnation and atonement.⁹⁴ Although Bennett did not explore the implications of this conclusion, it almost seems that he felt he has been tricked into unknowingly following a practice that was incompatible with his own Christianity. He does not seem at this point to have had a very high opinion of Sufism, the origins of which he explained not in terms of perennial truth, but in terms of the influences on Islam of Christian monks and hermits.⁹⁵ This view, once popular among some Western scholars but now no longer widely accepted, makes Sufism a poor copy of something else, and thus hardly recommends it.

Soon after rejecting Subud as Sufism in disguise, Bennett visited the Benedictine monastery of St. Wandrille at Fontenelle Abbey in Normandy, France. He had previously visited the monastery as a representative of Subud, responding to a request by the monks to experience the *latihan*. He had himself experienced the presence of Jesus again during the *latihan* there, briefly concluding that Christianity was "the one true

religion,” but finding at the same time that he was reciting the Fatiha, the central prayer of Islam.⁹⁶ Despite this inconclusive experience, on his return to St. Wandrille during the winter of 1961–62 he formally converted to the Catholic faith, even though he “could not help seeing how much human speculation and even human fantasy had entered the teaching of the Church.” “The Catholic Church is the custodian of a mystery that it does not understand,” he concluded, “but the sacraments and their operation are no less real for that.”⁹⁷

THE MARYAMIYYA AND THE OGLALA SIOUX

Interest grew during the nineteenth century in Hinduism, seen by some after Sir William Jones as the most ancient human religion; in Buddhism, promoted as we have seen by the Theosophists; and in Sufism. There was initially little interest in the religions of the Native Americans, however. This was both because of the absence of suitable texts for translation, and because of continuing conflict between Native Americans and the US Army. Like other “Indians,” the Sioux had, since 1868, been restricted to “reservations” in which they were subject to the authority of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and to policies aimed at “civilizing” them and eliminating their “heathenism.” This involved sponsoring Christian religious instruction in schools and eliminating certain major non-Christian rituals, including the Sioux’s Sun Dance (Wiwanke wachipi), which was banned in 1883.⁹⁸ It also involved the attempt in 1890 to ban a novel but related ritual, the Ghost Dance (Wanagi wachipi), also a circle dance. This attempt led to a confrontation between the Pine Ridge Sioux and the US Army that culminated in the massacre at Wounded Knee, when some three hundred Sioux were killed by artillery shells, including woman and children who appeared to later investigators to have been attempting to flee the massacre at the time of their death.⁹⁹

These events framed American public interest in Sioux rituals until 1932, when the American poet and journalist John G. Neihardt published *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Neihardt’s account of Black Elk’s story was, like other successful nineteenth-century works of the kind, an interpretation rather than a translation. There is more agreement on what it omitted (Christianity in general, and Black Elk’s conversion to Catholicism) than on what it added.¹⁰⁰ George W. Linden, who knew Neihardt, has argued against any Neoplatonic influence.¹⁰¹ Neihardt was, however, in touch with the religious thought of his day, and his first publication, a collection of “mystic poems” written in his late youth, starts with a reference to the *kali yuga* (final age) and “the mighty Soul”¹⁰² (God), and reflects an interest in Vedanta that Neihardt himself noted in his autobiography.¹⁰³ It is reasonable to expect, then, that some similar perspectives found their way into *Black Elk Speaks*, parts of which suggest universalism and perhaps even emanationism, despite Linden’s assertion that Neihardt never mentioned Plato.¹⁰⁴

Schuon and an American follower of his, Joseph Epes Brown, recognized perspectives similar to their own in *Black Elk Speaks*, which Schuon read in 1946. Schuon encouraged Brown to contact Black Elk, which he did shortly before Black Elk's death, later writing his own version of his story, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, with Schuon's help.¹⁰⁵ Schuon traveled with his wife to Pine Ridge, South Dakota in 1959, and was introduced to the Oglala Sioux. The Schuons then moved on to Fort Hall, Idaho, where they participated in the Sun Dance,¹⁰⁶ which had been revived in slightly modified form in 1934 and was performed regularly after 1958.¹⁰⁷ The Schuons were then adopted into the Oglala Sioux.

At first, Schuon's new relationship with the Oglala Sioux had no impact on the Alawiyya. Along with a breach that had opened between Schuon and the Algerian leadership of the Alawiyya,¹⁰⁸ however, it probably contributed to the reformulation of the Alawiyya as a new *tariqa*, the Maryamiyya. As I have written extensively about these events elsewhere, I will merely summarize them here. The name Maryam (Mary) referred to the Virgin Mary, whom Schuon had seen in visions in 1965 and 1966, and who he believed had charged him with establishing a new *tariqa*.¹⁰⁹ The transformation of the Alawiyya into the Maryamiyya was not initially marked by significant changes in practice. Later, however, there were additions to the practice of Schuon himself and then of many of his followers, taken from the practices of Oglala Sioux. From 1981, when Schuon moved from Switzerland to America to live with a number of his followers at Inverness Farms, Bloomington, Indiana, versions of the Sun Dance were conducted by Schuon's followers, as was the Sufi *dhikr*. Schuon became increasingly critical of Islam, emphasizing more and more "the perennial religion" rather than Sufism.¹¹⁰ The symbol and logo of the Bloomington community became the "feathered sun," designed by Schuon on Sioux models. Some years before his death in 1998, rituals known as "primordial gatherings," which seem to have been of Schuon's own devising and are reported to have included "sacred nakedness," resulted in Schuon's arrest on charges of child molesting and sexual battery. Even though these charges were dismissed before trial, Schuon's reputation suffered significant damage.¹¹¹

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Although Schuon and many of those who were close to him in Bloomington moved away from Islam toward universalist Traditionalism, Schuon's most important follower, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, moved toward Islam. Nasr was by birth Iranian, but was educated largely in the US, as was then not uncommon for the children of the Shah's elite, a class to which Nasr's father belonged. Nasr read Guénon while studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and as a result met Schuon, joined the Maryamiyya, and changed his studies from natural sciences to Islam.¹¹² He completed a PhD at Harvard with a dissertation on "Conceptions of Nature in Islamic Thought during the Fourth Century (A.H.): A Study of the Conceptions of Nature and the Methods used for

its Study by the Ikhwân as-Safâ, al-Bîrûnî, and Ibn Sînâ.” He then returned to Iran, where he taught at the University of Tehran and then, under the patronage of the Shah’s wife, with whom he had good relations, established the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (Anjoman-i shahanshahi-i falsafahi-i Iran), the purpose of which was to study not modern philosophy but “traditional” philosophy—that is, Arab philosophy and its Persian developments. The Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy became an important gathering place for Traditionalists and their sympathizers worldwide, being visited both by Maryamis and non-Maryamis such as Henry Corbin, the great French scholar of Islamic philosophy. Its relationship with the Iranian religious establishment was complicated, since its work was respected, but its imperial connections disliked. It also published a journal and a number of books.¹¹³

Nasr’s achievement in the 1970s was to bring a Traditionalist perspective onto the world stage. The Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy was a prominent and prestigious organization, located in splendid premises, that united Western scholarship and the Islamic (or at least Iranian) tradition. It fitted well with another Maryami initiative, the World of Islam Festival, held in London in 1976, which involved everyone from the Queen of England to the Archbishop of Canterbury and *The Evening Standard*, London’s biggest tabloid newspaper. It presented Islam in terms of its intellectual, artistic, and philosophical achievements, with Traditionalist perspectives often visible to those who could recognize them.¹¹⁴ It is hard to think of any other event that did more to encourage Western respect for Islam and for premodern philosophical and spiritual tradition.

The Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 put an end to these activities. Nasr was too closely associated with the imperial family to remain in Iran, and went into exile in America. The Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy became the Iranian Academy of Philosophy, and lost its international role. The favorable impressions of Islam that had been encouraged by the World of Islam Festival were replaced with the view of Islamic “fundamentalism” as the enemy of the West, a view that has since become well established, as one crisis in Islamic-Western relations has succeeded another, from the Salman Rushdie affair to the Gulf War, from 9/11 to the cartoon crisis and the rise of the so-called Islamic State. Despite this, the stream within the Maryamiyya with which Nasr was associated remained true to Islam, creating a *de facto* division between them and Schuon’s less Islamic Traditionalism. This *de facto* division never resulted in a public split during Schuon’s lifetime, but there are strong indications that since Schuon’s death the two streams within the Maryamiyya have proceeded independently.

Maryami Writings

Nasr was active intellectually as well as organizationally, and his intellectual activity was not interrupted by the Iranian Revolution. In the United States, he continued his academic career, becoming a professor at George Washington University and a frequent commentator in the American media. As before the Iranian Revolution, he wrote both

for academic audiences and more general audiences, covering topics such as Islam in the modern world, Sufism, and the relationship between Islam and science.¹¹⁵ He focused almost exclusively on Islam. Other religions were respected, but not often referred to. There is no equivalent in Nasr's work of Guénon's interest in Hinduism or Schuon's interest in Native American religion.

Nasr's audience was wider than that of any other Western Sufi. He was read in English, the language in which he generally wrote, and in translation in other European languages, as were other Western Sufis like Inayat Khan and Schuon. He was also read in Persian, Turkish, and to a lesser extent in Arabic, Indonesian, and Malay.¹¹⁶ Although he was no longer welcome in Iran after the revolution, his ideas were. In Iran as in Turkey, they appealed to the new generation of intellectuals who were well-read in the modern classics of Western thought, and who inhabited much the same intellectual world as Nasr's Western readers did. The concerns of Nasr's Iranian, Turkish, and other Muslim readers, however, were different than those of his Western readers. For most Westerners of the late twentieth century, questions concerning relations between religion and science, and between religion, society, and politics, were no longer urgent questions. They seemed to have been solved in the nineteenth century, or even perhaps in the seventeenth. For some Iranian, Turkish, and other Muslim intellectuals, however, these questions remained urgent. This is the audience to whom Nasr spoke. His work never became absolutely central to Iranian or Turkish debates, but it was important, and remains so today.

Nasr was not the only Maryami author to provide Traditionalist understandings of Sufism and religion to the Western public. Schuon himself wrote extensively about Islam, Sufism, and Native American religion, and replaced Guénon as the standard point of reference for many Traditionalists. The English-language *Studies in Comparative Religion*, which was aligned with the Maryamiyya, replaced the French-language *Traditional Studies* (*Études Traditionnelles*) as the main Traditionalist journal. Schuon and *Studies in Comparative Religion* were not, however, much read by the general public. Other books by other Maryamis reached wider audiences, generally de-emphasizing the strict perennialist and Traditionalist positions found in the works of Guénon and Schuon in favor of other subject matter—normally Islam, Sufism, modernity, and related topics. Maryami understanding of these topics generally followed perennialist and Traditionalist lines, although this was not always appreciated by outsiders, who were not familiar with the positions in question. Among the Maryamis who reached wider audiences in this way were Nasr and Huston Smith, discussed below. There were also other important Maryami writers: Titus Burckhardt was well known for his work on Islam and architecture, and Martin Lings's biography of the Prophet Muhammad became a classic. Then there was Marco Pallis, who wrote on Buddhism, mountains, and Tibet, and Léo Schaya, who wrote on Kabbalah and Sufism.

Huston Smith is best known for his *The World's Religions*, which has sold two million copies and is one of the best-known books on religion in contemporary America (though

much less well known in Europe). *The World's Religions* was first published in 1958 as *The Religions of Man*, before Smith met Schuon, but since then has been extensively revised, and in its later editions argues for positions such as a universally valid distinction between esoteric and exoteric religion, and for understanding Sufism as esoteric Islam.¹¹⁷ Similar positions are found in Smith's other work, which includes several further books and numerous media appearances. Smith probably became the twentieth century's most famous Western Sufi academic, but he was not generally known as a Sufi. His public identity was rather that of scholar and universalist believer, although he frankly credited Schuon and Guénon in his autobiographical writings, and even wrote of his initiation into the Maryamiyya in Switzerland (though he did not mention the order's name).¹¹⁸

Like Schuon, Smith did not restrict himself to Sufi practice. As well as performing Islam's ritual prayers, he also practiced hatha yoga and read sections of the Christian scriptures.¹¹⁹ Similarly, although his writing built on Schuon and Guénon, he did not restrict himself to Traditionalist positions. His references were wide, characteristic of the contemporary American scholar of religion. They included, for example, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose "*Philosophia* as One of the Religious Traditions of Mankind" argues that "the Greek Tradition" (approximately what this book has been calling Neoplatonism) should be understood as "one of our planet's major religious traditions," a position that Huston Smith found convincing, though he preferred to place what he called "Greek *gnosis*" within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, not alongside them. When Jews, Christians, and Muslims "came to conceptualize their greatest insights," wrote Huston Smith, "a grammar for the purpose awaited them."¹²⁰ Smith's esoteric *prisca theologia*, then, was Neoplatonism.

Smith's sources also included the early work of Timothy Leary, the controversial American psychologist who, after his dismissal from Harvard University in 1963, became an iconic figure in the counterculture. In 1961, while teaching nearby at MIT, Smith was one of those who participated in Leary's experiments in the use of psychedelic drugs, which remained legal until 1966. Leary's early work was on the effects of psilocybin mushroom, which Smith also took, but the psychedelic that had most impact on him was mescaline, the active ingredient of peyote. Aldous Huxley had also taken mescaline in 1953 as part of his own enquiry into the transcendent, an enquiry which included his 1945 *The Perennial Philosophy*, a book that pays little attention to Sufism. Under the influence of mescaline, Smith experienced the scheme of emanation. Shortly after the experiment, he wrote:

I found myself amused, thinking how duped historians of philosophy had been in crediting the originators of such worldviews with being speculative geniuses. Had they had experiences such as mine, they need have been no more than hack reporters. But beyond accounting for the origin of these philosophies, my experience supported their truth. As in Plato's myth of the cave, what I was now seeing

struck me with the force of the sun, in comparison with which everyday experience reveals only flickering shadows in a dim cavern.¹²¹

That Smith experienced the emanationist scheme in this way may, of course, have been because he was already familiar with it through his reading. Huxley did not report such an experience. Smith's experience, then, does not actually resolve the question of whether the emanationist scheme corresponds to a reality that can be independently experienced.

Idries Shah and Sufi Psychology



JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS 1961, an article entitled “Solo to Mecca” appeared in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, a venerable British literary journal.¹ “Solo to Mecca” was a travel article, and told the story of a Persian-speaking Englishman who was helped on his way to Mecca by a number of Sufis, the first of whom he met in a cafe. This Sufi explained Sufism as the ancient and universal essence of all religions, and invited the Englishman to spend a month in a Sufi “monastery,” where the participants practiced the “Stop” exercise. They also explained that there is a secret Sufi hierarchy, and that the peak of this hierarchy was “the Grand Sheikh of the Sufi Way,” a prince known as *Idries Shah* [original italics], glossed as “the Studious King.”²

“Solo to Mecca” caught the attention of an Englishman living in Paris named Reginald Hoare, who, as a follower of the Gurdjieff movement,³ recognized the “Stop” exercise, and also recognized the understanding of Sufism as the ancient and universal essence of all religions. He wondered whether the Sufi monastery referred to was the one that George Gurdjieff was reported to have visited at the end of the nineteenth century. He accordingly wrote to the author of the article, “Omar Burke,” via the editor of *Blackwood’s*. He received a reply not from Omar Burke, but from Omar Shah and his brother Idries Shah,⁴ then thirty-seven years old.

Hoare introduced Idries Shah to John G. Bennett, the Gurdjieff teacher who, despite a disappointment with Pak Subuh, was still expecting the arrival of an unidentified teacher, perhaps an emissary from the sources of Gurdjieff’s teachings. By 1964, Bennett had become convinced that Idries Shah was the unidentified teacher he had been expecting, and passed control of his community at Coombe Springs to him. Shah, however, declined the role of guru, and instead spent the rest of his life writing about Sufism. He was a talented writer, and his books matched

the spirit of the times. They were phenomenally successful, and are said to have sold 15 million copies in total.⁵ Shah thus became the most widely read Western Sufi of the twentieth century.

Shah never wrote an autobiography, and much about him remains mysterious, including the motivation behind the 1961 article “Solo to Mecca.” It is clear from his writings that one of his major sources was the literature of the Muslim world, which was the fund on which he drew to retell countless stories, delighting his readers as similar tales had delighted Western audiences with the publication of the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in the seventeenth century, *The Thousand and One Nights* in the eighteenth century, and *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* in the nineteenth century. While nineteenth-century uses of Sufi motifs generally trivialized them, Shah’s retelling of old tales gave them new meaning, making available “the psychological insights of the Sufis.”⁶ While the sources of Shah’s “psychological insights” are less clear than the sources of his tales, they evidently include the Gurdjieff movement.

SHAH AND THE GURDJIEFF TRADITION

Idries Shah was born in Simla, the “summer capital” of British India, in 1924, but he was more British than Indian in terms of his ethnic and cultural makeup. He was the son of the Indian-British writer Iqbal Ali Shah, who had remained in Britain with a Scottish wife after originally going to Edinburgh to study medicine before the First World War.⁷ He was brought up mostly in England, and attended the City of Oxford High School.⁸ His father lived off his writing, which covered “Oriental” topics, ranging from travelogues to biographies of well-known figures such as Atatürk, the Aga Khan, and King Fouad of Egypt. Nothing is known of Shah’s early adulthood, about which he said nothing either to friends or family, save that in the 1940s he spent some time with his father in South America.⁹

Magic and Mushrooms

Shah’s earliest interest was not in Sufism, but in magic. His first book, published in 1956 when he was thirty-two, was *Oriental Magic*, a popular treatment of magic in various non-Western cultures, East Asian as well as Middle Eastern. It was followed in 1957 by *The Secret Lore of Magic*, which paraphrased classic Western texts, and paid little attention to “Oriental” magic. It indicates a familiarity with classic occultist works, including those of Eliphas Lévi.¹⁰ In 1957 Shah also published a light travelogue, *Destination Mecca*. This includes what seems to be a well-informed account of smuggling cigarettes into Spain from Morocco, as well as accounts of other Arab countries which may or may not have been based on firsthand knowledge. The 1961 article “Solo to Mecca” in some ways echoes *Destination Mecca*.

In 1959, Shah met Gerald Gardner, a former rubber planter and colonial official who had engaged in both Rosicrucianism and the Ordo Templi Orientis, before going on to run a Museum of Magic and Witchcraft on the Isle of Man and working to revive the practice of witchcraft; he organized a coven and published several books on witchcraft.¹¹ Shah was the ghostwriter for Gardner's biography, *Fifty Years of Wicca*.¹² He was well acquainted with magic and witchcraft, then, but there are few traces of this in his mature work.

In 1961, Shah befriended the celebrated English writer Robert Graves, known especially for his war poetry and his historical novels set in Greek and Roman antiquity (especially *I, Claudius*, which was published in 1934 and made into a successful television series in 1976). Graves was interested in witchcraft, on which he had published in 1948, and also in psychedelic mushrooms, on which he had published in 1960.¹³ During a visit with Gardner to the Spanish island of Majorca, where Graves had been living since the 1920s, Shah wrote to Graves that he had been attending "experiments conducted by the witches in Britain, into mushroom-eating and so on."¹⁴ This interested Graves, who met Shah and Gardener.¹⁵ He was not impressed by Gardener, but he and Shah became close friends.¹⁶

Under the influence of Graves, Shah moved on from witchcraft, dropping the project of writing *The Secret Lore of Alchemy* as a companion to *The Secret Lore of Magic*.¹⁷ He attempted to interest Graves in a joint project to rewrite the *Thousand and One Nights*, to "decode" it in the light of Graves's rereading of Greek myth.¹⁸ Graves had succeeded in making classical antiquity speak to modern readers, and might well have done the same for Arab myth. He does not seem to have been much interested in Shah's idea, however, as there is no word of the project getting anywhere. This project was the first sign of what would become central to Shah's later work: namely, the retelling of old tales for modern readers. The example of Graves, then, was one of Shah's sources.

The Shah Brothers in Paris

At some point before 1961, Shah also encountered the Gurdjieff tradition, though there is no indication of how this happened, and Gurdjieff is not mentioned in his later work, which frequently acknowledges ancient and Islamic sources, but never cites or discusses modern or Western sources. It may have been through the works of Peter Ouspensky, whose *In Search of the Miraculous* was published in 1949, and would almost certainly have come to the attention of anyone with a serious interest in the occult.

Like Bennett, Shah seems to have focused primarily on the Sufi elements in Gurdjieff's (largely fictional) autobiography, which are emphasized in "Solo to Mecca." As has been noted, the motives behind this article are unknown, but there are two obvious possibilities. One is that it was a joke, perhaps even a Christmas present from Omar Shah to his brother Idries. This is suggested by the description of Idries Shah as "the Grand Sheikh of the Sufi Way" and the glossing of his name

as “the Studious King.” Both of these are somewhat ridiculous. Although individual Sufi orders have shaykhs and even sometimes grand shaykhs, there has never been any single Grand Sheikh of the Sufi Way. *Shah* does indeed mean “king,” but *Idries* does not really mean “studious.” It is the name of a minor prophet mentioned in the Quran, though some imaginative manipulation of Arabic morphology might conceivably produce a meaning of “studious.” The other obvious possibility is that the article was intended to catch the attention of the Gurdjieff movement, rather as the mention of psychedelic mushrooms caught the attention of Graves.

Whatever the intention, the result of the article was that the Shah brothers were invited to visit a group of expatriate English Gurdjieffians in Paris, which they did in 1962. It is unclear what they said or how they presented themselves, but the Parisian Gurdjieffian group was evidently in search of a leader, and in 1963 took the Shah brothers as its joint leaders. Omar remained in Paris as the resident leader of the group.¹⁹ Idries returned to London, where Hoare introduced him to Bennett. At this point, Idries responded to the expectations of Bennett and his followers, presenting himself in a “Declaration of the People of the Tradition” as a representative of an “Invisible Hierarchy” which possessed a “superior form of knowledge,” which made it possible to “slip through the veil of conditioning to a perception with a part of the mind which is virtually unused.”²⁰ Despite the use of the word “tradition,” then, the references to “conditioning” and “perception” make clear that it is to the Gurdjieffian tradition that Shah is referring, not to the Guénonian tradition. His “Declaration” ended with a direct call to those of Bennett’s followers who had “capacity for obtaining the special knowledge of man which is available” to form “a harmonious organism . . . to provide an external and interior format with which to work.”²¹

Shah and The Sufis

At first, Bennett and his followers merely reflected on this call. Then, in 1964, Shah published one of his most important books (and the first of his mature works), *The Sufis*, which identified Sufism as “the secret tradition,”²² a variation on Helena Blavatsky’s “secret doctrine.” Graves wrote a long and enthusiastic introduction to *The Sufis*, and explained that it was he who had encouraged Shah to write it.²³ Under Shah’s guidance, Graves accepted a universalist, perennialist, and anti-dogmatic construction of Sufism. “The Sufis are at home in all religions,” he stated, even though they were “commonly mistaken for a Moslem sect.” In fact, Sufis were an ancient spiritual order of unknown origins, with “no religious dogma however tenuous” who “respect the rituals of religion insofar as these further social harmony.”²⁴ This understanding of Sufism was confirmed by Shah. Sufism is universal, a combination of the secret wisdom of the Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, and is perhaps indeed the “primordial religion of the Aryan race,” as Edward Palmer had suggested in 1851. “Formal religion is for the Sufi merely a shell . . . which fulfills a function.”²⁵

Shah's universalist, perennialist, anti-exoteric, and anti-dogmatic understanding of Sufism was of relatively recent origin. In his earliest treatment of Sufism, a chapter in *Oriental Magic* in 1956, he had made it clear that Sufis are Muslims, and as such observe the ritual prayers (*salat*) and the month of fasting.²⁶ He also recommended his father's *Islamic Sufism*, the book which in 1933 objected to "non-Islamic movements which due to utter ignorance are styled Sufism,"²⁷ as we have noted. The change in understanding between 1956 and 1964 can only be ascribed to Gurdjieff. Shah also adopted a Gurdjieffian understanding of Sufism in one important detail. In 1956 he had identified the ninth of the "rules" (*kalimat-i qudsiyya*, or "holy words") of the Naqshbandi *tariqa* as "pause of time," and had explained it as being to "recapitulate . . . , actions, and examine them."²⁸ In this he was right, as the *wuquf-i zamani* (temporal awareness) is a form of examination of one's spiritual state practiced by Naqshbandis during the *dhikr*.²⁹ In 1964, however, this ninth rule had become the "Stop" exercise, "a method . . . [for] breaking through the web of associational thinking."³⁰ There was some justification for this reinterpretation, as the word *wuquf* can mean "stop" as well as "awareness," even though in this context and in the standard Naqshbandi understanding it does not. The impulse for the reinterpretation can only have been the work of Gurdjieff.

Graves accepted Shah himself as Grand Sheikh of the Sufi Way, adding that he had inherited the secrets of his ancestors, the Caliphs³¹; this was evidently a reference to the Shah family tradition of descent from Ali al-Rida,³² the eighth Shi'i imam, who was descended from the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib. This identification followed a short anonymous article in *The Times* in which the absent leader of the Sufis was again identified as Idries Shah, this time spelled "Idd-rees Shaah."³³ It seems that at the beginning of his career as a writer on Sufism, Shah was "talking up" his qualifications.

Graves's support of Shah was valuable. *The Sufis* was published not by the small publisher of *Oriental Magic*, Rider & Co., which specialized in occult and spiritual works, but by the major publisher W. H. Allen in London, with American publication by Doubleday. This and the introduction by Graves were enough to get the book a review in *The Spectator* in the UK and in the *New York Times Book Review* in the US. In her review for *The Spectator*, the novelist Doris Lessing (whose *Golden Notebook* had just been published to acclaim) described *The Sufis* as "a fascinating book," adding, "I can't remember being more provoked and stimulated."³⁴ So, at the end of 1964, *The Sufis* carried the recommendation of two of the UK's major literary figures—the established Graves and the rising Lessing.

Coombe Springs

Bennett encouraged everyone at Coombe Springs to read *The Sufis*,³⁵ and in 1965 the call that Shah had issued in 1963 was formally put by Bennett to a General Meeting of the members of the Institute that owned Coombe Springs. As discussed in a previous chapter, when Bennett welcomed Subuh to Coombe Springs, issues arose because it was not clear who was in charge, Subuh or Bennett, and also because Subud and the

Gurdjieff tradition did not mesh well. In 1965, *The Sufis* and the Gurdjieff tradition combined much better, and Shah insisted on clarity over the question of leadership. Bennett accordingly asked the General Meeting to decide whether or not they would accept Shah as their leader and transfer Coombe Springs to his care. As recommended by Bennett, they mostly voted in favor of this, and ownership of the Coombe Springs property was transferred to a new body controlled by Shah.³⁶

Shah, however, did not in the event lead a community at Coombe Springs. He ended the Gurdjieff exercises and the Subud practice (*latihan*), on the grounds that they were too mechanical, and only accepted part of Bennett's former following. Then he asked the remaining residents to move out, sold the house and grounds, and moved to Langton House in Kent.³⁷ This was also a substantial property, but, given its distance from London, probably a much less expensive one. He lived there for the next thirty years, until his death in 1996, with no permanent community in residence, devoting his time to writing, to occasional visits by members of his informal following, and to running a small publishing house called Octagon Press. He also organized lectures under the auspices of the Society for Understanding Fundamental Ideas (SUFi), later known as the Institute for Cultural Research (ICR), which had some two hundred members.³⁸ These activities were well financed: when the ICR was finally dissolved in 2014, it had net assets of almost \$4 million.³⁹

The acquisition and subsequent sale of Coombe Springs has often been portrayed by Shah's critics as a deliberate deception for personal financial advantage. This was not the understanding of Bennett himself, however, who wrote of the transaction without recrimination.⁴⁰ Shah's intentions when Coombe Springs was transferred to him are not known. It is quite possible that he did intend to lead the community there, as announced in the "Declaration of the People of the Tradition," but then changed his mind. As we will see, he later accepted only a small and informal following, and frequently criticized the sort of group that Khan, Schuon, Gurdjieff, Bennett, Subuh, and others had led. It could certainly be argued that it made little sense to use such a valuable property as Coombe Springs only for occasional gatherings, and that its sale and reinvestment made sense in terms of the objectives of the Institute that retained and used the proceeds of the sale. These proceeds were used to support the Institute's objectives, not just Shah personally. The transaction may, then, have been entirely proper.

SHAH'S SUFISM

Lessing opened her review of *The Sufis* with the tale of the elephant, told by Shah. As she puts it:

The citizens of a certain town, mad with curiosity, sneaked a preview of a beast strange to them, an elephant. For safety's sake it was kept in the dark, and they had to rely on their sense of touch. One, finding its trunk, said it was a hosepipe. Another, that it was a fan: he had touched its ear. A third said it was a kind of pillar,

while a fourth reported it must be a living throne. Each was sure he was right; yet none had formed a complete picture; and of the part he had felt, could only talk in terms of things he knew.⁴¹

For Shah and Lessing, this is a Sufi story, and illustrates how important truths are often only partially understood. Sufism was one such truth, and had been only partially understood by those Westerners who had written about it—but not by Shah, who became Sufism's authoritative representative. In fact, the story of the elephant is not a particularly Sufi story, and a reader of Lessing's review immediately wrote a letter to the editor to draw attention to the famous print of this scene by the Japanese artist Hokusai.⁴² The oldest version of the story of the elephant is in fact found in the Buddhist Pali Canon, recorded in 29 BC.⁴³ That does not, however, stop the story from making a good point in other contexts as well, and even Robert Payne, the author of a hostile review of *The Sufis* in the *New York Times Book Review*, liked Shah's use of stories, one of which he retold, and conceded that *The Sufis* was "eminently readable."⁴⁴

Payne was right. *The Sufis* is eminently readable, and the stories are excellent. Many of them are Mulla Nasrudin stories. These are an important part of the folk wisdom of the Muslim world, known universally from the Arab countries through Turkey and Iran to India. They are a genre of short tales, by multiple authors, in which Nasrudin (Nasr al-Din) normally says or does something apparently ridiculous which, on closer examination, turns out to make complete sense, often in a rather wacky way. The result has something in common with Gurdjieff's "discomfitures," which Shah called "shock-teaching,"⁴⁵ but the process is a lot less painful for the individual concerned.

The Sufis sold well and has never been out of print. As well as going into multiple editions in English, it was translated into French in 1972, German in 1976, and then into a number of other languages, including Arabic and Japanese. It is not, however, Shah's best selling book. Even more successful was his next book, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*, published in 1966, and translated into French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Spanish, Polish, and Russian. Two other successful Nasrudin collections followed: *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mullah Nasrudin* in 1968, and *The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin* in 1973. *Tales of the Dervishes* (1967) was Shah's single most successful book. It collects over eighty tales by various notable Muslims, mostly Sufis, all comparable to the Nasrudin stories, though often more literary and less earthy. This book was translated into Japanese, Chinese, and Thai, as well as most of the major Western languages.

The majority of Shah's books after *The Sufis*, of which there were twenty-six, are collections of such stories. Exceptions, like *Learning how to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* (1978), which is based around a series of questions and answers, still contain many stories. *Learning how to Learn* also contains Shah's own understanding of the use of these stories: that instead of arguing about what Sufism is or is not, all that is necessary for people to understand Sufism and its "psychological insights" is to

retell Sufi stories.⁴⁶ Another exception is *The Book of the Book* (1969), an unusual work dedicated to making the point that contents and their container may differ. This point is made partly in classic Shah fashion, with short tales of kings and dervishes, and partly by example: the contents of the book stop on page sixteen, leaving some two hundred entirely blank pages to fill the remainder of the container.⁴⁷

The popularity of these stories, in *The Sufis* and in subsequent books, is easy enough to explain. As has been noted, they are comparable to the stories in the *Thousand and One Nights*, which Shah had tried to interest Graves in rewriting. Nasrudin had been popular for centuries among Arabs, Turks, Iranians, and Indian Muslims, so why not also—once well retold in English—among Westerners?

Sufi Psychology

Shah was not only a reteller of classic stories, however. He was never entirely explicit about exactly what Sufism was, rather as Gurdjieff was never entirely explicit about what his teaching was; nevertheless, his understanding of Sufism was often connected with psychology, as in the subtitle of *Learning how to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way*. The psychology in question often echoes Gurdjieff. Ways of thinking are a major theme in Shah's writings, and are also the focus of a forty-minute television documentary that he made in 1970 as part of the BBC's "One Pair of Eyes" series. The documentary, titled "The Dreamwalkers," starts by stating "Man is asleep," and asking "Must he die before he wakes up?"⁴⁸ This echoes the opening of *The Sufis*, which states that "Humanity is asleep, concerned only with what is useless, living in a wrong world." This statement is credited to the twelfth-century Persian poet Abu al-Majd Majdud Sanai al-Ghaznavi,⁴⁹ but its underlying sentiment aligns with that of Gurdjieff, for whom it is axiomatic that man is asleep, and therefore needs to develop a new consciousness. In a 1975 interview, Shah explained that Sufism is not "a body of thought," but rather an "experience [that] has to be provoked in a person," and that his teaching stories allowed people to "burn . . . off the[ir] conditioning."⁵⁰ In 1978, he wrote "Sufis jolt people from . . . sleep."⁵¹ Again, the teaching is that of Gurdjieff. Similarly, Shah followed William James, Ouspensky, and Gurdjieff in focusing on "automatic acts," which he sometimes called "automatism," a term he used in his "Declaration" to Bennett's following.⁵² Shah continued to see Sufism as in opposition to, even combating, automatism.⁵³

Shah's Sufism, however, was not just the *Thousand and One Nights* and Gurdjieff. He also quoted from classic Sufi writers, and from Nasrudin. The Nasrudin tales are not really Sufi, as they are not claimed by any particular Sufi order, but the folk wisdom that they draw on and encapsulate is often compatible with perspectives that a Sufi might take, possibly because of the impact of centuries of Sufi teachers on the accumulated folk wisdom of the Muslim world. Sometimes, however, Shah pushed his classic Sufi writers too far in the direction of Gurdjieff. According to Shah, for example, Ghazali

“pointed out” that “people are conditioned, and that what they call their opinions and beliefs are frequently not their own but implanted by other people and institutions.”⁵⁴ Ghazali could hardly have pointed out precisely this, as there was no word for “conditioning” in twelfth-century Arabic, since the concept did not exist, and it is hard to think of words that would have given anything like the modern sense of “implanted.” Ghazali may well have noted that the thoughts and behavior of one person are often affected by the thoughts and behavior of another person, but that is not quite the same thing.

Reading Shah

When asked in an online survey in 2015 what they most appreciated in Shah’s work, dedicated readers—most of whom had started reading Shah in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s, usually when in their thirties—offered varied responses. Certain themes, however, were repeated. Many respondents recalled that they had felt immediately that Shah’s books were different: “I had never read anything like it” was a phrase used more than once. Some were struck by the “breadth of learning,” the “deep knowledge, understanding” that they found. For others, Shah’s books were different in that they were not like other “spiritual” books of the time. Several respondents noted the absence of “mere emotionality” and of sentimentality, of the “trappings” of religion and philosophy, and the presence of the psychological dimension. Some respondents found the books different because they gave access to an unknown world, to “centuries of Arabic thought, philosophy, psychology and spiritual teachings” which “a Western audience . . . was almost totally ignorant of.” One respondent recalled “how shocking it was to uncover a major and complex system of thought in Islamic guise, where I [had been] led to believe there was nothing progressive.”⁵⁵

Several respondents commented on the use of stories that were easy to read and even entertaining. The stories’ real points were sometimes not immediately obvious. “At first, I found amusement in the stories, and I treated them like puzzles,” remembered one respondent. The puzzles often solved themselves over time. “Finding myself in particular situations I will recall a tale, joke, or comment of Shah’s that relates directly to the situation,” wrote another respondent. “Passages from the books come back to me from time to time and help me deal with new situations as they occur,” wrote a respondent. “The tales, jokes, and historical anecdotes . . . embody the observations and insights gained and passed on over the centuries,” noted a further respondent. “The patterns contained in their story structures play out again and again in modern society as they did in previous centuries.”

For many respondents, Shah’s books were more than just books. Together, they formed a coherent corpus, to be read and reread. “I continue to find new meaning in the books and they reinforce my hope that I am slowly learning how to learn,” wrote a respondent who was, at the time of writing, in his seventies. Together, the books “work like a guide for the development of consciousness,” showing that there are “other modes

of thinking,” “another way of seeing the world and ways of being/acting beyond the everyday,” beyond everyday assumptions and conditioning. “The books work, initially, without the reader’s knowledge,” noted one respondent. “While reading his work, some alchemy occurs within,” noted another.

FOLLOWERS AND OPPONENTS

Had Shah conformed to the normal pattern among Western Sufis of combining writing with leading followers, his following would probably have been large, as by the mid-1970s he was receiving some 10,000 letters a year, which included many requests to meet him.⁵⁶ He argued that he could not both write and lead many followers at the same time,⁵⁷ though many others have managed to combine these two activities, which in some ways come together naturally. Even René Guénon, who was also a writer rather than a leader of followers, had found someone to whom he could refer his correspondents, as discussed in an earlier chapter. Shah, however, is not known to have ever referred any correspondent to anyone, and criticized those who, inspired by his writings, were sufficiently “religious-minded” to go in search of Sufi groups and teachers, whether “the often grotesque versions of Sufism in the East” or “guru-ist cults of the West.” He regarded the human desire for “meetings, groups and classes” as childish, and considered that Sufi groups that indulged this desire had deteriorated into cults. Groups, gurus, and rituals were often a substitute for knowledge and an obstacle to understanding, as they produced effects that might seem to be spiritual, but were in fact merely emotional.⁵⁸ Sufi rituals, he thought, were “automatic processes” of no value⁵⁹ or—even worse—“conditioning.”⁶⁰ Shah is here using the logic and even some of the terminology of Gurdjieff, but coming to very different conclusions about the merit of these practices and traditions.

Despite his criticism of gurus and groups, Shah did have a few followers, who visited him on weekends, by invitation.⁶¹ Small groups would arrive, engage in communal physical work on Saturday, and then move for dinner to a former barn on the estate known as “The Elephant” (a reference to the story retold above), and then gather to listen to Shah speak until after midnight.⁶² Something of the basic framework of Le Prieuré and Coombe Springs survived, then. Shah also had a small following in North America. An American organization, the Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge (ISHK), was established in 1969 under the leadership of Robert Ornstein, a postdoctoral fellow in psychology.⁶³ There was also a Shah group in Denver, Colorado, under the leadership of Leonard Lewin, an electrical engineer who taught at the University of Colorado.⁶⁴

A further group was established by Shah’s brother Omar, who began to distance himself from the Gurdjieffian tradition in 1968, replacing the Gurdjieffian term “work” with the more neutral term “tradition.” In 1977 Omar formally separated himself from Idries, and introduced such Islamic Sufi practices as *dhikr* and prayers in Arabic.⁶⁵ Omar’s following⁶⁶ did not become fully Islamic in its practice, however. An account from the

1990s of a substantial center in Arcos de la Frontera, Spain reports Islamic forms of practice combined with heavy consumption of alcohol.⁶⁷

Doris Lessing and Others

Shah's most famous follower, after Robert Graves, was Doris Lessing. Graves was important at the beginning of Shah's career, as noted. Lessing was important later on. Her *The Golden Notebook* was widely read and much respected. One of its themes was the limitations placed on women in English society, and this was the theme for which the book became best known. Lessing later complained that "it became the property of the feminists," despite the fact that so far as she was concerned, "it was fundamentally a political book."⁶⁸ Another theme is disenchantment with, and disengagement from, the Communist Party, which Lessing had herself joined and left (unlike her husband, who went on, after their divorce, to become a senior member of East Germany's ruling party). After finishing *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing found she "could no longer accept the contemporary package of materialism, socialism, and atheism," and went looking for something else.⁶⁹ Like many writers before her, she read her way through the Christian and non-Christian spiritual classics, concluding that "all religions and types of mysticism say the same thing in different words." At this point, she read *The Sufis*, wrote to Shah, and was accepted by him as a pupil.⁷⁰

Lessing promoted Shah's work in three ways. Firstly, she introduced him to her publisher, Tom Maschler at Jonathan Cape,⁷¹ who subsequently published and promoted his books. Secondly, she periodically wrote glowing reviews of his work in various newspapers and magazines, accepting and repeating his claims to authority, and thus adding to his fame and legitimacy. Thirdly, she referred to him and Sufism so often that anyone seriously interested in her work inevitably became interested in, or at least aware of, Shah as well. This is visible in the number of scholarly books and articles devoted to Lessing and Sufism. What was true for professional devotees of Lessing was presumably also true for amateur devotees. Many readers of Lessing must have become readers of Shah.

Another famous writer who was influenced by Shah, though never a formal follower of his, was the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho.⁷² In Coelho's *Veronika Decides to Die*, the rebirth of the central character, Veronika, is preceded by the advice of a Sufi teacher who bases his lesson around "Nasrudin, the great master of the Sufi tradition."⁷³ As Nasrudin is regarded as a Sufi primarily by Shah, whose spelling Coelho also follows, Shah must be Coelho's source. Nasrudin not only features in *Veronika*, but also makes periodic appearances on Coelho's blog.⁷⁴

Shah's promotional material also claimed an academic following, emphasizing that many universities used his work.⁷⁵ Universities were also introduced into the titles of some books, as when *The Elephant in the Dark* was subtitled *Geneva University Lectures, 1972/73*. The dedication of this book gives "grateful thanks" to the University of Geneva.⁷⁶ In fact, the association with the University of Geneva was weaker than Shah implies: he

delivered only one lecture there during 1972–73, and that was at his own proposal, not at the invitation of the university. Some of those involved at the university were unhappy to see themselves associated with the *Elephant in the Dark*.⁷⁷

Opponents

Criticism of Inayat Khan's understanding of Sufism in the 1920s and 1930s was limited, as we saw in an earlier chapter, partly because there were then few Muslims in the West. There were more Muslims in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, but most of these were recent immigrants, not yet highly visible in the public sphere. Criticism of Idries Shah came from other quarters, and grew with time. As has been mentioned, Payne's original 1964 review of *The Sufis* in the *New York Times Book Review* was less than positive. The reviewer complained that the book was "inclined to see Sufi influence everywhere," and mocked Shah's suggestion that Shakespeare might be Shaykh-pir (a combination of Arab and Persian terms for a Sufi master). While Payne conceded that "there is a good deal of information to be derived from the book," this was "in spite of so many incursions into the higher lunacy, magic, witchcraft, and numerology."⁷⁸ *The Sufis* indeed made extraordinary claims for Sufi influence everywhere, including in the Carbonari, the alchemists, and the Order of the Garter,⁷⁹ Britain's premier order of chivalry. There were also many excursions into what might be termed "higher lunacy," not only in the form of numerology, but also in the less familiar form of Arabic grammar. Using J. G. Hava's *Arabic-English Dictionary* of 1915, Shah drew on the remarkable variety of meanings that can be derived from a single Arabic triliteral root, some of which are logically related, and some of which are startlingly contrasting.

Criticism of Shah grew after 1967, when a new translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* was published under the joint names of Robert Graves and Omar Shah (Idries Shah's brother). The translation was presented as their joint work; Graves put into verse what Omar had translated from the Persian. It was also presented as a vast improvement on the original FitzGerald translations. Firstly, Graves and Omar recognized Omar Khayyam for the Sufi he was, unlike FitzGerald, whom Graves attacked in a long introduction entitled "The Fitz-Omar Cult." Secondly, Graves and Omar were working from the original twelfth-century manuscript, rather than the later and defective manuscript that FitzGerald had used.⁸⁰ The new translation was not well received, however. One reviewer described it as "a prosy *New English Bible* sort of Khayyam,"⁸¹ referring to the generally unloved 1961 new translation of the Bible into more faithful, but definitely unpoetic, English. More importantly, those who knew classical Persian literature immediately doubted the existence of a previously unknown twelfth-century manuscript, especially since that manuscript seemed suspiciously close to FitzGerald's text. Public controversy followed, with Graves coming under attack from Laurence Elwell-Sutton, a leading Persianist at Edinburgh University, who identified the translation's source as the 1899 work on FitzGerald's translation by Edward Heron-Allen.⁸² The reason the

allegedly new manuscript resembled FitzGerald's translation was that it was, in fact, actually based on that translation.

This controversy was painful for Graves, who wrote to Idries Shah that it did him "a great deal of harm," and who took the Shah brothers' failure to silence critics such as Elwell-Sutton by producing the original twelfth-century manuscript as an inexplicable betrayal of their long friendship.⁸³ It is likely that the manuscript was in fact an invention of Omar's, but that Idries felt he had to support his brother, despite his friendship with Graves. For a follower of the Shah brothers, however, the controversy did not discredit them. It merely showed that, unable to object to the basic argument that Omar Khayyam was an unrecognized Sufi, the academic establishment focused instead on petty details about the provenance of manuscripts.⁸⁴

When he revealed the 1899 origin of the allegedly twelfth-century manuscript of Khayyam in a scholarly journal, Elwell-Sutton observed standard academic courtesies. In later articles in general publications, however, he was much less restrained. In 1970, he described Shah's works in the *New York Review of Books* as "merely trivial," "a schoolboy essay," and "a muddle of platitudes, irrelevancies, and plain mumbo-jumbo."⁸⁵ In 1975, he accused Shah of "a well-planned build-up" of the "attempt to upgrade [a] rather undistinguished lineage," and drew attention to the transaction involving the acquisition and sale of Coombe Springs in a way that implied dishonest dealings. In Elwell-Sutton's view, Shah's only achievement was to acquire such knowledge of Sufism as was available in commonly available reference works, and to use it to produce a pseudo-Sufism fitted to the needs of the intellectual of his time, who "is usually incapable of swallowing the idea of a transcendent God more omnipotent than himself."⁸⁶

Elwell-Sutton was right in his identification of the source of the alleged twelfth-century manuscript, but he went too far in his other criticisms. As already seen, the Coombe Springs transaction may have been entirely proper. Shah was indeed sometimes presented as an Afghan aristocrat—for example, in the American popular magazine *Psychology Today*, which described him as "a witty, urbane man whose family palaces are in Afghanistan" and added that "Shah is adviser to several monarchs and heads of state—purely in an unofficial capacity."⁸⁷ There is no record of Shah advising monarchs or heads of state, and no known palaces in Afghanistan, but Shah's background was not as undistinguished as Elwell-Sutton suggested. Shah was descended from an Afghan, Muhammad Jan Fishan Khan, who moved to India at the end of First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42), and remained loyal to the British during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, as a reward for which he had been granted what a British semi-official source described as "an important estate," covering about twenty-eight square miles, at Sardhana in Uttar Pradesh, along with the title *nawab*, a form of peerage.⁸⁸

Elwell-Sutton, then, was far from fair in his criticisms. He was not Shah's only critic, however. James Moore, the respected amateur historian of the Gurdjieff movement, contrasted some of the exaggerated claims made on Shah's behalf with the reality to

devastating effect. Moore concluded that Shah's Sufism was "a 'Sufism' without self-sacrifice, without self-transcendence, without the aspiration of gnosis, without tradition, without the Prophet, without the Quran, without Islam, and without God."⁸⁹ Moore was right, but the same could be said of Gurdjieff, and indeed of a lengthy tradition going back to Spinoza.

Idries Shah died in 1996. His following dispersed, Langton Place was sold, and the proceeds transferred to the Idries Shah Foundation,⁹⁰ which now publishes and promotes his books, demand for which has declined. Save among his remaining readers, Shah's version of Sufism has not survived him.

Sufism Meets the New Age



IN 1969, AN elderly man with long gray hair and a long gray beard, wearing white robes, deplaned at the San Francisco airport, where he was met by a large crowd of young followers. “Who is *that*?” asked a passing porter. “That,” replied the elderly man, who had heard the question, “is the new age . . . In person.”¹

The elderly man was Samuel L. Lewis, also known as “Sufi Sam” and as Sufi Ahmed Murad (a name which conveniently gave the initials S. A. M.). He was a former member of Inayat Khan’s Sufi Movement, and a frequent and popular speaker in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood—a place made famous by the 1967 “Summer of Love,” a spontaneous gathering of hippies and alternatives that paved the way for Woodstock, the iconic festival of 1969. Lewis welcomed the “new age” in which people were suddenly interested in things that older generations had generally never understood. As we have seen, some Westerners had actually been interested in these things for eight hundred years, but Lewis was right that interest in them was growing in 1969.

Lewis was an early member of Rabia Martin’s Californian branch of the Sufi Movement. After that branch had turned to follow Meher Baba in 1953, Lewis had left. He started taking on followers of his own in 1964, responding to the increased interest in Sufism that followed the publication of Idries Shah’s *The Sufis*. A third group descended from the interwar Sufi Movement thus came into being, in addition to Sufism Reoriented and the original, official Sufi Movement, based in the Netherlands, though still with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. These was joined by a fourth group in 1968, when Inayat’s son, Vilayat Inayat Khan, founded the Sufi Order International. Then, at about the same time, a fifth group came into being within the official Sufi Movement, when Inayat’s grandson Fazal Inayat-Khan began to develop a distinct following of his own. This fifth group became formally independent in about 1983. Both Vilayat’s and Fazal’s groups established alternative communities that resembled the hippie communes that

were characteristic of the new age. Following the general tendency toward polarization, all these groups moved gradually away from Islam.

This chapter follows these groups and their different approaches to the new age. As we will see, the official Sufi Movement more or less ignored it. Despite seeing himself as the “new age . . . in person,” Lewis (who was seventy-three in 1969) made only minor modifications to the teachings of the Sufi Movement, though he added a new practice, the very successful “Dances of Universal Peace.” Vilayat (who was fifty-three in 1969) also made only minor modifications to practice, but moved his teachings toward a focus on consciousness. Fazal (who was twenty-seven in 1969) embraced the new age so wholeheartedly that, some thought, he himself became part of the hippie movement.

TRADITIONALISM AND THE NEW AGE

The Traditionalist Maryamiyya of Frithjof Schuon, in contrast, rejected the new age, which it saw, in accordance with its understating of Western civilization as regressing, not as the start of a new age but as part of the end of the *kali yuga* (final age). “Our culture being what it is,” wrote one Traditionalist, “perhaps we ought not therefore to be surprised at the development of ‘sub-cultures’ founded on drugs, on sexual license, on quasi-religious fantasies, or even on violence, usually in the name of a so-called ‘freedom’ which is in reality nothing else but the very same enslavement to sensation as that which marks our culture.”²

Even so, Traditionalism did benefit from the new age, especially in France, where it was promoted by the work of Louis Pauwels. Pauwels had been a follower of Gurdjieff, on whom he published a book in 1954.³ His eccentric and eclectic *The Morning of the Magicians* (*Le matin des magiciens*), written with Jacques Bergier and published in 1961, was a bestseller, and gave rise to a monthly magazine, *Planet* (*Planète*) that soon achieved a circulation of 100,000, and itself gave rise to special issues and versions in other languages. Guénon was discussed in both book and magazine.⁴ In contrasting the progressivist ethos of socialism with the anti-modernist ethos of Nazism, Pauwels and Bergier observed that if, as Lenin had said, communism was socialism plus electricity, Nazism was “Guénonianism plus armored divisions.”⁵ This helped increase interest in Guénon, despite the lack of any actual connection between Traditionalism and Nazism. Umberto Eco later used this observation as an epigraph for one chapter in his book *Foucault’s Pendulum*.⁶

THE SUFI MOVEMENT CONSERVED

After the unexpected death of Inayat Khan in 1927 at the age of forty-four, the institutional structures of the Sufi Movement ensured its continued existence. A series of five relatives of Inayat occupied the most senior post, that of Murshid (guide), consecutively, with other senior members of the Sufi Movement who were not related to Inayat also playing important roles. This leadership was successful in maintaining the Sufi Movement’s

position, especially in the Netherlands, but in general there was a shortage of charisma and of new initiatives, and few new members joined the Sufi Movement, except when Fazal gathered a distinct hippie following of his own during the period 1967–83. An observer of the 1950 summer school remembers solemn, elderly people in dark clothes,⁷ and observation at the 2012 summer school, when both of the Sufi Movement's joint leaders were in their nineties, suggested that about half of those present were over age sixty, with almost no followers younger than age forty.⁸ By this point the main activity of the Sufi Movement in the Netherlands had become Universal Worship,⁹ the continuing popularity of which was explained by Inayat's nephew Mahmood Khan in terms of the Dutch Calvinist tradition of small and independent "free churches," which made starting one's own church a normal thing to do, and provided a context into which the Church of All fit comfortably.¹⁰ Except during the period of Fazal, discussed below, the Sufi Movement did not make significant changes to the understanding of Sufism that it had inherited.

The effective leader of the Sufi Movement after 1982, and an influential member from the 1950s onwards,¹¹ was Johannes Witteveen. Witteveen had a successful career in Dutch politics, first as minister of finance and deputy prime minister of the Netherlands, and then as head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He made no secret of his allegiance to the Sufi Movement during this career, and held Sufi meetings in Washington, DC while running the IMF, where the other participants ranged from a vice president of the World Bank to a local carpenter.¹² However, it was not until 1995 that he published *Universal Sufism: The Way of Love, Harmony and Beauty* (*Universeel soefisme: de weg van liefde, harmonie en schoonheid*). This book restates the classic argument for the universalism of Sufism, presenting mysticism in perennialist terms and as a tradition that can be traced back to "very ancient times," and then from Egypt through Hermes and the Neoplatonists into Sufism. Witteveen here refers to the conclusions of Reynold A. Nicholson,¹³ whose article Inayat may have read in the New York Public Library in 1912. Beyond this, Witteveen also saw Sufism as the recipient of "religious and mystical influences" from Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Vedantan sources as well as late antique sources, and thus as a comprehensive source from which Inayat was able to "universalize Sufism."¹⁴ Though at the cutting edge of his own field (economics), Witteveen did not refer to more recent Western scholarship in the fields of religious studies or Islamic studies.

Again, except during the period from 1967–83, the Sufi Movement made relatively few changes to the practices that it had inherited. The summer school continued, and still continues today, at the Universel, an impressive "Sufi temple" that was built in the coastal moorland outside Katwijk-aan-See, the Dutch fishing village where Inayat had first held a summer school in 1922.¹⁵ The general tendency of the few changes that were made was that practices that used to be either private or individual became public. Not all practices became public, however, and some, including certain initiations, remained secret.¹⁶ Inayat's cousin Ali Khan, the leader of the Sufi Movement

from 1948 to 1958, made the *dhikr*, which under Inayat had only been only for more senior followers, open to everyone.¹⁷ Later, Inayat's son Hidayat Inayat Khan, who became joint leader with Witteveen of the Sufi Movement in 1988, made breathing exercises, which had previously been private, public.¹⁸ A professional musician for most of his life, Hidayat introduced lots of music, including a sung litany (*wazifa*).¹⁹ He also introduced healing practices.²⁰

Inayat's relations seem to have maintained Islamic practice in their own lives. Ali Khan observed Islam's rules on ritual purity, and encouraged Witteveen to start his showers with the phrase "I purify and revivify in the name of the all-mighty God,"²¹ which in some interpretations of the sharia would constitute making the act of intention that starts ritual purification (*wudu*), and so would leave Witteveen, after his shower, in a state of ritual purity. Musharraf Khan evidently took a slightly different view, as there is an account of a dispute between him and a Dutch follower who maintained that the need for ritual purification had been superseded by the introduction of the shower—a proposition with which Musharraf disagreed.²² Ali Khan also observed the Islamic prohibition on alcohol, once ostentatiously throwing away a cake he had been given which contained rum.²³

The Sufi Movement as a whole, however, remained universalist rather than Islamic. At the 2012 summer school there were no references to Islam, and none of the participants seemed aware that the *dhikr* they were performing had a connection to Islam, or that the movements of the Saum prayer echoed those of the Islamic ritual prayer.²⁴ When the phrase "La ilaha il'Allah" (there is no god but God) was used, it was mispronounced as "La ilaha *il el* Allah," following a transcription error that had crept into the texts of the Sufi Movement at an unknown point.²⁵ The error is obvious to anyone who knows Arabic, but the later leaders and members of the Sufi Movement did not know Arabic.²⁶ The practices discussed by Witteveen in his *Universal Sufism*, described with many long quotations from Inayat, are concentration and contemplation; expansion of consciousness through unlearning and mental purification assisted by initiation and discipleship; overcoming the false ego; and "the mysticism of sound."²⁷ He also discusses healing.²⁸ This is a fair summary of the practices of the Sufi Movement after the 1970s, with the addition of Universal Worship, which Witteveen does not discuss in his book.

SUFI SAM IN SAN FRANCISCO

Samuel Lewis came from a wealthy Jewish background. His father was a vice president of Levi Strauss & Co., and his mother was the daughter of a Rothschild. Born in 1896, he attended the University of California, spent time with the Theosophical Society,²⁹ and read classical nineteenth-century French occultist authors, including Antoine Fabre d'Olivet and Gérard Encausse (Papus),³⁰ to whose Martinist Order René Guénon had

once belonged. In 1919 he met Rabia Martin and became one of the first American members of her Sufi Order.³¹ He was later ordained as a Cherag in the Church of All,³² and had discussions with Inayat Khan during his final visit to America in 1926.³³ Lewis's involvement with the Sufi Movement was thorough, then. It did not, however, end his other interests, and six weeks after meeting Martin, Lewis met Nyogen Senzaki,³⁴ a Japanese Zen teacher, whom he also followed, as he later followed another Japanese Zen teacher, Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki, at the newly opened Buddhist Society of America (now the First Zen Institute of America) in New York.³⁵

Lewis disapproved of what happened within the Sufi Movement after Inayat's death in 1927, and also disapproved of what happened within Rabia's group after her own death in 1947. After the establishment of Sufism Reoriented by Rabia's successor Ivy Duce in 1952, Lewis proceeded independently. He enrolled as a mature student at the College of the Pacific in Stockton, California, where he took classes with Rom Landau, the author of *God is my Adventure*, who had been appointed professor of Islamic Studies there.³⁶ He traveled to Japan, India, and Pakistan in 1956, and then between 1960 and 1962 traveled again in the Muslim world, including Egypt. His travels parallel those of John G. Bennett in Turkey and Syria in search of the sources of Gurdjieff's teaching, but while Bennett spoke fluent Turkish and did his best to maintain his Christian identity, Lewis spoke no language but English and adopted a Muslim identity, using the name Ahmed Murad. He visited Islamic institutions such as the Azhar in Cairo, where he was given books and help in improving his Arabic for prayers,³⁷ and also visited various Sufis. In India in 1956 he visited the Chishti *tariqa*, which he saw as his own *tariqa*, given that he had been initiated by Inayat Khan, himself a Chishti. The Chishtis welcomed him, renewed his initiation, and encouraged him to spread the *tariqa* in the West, or, as Lewis put it rather grandly to a friend, "to represent Chistian Sufism in all non-Islamic lands."³⁸ In Cairo he visited the Shadhali *tariqa* and the Rifai *tariqa*.³⁹ He also had many conversations with Indians, Pakistanis, and Egyptians, especially academics and officials working in the field of foreign cultural relations. There seems to have been some confusion about his status in Egypt, however: as a member of the University of California Alumni Association, he seems to have been taken as the official representative of the University of California, and hence of the United States.⁴⁰

Despite adopting a Muslim identity, Lewis remained a universalist. In India, he visited Hindu temples as well as mosques and Sufi shrines, and chanted to Krishna as well as repeatedly allowing people he met in mosques to convert him to Islam, which he found made them happy.⁴¹ He managed to understand his interlocutors at the Azhar as agreeing with his understanding of Sufism as separate from Islam, as they "distinguish between the pure Islam, worship of Allah; and the so-called 'Islam' which consists of talking about 'Islam' . . . which they regard as a grave detriment to the true faith."⁴² By this, of course, they did not mean that Sufism was separate from "so-called 'Islam,'" but that talking about Islam was not the same as being a good Muslim. In 1965, a year after beginning to take on Sufi disciples of his own, Lewis was proclaimed a "Zen master"

(more a Western than an East Asian term) by Kyung-Bo Seo of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism.⁴³

After leaving the Muslim world and returning to the United States in 1962, Lewis became critical of American and other Muslims for their lack of universalism. His own reading of the Hadith did not confirm the understanding of the Prophet “given us by so-called ‘Muslims,’” as he put it, but rather “confirm[ed] the Universe of Wisdom, Compassion and Love.”⁴⁴ “It is safer to live away from the Islamic countries,” he wrote in 1968, “so that one can accept what Mohammed said and does not have to agree with Ijma-Muslims,”⁴⁵ *ijma* (consensus) here being used to denote the majority of Muslims in the Muslim world, previously referred to as “so-called ‘Muslims.’” Lewis’s approach to Islam echoes Henry Steel Olcott’s approach to Buddhism and Idries Shah’s approach to Sufism as found in the Muslim world—both of which, as already seen, ascribed differences between actual practice and their own conceptions to degenerations in the originals.

Lewis found that interest in Sufism in the US began to increase in 1964, after the publication of Idries Shah’s *The Sufis*.⁴⁶ He began to acquire Sufi disciples himself, starting with one formal *mureed* (disciple) and two other followers in 1964.⁴⁷ In 1966 he acquired his first female *mureed*,⁴⁸ and in 1967 he started a weekly *dhikr*, and soon found he had seventeen *mureeds*.⁴⁹ His group then expanded dramatically. By August 1968 he had sixty *mureeds* and another one hundred followers.⁵⁰ Lewis then introduced a version of Arab clothing, because there was “a revolt against our traditional clothing here.”⁵¹ In addition to wearing his own version of Arab clothing, he also grew his hair and beard long. “The beard has made [me] become very popular; like a hierarch or patriarch,” he wrote to a friend.⁵² He was soon “afraid to admire a girl for the next thing she will be telling him she loves him.”⁵³ By 1970 he had followers in Boston, the Southwest, and London as well as in San Francisco,⁵⁴ and was writing to friends that he had reached the limitations of what he alone could do, even with the assistance of secretaries, and needed some form of organization.⁵⁵ In the event, however, he suffered a severe concussion after falling down a set of stairs in late 1970, and died as a result of this accident early in 1971, at the age of seventy-four. His group was then continued by one of his secretaries, Moineddin Jablonski.

In his lectures and classes between 1966 and 1970, Lewis preached the universalism of the original Sufi Movement. He read the Sufi Movement’s Gathas, teaching them “exactly as both Rabia Martin and Pir-o-Murshid [Inayat] wanted,”⁵⁶ but also spoke freely from his own experience, often stressing the primacy of that personal experience.⁵⁷ He taught two varieties of practice. On the one hand he used the practices he had learned in the Sufi Movement, including the main prayers of Universal Worship. He was faithful to the Sufi Movement even to the extent of teaching his followers the characteristic mispronunciation of “La ilaha il’Allah” as “La ilaha *il el* Allah,”⁵⁸ which suggests that his study of Arabic at the Azhar had been extremely limited. On the other hand, he introduced a very successful new practice, later known as the Dances of Universal Peace.

The Dances of Universal Peace

Originally there was a single Dance of Universal Peace, which Lewis developed in 1964 with the inspiration and perhaps blessing of Ruth St. Denis,⁵⁹ the dancer who had hired Inayat and his relatives as backing musicians in 1911, and who by then was eighty-five years old. To this one dance he then added a series of "Dervish Dances."⁶⁰ A number of further dances were then added, and by 1970 the dances as a whole had become known as the Dances of Universal Peace.⁶¹ These Dances were the Sufi answer to the dances of the Hare Krishna movement, which also became popular at about the same time. The Hare Krishna dancers wore saffron robes and danced in lines along public streets, while Lewis's Sufi dancers wore white robes and danced in circles, sometimes in public parks.⁶² The Hare Krishna movement spread further, but Lewis's dances also spread, and are today performed regularly across the United States and Western Europe, and also sometimes in Russia and Latin America.

The Dances were performed in a circle, accompanied by guitar music, with participants chanting the names or attributes of God taken from the Sufi Movement's *dhikr* and also phrases Lewis remembered from Rifai and Shadhili *dhikrs* he had attended in Cairo.⁶³ Other formulas were then added, following both Lewis's universalism and his interest in interfaith dialogue, especially between Muslims and Jews. The first album released by Lewis's "Sufi Choir," founded in 1969, gives the general flavor of these dances and music. The album starts with a track called "Bismillah" (in the name of God), as any Islamic activity should. It then moves on to the Twenty-Third Psalm ("The Lord is my Shepherd"), which is sung to a chorus of "Allah Hu." Other tracks include the Jewish "Shema" ("Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone") and the Hindu "Sri Ram" ("Beloved Ram, I honor You"). Although many religions are represented in the album, Sufism predominates. The final tracks include "Turning" and "Rumi Blues."⁶⁴

Ruth St. Denis is the standard acknowledged inspiration behind the Dances. A second inspiration, acknowledged by Lewis in letters to friends, was Fabre d'Olivet,⁶⁵ whom Lewis had read in the 1920s, and who wrote on the "moral effects" of ancient music and the incapacity of modern Western music to reproduce them.⁶⁶ A third possible inspiration is the round dance of the Hasidim, the Jewish movement of eighteenth-century central European origin that is quite distinct from the Egyptian Hasidism of the sons of Maimonides, but also resembles Sufism in some ways. Lewis was on good terms with a Hasidic rabbi, Schlomo Carlebach, who was then using music and dance to reach out to Jewish hippies in San Francisco. Lewis acknowledged the influence of Hasidic dance.⁶⁷

Followers

Lewis's lectures and the Dances primarily attracted young people, eager to listen and learn. He was especially successful in the Haight-Ashbury district,⁶⁸ and remarked that there was no point in trying to convince anybody over age thirty-five.⁶⁹ He also thought

that “the use of psychedelics has awakened [people] to the realities beyond the senses, and they seek either the ‘opiate’ state or the realities beyond,”⁷⁰ which in some cases was probably true. He found that people often gave up the use of “artificial drugs” in favor of Sufi “spiritual activities.”⁷¹

Lewis’s lectures were countercultural, and thus well suited to his audience. On the one hand, he spoke positively of universalism, Sufism, Zen, and the East. On the other hand, he was severely critical of the West and the Western establishment. He spoke angrily of priests’ “sanctimoniousness,” and he denigrated American academia, which he saw as inhabited by so-called experts who were generally either Europeans or Zionists, understood nothing of the reality of Sufism or Islam, and abused their positions of authority to prevent others from understanding anything either.⁷²

Lewis and Academia

Lewis’s focus on academia seems to have dated from an instruction by Inayat Khan in 1926 to spread the Sufi message in American universities,⁷³ a task that was unsuccessful—which is unsurprising, given the inherent incompatibility between academia’s methods and interests and the methods and interests of Inayat Khan and Lewis. He especially disliked Rom Landau, with whom he had clashed in class during the 1950s, and who had then excluded him from subsequent classes.⁷⁴ This evidently rankled, as Landau is referred to in very negative terms in seven separate letters written in 1960. He is criticized for writing about Sufism on the basis not of real personal experience, but on the basis of reading Ibn Arabi, who “does not tell about what people think and how they think any more than Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus reveal American thought,” and is also criticized for writing about Ibn Arabi in the first place without having had any “training in Sufism.”⁷⁵ This is somewhat ironic, as Landau had not followed the standard philological path to becoming a scholar of Islam, and knew Islam primarily from many years spent in Morocco. It is also ironic because Lewis himself, in a slightly different context, rejected “what people think and how they think” as “ijma-Islam,” a less true Islam than his own understanding of Islam. His own understanding of Islam derived ultimately from Western and written sources, which he criticized Landau for using. He himself rejected “what people think,” which he criticized Landau for knowing too little about.

Lewis was, however, pleased to find things changing in academia, and that there were some scholars whom he could respect. He was especially an admirer of Huston Smith and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, both followers of Frithjof Schuon and the Traditionalist movement. Lewis knew of this movement’s existence, as he was a reader of the Traditionalist journal *Studies in Comparative Religion*.⁷⁶ He thought that Nasr, Titus Burckhardt, René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, and the other Traditionalists “give us the most profound literature of the times.”⁷⁷ He understood Traditionalism as fully compatible with his own

approach, and thought in 1970 that he should “coalesce . . . with the work of Dr. Nasr.”⁷⁸ This never happened, because of Lewis’s death, and would in fact have been impossible anyway. As Lewis rightly noted after Nasr had declined to participate in a project for a “Temple of Understanding,” “each [group] . . . has a particular and sometimes quite narrow view, of universality.”⁷⁹ Traditionalist perennialism was more different from his own universalism than Lewis realized.

Lewis and Other Sufis

Lewis was also aware of the other parts of the Western Sufi milieu. He had no respect for the leadership of the Sufi Movement in the Netherlands or for Fazal Inayat-Khan (discussed below). He detested Meher Baba.⁸⁰ He was neutral about Gurdjieff, whose teachers he described as “non-existing Sufis.”⁸¹ At first he had a positive view of Idries Shah,⁸² but then changed his mind, deciding that Shah “mystif[ies] everything and ha[s] all the great Sufis in inaccessible places,” ignoring contemporary Sufis who were easily accessible.⁸³ Lewis was also initially critical of Vilayat Inayat Khan (discussed below), whom he at first thought did not “recognize any of the Dervish Orders and they do not particularly recognize him. He goes around . . . spreading about his father.”⁸⁴ The criticisms levied at Shah and Vilayat are very similar: they are not connected to the Sufi *tariqas* in the Muslim world; and they are not connected to the Islamic Sufi milieu that Lewis himself had visited.

In 1968, however, Lewis revised his opinion of Vilayat after meeting him, and decided to accept his supreme authority.⁸⁵ In 1970 he and Vilayat coordinated summer camps.⁸⁶ Lewis’s group retained its own identity, however, and after 1968 sometimes used a distinct name, Islamiyya Ruhaniat Society (Islamic Spirituality Society, though the Arabic does not work grammatically),⁸⁷ as Lewis felt the term “Sufi” was being overused by too many disparate groups.⁸⁸ The relationship between Lewis and Vilayat was not always comfortable,⁸⁹ and would probably not have endured. In the event Jablonski formally separated from Vilayat’s Sufi Order International in 1977, replacing “Islamiyya” with “Sufi” in the group’s name. It is now called Sufi Ruhaniat International.

After Lewis

Sufi Ruhaniat International and the Dances of Universal Peace continued to expand under Jablonski. Between 1972 and 1976, the Sufi Choir became something of a Californian institution, especially after it was invited to play at Governor Jerry Brown’s election victory party in 1974 and at the governor’s annual prayer breakfast in 1976.⁹⁰ Governor Brown was also a reader of Idries Shah.⁹¹

Sufi Ruhaniat International is now entirely universalist. Most members have no idea of the Islamic origins of their practice, or even of the meaning of the words they

chant during the Dances of Universal Peace. During the European Sufi Ruhaniat summer school in 2012, one group leader mistranslated the Arabic “Allahu ahad” (“God is One,” a well-known Quranic phrase) as “Divinity is eternal,” and another leader described what were actually the words of the Islamic Confession of Faith (*shahada*) as “a very ancient Ismaili *dhikr*.”⁹² Members of Sufi Ruhaniat today show great respect for “Murshid Sam,” Ruth St. Denis, and Inayat Khan, but are mostly interested in very generic spirituality.

VILAYAT AND THE SUFI ORDER INTERNATIONAL

Inayat Khan’s son Vilayat Inayat Khan, who started to take followers of his own in 1951 at the age of thirty-five, broke formally with the Sufi Movement in 1956, and founded the Sufi Order International in 1968.⁹³ This still exists today. It is based in the US, and is active worldwide.

Events during the Second World War distanced Vilayat from the leadership of the main European organization of the Sufi Movement in the Netherlands, which was separated by the German occupation from Inayat’s children, who spent the war in England. Vilayat served in the Royal Navy, and his sister Noor served in the Special Operations Executive. She was captured by the Germans on a mission inside occupied France in 1943, and executed in the Dachau concentration camp in 1944.⁹⁴

After the war Vilayat, who was not on good terms with his uncle Ali Khan,⁹⁵ who had succeeded to the leadership of the Sufi Movement in 1948, worked in various jobs, and traveled widely, spending time in Greece at the Orthodox monastic community on Mount Athos,⁹⁶ and in India with the Chishti *tariqa*.⁹⁷ He visited the United States during the summers of 1946 and 1947, and delivered a few lectures on each occasion.⁹⁸

The breach between Vilayat and the Sufi Movement does not seem to have had any consequences until 1967, when Vilayat returned to the US and delivered lectures that were rather more successful than those of the 1940s; these lectures became more frequent, especially in 1975–76.⁹⁹ The increased interest in Sufism in the US from which Lewis benefitted, then, also benefitted Vilayat. In 1968 he announced the establishment of the Sufi Order International,¹⁰⁰ and as already noted, he became the official leader of the group led by Lewis, which gave him a further base in the United States.

Vilayat attracted a respectable following to his annual European summer school (called a “youth camp”), held sometimes in the Swiss Alps and sometimes in the French Alps. During the 1970s it was generally attended by two or three hundred people. Vilayat lived in a cave, and his followers stayed in tents, among spectacular scenery. Lectures and dances were interspersed with walks in the mountains.¹⁰¹

In addition to the European summer school and some American summer schools, in 1975 Vilayat established a “community” called “The Abode of the Message” at New

Lebanon, New York, a secluded location twenty-five miles southeast of Albany. The term “community” was preferred to “commune,” as Sufis were not hippies and did not take drugs, explained a Californian Sufi and physician to a reporter from the local newspaper.¹⁰² The “community,” however, had something in common with the many communes and alternative communities that were then being established across the US and Western Europe. Some thirty Sufis started the day with mediation at 6 a.m., met again for more mediation at noon, and ended the day with a final mediation session at 6 p.m.¹⁰³ Different Sufis did different jobs, and some worked on establishing a commercial bakery. Others restored the dilapidated property they had bought. A journalist noted two female Sufis repointing the brickwork in the kitchen, while two male Sufis shredded cabbage for lunch.¹⁰⁴

Vilayat dressed in Indian robes and wore a *sibha* around his neck as Inayat had, but his identity and teaching were universalist rather than Islamic. His teachings differed from the norm of the Sufi Movement, in that his emphases were especially on meditation, consciousness, Buddhism, and yoga. Sufism became not so much the essence of all religions, as one approach among many:

In Sufism, and this is also true of Vedanta, all is one. So you cannot say that the divine consciousness is looking through your eyes. Your glance is the divine glance that has become focalized. That's the way of thinking in terms of unity. And you see that it's a more advanced way of thinking. . . . So Buddha says, when consciousness has been carried beyond the point where it is a personal consciousness, that is the state of awakening. And the Sufis would call it God consciousness. So at this point, what Sufism is saying and what Buddhism is saying is exactly the same, except using different words.¹⁰⁵

Quantitative analysis of three books of Vilayat's lectures published more or less evenly over his career—in 1974, 1984, and 1999¹⁰⁶—indicates a greater use of key terms from Buddhism and Hinduism than from Islam. In both the 1974 and 1984 books there were more references to meditation than to any other practice, though in the 1999 book there were slightly more references to *dhikr* than to meditation. In all three books, there were many references to breath, *chakras* (nodes), and *samadhi* (an ultimate meditative state), which are Hindu or Buddhist, rather than Islamic, concepts. At the Abode of the Message, each day's mediation was themed after a particular religion. Friday was Islamic, Saturday Jewish, and Sunday Christian. This left Monday for Buddhism, Tuesday for Hinduism, and Wednesday for Zoroastrianism. Thursday was for Sufism,¹⁰⁷ again given the status more of a religion in its own right than as the essence of all religions.

Quantitative analysis of the same three books indicates a greater use of nondenominational than of denominational terms. The single most frequently used term was “consciousness.” Other frequently used terms were “spiritual,” “reality,” “cosmic,” “love,” and “energy.” In this mode, Vilayat can be hard to place within any tradition. For example:

Now supposing that I, instead of contacting the physical universe through my senses, which . . . limits . . . my experience to the vantage point, supposing that I were to experience the universe beyond my senses . . . [If] I would get into the consciousness of the trees and the rocks and the animals and the people. Then imagine how different the universe would look.¹⁰⁸

Vilayat died in 2004, and was succeeded by one of his sons, Zia, whose preparation for his future post included a PhD from the Department of Religion at Duke University. His dissertation was titled “A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: The Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan”; I have referenced it frequently in this book. Since 2004, Zia has successfully taken the Sufi Order International in new directions that fall beyond the scope of this chapter.

FAZAL AND MYSTICAL WARFARE

As has been noted, the period 1967 to 1983 was an exception to the general rule that the Sufi Movement was conservative and acquired few new followers. In 1967, following the death of Inayat’s youngest brother Musharaff, leadership of the Sufi Movement passed to Inayat’s grandson Fazal Inayat-Khan, who was then twenty-five, partly because no other suitable relative of Inayat was available, and partly because it was hoped that a young leader might reinvigorate the movement.¹⁰⁹ The expectation was that Fazal would do this while following the advice of senior members of the movement,¹¹⁰ but this did not happen. Fazal had left home at the age of sixteen and moved to the US, where he studied psychology and worked as a computer programmer.¹¹¹ He later compared computer programming to meditation,¹¹² and developed an interest in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), a therapeutic school developed during the 1970s by an assistant professor in the linguistics faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz named John Grinder, and a Gestalt psychologist, Richard Bandler. Although criticized by mainstream psychologists,¹¹³ NLP remains popular among alternative practitioners. Fazal worked as an NLP trainer and psychotherapist under the pseudonym “Frank Kevlin,” and was instrumental in the foundation of the British Association for Neuro Linguistic Programming (now the Neurolinguistic Psychotherapy and Counseling Association).¹¹⁴ He was also on the board of the Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners.¹¹⁵

Fazal determined that he should “achieve [his] own independent realization, free from the establishment of the movement which [Inayat] left and the imperfection of . . . his highly edited talks.”¹¹⁶ He was right that Inayat’s talks had been heavily edited, but his own “independent realization” owed much to the spirit of his own times and to the hippie movement. He echoed Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard and Idries Shah in defining Sufism as “an approach to life, a way of life” and Shah and Gurdjieff in defining it as “a call, a cry to awaken . . . a cry to the genes of your consciousness, to the chromosomal

activity of your mind, of your being, to awake, and live.” Sufism was something that helped “to unload the weight, the gravity of fear and attachment, bringing you to a transcendent freedom.”¹¹⁷

Fazal’s conception of freedom involved, among other things, breaking with the past in three areas: the socio-economic system, the family system, and the educational system. “The four-wall family system,” wrote Fazal, “is the symbol of the neurosis in which . . . people have grown up to be afraid to be free.” Thus “the teaching that the Sufi Message brings is freedom and equality of male and female . . . a completely new and different family system.”¹¹⁸ Fazal proposed on another occasion that “sex should be free, that people should searchingly engage in it and find a real companionship, and that this engagement should be entirely sexual first, and not second.” To this he added some suggestions about sexual positions, supplying enough detail for his advice to be easy to apply in practice. On the equally topical question of drugs, Fazal refused to commit himself, save to condemn excessive use, and to stress that the states induced by LSD were temporary, while true spiritual states were more lasting.¹¹⁹

Fazal maintained the established practices of the Sufi Movement, including initiation, Universal Worship and ordination into the Church of All, and giving “Sufi” (Islamic) names to his followers¹²⁰—although sometimes he also undermined these practices, for example by replacing the name “Allah” in the litany (*wazifa*) with meaningless terms like the number 1600.¹²¹ He added, however, new practices of his own. NLP therapy proceeds on the understanding that a person “already has the answers and solutions within their own system,” and attempts “to enable the client to discover the inner structure that is generating the presenting problem.”¹²² In a similar spirit, Fazal attempted to penetrate the inner structures of his followers, using techniques such as “mystical warfare” and “chillas,” or difficult tasks assigned to his followers (*chilla* is the Persian/Urdu word for a spiritual retreat).

“Mystical warfare” involved complicated role-playing with rewards for betrayal as well as for loyalty.¹²³ One follower believed that “shocks and surprises” had been used as “methods of awakening” by the Naqshbandiyya Khalidiyya in the thirteenth century.¹²⁴ Although the Naqshbandiyya Khalidiyya actually dates to the eighteenth century, other branches of the Naqshbandiyya did exist in the thirteenth century, but there is no evidence of the use of shocks or surprises, though there were probably *chillas* in the sense of retreats. Fazal’s chillas are in fact reminiscent of the “discomfiting” element of the Gurdjieff Work, though there is no known connection between Fazal and the Gurdjieff teaching. One follower described them as “inductive tasks designed to bring about significant internal change and shifts in consciousness.”¹²⁵ Again, the emphasis is on consciousness. Sometimes followers were given relatively simple tasks, such as fetching markers from trees,¹²⁶ but sometimes the tasks were more difficult, as when Fazal instructed everyone to adjust their rhythm by one hour each day until day and night had swapped places,¹²⁷ or paired people who disliked each other for particular tasks.¹²⁸ In general he “meddled in everyone’s . . . relationships,

upsetting the balance and peace, playing the magician or musician.”¹²⁹ Chillas were sometimes extremely difficult, as when one follower was told to spend three days alone in the open landscape without money or food,¹³⁰ and another was told to drive from Europe to Ghana.¹³¹ One follower’s chilla led him to set another follower’s hair on fire.¹³²

Mystical warfare and the chillas did not appeal to the older generation of followers of the Sufi Movement.¹³³ Mystical warfare, the chillas, and Fazal himself did, however, appeal to the postwar generation of hippies who, especially after 1970, gathered at Four Winds, Fazal’s Sufi commune in Dockenfield, a small village near Farnham, Surrey, in England, and at Fazal’s Sufi Cultural Centre in Stratford, London.¹³⁴ Young people from Europe, the US, and other English-speaking countries moved to Four Winds, sometimes staying for several years, working in various ways to support the community, engaging in mystical warfare and chillas, and moving to Katwijk-aan-See in the Netherlands for the summer school.¹³⁵ Katwijk-aan-See was a conservative community that was shocked by the activities of Fazal’s strangely dressed followers, and on one occasion when mystical warfare moved from the Universel to the town itself, Fazal’s Sufis were followed by the police.¹³⁶ Young participants later remembered Four Winds and their time with Fazal as “exalted places of (ir)reality and rebellion . . . mystical games—bliss and pain,”¹³⁷ and as “intense, exciting, sometimes mind-blowing and shocking.”¹³⁸ Older followers of the Sufi Movement, though, seem to have found these activities primarily shocking, and were also unhappy about Fazal’s numerous children by different women.¹³⁹

As well as losing the respect of most of the older members of the Sufi Movement, Fazal also got into repeated financial difficulties, and solving his financial problems seems to have been the basis of the agreement between him and Witteveen in about 1982 which led to him and his followers leaving the Sufi Movement to form a separate organization, the Sufi Way.¹⁴⁰ The Sufi Way still exists, and is active mostly in England and the United States, despite the early death of Fazal in 1990.



THE SUFI MOVEMENT and its offshoots were not the only Western Sufi groups to respond to the new age. Two other Sufi groups of the period also catered to the hippie generation and established communities resembling communes. In contrast to the Sufi Movement and its offshoots, however, both of these other, separate groups moved toward Islam, rather than away from it. One was an entirely new group: an English branch of the Moroccan Darqawiyya *tariqa* that was established in London after 1968 by a Scot, Ian Dallas, later known as Abdalqadir al-Sufi. Dallas had no connection with the interwar Sufi milieu, and was neither a universalist nor a perennialist. He became a Muslim before he became a Sufi. His Darqawiyya was thus both a phenomenon of the new age and more closely aligned with Sufism as found in the Muslim world than any other Western Sufi group. Its foundation thus marked an entirely new phase in the history of Western Sufism. The other group to respond to the new age derived from Vilayat's Sufi Order, and after 1973 developed under the influence of a Turkish exile, Bülent Rauf, into the Beshara School, a group with a strong focus on Ibn Arabi, if not on Islam.

The Darqawiyya is unique in the history of the early development of Western Sufism not only because of its origins and its emphasis on Islam, but also because, in the late 1970s, it developed both a political program that in theory promoted jihad, and an organization to prepare for jihad, called the Murabitun. In practice, however, the Murabitun ended up promoting not violence, but classic Islamic scholarship. It is still too early to know for certain, but the promotion of classic Islamic scholarship in the West have been one of the most important contributions that Western Sufism has made to the development of global Islam.

IAN DALLAS AND THE DARQAWIYYA

Ian Dallas was born in Ayr, Scotland in 1930, and after studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, embarked on a career in drama and television. His second play, *The Face of Love*, won him a contract with the British state broadcasting service, the BBC, where he worked until the mid-1960s,¹ writing the scripts for three television series and a number of stand-alone plays,² as well as acting in a minor part in Federico Fellini's film, *8½* (1963).³

Dallas's intellectual interests outside television and drama were not religious but philosophical (he especially appreciated Heidegger), and the doubts that disturbed him were not religious but political. He had always been suspicious of the system he lived in, and had once helped persuade a friend at the BBC, James Mossman, to ask British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, on air, "what in fact he believed in, what were the moral imperatives that drove his social pragmatism" (the question helped end Mossman's career as a political journalist). Dallas's political disenchantment was completed by a friendship that developed during a visit to America with Lillian Hellman,⁴ the playwright known for *The Little Foxes* (1939) and *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), and whose career suffered severely from her 1952 clash with the McCarthyite House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

Dallas's political reorientation was cemented by the work of Ernst Jünger and Hilaire Belloc.⁵ Jünger was the German author of the bestselling novel *Storm of Steel* (*In Stahlgewittern*), which has since become something of a cult classic among those who criticize contemporary Western societies from the right. It is the mirror image of the classic antiwar novel, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts Neues*). Instead of exploring the horror of war, *Storm of Steel* explores its glory, and the exultation that war can produce. It portrays a way of living that is markedly different from modern everyday life. It inspired many Nazis, but Jünger himself was, if anything, an opponent of Nazism.

The Anglo-French Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc, in contrast, is now generally remembered only for his humorous *Cautionary Tales for Children*, which remains extremely popular in Britain, but he also wrote on history and politics. One of his earliest political positions was to oppose the Boer War and the role he believed "cosmopolitan finance" had played in starting it. Two terms in the British Parliament as an MP for the Liberal Party turned him into a radical critic of the system, and especially of the role played by party funding.⁶ After leaving Parliament, he used his experience as the basis of a series of articles in the progressive magazine *The New Age* on "The Party System," which, he argued, operated to promote the interests of finance and business, not of electors or working people.⁷ In *The Servile State* (1912), he went further, warning that capitalism and party democracy were together producing

“the re-establishment of slavery.”⁸ *The Servile State* was widely read during the inter-war period.

In 1911 and 1912 Belloc was primarily interested in exposing the failings of capitalist parliamentary democracy. After the First World War, when capitalist parliamentary democracy was widely accepted to be in crisis and there was much support for alternative systems such as Communism or Fascism, Belloc proposed an alternative to capitalist parliamentary democracy. This was the re-establishment of personal rule (“monarchy”) and of pre-capitalist society, including its original Catholic base:

We have reached at last . . . a state of society which cannot endure and a dissolution of standards, a melting of the spiritual framework, such that the body politic fails . . . Our European structure, built upon the noble foundations of classical antiquity, was formed through, exists by, is consonant to, and will stand only in the mold of, the Catholic Church. Europe will return to the Faith, or she will perish.⁹

There is something of the anti-modernism of Albert-Eugène de Pouvoirville and René Guénon to Belloc. Pouvoirville and Guénon were, of course, writing in the same period.

Dallas agreed with Belloc, up to a point:

It was clear to me that for the success of the Belloc doctrines, the presentation of True Religion had to be sound and unshakeable in its fundamental precepts. Tragically, for Europe, Catholicism was a failed theology. It was this realisation which brought me as a beggar to the door of Islam.¹⁰

Why Dallas selected Islam as a replacement for the failed theology of Catholicism is not clear, but Belloc may have contributed to this choice, as he wrote approvingly of Islam as a religion that had not been corrupted by modernity and capitalism.¹¹ Dallas produced his last television play, an adaptation of Mikhail Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time*, in 1966,¹² and travelled to Morocco, where in 1967 he converted to Islam.¹³ He took the name Abdalqadir (Abd al-Qadir).

Dallas’s conversion to Islam for political reasons is not unprecedented. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, who as we saw in an earlier chapter objected that Inayat Khan’s Sufi Movement did not accept the *Qur’an* as God’s final revelation, had become convinced of the truth of Islam during the 1890s for what might be called religious reasons. He then formally converted to Islam in 1917 for reasons that were at least partly political, in response to the anti-Islamic positions that became widespread in Britain during the First World War.¹⁴ Ivan Aguéli’s conversion to Islam may also have had political motives: he was certainly committed to radical political causes. René Guénon’s Islam reflected not only his appreciation of Sufism, but also his rejection of contemporary French modernity—a rejection that was in some ways inherently political. Conversion is a complex phenomenon, and political motivations may be more common than thought.

The year following his conversion, Dallas returned to Morocco with a friend from London, Rufus Bewley, whose parents had been followers of the Gurdjieff movement and of John G. Bennett, which contributed to his interest in spiritual matters.¹⁵ This was Dallas's only connection to interwar Western Sufism, and a very weak one at that. Bewley converted to Islam in Fez, taking the name Abdalhaqq (Abd al-Haqq), and the two friends then moved on, looking for a Sufi shaykh. They were recommended to Muhammad Ibn al-Habib of the Darqawiyya *tariqa*, in Meknès. They caught up with him in Casablanca, and joined the Darqawiyya.¹⁶ Abdalqadir soon after wrote *The Book of Strangers*, which portrays his experience of living with other Darqawis in the *zawiya*, learning to do the litany (*wird*) and the *dhikr*, learning to live more simply, and also learning to control his *nafs*.¹⁷ It is an excellent account of the spiritual transformation at the beginning of the Sufi path.

After some time, Abdalqadir returned to London. Abdalhaqq also returned to London, but then went back to Meknès, remaining in the *zawiya* until al-Habib's death in 1972, when he too moved back to London.¹⁸

Bristol Gardens

A group of followers gathered around Abdalqadir on his return to London, often from the musical and artistic worlds in which he had, as Ian Dallas, been well known. They included Mike Evans, Roger Powell, and Ian Whiteman from the mod band The Action (later the psychedelic rock band Mighty Baby),¹⁹ Richard Thompson from the band Fairport Convention,²⁰ the American Beat poet Daniel Moore (who had met Abdalqadir during a visit to Berkeley, California), and the English photographer Peter Sanders. Eric Clapton did not join the Darqawiyya, but was given a translation of Nizami's *Layla and Majnun* by Abdalqadir. This classic tragic tale of constant but unfulfilled love gave rise to one of the most successful popular songs of the period, Clapton's "Layla."²¹

In about 1972, Abdalqadir established a Darqawi community in London with Abdalhaqq and his other followers, famous and less famous alike. They took over some houses in Bristol Gardens, a street scheduled for redevelopment that also housed a variety of hippies.²² They tried to recreate the Moroccan *zawiya* that Abdalqadir and Abdalhaqq had known, even to the extent of wearing Moroccan *jellabas* (gowns) and sitting on the floor. At one point the use of modern innovations such as electricity was banned.²³ Abdalqadir spoke of the mysteries of creation and the importance of the Unseen, and the community prayed together, recited the long *wird* (litany) of the Darqawiyya, and performed a powerful *dhikr*.²⁴

Members of the community supported themselves in various ways. Some worked as painters and decorators.²⁵ The three musicians from Mighty Baby got together with two other musicians to form a group called Habibiyya, and released one Sufi album, "If Man but Knew." This was based on the *qasidas* (poems) chanted in the Darqawi *zawiya*, backed by an unusual mixture of instruments that produced a somewhat Indian sound. The musicians prepared for their recording by fasting and prayer.²⁶ The back of the album cover

showed them wearing turbans and, for the one woman, a hijab, but did not give their Muslim names.²⁷ Richard Thompson and his wife Linda recorded the album *Pour Down Like Silver*.²⁸ They used only Western instruments and styles, but their lyrics followed in an ancient Sufi tradition, using images of wine, love, and intoxication that could be understood in either profane or spiritual senses. Again the artists were shown in turban and hijab.²⁹ Neither of these albums seems to have had a great impact, certainly not in comparison to “Layla” (which was, of course, purely secular) or even the Californian Sufi Choir. One participant later recalled that Bristol Gardens “had much more to do with students’ revolution in Paris” than with anything else, and was “a sort of Islamized version of new left politics and philosophy.”³⁰ It was, indeed, political in the way that other alternative communities of the period were. It was, however, definitely Islamic. Over following decades, as we will see, the Islamic emphasis strengthened, and the hippie overtones vanished.

Norfolk

In about 1976, the Darqawis left London to establish a community in northern Norfolk, where they bought a large house, Wood Dalling Hall, and a farm. This community grew to include some two hundred families, supported in part by donations from the Muslim world. Practical difficulties, however, arose. Moroccan dress fell by the wayside, followed by the turban. Home schooling was tried, but after some time was also abandoned, and families started to send their children to local schools.³¹ Finally, it had to be accepted that the Wood Dalling Hall community had failed. People began to leave, and those who remained returned to urban life in the Norfolk city of Norwich. A disused school hall there had been bought in 1977 with funds from a charitable foundation and transformed into a mosque,³² and this became the new center of Darqawi community life, though also open to non-Darqawis for prayers. In 2006, there were about 150 Darqawis living in Norwich.³³

One person who did not follow Abdalqadir to Wood Dalling Hall was a British Muslim of South Asian origin, Ziauddin Sardar, who was at first very impressed by “the lyrical power” of *The Book of Strangers* and by the Bristol Gardens community.³⁴ He had watched as Abdalqadir seemed to become more and more the absolute master of his community, a pattern that he had also noticed with other such groups elsewhere. He began to identify a “guru syndrome” whereby “mysticism lured eager souls” but then “their physical world became circumscribed by the diktats of the guru.” This, he thought, was a problem with mysticism itself.³⁵ He instead embarked on a long career as an author and a self-described “skeptical Muslim.”³⁶

IBN ARABI AND BESHARA

The final Sufi group that established a commune during the new age was the Beshara School, a name derived from the Arabic *bishara*, “good news.” This was originally

established by a follower of Vilayat Inayat Khan, Reshad Feild, who as Tim Feild had been one of the two guitarists who backed an iconic English singer of the period, Dusty Springfield. Feild's community at Swyre Farm in Gloucestershire, England, initially resembled Vilayat's commune at New Lebanon, New York. Rabbis, Christian priests, and druids were invited to the dedication of its meditation center, a ceremony that involved readings from St. Augustine and the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Quran and Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.³⁷ It gradually became more Islamic, however, under the influence of Muhammad Ali Bülent Rauf Bey. "Bey" is an Ottoman title comparable to the "Sir" used by British knights.

Rauf was a playboy fallen on hard times. He was born in Istanbul and educated there at the elite Robert College, and then moved to Cairo, where he married Princess Faiza, the sister of Egypt's King Farouk. Rauf and Faiza together made a considerable splash, both in Egypt and abroad, to the extent that their extravagance attracted the disapproval of the king,³⁸ who was not himself known for restraint. After Farouk's forced abdication in 1952, Rauf moved to Paris, where he and Faiza quickly ran through the little money they had been able to take with them into exile, and where their marriage collapsed. Faiza moved to America,³⁹ and Rauf moved around Europe for some years, finally ending up sleeping in the living room of a former Egyptian diplomat and courtier, himself in exile in Germany.⁴⁰ From Germany he moved to England, where he took a job in a high-end London jewelers shop, putting to use the excellent knowledge of jewels that he had acquired in happier times. He then married Angela Culme-Seymour, a previously much-married English society figure, and met Feild, who invited him to address his followers.⁴¹

Under Rauf, Feild's followers focused increasingly on Ibn Arabi, whose work Rauf knew, even though his life had not previously focused much on spiritual matters. The key text was *The Twenty-nine Pages*, Rauf's adaptation of part of a 1939 book by an Egyptian scholar, Abul Ela Afffi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Dīn-Ibnul Arabī*. This was a revised version of Afffi's PhD thesis, done at Cambridge under Reynold Nicholson.⁴² Afffi followed Nicholson's lead in understanding Ibn Arabi as a pantheist, and as the heir to the Hermetic philosophy of late antiquity and to the body of work known as the Arabic Plotinus.⁴³ Rauf edited out Afffi's references to pantheism, but retained the basic understanding of Ibn Arabi as a Hermetic Neoplatonist.⁴⁴ For Rauf, Ibn Arabi was the source of "intensive esoteric education,"⁴⁵ and Beshara did not understand itself as Islamic, or even as Sufi.⁴⁶ Ibn Arabi's understanding of the esoteric, however, is Islamic as well as emanationist, and Islam can also be discerned behind some of the practices at Beshara, which followed Rauf after 1973, when a conflict developed between him and Feild, who left Beshara and moved to America.⁴⁷

An anthropologist, Frank Musgrove, provided an anonymized account of what is almost certainly Beshara, which he understood as a Sufi commune, as it was in late 1974.⁴⁸ He described a combination of an experiment in communal living for the new age, syncretic religious practice, and the serious study of Ibn Arabi. With regard to the new age, some residents were taking career breaks, but others were exploring new ways of

living. One explained that “the transformation of society that is taking place” involved a “right-angled turn” and that this was being done in different ways in different places: in European, Catholic countries there was Marxism, while in “Protestant-positivist societies” like the US and England there were hippies and experimentation: “And so Sufism really coheres in my mind with Marxism.”⁴⁹ This resident of Swyre Farm, then, agreed with the resident of Bristol Gardens who spoke of the interplay of Islam, leftist politics, and philosophy—and both might also have found common ground with Aguéli and his anarchist friends in late nineteenth-century Paris. Another resident explained to Musgrove that she had given up her job as a special education teacher after attending a lecture on Zen where the lecturer said that, “if what you’re doing doesn’t feel right for you, you should stop doing it.” After traveling to Turkey and seeing what she called the “whirling Dervishes,” she had found her way to Swyre Farm. “There’s so much wrong with education and society,” she explained, “but you can’t change it all overnight. You’ve got to start somewhere—like here. Even a few people who come to know themselves can have an effect.”⁵⁰ For her too, then, the political and the spiritual were connected.

Practice at Swyre Farm included elements of Islamic origin such as ritual ablutions, the chanting of the name “Hu,” and fasting, and elements probably derived from the Sufi Movement’s Universal Worship such as “meditation” in a “temple” that started with bowing to an altar and lighting a candle.⁵¹ Another account suggests that practice later became more Islamic, with meals starting with the *bismala* (dedication to God), though in English rather than Arabic, no pork or garlic (which some pious Muslims also avoid), and *dhikr* at the end of the day, as well as ablutions upon waking in the morning.⁵²

Musgrove discusses the sociology of Beshara. He distinguishes between short-term visitors and longer-term residents, and uses Irving Goffman’s understanding of one variety of social life in terms of “front,” “backstage” and “team” to identify the invisible team that was actually running the commune, and to note that backstage tensions were invisible to the front-stage audience of visitors.⁵³ Beshara, he stresses, was not divided from society in general, but rather was well integrated into it. In contrast to sociological literature on American communes that suggested that the model of the commune was the frontier community, he suggested that the model of Beshara was the English “public school” (elite private school), a model that the Beshara residents replicated very easily, as so many of them were products of the English public-school system, though there were also people from other social backgrounds and other countries. Socioeconomically, Beshara residents tended toward the wealthy and well-educated: Beshara was “high status marginality.”⁵⁴ Beshara’s socioeconomic profile was probably the norm for Western Sufi groups of the period, in the US as well as in England, though it is only for Beshara in 1974 that we have a contemporary report.

The Beshara School, first developed by Feild within the context of Vilayat Inayat Khan’s Sufi Order International, developed under Rauf into a forum for the promotion of a form of Islamic Neoplatonism. It still exists today as a school of Ibn Arabi, based in Scotland rather than Gloucestershire, and was a key force behind the establishment in

1977 of the Ibn Arabi Society, an important organization that is also still active. With the Besahara School and the Ibn Arabi Society, Western Sufism returned to the original theological roots of Sufism in Arab Neoplatonism.

THE MURABITUN AND SUFI JIHAD

The Darqawiyya of Bristol Gardens and Wood Dalling Hall ultimately owed its existence to Abdalqadir's political views, which were what had attracted him to Islam in the first place, but did not reflect those views. Politics, however, became important again in the late 1970s, and it has been suggested that this new emphasis was one reason why many early members of the group left it.⁵⁵ In 1978 Abdalqadir published a short booklet entitled *Jihad: A Ground Plan*, in which he lamented the absence of any truly Islamic societies beyond a few "Sufic enclaves,"⁵⁶ and called for jihad to establish an Islamic society, and for the training of *murabitun*, frontier warriors, to carry out that jihad—in effect, as a revolutionary vanguard, though he did not use that term. *Jihad: A Ground Plan* is a truly radical work, and if published in the 2010s might well have landed its author in jail. The late 1970s, however, were a period in which there were many explorations of political and social alternatives, as Musgrove's informants at Swyre Farm illustrated, and also a period in which Western fear of Islam was at a low point. Abdalqadir's *Ground Plan* never led to any actual violence, so far as is known.

The basic argument of *Jihad: A Ground Plan* was that the true Islamic society was the original Muslim community that followed the Prophet in Medina, and that this original Islamic community was destroyed first by the Muslims themselves, then by the modern West, and finally by the infidel (*kafir*) rulers of the states of the Muslim world. The way to re-establish this true Islamic society was what Abdalqadir called "the Ribat model,"⁵⁷ a *ribat* being a fort or outpost such as was used during the conquest of territories in North and West Africa. A *murabit* is one who dwells in a *ribat*, and by implication lives an exemplary religious life. This is how the term acquired the colloquial sense it has in northwest Africa, where it denotes a Sufi shaykh or a dervish, and is rendered as *marabout* in French ("marabout" is also used in English). The first organized group to be called the Murabitun was an eleventh-century Moroccan reformist movement, known in English as the Almoravids, which later established a kingdom that extended its control over southern al-Andalus.

The first step in Abdalqadir's "Ribat model" was for "a group of Muslims [to] enclose themselves in the ribat for intensive training, in the Quran, in *dhikr*, and in combat." He specifically rejected the "Christian fantasy of pacifism" and noted that "while the kafir society lives by cold war and paranoia, the muslims live by hot war and happiness." Abdalqadir, then, was not using the term "jihad" metaphorically. Once the new Murabitun had been prepared, "they will be ready to fight the kafirun . . . to establish an Islamic society according to the Madinah pattern."⁵⁸

Abdalqadir's "Ribat model" was not new. It resembled the model proposed by some radical Islamists connected to the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, whose revolutionary strategy was the establishment of truly Islamic groups within society as a basis for jihad, rather as the Prophet had established a truly Islamic society in Medina and from there had returned to conquer Mecca from the polytheists. The only serious attempt to follow this strategy was by Shukri Mustafa, whose Society of Muslims (Jamaat al-muslimin) established a small separatist community on the outskirts of Cairo in 1973. Conflict developed between this community and the Egyptian authorities, and during 1978 the Society of Muslims was destroyed and its leaders executed, becoming known to the world as the "Takfir and Hijra" (excommunication and withdrawal) group, the label given it by the Egyptian press.⁵⁹ Abdalqadir described the Muslim Brothers as "heroic" and mentioned the breaking up of Shukri Mustafa's group as the last in a series of misfortunes to befall the Muslims, starting with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt.⁶⁰

Abdalqadir's announcement of jihad in *Jihad: A Ground Plan* has been taken by some as an early example of the jihad later declared by Osama bin Laden, for example in Yossef Bodansky's best-selling *Bin Laden*, which identifies Abdalqadir as "one of the greatest thinkers and philosophers of contemporary Islamism."⁶¹ This identification inflates Abdalqadir's status as a strategist of jihad, as *Jihad: A Ground Plan* does not seem to have been widely read, and is now a little known work. It is clear, however, that in 1978 Abdalqadir was siding with the most radical elements of the revolutionary Islamism of the time. The great difference between him and Osama bin Laden is that there is no indication that Abdalqadir or the Murabitun ever got past the planning stage. When Bin Laden did launch his attacks on 9/11, Abdalqadir condemned them. Nothing, he said, indicated any need to revise Dostoevsky's conclusion that "terrorists are a mixed bunch of social misfits and outcasts, adhering to a philosophy of nihilism," he wrote. "The nihilism . . . is itself spawned by, needed by, and guaranteeing the survival of, the tyrant state." The most important consequence of 9/11 was thus increased restrictions on individual liberties, and the persecution of Muslims.⁶²

Abdalqadir's first *ribat* was in Norwich, where in about 1981 he appointed an *amir*, or local commander.⁶³ The view was that it was ultimately necessary to restore the Caliphate, and that in the meantime, every Muslim should give obedience to an *amir*. This was separate from, though not in conflict with, the obedience that a Daraqawi owed to his shaykh. A second *ribat* was then established in Granada, Spain, and a third in Johannesburg, South Africa. According to one unconfirmed account, the Johannesburg *ribat* had a *qadi* (judge) as well as an *amir*, and on one occasion during the second half of the 1980s, when a member of the community had been drinking alcohol, the *qadi* ordered the administration of the prescribed sharia (*hadd*) punishment of forty lashes. This punishment is reported to have been carried out in public outside Johannesburg's main mosque, the Newtown Mosque, and to have given rise to some controversy.⁶⁴

The political views of *Jihad: A Ground Plan*, then, echo the radical Islamism of the time. They also echo Belloc. As Belloc condemned the party system, capitalism, and

cosmopolitan finance, so Abdalqadir identified the causes of “kafir” power as bureaucracy and armed force, as “illusory democratic or ‘people’s’ leadership,” the way that “the people are enslaved by the production process,” and the economic base of all this in capital, whether “corporation capital or state capital.”⁶⁵ Abdalqadir thus updated Belloc’s analysis to include the state socialist model of the Communist bloc. He still maintained Belloc’s emphasis on finance, though, describing the banking system as “the weakest and at the same time the most powerful element in *kafir* pharaonic control systems.”⁶⁶ Abdalqadir’s remedy also followed that of Belloc. As Belloc called for the re-establishment of personal rule in the form of a monarch, so Abdalqadir called for an *amir* and a Caliph. As Belloc called for the return to Europe of the True Faith in the form of Catholicism, so Abdalqadir called for the return of the True Faith in the form of Islam.

The Murabitun of Norwich, then, were Darqawis who continued to practice the Darqawi *wird*, and also a community under the rule of Islam. How the rule of Islam was understood changed over time. Initially, the emphasis was on “the living dynamic of the pure and inspiring model of Madinah,” where there was no intermediary between the people and their ruler, and the sharia was in the hands of the people. This rather anarchistic vision of Islam was contrasted with the introduction of the ulema as an intermediary between ruler and people, the replacement of “the utterly revolutionary doctrine of Islam” with “all the ritualized garbage that the *fuqaha* have surrounded us with.”⁶⁷ “The arguments of *madhhab* [interpretative tradition] and *fiqh* [rules of sharia] are utterly irrelevant to both the survival of Islam and the future of the human race,” wrote Abdalqadir in 1978.⁶⁸ This position was both a continuation of the anti-dogmatism and anti-clericalism we have noted in other groups and a reflection of the radicalism of the new age. New-age radicalism may also be discerned in the observation, made in the context of an argument in favor of polygamy as specified in the sharia, that “multiple wives is the necessary condition to end the basically neurotic bourgeois family group on which totalitarian modern statism is built.”⁶⁹ Abdalqadir here agreed with Fazal Inayat-Khan, who (as we have seen) held that “the four-wall family system is the symbol of the neurosis in which . . . people have grown up to be afraid to be free.”⁷⁰

Later, however, the condemnation of the *fiqh* was dropped, and the Maliki *madhhab* was adopted as the “the closest possible exposition of Islam as it was actually lived by the Prophet and his Companions” and “the most complete picture of the Sunna, both in terms of its spirit and its actual practice.”⁷¹ The Maliki *madhhab* was both the natural *madhhab* of a Darqawi, since it prevails in Morocco, and also the *madhhab* that pays most heed to the practice of the original Muslim community of Medina, though it does also follow other sources.

Rather as the Paris Alawiyya of Valsan contributed to the Western study of Ibn Arabi, so the Darqawiyya of Norwich contributed to the Western study of the Maliki *fiqh*. A number of Darqawis were good Arabists and good scholars in this *madhhab*, including Abdalhaqq and his American wife Aisha. Abdalhaqq had spent several years with

al-Habib in Meknès at the beginning of the *tariqa*, a much longer period than most Western Sufis spend in such a milieu. He and his wife produced a number of English translations from Arabic of classic Islamic works,⁷² notably of the *Muwatta* of Imam Malik, the foundational text of the Maliki *madhhab*, which they published in 1992, and of the Quran, published in 1999. The Murabitun also organized a series of conferences on Maliki *fiqh*, of which the first three were held in Norwich, Granada, and Tunis.⁷³ The final impact of the Murabitun on Islam in the West has been not jihad, then, but rather the growth of enthusiasm for, and competence in, the classic scholarship of Islam. Today, the name “Murabitun” is no longer used, and the efforts of the followers of Abdalqadir have shifted to education.

JOHN G. BENNETT AT SHERBORNE

The tendency to move toward Islam affected even John G. Bennett, whose first involvement with Sufism had been monitoring the *tariqas* of Istanbul for British Military Intelligence during the last days of the Ottoman Empire; he eventually joined and then left the Sufis of Damascus in the 1950s, and then converted to Catholicism after discerning Sufism in the Subud movement of Pak Subuh.

After the transfer of Coombe Springs to Idries Shah, Bennett returned several times to Turkey, where Sufism had begun to re-emerge from the ban imposed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1925. In 1950, a free election was held, and power passed to the Democrat Party, which relaxed the restrictive secularist policies introduced by Atatürk. The Sufi orders remained banned, but individual Sufis could again appear, within limits, in the public space. Bennett met two of those who did: Hasan Lütüf Şuşud, who belonged to no particular *tariqa*, and Muzaffer Ozak, of the Khalwati-Jerrahi *tariqa*.⁷⁴ Ozak ran a stall selling Islamic books in the book market by the Beyazit mosque in Istanbul, where he served as muezzin,⁷⁵ and had studied in the 1950s with Ibrahim Fahreddin Efendi, formerly the shaykh of a Khalwati lodge in Istanbul which had been closed in 1925.⁷⁶ Ozak, then, represented the survival of classic Ottoman Sufism into modern Turkey.

Those of Bennett’s followers who had not been accepted by Shah returned to Bennett’s leadership at a new location, Sherborne, a new institute in Gloucestershire housed in an even more substantial house than Coombe Springs. Şuşud was invited to England, and taught at Sherborne, where Bennett established a long and demanding training program that mixed practices taken from the Gurdjieff Work with Sufi and Islamic practices including fasting, *dhikr*, and the ritual prayer (*salat*).⁷⁷ The program proved especially popular with young Americans, and this led Bennett to establish an American version of Sherborne at Claymont, a comparable mansion in West Virginia. Bennett died unexpectedly in 1974 before courses could start there, but his plans were carried forward by his nephew and long-term associate, Pierre Elliot, who directed the first Claymont course in 1975.⁷⁸

Among those whom Elliot invited to Claymont were Ozak (the other Turkish Sufi whom Bennett had met in Istanbul), and a Mevlevi, Süleyman Loras.⁷⁹ Both Ozak and Loras were important at Claymont and in the subsequent history of Sufism in the United States. Ozak established the Jerrahi *tariqa*, which like the early Alawiyya combined Islamic and universalist perspectives. Like the Alawiyya, it then split into two separate groups: the Jerrahi Order of America, which is more Islamic, and the Nur Ashki Jerrahi Community, which is more universalist. Süleyman Loras's son Jelaluddin is now head of the Mevlevi Order of America. In the end, though, the Sufi contact of Bennett who proved most important for Western Sufism was Abdullah Daghestani, the Naqshbandi whom Bennett had met in Damascus in 1955. In 1974 a young English-speaking follower of his, the Turkish-Cypriot Mehmet Nazim Adil, traveled to England, where he was welcomed by Bennett's followers. Nazim subsequently developed a branch of the Naqshbandiyya that, by the time of his death in 2014, had a global presence that superseded previous distinctions between Sufism in the Muslim world and Sufism in the West. This was the *tariqa* which the brother of the "skeptical Muslim," Ziauddin Sardar, joined, and did not leave.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION TO PART IV

Western Sufism was established during the interwar period in three main forms: the Sufi Movement, Traditionalism, and the Gurdjieff movement. After the Second World War, from this base, Western Sufism became a larger and more varied phenomenon. At first there was a process of polarization, with some Western Sufi groups moving away from Islam in the face of non-Sufi influences. The Indian guru Meher Baba, whose teaching was universalist but had little to do with Sufism, absorbed the Californian branch of the Sufi Movement. John G. Bennett set off for the Middle East and came closer to the life of a regular Sufi in the Muslim world than had any Westerner since Schuon in 1933—indeed, perhaps closer than Schuon, as Bennett spoke fluent Turkish, and Schuon did not speak fluent Arabic. Bennett might have become what many Darqawis later became—namely, Westerners who were Sufis in the way that Muslims in the Muslim world are Sufis. He remained committed to his original search for the sources of Gurdjieff, however, and so returned to England and the Gurdjieff Work, soon to welcome Pak Subuh. Subuh's Subud movement had Sufi and Islamic elements in its teaching and perhaps its practice, as Bennett later realized, but it was closer to universalism than to Sufism. At about the same time, Schuon cut his links with the Alawiyya in Algeria and replaced them with links to the Oglala Sioux in America, a tribe who appeared universalist in *Black Elk Speaks*, and who were, again, in no way Sufi. Schuon's Alawiyya did not become a branch of the Oglala Sioux, however, though practice derived from the Oglala Sioux did later join their Sufi practice. It instead became the Maryamiyya.

Not all interwar Western Sufism moved away from Islam, however. Two groups moved toward Islam, one in Paris under Michel Vâlsan, and one in Tehran and then in America under Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Both restricted themselves to Islam. Both also had an impact on intellectual life, as followers entered academia, and became recognized experts on Islam, Sufism, and Sufi theology, especially Ibn Arabi.

Books by members of Maryamiyya were widely read during the postwar period, and transmitted a Traditionalist understanding of Sufism to the Western public. The books of Idries Shah, however, were even more widely read, and transmitted an understanding of Sufism that depended partly on classic stories, especially those of Nasrudin, and partly on other sources, most likely Gurdjieff.

One person who read and liked both the Traditionalists and Shah was Sam Lewis, “the new age in person.” What was at the time widely understood as the dawn of a new age provided a context in which Sufism flourished, along with a variety of other religious and new religious movements. This age was in effect a new Great Awakening, but not a Christian one. The Traditionalists were not impressed by “‘sub-cultures’ founded on drugs [and] sexual license,” and the official Sufi Movement in the Netherlands had difficulties in coping with Fazal Inayat-Khan’s hippies, but all other Western Sufi groups benefitted from the new age in one way or another. The Dances of Universal Peace of “Sufi Sam” were popular in San Francisco and beyond, as was his Sufi Choir, most famously at Governor Jerry Brown’s prayer breakfast. Vilayat Inayat-Khan’s lectures on consciousness were appreciated, his summer schools attracted hundreds, and a Sufi alternative community was successfully established at New Lebanon, New York. Fazal Inayat-Khan also established a Sufi alternative community, which owed at least as much to the radical spirit of the times, and perhaps to Neuro-Linguistic Programming, as it did to the Sufi Movement.

The Sufi content of the Sufi Movement and its offshoots in the new age was less than the Sufi content of the original Sufi Movement of Inayat-Khan. Two other groups that also benefitted from the new age, however, were more Islamic. One was the Darqawiyya of Abdalqadir al-Sufi, which owed its existence not to the sources that were common to all other Western Sufi groups, but to the politics of its founder, which had sent him “as a beggar to the door of Islam.” The Darqawiyya was determinedly Islamic, and made a significant contribution to the development of classic Islamic scholarship in the West. The other was the Beshara School of Bülent Rauf, which was not particularly Islamic in its practice, but was Islamic in its focus on Ibn Arabi, even though he was understood more as a Neoplatonic philosopher than as a Sufi. Rauf was not the only Turkish Sufi to have an impact on Western Sufism in this period. Hasan Lütü Şuşud taught at John G. Bennett’s new school, Sherbourne, while Bennett’s American outpost, Claymont, welcomed Muzaffer Ozak and Süleyman Loras. Most important of all, however, was Mehmet Nazim Adil, a follower of Bennett’s Naqshbandi shaykh in Damascus, Abdullah Daghestani.

Conclusion

THE DEVELOPMENT OF Western Sufism since the Murabitun and Claymont has continued into the early twenty-first century, becoming ever more varied. Since at least 1536, globalization has been one of the major factors driving the developments that this book has followed, and globalization has now reached a point where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish West from non-West, and where intercultural transfer is being superseded by transcultural spaces that ignore boundaries between cultures. During the first period covered in this book, the polarization between Arab Muslim and Latin Christian worlds was so extreme that it took the conquering of cities for texts to pass from one world to another. During the second period, it was still necessary for George of Hungary and Giovanni Menavino to be captured and enslaved for them to have unrestricted access to Ottoman Sufism. Even after polarization declined in the aftermath of the Franco-Ottoman alliance of 1536, at first only a few Westerners had access to the Muslim world, usually as diplomats or colonial officials. Private travel between the Muslim world and the West did not become routine until the late nineteenth century, when the advent of steamships made intercontinental travel reasonably safe and regular, if still expensive. Steamships made it possible for Helena Blavatsky and Ivan Aguéli to travel to Ceylon, and for Inayat Khan and Meher Baba to travel to the United States. It was not until the 1960s, however, that travel had become inexpensive and easy enough for Ian Dallas to travel from England to Morocco and back during two consecutive summers.

After the 1960s, the distance between the Muslim world and the West began to decrease even further, as the introduction of long-range, wide-bodied jet aircraft made intercontinental travel ever cheaper, and the price of international phone calls fell until,

with the introduction of Skype, it reached zero. At the same time, the number of immigrants from the Muslim world living in Western cities began to grow. At first there was little interaction between Westerners and newly arrived Muslim residents, who in Europe were often poorly educated “guest workers” who were expected to return to their homelands. Most never went home, however, as it turned out that “home” had moved, too. As subsequent generations of Muslims were born and educated in the West, Islam became established as a Western religion, though this was not always recognized or welcomed by all Westerners of non-Muslim origin. As Islam became a Western religion, Sufism too became a Western phenomenon in a way that it had not been before. The vast majority of Western Sufis discussed in this book shared in the majority ethnicity of the countries in which they lived. Today, in contrast, many or even most Western Sufis belong to ethnic minorities. Many *tariqas* that are based in countries outside the West have branches in the West that cater to particular minorities, often employing a minority language.

Today’s transregional *tariqas* differ significantly from earlier Western Sufi groups. Muslim identity is not an issue for them, as they have never had any other religious identity. Islamic practice is sometimes an issue for all Muslims in the West, as there are various obstacles to it there, but Islamic practice is still much less of an issue for transregional ethnic-minority *tariqas* than it was for earlier Western Sufi groups. Islamic theology is likewise less of an issue.

In yet a further stage of globalization, however, the concept of “ethnic minority” is beginning to lose its meaning. Within a few generations, the ethnic origins of one’s ancestors cease to be of much significance, and differences of class and education become more important. Well-educated Westerners with ancestors from South Asia have more in common with other well-educated Westerners than they do with the South Asian poor. A new sort of “post-ethnic” *tariqa* is now emerging in the West that appeals to well-educated Westerners irrespective of their ethnic background. As a result, identity, practice, and theology are again becoming issues, and the history of Western Sufism is assuming new relevance. Some older Western Sufi groups now have a partly post-ethnic membership, but not all. The rejection of Islam by most of the Sufi Movement, for example, tends to deter those who have any sort of Muslim background. It is hard for a Muslim to chant “La ilaha *il el* Allah.” Sufi groups of Traditionalist origin, in contrast, are more integrated into the post-ethnic milieu.

It makes little sense to treat the West and Islam as a binary pair, then. Both the West and Islam are heirs to late antiquity, with the emanationist scheme of Plotinus being important to both Western and Islamic theology. Although the West and Islam have often developed separately from each other, they have not developed in isolation from each other. Scholastic and Arab philosophy were in many ways one. Understandings of Sufism have played a role in Western intellectual life since at least 1530, when Martin Luther praised Ottoman dervishes in order to criticize Catholic monks. Personal contacts between the West and Islam have been increasing steadily since 1536, with

consequences for Islam as well as the West. This book has focused on consequences for the West, but it has also looked briefly at the backgrounds of Maher Baba and Pak Subuh, both of which involved the Theosophical Society, and it has mentioned in passing the Turkish and Iranian readership of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Contacts between the West and Islam have also had consequences for Islam in the Muslim world.

The West, then, has been becoming Islamized ever since the first translations of Arab philosophy into Latin after the fall of Toledo in 1085, a process continued by Martin Luther in 1530. Throughout the centuries, however, Islamization has been accompanied by Westernization, starting with the modification of Arab philosophical emanationism to accommodate the Trinity, and with the editing of the reports of George of Hungary to support the anti-denominationalism of the “radical reformation.”

Despite this, Sufism had still sometimes played its established role in spreading Islam among non-Muslims. Sometimes Western Sufism is so universalist that its Islamic content is insignificant. A participant in the Dances of Universal Peace, for example, is no more Muslim when chanting Qur'anic phrases than she or he is Hindu when chanting “Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.” Sometimes, however, Western Sufism is distinctly Islamic. There are no significant non-Islamic elements in the theology or practice of the Darqawiyya, though there were non-Islamic elements in its politics, as there are also non-Islamic elements in the politics of the Muslim Brothers. There are non-Islamic elements in the theology of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as there were non-Islamic elements in the theology of Ibn Arabi. Western Sufism can sometimes be quite as Islamic as anything in the Muslim world.

Sufi groups in the West today are often classified as either Islamic or Neo-Sufi. This distinction is problematic, which is why this book has generally avoided using the term “Neo-Sufi.” Firstly, the opposite of “Islamic” is “non-Islamic,” and the opposite of “neo-” is “classic.” Logically, neo-Sufism might also be Islamic, and classic Sufism might also be non-Islamic, and in fact we have seen how a series of very Islamic *tariqas* in the nineteenth-century Muslim world were identified as “neo-Sufi,” and we have also seen some classic phenomena, especially in India, that are related to Sufism, are not particularly Islamic. At least two scales, then, are needed: one to measure how Islamic a Sufi group is, and another to measure how classic it is.

In later chapters of this book, the pair of classic and novel has occasionally been an issue, as older and institutionalized groups such as the Sufi Movement under Johannes Witteveen have behaved differently from newer groups such as the Darqawiya under Abdalqadir as-Sufi. Age is here related to size and organizational form, as newer groups are of necessity small, local, and personally led, while older groups may become large and transnational, and acquire a complex leadership structure. Organization is not just a function of age, however, as a group may follow the classic organizational model of the Sufi *tariqa*, as the Alawiyya and Darqawiyya did, or may follow alternative models. Alternative models may be informal, like the address book that Idries Shah used to invite people to Langton House for the weekend; somewhat formal like the community

at Swyre Farm with its “front,” “backstage,” and “team”; or highly formal, like the Sufi Movement, with its committees and councils and a complicated voting system. The pair of classic and novel has also been an issue as groups like the Traditionalists have sought to present themselves as following a classic teaching, while groups like the Sufi Order International have sought to present themselves as fully contemporary.

The issue of self-presentation has also arisen with regard to Islam, as some groups have presented themselves as separate from Islam as the Sufi Movement did, while others have presented themselves as more Islamic, either in religious terms as the Darqawiyya did, or in broad cultural terms as Idries Shah did. The issue of self-presentation also extends to individuals, who may or may not adopt Muslim public identities. Islam, however, has not been an issue solely of identity, but also of practice and theology. Sometimes everyday practices, spiritual practices, and theology have all been Islamic, and Sufi spiritual practices and theology have also been followed. In the absence of Islamic everyday practices, Western norms have instead applied. In the absence of Islamic and Sufi spiritual practices and theology, however, there has been much more variety.

Some spiritual practices and theology that remain of importance today originated in the premodern period. At the end of antiquity, Plotinus developed the classic emanationist scheme. This scheme, as we have seen, was taken up in part by St. Augustine, and in full by Arab philosophy. It involved a chain of being stretching from the One by emanation, to the individual soul, and to matter, and implied an “emanative pull,” or the tendency of everything to return toward that from which it emanates. This both explained the human appreciation of beauty and illuminated the proper direction of the soul, “toward the One,” as the central prayer of the Sufi Movement would later put it. The result of this spiritual process was the mystical experience: *homoiosis to theo* for Plotinus, *fana* for the Sufis, “union” for other purposes. And one result of union, according to Plotinus’s later follower Iamblichus, was that one who had achieved *homoiosis* could access and communicate divine knowledge. Al-Junayd agreed. The emanationist scheme of Plotinus proved remarkably long lasting, resurfacing periodically until it was adopted by the Beshara School.

For Plotinus, the understandings made available by philosophy were themselves a path toward union. It is not clear what other spiritual practices he followed or encouraged, but these probably included asceticism. Asceticism was also the first identifiable practice of those who were later identified as Sufis. Iamblichus advocated prayer and music, which later Sufis also used. Another spiritual practice—the relationship between teacher and disciple—can also be found in antiquity, and developed into the model of *murshid* and *murid*. Asceticism is found again after the First World War with George Gurdjieff at Le Prieuré outside Paris.

The first major Arab philosopher to work with Plotinus was Yaquub al-Kindi, who lived in the ninth century and was the editor of the *Theology of Aristotle*, as *The Enneads* became known to the Arabs. Thus began the first of the series of intercultural transfers that continued until the new age, starting with transfer into the Abbasid world (not out

of it) and with the translation and adaptation of a text. This earliest premodern transfer was a transfer at the level of theology, and took place in two stages. First, Neoplatonic philosophy was reconciled with Islam enough to be absorbed and adapted into Arab philosophy. Second, Neoplatonic philosophy was absorbed into and developed by the ascetic and pietistic streams that have been identified as “proto-Sufism.” Al-Junayd was the first Sufi to stress the need for secrecy. Emanationism, Neoplatonism, and an emphasis on secrecy are then found in the greatest canonical Sufi writers—Muhammad al-Ghazali and Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi—and also in the *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* of Muhammad ibn Tufayl. Sufism is not just Islamic Neoplatonism, but Neoplatonism gave Sufism its main analytical framework, and much of its distinctive theology. Sufism is also Islam, and Sufism is also asceticism, and Sufism is particular religious practices such as *dhikr*, as has been discussed throughout this book. The experience of union was of great importance, and much discussed, if probably only rarely experienced.

The second premodern intercultural transfer was from Arab Muslim philosophy into Judaism. This was a different sort of transfer, resulting not from the translation and dissemination of any particular text, but rather from multiple individual contacts within a society in which two religions shared one language and one high culture. It had three consequences, two at the level of theology and one at the level of practice. At the level of theology, one consequence was an increased interest in philosophy among educated Arab Jews, exemplified by the monumental attempt of Maimonides to reconcile philosophy and Judaism, and Judah Ha-Levi’s fictional *Kitab al-Khazari*, in which Neoplatonic philosophy is presented to King Bulan as an alternative to Judaism, just like Islam and Christianity. The second consequence at the level of theology was the emergence of Kabbalah. The third consequence was at the level of practice, and was the first appearance of a non-Islamic Sufism, the Egyptian Hasidism of Maimonides’s son Abraham ibn Musa, and the attendant appearance of non-Muslim Sufis, of whom Abraham is the first known, and of a non-Muslim Sufi organization. This also had theological implications, as Abraham understood Sufism as containing lost ancient knowledge: “The Sufis imitate the prophets [of Israel] and walk in their footsteps, not the prophets in theirs.” Although Egyptian Hasidism seems to have vanished soon after 1404, the idea of Sufism as non-Islamic and containing ancient knowledge did not disappear. Different understandings of Sufism later became an important theological issue in their own right.

The third premodern intercultural transfer was from Arab Muslim and Jewish philosophy into Latin Christian philosophy. Like the first transfer, it took the form of translation and adaptation of texts. It may also have been accompanied by a Christian reception of Sufism, but this remains to be investigated. At present, the known consequences of this transfer were at the level of theology, not practice. The first consequence was again among scholars. Many Latin scholars were impacted by Arab philosophy, and followed Muslim and Jewish scholars before them in working to reconcile philosophy with Christian doctrine. One German scholar, Meister Eckhart, went beyond theory into practice, reinterpreting salvation in terms of union with the One. In principle, he

was trying to do no more than Maimonides, by reconciling philosophy with revelation. In the event, he emphasized detachment (*abegescheidenheit*) as a means to union, including detachment from standard Christian practice. This, combined with statements that made sense in philosophical terms but appeared outrageous in a sermon, such as declaring himself the Only-Begotten son of God, led to his condemnation as a heretic. Al-Junayd seemed to have been right when he stressed the need for secrecy. Perhaps, however, Eckhart's experience of union was so intense that he could not keep quiet about it.

The intercultural transfers of the premodern period, from the Abbasids to 1328, were of great importance for the intellectual and religious life of Arab Muslims and Jews, but of less importance for Latin Christians. The Arab philosophy of al-Kindi and Avicenna was a jewel in the crown of the golden age of Muslim civilization, and Sufism was central to Islamic life and practice for a millennium. Maimonides is one of the greatest names in Rabbinic Judaism, the *Kingly Crown* of Ibn Gabirol is part of the Yom Kippur liturgy to this day, and the Kabbalah has been important to Jewish life and practice for a millennium, if perhaps not quite as important as Sufism has been in Islam. Only Egyptian Hasidism—that is, the Jewish Sufism of Abraham ibn Musa—appears in retrospect to be somewhat marginal. In the Latin West, however, although scholastic philosophy provided the basis on which later Western thought was built, Aristotle reigned increasingly supreme, and Neoplatonism never had quite the impact that it had on Arab philosophy. In Latin Christian religious life, the mysticism of Meister Eckhart proved short-lived and marginal. Emanationism, however, had entered the fund of Western knowledge.

The significance of intercultural transfers of the early modern period, from 1480, lay in intellectual life, not in religious life. Union is mentioned only rarely. This period saw repeated intercultural transfers from the Muslim world into the West, sometimes taking the form of the translation of texts, and sometimes taking the form of the production of texts on the basis of individual contacts. At first, these contacts were few and far between (unlike contacts between Muslims and Jews in Andalus), but their impact was magnified by the texts that resulted from them. Then, during the period of European expansion, contacts became more frequent as Western officials and soldiers learned local languages and investigated local customs. The result was something resembling the conditions in Andalus, though this time it was two cultures, rather than two religions, that shared the same space, and more than one language was employed.

The earliest text dealing with Sufism that was produced as the result of an individual contact was the *Treatise on the Turks* of George of Hungary; this was followed by texts such as *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages made into Turkey* of Nicolas de Nicolay, and then by the works of Sir William Jones and Lieutenant James Graham. Later texts by scholars did not have the same impact on the general public. The earliest Sufi text to be translated was the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* of Ibn Tufayl; this was followed by Hafiz, *The Conference of the Birds* of Farid al-Din Attar, and finally the *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

The consequences of these transfers appear more varied than the consequences of the intercultural transfers of the premodern period. This may just be appearance, because early modern intellectual life is more visible to us than premodern intellectual life. Alternatively, it may be reality, as early modern intellectual life was complex and varied. Many very different theologies emerged and competed with each other, generally outside the boundaries set by the churches and universities, and theology and politics often became entangled. This complexity, and the entanglement of theology and politics, continued into the modern era.

Intercultural transfers interacted with pre-existing trends and controversies in the West. The *Treatise on the Turks* attracted the attention of both Martin Luther and of the anti-denominational Neoplatonic Protestant Sebastian Franck, because both could use it as ammunition in their own battles: for Luther, in battles against Catholic monks, and for Franck, against organized religion in general. The *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* attracted the attention of Deists, who saw it as supportive of their perspectives, and the Neoplatonists, who saw it as supportive of theirs. At the very end of this period, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* attracted the attention of everyone. Quite why is hard to say, but Ambassador John Hay may have come close to the truth when he spoke of Weltschmerz and “cheerful and jocund despair.” Perhaps *The Rubáiyát* seemed to offer an answer to the problem of how not to forget the transcendent in an age of disbelief.

As the early modern period progressed, the question of how Sufism should be understood (first raised in the premodern period by Maimonides’s son Abraham), assumed ever greater importance. The question was first investigated using long-established categories. Dervishes were initially angels, devils, or deviants, and Sufism was mystical theology. Then new categories began to be used, first in connection with the so-called “Panthéism” of Spinoza, when Sufism was placed in the “transhistorical conceptual category” accidentally created by Pierre Bayle. This understanding of Sufism attracted support, and was joined by understandings of Sufism in other new categories: as perennial, esoteric, Deistic, and universalist. Finally, the understanding of Sufism was established in what would become a classic form by Jones and Graham.

Jones understood Sufism as Theism and as a form of the *prisca theologia*, and Graham did not disagree. Graham then emphasized universalism, the idea of the equality of all religions, which might not have surprised Plotinus, but had been almost unthinkable for at least a thousand years after the collapse of the ancient world, as Jews, Christians, and Muslims all insisted that they, and only they, followed the true religion. Universalism was attributed to the quasi-Sufi Hurufis by George of Hungary, and Sebastian Franck developed a Neoplatonic universalism of his own, without realizing that the Sufis had a theology that potentially pointed in the same direction. Earlier Neoplatonists had come close to universalist positions, well expressed by Ibn Gabirol in the *Kingdom’s Crown*, and Guillaume Postel came to similar conclusions. Universalism then merged with Deism and Pantheism in the anti-exotericism of John Toland: the idea that there was a universal esoteric core to the various exoteric religious systems, and that this core was

true, while the exoteric systems served only to maintain public order, or perhaps to assist oppression. This was the sense in which Graham added “esoteric” to the understanding of Sufism. It had something in common with the need for secrecy that al-Junayd had stressed, but took this in new directions.

The Jones and Graham understanding of Sufism as perennial, esoteric universalism depended on the development of the concepts of perennialism, universalism, and anti-exotericism which they applied. It was not only of Western origin, however, as it also depended on the *Dabistan-i madhahib* (*School of Sects*), which also portrayed Sufis in perennialist and universalist terms. Although the *Dabistan* almost looks as if it might have been written by Toland, it actually precedes Spinoza, and owes its unusual vision to Indian conditions, perhaps to the universalist Din-i illahi (Divine religion) of the Emperor Akbar, and perhaps to the nondenominational tradition of the Indian guru. The *Dabistan* resembled the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in being an important text that was transferred from one culture to another, but differed from the *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in that its impact on the West was mostly indirect, through Jones, rather than direct.

These early modern intercultural transfers contributed to the dramatic transformation in the intellectual and religious life of the West that took place between 1480, when the intellectual and religious framework provided by the Catholic Church still reigned supreme, and 1899, when Christianity had decisively lost its monopoly, and anti-dogmatic universalism was becoming a new norm in much of the West. Transfers from the Muslim world first helped to complicate and undermine exclusive Christian narratives at the beginning of this period, as *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the idea of Sufism as Pantheism did, and then helped to provide inspiration for universalism at the end of this period, as *The Conference of the Birds* did for Ralph Waldo Emerson. The transformation of the intellectual and religious life of the West during this period was also political, as religious and political liberty were often advocated together. Spinoza and Toland were political radicals as well as religious ones. Early modern intercultural transfers from the Muslim world were thus associated with the cause of political liberty.

The early modern period was the first period in which we know of Westerners becoming Sufis. The earliest was George of Hungary, who later claimed that he had not actually converted to Islam, and had only been tempted, before coming to his senses. What actually happened remains unknown, but if George had become so assimilated into Ottoman society that he forgot his own mother tongue, as was the case, it seems likely that his fifteen years as a dervish were more than a cunning pretense. Another former slave who wrote about Sufism with what was evidently inside knowledge, Giovanni Menavino, may also have become a dervish, probably a Bektashi, but this remains speculation. What was unusual about George and Menavino was not that they assimilated into Ottoman society and (perhaps) religion, but that they returned to Europe and wrote about their experiences. Millions of Western and, especially, Eastern Christians passed under Ottoman control between 1299 and 1683, sometimes as slaves but more often as subjects, and while many remained Christians, many did not.

The intercultural transfers of the modern period during which Western Sufism became established, between 1910 (or perhaps 1911) when Ivan Aguéli initiated René Guénon, and 1933, when Frithjof Schuon established the Alawiyya in Basel, took the form of texts and of individual contacts. It also involved the rise of the first serious non-Muslim Sufi groups and organizations since the days of Maimonides's son Abraham. It had consequences at the level of practice as well as at the level of theology.

The individual contacts in this period were few but important. They were made by Westerners in the Muslim world, notably by Aguéli in Egypt and Schuon in Algeria, and then by Muslims in the West, notably by Inayat Khan. These contacts resulted in Western-produced texts which implicitly continued the ongoing discussion of how Sufism should be understood. The perennialist, anti-exotericist, Deistic, and universalist understanding of Sufism, which had passed through Emerson, the Missouri Platonists, and the Theosophical Society, was incorporated into the texts and practice of the first Western Sufi group, the Sufi Movement of Inayat Khan, with the help of Carl-Henrik Bjerregaard, the Theosophist and associate of the Missouri Platonists whom Inayat met in New York in 1912. The subsequent growth of the Sufi Movement in Europe was assisted by other former Theosophists, and its texts and practice thus also reflected Theosophy, with its anti-dogmatism, its belief in hidden masters, and its expectation of a World Teacher. They also reflected Islam and emanationism, however. The texts of the Sufi Movement reached a wide audience, though smaller than that of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. A parallel understanding of Sufism is found in the texts of Ivan Aguéli, who emphasized universalism, and of René Guénon, who emphasized perennialism. Texts by Aguéli and Guénon had a limited circulation during the interwar period, but texts by other Traditionalists later had a larger circulation.

A similar understanding of Sufism was present in the teachings of George Gurdjieff, but not in the first major text of the Gurdjieff movement, the *Tertium Organum* of Peter Ouspensky. The *Tertium Organum* ignored Sufism, and merged the Theosophy of Helena Blavatsky's successor Annie Besant with the psychology of William James. *Tertium Organum* was a truly revolutionary work, as it retained the basic emanationist scheme that had been used time and time again since Plotinus, but replaced the soul with "consciousness," and union with the One with "the expansion of consciousness." Union was something that Ouspensky experienced, but understood in very different terms.

The practice of the Sufi Movement developed on two tracks, as had practice at the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. On the one hand, there was Universal Worship, which incorporated some Islamic and Neoplatonic references into its prayers, but was otherwise inspired by Protestant models, rather like the "vespers" of the Vedanta Society. On the other hand, there was the practice of the Esoteric School, which included such standard Sufi practices as *dhikr*. Inayat seems to have tried to teach the standard Islamic practice of the ritual prayer (*salat*) to his first disciple, Rabia Martin, in San Francisco in 1911, but standard Islamic practice was not part of the practice of the Esoteric School of the Sufi Movement. The practice of the Alawiyya that was established by Schuon, in

contrast, included both *dhikr* and standard Islamic practice, and there was no equivalent of Universal Worship or “vespers.”

The practice of the Gurdjieff movement was almost as revolutionary as the theology of *Tertium Organum*. It included asceticism (hard physical work and lack of sleep), and Movements that derived in part from the *dhikr* of the Mevlevis, the *sema*, and also from yoga and the Eurhythmics of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, which were probably more important sources. It also included “discomfitures” and a “Stop” exercise of uncertain origin that were probably designed to break the habit of automatic, unconscious action.

The number of people who experienced the practice of the Sufi Movement, the Alawiyya and the Gurdjieff movement is unknown, but was certainly less than ten thousand people. Among them were a small number who converted to Islam, starting with Aguéli and ending with Guénon and Schuon’s Swiss followers. No conversions were associated with the Sufi Movement or the Gurdjieff tradition.

None of these conversions can be explained in terms of Sufism. Guénon’s conversion is complex, as he denied that he had actually converted. Instead, he wrote, he had “moved into” Islam.¹ This perspective was a consequence of his anti-exotericism: as all religions share the same esoteric core, they are not fundamentally different, and it is therefore appropriate to adopt the exoteric form appropriate for any given esoteric form. As Guénon was a Sufi, Islam was the appropriate exoteric form, a conclusion dictated not by Islamic or Sufi theology, but by Guénon’s own logic. This logic also dictated the conversion of Schuon and his followers. Schuon, following Guénon, converted to Islam in Paris, and *then* went to Algeria and met a Sufi shaykh. Little is known about the conversion of Aguéli, save that it was also not connected with Sufism, given that it was not until several years later that Aguéli became a Sufi.

Aguéli was the most politically active of the early Western Sufis. He was active in two progressive causes, anarchism and animal rights, that were linked primarily by the fact that both were progressive, and both were linked to terrorism. It is possible that Aguéli’s conversion was also politically motivated, as the conversions to Buddhism of Olcott and Blavatsky were: the Theosophical dedication to the “universal brotherhood of man” implied an anti-colonial position, and the Theosophical Society was active in support of Indian and Ceylonese nationalism. Aguéli was later active in support of anti-British nationalism in Egypt, though he was also supporting Italian colonialism, perhaps unwittingly.

There was also a political element to Traditionalism. Guénon himself was not politically active, but some of his associates were, notably Baron Julius Evola, an Italian who has not been mentioned so far in this book because he had no interest in Sufism, but who is today at least as well known as Guénon, and perhaps better known. Evola never joined the Fascist Party, largely because he found it insufficiently radical; he was somewhat to the right of Mussolini.² Guénon and Evola agreed about modernity, but differed in their responses to it, as Guénon’s response was theological, while Evola’s was political. It might

be argued, however, that the anti-modernism of both men was inherently political, and that Guénon's anti-exotericism was thus a response to political stimuli.

The intercultural transfers of the period after the Second World War and of the new age once again took the form of texts, individual contacts, and organizations. Once again, there were consequences at the levels of theology and practice. This time, there were more individual contacts, and Muslims in the West were more important in terms of these intercultural transfers than were Westerners in the Muslim world. Only Bennett and the two founding British Darqawis, Abdalhaqq and Abdalqadir, made important contacts in the Muslim world. The importance of Muslims in the West increased as time passed, starting with Meher Baba (who was Indian more than Muslim) and Pak Subuh, and then continuing with Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Bülent Rauf, Hasan Lütfi Şuşud, Muzaffer Ozak, Süleyman Loras, and Mehmet Nazim Adil. These were mostly Turks, but in later years Turks were joined by more Iranians, then by Arabs, and finally by Africans.

Although there were both new translations of texts, and texts produced as a result of individual contact, the crucial texts of the new age were produced in the West. In terms of sales, Idries Shah was most important, followed by Huston Smith. Nasr was also influential; although he never achieved the sales that Shah and Smith did, he was read extensively in the Muslim world as well as the West. Shah's retelling of the tales of Nasrudin and of classic Sufis proved extraordinarily popular, being in some ways the twentieth-century successor of the *The Thousand and One Nights* and *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. His understanding of Sufism was perennialist and anti-dogmatic, and showed the influence of Gurdjieff.

At the level of practice, tensions between the Islamic and non-Islamic content of interwar Sufism soon became apparent. Traditionalist Sufism was polarized between a more Islamic version under Nasr and a less Islamic version under Schuon. One branch of the Sufi Movement retained the word "Sufi" in its title, but joined the Meher Baba movement, which had nothing in common with the Sufi Movement other than universalism and anti-dogmatism. Bennett turned toward Pak Subuh, who was Muslim, but whose Subud was also characterized by universalism and anti-dogmatism. There were, however, Sufi elements in its teaching, and perhaps in its practice too, and when Bennett realized this he felt he had been tricked. This may have had something to do with his conversion to Catholicism.

The Sufi Movement, too, became less Islamic during the new age. The Dances of Universal Peace of Sam Lewis were successful, but had little to do with Sufism. Inayat Khan's son Vilayat retained the practice of the Sufi Movement but taught about consciousness and the cosmic, and his young nephew Fazal also blended his teachings on consciousness with psychology. Fazal's practice also had something in common with Gurdjieff's discomfitures.

Two other groups, however, catered to the same new age while moving toward Islam. One, the Beshara School, developed out of a branch of Vilayat's Sufi Order International,

but reflected the interest in Ibn Arabi of its leader, Bülent Rauf. The Beshara School did not identify itself as Islamic or even Sufi, but as Ibn Arabi was both Muslim and Sufi, Beshara inevitably approached Islam. The other group, the Darqawīyya of Abdalqadir al-Sufi, had no significant connection with the earlier traditions of Western Sufism, and simply attempted to replicate Moroccan Sufism in London and then Norfolk. It differed from the Middle Eastern Sufi norm, however, in developing a political program, which most Middle Eastern *tariqas* do not, though there are exceptions—indeed, one important exception, Al-adl wa'l-ihsan (Justice and Charity) arose in Morocco at about the same time, in 1985. Abdalqadir's political program followed the radical Islamism of the time, and called for utopian separatist communities to prepare for jihad, but never actually engaged in jihad. It instead developed classical Islamic scholarship, initially for its own self-government. This later became a major influence on contemporary Islam.

The new age saw more conversions to Islam. As during the interwar period, no conversions were associated with the Sufi Movement or its offshoots, and none with the Gurdjieff movement, though there were some reports of conversions by Subud followers in Indonesia. As during the interwar period, conversion was associated with Traditionalist Sufism. Conversion was also associated with the Darqawīyya.

The conversion of Aguéli may have been motivated by politics, and the conversion of Abdalqadir was definitely associated with politics, by Abdalqadir's own account. Abdalqadir's subsequent political text, *Jihad: A Ground Plan* laid out a political vision which assigned a political role to the type of separatist community he had established in Bristol Gardens, the prototype of the *ribat* that was to be the basis of the Murabitun. He was not alone in assigning a political role to such communities. Two of Frank Musgrove's informants at Besahara's Swyre Farm expressed the same views. Fazal Inayat-Khan's beliefs about the changes that Western society should undergo were also political.

Western understandings of Sufism have been very varied. At first there was no real distinction between scholarly and non-scholarly understandings, and non-scholarly understandings of Sufis as angels, demons, and deviants were clearly flawed. Once Orientalist scholarship became established in France in the seventeenth century, scholars soon arrived at a good understanding of Sufism, aided in the case of Barthélemy d'Herbelot by Katib Çelebi, an Ottoman scholar who himself had a good understanding of Sufism. Just as it does not always make sense to treat the West and Islam as a binary pair, sometimes it does not make sense to treat Orientalist and Islamic scholarship as a binary pair.

Difficulties arose, however, once Western scholars tried to apply such distinctly Western concepts as Pantheism or perennialism. Pantheism has too much of Spinoza in it, and perennialism has too much of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in it. Understanding Sufism in these terms, then, inevitably resulted in a distorted view of it. Taken to an extreme, it resulted in the conclusions of Sam Lewis and Idries Shah: namely, that their own understandings of Sufism and Islam were right, and other Muslims were thus wrong. Lewis also maintained that his former professor at the College of the Pacific, Rom Landau, was wrong, and Shah too sometimes criticized academics.

It is hardly appropriate, however, to criticize Sam Lewis and Idries Shah for failing to arrive at an “objectively correct” understanding of Sufism, as this was never their aim. Like Inayat Khan, René Guénon, and Peter Ouspensky, they were ultimately trying to fill the void left by the collapse of the structures of Christianity that had once sustained the Latin West. They were trying to make real the Renaissance and the Enlightenment dream of an alternative religion, pure and simple and true. And in this they had some success.

NOTES



INTRODUCTION

1. Nancy Shields Hardin, "Doris Lessing and the Sufi Way," *Contemporary Literature* 14 (1973), 566.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary* (online).
3. The thesis was the basis of Mark Sedgwick, *Saints and Sons: The Making and Remaking of the Rashidi Ahmadi Sufi Order, 1799–2000* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
4. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
5. Mark Sedgwick, "Neo-Sufism," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraff (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 846–49. Mark Sedgwick, "European Neo-Sufi Movements in the Interwar Period," in *Islam in Inter-war Europe*, ed. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (London: Hurst, 2008), 183–215.
6. David Westerlund, ed., *Sufism in Europe and North America* (London: Routledge, 2004); Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, eds., *Sufism in the West* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, eds., *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, eds., *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (London: Routledge, 2009); Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg, eds., *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009); William Rory Dickson, *Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

CHAPTER I

1. A number of scholars have pointed this out in recent years: see Ian Almond, “Divine Needs, Divine Illusions: Preliminary Remarks Toward a Comparative Study of Meister Eckhart and Ibn Al-Arabi,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), 263–82; Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989); Robert J. Dobie, *Logos & Revelation: Ibn ‘Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2010).

2. Almond notes this (“Divine Needs, Divine Illusions,” 264).

3. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” in *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, ed. Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 5–6, 14, 22.

4. Marcus Terentius Varro, *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum*.

5. Hans-Josef Klauck, “Nature, Art, and Thought: Dio Chrysostom and the Theologia Tripartita,” *The Journal of Religion* 87 (2007), 339–40.

6. Klauck, “Nature, Art, and Thought,” 339–40.

7. Peter Adamson, “Aristotelianism and the Soul in the Arabic Plotinus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (April 2001): 213.

8. Dominic J. O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 68.

9. Adamson, “Aristotelianism and the Soul,” 223.

10. O’Meara, 33. *Nous* may also be translated as “intellect,” but “intelligence” is used more often. Since there is no significant difference of meaning between the two, references to “intellect” have been systematically replaced with references to “intelligence.”

11. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 62.

12. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 44–45.

13. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 60.

14. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 62.

15. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 32.

16. Plotinus, *Enneads* V 2. 7–11, quoted in O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 91.

17. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 89.

18. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 34–37, 46.

19. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 67.

20. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 8, 81–84.

21. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 26–27.

22. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176a–176b, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921). Fowler uses “become like;” I have inserted the alternative of “assimilate to.”

23. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 102.

24. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” 45.

25. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V. 1 [10]. 1. 22–8, quoted in O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 104, slightly adapted.

26. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI. 9 [9]. 4. 11–16, quoted in O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 105.

27. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI. 7. 36. 6–21, quoted in O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 106, slightly adapted. My emphasis.

28. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” 2, 16.

29. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” 16.
30. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” 21.
31. Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus,” 46–47.
32. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 111–12.
33. Polymnia Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 117.
34. The title *De mysteriis* was given to it by Ficino. Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 117.
35. Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 119–25.
36. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 275–77. I have rendered “intellect” as “intelligence” for the sake of consistency.
37. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 129.
38. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 111–12.
39. E. R. Dodds, “Introduction.” In *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, by Proclus, ed. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), x.
40. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 107. My thanks to Anders Klostergaard Petersen for this reference.
41. Cornelius J. De Vogel, “Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 39, no. 1 (March 1985): 2, 19, 28.
42. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. A. W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 881.
43. Augustine, *The City of God*, 317.
44. A. W. Dyson, “Introduction” in *The City of God*, x; O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 113–14.
45. John 1: 1–9. King James Version.
46. Augustine, *The City of God*, 393.
47. John, Tractate 1, in *St Augustine: Tractates on the Gospel of John*, ed. John W. Rettig (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 49–51, 56.
48. Klauck, “Nature, Art, and Thought,” 337–40.
49. Seth Lerer, “Introduction,” in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), xi.
50. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Peter Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), book III, chapter 12.
51. A number of other Neoplatonic propositions are scattered throughout the remainder of Boethius’s book: that all things by their nature turn toward the One, but that the soul in matter is like a drunkard unable to find the way home; and that the way to the truth is to turn the mind inward so that the light that remains in the soul can show the way back to the One. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, book III, chapters 2, 11 and 12. Most of the third book of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, however, is not explicitly Neoplatonic.
52. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, book III, chapter 9. The translation is loose, but does not in any important way depart from the original.
53. Boethius may have been one of the inspirations for Iain Pears’s excellent novel *The Dream of Scipio* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002).
54. Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 20–21.

55. Dionysius, “On the Divine Names,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Colm Luibhéid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 62.
56. Dionysius, “On the Divine Names,” 50, 76.
57. Dionysius, “On the Divine Names,” 79.
58. Dionysius, “On the Divine Names,” 80. I have rendered “intellect” as “intelligence.”
59. Dionysius, “On the Divine Names,” 54.
60. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 252.
61. De Vogel, “Platonism and Christianity,” 43–47.
62. O’Meara, *Plotinus*, 113–14.
63. Lerer, “Introduction,” xix.
64. King Alfred, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Samuel Fox as King Alfred’s Anglo-Saxon Version of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses, 1999), 67.
65. Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 49–50, 67–68.
66. Acts 17:34.
67. Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 238.
68. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 238.
69. Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 269–72.

CHAPTER 2

1. Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the ‘Theology of Aristotle’* (London: Duckworth, 2002), 8, 18–19.
2. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 1, 11–14.
3. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 18–19.
4. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 7, 12–13. Stylistically, all the three works comprising what contemporary scholars call “the Arabic Plotinus” are by the same hand or hands.
5. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 5.
6. Dominic J. O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116.
7. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, p. 25.
8. Peter Adamson, “Aristotelianism and the Soul in the Arabic Plotinus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (April 2001): 213–16. An example is given by Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 50–52, 173.
9. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 181.
10. E. R. Dodds, “Introduction to Proclus,” in *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, ed. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), x.
11. Richard C. Taylor, “A Critical Analysis of the Structure of the *Kalam fi mahd al-khair* (*Liber de causis*),” in *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 11–12, 18.
12. Taylor, “A Critical Analysis,” 13.
13. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 6.

14. Cornelius J. De Vogel, “Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 39, no. 1 (March 1985): 28.

15. Quran 112. My translation.

16. Georges Tamer, “Hellenistic Ideas of Time in the Koran,” in *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts*, ed. Lothar Gall and Dietmar Willoweit (Munich: Oldenbourg-Verlag 2010), 21–42. My thanks to Thomas Eich for this reference.

17. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 125–26. There are alternative derivations, from *inna* or *in*. I have chosen a less fashionable derivation from *ana* by parallel with *huwa*. The Greek *einai* may also suggest *ana* in Arabic.

18. Thayer’s *Greek Lexicon*.

19. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 119.

20. This is the controversy, well-known to students of the period, in which the Mutazila finally lost. Adamson discusses whether the philosophers were impacting the Mutazila in this, or whether the Mutazila were impacting the philosophers, and concludes that either is possible. *The Arabic Plotinus*, 166–70.

21. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 112–13.

22. *Theology of Aristotle* X 3, 12, translated and quoted in Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 141. I have rendered “intellect” as “intelligence.”

23. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 128–29, 138–40.

24. Adamson, who gives the excellent example used below, sees these changes as moralization, not Islamization (*The Arabic Plotinus*, 69). In a sense, he is right, but I think that Islamization comes closer to what is going on.

25. Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8.8, quoted in Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 70.

26. *Theology of Aristotle* VII 49, translated and quoted in Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 70.

27. Richard C. Taylor, “Aquinas, the ‘Plotiniana Arabica’, and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 2 (April 1998): 228.

28. R. Walzer, “Al-Farabi, Abu-Nasr Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Tarkhan b. Awzalagh,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill), vol. 2, 778.

29. Taylor, “Aquinas,” 228.

30. Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989), 61–65.

31. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 105.

32. Walzer, “Al-Farabi,” vol. 2, 778.

33. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 162–64.

34. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 61–65.

35. Walzer, “Al-Farabi,” vol. 2, 778.

36. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 114–18, 162–64.

37. Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (1931; Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1973), 255.

38. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3.

39. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 5.

40. R. Arnaldez, “Al-Muhasibi, Abu-Abd Allah al-Harith,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill), vol. 7, 466.

41. This is the expression used by William Law, an eighteenth-century Anglican mystic, writing in a different context, quoted in L. Lewisohn, "Taqwa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill), vol. 12, 781.
42. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 29, n. 17.
43. Translated and quoted in Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 4. Karamustafa translates *annaniyya* as "I-ness."
44. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 4.
45. Gerhardt Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical: The Quranic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d. 283/898)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 43.
46. The Quranic Arabic Corpus, <http://corpus.quran.com>.
47. The Muslims, for example, are told "Remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me." *Quran* 2: 152.
48. Reported by Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushairi, translated and quoted in Böwering, *Mystical Vision of Existence*, 45. I have adapted the translation slightly.
49. It has been called "rambling," Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), 34.
50. Translated in Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 93–94.
51. Translated in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 93–94.
52. Translated in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 93–94.
53. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 6–7.
54. Arnaldez, "Al-Muhasibi," vol. 7, 466.
55. Böwering, *Mystical Vision of Existence*, 89.
56. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 20.
57. Annemarie Schimmel, "Raks," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online, 2013).
58. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 17–18.
59. Quoted in Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 18.
60. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 22–23.
61. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 24.
62. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 26.
63. Ian Almond, "Divine Needs, Divine Illusions: Preliminary Remarks Toward a Comparative Study of Meister Eckhart and Ibn Al-Arabi," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 264.
64. A table of contents (and full text) may be found at <http://www.ghazali.org/ihya/ihya.htm>.
65. Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris as *The Book of Knowledge, being a Translation with Notes of the Kitab al-ilm of al-Ghazzali's Ihya ulum al-din* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1962), 39.
66. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, xiv.
67. He objects to Alfarabi's emanationism, for example. Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 23.
68. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 40–41.
69. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 42.

70. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 41.
71. Al-Ghazali, *Mishkat al-anwar*, trans. David Buchman as *The Niche of Lights* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 50–53. See discussion in Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 251–54.
72. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 86.
73. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 86. The translations of *batala min al-amal* and *tazkiyat al-nafs* are not obvious, and are my own.
74. Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-ilm*, 41–42.
75. William Montgomery Watt, “Al-Ghazali,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill), vol. 2, 1039.
76. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 268.
77. William C. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oneworld: Oxford, 2005), 2–3.
78. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi*, 14.
79. Ahmed Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill), vol. 3, 707–11.
80. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.”
81. James W. Morris, “Introduction,” in *The Meccan Revelations*, by Ibn al-‘Arabi, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 12.
82. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.”
83. Miguel Asín Palacios, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his Followers* (1914; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 124.
84. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.”
85. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, trans. Michel Chodkiewicz as *The Meccan Revelations* (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 32.
86. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 270.
87. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 32.
88. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 270.
89. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.”
90. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 33–38.
91. Quran 42:11. Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 274.
92. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.” Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, 285.
93. Ateş, “Ibn al-Arabi.”
94. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 217–30.
95. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 213–15.
96. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 103.
97. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 106, 109.
98. Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, 110.
99. Lawrence I. Conrad, “Introduction: The World of Ibn Tufayl,” in *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, ed. Conrad (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 31.
100. Simon Ockley, trans., *The Improvement of Human Reason Exhibited in the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdhan* (London: Edm. Powell, 1708), 2–4, 21.
101. Abd Al-Wahid al-Marrakushi, quoted in Conrad, “Introduction,” 7. Al-Marrakushi says that Ibn Tufayl was engaged in trying to reconcile philosophy and religion, not that *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan* is the fruit of such an attempt.
102. Conrad, “Introduction,” 16.

103. Conrad, "Introduction," 5–6.
104. Vincent J. Cornell, "Hayy in the Land of Absal: Ibn Tufayl and Sufism in the Western maghrib during the Muwahhid Era," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 156.
105. Conrad, "Introduction," 6, 19–20.
106. Cornell, "Hayy in the Land of Absal," 134.
107. There are many editions and translations. A good recent translation is *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
108. George Ashwell, trans., *The History of Hai Eb'n Yockdan, an Indian Prince: Or, the Self-Taught Philosopher* (London, 1686), 126.
109. Conrad, "Introduction," 31.
110. These names are taken from another work of Avicenna. Conrad, "Introduction," 32.
111. The words used are *zahir* and *batin*. J. Christoph Bürgel, "Symbols and Hints. Some Considerations concerning the Meaning of Ibn Tufayl's Hayy ibn Yaqzan," in *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 125.
112. That is, *al-ma'qul wa al-manqul*.
113. Ashwell, trans., *The History of Hai Eb'n Yockdan*, 179.
114. Bürgel, "Symbols and Hints," 129.
115. Conrad, "Introduction," 25.
116. Cornell argues this last point more strongly. "Hayy in the Land of Absal," 154.
117. Mark Sedgwick, "Establishments and Sects in the Islamic World." In *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, ed. Phillip Lucas and Thomas Robbins. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 283–312.
118. J. Chabbi, "Khankah," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online). Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandi-s in the Ottoman World, 1450–1700* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 45–47.

CHAPTER 3

1. Steven M. Wasserstrom, "The Islamic Social and Cultural Context," in *Routledge History of World Philosophies: History of Jewish Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Oliver Leaman (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1997), 94–99.
2. This is generally assumed to have been the original title. The full Arabic text has been lost.
3. A translation was made in 1925 by Yaakov Bluvstein (Belovstein) and published in Jerusalem.
4. Jochanan Wijnhoven, "The Mysticism of Solomon Ibn Gabirol," *The Journal of Religion* 45, no. 2 (April 1965): 140.
5. Wijnhoven, "Mysticism of Solomon Ibn Gabirol," 137, 150, n. 2.
6. Marianne Schleicher, "Det andalusiske kulturmode: Jødedom, kristendom og islam i Gabirols religiøse digtning," *Religion* 3 (2006): 18.
7. Ibn Gabirol, "The Kingly Crown," in *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol Translated into English Verse*, ed. and trans. Israel Davidson and Israel Zangwill (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1923), 68. This translation is old, but is more faithful

to the original than the more recent but more poetic translation of Peter Cole in *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

8. Ibn Gabirol, "The Kingly Crown," 87.
9. Ibn Gabirol, "The Kingly Crown," 87.
10. Ibn Gabirol, "The Kingly Crown," 105–06.
11. Lenn E. Goodman, "Judah Halevi," in *Routledge History of World Philosophies: History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Leaman (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1997), 188–89.
12. Michael S. Berger, "Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's 'Kuzari,'" *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (April 1992): 210.
13. Goodman, "Judah Halevi," 196.
14. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kitab al-Khazari*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1905), 36–39. This and subsequent quotations have been modernized and revised on the basis of the newer translation in *Le Kuzari: apologie de la religion méprisée*, trans. Charles Touati (Paris: Peeters, 2006), 1–4.
15. Ha-Levi, *Kitab al-Khazari*, 38.
16. Ha-Levi, *Kitab al-Khazari*, 40.
17. Ha-Levi, *Kitab al-Khazari*, 268, 271.
18. Berger, "Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's 'Kuzari,'" 219.
19. Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 329.
20. Berger, "Toward a New Understanding of Judah Halevi's 'Kuzari,'" 210.
21. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 333, 380.
22. Norbert M. Samuelson, "Maimonides' Doctrine of Creation," *The Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (July 1991): 249–50.
23. This is the view of Leo Strauss. Andrew Patch, "Leo Strauss on Maimonides' Prophetology," *The Review of Politics* 66, no. 1 (Winter, 2004): 84, 86–90.
24. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 337, 378.
25. Genesis 1: 26.
26. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 337, 358–60, 362, 371.
27. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 379.
28. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 381–84.
29. Ronald Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites: A Re-Orientation," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. Michael M. Laskier and Yaacov Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 156.
30. Moshe Idel, "Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 203–04.
31. Idel, "Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," 206.
32. Joseph Dan, "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah," *Modern Judaism* 5, no. 1 (February 1985): 40–41, 46.
33. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites," 149.
34. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites," 154.
35. Dan, "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction," 44, 48, 57–58.
36. Boaz Huss, "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Kabbalistic literature" *Micrologus* 9 (2001): 126–27.

37. Idel, "Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," 202.
38. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites," 155, 163.
39. My thanks to Boaz Huss for pointing this out.
40. Paul B. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 758–59. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites," 159.
41. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 756–57.
42. Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 88–91.
43. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites," 158.
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47. Epafra, "The Condition of Jewish Minority in Medieval Egypt," 179.
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51. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 756–57.
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60. Baldwin, "Masters at Paris," 148–51.
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67. John Marenbon, "Introduction," in *Routledge History of World Philosophies: Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (London: Routledge, 1998), 1–2.
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73. Wippel, "The Condemnations of 1270 and 1277," 186.
74. Wippel, "The Condemnations of 1270 and 1277," 185–86.
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80. Colledge and McGinn, "Historical Data," 10–11.
81. Flasch, *Meister Eckhart*, 115, 125, 129, 140. For Dionysius, see Ian Almond, "Divine Needs, Divine Illusions: Preliminary Remarks Toward a Comparative Study of Meister Eckhart and Ibn Al-Arabi," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 264. My thanks to Markus Vinzent for sharing some early results of his Eckhart project, confirming the relative importance of these sources, and for pointing out the importance of Boethius and Ibn Gabirol.
82. Flasch, *Meister Eckhart*, 89, 125. John Marenbon, "Bonaventure, the German Dominicans and the New Translations," in *Routledge History of World Philosophies: Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (London: Routledge, 1998), 230–31.
83. Eckhart, "Commentary on John," in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (London: SPCK, 1981), 123.
84. Eckhart, *The Book of Divine Consolation* 33, in Colledge and McGinn, *Meister Eckhart*, 221.
85. Eckhart, *On Detachment*, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 286.

86. Eckhart, Sermon 6, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 185, 187.
87. Eckhart, Sermon 48, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 198.
88. Eckhart, Sermon 15, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 192.
89. Eckhart, Sermon 2, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 180.
90. Eckhart, Sermon 15, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 192 for the Holy Spirit; and Sermon 6, 187 and Sermon 53, 205, for the Son. Sermon 83, 206, for both.
91. Eckhart, Sermon 15, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 189.
92. Eckhart, Sermon 22, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 193.
93. Eckhart, Sermon 48, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 198.
94. Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 200.
95. Eckhart, Sermon 48, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 198.
96. Eckhart, *On Detachment*, 285. Colledge and McGinn have “conform himself to God,” but “be bound to God” seems to me closer to the original.
97. Eckhart, Sermon 15, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 190; Sermon 22, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 195. *On Detachment*, 294.
98. Eckhart, Sermon 22, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 195.
99. Eckhart, *On Detachment*, 286.
100. 1 Corinthians 13:2, King James Version, with “love” replacing “charity.”
101. Eckhart, *On Detachment*, 286.
102. Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 199.
103. Eckhart, Sermon 2, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 178.
104. Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 199–200. Eckhart concedes, however, that the intention of such people is good, and therefore prays that they may be given the kingdom of heaven.
105. Eckhart, Sermon 5b, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 183–84.
106. Eckhart, Sermon 15, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 192.
107. Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 200 and 202.
108. Eckhart, Sermon 52, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 203.
109. Eckhart, Sermon 83, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 207.
110. Eckhart, Sermon 6, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 187–88.
111. Eckhart, Sermon 6, in *Meister Eckhart*, ed. Colledge and McGinn, 187–88.
112. Eckhart, *The Book of Divine Consolation* 83, 239.

CHAPTER 4

1. Martin Luther, “Martinvs Lvthervs Lectori Pio” (Nuremberg, 1530), in “*Cronica der Türckey*,” Sebastian Franck’s Translation of the ‘*Tractatus de Moribus, Conditionibus et Nequitia Turcorum*’ by Georgius de Hungaria, by Stephen C. Williams. PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1991, 369–70.
2. *The Bookman* 1899, quoted in Mukhtar Ali Isani, “The Vogue of Omar Khayyám in America,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 14 (1977): 258.
3. Jeremiah E. Dittmar, “Information Technology and Economic Change: The Impact of The Printing Press,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (2011): 1142.
4. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 44, 167.

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6. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 19.

7. Tahsin Yazici, “Kalandariyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).

8. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 44–46.

9. Alexandre Papas, “Dervish,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).

10. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 78–79.

11. R. Tschudi, “Bektashiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).

12. This seems to be the consensus. More evidence is, however, needed. It falls beyond the scope of the present book to investigate fifteenth-century antinomian Turkish dervishes, but it is possible that the account given here will one day need significant revision.

13. Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 499.

14. Albrecht Classen, “The World of the Turks Described by an Eye-Witness: Georgius De Hungaria's Dialectical Discourse on the Foreign World of the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 7 (2003): 264.

15. Classen, “The World of the Turks Described by an Eye-Witness,” 264–65.

16. Williams, *Cronica der Türckey*, 46–47.

17. George of Hungary, *Tractatus de moribus, conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum* (Rome, 1480), in *Cronica der Türckey*, by Williams, 312.

18. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 317.

19. Williams, *Cronica der Türckey*, 46–49.

20. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 324–25.

21. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 360–61.

22. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 317.

23. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 361–65.

24. Karl Foy, “Die ältesten osmanischen Transcriptions-texte in gothischen Lettern,” *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* 4 (1901), 241–42.

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26. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 344.

27. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 312–16.

28. Copied as *czilar*, but the *l* is clearly a miscopying of *k*. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 344–45.

29. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 314, 316.

30. George of Hungary, *Tractatus*, 343–45.

31. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Astarābādī, Faḍlallāh,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).

32. Mir-Kasimov, “Astarābādī, Faḍlallāh.”

33. A. Bausani, “Ḥurūfiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).

34. Classen, “The World of the Turks Described by an Eye-Witness,” 258.

35. Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 131–33.
36. Johann Boehme, *Omnium gentium mores, leges & ritus, ex multis clarissimis rerum scriptoribus* (Freiburg, 1535), 125.
37. Luther, “Martinvs Lvthervs Lectori Pio,” 369–70.
38. Priscilla A. Hayden-Roy, “Hermeneutica gloriae vs. hermeneutica crucis: Sebastian Franck and Martin Luther on the Clarity of Scripture,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 81 (1990), 51.
39. Alfred Hegler, *Geist und Schrift bei Sebastian Franck eine Studie zur Geschichte des Spiritualismus in der Reformationszeit* (Freiburg im Breisgau: J. C. B. Mohr, 1892), 203.
40. Hayden-Roy, “Hermeneutica gloriae vs. hermeneutica crucis,” 55.
41. Sebastian Franck, “Anhang Sebastiani Franci auß ander Cronicken getzoge,” in *Cronica der Türckey*, by Williams, 216.
42. Hayden-Roy, “Hermeneutica gloriae vs. hermeneutica crucis,” 51–52, 56.
43. Sebastian Franck, “Beschluß Sebastiani Franci Wördensis,” in *Cronica der Türckey*, by Williams, 232.
44. Sebastian Franck, “Sebastian Franck wünscht dem Got seligen Leser,” in *Cronica der Türckey*, by Williams, 145.
45. Geoffrey Dipple, “Sebastian Franck in Strasbourg,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 73 (1999): 791.
46. Sebastian Franck, ed., *Cronica, Abconterfayung und entwerffung der Türckey* (Augsburg, 1530), n.p.
47. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 48–49.
48. Alexandra Merle, *Le miroir ottoman. Une image politique des hommes dans la littérature géographique espagnole et française (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 44.
49. Antoine Geuffroy, *Estat de la court du Grant Turc, l’ordre de sa gendarmerie, & de ses finances* (Paris, 1542), 30, 38.
50. The sixteenth-century meaning of the word was very different from the current sense.
51. Geuffroy, *Estat de la court du Grant Turc*, 32.
52. Alexandra Merle, “Introduction,” in *Voyage au Levant (1553): Les Observations de Pierre Belon du Mans*, ed. Merle (Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 2001), 18–19.
53. F. Lestringant, “Guillaume Postel et l’«obsession turque»,” in *Guillaume Postel 1581–1981: Actes du Colloque International d’Avranches, 5-9 September 1981* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1985), 271.
54. Pierre Belon du Mans, *Observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses memorables, trouuees en Grece, Asie, Iudée, Egypte, Arabie, & autres pays estranges*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gilles Corrozet, 1555), 188.
55. Belon, *Observations*, 188.
56. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, book I, 13.
57. Barry Cunliffe, *Druids: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57–58, 60–61.
58. Marcus Keller, “Nicolas de Nicolay’s Navigations and the Domestic Politics of Travel Writing,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 18.

59. Worldcat at www.worldcat.org.
60. David Brafman, "Facing East: The Western View of Islam in Nicolas de Nicolay's "Travels in Turkey,"" *Getty Research Journal* 1 (2009): 153–54.
61. Brafman, "Facing East," 160, n.8.
62. Brafman, "Facing East," 160, n.8.
63. Noel Malcolm, "The Crescent and the City of the Sun: Islam and the Renaissance Utopia of Tommaso Campanella," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125 (2003): 47.
64. Brafman, "Facing East," 160, n.8.
65. Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *Trattato de costumi et vita de Turchi* (Florence, 1548), 63.
66. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 63.
67. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 77–79.
68. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 63–64.
69. Yazici, "Kalandar."
70. It is possible that Menavino's Qalandars are scholarship's Haydaris, and his Torlaks are scholarship's Qalandars, just as his Dervishes are clearly history's Bektashis. It is possible that categories were less fixed in the sixteenth century. It is also possible that Menavino was confused in his nomenclature, but unlikely, as in other respects his descriptions seem accurate.
71. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 72–76.
72. Paul Smith, ed., *Nesimi: Selected Poems* (Victoria, Australia: New Humanity Books, 2012), 226.
73. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 76.
74. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 75, 77–79.
75. Menavino *Trattato de costumi*, 80–81.
76. Nicolas de Nicolay, *Les Navigations peregrinations et voyages faits en la Turquie* (Anvers, 1576), 178, 183, 185.
77. Nicolay, *Navigations*, 180.
78. Nicolay, *Navigations*, 85–86.
79. Nicolay, *Navigations*, 186.
80. Nicolay, *Navigations*, 186.
81. Nicolay, *Navigations*, 189–91.
82. Guillet de la Guilletière, *Athènes ancienne et nouvelle et l'état présent de l'empire des Turcs* (Paris, 1676), 196.
83. F.-R. Chateaubriand, "Introduction," in *Oeuvres complètes de M. le vicomte de Chateaubriand*, vol. 8 (Paris: Pourrat, 1835), cxix.
84. Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* (Paris, 1680), 290–91.
85. J. A. B. Palmer, "Fr. Georgius de Hungaria, O P., and the Tractatus de Moribus Conditionibus et Nequicia Turcorum," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 34, no. 1 (1951): 61–63.
86. Georgius de Hungaria, *Tractatus de moribus, conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*, ed. and trans. Reinhard Klockow (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993). A French translation has also been published: Georges de Hongrie, *Des Turcs : Traité sur les moeurs, les coutumes et la perfidie des Turcs* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2003).
87. Anon, *Théologie mystique, ou instruction a l'oraison mentale* (Lyon, 1630), vii, ix-x.

88. Jasper Hopkins, *Hugh of Balma on Mystical Theology: A Translation and an Overview of his De Theologia Mystica* (Minneapolis: Banning, 2002).

89. Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 120–122, 129–134.

90. Michele di Molinos, *Guida Spirituale* (Venice: Giacomo Hertz, 1678).

91. François Pétis de la Croix, “Lettre,” in *Suite du voyage de Levant*, vol. 2, by Jean de Thévenot (Paris, 1674), xix.

92. Barthélemy d’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale ou Dictionnaire universel* (Paris: Compagnie des Libraires, 1697), 5, 121. D’Herbelot uses the phrase several times. See for example *Bibliothèque orientale*, 848.

93. Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV’s France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169–70, 177–80.

94. D’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale*, 424.

95. D’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale*, 873.

96. D’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale*, 268.

97. D’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale*, 797.

98. Jacobus Golius, *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum* (Amsterdam, 1653), 1391.

99. Had Sufi been an Arabization of *sophoi*, the transcription would presumably have used the letter *sin*, not the letter *sad*.

CHAPTER 5

1. Lawrence I. Conrad, “Introduction: The World of Ibn ‘Tufayl” in *The World of Ibn ‘Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, ed. Conrad (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3.

2. As Wouter Hanegraaff writes, the idea of the *prisca theologia* is potentially revolutionary, as it argues that something of importance was lost and can be or has been recovered, while perennialism is conservative, as it argues that the truth has been known all along. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9–10.

3. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 18, 20–21.

4. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 24.

5. Justin, Apology i.46.2–3, quoted in Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 21.

6. Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, vo. 2, ed. John Henry Bridges (1897; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 2, 54–55.

7. Bacon, *The Opus Majus*, 55.

8. It was a Latin translation of the *Sirr al-asrar* (*Secret of Secrets*), ascribed to Aristotle. The actual authorship of the *Sirr al-asrar* is obscure, but the book probably dates to the middle of the tenth century, around the time of the death of al-Farabi. Charles B. Schmitt and W. F. Ryan, “Introduction,” in *Pseudo-Aristotle, The Secret of Secrets: Sources and Influences*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Ryan (London: Warburg Institute, 1982), 1.

9. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “How Hermetic was Renaissance Hermetism?” *Aries* 15 (2015): 179–209.

10. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 52–53.

11. Ruth Webb, “The Nomoi of Gemistos Plethon in the Light of Plato’s Laws,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989): 215.

12. Stephen A. McKnight, "Francis Bacon's *Instauratio* and Renaissance Neoplatonism," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. John J. Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 473.
13. Christopher S. Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79.
14. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 34–35, 39–40, 43.
15. Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," 80.
16. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 48.
17. McKnight, "Francis Bacon's *Instauratio*," 473.
18. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 46, 51.
19. Fabrizio Lelli, "'Prisca Philosophia' and 'Docta Religio': The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 91, no. 1/2 (2000): 65, 66.
20. William J. Bouwsma, "Postel and the Significance of Renaissance Cabalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15, no. 2 (1954): 223.
21. Gérard Defaux, "Une leçon de scepticisme : Montaigne, le monde et les grands hommes," *MLN* 116 (2001): 656.
22. Eve Rachele Sanders, *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 74.
23. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man & Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1486), §8, 36, 40–42. http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/text/bori/frame.html.
24. Lelli, "'Prisca Philosophia' and 'Docta Religio,'" 67.
25. Pico, *Oratio*, §31, 198–202.
26. Pico, *Oratio*, §34, 213.
27. Pico, *Oratio*, §33, 212.
28. Eugenio Anagnine, *G. Pico della Mirandola. Sincretismo religioso-filosofico. 1463–1494* (Bari: G. Laterza & Figli, 1937), cited in William G. Craven, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 9. Craven disagrees.
29. Bouwsma, "Postel and the Significance of Renaissance Cabalism," 218.
30. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 90.
31. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 103–05, 108–15, 127–31, 137–45, 154.
32. William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510–1581)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 2–3.
33. Hartmut Bobzin, "Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) und die Terminologie der Arabischen Nationalgrammatik," in *Studies in the History of Arabic Grammar II: Proceedings of the 2nd Symposium on the History of Arabic Grammar, Nijmegen, 27 April–1 May 1987*, ed. Kees Versteegh and Michael G. Carter (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), 58.
34. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 5–6.
35. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 8.
36. Guillaume Postel, *Grammatica arabica* (Paris, 1545) and *De originibus seu de hebraicae linguae et gentis antiquitate* (Paris, 1538). Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 7–8. Karl H. Dannenfeldt,

- “The Renaissance Humanists and the Knowledge of Arabic,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 2 (1955), 111.
111. Robert J. Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation: The First Printing of the Syriac New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 106–08.
37. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 8–9.
38. Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah*, 110.
39. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 9.
40. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 356.
41. Guillaume Postel, *De orbis terrae concordia* (Basel, 1544), i.
42. Postel, *De orbis terrae*, 22, 24.
43. Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah*, 118–19.
44. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 11–15.
45. Postel, *Panthenosia*, 7, quoted and translated in François Secret, “Guillaume Postel en la place de Realte,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 192, no. 1 (1977), 64.
46. Passage quoted and translated in Secret, “Guillaume Postel,” 61.
47. Passage quoted and translated in Secret, “Guillaume Postel,” 61.
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CHAPTER 6

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CHAPTER 7

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107. Gauffin, *Ivan Aguéli*, vol. 2, 53–55.
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111. Gauffin, *Ivan Aguéli*, vol. 2, 138.
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166. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 29.
167. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 60.
168. Gauffin, *Ivan Aguéli*, vol. 2.
169. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 68.

CHAPTER 9

1. Mark Sedgwick, “Saudi Sufis: Compromise in the Hijaz, 1925–40,” *Die Welt des Islams* 37 (1997): 349–68.
2. Rom Landau, *God is my Adventure: A Book on Modern Mystics, Masters and Teachers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 18.
3. Zia Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: The Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2006), 49–56.
4. *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan* (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1979), §11.
5. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 67.
6. *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid*, §11.

7. He announced this intention to two Indian newspapers in 1907 and 1908. Hendrik J. Horn, "Introduction to Theo van Hoorn as Sufi Memoirist," in *Recollections of Inayat Khan and Western Sufism*, by Theo van Hoorn (Leiden: Folcor, 2010), 101–02.

8. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan* (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1979), §1.

9. Mahmood Khan, personal communication, September 29, 2015.

10. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 71.

11. This is the title given on the poster for the performance at the London Coliseum, April 19, 1909.

12. Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73.

13. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 71.

14. "Attractions of the Week in Theaters of Salt Lake," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 26, 1911, 22.

15. "Ruth St. Denis Coming," *The Seattle Star*, May 6, 1911, 8.

16. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 71.

17. "Musician from India will sing," *The San Francisco Call*, April 15, 1911, 21.

18. "Bryce withdrew name," *New-York Daily Tribune*, February 20, 1912, 3.

19. "Enter Prof. Inayat Khan, who'll make us Realize our Souls through Music," *The Sun* (New York), January 13, 1911, 7.

20. Arijit Sen, "Architecture and World Making: Production of Sacred Space in San Francisco's Vedanta Temple," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 77.

21. Sen, "Architecture and World Making," 84, 87.

22. Sen, "Architecture and World Making," 87.

23. Swami Trigunatita, *The Essential Doctrines of Hinduism* (San Francisco: San Francisco Vedanta Society, 1911), 4–5, quoted in Sen, "Architecture and World Making," 88.

24. Sen, "Architecture and World Making," 89–90, 92, 96.

25. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography*, §1.

26. Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 215–16.

27. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography*, §1.

28. Inayat Khan, *Book of Instructions for the Murshid* (Given to Murshida Rabia A. Martin), by Rabia Martin (Privately printed, Sufi Ruhaniat International, 1978).

29. Inayat Khan, *Book of Instructions for the Murshid*.

30. Inayat Khan, *Book of Instructions for the Murshid*.

31. Inayat Khan, *Book of Instructions for the Murshid*.

32. Bowen, *History of Conversion to Islam*, 220.

33. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 110.

34. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 79–80; Bowen, *History of Conversion to Islam*, 219.

35. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography*, §1.

36. Eugene H. Chai, "Oriental Division, New York Public Library," *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 89 (1990): 33–38; Victor Hugo Paltsits, *The Manuscript Division in the New York Public Library* (New York, 1915), 8.

37. "A List of Works in the New York Public Library relating to Muhammadansim," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 15, no. 4 (April 1911): 242–43.

38. Reynold A. Nicholson, "A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism, with a List of Definitions of the Terms 'Şúfî' and 'Taşawwuf,' Arranged Chronologically," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38 (1906): 303–348.
39. Nicholson, "Historical Enquiry," 304, 309, 316–17.
40. Nicholson, "Historical Enquiry," 315–16.
41. The most important of these is the emphasis that Nicholson places on Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (311–15).
42. What this book calls Sufi theology, Nicholson calls Sufi "theosophy." Nicholson is here using "theosophy" in a very different sense than Blavatsky, however, contrasting theosophy and theurgy. Nicholson, "Historical Enquiry," 313.
43. *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid*, §11.
44. There are indications of this in his autobiography, but these indications are hard to confirm.
45. *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid*, §11.
46. *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid*, §11. A slightly different version appears in *The Sufi Call* (London: The Sufi Publishing Society, 1916), 5–6. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 65–66.
47. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography*, §2, §3, §4.
48. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 83.
49. Inayat Khan, *Autobiography*, §4.
50. It is found, for example, on the frontispiece of "Esoteric Instruction No. IV: The Eastern School of Theosophy," in H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 12, ed. Boris De Zirkoff (*Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House*, 1980), 654. My thanks to Tim Rudbøg for this reference.
51. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1914), 19–20.
52. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, 55–56.
53. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, 34.
54. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, 17.
55. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, 24–25.
56. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty*, 35.
57. Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, vol. 8 (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1962), 13–14. My thanks to Zia Inayat-Khan for this reference and the following reference.
58. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, vol. 8, 18.
59. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, vol. 8, 26, 38.
60. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, vol. 8, 38.
61. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 95.
62. "Music and Mysticism: A Sufi Mission to the West," *The Times*, February 2, 1915, 21.
63. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 84–88.
64. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 79, n. 44.
65. Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1995), 158–59.
66. Magan Lal and Jessie Duncan Westbrook, *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa: The First Fifty Ghazals* (London: John Murray, 1913).
67. Jessie Duncan Westbrook, *Diwan of Inayat Khan* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996), 12.

68. Inayat Khan, *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan* (1923; [Germany]: Centrum Universel, 2005), 151.
69. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 110–11.
70. Inayat Khan, *Book of Instructions for the Murshid*, 35, 40.
71. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 97.
72. Raden Ayou Jodjana, “From ‘Autobiography,’” in *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, ed. Zia Inayat-Khan (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 2001), 389.
73. “Khankah of the Sufi Order: Indian Ceremony in London,” *The Times*, June 17, 1920, 10.
74. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 116–17.
75. Horn, “Introduction to Theo van Hoorn,” 131.
76. Counted from photographs available on the Nektakht Foundation website, <http://www.nektakhtfoundation.org>.
77. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 148.
78. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 121, 146, 148.
79. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 147.
80. Karin Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West: Life and Leadership of Hazrat Inayat Khan's Brothers 1927–1967* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 63–64.
81. This list is compiled from the “Biographical Sketches” in Inayat Khan, *Biography* (2005), 180–214.
82. Inayat Khan, *Biography* (2005), 99–100.
83. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 130–32. Inayat-Khan says that Universal Worship followed the model of the Theosophical Liberal Catholic Church, but this seems to have been far more Christian, to judge from Jenny McFarlane, “Agency of the Object: Leadbeater and the Pectoral Cross,” in *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, ed. Carole Cusack and Alex Norman (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 133–52.
84. In 1939, *The Sufi* announced Sunday services of Universal Worship in ten cities in the Netherlands, as well as five cities in England.
85. “Universal Worship: The Prayers,” <http://sufimovement.org/index.php/branches/universal-worship/the-prayers>.
86. Inayat Khan, *The Way of Illumination* (London: The Sufi Movement, 1924), 26–27.
87. A similar conclusion is reached by Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 302.
88. Mahmood Khan, personal communication, October 2, 2015.
89. Based on the movements observed at the summer school of the Sufi Movement at Katwijk-aan-Zee, Netherlands, in July 2012. It is impossible to say to what extent the movements of 2012 differ from those of 1921, though the fact that almost no one at Katwijk seemed to be aware of the obvious echoes described here suggest that the movements were long established.
90. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 135.
91. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 172–73. The glosses of the Sanskrit terms are creative, and my thanks are due to Peter Forshaw for helping me with them. It is possible that the titles involve a play on words, perhaps from the guitar to the sonata.
92. For example, in *Sangatha* 1. Manuscript from private collection.
93. Inayat Khan, *Sangitha* 1. Manuscript from private collection.

94. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 175.
95. Hidayat Khan, *The Inner School: Esoteric Sufi Teachings* (Banff, Alberta: Ekstasis Editions, 1996).
96. As found in everything from the armed services, where the circles of generals, colonels, and lieutenants are divided into different levels, to academia, where the circle of professors is divided into three levels, the circle of undergraduate students into four levels, and so on.
97. This section draws on my on “European Neo-Sufi Movements in the Interwar Period,” in *Islam in Inter-war Europe*, ed. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (London: Hurst, 2008), 183–215.
98. Inayat Khan, *The Art of Being and Becoming* (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1982), 4, 8–9, 41.
99. Inayat Khan, *Art of Being and Becoming*, 10–11.
100. Inayat Khan, *Art of Being and Becoming*, pp. 5–6.
101. Inayat Khan, *Biography* (2005), 164.
102. Inayat Khan, *Biography* (2005), 136–38.
103. Mahmood Khan, “Hazrat Inayat Khan: A Biographical Perspective Article,” in *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, ed. Zia Inayat-Khan (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 2001), 123.
104. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 193.
105. Horn, “Introduction to Theo van Hoorn,” 107.
106. Horn, “Introduction to Theo van Hoorn,” 108–09; Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 166.
107. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 149–52.
108. Horn, “Introduction to Theo van Hoorn,” 83, 94.
109. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 152.
110. Influenza is suggested. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 192.
111. Counted from photographs available on the Nekbakht Foundation website, <http://www.nekbakhtfoundation.org>.
112. Haifaa A. Jawad, *Towards Building a British Islam: New Muslims’ Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2012), 64–66.
113. Horn, “Introduction to Theo van Hoorn,” 113–14.
114. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 103, 105, 106.
115. Ikbal Ali Shah, *Islamic Sufism* (1933; Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), 14.
116. Inayat-Khan, *Hybrid Sufi Order*, 178–80.
117. Mahmood Khan, personal communication, October 3, 2015.
118. Inayat Khan, *Sangitha* 1. Manuscript from private collection.

CHAPTER 10

1. Kocku von Stuckrad, email to the author, August 10, 2015. See also Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014).
2. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
3. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 47–48.
4. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 56.

5. René Guénon, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (1921; Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1987), 137.

6. René Guénon, "Le Théosophisme : histoire d'une pseudo-religion," *Revue de Philosophie* 28 (1921): 113–19, 260–65.

7. Guénon, *Introduction générale*, 15, 19, 33.

8. Guénon, *Introduction générale*, 253, 305.

9. Albert de Pouvoirville, editorial, *Le Continent* 1, no. 1 (1906): 11–16.

10. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 33. The title was used after 1933.

11. Guénon, *Introduction générale*, 164, 218.

12. Guénon, *Introduction générale*, 218.

13. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 34–36, 98–109, 109–14.

14. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 37.

15. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 74–76, 79–80.

16. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 121–22.

17. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 84–90.

18. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 84–90.

19. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 91.

20. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 92.

21. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 93.

22. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 91.

23. P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 7.

24. George Gurdjieff, *The Herald of Coming Good: First Appeal to Contemporary Humanity* (1933; London: Book Studio, 2008), 13–15.

25. This conclusion is based on the areas on which Gurdjieff announced he would lecture in Fontainebleau in 1924: Turkestan, the Pamirs, Tibet, Chitral, Kafiristan, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan. [George Gurdjieff and others], *G. Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man* (privately printed, 1922), 10. Turkestan and the Pamirs are in what was then Russian Central Asia, and Chitral (then India, now Pakistan) and Kafiristan (now Nuristan, Afghanistan) adjoin the Pamirs. Baluchistan is the area of what was then India that is immediately south of the Afghan border, and is somewhat further away. Tibet is a long way away from any of these areas, and was famous enough in Occultist circles to be both required in such a lecture and possible to describe from secondary literature.

26. Gurdjieff, *Herald of Coming Good*, 17. Gurdjieff says he read widely on hypnotism and "mehkeness," which he defines as "taking away of responsibility." The word "mehkeness" looks Arabic, but is not, and its meaning is unclear. He later says that he knew a lot about "so-called 'supernatural science'" before he emerged into the occultist milieu, so the assumption must be that he was reading about it.

27. Gurdjieff, *Herald of Coming Good*, 17–18.

28. Peter Brook, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. London: Enterprise Pictures, 1979.

29. George Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963; New York: Penguin Compass, 2002), 89–92, 148.

30. James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and their Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 109, 126.

31. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 20.
32. James Carruthers Young, "An Experiment at Fontainebleau: A Personal Reminiscence," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 7 (1927): 447.
33. Webb, *Harmonious Circle*, 135–36.
34. Thomas de Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 114–15.
35. Claude Bragdon, "Introduction," to *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, by P. D. Ouspensky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 4.
36. P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 275–76.
37. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 89. He follows James's terminology exactly, except that what he calls "rational acts," James called "conscious acts." I am uncertain whether the distinction originated with James. Like other early psychologists, James is responding to Theodor Meynert, the teacher of Freud, who emphasizes the reflex, and does not seem to use the other categories. Likewise, Hugo Münsterberg, whose criticism of Meynert's scheme James approves, does not seem to use all four categories.
38. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 89. Compare William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (1890; New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 5–6.
39. Or actively rejects: James, *Principles of Psychology*, 128–44.
40. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 89.
41. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 238–39, 261–62, 277.
42. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 304; Webb, *Harmonious Circle*, 125–26.
43. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 304.
44. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 18–19, 21.
45. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 30–32, 41–42, 47–49, 66.
46. Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 5–7.
47. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 241.
48. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 132.
49. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 240.
50. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 5.
51. [Gurdjieff and others], *G. Gurdjieff's Institute*, 45.
52. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 347.
53. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 350–52.
54. Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 79.
55. Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 102. Thierry Zarcone, "Mevlevîlerin Semâ'ına Ezoterik Bir Yorum: Gürciye' in 'Kutsal Dansları,'" in *Aşk Ocağında Cân Olmak. İnsanlığı Mirası: Mevlâna Celâleddini Rûmî*, ed. Ekrem Işın (Istanbul, T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2007), 158–59.
56. Carruthers Young, "An Experiment at Fontainebleau," 455.
57. Brook, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.
58. The demeaning treatment of Laurence Oliphant by Thomas Lake Harris. Webb, *Harmonious Circle*, 531–32.
59. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 36.
60. William J. Welch, "Recollections," in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings*, ed. Jacob Needleman and George Baker (London: Continuum International, 1998), 373.

61. Welch, "Recollections," 372.
62. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 353–56.
63. Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 94–96.
64. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 383.
65. Zarcone, "Mevlevîlerin Semâ'ına Ezoterik Bir Yorum," 162–64.
66. James Moore, *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Shaftesbury, UK: Element, 1991), 152.
67. Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 112–14. Carruthers Young, "An Experiment at Fontainebleau," 458.
68. John G. Bennett, *Witness: The Autobiography of John Bennett* (London: Turnstone Books, 1975), 110.
69. Denis Saurat, "Visite à Gourdjieff" *La Nouvelle Revue française* (November 1933): 688–89, 693, 697.
70. Bennett, *Witness*, 110, 113.
71. Olga de Hartmann in Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, 145, 149.
72. In fact, re-established, as it already existed as an unsuccessful Christian Socialist periodical before Orage and Holbrook Jackson took it over.
73. Rebecca Rauve, "An Intersection of Interests: Gurdjieff's Rope Group as a Site of Literary Production," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 1 (2003): 50–52.
74. "The Little Review," The Modernist Journals Project, http://modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=LittleReviewCollection.
75. Quoted in Rauve, "Intersection of Interests," 57.
76. George Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 872.
77. Bennett, *Witness*, 4, 8, 13, 15–16, 21, 29–33.
78. Bennett, *Witness*, 42–46, 52, 55.
79. Bennett, *Witness*, 61, 95, 109–10.
80. The standard version ends "have mercy on me, the sinner."
81. Bennett, *Witness*, 162–63.
82. Bennett, *Witness*, 152, 178–79.
83. Bennett, *Witness*, 198.
84. Bennett, *Witness*, 276.
85. Bennett, *Witness*, 344.
86. Carruthers Young, "An Experiment at Fontainebleau," 449.

CHAPTER 11

1. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 124–26, 129.
2. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 133.
3. Michel Chodkiewicz, Denis Gril, and one other, not identified by his own request. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 134–35.
4. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 128.
5. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 126–27, 132.
6. Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher* (Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Trust eBook), www.lordmeher.org, 90.
7. D. Menant, "Zoroastrianism and the Parsis," *The North American Review* 172, no. 530 (January 1901): 146.

8. Tanya M. Luhrmann, "The Good Parsi: The Postcolonial 'Feminization' of a Colonial Elite," *Man*, new series, vol. 29, no. 2 (June 1994): 337, 339–40.
9. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 90, 101, 112, 179.
10. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 136; Kaikhushru Jamshedji Dastur, *His Divine Majesty Meher Baba and the Meherashram Institute* (Ahmednagar: R. K. Sarosh Irani, 1928), 6.
11. A note in his own hand reproduced at http://www.ambppct.org/Book_Files/IGH_%201.pdf indicates complete fluency.
12. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 139, 180.
13. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 151.
14. Dastur, *His Divine Majesty*, 17–18.
15. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 153–55, 164–65.
16. Smriti Srinivas, "The Brahmin and the Fakir: Suburban Religiosity in the Cult of Shirdi Sai Baba," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 (1999): 247–48.
17. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 165.
18. Tanya M. Luhrmann, "Evil in the Sands of Time: Theology and Identity Politics among the Zoroastrian Parsis," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (2002), 869–73.
19. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 842.
20. Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 142.
21. Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, "Mahadev Govind Ranade," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://global.britannica.com/biography/Mahadev-Govind-Ranade>; "Ahmednagar Education Society's DED College," aesdaed.com, captured by the Internet Archive, May 23, 2013.
22. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 791.
23. Dastur, *His Divine Majesty*, 30–33.
24. Blavatsky found the Prarthana Samaj's "platform was ever closed for, and refused to us, even when asked for." H. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 5, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), 95.
25. F. H. Dadachanji, "News about the Master," *Meher Baba Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 1938): 39–50, 46–47.
26. The Circle Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba, the Perfect Master: Questions and Answers* (Privately printed: London, 1933), 3.
27. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 21, 47.
28. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 37.
29. Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1427–29.
30. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 2, 61.
31. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*.
32. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 23, 33, 38.
33. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 19, 24.
34. Dadachanji, "News about the Master," 42–43, 46–48.
35. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 20.
36. Ira G. Deitrick and Henry S. Mindlin, "Meher Baba's Blueprint for the Highways to God: The Story of the Sufi Charter," *Glow International* (Summer 2009): 9.
37. Deitrick and Mindlin, "Meher Baba's Blueprint," 9–10.

38. Sufi terminology was used in 1928, and al-Junayd and al-Bistami cited *His Divine Majesty*, 12, 14. An unidentified Sufi poet was quoted in 1933. See Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 10.

39. Deitrick and Mindlin, “Meher Baba’s Blueprint,” 11–13.

40. Charter, section I, point 3, quoted in Ira G. Deitrick and Henry S. Mindlin, “Meher Baba’s Charter: Universal Principles of the Spiritual Path,” *Glow International* (Winter 2009): 19.

41. Editorial Committee, *Shri Meher Baba*, 20.

42. *Religious Movements Homepage*. For a description of the Meher Baba center in South Carolina in this period, see Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, “Getting Straight with Meher Baba: A Study of Mysticism, Drug Rehabilitation and Postadolescent Role Conflict,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11 (1972): 122–40.

43. Comments on www.greatschools.org are very positive. Reviewed July 27, 2015.

44. John G. Bennett, *Witness: The Autobiography of John Bennett* (London: Turnstone Books, 1975), 139–44.

45. Bennett, *Witness*, 146, 171, 205–06.

46. Bennett, *Witness*, 182, 186.

47. Bennett, *Witness*, 201–03, 210–11.

48. Bennett, *Witness*, 110.

49. Anthony Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud* (Amazon: BookSurge, 2005), 58–62.

50. Bennett, *Concerning Subud*, 28.

51. Bennett, *Witness*, 278–81.

52. Bennett, *Witness*, 284.

53. Bennett, *Witness*, 287–88, 300, 308.

54. Bennett, *Witness*, 300, 310.

55. Bennett, *Witness*, 302.

56. Bennett, *Witness*, 301.

57. Bennett, *Witness*, 294.

58. Bennett, *Witness*, 311.

59. Bennett, *Witness*, 294, 298.

60. Informants in Cairo, 2000.

61. Bennett, *Witness*, 309.

62. Bennett, *Concerning Subud*, 23.

63. Antoon Geels, *Subud and the Javanese Mystical Tradition* (London: Curzon, 1997), 117–18.

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66. Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud*, 95.

67. Justus M. van der Kroef, “New Religious Sects in Java,” *Far Eastern Survey* 30, no. 2 (February 1961): 18.

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70. Chuzaimah Batubara, “Islam and Mystical Movements in Post-Independence Indonesia: Susila Budhi Dharma (Subud) and its Doctrines” (master’s thesis, McGill University, 1999), 27–30.

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74. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 340, 342.

75. Geels, *Subud*, 127.

76. Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud*, 138.

77. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, esp. 341, 343, and 348.

78. Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud*, 98–99.

79. Geels, *Subud*, 124–26.

80. Geels, *Subud*, 130.

81. Bennett, *Witness*, 229, 324–25.

82. Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud*, 90.

83. John G. Bennett, *Concerning Subud* (1958; NP: Undiscovered Worlds Press, 2007), 45–48. Bright-Paul, *Stairway to Subud*, 110.

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86. Bennett, *Concerning Subud*, passim. Chapter one is entitled “The New Epoch.”

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90. Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 122.

91. Hanafi Fraval, “The Numbers Speak Volumes,” *Subud Voice* 15 (April 2012): 5–6.

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98. Allison M. Dussias, “Ghost Dance and Holy Ghost: The Echoes of Nineteenth-Century Christianization Policy in Twentieth-Century Native American Free Exercise Cases,” *Stanford Law Review* 49 (1997): 777–81, 783–87, 788–92.

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100. Jerome McGann, “American Memory in *Black Elk Speaks*,” *New Literary History* 44 (2013): 404–05.

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103. John G. Neihardt, *All Is But a Beginning: Youth Remembered, 1881–1901* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 37, 69.
104. Linden, “John Neihardt and *Black Elk Speaks*,” 83.
105. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 123.
106. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 148–49.
107. Anpetu Oihanke Wanica (Jeffrey Zelitch), “The Lakota Sun Dance,” *Expedition* (Fall 1970): 18.
108. Details are unclear, but this is the view of contemporary Algerian Alawis, and certainly all reference to Algeria ceased on Schuon’s part.
109. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 149–52.
110. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 170–73.
111. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 173–76.
112. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 154–55.
113. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 155–58.
114. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 168.
115. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 169.
116. Based on review of library catalogs in relevant languages.
117. Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 258, 422.
118. Huston Smith, “No Wasted Journey: A Theological Autobiography” (1994) and “My Three Other Religions,” (2009) in *The Huston Smith Reader*, ed. Jeffery Paine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), Kindle eBook.
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CHAPTER 12

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3. He had been a follower of Ouspensky since 1924 and then a follower of Gurdjieff after 1948. William James Thompson, *J. G. Bennett’s Interpretation of The Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff: A Study of Transmission in The Fourth Way* (PhD diss., University of Lancaster, 1995), 538.
4. Augy Hayter, *Fictions and Factions* (Reno: Tractus Books, 2002), 187. Hayter is a somewhat problematic source, as some of the material in his book is distinctly bizarre. His account of the 1960s, however, is internally consistent, and fits with what little is known from other sources.
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6. Idries Shah, *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* (London: Octagon Press, 1978), 14.
7. Zia Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: The Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2006), 103, 105, 106.
8. James Moore, “Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah,” *Religion Today* 3, no. 3 (1986): 5.
9. Tahir Shah and Leon Flamholz, interviews, May and June 2015.
10. Shah, *Secret Lore of Magic*, 11–12, 212. Notably the *Grimorium Verum*, Albertus Magnus, the *Art Almadel*, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, and *The Grimoire of Honorius the Great*. Idries Shah, *The Secret Lore of Magic: Books of the Sorcerers* (New York: Citadel Press, 1958).
11. J. L. Bracelin [pseud.], *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (1960; Louth, England: I-H-O Books, 1999).
12. Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca* (Sutton Mallet, UK: Green Magic, 2004), 19.
13. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948). Graves, “Centaur’s Food,” in *Food for Centaurs: Stories, Talks, Critical Studies, Poems by Robert Graves* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 257–82. Michel Pharand, “The Mythophile and the Mycophile: Robert Graves and R. Gordon Wasson,” *Gravesiana: the Journal of the Robert Graves Society* 1, no. 2 (1996), 205–15.
14. Shah to Graves, January 1961, quoted in Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess, 1940–85* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 326.
15. Robert Graves, *Between Moon and Moon: Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1946–1972*, ed. Paul O’Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 214.
16. To judge from the tone of many of Graves’s letters to Shah in *Between Moon and Moon*. This is confirmed by Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves*, 326.
17. *The Secret Lore of Alchemy* was advertised as “forthcoming” in the 1958 US edition of *The Secret Lore of Magic* (2), but no such book was ever published.
18. Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves*, 339.
19. Hayter, *Fictions and Factions*, 187–93.
20. Idries Shah, “Declaration of the People of the Tradition,” reproduced in John G. Bennett, *Witness: The Autobiography of John Bennett* (London: Turnstone Books, 1975), 356–58.
21. Shah, “Declaration,” 358.
22. Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (London: Idries Shah Foundation, 2014), xiii.
23. Robert Graves, “Introduction” in *The Sufis*, by Idries Shah (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969).
24. Graves, “Introduction,” ix–x.
25. Shah, *The Sufis*, 31–32, 51.
26. Idries Shah, *Oriental Magic* (London: Rider, 1956), 63.
27. Ikbal Ali Shah, *Islamic Sufism* (1933; Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), 14.
28. Shah, *Oriental Magic*, 75.
29. Hamid Algar, “Naqshband,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill online).
30. Shah, *The Sufis* (2014), 363.
31. Graves, “Introduction,” xx.

32. “Sardhana Estate,” *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 22 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 104–05.
33. “Ancient Secrets,” *The Times*, March 9, 1964, 12.
34. Doris Lessing, “An Elephant in the Dark,” (review of Idries Shah, *The Sufis*), *The Spectator* September 18, 1964, 373.
35. Leon Flamholz, interview, June 2015.
36. Bennett, *Witness*, 361–62.
37. Leon Flamholz, interview, June 2015. Bennett, *Witness*, 361–62. The sale is reported to have been for around £100,000, about \$2.5 m. in 2015 terms.
38. Tahir Shah, interview, May 2015.
39. £2.6 million, according to ICC Financial Analysis Report, January 3, 2015. Available from LexisNexis.
40. Bennett, *Witness*, 361–62.
41. Lessing, “Elephant in the Dark,” 373.
42. High Gordon Porteus, “Letter,” *The Spectator* September 29, 1964, 401.
43. *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka: Two Classics from the Pali Canon*, trans. John D. Ireland (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997), 82–84.
44. Robert Payne, “Mystics in White,” *New York Times Book Review*, September 13, 1964, 24.
45. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 266.
46. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 13–14.
47. Idries Shah, *The Book of the Book* (London: Octagon Press, 1969).
48. “Dreamwalkers,” *One Pair of Eyes*, BBC Television (December 19, 1970), www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vooGh7mTVo.
49. Shah, *The Sufis*, xi.
50. Idries Shah, “Interview with Elizabeth Hall: The Sufi Tradition,” *Psychology Today* July 1975, 54–55.
51. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 48.
52. Shah, “Declaration,” 357.
53. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 127.
54. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 149.
55. Quotations from online survey carried out by the author in January 2015. This was completed by almost 20 percent of 1,000 English-speaking Shah enthusiasts identified by Facebook and contacted by means of a Facebook advertisement. Of respondents, 73 percent were university graduates, and a remarkable number had a postgraduate qualification: 36 percent of male respondents, and 58 percent of female respondents. To some extent, of course, this reflects the fact that the better-educated are more likely to spend time writing short essays to help a research project.
56. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 77, 97.
57. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 97.
58. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 50, 125–26, 294–96.
59. Shah, *Learning how to Learn*, 276.
60. Shah, “Declaration,” 356–58.

61. Tahir Shah, interview, May 2015.
62. Anonymous participant, interviewed in 2013. Leon Flamholz, interviewed in 2015.
63. "Robert Ornstein, Biographical Information," www.robertornstein.com/biography.
64. Mohamed Abouzahra and Edward Kuester, "In Memory of Prof. Leonard Lewin," *IEEE Microwave Magazine* (February 2008), 113.
65. Hayter, *Fictions and Factions*, 199, 201.
66. Omar spoke Spanish, and his following seems to have become mostly Hispanophone. There are reports of followers in Latin America in Hayter, *Fictions and Factions*, 200.
67. Dirk Campbell, "Impressions of La Zahara," www.dirkcampbell.co.uk/Impressions_of_La_Zahara.html.
68. Doris Lessing, quoted in Nigel Farndale, "Doris Lessing: Her Last Telegraph Interview," *The Telegraph*, November 17, 2013.
69. Doris Lessing, untitled sound recording beginning "To be political is to be on the side of the angels," www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOixOR2DpKA.
70. Lessing, "To be political."
71. Tom Maschler, *Publisher* (London: Picador, 2005), 72.
72. This section draws on Mark Sedgwick, "The Reception of Sufi and Neo-Sufi Literature," in *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*, ed. Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt M. Klinkhammer (London: Routledge, 2009), 180–97.
73. Paulo Coelho, *Veronika Decides to Die* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 87.
74. Four in 2007; paulocoelhoblog.com.
75. For example, inside front flap, cover, Shah, *Destination Mecca*.
76. Idries Shah, *The Elephant in the Dark* (London: Octagon Press, 1978), 3–4.
77. Gabriel Widmer, interview, Bremen, September 2007.
78. Robert Payne, "Mystics in White," *New York Times Book Review*, September 13, 1964, 24.
79. Shah, *The Sufis*, 217, 233, 265–66.
80. Robert Graves, "The Fitz-Omar Cult," in *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*, ed. and trans. Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah (London: Cassell, 1967), 1, 3.
81. Martin Dodsworth in *The Listener*, quoted in "Robert Graves 1895–1985," Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/robert-graves.
82. L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "The Omar Khayyam Puzzle," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 55, no. 2 (1968): 176–79. Once the two texts are placed side by side, the correspondence is obvious.
83. Robert Graves to Idries Shah, November 11, 1970, in *Between Moon and Moon*, 282–83.
84. Hayter, *Fictions and Factions*, 197–98.
85. L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Mystic-Making," *New York Review of Books*, July 2, 1970, 35–36.
86. L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Sufism & Pseudo-Sufism," *Encounter* 44, no. 5 (May 1975): 12–16.
87. Elizabeth Hall, "At Home in East and West: A Sketch of Idries Shah," *Psychology Today*, July 1975, 56.
88. "Sardhana Estate." This confirms the origins of the Sardhana family, not Iqbal Ali Shah's descent from it, but that descent seems very likely, as only wealthy Indian families were in a position to send children to study in Britain in 1914.
89. Moore, "Neo-Sufism," 4–8.
90. Tahir Shah, interview, May 2015.

CHAPTER 13

1. Walter H. Bowart, “Forward,” in *This Is the New Age, In Person*, by Samuel L. Lewis, ed. Bowart (Ebook: 1973). <http://www.gnostic.org/murshidsam/contents.htm>.
2. Lord Northbourne, “The Survival of Civilization,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* 7, no. 1. (Winter 1973): www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/Public/articles/The_Survival_of_Civilization-by_Lord_Northbourne.aspx.
3. Louis Pauwels, *Monsieur Gurdjieff: documents, témoignages, textes et commentaires sur une société initiatique contemporaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1954).
4. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 207–08.
5. Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *Le Matin des magiciens: Introduction au réalisme fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 326.
6. Umberto Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum* (Boston: Harcourt, 2007), 99.
7. Ameen Carp, interview, July 2012.
8. Observation, Katwijk-aan-See, July 2012.
9. Carp, interview.
10. Mahmoud Khan, interview, July 2012.
11. Mahmood Khan, interview.
12. Sven Burmester, interview, August 2015.
13. H. J. Witteveen, *Universal Sufism* (Shaftesbury, UK: Element, 1997), 1–2.
14. Witteveen, *Universal Sufism*, 15, 18.
15. Eric R. Roose, “Dargāh or Buddha? The Politics of Building a Sufi Sanctuary for Hazrat Inayat Khan in the West,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 193–223.
16. Khidr Braakman, “My initiations ...” in *Heart of a Sufi—Fazal Inayat Khan: A Prism of Reflections*, ed. Rahima Milburn, Ashen Venema, and Zohra Sharp (NP: Arch Ventires Press, 2013), Kindle Ebook.
17. Mahmood Khan, interview.
18. Johannes Witteveen, interview, July 2012.
19. Mahmood Khan and Witteveen, interviews.
20. Karin Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West: Life and Leadership of Hazrat Inayat Khan’s Brothers, 1927–1967* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 96.
21. Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West*, 111.
22. Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West*, 90.
23. Jironet, *Sufi Mysticism into the West*, 78.
24. One occasional participant, Inayat Khan’s nephew Mahmood Khan, was well aware of these echoes.
25. Observation, Katwijk, July 2012.
26. The exception, again, was Mahmood Khan, who was aware of the transcription error.
27. Witteveen, *Universal Sufism*, 105, 109–13, 121–24, 125.
28. Witteveen, *Universal Sufism*, 133–42.
29. Ali Meyer, “Murshid Samuel L Lewis, Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti, 1896-1971,” www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/lineage/murshid-samuel-l-lewis
30. Lewis to Gavin Arthur, January 11, 1968, in Samuel L. Lewis, *Correspondence: Diaries*, www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/writing/diaries.

31. Meyer, "Murshid Samuel L Lewis."
32. Lewis to unidentified recipient, April 13, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
33. Lewis to Vilayat Inayat Khan, January 26, 1970 in *Correspondence*.
34. Lewis to Fuard Uduman, February 18, 1965 in *Correspondence*.
35. Lewis to Magana, August 27, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
36. Lewis to Walter J. Fischel, April 3, 1960 in *Correspondence*.
37. Lewis to Hozny M. Gaber, 1960 undated, in *Correspondence*.
38. Lewis to Quantz Crowford, October 6, 1956, and letter to Nuria, October 25, 1956, in *Correspondence*.
39. Lewis to Andul Ghafour, January 24, 1961, in *Correspondence*.
40. Lewis to Florie Leonard, September 18, 1960, in *Correspondence*.
41. Lewis to Crowford, September 10, 1956. Lewis to Rudolph Schaeffer, undated, probably October 1956, in *Correspondence*.
42. Lewis to Leonard, December 16, 1960, in *Correspondence*.
43. Lewis to Bosatsu San, August 12, 1965, in *Correspondence*.
44. Lewis to Saladin, May 10 [1963], in *Correspondence*.
45. Lewis to unidentified recipient, May 6, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
46. Lewis to Sharab Harris, March 24, 1964, in *Correspondence*.
47. Lewis to Harris, April 22, 1964, and Lewis to Aramdarya, May 21, 1964, in *Correspondence*.
48. Lewis to unidentified recipient, June 10, 1966, and Lewis to Bodhisattva, December 1, 1966, in *Correspondence*.
49. Lewis to Shamcher Bryn Beorse, July 20, 1967, and Lewis to Beorse, September 1, 1967, in *Heart of a Sufi*.
50. Lewis to Magana, August 27, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
51. Lewis to unidentified recipient, September 16, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
52. Lewis to Saadia Khawar Khan, February 16, 1969, in *Correspondence*.
53. Lewis to Beorse, June 6 1969, in *Correspondence*.
54. Lewis to Dewwal Shereef, June 17, 1970, in *Correspondence*.
55. Lewis to Vocha Fiske, February 7, 1970, in *Correspondence*.
56. Lewis to Beorse, September 1, 1967, in *Heart of a Sufi*.
57. Audio recordings of Lewis's lectures are available at www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/audio/sixty-four-talks. These comments and comments below are based on listening to a selection of lectures and classes.
58. Undated audio recording of a lesson given by Lewis, available at www.ruhaniat.org.
59. Lewis to Connie, December 22, 1964, in *Correspondence*.
60. Lewis to Norman, October 2, 1968, in *Correspondence*.
61. *Passim*, 1970 letters in *Correspondence*. Lewis to Ram, February 8, 1970, in *Correspondence*.
62. Comment based on video recordings shown at the SRI summer camp in July 2012.
63. Lewis to unidentified recipient, September 16, 1968, and Lewis to Paul Reps, January 27, 1969, in *Correspondence*.
64. "Sufi Choir, The." Discography. www.discogs.com/Sufi-Choir-The-Sufi-Choir/master/506338.
65. Lewis to Margaret Houghton, April 17, 1966, in *Correspondence*.

66. Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, *La Musique expliquée comme science et comme art et considérée dans ses rapports analogiques avec les mystères religieux, la mythologie ancienne et l'histoire de la terre* (Paris: Chamuel, 1896). My thanks to Joscelyn Godwin for his assistance.

67. Lewis to Ram, December 15, 1969, in *Correspondence*.

68. Lewis to Ram, February 12, 1969, in *Correspondence*.

69. Lewis to Fiske, January 11, 1969, in *Correspondence*.

70. Lewis to Beorse, June 7, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

71. Lewis to unidentified recipient, September 16, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

72. Audio recordings of Lewis's lectures, available at www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/audio/sixty-four-talks. Similar criticisms are also present in Lewis's letters in 1961 and 1962 in *Correspondence*.

73. Lewis to Ram, February 20, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

74. Lewis to Fischel, April 3, 1960, and Lewis to Ruth, January 18, 1961, in *Correspondence*.

75. Lewis to Florie Leonard, November 5, 1960, and December 16, 1960, in *Correspondence*.

76. Lewis to F. Clive-Ross, March 14, 1969, in *Correspondence*.

77. Lewis to Saadia Khawar Khan, undated letter from 1968, in *Correspondence*.

78. Lewis to Beorse, May 11, 1970, in *Correspondence*.

79. Lewis to Peter, May 26, 1970, in *Correspondence*.

80. Numerous comments throughout *Correspondence*.

81. Lewis to Fiske, March 17, 1969, in *Correspondence*.

82. Lewis to Beorse, September 16, 1966, in *Correspondence*.

83. Lewis to Beorse, September 1, 1967, in *Correspondence*.

84. Lewis to Shams-ed-din, January 20, 1967, in *Correspondence*.

85. Lewis to unidentified recipient, June 24, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

86. Lewis to Gavin Arthur, July 25, 1970, in *Correspondence*.

87. "Islamic spirituality" would actually be *ruhaniyya islamiyya*, and *Islamiyya ruhaniat* means something like "Islamicness spirituality." There are different possible ways of transcribing the final syllable, either *-iyya* or *-iat*, and the fact that "Islamiyya Ruhaniat" mixes two alternatives also suggests that no one was thinking in terms of the Arabic originals.

88. Lewis to unidentified recipient, September 16, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

89. Lewis to Repts, July 15, 1968, in *Correspondence*.

90. UPI, "Brown Prayer Breakfast is 'Different,'" *Independent Journal* (San Rafael, California), January 9, 1976, 35. Other comments based on number of newspaper articles referring to the Sufi Choir in newspapers.com.

91. "Politics: Now the Candid Sell," *Time*, October 21, 1974, 28.

92. Observation, SR summer school, June–July 2012.

93. Zia Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order at the Crossroads of Modernity: The Sufi Order and Sufi Movement of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2006), 240, 244–46, 259.

94. For Vilayat, see Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order*, 231. For Noor, see Shrabani Basu, *Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan* (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 2007).

95. Zia Inayat-Khan, email to the author, September 22, 2015.

96. James Jervis, "The Sufi Order in the West and Pir Vilayat Khan: Space-Age Spirituality in Contemporary Euro-America," in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental, 1998), 221.

97. Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order*, 258.
98. A search at newspapers.com reveals these lectures, but no more.
99. Search at newspaper.com.
100. Inayat-Khan, *A Hybrid Sufi Order*, 259.
101. Carp, interview. For the scenery, video film.
102. Barbara Van Nice, "Shaker Prophecy Fulfilled: Sufi Sect Revives Heritage at New Lebanon Camp," *The Berkshire Eagle*, June 13, 1975, 1.
103. Barbara Van Nice, "Sufism: Mixture of Mysticism," *The Berkshire Eagle* June 13, 1975, 16.
- Van Nice, "Shaker Prophecy Fulfilled."
104. Van Nice, "Sufism: Mixture of Mysticism."
105. Vilayat Inayat Khan, "Awakening the Glimpse of the Dervish," <http://www.universel.net/lessons/media.cfm?Selected=Media&SelectedID=83>.
106. The books are Vilayat Inayat Khan, *Toward the One* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); *That Which Transpires Behind That Which Appears: The Experience of Sufism* (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1984); and *Awakening: A Sufi Experience* (New York: J.P. Tarcher, 1999). Data for analysis was obtained from Google Books, using the Google Books word-cloud as a starting point.
107. Barbara Van Nice, "Sufism: Mixture of Mysticism"; "Shaker Prophecy Fulfilled."
108. Vilayat Inayat Khan, "1st Jhana," www.universel.net/lessons/media.cfm?Selected=Media&SelectedID=68.
109. Mahmood Khan, personal communication, October 3, 2015.
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CHAPTER 14

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CONCLUSION

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