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Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts (Qūt al-qulūb)* in the Context of Early Sufism

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Very little is known about the life of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996 CE) with the exception of a few minor details.[1] The lacuna in the historical source material led Richard Gramlich to lament "the meager information which has come down to us with respect to the life of Abū Ṭālib."[2] And yet although Makkī's life is cloaked in obscurity, his *Nourishment of Hearts* (*Qūt al-qulūb*) is not. It was one of the most widely read attempts in early Islam to explain the rules which should govern the inner life as well as demonstrate the harmony of the science of the inner life with the more outward or "exoteric" formulations of Islam. The work had such an impact on Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) in his own personal spiritual quest, as he would confess in the *Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl)*,[3] that it would eventually become one of the main sources of inspiration for the *Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn)*. One might even go so as to argue that the *Iḥyā'* was in many ways an exegetical elaboration of Makkī's earlier work, infused with Ghazālī's personal insights and organized according to his own analytic genius.[4] Due to the degree to which

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[1] To date not a single monograph has been published on this most influential early Sufi author. For brief analyses of particular aspects of his thought, see W. Mohammad Azam, "Abu Talib al-Makki: A Traditional Sufi," *Hamdard Islamicus* 22, no. 3 (1999): 71–79; Abdel Salam Moghrabi, "La notion d'ascèse dans la pensée de Abu Talib al-Makki," *Études Orientales* 2 (1998): 52–55; Kojiro Nakamura, "Makkī and Ghazālī on Mystical Practices," *Oriens* 20 (1984): 83–91; M. A. Shukri, "Abu Talib al-Makki and his *Qut al-Qulub*," *Islamic Studies* 28, no. 2 (1989): 161–170. John Renard has translated Makki's chapter on knowledge from the *Qūt* in his *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 112–263. The only full translation of the *Qūt* in a European language is that of Richard Gramlich, *Die Nahrung der Herzen,* 4 vols. (Stuggart: F. Steiner, 1992). For some recent remarks on the place of Makkī in the context of early Sufism, see Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 87–89.

[2] Richard Gramlich, "Introduction," *Die Nahrung der Herzen,* 1:11.

[3] Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, in *Faith and Practice of Ghazali*, trans. with an introduction by W. Montgomery Watt, (1952; repr. Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 54.

[4] For the influence of Makkī's *Qūt* on Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1975), 34–35; Nakamura, "Makkī and Ghazālī," 83–91; Mohamed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY, 1975), 105–107. See also the relevant sections in *Muḥammad al-Ġazzālīs Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe*, trans. Richard Gramlich (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1984).

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the *Ihyā'* resembles the *Qūt* — in structure, content and motive — a close study of the *Qūt* may help dispel the commonly held view that Ghazālī was the first major figure to "validate," in the words of one scholar, "the previously suspicious Islamic mystical tradition."[5] For all of his contributions, Ghazālī was not the grand reconciler he has often been made to be even though he did contribute to more fully integrating Sufi thought into the mainstream discourse of the *'ulamā'*. The initial effort to provide greater legitimacy to the inner tradition of Islam or what would later be referred to as the "jurisprudence of the heart" *(fiqh al-qalb)* in a sustained, comprehensive fashion was undertaken more than a century earlier, by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī.

Makkī's own enterprise was partly the result of a historical context in which representatives of the emerging Sufi tradition were, in less extreme cases, viewed with suspicion for holding onto apparently heretical doctrines, and in more extreme cases, outright persecuted. The tensions between more "exoteric" and "esoteric" strains of Islam[6] which had been developing for some time prior to the appearance of the *Nourishment* formed, therefore, an essential backdrop to a work that would become one of the most widely read in early Sufi history.

I. Background to the *Qūt*

a. Tensions in Early Islam

Gerhard Böwering has noted that the antagonism early Sufis faced can best be illustrated by examples from the 9th century.[7] It is during this period that we begin to

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The influence of al-Ḥārithal-Muḥasibī (d. 857), Aḥmad b. Miskawayh (d. 1030) and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1060 or 1108/9) must also be acknowledged. For Ghazālī's debt to Muḥāsibī, see Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad: A Study of the Life and Teaching of Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī A.D. 781–857* (1935; repr., London: Sheldon Press, 1977), 269–280; idem., "The Forerunner of Ghazālī," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1936): 65–78. For the influence of Iṣfāhānī, see Wilferd Madelung, "Ar-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī und die Ethik al-Gazālīs," in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (Ashgate: Vermont, 1985), 152–163.

[5] Jonathan Brown, "The Last Days of Ghazali and the Tripartite Division of the Sufi World: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazzālī's Letter to the Seljuq Vizier and Commentary," *Muslim World* 96 (2006): 90. Brown's article nevertheless provides an excellent analysis of the historical origins of the formulation of the tripartite schema (between commoners, elect, and the elect of the elect) that would become common in Sufi literature.

[6] I use the terms "esoteric" and "exoteric" Islam with some caution to indicate the distinction between *ẓāhirī* ("external" or "outer") and *bāṭinī* ("internal" or "inner") modes of religion. My reservation with these terms rests on the historical baggage which has accompanied them. This has been due to their association, particular in the case of "esotericism," with certain religious currents in the West such as theosophy and spiritualism. In the words of Antoine Faivre, esotericism "calls forth a bundle of attitudes and an ensemble of discourses" (*Access to the Western Esotericism* [Albany: State University Press, 1994], 4), many of which would be alien to more normative expressions of Sufism. For some brief but critical reflections on the use of these terms, see William C. Chittick, "The Absent Men in Islamic Cosmology," in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Library of Living Philosophers*, eds. E. Hahn, R. Auxier, and L. Stone (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 689. See also Nasr's defense of these terms in his reply to Chittick in the same volume, 711–712.

[7] Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī (d.283/896)* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), 54. Böwering has more directly

discern the emergence of a strain within the emerging Islamic tradition that on the surface violated the dogmatic creedal formulations of the religious establishment. The fame of the earliest figures such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), Mālik b. Dinār (d. 749), Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 778), and Rābiʿat al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 801) lay in their renunciation and pure-minded devotion to God, qualities that did not elicit the same degree of hostility that the later Sufis would face for their doctrinal beliefs. If anything, the piety and self-mortification of early figures such as Ḥasan and Rābiʿa were admired even by those outside their ranks.[8] But in the 9th century a shift occurred which manifested itself in new forms of discourses, some of which were perceived as subversive. These in turn provoked intense, even hostile responses. From the perspective of many of the Sufis themselves, they started to speak of matters about which their predecessors had remained silent,[9] and faced the consequences for their provocative claims.

Dārānī (d. 830), for example, was expelled from Syria for declaring he had a vision of the angels in which he was also spoken to by them. Basṭāmī (d. 874–5) was driven out of his hometown for claiming to have undergone a heavenly ascent (*miʿrāj*) similar in kind to that of the Prophet of Islam.[10] Al-Hamza al-Baghdādī (d. 882–3), on the other hand, was socially ostracized for claiming to have experienced the presence of God in the cock's caw and the blowing of the wind. Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899), labeled the "tongue of Sufism" for his profound eloquence, and credited with developing the pivotal Sufi concepts of *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence),[11] was accused of disbelief by

addressed this question in "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics,* ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernde Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45–67. See also Josef van Ess, "Sufism and its Opponents: Reflections on Topoi, Tribulations, and Transformation," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics,* eds. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 22–44.

[8] Ibn Khallikān said of Ḥasan that "he was from among the chiefs of the first generation of successors (to the Prophet), and their great ones." *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān wa abnāʾ al-zaman* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, n. d.), 2:69. For the significant role he played in the formation of Islamic mysticism, see Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 119–138.

[9] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazalī, for example, notes that the Prophet of Islam possessed two kinds of knowledge: one which he gave freely to the common lot of believers, and the other which he revealed only to select group of companions. The implication, of course, is that the later was mystical or esoteric in nature. He quotes a saying attributed to Abū Hurayra (d. 681), "I have preserved from the messenger of God — peace be upon him — two vessels (of knowledge), one from which I have (freely) given you, but were I to disseminate (what is in) the other, this throat would be cut off (*laqūtiʿa hādhā l-ḥulqūm*)." *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Aleppo: Dār al-Waʿi, 1998), 1:177. Makkī also mentions the case of Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 657), the companion to whom the Prophet revealed not only the identities of the hypocrites, but more importantly, "the mysteries of knowledge (*sarāʾir al-ʿilm*), subtleties of understanding (*daqāʾiq al-fahm*), and secrets of certainty (*khafāyā l-yaqīn*)." *Qūt al-qulūb fī muʿāmalat al-maḥbūb wa waṣf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd*, ed. Saʿīd Nasīb Mukarram (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995), 1: 309.

[10] Böwering, "Early Sufism" 54–55; Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism in the Middle of the Ninth Century," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 64–65.

[11] Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭāʾ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 183.

the Baghdad *ʿulamāʾ* because sections of his *Kitāb al-sirr* (*Book of the Secret*) were deemed heretical. Later in his life when he took up residence in Mecca, he was forced to leave after a little more than a decade by the local governor because of his teachings.[12] Ironically, this was the same figure that sought to display the superiority of prophets to saints and argued that any mystical notion which contravenes the letter of Scripture is fraudulent.[13] Dhū l-Nūn al-Misrī (d. 860), the "Nubian" Sufi, influential for his teachings about *wajd* (ecstasy) and *maʿrifa* (enlightenment/gnosis),[14] as well as his description of the journey to God through the states and stations,[15] was charged with secret disbelief. He was accused of being a philosopher and an alchemist, as two works on alchemy are attributed to him.[16] Later Persian Sufis credited him with introducing Hellenistic ideas into Sufi notions of *maʿrifa*.[17] Yet another prominent Sufi, Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 865), the teacher and uncle of Junayd, honored with such titles as "commander of the hearts" and "moon of the Sufis," was accused of *kufr*.[18] Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), a student of Dhū l-Nūn, and one who would have a tremendous impact on Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's own spiritual development, also did not escape hostility despite his conservative asceticism, as he was expelled from his own town of Tustar. He moved to Baṣra where the controversy surrounding him continued,[19] centering on what he considered to be the obligatory nature of repentance[20] as well as his claim to be the "Proof of the Saints" (*ḥujjat al-awliyāʾ*).

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[12] Böwering, "Early Sufism," 58.

[13] Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, *Rasāʾil al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmārāʾī (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Majmaʿi al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1968), 31–32; According to Sulamī, Kharrāz declared that "every esoteric (*bāṭin*) [teaching] that is contradicted by the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) is null (*bātil*)." *Ṭabaqāt*, 185.

[14] For an excellent analysis of this concept within the Sufi tradition, see Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Notion and Significance of *Maʿrifa* in Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 155–181.

[15] Massignon, *Essay*, 145. See for example the aphorisms of Dhū l-Nūn, where he speaks extensively of such virtues as *tawakkul, rajāʾ, maḥabba*, and *khawf*, and their relationship to the larger journey to God; Abū Nuʿaym b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa ṭabaqāt al-asfiya*ʾ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002), 9:345–410; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 27–34. Cf. Mohammed Rustom, "The Sufi Teachings of Dhu'l-Nun." *Sacred Web* 24 (2009): 69–79.

[16] Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism," 64; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapell Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 92–93.

[17] Böwering, "Early Sufism," 57; Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism," 64; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 92–93.

[18] Melchert, "Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism," 64.

[19] Böwering, *Mystical,* 64–65; Melchert, "Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism," 64–65. Böwering points out that while Tustarī's religious claims certainly played a role in his expulsion from Tustar, political motivations related to the Zanj rebellion may have also been a factor. *Mystical,* 60.

[20] The basis of Sahl's claim regarding the obligatory nature of *tawba* was not rooted in a simplistic interpretation of the mandates of Islamic revelation, but in a particular understanding of the spiritual-psychological effects of sin. Sahl described the human soul as a theatre for the struggle between the luminous heart and the dense lower self. While the former is a positive force which inclines towards God, the latter is a negative force which turns man in the direction of his ego and disobedience. Since the human being is pulled by these two opposing tendencies, the task of the spiritual seeker is to overcome the negative impulses of the lower soul and return constantly to the

The opposition to the nascent Sufi tradition appears to have reached its height when Ghulām Khalīl (d. 888), a popular moralizing preacher and something of an ascetic in his own right initiated an inquisition against the Baghdad Sufis in 885 CE.[21] All in all, 75 people were blacklisted, later to be summoned by the authorities for interrogation. Khalīl was successful in convincing the regent al-Muwaffaq that the accused were downright heretics and must be executed.[22] Junayd was among those who were summoned. When, however, he appeared before the court he was recognized as a jurist of some distinction and therefore escaped trial. Others went into hiding.

Khalīl's main quandary, among others, appeared to have been with Sufi disquisitions of passionate love (*ʿishq*) between humans and God. For Khalīl, those who spoke of such impious matters were indistinguishable from adulterers.[23] He even managed to present to the court a woman who had concocted charges of sexual impropriety against the Sufis. It was later revealed that she had frequented the talks of Sumnūn al-Muḥibb b. Hamza (d. 900),[24] a handsome teacher known for his discourses on Divine *maḥabba* and *ʿishq*, and with whom she had fallen madly in love. When Sumnūn came to learn of her affections, she was removed from his circle. In response, she approached Junayd and inquired, "What do you think of a man who was my way to God, but then God disappeared while the man remained?" He understood the intimation but responded with silence. In despair and aroused by a desire for revenge she proceeded to Ghulām Khalīl, Sumnūn's adversary, to complain of misconduct. Accusations of *zandaqa* (heresy) were therefore intermingled with those of *ibāḥa* (licentiousness) — not an altogether uncommon combination used to discredit religious opponents.[25]

At the center of the storm lay Nūrī (d. 907),[26] the Sufi ecstatic, distinguished, like Sumnūn, for his emphasis on Divine love. He had to answer to three specific charges

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"higher self" and God through the regenerative, transformative power of *tawba*. See Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 362; Bowering, *Mystical*, 253. Abū Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 935) noted in that the Muslims "disagreed over the obligation of repentance (*wujūb al-tawba*). One group said that repentance from sins is absolutely obligatory (*farīḍa*) while another group denied it." *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyin*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980), 476.

[21] Carl Ernst has suggested that Khalīl was a Ḥanbali, an affiliation disputed by Van Ess. See Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University Press, 1985), 97; Van Ess, "Sufism and its Opponents," 26. Christopher Melchert inclines towards Van Ess's view. See "The Ḥanābila and the Early Sufis," *Arabica* 48, no. 3 (2001): 353.

[22] Van Ess, "Sufism and its Opponents," 27.

[23] Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 97.

[24] For more on Sumnūn b. Hamza, see Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla,* ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. Sharīf (Damascus: Dār al-Farfūr, 2002), 106–107; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 158–162.

[25] Ali Hasan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality, and Writings of Junayd* (London: Luzac, 1976), 39. Al-Nisāʾī, an early Ḥanbalī heresiologist, says in his categorization of the 72 erring-sects that five of these are the *ruḥāniyya* ("spiritualists"). One of these sub-sects, in his words, "claim that the love (*ḥubb*) of God overpowers their hearts [. . .] When their situation is thus [. . .] He (God) allows them theft, adultery, wine-drinking and fornication." Cited in Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 100.

[26] For some of the early biographical entries on Nūrī, see ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Jullābī Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; repr., Lahore:

brought before him: (1) his claim of mutual love with God, (2) his assertion that God is with him in his home, and (3) his cursing of the muezzin — "stab and poison him!" — while responding to the barking of a dog with "Here I am, Blessings to You!" His defense against the accusations was ingeniously drawn from the Qur'ān. For his claim of mutual love he cited the verse, "He loves them and they love Him" (Q 5:54). For the second complaint, he cited, "We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (Q 50:16). For the third one, he explained that the muezzin was simply making the call to prayer for his salary, while the dog's barking was, in its own way, its praise of God, since "there is nothing except that it hymns His praise, but you do not understand their praise" (Q 17:44).[27]

The charges against Nūrī and the Sufis were dismissed by the caliph after an extensive investigation, but not without an altogether unfortunate ending. Nūrī left Baghdad to take up residence in Raqqa, either at the caliph's own request, or due to the hostility which had been aroused against him by the Inquisition. Other Sufis of Baghdad further withdrew from social life and became much more reticent to speak about doctrinal matters pertaining to higher reaches of the spiritual path. As for Junayd, even though he escaped trial, these "events must have left their impact on [. . . him . . .] and cast a shadow over his later life. It was for him an experience leading to withdrawal."[28]

To what extent did the Inquisition reflect widespread anti-Sufi religious sentiments? And to what degree did the political context play a role in the arrests at Khalīl's urgings? Joseph van Ess has noted that the exact nature of the historical episode remains unclear, and that the precise motives for the persecution remain difficult to determine. He admits, however, that according to the earliest records, it appears to have revolved around Sufi claims of mutual love between the human being and God.[29] Carl Ernst has suggested that the political factors involved in the affair played as much a role, if not more, than the religious ones. "The tense political situation in Baghdad [because of the Zanj rebellion] doubtless contributed to an atmosphere in which the government acted on accusations of heresy without delay," writes Ernst, adding, that "[u]nder such circumstances it is perhaps natural that strange religious expressions should be suspected of having revolutionary content."[30] Christopher Melchert disagrees, arguing that while politics might have played a role, the religious tensions that came to the fore reflected a deep-seated and brewing antagonism against what seemed to be a new form of mystical

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Islamic Book Service, 1992), 189–195; Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, 10:267–273; Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 99–100; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 135–139. See also Gramlich's study of Nūrī and his teachings in *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 1995) 1: 381–445, as well as Schimmel's excellent article, "Abū'l Ḥusayn al-Nūrī: 'Qibla of the Lights'," in *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 59–64.

[27] Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 98–99; Böwering, "Early Sufism," 54–55.

[28] Abdel-Kader, *Writings of Junaid*, 40.

[29] Van Ess, "Sufism and its Opponents," 27.

[30] Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy,* 101.

consciousness that was replacing the older and more accepted ascetical strain.[31] Khalīl himself was of ascetic demeanor and admired Ḥasan al-Basrī, yet was incensed by the provocative and bold discursions of the Sufis which marked a contrast, in his eyes, to the sober and balanced religiosity of the early, non-speculative, otherworldly renunciants.

By far the most controversial of events was certainly the well-known public execution of Ḥallāj. Initially a student of Sahl Tustarī, he went with him to Baṣra, when he was forced out of Tustar. But then he left Sahl without permission to become the disciple of ʿAmr al-Makkī, only to later break with him and seek the discipleship of Junayd, who was unwelcoming. "I do not associate with madmen," declared Junayd. "Association demands sanity; if that is wanting, the result is such behavior of yours in regards to Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh Tustarī and ʿAmr." At the end of the conversation, Junayd further reproached him, "O Son of Manṣūr, in your words I see much foolishness and nonsense."[32] Junayd also refused to grant Ḥallāj the initiatic Sufi cloak, a mark of those on the Path.[33] It is not an entire surprise that Junayd himself approved of the execution, even though he refrained, according to Hujwīrī, from passing judgment on Hallāj's spiritual state to his fellow Sufis. ʿAmr al-Makkī and other contemporaneous Sufi teachers, however, held no reservations in rejecting him.[34] Junayd's approval of his execution rested on his respect for the norms of the law, by the standards of which so audacious a pronouncement as "I am the Truth" warranted death, even if it contained mystical truth. Unlike Ḥallāj and other ecstatics, Junayd favored outward sobriety in all circumstances and showed extreme reticence in disclosing the mysteries of the Way to the uninitiated.[35] It was such open pronouncements on the part of Ḥallāj that led later writers such as the Ḥanbali jurist, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), to declare in the strongest of terms that "the beliefs of Ḥallāj were despicable,"[36] a charge he could not have leveled against more prudent and circumspect figures such as Junayd, as well as other early Sufi figures whom he cited approvingly in his *Talbīs Iblīs (The Devil's Deception)*.

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[31] Melchert writes that "[t]he religious issues alone can explain both the Inquisition in Baghdad and the expulsion of Abū Sulaymān [al-Dārānī] from Damascus, Abū Hamza from Tarsus, and al-Kharrāz from Old Cairo and Mecca." "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism," 65–66.

[32] Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, 151, 189.

[33] Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1996), 266.

[34] Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, 150. ʿAmr al-Makkī advocated external sobriety. "Ecstasy," he said, "is a secret between God and the true believers." Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, 138. His dismissal of Ḥallāj is therefore not surprising.

[35] Even in his extant writings, it is often difficult to discern the exact meaning behind Junayd's words because he seems to veil his intended meanings through a play of intimations. Junayd is recognized within the Sufi tradition for his development of the science of *ishārāt* or mystical allusions, a style that Sells described as "often cryptic and contorted." *Early Islamic Mysticisim*, 251. It was perhaps Junayd's fear of unwittingly divulging forms of knowledge that were wisely kept hidden from those unprepared to receive them, that led him to request, according to Baghdādī in his *Tārīkh,* that all his books be buried upon his death. Abdel-Kader, *Writings of Junaid*, 57.

[36] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2004), 408.

Some scholars have sought to downplay the theological factors behind the execution and more seriously question the traditionally accepted narrative surrounding his death, arguing that his grim execution had more to do with his provocative temperament and political involvements.[37] Even if such conclusions are to be accepted, it is important to recognize that there was an underlying belief in the Sufi literature that Ḥallaj was executed principally for his views. Whatever may have been the actual historical circumstances of his death, a myth of Ḥallaj quickly formed and shaped the nature of subsequent discourses of Sufis, some of which sought to strategically associate and disassociate themselves from Ḥallāj.[38] Loved, reviled, and misunderstood, the martyr of Baghdad left an indelible mark on the course of Sufi history.

b. The Emergence of Sufi Apologia

It was near the end of the 10th century that the first manuals to systematically explore Sufi teachings as self-conscious modes of Sufi inquiry arose. Having outlined the development of the tensions between the exoteric and more esoteric formulations of the religious vision of Islam up until the period of these manuals, we are in a now much better position to understand the nature of this literature, of which the *Qūt* was a part. It would be impossible to isolate these texts from their religious contexts, which, in the words of Schimmel, "arose to prove to the world the perfect orthodoxy of Sufi tenets."[39]

The first three methodical studies were Kalābādhī's (d. 990 CE) *Taʿarruf li madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (*An Introduction to Sufī Doctrine*), Sarrāj's (d. 988 CE) *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī l-taṣawwuf* (*The Book of the Flashes of Sufīsm*), and Makkī's own *Qūt al-qulūb*.[40] These texts covered the nature of sainthood, miracles, creed, the importance of the law, communal worship and a range of other subjects that were points of controversy. The writers not only sought to demonstrate Sufism's compatibility with the teachings of the Prophet and the earliest Muslims, but also to reveal how its adepts were the elect of the community, those who after ascetic and spiritual exertion had realized the highest truths of religion.[41]

It would be misleading to presume that these works were simply guided by an apologetic agenda. While this was certainly an important factor, these writings were more than just Sufi *apologia* in that they were also, in many respects, consolidations of Sufi teachings that had hither-to-fore been scattered, having been transmitted orally or

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[37] See Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 25–26, as well as his sources.

[38] Jawid Mojadeddi has demonstrated this in the case of Qushayrī's *Risāla*, which conspicuously excluded mention of Ḥallāj in the biographical section of the work, but which also strategically included sayings and anecdotes of his in other sections of the text. See "Legitimizing Sufism in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*," *Studia Islamica* 90 (2000), 42–43.

[39] Schimmel, *Mystical*, 84.

[40] For a list of the literature that was produced in early Sufism, see Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 84–86. The three mentioned texts are the only extant ones dealing comprehensively with Sufi teachings.

[41] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 116–118.

through personal correspondences between teachers and students over a period of almost two centuries. Prior to these manuals Sufi novices would have learned more directly through masters with minimal use of standard texts. The 9th and especially the 10th century marked a transition in that Sufi teachings were now more systematically explicated through the written medium. It is this period which Michael Sells has identified as the "formative period of Sufi literature," a historical development in which Sufism was presented as a "self-conscious mode of spirituality embracing all aspects of life and society."[42]

Kalābādhī's *Taʿarruf* was the shortest and most concise of the three works.[43] Arberry, who translated the text into English,[44] notes that very little is known of the author other than that he was most likely from Bukhāra, where Kalābādh is located, and that he was also buried there. He also seems to have been a Ḥanafi jurist,[45] and distinguished himself to such a degree as a religious scholar that he was given the title "the crown of Islam" (*tāj al-islām*).[46] As for the structure of the book, it is broken down into five main sections: (1) an introduction addressing the various meanings of *taṣawwuf* and providing a list of important Sufis, (2) a statement of Sufi tenets, (3) a discussion of the states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*), (4) technical terms, and (5) a discussion on miracles. Most of the work simply consists of Sufi apothegms classified by subject headings. It is clear that Kalābādhī wants the Sufis to speak for themselves. The work was widely read and numerous commentaries written on it, and it had a particularly strong influence in medieval India.[47] It is also set apart by its clear Ḥallājian sympathies, in light of which it is interesting to note the remark of that other famous martyr, Yaḥyā al-Suḥrawardī(d. 1191): "But for the *Taʿarruf* we should not have known Sufism."[48]

Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj's *Lumaʿ* was the second of the three earliest manuals. Sarrāj was a native of Ṭūs in Khurasān, and traveled extensively, through Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. He had personal contacts with Sahl Tustarī's disciples in Basra and with Junayd's circle in Baghdad. Sarrāj — surnamed "peacock of the poor" (*ṭāʾūs al-fuqarāʾ*) — did not conceal his own views that squarely placed him in the sober tradition of Junayd. In the introduction, Sarrāj did not hide his intentions in writing the book, which he said was to show that the teachings of the Sufis were in total agreement with the doctrines of

[42] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 18; cf. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 83.
[43] A recent Arabic edition of this work runs a little more than a hundred pages. *Al-Taʿarruf li madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Yūḥannā al-Jayb al-Ṣādir (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001).
[44] Arthur Arberyy, trans. *Doctrine of the Sufis* by Kalabādhī (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935).
[45] Arberry, "Introduction," *Doctrine*, ix; Ṣādir, "introduction," *Taʿarruf,* 9; Dārā Shīkūh, *Safīnat awliyā* [urdu translation] (Karachi: Ṣadr, 1972), 38;
[46] Ṣādir, "Introduction," *Taʿarruf,* 9.
[47] Arberry, "Introduction," *Doctrine*, ix–xi; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 85.
[48] Cited in Arberry, "Introduction," *Doctrine*, xii.

the Qurʾān and ḥadīth. Nicholson, who produced a partial translation of the work, characterized it as "avowedly apologetic."[49]

The *Lumaʿ* presents the figures of the earlier period of Islamic history as the role models of the Sufis. Like the *Taʿarruf*, it presents the Sufis as the communal elite. Interpreting the famous Prophetic tradition according to which the learned are the heirs to the Prophets, Sarrāj argues that of the three contenders from among the jurists, ḥadīth specialists, and Sufis, it is the last group which has inherited the knowledge in its fullest perfection. Sarrāj also defends Ḥallāj, but not to the same degree as Kalābādhī. The *Lumaʿ*'s content is similar to the *Taʿarruf*, though much more elaborate. The author addresses such areas of controversy as the *shaṭaḥāt* (ecstatic utterances), *wajd* (ecstacy), *samāʿ* (musical audition), *ḥulūl* (indwelling/incarnation), and *fanāʾ* (extinction). Although, like the *Taʿarruf*, it also comprises of Sufi apothegms, it is much more lively and engaging a text than Kalābādhī's, which Schimmel calls a "somewhat dry exposition . . . and not as enjoyable as Sarrāj's study."[50] Although the *Lumaʿ* is much longer than the *Taʿarruf* it is nowhere nearly as exhaustive as the *Qūt*.

Of particular relevance to us in our analysis to the background of the *Qūt* is that the author of the *Lumaʿ* studied under the same teacher as Abū Tālib al-Makkī, a certain Aḥmad b. Sālim (d. 967), about whom we also know very little. "It is striking," remarks Nicholson, "that two of the three oldest surviving Arabic treatises on Sufism were directly influenced by Ibn Sālim."[51] This Ibn Sālim was the founder of a Sufi theological school named after him, the Sālimīyya, but whose principle ideas should properly be traced back to Sahl al-Tustarī through his father, Sālim Sr. (d. 909),[52] a close friend and disciple of the famous Sufi. Unlike Makkī, Sarrāj was not a member of the Sālimiyya, although he had close acquaintances with them and was deeply influenced by their thinking. Before exploring Makkī's relationship to this particular group of Sufis, and their doctrines, we shall turn to the limited information we have about his life from some of the medieval biographical encyclopedias.

II. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī

a. The Biographical Literature

As noted, the main sources provide us with minimal information about the life of Makkī, with some of the material conflicting. What we can be more or less certain of is that he was born in the Persian province of Jibal but grew up in Mecca, where he studied under a disciple of Junayd, Abū Saʿīd al-Aʿrābī (d. 952). He later left Mecca for Basra where he joined the Sālimīyya, after which he went to Baghdad, where he died in 996

[49] Nicholson, "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿfī al-taṣawwuf* by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī al-Sarrāj, ed. and trans. Reynold Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1914), v.
[50] Schimmel, *Mystical*, 85.
[51] Nicholson, "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, xi.
[52] For some of the sayings attributed to him, see Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, 10: 408; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 312–314.

CE. Because he was buried in the Māliki cemetery we can more or less be certain of his juridical affiliation. In what follows, I provide some of the summary accounts of Makkī from a few of the encyclopedic biographical sources, omitting overlaps, as there are many. The frequent repetition makes it clear that the later works relied on earlier ones.

Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282) writes in the *Wafayāt al-aʿyān,*

> He was a righteous man who exerted himself in worship. He lectured in the mosque and authored works on Divine Unity. He was not from Mecca but Jibal. [Later] however he resided in Mecca and was therefore given the attribution [al-Makkī]. He was rigorous in ascetic exercise, to the extent that it was said that he left food [altogether] for a while and resorted simply to the eating of lawful wild herbs (*al-hashāʾish al-mubāḥa*). Because of this his complexion (lit. "skin," *jald*) turned green.
>
> He associated with a group of ḥadīth scholars and Sufi masters taking knowledge from them. He entered Basra after the death of Abū l-Ḥasan b. Sālim and relied on his teaching. He went to Baghdad and preached to the people but he mangled his words and so they left and fled him . . .
>
> [As for his being called al-Ḥārithī. . .] this is an attribution (*nisba*) [for members] of many tribes, one of which is al-Hārith, another of which is al-Ḥāritha. I do not know from which of these tribes Abū Ṭālib was from.[53]

Baghdādī (d. 1071) has a short section on him in his *Taʾrīkh Baghdād,* not entirely favorable:

> He authored a book which he called the *Nourishment of Hearts* in the language of Sufism (*ʿalā lisān al-sūfiyya*), in which he said reprehensible, objectionable things about the (divine) attributes . . .
>
> Abū Ṭāhir said, Abū Tālib al-Makkī . . . entered Baghdad where the people gathered for a sermon, but his words were confused. It was remembered that he said, "there is no one more harmful to the creatures than the Creator (*laysa ʿalā al-makhlūqīn aḍarr min al-khāliq).*" They accused him of heresy and fled. (As a consequence) al-Makkī renounced preaching . . .
>
> Al-ʿAtīqī said that he was a righteous man (*rajul sālih*) who exerted himself in worship, and (attributed) to him are works on divine unity.[54]

Dhahabī (d. 1348) writes in *al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar:*

> Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, author of the *Nourishment of Hearts* [. . .] engaged in asceticism and traveled the Path (*tazahhada wa salaka*) and associated with the Sufis. He authored books and preached, and was a man of rigorous ascetic practice

[53] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān,* 4:303–304. See also *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*, trans. B. Mac Guckin De Slane (Paris: Bernard Quaritch, LXVIII), 3:20–21.

[54] Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī *Taʾrīkh Baghdād aw madīnat al-salām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1931), 3:89.

> and exertion. He was of the school (*nihla*) of Abū Ḥasan b. Sālim, the Baṣrī, the shaykh of the Sālimīyya. He narrated [ḥadīth] from ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Masīsī and others.[55]

In his *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ,* Dhahabī provides a longer description:

> The imam, ascetic and gnostic, shaykh of the Sufis, Abū Ṭālib [. . .] originally of non-Arab descent. He narrated ḥadīth from numerous scholars]. . . .
>
> Someone said that he used to hunger much (*kāna yajūʿ kathīran*) and associate with the descendents of the Prophet . . .
>
> Abū al-Qāsim b. Bashrān said: ʿI entered into the presence of our shaykh, Abū Ṭālib, who said: "if you know that my final state is good, then sprinkle over my grave sugar and almonds, and say, "this is the master". When I die, take my hand, and if I grasp yours, know that my final end has been good." . . . "When he [the shaykh] passed away, he grasped my hand with much strength, and so I sprinkled over his grave sugar and almonds."
>
> I saw a collection of 40 ḥadīth written by his own hands. There is in it an *ijāza* from ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar b. Fāris al-Iṣbahānī, and there are also in it ḥadīth from Abū Zayd al-Marūzī from the Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī . . . And to him is attributed the famous book, the *Nourishment of Hearts*.[56]

Ibn al-Jawzī, the author of the *Talbīs Iblīs* cited earlier, writes in his *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk:*

> It has reached us from ʿAlī b. ʿUbayd Allāh from Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī who said that ʿAbd al-Ṣamad entered in the presence of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and reprimanded him for considering audition lawful (*ibāḥat al-samāʿ*), upon which Abū Ṭālib sang:
>
> O Night, how much is there in you of sweetness!
> O Morning, would that you would not draw near!
>
> ʿAbd al-Ṣamad angrily left . . .[57]

Neither Ibn Ḥajar's short description in the *Lisān al-mīzān,* or Ibn Kathīr's entry in *al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya* add anything significant to what has been mentioned above, with the exception that Ibn Ḥajar mentions Ibn al-Nadīm included Makkī in his book on the Muʿtazilites,[58] and Ibn Kathīr says that according to ʿAtīqī the *Qūt* contains many spurious ḥadīth, although Dhahabī, who also relied on ʿAtīqī for his knowledge of

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[55] Dhahabī, *al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar* (Kuwait: Dar al-Kutub, 1961), 3:34.
[56] Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ,* ed. Shuʿayb Arnāʾūt (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, n.d.), 16: 536–538. In his *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl*, praising Makkī's work, he rhetorically asks, "and what book is to be compared with the *Qūt?*" Cited in Smith, *An Early Mystic*, 259.
[57] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam* (n.p.: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1977), 7: 189.
[58] This would most likely be because the Sālimīyya, the group that Makkī was affiliated with, was usually described as a theological school. See discussion below.

Makkī, made no such claim.[59] For the most part the core details of his life were simply repeated in the later biographical sources. It is worth noting that most of the biographers generally presented him in a positive light, with the exception of Baghdādī, who, as we saw, found parts of the *Qūt* objectionable. Even Baghdādī's criticism, however, was tempered by some of his more commendable observations.

As for the circumstances which forced him to renounce preaching in Baghdad following his sermon, the biographers simply mention it and do not go into details. They neither defend nor criticize him. The incident itself is somewhat difficult to reconcile with what we know of Makkī, considering the somewhat reserved and tempered nature of the *Qūt*. It may have been that his listeners completely misunderstood him. After all, to say, as he did, that "there is nothing more injurious to the creatures than the Creator" could simply have meant, "there is no one truly capable of injuring creation except God," which is entirely in line with the doctrine so central to traditionalist formulations of Islamic faith, that God is the ultimate actor, the *musabbib al-asbāb* or the "cause of causes." If this was indeed Makkī's intention, he was simply guilty of a poor choice of words. It is also possible that Makkī's listeners misheard him. Perhaps his actual words were, "there is nothing more injurious to the creatures than *creation*," that is to say, *khalq* instead of *khāliq*.[60] Due, however, to the limited nature of the historical source material, it remains difficult to determine with any degree of certainty the events surrounding episode, as well as the actual intentions behind Makkī's words.

The sources are almost unanimous in drawing our attention to Makkī's rigorously ascetic lifestyle, and, most notably, his virtual abstention from food. This reached an extent, as we saw earlier, where he relied solely on eating wild herbs. This pivotal aspect of his spirituality allows us to discern a link between him and Tustarī, whose ideas became the basis for the Sālimīyya, and who was renowned for his meager diet. It is not difficult upon inspection to discern the parallel between Sahl's and Makkī's superhuman austerity concerning food. Ghazālī mentions the following story about Tustarī:

> Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh used to go some twenty days or so without eating. Food [purchased by] one dirham would suffice him for a year. He used to exalt hunger and go to great lengths in it (*yubāligbu fī hi*), to the extent that he said that on the Day of Resurrection no righteous deed will surpass abstaining from excessive food [performed] in imitation of the Prophet — peace by upon him — regarding how he ate.[61]

Ghazālī then adds a few more of Sahl's sayings: "The intelligent (*al-akyas*) will not find anything more beneficial than hunger (*jūwʿ*) for this world and the next," "I do not know of anything more harmful to the seekers of the next world than food." "Wisdom

[59] Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān* (n.p: Maktabat al-ʿAlamī, n. d.), 7:189–190; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1966), 11: 319–320.
[60] This possibility was noted by De Slane. *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*, 3:21.
[61] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 3:132.

and knowledge lie in hunger whereas disobedience and ignorance lie in satiation."[62] Qushayrī (d. 1072) noted an extremely peculiar feature of Sahl's physical constitution: it would weaken upon the consumption of food and acquire strength through hunger.[63] Ibn ʿArabī also also took note of Sahl's mystical understanding of food and hunger and devoted a whole chapter in the *Futūḥāt* entitled the *Presence of the Nourisher* (*Ḥaḍrat al-muqīt*) elaborating Sahl's ideas. He mentions a telling incident:

> He [Sahl] was asked about nourishment (*qūt*), to which he replied "God!" It was then said to him, "we are asking about food (*ghadhā*)", to which he [again] replied, "God!" [. . .] Then the questioner said, "I am asking you about the nourishment of bodies or persons (*qūt al-ajsām aw ashbāḥ*)." Sahl [then] knew that the questioner was ignorant of what he intended and so Sahl descended [to his level] by an answer with another breath, different from the first breath, and knew that he — may God be pleased with him — was ignorant of the state of the questioner just as the questioner had been ignorant of his answer. Sahl then said to him, "what have you do with them," meaning the bodies, "leave the houses to their Builder. If He wills He will destroy them and if He wills he will fill them." Sahl thus retained his first answer but in another form. The house is filled through its dweller and nourishment [of the body] is God just like he said the first time, except that [now] the questioner was satisfied with the second answer.[64]

Sahl's austerity regarding food, as we gather from Ibn ʿArabī's version of the story,[65] was not simply rooted in asceticism for its own sake, but in a mystical vision that identified God not just as the provider of nourishment but the nourishment itself. Makkī adopted this perspective, and this would explain the extraordinary feats of self-mortifying hunger that characterize his own spirituality. Makkī did not simply avoid satiation like many of the other Sufis, but went to such an extreme that he would rely for his diet on a meager serving of wild herbs.[66] Only Sahl's perspective on nourishment

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[62] Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 3:132.

[63] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 283.

[64] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), 8: 325–326; cf. William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Arabi's Cosmology* (SUNY: Albany, 1998), 257.

[65] A slightly modified version of the event is cited in the *Qūt*. Makkī writes, "Sahl was asked about nourishment (*qūṭ*). He replied, 'his nourishment is God most High.' The man said, 'I asked about his bodily sustenance (*qiwām*).' He replied, '[it is] the remembrance (of God).' The man said, 'I asked about food (*ghadhā'*).' He replied, 'his meal is knowledge.' The man (then) said again, 'I meant food for the body (*ṭuʿmat al-jism*).' He said, 'what do you have to do with the body? Leave the body to the One who took charge of it in pre-eternity, He will take charge of it now." *Qūt*, 2:325.

[66] It is worth noting that Sahl, according to Makkī, nourished himself for a while on lotus fruits. Bowering, *Mystical*, 56. For an extensive discussion in Makki on the virtues of hunger, see *Qūt*, 2:324-344. For early Sufi disquisitions on food, fasting, and hunger, see Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, 320–325; Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-makāsib* (published as *al-Rizq al-ḥalal wa ḥaqīqat al-tawakkul ʿalā Allāh*), ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Khisht (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'ān, 1984), 117–121; Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 281–286. Sarrāj also discusses the virtues of hunger, but also explores some of the dangers latent in hunger for hunger's sake, or extreme forms of fasting pursued without the guidance of a spiritual teacher, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 161–166,182–186, 202. See also Valerie Hoffman, "Eating and Fasting for God in the

allows us to understand the extremes to which Makkī went regarding his abstention from food, a point which both Dhahabī and Ibn Khallikān felt compelled to mention.[67] The emphasis on God as nourishment also allows us to more deeply appreciate the title of Makkī's work — the nourishment of hearts consists not only of spiritual practices associated with the inner life, but the ultimate end of the path itself. It is also worth highlighting in this context that when Makkī died, he had his companion sprinkle almonds and sugar over his grave if his "final end has been good," symbolic, perhaps, for the ultimate gratification of those desires that he renounced in this world.

b. Makkī's Ties to the Sālimiyya

Many of the biographical sources draw our attention to Makkī's association with Aḥmad b. Sālim (d. 967 CE), the founder of the Sālimiyya, who, observed Nicholson, "justly claim him as one of themselves."[68] Nicholson's view is based on the medieval source material as well as the contents of the *Qūt*. Aḥmad b. Sālim was, as we noted, the son of a close friend and disciple of Sahl Tustarī, Ibn Sālim al-Baṣrī. The sources tend to confuse the father and the son.[69] Makkī studied not with the older Sālim but the younger one, whom he referred to in the *Qūt* as "our shaykh"[70]

The Sālimiyya were primarily transmitters of the teachings of Tustarī, who had disciples in both Baghdad and Basra. When he died, the Baghdad disciples either joined the circle of Junayd or the Ḥanbalis. There is also some evidence to suggest, as Böwering has noted, that they transmitted their "Tustarī tradition" to Meccan Sufis. In any case, within a short of period time they disappeared altogether as a distinct group, unlike the Basran Sahlis who gathered around the two Sālims. Sālim Sr. is said by Sarrāj to have kept the company of Tustarī for sixty years, and by others, thirty years. Not only was he a close disciple of the famous Sufi, he was an intimate friend,[71] associating with no other spiritual master during his lifetime.[72] He died thirteen years after his shaykh's death, upon which his son, also a disciple of Tustarī, led the group which then became identified as the Sālimiyya. When Sālim Jr. died, Makkī became head of the school succeeding his own teacher.[73] Makkī's own reverence for Tustarī is evident by his

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Sufi Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 464–484. For the broader religious significance of fasting and hunger, see Sharman A. Russel, *Hunger: An Unnatural History*, (New York: Perseus Books, 2005), 37–51.

[67] The editor of Dhahabī's *Siyar* felt obliged to cite his disagreement with Makkī's practice in a footnote, "this is not from the guidance of Islam." 16: 538. It is worth noting here that Catherine of Sienna (d.1380), who relied on a similar diet, is reported to have died of starvation. Russel, *Hunger: An Unnatural History*, 45–46.

[68] Nicholson, "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿ,* xi.

[69] Nicholson notes that "Muhammadan writers frequently fail to distinguish between the father and the son." "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, x.

[70] *EI²*, s.v. "Sālimiyya." Cf. Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 313.

[71] Böwering, *Mystical,* 88–92; Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 177.

[72] Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 431; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 312.

[73] *EI²*, s.v. "Sālimiyya."

references to him as "our leader (*imām*)," "our learned one (*ʿālim*)" and "the shaykh of our shaykh (Sālim Jr.)"[74] He refers to him in at least two hundred occasions in the *Qūt*. This is the most conservative estimate considering the numerous instances in which Tustarī's identity might be concealed under the commonly employed expression, "one of the *ʿulamāʾ* said."[75]

Makkī is our only direct source to the teachings of the Sālimiyya, as we do not have any works authored by other members of the school; nor do we know, for that matter, whether they wrote anything. The Qurʾān commentary attributed to Tustarī was compiled by non-Sālimiyya disciples and so does not give us direct access to their doctrines, which slightly vary from Tustarī's on a few matters.[76] Muqaddasi (d. 990 CE), the geographer, mentions them as popular preachers and Sufi theologians of ascetic demeanor.[77] The herisiographer al-Qāri al-Baghdādī (d. 1037) in his famous classification of the various factions of the Muslim community, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, makes mention of them in his section on the incarnationists (*ḥulūliyya*), indicating that they were theologians, some of whom accepted Hallāj.[78] Suyūṭī (d. 1505) mentions them neutrally in his *Lubb al-Lubbāb*.[79] The Sālimiyya did have a few critics for their alleged espousal of heretical doctrines, but many of the accusations leveled against them were based on mere hearsay, dubious sources, and/or a confusion between different communities.[80] However, Dhahabī did say of Sālim Jr. that he "was opposed to fundamental principles of the Sunna in some respects though extremely orthodox in others," which seems to accurately reflect what we know of the Sālimiyya.[81]

An example of this "extremely orthodox" strain would be Sālimiyya criticisms of those guilty of ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*). This is evident in the *Qūt* when Makkī says, "the ones who exceed the proper bounds are the ecstatic utterers (*shāṭiḥ*)." He puts

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[74] Böwering, *Mystical,* 27; cf. Makkī, *Qūt*, 2:324, 325.

[75] Böwering, *Mystical,* 27.

[76] Böwering, for example, says that Tustarī was more approving of marriage than Salim Sr., who only advised it for one who could not contain his sexual instincts. Bowering, *Mystical*, 89.

[77] Böwering, *Mystical,* 92.

[78] "And a group of theologians of the Sālimīyya in Basra accepted him" (*wa qabila-hu qawm min mutakallimī al-sālimiyya bi l-baṣra*). ʿAbd al-Qādir Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Al-Maktaba Al-ʿAṣriyya, 1998), 261. The Arabic does not unequivocally suggest that all of them accepted him, as Böwering in fact says. *Mystical,* 92.

[79] Bowering, *Mystical*, 92.

[80] Even though the Sālimiyya were accused of *ḥulūl*, but there is nothing in their teachings evidenced from the *Qūt* or any of the other historical sources that I have examined to suggest they espoused such a belief. The first mention of the Sālimiyya appears in Muqaddasī's (d. 990) *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, where he defines them as popular preachers, ascetics and Sufi theologians of Basra. For more on the Sālmiyya, including the debates over their supposedly heretical doctrines, see Böwering, *Mystical*, 89–99; Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, 261; ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya*, ed. Yūsuf Maḥmūd al-Ḥājj Aḥmad (Damascus: Maktabat al-ʿIlm al-Ḥadīth, 2001), 172–173; Nicholson, "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, x–xi; Massignon, *Essay,* 199–203; *EI*^{2}, s.v. "Sālimiyya."

[81] Nicholson, "Introduction," *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, x.

them in the same ranks as the innovators (*mubtadiʿ*) and people of ignorance (*jahāla*).[82] Such sentiments may have been partly rooted in Sahl's approach to the Path which placed primary emphasis on sobriety and composure, a teaching which runs through the *Qūt*.[83] The opposition to "fundamental principles of the Sunna," on the other hand, may be illustrated by Makkī's acceptance of *samāʿ*, the use of musical audition, against the disapproval of others, evidenced by Ibn al-Jawzī's account of his meeting with ʿAbd al-Ṣamad mentioned earlier.

Although the Sālimiyya were referred to as *mutakallimūn* (speculative theologians) in much of the literature, the categorization is misleading because of Makkī's own scathing criticisms of the partisans of kalām, whom he defined as the "the people of opinion (*raʾy*), sciences of the intellect (*ʿulūm al-ʿaql*), analogical deductions (*qiyās*), and consideration (*naẓar*)," and whom also he accused of weak faith.[84] This is not to suggest that the Sālimiyya did not discourse on divine unity. Indeed, as we saw, Makkī was credited with having authored works on monotheism himself, none of which have survived. But he did no rely on the tools of speculative theology to explain the nature of God in the manner of the kalām authorities, most notably the Mu'tazilites. If anything, Sālimiyya deliberations on God must have relied almost entirely on Scriptural exegesis, prophetic reports, and mystical experience. As any reader of the *Qūt* quickly comes to realize, Makkī neither quotes the speculative theologians nor is the style of his writing reminiscent in any sense of the kalām literature. Makkī does, however, frequently refer to the sayings and aphorisms of the "gnostics" (*ʿārifūn*) and "knowers through God" (*ʿulamāʾ bi-llāḥ*), that is to say, the privileged elect who, in Makkī's eyes, were singled out for that special knowledge which is attained only through direct experience.

III. The *Qūt al-Qulūb*

a. Content and Structure

Judging from the contents of the *Qūt*, it would be difficult to accuse the Sālimīyya of espousing doctrines that would set them up significantly apart from other more or less

[82] The Sālimyya appear to have been divided over the figure of Abū Yazīd Basṭāmī, well known for his ecstatic utterances. While Sarrāj defended him, Sālim Jr. remained accused him of harboring the beliefs of Pharoah. This is because while the latter declared "I am your Lord most high! (Q 79:24), the former exclaimed, "Glory be to Me!" Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* 390–391; cf. Böwering, *Mystical*, 96. Even though Makkī disapproved of the *shāṭiḥūn*, he quoted Abū Yazīd favorably in the *Qūt* and went so far to refer to him on one occasion as the "greatest from among this party (*wa huwa aʿlā hādhihi al-ṭāʾifa*)." *Qūt*, 2:326. This is just before citing an anecdote about the relation between Basṭāmī's gnosis and his practice of hunger. See also 1:253.

[83] Although Junayd sought to absolve Basṭāmī by explaining the intended meanings behind his *shaṭaḥāt*, he did not approve of his loss of control. Hujwīrī's writes that "Abū Yazīd and his followers prefer intoxication to sobriety [. . .] Junayd and his followers prefer sobriety to intoxication. They say that intoxication is evil, because it involves disturbance of one's normal state and loss of sanity and loss of self-control." *Kashf*, 185. For Junayd's explanations of Basṭāmī's sayings as explained by Sarrāj, see *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 380–384.

[84] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1:282.

accepted Sufis. Considering that the other highly influential and widely circulated Sufi manual of the 10th century was composed by an affiliate of the Sālimīyya, Sarrāj, we have no reason to presume that they made up a fringe group on the sidelines of the Sufi community. This is further confirmed by the wide circulation and popularity of the *Qūt* itself, to the extent that Arberry went so far as to contend — perhaps with some degree of exaggeration — that after Qushayri's *Risāla* the *Qūt* was the most valuable summary of Sufi doctrine ever composed.[85] It is worth noting that even after the composition of Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, the *Qūt* still retained its influence. Thus Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) informed his disciples that while the *Iḥyā'* would give them knowledge (*ʿilm*), the *Qūt* would give them nourishment (*qūt*) and light (*nūr*).[86] And while the Andalusian Malikī Sufi, Ibn ʿAbbād (d. 1390), singled out the works of both Ghazālī and Makkī for praise when he wrote that they, of all Sufi works, are most able "to quench the thirst, cure illness, and lead to the Path," he gave precedence to the *Qūt*: "Abū Ṭālib's book is revered and preferred above all others," he wrote, "for nothing else of its scope is available and I know of no one who has produced the likes of it. In it he sets forth the erudite sciences of Sufism [in a manner] which defies explanation."[87]

This wide scale acceptance of the work may have had much to do with the structure and contents of the *Qūt*, which resembles in some ways the format of juridical texts. Makkī discusses the five pillars in meticulous detail devoting large sections to the analysis of each of them. Unlike the *fīqh* books, however, he seeks to draw out their inner meanings. A discussion of the outward forms of the pillars is thus followed by an investigation into their inner significance. He does not stop at the pillars but goes on to scrutinize the way one should eat, sleep, dress, earn one's livelihood, and marry, with the end of sanctifying such apparently mundane activities and thereby enabling one to draw closer to God. None of this would have been alien to the jurists considering the extent to which the Sharīʿa encompasses even the minutest details of the believer's life. Makkī however sought to infuse these activities with spiritual vitality because of what he considered to be the Sharīʿa's incapacity to do so. The law may inform the believer what to do, and how to do it, but it does not concern itself with his state in the performance of his duties.[88] Much of Makkī's work also consists of recommended devotional practices from the prophetic tradition, (supererogatory fasts and ritual prayers, night vigils, Qur'ān

[85] Arberry, "Introduction," *Doctrines*, xiii.

[86] Playing on the titles of both works, he said in regards to the latter, "you should take upon yourself (the reading of) the *Nourishment*, for it is a nourishment" (*ʿalaykum bi l-qūt fa inna-hu qūt*). Ibn ʿAṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī, *Laṭā'if al-minan*, ed. Khālid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAkk (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā'ir, 1992), 136. The work has been translated into English as *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi & his Master Abu al-Hasan*, trans. Nancy Roberts Lousville: Fons Vitae, 2005).

[87] *Ibn ʿAbbād of Ronda: Letters on the Sufi Path*, trans. with an introduction by John Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 125–126. See also Ibn Taymiyya's opinion, in J. R. Michot, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991), 115, 121, 191.

[88] The *Qūt*'s inquiry into the "outer" and "inner" dimensions of ritual worship, and certain aspects of the law, almost certainly became the model for Ghazālī's similar explorations in the *Ihyā'*. More than a century before Ghazālī, we find Makkī arguing for a *revival* of the inner dimensions of religious life that

recitation, various litanies), that every spiritual aspirant should integrate into his life. The text's emphasis on ritual worship is made evident in the full title of the work: *The Nourishment of Hearts in Dealing with the Beloved and the Description of the Way of the Seeker to the Station of Divine Unity (Qūt al-qulūb fī muʿāmalāt al-maḥbūb wa waṣf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd).*

Makkī's exploration of the inner meanings of these devotional methods of worship leads him into detailed analyses of the psychological states that should accompany not only formal worship but also the everyday life of the spiritual aspirant. Because the outward forms of worship are only acceptable to God if the accompanying inner states are pure, Makkī addresses the importance of sincere intentions and provides suggestions on how to introspectively examine the heart. The *Qūt* contains a lengthy section on the nine "stations of certainty," (*maqāmat al-yaqīn*), where Makkī explores the meaning of repentance (*tawba*),[89] patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), hope (*rajāʾ*), fear (*khawf*), asceticism and renunciation (*zuhd*), trust (*tawakkul*), satisfaction and good-pleasure (*riḍā*) [90] and finally love (*maḥabba*).[91] The elaborate analysis makes up almost a quarter of the work with the section on *tawakkul* by far the longest.

Since the *Qūt* is concerned principally with the science of *praxis*, the *ʿulūm al-muʿāmalāt,* Makkī does not devote serious attention to theoretical questions which pertain to mystical theology. Even the sections of the *Qūt* which touch on such matters, such as the work's brief inquiry into the nature of the heart, light, and faith, relate in some form or another to the pragmatic concerns of the aspirant. By ignoring such issues Makkī wishes to avoid diverting the attention of the spiritual amateur from the most pressing matters of the Path. Such questions are, on the other hand, explored to a certain degree in the *ʿIlm al-qulūb* (*Knowledge of Hearts*), a work that was intended for more advanced Sufis. The authorship of the work, however, remains a question of some dispute. Gramlich accepted the attribution of the treatise to Makkī, even though he acknowledged the absence of its mention in the classical biographical dictionaries. His reasoning for accepting Makkī as its author was that it is not uncommon to find omissions of works in biographical entries, particularly if the given work was not well known. This would explain why the *ʿIlm* remained unmentioned in the biographical dictionaries, overshadowed, as it was, by the influence and popularity of the *Qūt.*[92] More recently, Karamustafa, relying on the scholarship of Pourjavadi, has contested the traditionally ascribed authorship of the *ʿIlm*, stating that it is most likely a mid-11th century work which

had slowly been lost following the Prophet's death through a *nourishing* of the hearts: for Makkī, only *qūṭ* could bring an *iḥyāʾ*.

[89] I have explored the nature of *tawba* in Makkī in a forthcoming article, "*Tawba* in the Sufi Psychology of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī."

[90] For an examination of some aspects of Makkī' understanding of *riḍā*, see my forthcoming article, "Contentment, Satisfaction, and Good-Pleasure in Early Sufism."

[91] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1:361-537; 2:1–114.

[92] Gramlich, "Introduction," *Die Nahrung der Herzen,* 1:19–20.

was later attributed to Makkī. Part of the confusion, notes Karamustafa, rests on the fact that *ʿIlm* consists of some of Makkī's own words drawn from the *Qūt*.[93]

As for the relation of the *Qūt* to the Qur'ān, the reader cannot help but notice the extent to which the latter interlaces its fabric. Not only does Makkī open each chapter with the relevant verses, he constantly returns to Scripture in his elucidation of virtually every subject which he covers. So deeply interwoven is the Qur'ān into the work that one could argue that it would fall apart were all the citations to be removed. Echoing a prophetic tradition, Makkī states that "the people of the Qur'ān . . . are the people of God, and His elect."[94] This extreme reverence for Islam's primary text is not a peculiar characteristic of his mold of Sufism but emblematic of Sufi spirituality in general. As Schimmel poignantly observed, "the words of the Qur'ān have formed the cornerstone of all mystical doctrines."[95] By integrating Islamic Revelation so deeply into the substance of the *Qūt* he is able to forcefully argue for the legitimacy of Sufism through the Qur'ān itself.

Makkī also extensively utilizes Prophetic traditions even though some critics such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), and Ibn Kathīr, as we saw earlier, accused him of employing weak or spurious ḥadīths.[96] This was unsurprisingly the same accusation that would later be made against the *Ihyā'* of Ghazālī.[97] Makkī also heavily relies on Sufi sayings and anecdotes. The almost excessive use of quotations may be seen as a drawback, at least to the sensibilities of the reader accustomed to flowing, linear prose. One gets the impression he has simply strung together various sayings and divided them by subject headings. Knysh's claim that the *Qūt* "simply brims with long-winded quotations,"[98] is accurate, to a certain extent, and one can legitimately make a similar observation about Kalābādhī's *Taʿarruf* and to a lesser extent Sarrāj's *Lumaʿ*.

b. The Sufis as the Heirs to the Prophets

An important feature of the *Qūt* is that Makkī does not argue for the legitimacy of Sufism simply by demonstrating the extent to which the Sufis agree with the religious establishment. He turns the tables around by contending that the religious establishment itself has degenerated from the time of the Prophet and deviated from his teachings, and that it is the Sufis who most perfectly embody the Prophetic heritage.[99] Makkī repeatedly makes it clear that to the extent that the Sufis are the possessors of an experiential inner

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[93] Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 87–88.

[94] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 284. For some remarks on this ḥadīth within the context of a larger discussion of the "masses" (*ʿāmm*), "elect" (*khāṣṣ*), and the "elect of the elect" (*khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*), see Brown, "The Last Days of Ghazzālī," 97–98.

[95] Schimmel, *Mystical*, 25.

[96] For Ibn Taymiyya's observations, see Michot, *Musique*, 191.

[97] Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 12:174. This was to a large extent because Ghazālī himself relied on *ḥadīths* cited in the *Qūt* for his own work.

[98] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 121.

[99] Ghazālī would make the same argument in the *Ihyā'*, 1:38–62.

knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-bāṭīn*), they occupy a superior position in relation to the the scholars of exoteric knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-zāhir*). The *Qūt* is therefore not simply a defensive apologia but a thorough critique of the scholars of its day.

Judging from the criticisms Makkī tends to level against the jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) and speculative theologians, it is clear that for him a very large segment of the representatives of the outer, exoteric sciences have lost sight of the underlying purpose of religion. These kinds of scholars are the ones who hold power over the religious establishment and have been responsible for much of the persecution which genuine *ʿulamāʾ* have been historically subjected to. They are, says Makkī, aligned with high-ranking officials and celebrities, unlike real knowers who are reclusive (*munfarid*), avoid leadership, and are found in the *zawāyā* (small mosques or spiritual lodges).[100]

Makkī's criticisms of the exoteric scholars focus on the extent to which their preoccupations do not effectuate genuine spiritual transformation. Among the signs of such an inner change are fear (*khashya*), lowliness (*khushūʿ*), humility (*tawāḍuʿ*), beauty of character (*ḥusn al-khuluq*), and renuncation (*zuhd*) — qualities that Makkī saw lacking in many of the scholars of his day but which, for him, are five essential characteristics of the *ʿulamāʾ al-ākhira* or "the learned ones of the next world."[101]

The anti-establishment strain running through Makkī's discussion of knowledge is reflected in many of the apothegms and anecdotes that he chooses to cite, which provide a glimpse of the tensions between the official clerics and more independent oriented Sufis within the historical context just before and during the composition of the *Qūt*. Makkī's criticisms are rooted fundamentally in what he sees to be the hypocritical worldliness of the clerical establishment and its inability to comprehend the true nature of knowledge. He shares the perspectives of some of those whom he considers to be genuine possessors of knowledge:

> One of the *ʿulamāʾ* said, 'If it were asked of me, "who is the most learned of people?" I would respond, "the most godly of them."' [. . .] And another one said, 'if I was asked, "who is the stupidest (*aḥmaq*) of people?" I would grab the hand of a *qāḍī* (state jurist)!'[102]

The general anti-scholastic thrust of the *Qūt* finds some of its justification in the illiteracy of the Prophet, since the knowledge that he was privileged with, according to Muslim tradition, was received directly from God through the angel of revelation. The Sufis, for Makkī, follow the footsteps of the Prophet in the manner in which they obtain knowledge, unlike the exoteric scholars, who are forced to rely on their own rational abilities and scholastic pursuits. The Sufis are therefore, according to Makkī, the real possessors of divine knowledge and most deserving to be recognized as the rightful heirs of the Prophet. Through their ascetic self-discipline, worldly detachment, and

[100] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 293.
[101] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 301.
[102] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 286.

sincere love of God, they receive the prophetic heritance directly from the source of the Prophet's own revelation. Drawing on the words of Abū Yazīd, Makkī writes,

> 'Verily the *ʿālim* is not the one who memorizes from the book of God, and if he forgets what he memorized, becomes ignorant. Verily the *ʿālim* is the one who takes his knowledge from his Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, any time he wishes, without memorization or study (*dars*).'[103]

Like the founding figure of Islamic revelation, the genuine knower receives knowledge directly from heaven. It is this kind of knowledge that Makkī inspires his reader to seek in the *Qūt*. Such knowledge however is only possible by surrendering oneself to the taxing demands of the inner life. It was one of the main purposes of the *Qūt* not only to demonstrate the superiority such a way of life, but also to meticulously outline its details, drawn from the sources of Islamic revelation as well as the examples of those who most perfectly embodied the ideals of the fledging Sufi tradition.

[103] Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 253.