

The Conceptual Development of Deviance among Islamic Mystics: The Malāmatiyya

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Abstract

The concept of deviance in early Islamic mystic piety developed as an aspect of the same social and intellectual processes which defined Ṣūfism as a normative or orthodox mode. The mysticism which developed in and around Baghdad and in Khurāsān was varied in its outward forms for the first several centuries. Asceticism was common, but it was not homogeneous in its expression. The process of systematizing and normalizing Islamic mystic doctrine and practice was concurrent with a similar systematization in legal and theological contexts. In this process of systematization some previous forms were marginalized and some were subsumed into what would become the normative Ṣūfī practice. Other forms were continued and taken up by movements which would eventually be regarded as heterodox. One label that stands out as representing a heterodox mode is that of the Malāmatiyya — those who followed the “path of Blame.” This paper will explore the development of that term and its usage as first a descriptive and then a derogatory term over the course of several centuries and explore how that change reflected concurrent Khurāsānian societal changes.

Terminology and Sources

Ṣūfism was not alone in its early development as a mystic mode of piety. Richard Nicholson identified its origins in the “powerful and widely-spread ascetic tendencies which arose in the first century A.H.” and that its “chief factors” were “an exaggerated consciousness of sin, [...] and an overwhelming dread of divine retribution.”¹ Other forms of mysticism were still alive and well at the be-

1. Richard A. Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry concerning the Origin and Development of Sūfism, with a List of Definitions of the terms ‘Ṣūfī’ and ‘Taṣawwuf,’ Arranged Chronologically,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1906): 304.

gining of the third/ninth century and it was not until the beginning of the fourth/tenth century that Ṣūfism would crystallize into a discreet mystical system.² The term “Ṣūfī” had come to be used as a label for a structured, normative type of mysticism associated with Baghdad ascetics around at same time.³ There were, however, other groups operating to the east in Khurāsān, particularly in Nīshāpūr. In the fifth/eleventh century writings of ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwārī (d. 465 or 469/1072 or 1077), the author identifies that some Ṣūfīs had taken up “the path of Blame [*sic*].” He referred to these “followers of the Truth [*sic*] (*ahl-i ḥaqq*) [as being] distinguished by their being the objects of vulgar blame, especially the eminent ones of this community.”⁴

Hujwārī’s *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (*The Revelation of the Veiled*) contains a chapter on *malāma* made up of anecdotes which on the surface place those following the “path of blame” in a negative light. The work at large is a good distillation and outline of the principles associated with fifth/eleventh century orthodox Ṣūfī practice and custom. It comprises a discussion of the development of mysticism, and then a list of notable mystics — though it is not a complete work of *ṭabaqāt*. Hujwārī also lists “modern sects” before arriving at discussions of the esoteric aspects of Ṣūfī doctrine. It is not as systematic or comprehensive as the *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* of Abū al-Qāsim Karīm b. Hawazīn al-Qushayrī (376/986-465/1072) — which is probably the most exhaustive explication of the esoteric structure of Islamic mystical knowledge extant — but it is an example typical

2. Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry concerning the Origin and Developmnt of Sufism, with a List of Definitions of the terms ‘Ṣūfī’ and ‘Taṣawwuf,’ Arranged Chronologically,” 323.

3. *Ibid.*, 365.

4. ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al- Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Warminster, Wiltshire: The E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1986), 62.

to the genre of Ṣūfī manuals and treatises from this period. In addition to the commentary on Ṣūfism contained in the book, Hujwīrī’s discussion of heterodox mystical practice — in the character of “the followers of the Truth (*ahl al-haqq*)” — is short but very well developed, even providing a hierarchy of the types of blame which practitioners seek.⁵

As with other mystical writings, there are multiple layers of meaning contained therein. A background theme in *Kashf al-maḥjūb* is that the “path of blame” is not only the appropriate form for a mystic to express, but that the author himself was perhaps sympathetic to the aims of this mode of piety and even possibly a practitioner himself. The “blame” to which Hujwīrī refers is rendered in Arabic and Persian as *malāma* and characterized differently depending on the source, though the kernel concept is simple. The truly pious wish to have no public recognition for their piety and in order to avoid this, they either abstain completely from public displays of piety, or they perform blameworthy acts which will draw scorn from those around them. They do not, according to Hujwīrī, do so ostentatiously in order to seek attention. On the contrary the goal is to turn away attention for pious acts.⁶

Those who followed “path of blame” were known as the *Malāmātiyya*. The term itself is used in one manner to describe the earliest group to be identified as such and then takes on a different meaning in several centuries later.⁷ Ahmet Karamustafa makes the argument that this term refers to two distinct groups of mystics which are differentiated by their concern for “self-censure” [in the case

5. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 63.

6. *Ibid.*, 63-65.

7. Jong, F. de; Algar, Hamid; Imber, C.H. “Malāmātiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

of the older Malāmātiyya] as opposed to “public censure [in the case of the later, libertine Malāmātiyya].”⁸ Hujwīrī does not identify that these groups are distinct, moreover he describes them as a subset of Ṣūfīs generally.⁹ He does imply that there was a group of mystics at some point in the past who followed the “path of blame” as a legitimate mode of piety.¹⁰ It is clear from the texts that groups are groups are different, but it is also particularly difficult to identify the earlier group as they specific sought to deter attention from themselves.

Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣulamī (325 or 330-412/937 or 924-1021), writing a century before al-Hujwīrī, is particularly sympathetic to the Malāmātiyya in his characterization of them as the “highest spiritual achievers.”¹¹ al-Ṣulamī’s major work on the Malāmātiyya — *Risālat al-malāmātiyya* or *Uṣūl al-malāmātiyya wa ghalāṭat al-ṣūfiyya* depending on the edition or manu-script¹² — is an exhaustive treatise on the group as an distinct but parallel feature in the development of mystic practice in their context in Nīshāpūr. It is regarded by most modern scholarship to be one of the main sources for information about this group.¹³ This reliance on Ṣulamī’s *Risālat al-Malāmātiyya* — as well as his treatment of the Malāmātiyya in *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* which is an abridgment of *Tārīkh al-ṣūfiyya* — is problematic but unavoidable. Ṣulamī’s work is the only extant source which treats the Malāmātiyya and the *Tārīkh* is one of the earliest and most comprehen-

8. Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 162.

9. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 66-67.

10. Ibid., 62-63.

11. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 62.

12. See the introduction to Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al- Ṣulamī, *Uṣūl al-malāmātiyya wa ghalāṭat al-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fatāḥ Aḥmad al Fāwī Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Irshād, 1985), 102 for a listing of important manuscripts and copies of this text in various collections.

13. F. de Jong, Hamid Algar and C.H. Imber, “Malāmātiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

sive sources for investigating early Islamic mysticism.¹⁴ Sara Sviri summarizes this problem:

“What is overlooked by [...] scholars is the fact that the Ṣulamī’s [*sic*] text was never intended by its author as an historical document. It was written by a disciple and grandson of one of the apparently moderate member of the Nīshāpūrī [*sic*] school, known as the *Malāmātiyya*, with the triple purpose of: a) placing the *Malāmātiyya* in the arena of the mystical tradition within Islam (quite possibly with a view to counterbalancing the Baghdadi centre), of b) promoting the Nīshāpūrī [*sic*] teachers and evaluating their distinctive teaching as the purest in the mystical tradition, and c) vindicating them of the accusation of nonconformity and antinomianism.”¹⁵

It is the last point in which we are most interested for the present discussion as it relates to not only the terminology at hand but the system of social order in which the term was brought into use. This will be discussed below.

Defining Deviance Based on Association and Social Norms

One of two teachers referred to as ‘Malāmāṭī’ in the *Ṭabaqāt* was Ṣulamī’s maternal grandfather Abū ‘Amr Ismā‘īl b. Nuḡayd (d. 366/976-7), the other being Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār (d. 271/884-5).¹⁶ Ḥamdūn is credited by Hujwīrī as introducing the concept of *malāma* to Ṣūfism. He is quoted as saying that “blame is the abandonment of welfare.” This means that if someone “purposely abandons his own welfare and girds himself to endure misfortune, and renounces his pleasures and familiar ties, [...] the more he is united to God.”¹⁷ This is in line with what

14. Sara Sviri, “Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the Malāmāṭī Movement in Early Sufism,” in *Classical Persian Sufism: From Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 587.

15. *Ibid.*, 588.

16. Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn al-Shurība (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī fī Maṣr, 1953), 123-129, 454-457.

17. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 66.

Şulamī reports as Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār’s answer to his grandfather’s question about what comprises the “path of blame” (*tarīq al-malāma*): “Renouncing adornment in outward appearance in all circumstances; renouncing seeking the approval [of others] in the form of attitude and actions, never removing yourself from God by refusing the blame of the accuser.”¹⁸

There were a great deal more teachers and disciples within the Malāmātī school, which makes Şulamī’s omission of labels in the *Ṭabaqāt* very curious. According to Christopher Melchert, the Malāmātī master who stands out as being the originator of the school is Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥīrī (d. 298/910). Abū ‘Uthmān synthesized the the doctrine of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād al-Naysābūrī (d. 265-878) — who was his teacher — and Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār into what Şulamī and Hujwīrī have identified as the “path of blame.” He argued a moderate approach which combined Abū Ḥafṣ recommendation to do good works and perform ascetic austerities with Ḥamdūn’s belittling of such works and austerities. Most importantly, he penned his teachings, which neither of his predecessors had done.¹⁹ In *Uṣūl al-Malāmātiyya* Şulamī discusses sayings of both Abū Ḥafṣ and Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār in the form of responses to questions from their disciples, including his grandfather.²⁰ Given that his grandfather Ismā‘īl b. Nujayd was a student of Abū ‘Uthmān, Şulamī’s characterization of Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār as a Malāmātī is important here. Şulamī’s biography of Abū ‘Uthmān identifies him as being associated with Abū Ḥafṣ and having taken up his path.²¹

Şulamī appears to be including Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār as a Şūfī *and* a Malāmātī

18. Şulamī, *Uṣūl al-malāmātiyya wa ghalaṭat al-Şūfiyya*, 143.

19. Christopher Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” *Iran* 39 (2001): 238-239.

20. Şulamī, *Uṣūl al-malāmātiyya wa ghalaṭat al-Şūfiyya*, 143.

21. Şulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Şūfiyya*, 170.

but regarding the moderate Abū ‘Uthmān as only a Ṣūfī and not an adherent to the “path of blame” — as was his grandfather. In light of Sviri’s argument, referenced above, Ṣulamī likely includes Ibn Nujayd and Ḥamdūn as a way of associating the Malāmatī mystics, with whom he is possibly associated, with the larger Ṣūfī mystic tradition. She also emphasizes that Abū ‘Uthmān, as a disciple of Abū Ḥafṣ was moderated in his views on asceticism and rejection. This means that Ṣulamī probably believed that the doctrine of the Malāmatī Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār was still a valid mystic doctrine even after the Ṣūfīs had become the face of orthodox Islamic mysticism in the fifth/eleventh century. This indicates, as will be identified in Hujwīrī, that the Malāmatī doctrine and practice had not disappeared by the time of Ṣulamī’s writing, but had been subsumed into that of the Ṣūfīs. The term *Malāmatī* for Ṣulamī — as well as Hujwīrī a century later — still refers to the rejectionist, inward-oriented mystics even though others writing in the same century had begun to characterize them as libertines along with the Qalandariyya.²² I will explore why this may have been the case below.

By the time Ṣulamī was writing the label “Ṣūfī” was already in common use as was the word *taṣawwuf*. The earliest uses of the term were in association with the names of individual mystics. These are listed by Louis Massignon.²³ I need not discuss the origins of this term, as it is discussed at length in practically every pre-modern and modern source on Ṣūfīs or Ṣūfism. al-Hujwīrī gives the standard explanations in the beginning of his chapter “On Ṣūfism [*sic*].”²⁴ It is more important to discuss what the term came to signify, particularly as it is related to the

22. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 163-165.

23. Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 104-105.

24. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 30-31.

other terms presently being discussed. Ṣūfism is defined by its outward forms — i.e., the particular manners and customs of a given group or order: *adab*. Massignon relates this in his seminal *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*:

“Ṣūfism is more than a simple nomenclature of pharmaceutical prescriptions. It is therapy that the attending physician has tried on himself, to allow others to benefit. ‘Ṣūfism,’ said Nūrī, is neither a group of texts nor a system of speculative knowledge, it is customs,’ i.e., a way of living, a rule. Junayd said to Jurayri, “We did not learn Ṣūfism by listening to those who say this or that, but by enduring hunger, renouncing the world, severing ourselves from that is familiar and delightful to us.”²⁵

al-Hujwiri relates his definition of Ṣūfism with *malāma* in his chapter on the “path of blame” from *Kashf al-maḥjūb*. He argues that anyone who “abandons the law and commits an irreligious act, and says that he is following the rule of ‘blame,’ is guilty of manifest wrong and wickedness and self-indulgence.”²⁶ We can begin to see the development of social norms related to mystic practices and *sunna* as correlated in his line of argumentation. He is also very specific in setting up a distinction between orthodox and heterodox and links them to matters of social behavior. He relates this dialogue in order to illustrate his distinction:

“On a certain occasion I was in the company of one of these vain pretenders. He committed a wicked act and excused himself by saying that he did it for the sake of blame. One of the party said, ‘That is nonsense.’ He heaved a sigh. I said to him: ‘If you claim to be a Malāmatī and are firm in your belief, this gentleman’s disapproval of what you have done ought to encourage you to persevere; and since he

25. Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 10.

26. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 65.

is seconding you in your chosen course, why are you so unfriendly and angry with him? Your behaviour [*sic*] is more like pretence [*sic*] than pursuit of blame. Whoever claims to be guided by the Truth must give some proof of his assertion, and the proof consists in obeying the *Sunna* (Ordinances of the Prophet). You make this claim, and yet I see that you have failed to perform an obligatory religious duty. Your conduct puts you outside the pale of Islam.”²⁷

Hujwīrī is alluding to the idea that it might be possible that there are those who follow the path of blame and maintain the *sunna* without contradiction. The incompatibility of Ṣūfī and Malāmatī modes is reflected in the commentary of Abū Sa‘d ‘Abd al-Mālīk b. Muḥammad al-Khargūshī (d. 406/1015 or 407/1016), an fifth/eleventh century ascetic in Nīshāpūr, roughly contemporaneous with Ṣulamī.

One chapter in his *Tahdhīb al-asrār* (*Refining the Secrets*) was devoted to describing the differences between the Malāmatīyya and the Ṣūfīs. He characterizes Ṣūfīs as ascetics who withdraw from the world in order, whereas the Malāmatīyya insist on maintaining employment and reject the distinctive dress of the Ṣūfīs.²⁸ This view of the of the Malāmatīyya as rejectionists finally betrays a on opinion contrary to the others we have seen in Hujwīrī and Ṣulamī. It is here that the Malāmatīyya are transformed from quiet, pious mystics into heterodox rebels who would wish to upset the social order.

This critique raises several important points to be considered in treating the development of antinomianism and its association with the term *Malāmatī*. Within the next century the term would come to be conflated with derogatory labels for antinomian groups, though it is still unclear exactly why from the texts. One argument is that as the Ṣūfīs systematized their practices — and doctrine related to

27. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 65-66.

28. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 65.

social customs — the Malāmatiyya began to appear less-than-pious given their seeming obsession with worldly affairs. These aspect of the Malāmatī’s activities are discussed at some length in *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* by Shihab al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (539-632/1145-1234) in connection with the Qalandariyya — a group associated with “drunken” [*sakr*] Ṣūfism and severe antinomianism, who practiced bodily mortification (*taqashshuf*) and extreme mendicancy and poverty as signifiers of trust in God’s providence (*tawakkul*). The Qalandariyya appear extensively as a topos in Persian poetry.²⁹ References to the Qalandars also appear in Hujwīrī’s section on the Malāmatiyya.³⁰ Karamustafa uses Suhrawardī to explain the connection that can be drawn between the groups:

“[I]t is remarkable that al-Suhrawardī discusses the Qalandars along with the Malāmatīyah [*sic*], possibly an originally non-Ṣūfī religious movement. He argues that the Qalandar differed from the Malāmatī in certain respects. The Malāmatī’s main concern was to hide his inner state from others for fear that an ostentatious display of piety would lead to overindulgence in the self and ultimately to self-complacency, thus distancing the believer from God. It was because of his painstaking endeavor to conceal the true nature of his religiosity that he sought to incur the public blame by deliberately transgressing the limits of social and legal acceptability.”³¹

Suhrawardī’s conceptions of the Malāmatiyya and of the more extremely heterodox Qalandariyya places them on a scale of behavioral rejection of the social norms associated with Ṣūfism. Karamustafa describes that scale:

“Thus while he could be, in extreme cases as socially deviant as the Qalandar, the Malāmatī functioned within a ‘performance paradigm,’

29. Ahmet Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 34-35.

30. Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 66-67.

31. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 36.

where the nature and meaning of religious belief and practice as performed by individual believers were conditioned by other believers' perception of them. The Qalandar, however, claimed to have transcended this paradigm altogether. He too was concerned exclusively with his own inner state, yet he rejected the basic premise of the Malāmatī in his refusal to acknowledge the importance of any audience other than God, the auditor par excellence."³²

If the term *malāmatiyya* does indeed refer to two separate groups, then they at least share the above concerns. If that is the case, then why should this practice — as well as any later abstractions or iterations of it — be considered deviant? It is not accidental that al-Ṣulamī chose to give profiles of both Ṣūfīs and the Malāmatiyya. It is no more an accident in al-Hujwārī. Melchert suggests that “to some degree, coincidences between Baghdadi Ṣūfism and Nīshāpūrī Malamatism might be feedback. That is, communication between Iraqi Ṣūfīs and Nīshāpūrī Malāmatiyya by the time of al-Ṣulamī for Malāmatism to have come under Iraqi influence.”³³ If interaction between the Ṣūfīs of Baghdad and the Malāmatīs of Nīshāpūr was as extensive as Melchert indicates — and there is nothing to suggest otherwise — then it is reasonable to consider that they must have also come into clashes with one another on occasion.³⁴ It is also reasonable that as the social and political environment in Nīshāpūr changed, the relationships between those holding different doctrines changed and changed in relation to societal norms. The insistence of the Malāmatiyya on eschewing the ascetic modes being practiced by other Nīshāpūrī mystics resulted in their name being associated with that of other groups whose behavior was deemed heterodox and deviant, such as the Qalandariyya.

32. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 36.

33. Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” 239.

34. *Ibid.*, 240.

Formulation of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

It is helpful for the purposes of this discussion to define what is meant by ‘orthodox’ and ‘heterodox’ in abstract terms. In Islamic political thought and theological history this is an difficult task. It would be perfectly reasonable to suggest that it is impossible to assign these labels without being influenced by modern conceptions of orthodoxy. As this proves difficult and has been discussed at length elsewhere, I will abdicate the task to Daniel Shankland, who expressed the following in a recent article introducing a volume on the heterodox in Islam:

“This uncertainty has prompted the occasional suggestion that ‘heterodox’ should be abandoned completely as an idea, perhaps accompanied by the argument that there is no such thing as ‘orthodox’ anyway in any neo-Platonic sense so that the very use of the term creates a false dichotomy. Whilst it is true that prejudice all too often may lead to the belittling, and therefore the negative labeling of any group which appears to be an outsider or in a minority, I would argue that it is not the only social factor which appears to be operating in perpetuating and giving rise to these groups. In other words, I would assert that there are groups which are more or less heterodox, or unorthodox in their belief. To ignore this, I believe, is to overlook the fact that there is a common core of ideas which these groups often define themselves in opposition to; further that they equally often do appear to have factors in common, however different their name or their doctrines appear to be from one another. ‘Unorthodox’ in this context is not simply a random instance of rebellion, resistance or difference, but does appear to exhibit certain patterns.”³⁵

The above is an excellent characterization of how normative principles in practice and doctrine were applied as Baghdad Sūfism began to have greater influence in Nīshāpūrī mystic circles. Orthodoxy as it applied to mysticism is difficult to

35. David Shankland, “Maps and the Alevis: On the Ethnography of Heterodox Islamic Groups,” *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (December 2010): 229.

identify. If we use Shankland’s view of orthodoxy and heterodoxy to assess the development of mysticism in Nīshāpūr then we will see that there are several groups which are vying for prominence in different doctrinal realms. In addition to the Malāmatiyya and the Ṣūfīs, there are the Karrāmiyya, another mystic sect. At the level of *fiqh* there are the Ḥanafīs and the Shafī’īs. Each of these groups was involved in social politics in Nīshāpūr as well as politics abroad. There were also pre-existing factional disagreements between various social and ethnic groups. Richard Bulliet does not believe that the differences between these groups are sufficient to explain why the factional strife continued into the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries.³⁶ He argues instead that the main point of contention in Nīshāpūr was the proscription of Ash‘ārī theology by the Mu‘tazila entrenched in Nīshāpūr in the third/ninth century, the former eventually coming to the fore. Later, as the legal schools became important for practical, legal matters, particularly among the upper classes, the Shafī’ī would come to dominate over the Ḥanafīs.³⁷

The ‘*ulamā*’ — who were from the the upper classes and who had largely taken up Ash‘ārī theology — were also aligning with the with the Ṣūfīs. Margaret Malamud writes that in late fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century Khurāsān, “Ṣūfī organizations and structures of authority were closely connected with those of the ‘*ulamā*’. In this period “Ṣūfism became intertwined with the activities, practices and institutions of the ‘*ulamā*’; Ṣūfīs were often members of the ‘*ulamā*’ and they were able to provide institutional as well as literary support for Ṣūfism.³⁸ As the

36. Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 33.

37. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

38. Margaret Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (August 1994): 428.

Ṣūfīs became more entrenched in the social and political hierarchy of Nīshāpūr, groups without the aforementioned support were marginalized. Malamud argues that the Karrāmiyya and the Malmātiyya were really being ousted by the Shafī‘īs, using Bulliet’s listing of “terms to describe mystics and, where possible, their legal affiliations.” In his listing, “no Ḥanafīs or Karrāmīs were Ṣūfīs; only Shafī‘īs were Ṣūfīs.”³⁹ Malamud also considers the Karrāmiyya to be a *madhdhāb* rather than a mystic sect. How they were aligned and what they believed will be discussed in the next section.

Melchert is critical of Malamud’s insistence that the Ṣūfīs were associated with the Shafī‘ī school, arguing that she presents no hard evidence to that effect.⁴⁰ He instead presents the case that the Karrāmiyya were in fact associated with the Ḥanafī school — referring to them as “partisans of Abū Ḥanīfa” — which puts them into estrangement with the Malmātiyya by the fourth/tenth century.⁴¹ The main point of contention between the two appears to have been that “Abū Ḥanīfa and the Murjī’a believed in ordering the good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi-’l-ma’rūf wa-’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*) to the point of active disobedience to rulers. It is possible that Aḥmad b. al-Ḥarb and Ibn Karrām carried on the tradition.”⁴² His evidence for this claim is two quotes from Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār in which he replies to a disciple’s question about responding to evil. Ḥamdūn encourages the questioner to ignore the wrong-doing and remain humble.

As mentioned above Bulliet identifies factional struggles in Nīshāpūr that pre-date those between the Ḥanafīs and Shafī‘īs in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh

39. Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” 429.

40. Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” 242.

41. *Ibid.*, 240.

42. *Ibid.*, 241.

centuries.⁴³ He suggests that this *'aṣabiyya* ("factional strife") continued into the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries and evolved into "all out intraurban warfare and the destruction marginalized and abandonment of the city."⁴⁴ It is in this environment that conceptions of deviance and antinomian behavior among groups drawn along religious lines developed. Regardless of how these social changes occurred in Nīshāpūr, along with the accordant political and theological alignment and realignment, the winners are clear. Ash'ārī theology becomes dominant, particularly among the upper classes. The Shafi'ī *madhhab* comes to primacy in the courts. Lastly, Ṣūfism indeed becomes the dominant mode of mystic piety. It is hardly a coincidence that these alignments are represented primarily in the upper classes, while the others are relegated to the lower.⁴⁵ The above theological, juridical, and mystical-social alignments represent the closest approximation of orthodoxy we can render for the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. The other movements which existed would become more homogeneously heterodox in their outward forms, eventually simply being designated as deviant.

Conceptions of Deviance in Social Alignment and Behavior

I have discussed by this point several possibilities for the dominance of Ṣūfism and the marginalization of other forms of mysticism in Nīshāpūr. First, the fifth/eleventh century Ṣūfī compilers were intent upon describing a narrowly defined normative mysticism. In order to do this, they either omitted references to Ṣūfī association with heterodox mystics groups and alignments, or they redefined and associated older mystic traditions with heterodox groups in order to marginalize them in the discourse. Second, the social and political structures that existed in

43. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, 31.

44. *Ibid.*, 32.

45. *Ibid.*, 40-42.

Nīshāpūr became aligned with larger trends in the developing Islamic orthodoxy which further relegated heterodox groups to subaltern status.

The development and expansion of the *khānaqah* as a Ṣūfī institution is key to their established dominance over the social aspect of mystic practice. The Karrāmiyya are credited with the establishing the institution of the *khānaqah*, the first of which is believed to be the tomb of Aḥmad b. Ḥarb in Jerusalem, though there is some discussion that this is apocryphal.⁴⁶ The fifth/eleventh century Ṣūfīs appropriated and adopt the *khānaqah* institution for their own purposes.⁴⁷ Several were established by wealthy patrons on behalf of Ṣūfī masters in Nīshāpūr. Ṣulamī, Qushayrī and his master Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq all had *khānaqahs* in Nīshāpūr at the end of the fourth/tenth and beginning of the fifth/eleventh centuries. These institutions in Nīshāpūr became associated with the Shafī‘ī *madhdhhab*, as many of their directors were Shafī‘īs.⁴⁸ Later the *khānaqah* would feature heavily in the establishment of *waqf* endowments in other parts of the Muslim world. The Saljūqs would become great patrons in the establishment of Ṣūfī *khānaqahs* at the end of the fifth/eleventh century.⁴⁹

The group with which the earliest *khānaqahs* are associated — the Karrāmiyya — are considered to be a heterodox Islamic mystic movement in Khurāsān named for Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Karrām (190/806-255/869). Ibn Karrām derived most of his doctrine from his teacher Aḥmad b. Ḥarb (176/792-234/849). The Karrāmiyya were the most numerous mystics in Khurāsān until the fourth/tenth century, though they are absent from accounts of the development of mys-

46. Jacqueline Chabbi, “Khānqah,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

47. Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” 435.

48. *Ibid.*, 431, 436.

49. Chabbi, “Khānqah.”

ticism and Ṣūfism referenced in this paper.⁵⁰ They were literalists and anthropomorphists — they believed that God was a physical entity, or could be. There were different views within the Karrāmiyya on what God’s corporeal form actually was.⁵¹ Ibn Karrām held moderate views on faith and practice, in terms of obligations for fulfillment. His definition of faith allowed for someone to simply recite the double *shahada*, which would remain valid except in the case of apostasy. His views on practice allowed for someone to perform prayer without ablutions (*wūḍū’*) or ritual cleanliness of dress (*tahāra*) and did not require ablutions after the handling of impure objects and substances.⁵²

The Karrāmiyya were extreme ascetics and practiced bodily mortification (*taqashshuf*) and extreme dependence upon God (*tawakkul*). The latter was typically expressed as extreme poverty and mendicancy. The above practices and doctrine are very similar to those of the aforementioned Qalandariyya, whose origins are uncertain, but to whom references can be found beginning in the fifth/eleventh century.⁵³ I will not speculate about connections between the Karrāmiyya and the Qalandariyya, except to identify that their practices do have distinct similarities and are connected in their backward-read heterodoxy. This is not an incidental label though. As the principles of Ṣūfism were systematized in the the *khānqahs* of fifth/eleventh century Nīshāpūr under the watchful eyes of great *shuyūkh* like Ṣulamī and Qushayrī, all heterodox forms were subject to ridicule, scorn and even punishment.⁵⁴ Suhrawardī — writing in the sixth/twelfth century — relates

50. Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” 237.

51. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al- Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Mīlāl wa ’l-Niḥāl*, trans. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 92-93.

52. C. E. Bosworth, “Karrāmiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

53. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 32-33.

54. Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” 241-242.

vastly different forms of social deviance, as cited above. This indicates that the institutions which established the norms were also perpetuating those norms as a part of their criteria for belonging. For those sympathetic to the increasingly marginal, references to past mystics suffering from similar marginalization. These themes are present in Hujwārī's anecdotes, which present a glimpse of the author's perception of how mysticism was developing or degrading as inward-reflection was replaced by outward acts of piety.

Hujwārī relates a story about Abū Yazīd traveling through Rayy on his way from the Ḥijāz during Ramaḍān.⁵⁵ A crowd gathered to honor him upon his arrival and it is said that this distracted his thoughts from God, at which point he stopped to eat loaf of bread. The crowd left him, because they perceived this act as impious. He replied to a disciple: "You see! as soon as I perform a single article of the law, they all reject me."⁵⁶ Hujwārī comments on the above story: "In those days [ostensibly the third/ninth century] it was necessary, for incurring blame, to do something disapproved or extraordinary; but in our time, if anyone desires blame, he need only lengthen a little his voluntary prayers or fulfill the religious practices which are prescribed: at once everybody will call him a hypocrite and impostor."

This creates a distinct insider-outsider paradigm which is reflected in the above anecdote related by al-Hujwārī about blameworthy acts. Abū Yazīd follows the *fiqh* about not fasting while traveling, but even this falls outside of his normative prescriptions for behavior based on the crowd's conception of the *sunna*. The

55. Abū Yazīd [Bāyazīd] Ṭayfūr b. 'Īsā b. Surūshān al-Biṣṭāmī (261/874 or 264/877-8), celebrated mystic whose sayings and stories are often quoted by later Ṣūfīs. See Helmut Ritter, "Abū Yazīd (Bāyazīd) Ṭayfūr b. 'Īsā b. Surūshān al-Biṣṭāmī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

56. Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 65.

concept of social mores and *sunna* behavior defining the legitimacy of the practitioner is important here. Hujwārī's commentary is meaningful in that it betrays his despair over the scrutiny that the pious face if they are caught exploring their piety in any way other than that which is prescribed. It exposes the view that because the early Malāmātiyya had continued in their tradition of mystic practice, but were being scrutinized by those mystic practitioners in Khurāsān who had been influenced and then supplanted by the Baghdad Ṣūfīs. Those who did not allow themselves to be absorbed into the Ṣūfī fold would have been subject to greater scrutiny. It is likely, as Melchert suggests, that after a time, many would cease in their practice because they could perceive no spiritual or material gain.⁵⁷

Closing his discussion of the Malāmātiyya, Hujwārī relates an anecdote of his own involving the hypocrisy of the Ṣūfīs and their obsession with social order and exoteric piety. He relates, in his own voice, that while journeying toward Khurāsān,

“I arrived at a village in that country where there was a convent (*khānaqah*) inhabited by a number of aspirants to Ṣūfism. I was wearing a dark-blue frock such as is prescribed by the *sunna* for travelers; but I had with me nothing of the Ṣūfī's regular equipment except a staff and a leathern water-bottle. I appeared very contemptible in the eyes of these Ṣūfīs, who did not know me. They regarded only my external habit and said to one another, “This fellow is not one of us.” And so in truth it was: I was not one of them, but I had to pass the night in that place.”⁵⁸

Hujwārī is making a claim here about the abasement of piety amongst the *khānaqah* Ṣūfīs, as evidenced by their rude behavior. He is also demonstrating his sym-

57. Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” 243.

58. Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 69.

pathies to those who adhere to a heterodox practice and do not carry with them the trappings of the Shafī'ī Ṣūfīs, who had by this point established themselves in *khānaqahs*. In this passage the *khānaqah* in which Hujwārī spends the night can be taken as a metaphor for Islamic mysticism in general in his lifetime. When presented from this point of view, the Ṣūfīs take on the role of the corrupt, vain usurpers of an older tradition who have become fully established as the orthodox arbiters of doctrine and practice — represented here by a building, the *khānaqah*. It is further significant that he makes *specific* mention of Khurāsān as the setting for the story. Hujwārī perhaps even betrays himself as a member of the heterodoxy:

“They lodged me on a roof, while they went up to a roof above mine, and set before me dry bread which had turned green, while I was drawing into my nostrils the savour of the viands which they regaled themselves. All the time they were addressing derisive remarks to me from the roof. When they finished the food, they began to pelt me with the skins of the melons which they had eaten, by way of showing how pleased they were with themselves and how lightly they thought of me. I said in my heart: ‘O Lord God, were it not that they are wearing the dress of Thy friends, I would not have borne this from them.’ And the more they scoffed at me the more glad became my heart, so that their endurance of this burden which was the means of delivering me from that difficulty which I have mentioned; and forthwith I perceived why the Shaykhs have always given fools leave to associate with them and for what reason they submit to their annoyance.”⁵⁹

Whether or not Hujwārī considered himself to be a follower of the “path of blame” or any other heterodox movement, he is sympathetic to them and to the degradation of their position in Khurāsānian society. His despair over the deterioration of individualistic modes of piety, and their replacement by socially-conscious modes, is plain. In the first anecdote cited, in which he admonishes a man who is seeking

59. Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb; The Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, 69.

blame and then sighs at receiving it, Hujwārī indicates that by his lifetime, the “path of blame” had lost its original associations and already become associated with other types of antinomian activity. Ṣulamī before him had already established that those who were identified as Malāmātiyya were rejectionists, as in the case of Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār, and that their mode of piety was becoming increasingly incompatible with that of the Ṣūfīs. By Suhrawardī’s time, rejection of asceticism in favor of inward-facing, this-worldly modes of piety had come to be just as socially deviant as that of the most antinomian ascetics, allowing references to either group to have ostensibly the same meaning.

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