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Ch. 6: Muḥammad as the Pole of Existence

CARL W. ERNST

The peculiar concerns of modern society tend to furnish the lenses through which figures like Muḥammad are viewed today. That is, modern biographies of the Prophet tend to see him chiefly as a leader responsible for establishing a movement, the significance of which is to be gauged mainly in terms of its social and political impact. His prophetic role is often understood primarily in terms of the establishment of ritual and legal norms that in principle governed the habits of an emerging Islamic civilization. The modern European concept of multiple religions carries with it assumptions about a contest between major religions for establishing a dominant position in the world today. Thus a prophet who is viewed as the founder of one of the world's major religions is inevitably seen in retrospect, mostly as a key player in this historic struggle. This observation holds both for non-Muslim Euro-Americans alarmed about the very existence of Islam, and for Muslim triumphalists who take refuge in Islam as an anti-colonial identity. Modern reformist Muslims tend to downplay suggestions that the Prophet could have had any extraordinary status beyond ordinary human beings, and the Protestant inclinations that characterize much of the contemporary climate of

opinion on religion (for Christians and non-Christians alike) reinforce the notion that Islam is a faith that lacks the supernatural baggage to be found, for instance, in Catholic Christianity. The legacy of anti-Islamic polemics among Christians since medieval times has also helped focus attention (mostly negative) on Muḥammad as a political and military leader.

From such a socio-political perspective, it therefore might seem surprising that Muḥammad has also been seen for centuries in a quite different light, as the prophet whose spiritual and cosmic role is the most important aspect of his career. Far from being viewed as a mere postman who delivered a message that happened to be of divine origin, Muḥammad, for a considerable portion of premodern Muslims, was the primordial light through which God created world, viewed in semi-philosophical terms as the “Muḥammadan reality.” The ascension of Muḥammad into the heavens and the divine presence, possibly alluded to in a couple of passages in the Qur’ān, became a major theme defining his spiritual supremacy as “the seal of the prophets.” Muḥammad was described as a human being of perfect beauty, immune from sin, whose life was marked by miracles testifying to his extraordinary status. He became the focus of a speculative prophetology, which, particularly in the hands of mystical thinkers of the Ṣūfī tradition, drew upon the metaphysical concepts of philosophers like Ibn Sīnā to formulate a cosmic understanding of Muḥammad's role in relation to the emerging

notion of sainthood (*walāya*). Concomitantly, the Prophet became increasingly invested with the power of intercession for the souls of the faithful on Judgment Day, a concept that would have wide repercussions on popular religious practice. This salvific power of Muḥammad became tangible in the form of devotional performances of literary texts in different languages, as well as the dreams and visions through which both elite mystics and ordinary believers could have direct access to the spirit of the Prophet. For these mystical understandings of the Prophet Muḥammad, we are particularly indebted to the research of Annemarie Schimmel, whose work is the standard reference on this subject.[1]

Muḥammad as Light

Since the literature on the Prophet's mystical qualities is vast, it will be convenient to begin with a short text that illustrates a number of important themes occurring in later Muslim piety. This is one of the short essays in rhyming Arabic prose composed by the early Ṣūfī and martyr, al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), entitled *Ṭā-Sīn of the Lamp*. Without dwelling on the esoteric letter symbolism alluded to in the first words of the title, one can quickly recognize the powerful imagery of light that occurs throughout this passage, presenting Muḥammad as the vessel through which the light of God is

communicated to humanity. Moreover, Ḥallāj makes it clear that Muḥammad not only is foremost among humanity's elite, the prophets, but also has a transcendental status beyond the confines of space and time. While Ḥallāj securely anchors the career of Muḥammad to the Sanctuary of Mecca and the historical context of his companions such as Abū Bakr, he nevertheless identifies the actions of the Prophet as transparent reflections of the will of God and even as an indication of his unity with God:

> A lamp appeared from the light of the hidden realm; it returned, and surpassed the other lamps, and prevailed. A moon manifested itself among the other moons, a star whose constellation is in the heaven of secrets. God called Muḥammad "illiterate" (Q 7:157) to concentrate his inspiration, "man of the Sanctuary" to increase of his fortune, and "Meccan" to reinforce his nearness to Him. God “opened his breast” (Q 6:125), raised his rank, enforced his command, and revealed his full moon. His full moon arose from the cloud of Yamāma, his sun dawned in the environs of Tahama, and his lamp radiated a mine of generosity. He only taught from his own insight, and he only commanded his example by the beauty of his life. He was present before God and made God present, he saw and informed, he cautioned and warned.
>
> No one has seen him in reality except his companion, (Abū Bakr) the

Confirmer. For he was in agreement with him, and then he was his companion, so that no division would occur between them. No one really knew him, for all were ignorant of his true description. "Those to whom We gave the Book know Muḥammad as they know their own sons, but there is a division among them, who conceal the truth although they know it" (Q 2:146). The lights of prophecy emerged from his light, and his lights appeared from the light of the Hidden. None of their lights is brighter, more splendid, or takes greater precedence in eternity, than the light of the Master of the Sanctuary.

His aspiration preceded all other aspirations, his existence preceded nothingness, and his name preceded the Pen, because he existed before all peoples. There is not in the horizons, beyond the horizons, or below the horizons, anyone more elegant, more noble, more knowing, more just, more fearsome, or more compassionate, than the subject of this tale. He is the leader of created beings, the one “whose name is glorious (Aḥmad)" (Q 61:6). His nature is unique, his command is most certain, his essence is most excellent, his attribute is most illustrious, and his aspiration is most distinctive. How wonderful! How splendid, clear and pure, how magnificent and famous, how illuminated, capable, and patient he is! His fame was unceasing, before all created beings existed, and his renown was unceasing before there was any "before" and after

any "after," when no substance or colors existed. His substance is pure, his word is prophetic, his knowledge is lofty, his expression is Arabic, his direction of prayer is "neither of the East nor the West" (Q 24:35), his descent is paternal, his peer (Gabriel) is lordly, and his companion (Abū Bakr) is of his people.

Eyes have insight by his guidance, and inner minds and hearts attain their knowledge through him. God made him speak, the proof confirmed him, and God dispatched him. He is the proof and he is the proven. He is the one who polished the rust from the mirror of the suffering breast. He is the one who brought an eternal Word, timeless, unspoken, and uncreated, which is united with God without separation, and which passes beyond the understanding. He is the one who told of the ends, and the end of the end. He lifted the clouds and pointed to “the house of the Sanctuary” (Q 5:97). He is the perfect one, he is the magnanimous one, he is the one who ordered the idols to be smashed, he is the one who tore away the clouds, he is the one sent to all humanity, and he is the one who distinguishes between favor and prohibition.

Above him, a cloud flashed lightning, and beneath him, lightning flashed and sparkled. It rained and brought forth fruit. All sciences are but a drop from his ocean, all wisdom but a spoonful from his sea, and all times are but an hour from his duration. Truth exists through him, and through him reality exists; sincerity

exists through him, and companionship exists through him. Chaos exists through him, and order exists through him (cf. Q 21:30). He is "the first" in attaining union and "the last" in prophecy, "the outward" in knowledge "and the inward" in reality (Q 57:3). No learned man has attained to his knowledge, and no sage is aware of his understanding. God did not give him up to His creation, for he is He, as I am He, and “He is He.”

Never has anyone departed from the M of Muḥammad, and no one has entered the Ḥ. (As for) his Ḥ, the second M, the D, and the M at the beginning: the D is his permanence (*dawām*), the M is his rank (*maḥall*), the Ḥ is his spiritual state (*ḥāl*), and the second M is his speech (*maqāl*). (God) revealed his proclamation, He displayed his proof, “He caused the Criterion (the Qur’ān) to descend” (Q 3:4), He made his tongue speak, He illuminated his paradises, He reduced his opponents to impotence, He confirmed his explanation, He raised his dignity. If you fled from his field, then where would be the path when there is no guide, you suffering one? For the wisdom of the sages, next to his wisdom, is “shifting sand” (Q 73:14).[2]

The density of the qur’ānic allusions that Ḥallāj summons to evoke his mystical portrait points to what was already in his time a tradition of deep interiorization of scripture

combined with speculation about the text's relationship with the messenger who delivered it.

The theme of Muḥammad as light seems to be anticipated in the Qur'ān, where the Prophet is called "a shining lamp" (*sirāj munīr*, 33:46), a phrase to which Ḥallāj clearly refers by the title of his treatise. Several other qur'ānic texts dealing with light have also been frequently understood as symbols for the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly the famous "light verse" (24:35), where the eighth-century interpreter Muqātil understood the "lamp" (*miṣbāḥ*) mentioned there to be once again a symbol for the Prophet as the vessel of the divine light. Likewise, sura 93, "The Morning Light" (*al-ḍuḥā*), was convincingly interpreted as an address to the Prophet.

The stage had been set for the interpretation of Muḥammad as the light of the world by Ḥallāj's teacher and predecessor, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), who explicitly states that Adam was created from the light of Muḥammad:

> When God willed to create Muḥammad, he displayed from his own light a light that he spread through the entire kingdom. And when it came before (God's) Majesty it prostrated itself, and God created from its prostration a column of dense light like a vessel of glass, the inside being visible from the outside and the outside being visible from the inside. In this column of light Muḥammad worshiped before the Lord of the Worlds a thousand thousand years with the

> primordial faith, being in the revealed presence of the invisible within the invisible realm a thousand thousand years before the beginning of creation. And God created Adam from the light of Muḥammad, and then Muḥammad from the clay of Adam; and the clay is created from the column in which Muḥammad worshiped.[3]

The key to this striking image of the light of Muḥammad is clearly his emanation from the divine light and his priority over Adam as the beginning of the sequence of prophecy.

As Schimmel has observed, the subsequent elaboration of the symbolism of the light of Muḥammad owes a great deal to the Andalusian Ṣūfī master Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and his interpreter ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. ca. 810/1408), and there are numerous reflections of this doctrine in poetry composed in Arabic, Persian, and other languages.[4] On a more abstract level, this light symbolism merges into the notion of the "Muḥammadan reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), which in turn is interpreted in terms of the "perfect human being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), combining both a cosmic and a revelatory function that is inherited by the prophets and, eventually, the Ṣūfī saints.

In dramatic terms, most striking aspect of the spiritual itinerary of the Prophet is undoubtedly his ascension (*miʿrāj*) into the heavens, and that voyage is commonly

merged into the account of his night journey (*isrāʾ*) from Mecca to Jerusalem, which becomes the point of departure for the heavenly journey. Muslim interpreters have typically seen two Qur'ānic texts (17:1-2, 53:1-18) as the locations for these events. A large narrative tradition has emerged on this topic, beginning with stories found in the standard Ḥadīth collections, but expanding beyond that to encompass a broad range of texts in various languages, which may be fruitfully compared with the heavenly journeys found in other religious traditions of the Near East. Some of these texts are accompanied by extraordinary miniature paintings depicting the story's celestial landscapes and encounters with angels and prophets.[5] The complicated history of these ascension narratives has recently been traced by Frederick Colby.[6]

As an example of this literature, one may take the important Arabic collection of Ṣūfī sayings on the topic of the ascension, which was compiled by the noted Ṣūfī scholar, al-Sulamī (d. 1021), under the title *The Subtleties of the Ascension*. As Colby points out, there are several separate emphases to be found in this text: first, the night journey and ascension "as proof for the unique status and favor that Muḥammad enjoyed"; second, the notion that Muḥammad was "clothed with the lights of the divine

attributes," which links up with the theme of the light of Muḥammad; third, Muḥammad's direct vision of God, something that is not typically found in the standard *ḥadīth* collections; and fourth, the stipulation that this experience of ascension was an esoteric one that could not be fully revealed to the public.[7] In this distinctively Ṣūfī approach to the ascension of the Prophet, one may see an increasing refinement in the notion of his distinctive status and unique proximity to God.

His physical and spiritual perfection

The special ontological status of the Prophet Muḥammad found more direct expression in the widespread literature devoted to Muḥammad as the physical and spiritual model of beauty.[8] This emphasis on his beauty goes beyond formal obedience to the Prophet, which is enjoined in several passages from the Qur'ān: "Whoever obeys the messenger obeys God" (4:80); "Those who swear allegiance to you swear allegiance to God" (48:10). While texts like those might have established a model of his legal and political authority, the Qur'ān also conveys a much loftier and more attractive status for him by calling Muḥammad "a mercy for creation" (21:107), "of noble character" (68:4), and "a beautiful model" (33:21). This combination of obedience and admiration as attitudes towards Muḥammad helps to explain the profound emotional

attachment that many Muslims have had for the Prophet. While this personal connection to the Prophet is by no means restricted to Ṣūfī adepts, devotion directed towards him is an exceptionally strong characteristic of Ṣūfī practice. An example of this kind of devotion is found in the description of the physical appearance of the Prophet by woman named Umm Maʿbad, who entertained the Prophet and his companion Abū Bakr on their way from Mecca to Medina:

> I saw a man, pure and clean, with a handsome face and a fine figure. He was not marred by a skinny body, nor was he overly small in the head and neck. He was graceful and elegant, with intensely black eyes and thick eyelashes. There was a huskiness in his voice, and his neck was long. His beard was thick, and his eyebrows were finely arched and joined together. When silent, he was grave and dignified, and when he spoke, glory rose up and overcame him. He was from afar the most beautiful of men and the most glorious, and close up he was the sweetest and the loveliest. He was sweet of speech and articulate, but not petty or trifling. His speech was a string of cascading pearls, measured so that none despaired of its length, and no eye challenged him because of brevity. In company he is like a branch between two other branches, but he is the most flourishing of the three in appearance, and the loveliest in power. He has friends

surrounding him, who listen to his words. If he commands, they obey implicitly, with eagerness and haste, without frown or complaint.

This description, with its laconic Bedouin eloquence, found its way into artistic representation in the calligraphic pieces known as “the adornment of the Prophet" (*ḥilyat al-nabī*), an art form that was highly developed in the Ottoman realms. Surrounded by medallions bearing the names of the four “rightly-guided” caliphs, and prominent quotations of the Qur’ānic passages on the cosmic and ethical centrality of the Prophet, these descriptions of Muḥammad's physical beauty, whether by Umm Maʿbad or ʿAlī, formed a kind of verbal icon to create the imaginative picture of the Prophet in one's mind, while avoiding the idolatry of visual representation.[9] Short texts like this were complemented by extensive works on the virtues of the Prophet, such as the extraordinarily popular *Guides to Blessings* (*Dalā’il al-khayrāt*) of al-Jazūlī (d. 1465), a collection of prayers for the Prophet which included descriptions of his tomb in Medina, and commonly featured facing pages of illustrations of that shrine, or else showed both Medina and Mecca.[10]

The admiration for the Prophet that is evident in the examples just mentioned found further devotional expressions that increasingly stressed his perfection, his charisma, and his ability to intercede with God for the forgiveness of others. All of these

tendencies admittedly move away from those the passages of the Qur'ān that repeatedly remind Muḥammad he is only a human being.[11] Scholars began to enunciate the doctrine of his immunity from sin, a stipulation that included all other prophets as well.[12] Despite the well-known doctrine that the Prophet's only miracle was the Qur'ān, it was not long before the story of this life was embroidered with tales of miracles.[13] Some of these stories could take the form of exegetical elaborations of enigmatic passages in the Qur'ān. Thus, a modern dictionary of the Qur'ān takes the opening lines of sura 94, literally, "Did We not open your breast?" as a figure of speech meaning, "Did We not prepare you to receive something spiritual?"[14] Traditional commentators took it in a different direction, providing a detailed narrative of an initiatic experience, in which angelic visitors removed from Muḥammad's heart the black spot of sin deposited in all other humans by Satan. Likewise, the eschatological sign mentioned in Sūra 54, where "the moon was split," was understood as a miracle by which the Prophet split the moon into two halves to demonstrate his authority to the pagans of Mecca.[1] The growth of these miraculous accounts of Muḥammad in literature was considerable. Alongside these tendencies was an increasing focus on Muḥammad as the intercessor who could act to obtain God's forgiveness for the sins of others. On this important question of intercession, the Qur'ān has a number of ambiguous passages, sometimes rejecting the

[1] See the discussion in Chapter Two of this volume.

possibility, yet at other times conceding that God may permit others to intercede with Him at the resurrection.[15] This theme is enlarged in Ḥadīth, where the standard collections of the Sunnis emphasize Muḥammad's ability to obtain God's forgiveness for his community, and indeed humanity at large.

The classic expression of devotional piety towards the Prophet, in terms of these themes of sinlessness, miraculous deeds, and intercession, is unquestionably the Arabic "Poem of the Cloak" (*Qaṣīdat al-Burda*) of the Egyptian poet al-Būṣīrī (d. 1298).[16] Written to celebrate the author's miraculous recovery from illness, which he attributed to the intervention of the Prophet, the *Burda* encapsulates all these key features of popular Islamic prophetology. One passage will suffice as an example of this text's insistence on Muḥammad's preeminence:

> Leave aside what Christians claim about their prophet,
> But award to him [Muḥammad] whatever you want in terms of praise, and stand by it,
> And ascribe to his person whatever you want in terms of nobility
> And ascribe to his power every greatness you want,
> For the excellence of the Messenger of God has no limit
> So that anyone who speaks with his mouth could express it completely.[17]

It is especially noteworthy that this Arabic poem was itself credited with miraculous and healing abilities, something that doubtless contributed to its widespread popularity in different regions from North Africa to Indonesia.

Muḥammad as exemplar

At this point we may pause for a moment to consider a fundamental problem that Henry Corbin has summarized under the phrase "the paradox of monotheism." While his exposition of this issue is complex, it may be simplified as follows: if the God of Revelation is indeed beyond intellect and explanation, the need of humanity decrees that there must be an intermediary to provide a connection to that transcendent source. In the case of a human prophet, after his demise there is a crisis, when the community of believers must decide how to proceed in his absence. While one formulation historically has moved towards scriptural codification of legal and authoritarian systems as ways to preserve the legacy of a prophet, there has always been a constituency that demands continuous access to the sources of inspiration. In the case of Shīʿism, the Imams step in to provide that continuing access to divine authority, at least for a few generations, and thereafter the religious class as a whole stands as the intermediary. In the broader stream of spirituality called Ṣūfism, it is through the Ṣūfī saints that God

continues to manifest on an ongoing basis. In either instance, there is an insistence on the notion of proximity to God, inadequately translated in English as "sainthood," and summarized under the Arabic term *walāya*.[18] It is especially noteworthy that the insistence on the intermediate authority of the Prophet Muḥammad also entails working out the roles of later saintly figures who continue to relay the divine message to humanity, but whose own authority is closely linked to and dependent on that of the Prophet.

Speculative understanding of prophecy and sainthood therefore went hand-in-hand, and in some respects it was difficult to disentangle the two concepts. As the Persian Ṣūfī Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 605/1209) put it, "The oceans of sainthood and prophethood interpenetrate each other."[19] While the devotional approach to the Prophet elevated his status to a cosmic principle comparable to the Christian logos doctrine, the mystical knowledge of the Ṣūfī saint who could announce such a discovery also in effect came close to claiming an authority equivalent to that of prophecy. This tension between sainthood and prophecy is prefigured in the Qur'ānic account (in sura 18) of the encounter of Moses with the "servant of God," identified as the immortal prophet Khiḍr, who has a divine knowledge that is not available to the prophet, and the same theme recurs regularly in the history of Ṣūfism. One famous example is the first encounter between the great Persian Ṣūfī Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) and his master

Shams-i Tabrīz; according to one account, Shams announced that the Prophet Muḥammad had said he could not praise God adequately, while the Ṣūfī saint Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī had proclaimed, “Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!” – so which had the higher state? This question was so shocking that it reportedly caused Rūmī to faint.[20] While most Ṣūfī theorists insisted on the supremacy of the Prophet Muḥammad, the issue of the relationship between prophecy and sainthood remained volatile, since the mystical knowledge of sainthood was in effect necessary for the validation of prophecy.

The most extensive formulation of mystical prophetology in Ṣūfism is found in the works of Ibn ʿArabī and his successors.[21] Building on the theories of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 936), he developed the concept of “the seal of the saints” (*khatm al-awliyā*) as an esoteric and eschatological parallel to the status of Muḥammad as “the seal of the prophets.”[22] While Ibn ʿArabī was scrupulous in stating the supremacy of the Prophet, yet it cannot be denied that his claims about his own status were spectacular, though the boldest of his declarations were circumspectly concealed in books that were esoteric to the point of creating secret alphabets.[23] In any case, the cosmic role of the Prophet was accompanied by an impressively detailed portrait of the invisible hierarchy of the saints, who form an extensive retinue, as it were, for the supreme spiritual figure of Muḥammad. From a historical and ritual perspective, the centrality of the Prophet for the mystical tradition was evident in the formulation of the spiritual genealogies of the

Ṣūfī orders, which every case were traced back to the Prophet as the source of spiritual knowledge. The oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*) that the Arabs gave to the Prophet, sealed by a handshake, became the rite of initiation that was transmitted through the chain (*silsila*) of Ṣūfī masters and disciples, constituting the authentic path of knowledge because of its prophetic source.

Yet there is certainly an overlap between the spiritual and cosmic status of the Prophet and the saint. An illustration is provided by the following poem addressed to the Prophet by al-Jīlī, known as a theorist of the doctrine of the perfect human:

> O Center of the compass! O inmost ground of the truth!
>
> O pivot of necessity and contingency!
>
> O eye of the entire circle of existence! O point of the Koran and the Furqan!
>
> O perfect one, and perfecter of the most perfect, who has been beautified by the majesty of God the Merciful!
>
> Thou art the Pole (*quṭb*) of the most wondrous things. The sphere of perfection in its solitude turns on thee.
>
> Thou art transcendent, nay thou art immanent, nay thine is all that is known and unknown, everlasting and imperishable.
>
> Thine in reality is Being and not-being; nadir and zenith are thy two garments.

> Thou art both the light and its opposite, nay but thou art only darkness to a gnostic who is dazed.[24]

The key term here is the pole or axis (*quṭb*), a symbol invoking the centrality of the Pole Star as the pivot around which the cosmos turns. While al-Jīlī applies this epithet to the Prophet Muḥammad, it is most commonly addressed to eminent mystics considered to perform the central role of sustaining the universe in their own day. And while from an ordinary geometrical view it might seem superfluous or contradictory to have more than one center, the mystical imagination has no problem with multiple centers of the world, so that the phrase “pole of poles” (*quṭb al-aqṭāb*) frequently occurs as a hyperbolic expression for the spiritual supremacy of a particularly favored saint. It is, moreover, on the basis of the applicability of that term, pole (*quṭb*), both to the Prophet and to the saints, that it can be used in the title for this chapter.

The horizontal transmission of prophetic blessing through the Ṣūfī lineages was certainly an important manifestation of the ongoing role of the Prophet Muḥammad in Muslim religious life, but this institutional framework was far from exhausting the possibility of connecting to his spiritual essence. From an early date, it was recognized that dreams were a less intense version of the divine communication of prophecy, and dreams of the Prophet were accorded a special status; it was, after all, recorded in a

ḥadīth that Satan could never insinuate himself into a dream in the Prophet's form, so dreams featuring Muḥammad had the distinction of being true.[25] Thus even for ordinary people, it was possible to have direct vertical contact with Prophet through a dream without being dependent on a Ṣūfī initiation. But for elite mystics, waking visions also offered direct access to encounters with prophets and angels, sometimes on a daily basis.[26] A number of Ṣūfīs are reported to have made regular visits to the tomb of the Prophet in Medina, by miraculous means, where they received *ḥadīth*s directly from his spirit without any intermediary. There were even some Ṣūfīs who specialized in the talent of producing dreams of the Prophet for others, in this way democratizing access to the source of spirituality.[27]

Conclusion

If anything, it may be said that the focus on the Prophet Muḥammad in Ṣūfī circles has continued to increase, regardless of whether the means of transmission was extraordinary, as in dreams or visions, or through the normal course of the study of Ḥadīth. Scholars have sometimes observed that the 17th and 18th centuries were a time of considerable activity, focused in Arabia, for the study of Ḥadīth, and that the principle networks fostering this scholarship were articulated through Ṣūfī orders, prior

to the rise of the Wahhābī movement with its strongly anti-Ṣūfī attitude.[28] It was a highly mystical form of devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad that sustained the work of eminent Ṣūfī scholars such as ʿAlī al-Muttaqī, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dihlawī, Ibrāhīm Kūrānī, and others. Indeed, it may be said that the forms of devotion sometimes referred to as the "Muḥammadan path" (*ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*) were not any kind of new ideology or institutional structure of Ṣūfism, but simply a marked emphasis on the centrality of the Prophet.[29] In modern Egypt, for example, classical Ṣūfī concepts such as the "annihilation" (*fanāʾ*) of the self have been redefined in effect as intense devotional absorption in the Prophet and his family.[30]

The major changes in Islamic thought signaled by the emergence of the Wahhābī movement in the late 18th century are still being felt today, but this is particularly the case with respect to its radical critique of the entire worldview associated with the notion of spiritual intercession. Recalling the view of Ibn Taymiyya that an intention to visit the tomb of the Prophet invalidates the performance of the *ḥajj* to Mecca, his successors in Wahhābī and Salafī circles have rejected many pious practices involving the visitation of the tombs of saints, imams, and indeed the Prophet himself, where police officials today severely discourage any undue expression of emotion that might be construed as an idolatrous reverence of the Prophet as more than human. Thus celebrating the Prophet's birthday is unlawful in Saudi Arabia today, and it is striking to see how many

historical sites associated with the Prophet Muḥammad and his family (particularly the Jannat al-Baqīʿ cemetery in Medina) have been demolished or, more recently, removed in the name of urban development. This debate is not confined to Arab circles, either. 19th-century reformist thinkers in India engaged in intense debates over questions such as standing or making other gestures of respect when the Prophet's name was mentioned. The controversies between the two major schools of the Barelwis and the Deobandis in South Asia swirl around the practices of intercessory piety, which the former defend and the latter reject, and the same issue applies whether it is the Prophet or the Ṣūfī saints whose status is under discussion.[31] Examples of this debate among contemporary Muslims over the Prophet's status could be multiplied indefinitely. But the strength of the emotional and spiritual attachments to the Prophet Muḥammad among a significant proportion of Muslims today must be considered to demonstrate the ongoing importance of this tradition that reveres his central place in the cosmos. It can still be summarized in the memorable Arabic verses of the poet Saʿdī (d. 691/1292):

> He reached the acme (peak) of grandeur by his perfections,
>
> He dispersed the tenebrous clouds of darkness through his beauty.
>
> Excellent were all his character traits;
>
> Then shower your blessings upon him and his family![32]

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[1] Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[2] This translation of Ḥallāj's *Ṭā-Sīn al-sirāj* has been modified from an earlier version, trans. Carl W. Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999), pp. 15-20, by comparison with the new edition by Stéphane Ruspoli, *Le Livre Tâwasîn de Hallâj* (Beirut: Dar Albouraq, 2007), pp. 319-323, along with Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Manṭiq al-asrār* (MS Tashkent), fols. 132-136.

[3] Abū 'l-Ḥasan `Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies Monograph Series 1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 54.

[4] Schimmel, pp. 123-143.

[5] Marie Rose Séguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet: Mirâj nâmeh* (New York: G. Braziller, 1977); *Exploring Other Worlds: New Studies on the Prophet Muhammad's Ascension (*Mi`raj*)*, ed. Frederick Colby and Christiane Gruber (forthcoming from Indiana University Press).

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[8] Schimmel, pp. 24-55.

[9] Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 76-79.

[10] Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān Jazūlī, *Guide to goodness (Dalā'il al-khayrāt)*, trans. Hassan Rosowsky (Chicago, IL: Great Books of the Islamic World, n.d. [2001?]); Jan Just Witkam, "The battle of the images: Mekka vs. Medina in the iconography of the manuscripts of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*," in *Theoretical Approaches to the Transmission and Edition of Oriental Manuscripts*, Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Istanbul March 28-30, 2001, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Manfred Kropp (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2007), pp. 67-84.

[11] Schimmel, p. 25.

[12] Schimmel, pp. 53-66.

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[13] Schimmel, pp. 67-80.

[14] Arne A. Ambros with Stephan Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004), p. 146.

[15] Schimmel, pp. 80-104; A.J. Wensinck, Annemarie Schimmel, "SHafāʿa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Brill, 2009, Brill Online, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 18 January 2009 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1019>).

[16] Schimmel, pp. 183-189.

[17] Schimmel, p. 187.

[18] Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998); Carl W. Ernst, "Introduction," *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, ed. Grace Martin Smith with Carl W. Ernst, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993), pp. xi-xxviii.

[19] Ruzbihan Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master*, trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill NC: Parvardigar Press, 1997), p. 7.

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[21] Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn `Arabi*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Oxford: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Hakādhā takallama Ibn `Arabī* ([Cairo]: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyya al-`Āmma lil-Kitāb, 2002; 2nd ed., Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thiqāfī al-`Arabī, 2004), pp. 62-72.

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[25] Nile Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13 (2003), pp. 287-313; Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad al-Zawâwî* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); Pierre Lory , *Le rêve et ses interprétations en Islam* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2003); and Annemarie Schimmel *Die Träume des Kalifen : Träume und ihre Deutung in der islamischen Kultur* (München: C.H. Beck, 1998).

[26] Carl W. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mystical Experience and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (London: Curzon Press, 1996); Ruzbihan Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master,* trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill: Parvardigar Press, 1997).

[27] Meenakshi Khanna, “Dreams, and Visions in North Indian Sufic Traditions ca. (1500-1800) A.D,” PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2001.

[28] John O. Voll, "Hadith Scholars and Tariqahs: An Ulama Group in the 18th-Century Haramayn and their Impact in the Islamic World," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 15.3-4 (1980), pp. 264-272.

[29] Schimmel, *And Mohammed*, pp. 216-238, where the political unity of this tendency is perhaps overstated.

[30] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

[31] Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870-1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[32] Gholamreza Aavani, “Glorification of the Prophet Muhammad in the Poems of Sa’adi”

<http://www.irip.ir/userfiles/Archive/Papers/English/R&M/Glorification%20of%20the%20Prophet%20Muhammad%20in%20the%20Poems%20of%20Sa'adi.pdf>.