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Antinomians and Nonconformists

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Excerpt from Chapter 6 of *Sufism: The Formative Period*, which
discusses the anarchist tendencies of certain Sufis in 9th century
Iraq.

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The early Sufis of the third/ninth century occupied a peculiar place in the social and mental world of Islamic Iraq. Unlike many itinerant renunciants who roamed the countryside, the Sufis firmly implanted themselves into the major urban centres of Baghdad and Basra, yet they were not altogether 'mainstream' and harboured anti-social and antinomian tendencies side by side with socially and legally-conformist ones. Socially, their nonconformist strains included distinct strands of celibacy, vegetarianism, avoidance of gainful employment, withdrawal and seclusion, as well as a certain proclivity for outlandish even outrageous behaviour (Nuri and Shibli stand out in this regard), though these were not universally accepted or practised by all or even most Sufis. Other characteristic Sufi practices and beliefs, notably *sama* – which tended to be a peculiar blend of music, poetry and dance – and discourses of closeness to God, did not necessarily deviate from the social mainstream and may have even been popular, yet they could be legally and theologically suspect. In this sense, the Sufis of Iraq, who can

be said to have harboured anarchist tendencies, were among the social and intellectual avant-garde of early Islam.

As an inward-orientated form of piety, Sufism contained an intensely self-critical strain from its very beginnings, and astute Sufi observers who surveyed the Sufi scene tackled the task of disentangling the 'questionable and undesirable' elements of their heritage from its 'genuine' solid core. On this front, Sarraj and Hujwiri stand out as forthright and honest surveyors of the whole canvas of Sufism who documented and discussed critically the contentious aspects of their tradition without making any undue compromises from what they considered to be its core (which, for them, definitely included *sama* – but not dance – and discourses of proximity and special access to God). The *oeuvre* of Ansari and Sulami, both inclusive and expansive, are also revealing in this regard. Kalabadhi and Qushayri, however, were more circumspect; they had a somewhat less inclusive and 'sanitised' picture of Sufism, one that was so closely aligned with their scholarly predilections that there was little room left for unruly elements.

Naturally, Sufis were not the only ones to write critically on Sufi subjects. As Sufism became socially more prominent, it caught the attention of 'outsiders' who recorded their reactions to this form of pious living in their works, mostly in the form of brief incidental comments. Since Sufism of Iraq first emerged as a synthesis of pre-existing strands of piety, it is not surprising that some of the themes sounded by its outsider critics had precedents in earlier 'heresiographical' literature. A revealing example is the following passage on heretics called 'pneumatics' (*ru'aniyya*) from Abu 'asim Khushaysh ibn Asram al-Nasa'i's (d. 253/867) *Kitab al-istiqaama fi 'l-sunna wa al-radd 'ala ahl al-ahwa* (*The Book of Sound Tradition and Refutation of Dissenters*):

They are so called because they believe that their spirits see the *malakut* ['the divine dominion'] of the heavens, that they see the pasture of paradise, and

further, that they have sexual intercourse with the houris. Furthermore, they believe that they wander with their spirits in paradise. They are also called *fi kriyya* [‘meditationists’] because they meditate and believe that in their meditation they can reach God in reality. Thus they make their meditation the object of their devotions and of their striving towards God. In their meditation they see this goal by means of their spirit, through God speaking to them directly, passing his hand gently over them, and – as they believe – looking upon them directly, while they have intercourse with the houris and dally with them as they lay upon their couches, and while eternally young boys bring them food and drink and exquisite fruit.¹

Khushaysh proceeded to report on other groups of mystics.

Other mystics teach that when love of God has supplanted all other attachments in the heart (*khulla*), legal bans are no longer valid (*rukhas*). And some teach a method of ascetic training (especially of the diet) that so mortifies yearnings for the flesh that when the training is finished the ‘ascetic’ gains licence to everything (*iba`a*). Another group maintains that the heart is distracted when mortification becomes too vigorous; it is better to yield immediately to one’s inclinations; the heart, having experienced vanity, can then detach itself from vain things without regret. One last group affirms that renunciation (*zuhd*) is

¹ Bernd Radtke, ‘Mystical union’, 189, translating from Abu’l-Ôsayn al-Malati, *al-Tanbih wa al-radd ‘ala ahl al-ahwa’ wa al-bida’*, ed. Sven Dederling (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1936), 73ff (the passage from Khushaysh is on the margins).

applicable only to things forbidden by religious law, that enjoying permitted wealth is good and riches are superior to poverty.²

Such criticisms, when directed against mystics, normally gravitated toward the major generic accusations of *iba'a*, 'permissivism and antinomianism', and *'ulul*, 'incarnationism or inherence of the Divine in the material world, especially in human form'. To these was added, especially by the Mu'tazila and Shi'a, the charges of obscurantist anti-rationalism, making 'false claims' to work miracles as well as rash dismissal of discursive learning. It was against the backdrop of these general accusations that specific Sufi practices such as *sama'*, tearing the cloak in ecstasy, and searching for manifestations of God in the creation – most notoriously in the form of 'gazing at beardless youths' – came under fire from critics of Sufism. Such frontal attacks against Sufism began to appear from very early on, with the Mu'tazila and the Twelver Shi'a explicitly attacking Sufis already during the fourth/tenth century, but they crescendoed only in the sixth/twelfth century with two critical chapters in the *Tabsirat al-'awamm fi ma'rifat maqalat al-anam* (*Instructions for the Common People concerning the Knowledge of Human Discourses*) of the Twelver Shi'i Jamal al-Din al-Murtada al-Razi (lived first half of sixth/twelfth century) and a long chapter contained in the famous Óanbali preacher and writer 'Abd al-Ra'man ibn 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi's (510–97/1126–1200) polemical work *Talbis Iblis* (*The Devil's Delusion*).

Jamal al-Din al-Murtada divided the Sufis into six sects: (1) those who believed in unification with God (*itti'ad*); here, he specifically named Óallaj, Bastami and Shibli; (2) lovers (*'ushshaq*); these

² Massignon, *Essay*, 80, paraphrasing from Abu'l-Óusayn al-Malati, *al-Tanbih wa al-radd 'ala ahl al-ahwa' wa al-bida'*, fols 160–7 (I omitted personal names); German translation of relevant passages are given in Bernd Radtke, *Kritische Gänge*, 261–2.

On Khushaysh, see Sezgin, *Geschichte*, 1: 600.

exemplified compromise, even corruption, of true piety because of their willingness to translate their expertise in religion to social, economic and political power.

It was for this reason that in the 'strange looking glass' of the *kharabat* complex, 'the norms and values of Sufi piety [were] all reversed', and the *qalandar* was elevated to the role of the genuine mystic.³⁰ This complete role-reversal suggests that whether real or imaginary, the antinomian, nonconformist edge of Sufism always functioned as an indispensable mirror in which Sufis could look to see a critical reflection of their true place in society and on the spiritual path.

³⁰ The quotes are from Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 76.

thought that only God was worthy of love; (3) *Nuriyya* (the 'Light Sect') who believed that two kinds of veils existed between humanity and God, one of light, and the other of fire; those who were veiled by light were to be condemned because they falsely belittled Paradise and Hell, while those who were veiled by fire were positively followers of Satan, who was himself made of fire; (4) *Wasiliyya* (the 'Attainers'), who attained union with God and thus saw no need to observe religious duties; (5) those who were against books and learning; and (6) those who cared only for sensual pleasures such as eating, dancing, and wearing nice clothes. In a separate chapter, al-Razi scrutinised the work of Qushayri' and took the Sufis to task for sanctioning *sama*', believing in incarnation, misunderstanding *walaya* (which he thought was reserved only for the Shi'i *imams*), and falsely claiming to perform miracles, while they only engaged in sorcery (*si'r*).³

Compared to al-Razi's criticism of the Sufis, Ibn al-Jawzi's denunciation of Sufism was at once more substantive and better informed. In *The Devil's Delusion*, Ibn al-Jawzi set out to document and expose the delusions that the Devil worked on different social groups, including philosophers, theologians, jurists, *'adith* experts and rulers, but he reserved his longest chapter to cataloguing the errors of the Sufis.⁴ The beginning of this chapter is revealing about how Ibn al-Jawzi classified Sufis:

³ Al-Razi's attack against Sufis is summarised in Nasr Allah Purjavadi, 'Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 615–19, on the basis of chs 16 and 17 of his *Tabsirat*, ed. 'Abbas Iqbal (Tehran, 1313/1934).

⁴ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 211–487 (ch. 10); the last pages of this chapter, 487–96, contain passages from an unidentified work of Ibn 'Aqil (431/1040–513/1119). Chapters 9 and 11 also contain material relevant to Sufis. An English translation by D. S. Margoliouth appeared serially in *Islamic Culture* 9 (1935) to 12 (1938) and 19 (1945) to 22 (1948); I have used this in making my own translations. On Ibn al-Jawzi, see 'Ibn al-Djawzi, 'Abd al-Ra'man ibn 'Ali' EI 3: 751a–752a (H. Laoust); his attitude toward Sufism is discussed in Makdisi, 'Hanbali school', 69–71.

The Sufis belong to the renunciants. We already described the delusions the devil works on the renunciants [in the chapter that precedes this one], but the Sufis are distinguished from them by certain qualities and states and are marked by [special] characteristics, and we need to discuss them separately. Sufism started out as a path of renunciation, but later its adherents allowed themselves *sama*' and dance. Those who seek the next world from among the common people began to view them favourably on account of their renunciation, and those who seek after this world looked upon them with favour when they saw how they [the Sufi s] enjoyed comfort and amusement.⁵

Clearly, in Ibn al-Jawzi's eyes the Sufis were a special branch of renunciants. They were distinguished from the renunciants by their distinctive practices and beliefs. These, which Ibn al-Jawzi proceeded to discuss in separate sections, included the following practices: *sama*'; ecstasy; dance and hand-clapping; gazing at beardless youths; an excessive concern for cleanliness and ritual purity; dwelling in lodges; celibacy; giving up property; wearing *fuwat*, 'aprons', and *muraqqa'a*, 'patched cloak'; investiture with the cloak; refraining from eating meat; rejection of trade and employment; withdrawal from society through solitude and seclusion; abandoning marriage and desire of children; travelling without provisions with no particular destination, sometimes in solitude and walking at night; avoiding medical treatment; refusal to mourn the death of close companions; abandoning scholarship. They also included the following beliefs: distinction between *'ilm al-batin* 'inner knowledge', and *'ilm al-Ωahir*, 'outer knowledge', this latter equated with *'ilm al-shari'a* 'knowledge

⁵ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 211.

qalandars as social types before the seventh/thirteenth century when they are attested as mendicant renunciants, it is impossible to answer this question. As in the case of the *darvish*, the literary figure probably did have some real counterpart already during the sixth/twelfth century, possibly as a continuation of the earlier anti-nomians discussed above, but this cannot be ascertained.²⁹ Apart from the issue of whether the literary *qalandar* corresponded to some real libertines in Persian-speaking Muslim communities, however, the flowering of the *kharabat* cluster gives rise to another significant question: could this new and potent poetic imagery be read as a literary commentary on the state of Sufism during the time period under consideration? More specifically, did the web of images spun around the figure of the *qalandar* constitute a criticism of the new Sufi communities that had taken shape under the leadership of powerful training masters? Indeed, the emergence of the *kharabat* imagery in Persian poetry was most likely the literary counterpart of Qushayri and Hujwiri's theoretical critique of the formalism that was so evident in the new Sufi social enterprises built around increasingly more authoritarian training shaykhs resident in their lodges. Whether it had an actual social base or not, the *kharabat* complex was the poetic response to the *khanaqah*, and the *qalandars* emerged as the authentic Sufis who were willing to sacrifice absolutely everything for the sake of God, while those *khanaqah*-residents actually called 'Sufis' were transformed in poetry to mere 'exoterists' who had abandoned the search for God in their greed for this world and thus had turned Sufism into a profitable social profession. In this sense, the so-called Sufis of the lodge communities were indistinguishable from all the other social types, such as the *'adith*-experts or the jurists of the *madrasa*s, that for most mystics

²⁹ See Meier, *Abu Sa'id*, 494–516, and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1994), 31–8 for more extended discussions.

it came to be associated very early on with libertinism, primarily because of the emergence of the *qalandar* as a peculiar literary type in Persian poetry during the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries, significantly, at the same time as the appearance of the *ghazal* as a new poetic form. More properly, one should talk of the emergence of a cluster of images organised around the central character *qalandar*. This cluster, which finds its first full-fledged expression in the poetry of Majdud ibn adam Sana'i (d. 525/1131), sometimes gelled into a separate genre called *qalandariyyat*, but more commonly it existed as a free-floating bundle of imagery found most conspicuously in lyric poetry but also in other poetic genres.

It was composed of several sets of images connected, most notably, to the central themes of wine-drinking, sexual promiscuity, gambling and playing games of backgammon and chess, and entering into non-Islamic, especially Zoroastrian and Christian, cults, all located at the *kharabat*, meaning literally 'ruins' but with the very real connotation of 'tavern' and 'brothel'. Through the use of this provocative cluster woven around the figure of an unruly libertine, a highly-positive spin was given to the *qalandar*'s way of life as the epitome of true piety cleansed of all dissimulation and hypocrisy, and the *qalandar* (along with his 'look-alikes', *rind* ('heavy drinker') and *qallash* ('rascal')) was portrayed as the truly sincere devotee of God unconcerned with 'the blame of blamers', in other words, as the real Malamati.²⁸ In this way, the term *qalandar* was brought within the orbit of the term Malamati.

Did this intriguing poetic development reflect an actual social phenomenon? In the absence of non-literary evidence about the

432–79, esp. 449–53 / *Revelation*, 334–66, esp. 345–7; and 'Unsur al-Ma'ali, *Qabus-nama*, 253; this book of counsel was written in 475/1082–3.

²⁸ J. T. P. de Bruijn, 'The *Qalandariyyat* in Persian mystical poetry, from Sana'i onwards', in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), 75–86; Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 71–6.

of the *shari'a*; 'loving God passionately' (*ishq*); visions of angels, jinns, demons, and even God in this world.

These practices and beliefs were indeed associated with Sufism, even though no single Sufi necessarily accepted all of them. Ibn al-Jawzi, for his part, rejected them as reprehensible innovations (*bid'a*, pl. *bida'*) and attempted to prove his case with the help of reliable *'adith*.⁶ He was most unhappy with how the Sufis, in his eyes, undermined the supremacy of the *shari'a* by their claim to possess an 'inner knowledge'. The distinction that the Sufis drew between *shari'a* and *'aqiqa*, 'reality', he argued, was patently wrong since the two were completely identical, and, contrary to Sufi views, inspiration (*ilham*) was not a separate means of communication with God but was simply the result of genuine knowledge (*ilm*). It was clear to Ibn al-Jawzi that the Devil had succeeded in deluding the Sufis mainly by diverting them from discursive knowledge.

Interestingly, Ibn al-Jawzi's criticism of the Sufis sounded like the self-critical remarks of Sarraj, Hujwiri and Abu Ōamid Ghazali. In his discussion of dress, for instance, Ibn al-Jawzi lashed out against formalism and, criticising the Sufi fascination with patched cloaks, he was moved to state, 'Sufism is a concept not a form!'⁷ Particularly telling in this regard is his account of 'libertines' who discredited the Sufis.⁸ According to Ibn al-Jawzi, certain antinomi-

⁶ The standard Sufi responses to the charge of *bid'a* was (1) to deny the accusation and to prove that the practice in question was instead 'recommended' (*sunna*); this, for instance, was the strategy adopted by most Sufi authors who discussed the question of *sama'* though they carefully circumscribed the practice with qualifications; for brief overviews, see 'Sama', 1. In *Music and Mysticism*, EI 8: 1018a–1019b (J. Dering) as well as Arthur Gribetz, 'The *Sama'* controversy: Sufi vs. legalist', *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 43–62; and (2) to accept that the practice under discussion was an innovation but to cast it as an 'acceptable innovation' and not a reprehensible one; this option was adopted especially in the cases of wearing patched frocks, building *khanaqah*s, and extended seclusion; see Meier, 'Book of etiquette', 52–3.

⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 244.

⁸ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 479ff.

ans and libertines had infiltrated Sufism and assumed Sufi identities in order to protect themselves by masking their true identities. These fell into three classes: (1) outright infidels; (2) those who professed Islam but followed their shaykhs without asking for any evidence or even ‘specious arguments’ (*shubha*) about the legal-theological status of the acts they were asked to perform [this is clearly a reflection of the elevation of the training master’s authority to new heights during the lifetime of Ibn al-Jawzi]; and (3) those who did produce ‘specious arguments’ for their actions but were deluded by the devil into thinking that their false arguments were sound. Ibn al-Jawzi reviewed and rejected six such ‘specious arguments’, all quasi-theological props for libertinism and abolition of the *shari’a*, some of which recall the heresiographical observations by Khushaysh quoted above. According to him, some justified their hedonism through predestinarian arguments; some argued that God did not need our worship; some took refuge in God’s infinite mercy; others gave up the effort to discipline the lower self as an unattainable goal; and still others claimed to have transcended the law by having successfully tamed their lower selves or by having experienced clear signs of God’s approval of their behaviour in the form of miraculous occurrences or visions and dreams.

In his decision to exclude libertines from the body of Sufism, Ibn al-Jawzi was in agreement with most Sufi observers of the Sufi landscape, who also sought to domesticate or eliminate the anti-nomian trends interwoven into their tradition of piety. It is noteworthy that the scope of Sufism as it was viewed by its most powerful critic largely coincided with its scope as it was understood by its most astute ‘insider’ observers from Sarraj to Hujwiri. Ibn al-Jawzi rejected the practices and beliefs that he associated with Sufism, while the Sufi authorities evaluated them critically, endorsing many and ruling out others, but outsider critics and insider ‘experts’ alike agreed on the boundaries of the form of piety that they picked out for review. Ibn al-Jawzi’s assault, in other words, was certainly directed at the right target. The frontal nature of this

the anecdote about the renunciant who pretended to be a glutton in front of the political ruler.²⁵

Were there really many libertines around who claimed to be Malamatis during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries? This question is rendered more complex by the emergence, at this period, of other terms that in time came to represent libertinism, notably *darvish* (Persian ‘pauper, beggar’) and *qalandar* (Persian, ‘uncouth’). Although the linguistic origins of these terms, as well as the history of the social types they designate, are obscure, it is likely that they were originally used equally for regular beggars as well as for itinerant renunciants who practised extreme *tawakkul* (‘trust in God’). Some of these latter accepted charitable offerings without, however, actively seeking charity, while others no doubt survived through active begging or, at least, were commonly perceived as beggars. It is, therefore, reasonable to see a confluence of voluntary and involuntary poverty, of wandering renunciants and the destitute, in the origin of *darvish*s and *qalandars*, even though the etymologies of the two terms remain uncertain.²⁶

During the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries, *darvish* seems to have mostly retained its primary meaning of ‘poor, beggar’, but the term must have already started to assume the added connotation of a particular kind of piety characterised by itinerant mendicancy in this period, since the use of the term in this sense and the image of a wandering dervish – complete with his hallmark accoutrements of a begging bowl (*kashkul*), a trumpet made from the horn of a ram or deer (*nafir* or *buq*), a hat of felt (*taj*), a short axe or hatchet (*tabarzin*), a patched bag (*chanta*), a gnarled staff (‘*asa*), an animal skin (*pust*), and a rosary (*tasbi*) – is well attested from the late fifth/eleventh century onwards.²⁷ The term *qalandar* may have had similar origins, but unlike *darvish*,

²⁵ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 201–2.

²⁶ Cf. ‘Begging, ii. In Sufi Literature and Practice’, *EIr* 3: 81–2 (Algar).

²⁷ ‘Darviš, ii. In the Islamic Period’, *EIr* 7: 73–6 (H. Algar); ‘Darvish’, s.v. *Lughatnama*. Two early attestations of mendicant dervishes are Hujwiri, *Kashf*,

sixth/twelfth century, quoted Abu Sa'id as having said, 'The Malamati is he who, out of love of God, does not fear whatever happens to him and does not care about blame'.²² At around the same time as Ibn Munavvar, Ibn al-Jawzi decried Malamatis in much the same way as Hujwiri and Ghazali, though in more caustic terms:

Certain Sufis, who are called the Malamatiyya, plunged into sins and then said, 'Our goal was to demote ourselves in the public eye in order to be safe from the disaster of good name and hypocrisy.' They are like a man who fornicated with a woman and impregnated her, and when he was asked, 'Why didn't you practise *coitus interruptus* ('*azl*?)' he replied, 'I had heard that '*azl* is reprehensible.' Then they told him, 'And you had not heard that fornication is prohibited?' These ignorant people have lost their standing with God and have forgotten that Muslims are the witnesses of God on earth.²³

Ibn al-Jawzi was in principle against intentional blame, and he stated unequivocally, 'it is no religious act for a man to humiliate himself in public'.²⁴ He narrated with disapproval what he considered clear examples of outrageous behaviour about, especially, Nuri and Shibli, though he was mostly silent about similar behaviour of Sufis closer to his own time. Like Hujwiri and Ghazali, however, he had no qualms about pious exemplars repelling public attention for the right reasons, and he repeated with approbation

²² Mu'ammad ibn Munavvar, *Asrar*, 1: 288 / *Secrets*, 436; I have corrected O'Kane's 'does not think of it as reproach' to 'does not care about blame'. Graham, 'Abu Sa'id', 128 gives the right translation.

²³ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 468; see also 478.

²⁴ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 468.

attack was most obvious in Ibn al-Jawzi's account of various reprehensible actions of Sufis, where the author focused on the more notorious aspects of the lives of especially Shibli and Nuri and related flagrantly-unconventional and shocking anecdotes about them, with extreme disapproval.⁹ In brief, Ibn al-Jawzi found practically nothing to approve in Sufism, even though he did not refrain from using statements of Sufis with approval if these neatly fit into his arguments.

Remarkably, in his attempt to refute the whole of Sufism as anti-nomianism plain and simple, Ibn al-Jawzi relied directly on the views of the eminent scholar-Sufi Abu Ōamid Ghazali. In his discussion of libertines in particular, Ibn al-Jawzi reproduced materials that can be traced back to the works of the 'Proof of Islam'.

Indeed, since all six of the specious arguments and their correct answers given by Ibn al-Jawzi in his *Delusions* appear in a Persian treatise of Ghazali entitled *The Idiocy of Antinomians* (*Ōamaqat-i ahl-i iba'at*), it is certain that Ibn al-Jawzi had access to an Arabic version of Ghazali's treatise or to another Arabic text that reproduced this latter's content.¹⁰ For his part, Ghazali naturally did not write the *Idiocy of Antinomians* as a refutation of Sufism, but he meant it instead as an attack against antinomians who masqueraded as Sufis. While Ghazali debunked such 'false' Sufis and expostulated in several of his other works the necessity of obeying the *shari'a*, the *Idiocy* was his most extensive and vehement criticism of 'permissivists' (*iba'is*).¹¹ In this treatise, Ghazali decried antinomians as the worst of all people. Misled by lust and

⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis*, 460ff. Among other authorities, Ibn al-Jawzi relied on Sarraj in this section.

¹⁰ An excellent recent edition of the *Ōamaqat* is in Purjavadi, *Du mujaddid*, 153–209; this now replaces the earlier published edition in Otto Pretzl, *Die Streitschrift des Gazali gegen die Iba'ija* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1933), 63–118. The overlap between this work and Ibn al-Jawzi's *Delusions* is also pointed out by Hamid Algar in 'Ebahiya', *EIr* 7: 653–4.

¹¹ See, for instance, his Persian letter on the same subject in Purjavadi, *Du mujaddid*, 139–45; Purjavadi discusses the contents of the letter on pp. 126–38.

laziness, they had dropped all prescribed ritual observances and embraced total sexual promiscuity. In so doing, they had allowed themselves to become mere toys in the hands of Satan, who used them to misguide others. Deprived of any critical faculty, they had accepted Satan's insinuation that scholarship was but a veil for true seers such as themselves and had turned into venomous critics of scholars. While admittedly not all such antinomians were 'Sufi-pretenders' (*sufi-numa*), Ghazali focused on these latter, for whom he reserved his most ascerbic tone. Like the Sufis, these impostors dressed in blue gowns or wore the patched cloak, shaved their moustaches, and carried prayer-rugs and tooth-brushes but, unlike the Sufis, they freely consumed wine, used illicit funds without shame and availed themselves of all bodily pleasures. Ghazali discussed in some detail eight 'specious arguments' (*shubhat*) that the Sufi-pretenders produced, and he refuted them one by one (the two that were not directly reproduced by Ibn al-Jawzi were the denial of after-life and the argument that the true poverty meant the absence of all knowledge, including knowledge of good and bad deeds or of paradise and hell!). Irked beyond measure by these would-be Sufi libertines and their hostile attitude towards scholarship, Ghazali the scholar-Sufi declared them beyond the pale of Islam in no uncertain terms and advised political rulers to exterminate ruthlessly these incorrigible sinners.

Who exactly were the libertines and antinomians associated with Sufism that were universally rejected by Sufis and non-Sufi observers? It is difficult to trace these shady characters, but Sarraj gave a full listing of them in the 'Book of Errors' of his *Light Flashes*, under the heading 'On those who erred in fundamentals and were led to misbelief'.¹² These included the following: (1) those who thought that once mystics reached God they should be called 'free' instead of 'Godservants'; (2) a group of Iraqis who thought that the Godservant could not achieve true sincerity

¹² Sarraj, *Luma'*, 410–35 / *Schlaglichter*, 584–602 (144–57).

one is gripped in his nature by infidelity and misbelief so that people say that he abandoned the law and prophetic custom, while he thinks that he is walking the path of blame.¹⁸

Hujwiri explained and endorsed the first two kinds, citing examples for them, and rejected the third, decrying it as a ploy to win fame and popularity. The proponents of this last kind often justified their actions as a deliberate attempt on their part to abase the lower self, and while Hujwiri thought that public blame could certainly have that therapeutic effect – he proffered an example from his personal experience about how being pelted with melon skins by formalist Sufis saved him from a spiritual snare that had seized him – he could not countenance such flagrant violation of the religious law.¹⁹

Hujwiri's attitude toward blame was shared by other fifth/eleventh century-and, later, sixth/twelfth-century figures who discussed the concept. Both Ansari and Abu Ōamid Ghazali, like Hujwiri, objected to those who contravened the law in the name of *malama*, but accepted shocking though licit acts in order to repel public attention and along with it the desire for fame or good name (*jah*); Ghazali cited an unnamed renunciant who began to eat voraciously when he was visited by the political ruler in order to avert this latter's attention from himself.²⁰ The Zahirī traditionist and Sufi Mu'ammad ibn Ōahir al-Maqdisi 'Ibn al-Qaysarani' (448–507/1058–1113) criticised Malamatis of his time as antinomians.²¹ Mu'ammad ibn Munavvar, the biographer of Abu Sa'id-i Abu'l-Khayr who wrote towards the end of the

¹⁸ Hujwiri, *Kashf*, 70–1 / cf. *Revelation*, 63–4.

¹⁹ Hujwiri, *Kashf*, 77–8 / *Revelation*, 69.

²⁰ Ghazali, *Kimīya*, 2: 199; Ghazali, *I'ya'*, 3: 304–5; Meier, *Abu Sa'id*, 497.

²¹ Purjavadi, *Du mujaddid*, 147, reporting from Ibn al-Qaysarani's *Īafwat al-tasawwuf* (Beirut, 1416/1995), 473. On this figure, see 'Ibn al-Qaysarani', EI 3: 821a (Joseph Schacht).

spiritual ancestors, the name Malamati continues to be used during the fifth/eleventh century to refer to antinomians who are indifferent to the *shari'a*. Not surprisingly, Qushayri, whose conception of Sufism was carefully circumscribed, mentioned the Malamatis of Nishapur only in passing in three entries in the biographical section of his *Treatise*, possibly because the term Malamati was already tainted with antinomianism in his eyes, but Hujwiri devoted a whole chapter to the question of 'blame', which is packed with interesting information.¹⁶ Referring to the Qur'anic locus of the concept of blame – Qur'an 5 [al-Ma'ida]: 54 that refers to the Prophet and his companions, 'they struggle in the path of God and do not fear the blame of any blamer' – Hujwiri reminded his readers that 'God's elect [that is, prophets and saints] are distinguished from the rest by public blame' and that 'public blame is the sustenance of God's friends'.¹⁷ He then proceeded to differentiate the different meanings of the concept with admirable clarity:

Blame is of three kinds: (1) [blame attached] to following the right path, (2) blame [incurred] intentionally, (3) [blame attached] to abandoning [the law]. Blame is attached to following the right path when one who minds his own business, practises religion and abides by the rules of social interaction, is blamed by the people; this is the way people behave towards him but he is indifferent to all that. Intentional blame is when one attracts great public esteem and becomes a centre of attention, and his heart inclines towards that esteem and grows attached to it, yet he wants to rid himself of the people and devote himself to God, he incurs public blame by dissimulating a [blameworthy] act that is not against the law so that people would turn away from him. Blame is attached to abandoning the law when

¹⁶ Hujwiri, *Kashf*, 68–78 / *Revelation*, 62–9.

¹⁷ Hujwiri, *Kashf*, 69–70 / *Revelation*, 62–3.

unless he ceased to pay attention to how others viewed him and who thus proceeded to ignore social norms in his actions, whether these were right or wrong; (3) those who placed sainthood above prophecy on account of their baseless interpretation of the Qur'anic story of Moses and Khidr (Qur'an, 18 [Kahf]: 60–82, summarised in Chapter 4 above); (4) those who argued that all things were permitted and that prohibition applied only to excessive licence taken with others' property; (5) those who believed in divine inherence in a person; (6) those who understood discourse of 'passing away' (*fana'*) as the passing away of human nature; (7) a group in Syria and a group in Basra ('Abd al-Wa'id ibn Zayd is named) who believed in vision of God with the heart in this world; (8) those who believed that they were permanently and perfectly pure; (9) those who believed that their hearts contained divine lights that were uncreated; (10) those who sought to avert blame from themselves when they incurred the punishments laid down by the Qur'an and violated the custom of the Prophet by arguing that they were compelled by God in all their actions; (11) those who surmised that their closeness to God exempted them from observing the same etiquette that they followed prior to achieving proximity to the Divine; (12) a group in Baghdad who thought that in passing away from their own qualities they had entered God's qualities; (13) a group in Iraq who claimed to lose all their senses in ecstasy and thus to transcend sensory phenomena; (14) those who erred in their beliefs concerning the spirit (*ru'*), with many versions of this error listed, most notably the belief in the uncreatedness of the spirit and the belief in transmigration of spirits.

Sarraaj did not claim to have personally seen all these groups, but there is little doubt that they existed (although their detractors no doubt exercised their imagination in their descriptions of them) and that they were generally linked with Sufism. A contemporary of Sarraj, al-Mutahhar ibn Êahir al-Maqdisi, who composed an historical work called *Kitab al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikh* around 355/966,

gave the names of four Sufi groups he came across as Óusniyya (*'usn* means 'beauty'), Malamatiyya, Suqiyya/Sawqiyya – which should most likely be amended to Shawqiyya (*shawq* 'longing') – and Ma'dhuriyya (*ma'dhur* 'excused'). He made the following observation about them:

These are characterised by the lack of any consistent system or clear principles of faith. They make judgments according to their speculations and imagination, and they constantly change their opinions. Some of them believe in incarnationism (*hulul*), as I have heard one of them claim that His habitation is in the cheeks of the beardless youth (*murd*). Some of them believe in permissiveness (*ibaha*) and neglect the religious law, and they do not heed those who blame them.¹³

Although it is possible to match these groups with those discussed by Sarraj (for instance, Ma'dhuriyya possibly to be associated with numbers 4, 10, or 11; Husniyya with 7; Malamatiyya with 2 and 10; and Shawqiyya with 13), it would be hazardous to attempt a one-to-one correspondence on the basis of such meagre evidence. Noteworthy, however, is Maqdisi's use of the name 'Malamati' for those who neglected the law and were not concerned with public blame. This is a different reading of the term Malamati than in the case of the 'Path of Blame' in Nishapur. The followers of this latter movement understood 'blame' primarily to mean 'self-censure', not 'public censure', and certainly did not neglect the law. Nor is there strong evidence that they sought to discipline the lower self by subjecting it to public blame through commission of deliberate and conspicuous acts that violated social norms.¹⁴ Af-

¹³ Sviri, 'Óakim Tirmidhi', 591, translating from *Kitab al-bad' wa'l-ta'rikh* (Paris 1899), 5: 147. Sviri gives the reading 'Óasaniyya' and translates *iba'a* as 'promiscuity'.

¹⁴ In Sulami's treatise on them, the following statement of Abu Óafs Óaddad is one of the rare statements that addresses the issue of public blame: 'They [the

ter all, attracting public blame would have been contrary to their goal of attaining complete public anonymity in an effort to conceal their true spiritual state from all others and thus deny the *nafs* the opportunity to gloat in public attention of any kind. It appears, however, that sometime during the ascendancy of Iraq-orientated Sufism in Khurasan during the fourth/tenth century, the term Malamati came to be applied increasingly to real or imaginary libertines, who justified their social and legal transgressions, genuinely or in dissimulation, either as 'indifference to public blame occasioned by true sincerity' (number 2 in Sarraj's list of errors above) or as 'disciplining the lower self by abasing it through public blame'. Maqdisi's usage certainly reflects this different use of the term outside Nishapur, and other independent evidence corroborates his observation. In a work written by the Caspian Zaydi Imam A'mad ibn al-Óusayn al-Mu'ayyad bi'llah (d. 411/1021) that apparently is 'the earliest extant Zaydi literary reaction to Sufism', the author referred to some Sufis who called themselves 'the people of blame' (*ahl al-malama*) and stated, 'They claim that by involving themselves in evil situations and committing reprehensible acts they abase their ego, yet in reality they fall from the state of repentance and may well revert to being offenders (*fussaq*)'.¹⁵

Sulami, who was a contemporary of al-Mu'ayyad bi'llah, seems oblivious to this use of the term Malamati to designate libertines and portrays the members of the Path of Blame as law-abiding mystics, but in spite of his attempts at preserving the good name of his

Malamatis] show to people their shameful deeds and conceal from them their good qualities. And the people blame them for their outer [behaviour] while they blame themselves for they know about their inner [state]', Sulami, *Malamatiyya*, 89. This is best understood not as active commission of blameworthy acts but as non-concealment of such acts that naturally occur. The Malamatis of Nishapur were more concerned with avoiding praiseworthy acts than seeking to attract public blame, cf. Sviri, 'Óakim Tirmidhi', 607.

¹⁵ W. Madelung, 'Zaydi attitudes to Sufism', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 126.