

BOOK REVIEW

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Giuseppe Scattolin and Hassan Ahmed Anwar, *al-tajaliyat al-ruhiyya fi al-Islam fi nusus abr al tarikh* (in Arabic); *Spiritual Manifestations in Islam: Sufi texts across history*. Cairo: al-haya al-masriyya al-amma lil-kitab. 2008 (684pgs.).

Al-tajaliyat al-ruhiyya fi al-Islam fi nusus abr al tarikh (*Spiritual Manifestations in Islam: Sufi texts across history*) covers some 684 medium-cut pages containing a foreword, two separate introductions by the authors, the main body (in three parts), and an extensive bibliography listing materials both in Arabic and European languages. The rich footnotes and commentaries add an invaluable source for further in-depth study and research. This book is extraordinary in that it is coauthored by a Roman Catholic Italian missionary, Giuseppe Scattolin—who teaches Islamic Sufism at the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (or Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica) in Rome—and his PhD student, Ahmed Hassan Anwar, an Egyptian, Sunni Muslim. Moreover, the foreword for the book is penned by the president of the Azhar University, one of the greatest Islamic institutions of learning at present. The book has secured not only the approval of Azhar University, but its praise as well.

Spiritual Manifestations in Islam is a remarkable collection of illuminating texts by prominent Sufi figures from the first century of hijrah (6th A.D.) defending the idea that Sufism in general and Islamic Sufism in particular have played important roles in enriching many civilizations. According to Giuseppe and Anwar, Sufi orientation immensely contributed to the spiritual, social and cultural life of Islamic civilization. The huge artistic and literary impact of Islamic Sufism (e.g. the poetry of al-Rumi) on human civilization can in no way be overlooked. The authors are quick to explain that Sufi orientation and thinking and the socio-historical conditions in which they are found are mutually intertwined. This is also true in the case of the exchange of Sufi experiences between different civilizations, Islamic Sufism being no exception. Nevertheless, the authors

underscore the originality of Islamic Sufism and its rootedness in the Quran and Sunnah. On the importance of Sufism to all humanity, the position of the authors extends beyond the historical epochs covered in the book to state that our contemporary world is in much need of adopting the inherent qualities and meanings of Sufism to deal with the current problems it is facing. However, this statement is not fully justifiable as the book does stop at the seventh century A.H. (13th A.D.), without discussing the circumstances pertaining to the seven-century gap between that date and the present. The statement therefore, if carried further, can only imply some essentialist overtones.

Given the position of the authors as stated above, one then understands the logic followed in the organization of the book. As mentioned, the main body of the book is divided into three parts, each of which deals with a specific period of Islamic history. Together, these three parts cover a span of seven centuries in Islam, with Sufism's influence represented by its major personalities, ideas and thoughts that characterize the corresponding historical stage under discussion. The first section deals with the beginnings of Sufism from the first hijra century (7th A.D.) to the third (9th A.D.). This period is described as one in which the rudimentary concepts of and writings on Sufism began to appear among ascetics and worshippers such as Salman al-Farsi, Abu al- Darda, al-Hasan al-Basri, Malik b. Dinar and Rabia al-Adawiyya. For the authors, this period merges with the fourth century A.H. (10th A.D.) by which time Sufi thought and practices had developed and become more articulate with the coming of people like Dhu al Noon al-Misri, abu Yazid al-Bustami and al-Junaid and al-Hallaj. The period of the fourth/ fifth centuries A.H. (10th - 11th A.D.), which is taken up in the second part of the book, witnessed some of the greatest writings by Sufis of very high caliber such as al-Hakim al Tirmithi, al-Shibli, al- m,Nafri, al-Tusi, al-Sulami, al- Qushairi, and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. The third and last part of the book reviews the period between the sixth and the seventh centuries A.H. (12th - 13th A.D.) when the most significant philosophical tradition emerged from the writings of great Sufis like Farid al-Din al-Attar, Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi, Ibn al Faridh and Ibn Atta Allah al-Sakandari.

Although they can be considered a continuation of the development and progress of the same Sufi trend, each of the three stages mentioned by the authors has its own unique feature. The main characteristic of the first period was the seeking of individual salvation. The second stage tended towards greater philosophical inclinations. In the third stage, while the philosophical trend continued, Sufism began to incorporate some social aspects as well. However, this is not to assume that homogeneity prevailed throughout each stage. For example, within the philosophical trend of the second stage there is a difference between al Ghazali who stressed the Sunni tradition and Ibn Arabi whose works reflected esoteric dimensions.

In the exposition of the three stages of Sufism in Islam, the unity of the book has been maintained by juxtaposing basic Sufi tenets and ideas such as spiritual states, ranks, observance of the inner soul, divine love and the like. All these aspects are highlighted throughout the book and demonstrated in the excerpts taken from the original works of the represented Sufi writers. One can, therefore, trace, compare and contrast, for instance, the idea of divine love throughout the historical period covered by the book. All of this is highlighted by a brief description of the prevailing socio-cultural conditions at the time, and very informative commentaries on the lives and contributions of the individual Sufis.

The book ends with a plea to seriously consider employing the Sufi attitude and ideas like love and peaceful coexistence to resolve the destructive conflicts and struggles in the world today. As Sufism stresses equality and the value of all human beings, irrespective of other factors, the authors argue it can be the best medium for discussions concerning issues such as the alliance of civilizations and religious dialogues. In particular the Sufi ideas of harmony, peaceful coexistence and respect for the welfare of animals can be very useful when dealing with environmental matters.

The book does suffer one noticeable shortcoming. There is no mention at all of Abd al- Qadir al- Jailani, a colossal figure in the history of Sufism. In this respect, missing the important impact of the *turuq* (Sufi Orders) — especially the Qadiriyya in this case — cannot be justified. Since the time of al-Jailani the *turuq* have played a significant role in many Islamic societies. In many cases

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the *turuq* have acted as a source of inspiration, as bases for brotherly organizations, social sanctuaries and shields against all forms of tyranny and oppression (including colonialism).

Spiritual Manifestations in Islam, therefore, is an admirable and remarkable scholarly work on Sufism. It is also a magnificent source for all those interested in Sufism in general and Islamic Sufism in particular. Scattolin and Anwar display a passionate defense of Sufism and its significance in our contemporary life. In addition, the massive information they make available on the topic and its wide coverage of Islamic and non-Islamic Sufi traditions qualify the present book as a necessary reading. To my knowledge, the book is only available in Arabic. If this is so, I strongly suggest that it be translated to English as well.