I. SUFISM IN FATIMID EGYPT?

There is a rather large and unsightly hole in the historiographical fabric of early Sufism. But this hole, which sits squarely in the middle of the history of early Sufism in Egypt, has become such an unremarkable feature of the historical landscape that most historians do not seem to notice or comment upon it, let alone attempt to repair it. Note, for example, the following passage from a widely read history of the subject, which offers a representative example of this endemic issue:

The first to sow the seeds of Sufism in Egypt was Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī ... Other Sufis participated in that sowing with him ... Abū Bakr al-Daqqaq ... Abū l-Hasan b. Bunān al-Ḥammāl ... Abū ‘Ali al-Rūdhabārī ... Abū l-Khayr al-Aqtā’ ... and Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṣāmit. ... But practical Sufism in its collective form would not develop in Egypt until the second half of the sixth century AH ... [when] the first khānqāh was founded during the time of Saladin.¹

The narrative arc delineated in this excerpt constitutes the status quo concerning the history of Egyptian Sufism: Dhū l-Nūn (d. 245/859) planted the seeds of Sufism in Egypt, where they found fertile ground in the ninth century CE. The tenth century saw Sufism grow under the care

¹ Author’s note: I would like to thank Marina Rustow, who introduced me to the Fatimids many years ago; Vincent Cornell, who first urged me to explore this subject; the Islamic Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion for their comments at the 2012 annual meeting in Chicago where I presented an early draft of this article; and the Journal’s two anonymous readers, who offered incisive and constructive critiques of my arguments. Any remaining errors and oversights are, of course, my own.

of al-Ḥammāl, al-Rūḍhabārī, and several others. Sufism then blossomed spectacularly under Saladin’s careful tending at the end of the twelfth century, after which point it grew vigorously across Egypt. Note, however, that with the exception of Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṣāmīt (who was probably not a Sufi) all the aforementioned figures died before the mid-tenth century. So, if Sufism has deep historical roots in Egypt, what happened to those roots during the 200 years of Ismāʿīlī Shiʿī rule under the Fatimid Caliphs (358–567/969–1171)? A perusal of the relevant historiography suggests that with the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, local Sufis vanished from the historical record, not to reappear until Saladin’s establishment of a Sunni polity in Egypt in the late twelfth century. The Sufi scene in Egypt apparently burned brightly but briefly and fizzled out abruptly, only to be rekindled 200 years later. But where did all those Sufis go? Did they die out? Did they leave for more hospitable political climes? Were they absorbed by the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa? Unfortunately, the Sufi sources, both early and late, are virtually silent on this vexing question. Even more vexing is that present-day historians of Egyptian Sufism typically gloss over this problem without a word. They tend to emphasize post-Ayyubid developments and dispatch this murky early period in a few short sentences.

But the question of Sufism in Fatimid Egypt is not obscure historical trivia. How historians conceptualize and reconstruct this early period has serious implications for the way we understand the emergence, development, and popularization of Sufism more broadly. There were several anti-establishment groups across the Muslim world prior to the ninth century known as ḫūfiyūn because of their penchant for wearing wool (ṣūf). However, these early groups were not necessarily or directly

2 I return to these individuals below. Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṣāmīt appears only in al-Suyūṭī’s history of Egypt, Husn al-muhāḍara fi taʾrīkh Misr wa-l-Qāhira (ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Ḥāḍir Ibrāhīm; Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyya, 2 vols., 1967–68), i. 515. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), relying on the history of Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), records al-Ṣāmīt’s date of death as 437/1046, but that portion of Ibn Muyassar’s chronicle is no longer extant and there is nothing in al-Suyūṭī to indicate that al-Ṣāmīt was a Sufi.

related to the tradition of Sufism (al-taṣawwuf) forged in Baghdad by Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 297/910 or 298/911) and his disciples. That is to say that the form of Sufism that would become so popular across the Muslim world after the twelfth century was a movement that coalesced in Baghdad and whose members were actively engaged in the construction and contestation of the doctrinal and devotional boundaries of the movement. The project of sharpening and maintaining that boundary discursively was then taken up vigorously by a number of Sufi authors in the tenth and eleventh centuries: Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), and Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), to name only a few. By this point, to self-identify or be known as a Sufi entailed more than being pious, abstemious, miraculous, or simply wearing wool; it involved the fundamental principle of being linked to a chain of authoritative masters ultimately connected to al-Junayd’s circle and being recognized as such by (at least some) other Sufis. The historiography of early Sufism in Egypt must be carefully attentive to the historical contours of the development of Sufism as an identifiable tradition and social movement. Indeed, Fatimid rule in Egypt coincided precisely with the period during which Sufis in the East, primarily Khurāsān, produced the handbooks and prosopographies that systematized and constructed Sufism as a tradition with a coherent present tied to a normative past. Therefore, given the widespread claim that Sufis have been in Egypt since the early ninth century we should expect to find at least a few Egyptian Sufis from the Fatimid period playing a role in that discursive project—as subjects, authors, or both. In fact, they did not. And while I am certainly not the first to notice this gap in the historiography, as far as I am aware nobody has investigated it systematically. While several historians have highlighted the Fatimid question and others have speculated on it obliquely, none offer much in the way of historical evidence.

In general, modern historians propose the same basic hypothesis, that the Ismāʿīlīs replaced (or absorbed) the Sufis during the Fatimid period and that the Sufis then replaced (or absorbed) the Ismāʿīlīs after Saladin’s coup in 1171. Muhammad al-Hajjājī, for example, claims that Fatimid propagandists exploited the similarities between Shiʿism and Sufism in order first to convert Sufis, and then the general populace, to the Ismāʿīli creed. ‘From here we can say that Sufism and Shiʿism walked

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side-by-side during the Fatimid period. The Sufis at that time was the propagandist who spread the doctrines of the Shi’i school, inviting [others] to it.⁶ ‘Ali Ṣāfi Ḥusayn, also pointing to doctrinal similarities between Shi’ism and Sufism, argues that the Isma’īlis disseminated these ideas in Egypt, which the Sufis then adopted after the Fatimid period. This notion leads him to suppose that Mamluk-era Sufis like Ahmad al-Badawi and Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī were actually crypto-Shi’is (mutashayyī’īn).⁷ Spencer Tringham speculates that the growth of Sufism in post-Saladin Egypt was due, among other factors, to the absorption of Shi’i ideas and practices popularized by the Fatimids.⁸ More broadly, Éric Geoffroy notes that ‘everywhere that Shi’ism became politically established, Sufism ended up by being either suppressed or pursued. This was the case in Fatimid Egypt, and even more so in Safavid Iran’.⁹ Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī goes so far as to argue that the Isma’īli bureaucracy ‘was the basis for later Sufi offices like the Chief Sufi of the Orders (mashyakhat mashāyikh al-ṭurāq), which corresponds to the position of the Chief Propagandist (dā‘ī al-duṭāt) in Ismā’īlimism’.¹⁰ This linkage is demonstrably incorrect.¹¹ Śāliḥ al-Wardānī claims that with the advent of Ayyubid rule many Egyptian Shi’is were absorbed by the Sufi orders. He proclaims that because the Ayyubids and Mamluks were ‘unable to eliminate Shi’ism in Egypt by means of the four schools [of Sunni jurisprudence], they were compelled to embrace and support the Sufis’

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due to their ability to draw in and neutralize Shi‘is. Likewise, Sa‘id ‘Abd al-Fattāh ‘Āshūr suggests that a strictly individualistic form of Sufism flourished in Fatimid Egypt, but that ‘it appears that just as the Fatimids exploited Sufism to spread their Shi‘i doctrine, so did Saladin exploit the same phenomenon to fight the Shi‘i doctrine by encouraging ‘Sunni Sufism’. It should be clear at this point that the entire question of Fatimid Sufism is a tangle of speculation, conjecture, and magical thinking. That is to say that these historians offer very little evidence to support their claims, but rather advance historical arguments on comparative and phenomenological grounds. Their conclusions are based upon certain doctrinal and phenomenological similarities between Sufism and Shi‘ism, including the valorization of bāṭin over zāhir, the oral transmission of an esoteric corpus, the centrality of the master–disciple relationship in that transmission, and the existence of a saintly hierarchy, among others.

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15 The most detailed survey of this material is al-Shaybānī’s aforementioned al-Ṣīla, the historical scope of which extends far beyond Fatimid Egypt. The primary statement of this kind in English is Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s ‘Shi‘ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History’, Religious Studies, 6 (1970): 229–42, which is a phenomenological-cum-comparative approach in the vein of Gerhard van der Leeuw, in which Shi‘ism and Sufism are both manifestations of ‘an aspect of the same reality’ (ibid, 230). For a more historically attuned discussion, see James W. Morris (ed. and transl.), The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue: Arabic edition and English translation of Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman’s Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa-l-ghulām (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001), 9–12; and id., ‘Revisiting Religious Shi‘ism and early Sufism: The Fourth/Tenth-Century Dialogue of the Sage and the Young Disciple’ in Todd Lawson (ed.), Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 102–16.
The fundamental assumption here is that these two systems are so similar that they are in fact incompatible, or perhaps too compatible, and thus cannot exist side-by-side. To a large extent medieval Sufi historiography appears to support this assumption. Following the death of Abū ʿAli al-Rūdhabārī and his companions in the early tenth century there were no Sufis of note in Egypt until the very end of Fatimid rule. At that point Sufis begin to appear quite frequently and prominently in the Sufi historiography again: Najm al-Dīn al-Khabūshānī (d. 587/1191) in Cairo,17 ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī (d. 592/1196) in Alexandria;18 and ʿAbd al-Rahīm al-Qināʿī (d. 592/1196) in Upper Egypt.19 In fact, Mamluk sources credit al-Qināʿī’s disciples with eliminating the Shi’ītes who had fled to Upper Egypt after Saladin’s coup.20 Now, it is certainly true that Mamluk-era Sufi authors could be quite hostile to Shi‘ism, that there are striking similarities between Sufi and Shi‘i thought, and that Fatimid rule left a distinct mark on Egyptian society.21 However, we must exercise some restraint here. These issues do not in any way mitigate the fact that there is absolutely no compelling evidence that Egyptian Sufis and Shi‘īs jockeyed with each other in a game of historical see-saw. This analytical ambivalence vis-à-vis the (in)compatibility of

16 Éric Geoffroy, Introduction to Sufism, 25, for example, writes that ‘There has generally been an incompatibility between these two forms of esoterism [i.e. Sufism and Shi‘ism], precisely because they are so close to each other’. Compare this with Marshall Hodgson’s judgment that in ‘some ways, but not all, the Sūfīs represented in a Jamā‘i-Sunnī milieu what Bātīni piety represented in a Shī‘ī milieu’. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3 vols., 1974), i. 393.


18 See the brief biography and bibliographical information in Denis Gril, La Risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn Abī l-Ma‘nṣūr Ibn Zāfīr: Biographies des maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du viie/xiiie siècle (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1986), 208.

19 The sources on al-Qināʿī are quite extensive, see Appendix A, #23.


21 The Fatimid legacy in Cairo is not limited to the fact of the city’s existence and its architectural landscape. Devin Stewart, for example, has shown that the Fatimids left a linguistic legacy in the Cairene dialect that exists to this day. ‘Popular Shi‘ism in Medieval Egypt: Vestiges of Islamic Sectarian Polemics in Egyptian Arabic’, Studia Islamica, 84 (1996): 35–66.
Sufism and Shi‘ism owes much to the mostly unacknowledged influences of al-Ghazālī’s polemical framework in his *al-Munqidh* and *al-Mustaṣbhirī*, as well as Ibn Khaldūn’s historical framework developed in the *Muqaddima*, where he blames the Ismā‘īlīs (among others) for the Sufis’ deplorable innovations. Present-day scholars have taken up these frameworks and amplified their phenomenological assumptions in lieu of careful argumentation and burdens of evidence. This is not to say that these historians are necessarily incorrect or misguided, but rather that their claims cannot be supported by the comparative and phenomenological evidence alone. The only truly measured statement on this subject is Muhammad Kāmil Husayn’s conclusion that while there must have been Sufis in Fatimid Egypt, we simply do not know anything about them.

A complete reexamination of the Fatimid question is thus long overdue. My objective here is therefore two-fold. First, as to the straightforward historical question—Were there Sufis in Fatimid Egypt?—I offer compelling evidence that there were. And while some of these Sufis enjoyed Fatimid patronage there is insufficient evidence to adjudicate the claims outlined above. At the very least the historical record suggests that we discard the paradigmatic ‘Sufism—Shi‘ism—Sufism’ narrative trajectory so common in modern scholarship. But the data raise a much more interesting and consequential question. If there were Sufis in Fatimid Egypt, why do none of the Sufi sources mention them? Moreover, why have modern historians continued to ignore them? Thus, my second objective here is to address this double historiographical lapse itself. To anticipate my conclusion, the medieval Sufi historiography is silent on this subject because the early systematizers of Sufism were partisan Sunnis writing at the apex of Fatimid power and influence. Quite simply, these authors ignored or obscured what was happening in Egypt as part of their ideological project to construct discursively the normative doctrines, practices, and boundaries of Sufism. The existence

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of the Fatimid state was anathema to their ideological project so they omitted it from that construction. This omission was taken up nearly whole cloth by subsequent Sufi authors through the Ottoman period and then, in turn, by modern historians. I would thus characterize the problem as one of intense historiographical inertia in which some of the same ideological biases and blindspots have been reproduced over and over, from the tenth century to the present. However, in order to make this historiographical argument I will first need to demonstrate that there were significant numbers of Sufis in Fatimid Egypt. This will be no easy task if the early Sufi historians have done their jobs well. And in fact it is difficult to say much on this subject with any certainty. Nevertheless, there are hints and muted echoes of Sufi activity in Fatimid Egypt that provide us with enough historical data with which to make the larger historiographical argument.

II. SUFIS IN FATIMID EGYPT

The historical record on this issue is sparse but not completely barren, particularly if we utilize non-Sufi and late-Sufi sources. Prosopographers like al-Khaṭṭāb al-Baghdādī (d. ca. 463/1071), Ibn `Asākir (d. 571/1176), and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) meticulously recorded the geographical origins, travels, and networks of scholars and hadith experts, whose ranks included many Sufis connected to Fatimid Egypt. While this is fortunate, it also means we know very little about these Sufis beyond the bare outlines of their scholarly biography. While one might hope that the trove of extant Ismā‘īlī literature would be of some help, this is not the case. I have found no references to Sufis in the theological-doctrinal texts of the Fatimid Ismā‘īlīs.24 Nor does the Ismā‘īlī traveller and diarist

Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 481/1088) mention any Sufis in his description of Cairo.

There are a few scattered references to Sufis in the extant Fatimid-era historiography as well as within the Mamluk historiography that includes snippets of otherwise lost sources. While Mamluk historians preserved some invaluable material, those texts pose two significant methodological problems. The first is the fact that the earlier material is embedded within ambiguous or anachronistic linguistic and conceptual frameworks. For example, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) records that after the last Fatimid Caliph died in 567/1171, a crowd turned out to witness the unfolding political drama. This crowd included ‘a large group from the zāwiyas, the Sufi folk (ahl al-taṣawwuf), and others who were interested in the food they could get at the mourning ceremony’. If there were people living in zāwiyas and Sufi folk hanging about, it


stands to reason there were substantial numbers of Sufis in Fatimid Egypt. But this assumption highlights our methodological problem in crystal clear relief. Are *ahl al-taṣawwuf* and *zāwiya* the language of al-Maqrīzī’s source or his own gloss on the original? Al-Maqrīzī was usually meticulously transparent in his use of Fatimid sources. But he was writing 300 years after the fact, when the meaning and social referents of words like *zāwiya* and *ahl al-taṣawwuf* had shifted semantically. Two other Mamluk biographers, Ibn Abī Usaybi‘a (d. 668/1270) and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafādī (d. 764/1363), utilize a similarly anachronistic gloss when they relate the story of a physician and a Sufi travelling to Cairo together in the early twelfth century. The two men became friends and the Sufi asks the physician where he might stay in Cairo so he can easily visit him. The physician invites him to a local tavern to drink and hang out, but the Sufi ‘rejected this idea and went to the *khānqāh*’ instead. It is obviously anachronistic to place a *khānqāh* in Egypt during the Fatimid period, since the first *khānqāh* did not appear in Egypt until 569/1173, a fact widely attested in the contemporary sources. Our biographers have glossed or embellished the source text with a term that made sense in a Mamluk context.

This issue of anachronism is related to the second methodological problem. Medieval Arabic historiography is full of individuals who appear Sufi-like, but were not actually Sufis. Indeed, there are many ascetic, pious, or esoterically inclined individuals from Fatimid Egypt in

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29 In another example, al-Maqrīzī (*Ittīāz al-Hunafā‘*, ii. 78) refers to a group of *awliyā‘* in a crowd in Fatimid Cairo. It is unclear who these ‘saints’ might be, as both Sufis and Shi‘ís use this terminology.


these late sources. It is tempting to count them among the Sufis of Egypt, as did some later Sufi authors like al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621).\footnote{A significant number of the early Egyptian biographies in al-Munāwī’s \textit{al-Kawākib al-durrīyya fī tarājim al-sādat al-ṣūfiyya} (ed. Muhammad Adīb al-Jādir; Beirut: Dār Sādir, 5 vols. in 6, 1999), are culled from the pilgrimage guide of Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. ninth/fifteenth c.). Most of these individuals appear there as pious renunciants or miracle workers, but Ibn al-Zayyāt does not describe them as Sufis. Once transplanted into al-Munāwī’s generations, however, they are placed explicitly into the prosopographical history of Sufism and thus appear as Sufis. The same thing occurs in al-Maqrizī’s \textit{al-Muqaffā fī al-kabīr} (ed. Muhammad al-Ya’lāwī; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 8 vols., 1991). It seems to me quite likely that the late Mamluk/early Ottoman period saw a significant semantic broadening of the word Sufi. Biographers from that era—both Sufi and non—use the word \textit{sūfī} to gloss a number of terms earlier biographers used quite deliberately: \textit{faqīr, zāhid, šālīh, wārī}, etc.} As I noted above, Sufism is a practical and discursive tradition fundamentally rooted in and shaped by the institution of the master–disciple relationship (\textit{al-ṣuḥba}) and legitimized through the purportedly unbroken links to the early Sufi masters, and ultimately to the Prophet himself. Sufi prosopographers often incorporated as many persons as possible into these linked chains as a legitimization tactic—even when such categorizations were patently impossible.\footnote{For example, Sufi authors claimed both al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/842) as key figures in the early Sufi movement. But as Michael Cooperson (\textit{Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma’mun} [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 154–87) and Suleimān Mourad (\textit{Early Islam between Myth and History: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship} [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 59–120) have shown in detail, these characterizations are legitimization tactics and not reflections of historical identity.} We must exercise caution in assuming that all those who appear in Sufi prosopographies, especially for this early period, were in fact engaged with the traditions of Sufism. We are thus faced not only with the problem of terminological anachronism, but with the medieval and contemporary tendency to categorize a variety of individuals as Sufis, regardless of their position in the historical field. In this specific case, wherein the task is to determine as accurately as possible the nature and contour of the Sufi movement in Egypt, sloppy terminological elision will prove disastrous. Without very careful attention to the language of the sources, checked whenever possible against other sources, one runs the risk of ballooning the
numbers of Sufis in Fatimid Egypt and mischaracterizing the scope of the movement.

These issues became clear as I began working on this project. Digging through the relevant sources I have come up with a relatively modest list of individuals whom I can describe with some confidence as Sufis who lived in Fatimid Egypt. I could substantially expand that list by including those whom Muslim historians and biographers call zuhhād (renunciants), ʂulabā’ (pious), or similar terms that are sometimes taken to be synonymous with Sufis. But I have avoided doing so for the reasons outlined here. This is, in fact, the precise point that Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) makes in his biting critique of Abū Nu‘aym’s overly inclusive approach to Sufi history in the Hilyat al-awliyā’. 35 Given these reservations, then, I have compiled a provisional list of 39 Sufis linked to Fatimid Egypt. I divide these individuals into two groups: those who lived in Egypt and those who visited Egypt as part of their travel and study. This list, including basic bibliographical information for each Sufi, can be found in the Appendices (numerical references in this article refer to these Appendices). Rather than exploring that list in any detail here I will simply summarize my preliminary conclusions. I have not exhausted the historical record by any stretch, so these conclusions are tentative and subject to revision. Much work remains to be done and further exploration in the sources will surely reveal more information.

To begin, a complete revision of the early history of Sufism in Egypt is in order. The disciples of Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 297/910 or 298/911) brought Sufism to Egypt in the early tenth century, not Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī. While Sufi authors retroactively claimed Dhū l-Nūn as one of their own, the earliest sources portray him as a renunciant, hadith transmitter, alchemist, and squishy opponent of the ‘Abbasid mīhna, not a Sufi. 36 The only other reference to Sufis in Egypt prior to the tenth century is in al-Kindī’s history of Egypt. Al-Kindī (d. 350/961) records that in 200/816 a man called Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣūfī led a group of ṣūfiyya to join


forces with the Andalusians in Alexandria in a campaign ‘to command the good as they understood it and to oppose the sultan’s authority’. Their uprising failed and we know nothing more about these particular šūfiyya. Given the early date and the aforementioned fact that several anti-establishment groups from this period called themselves šūfiyya, these rebels could not have been a part of the Sufi movement that grew from Baghdad. After Dhū l-Nūn, the formative Sufi historiography names only a few Sufis who lived in Egypt, most of whom were from Iraq: Bunān al-Ḥammāl (d. 316/928); ʿAbū ‘Alī al-Rūdhabārī (d. 322 or 323/933–935) and his wife Fāṭima; ʿAbū ʿl-Ḥasan al-Dinawārī (d. 330/1329).

37 Muhammad al-Kindī, The Governors and Judges of Egypt: Kitāb al umarāʾ (el umulā) wa Kitāb el qudāb of el Kindi (ed. Rhuvo Guest; Leiden: Brill, 1912), 161–4, on quotation on 162. Al-Kindī also records (Kitāb al-Wulāt, 213–14) that in 255–6/869–70 a militant ʿAlīd known as Ibn al-Sūfī led a series of violent attacks throughout Upper Egypt against representatives of the Tūlūnīd regime. Again, he was not associated with the Baghdad school.


This short list corroborates what we know of how Sufism spread from Baghdad: through an aggressive programme of proselytizing activism. The Sufis of Baghdad brought their ideas and practices to environs far afield, particularly into the Persian-speaking East.45 The most famous of these activists was Abū Bakr al-Wāṣiṭī (d. ca. 320/932) and his mission to Khurāsān.46 Several historians have highlighted this outreach to the East, but as far as I know nobody has made a systematic case for a similar programme in Egypt.47 So while we lack much detail, it was al-Junayd’s

Rūḍhbārī, see Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, Muʿjam al-buldān (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 5 vols., 1977), iii. 77.


43 Abū l-Husayn was a student of Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899); the two most likely met when the latter was in Egypt: al-Sulami, Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya, 389–90; Abū Nuʿaym, Ḥilyat al-auliyyāʾ, x. 362; al-Qushayrī, al-Risāla, 111; Knys, al-Qushayri’s Epistle, 66; Ibn Khamīs, Manāqib al-abrār, ii. 739–40. See also Ibn ‘Asākir, Taʾrikh madinat Dimashq (ed. `Umar b. Gharāma al-`Amrawī, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 80 vols., 1995–2000), lxvi. 147–9, who corroborates that Abū l-Husayn and al-Kharrāz met in Egypt.

44 We might add Muhammad b. Jābār (d. 361 or 362/971–3), although it is unclear whether he was actually keyed in to the early Sufi movement in Egypt. He does not appear in the early Sufi prosopography but does turn up in later compilations: Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-aʿyān, iv. 103–4; Ibn al-Zayyāt, al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fi tartīb al-ziyāra fi l-qarāfatayn al-kubrā wa-l-ṣughrā (Cairo: al-Matbaʿa al-Amiriyya bi-Misr, 1907), 127–9; al-Maqriẓī, al-Muqafaṣā, v. 473–6. We might also add Ibn al-Jawzī’s list of individuals from Egypt—both male and female—at the end of Șīfāt al-ṣawfa, iv. 309–35. However, except for the names already listed here, these are either not Sufis or are anonymous devotees.


47 The only reference to this idea I have found is Knys (Islamic Mysticism, 66), who writes that Sufi émigrés from Baghdad ‘were instrumental in carrying [the Baghdad school’s] teachings to Egypt, Arabia, Persia and Transoxania,
companions who planted the seeds of Sufism in Egypt, not Dhū l-Nūn. Their proselytizing was by all appearances a success; by the mid-tenth century there was a small but growing community of Sufis located at Fustat. If events had followed a similar course to those in the East, we would expect to see this nascent community continue to grow and produce literary treatments of Sufism tailored to the local cultural milieu, precisely as those in Khurāsān and Transoxiana did. In fact, Abū 'Alī al-Rūḍhabārī did apparently compose several ‘excellent treatises on Sufism’. While these treaties have not survived, al-Rūḍhabārī was clearly the key figure in establishing Sufism in Egypt. His small community persisted into the Fatimid period; most of the Sufis who lived in early Fatimid Egypt were connected to al-Rūḍhabārī in some way. Al-Rūḍhabārī’s role and reputation on this score earned him the where they laid the groundwork for the eventual triumph of al-Junayd’s version of Sufism’. We might juxtapose this history in Egypt with that of Sufism in the far West. In that case, local Maghrabis and Andalusians travelled east (particularly to Makka) and brought the doctrines and practices of the Sufis back with them. For a detailed overview of both regions, see Muhammad Barakāt al-Baylī, al-Zuhhād wa-l-muṭaṣawwifā fi bilād al-Maghrib wa-l-Andalus hattā al-qarn al-khāmis al-bijrī (Cairo: Dār al-Nahda al-‘Arabiyya, 1993). Al-Baylī shows that nearly all the early Sufis in the Maghrib and al-Andalus were locals who had travelled to the East, although he does note a few isolated examples of Sufis from the East who moved to the West (al-Zuhhād, 97). See also Karamustafa, Sufism, 71–4; Manuela Marín, ‘Abū Sa‘īd Ibn al-Arābī et le développement du soufisme en al-Andalus’, Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée, 63–4 (1992): 28–38; and especially the first two chapters of Vincent Cornell, Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998). Compare also the early history of Sufism in Yemen in Muhammad Ali Aziz, Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam: Theology and Sufism in Yemen (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 35–50. However, Aziz’s account here is hamstrung by his insistence on using the categories of ‘asceticism’ and ‘mysticism’ (the former ‘an early stage of self-preparation’ leading to the latter) to construct an over-determined historical narrative that traces the rise, decline, and revival of Sufism through many figures who were not actually Sufis.

48 In fact, Ibn al-Jawzī includes two sections for Egypt in his Shīfāt al-sa’dwā, one for Fustat (Miṣr, iv. 309–33) and one for Alexandria (iv. 333–5). As for those in Alexandria, Ibn al-Jawzī only mentions three people, two of whom are anonymous devotees while the third is not a Sufi.

49 This is certainly the case with the earliest extant treatises on Sufism: al-Kalābādhi’s al-Ta‘arruf and al-Sarrāj’s al-Luma’ fi l-taṣawwuf, on which see Karamustafa, Sufism, 67–71.

informal title ‘master of the Sufis’ (shaykh al-ṣūfiyya) in Egypt.\textsuperscript{51} I believe this informal role and title persisted through at least the eleventh century, when we find Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Ghazzī (d. 448/1056, #14) described as the shaykh al-ṣūfiyya in Fatimid Egypt. Al-Ghazzī hailed from Ramla, where he was the leader of the Sufis in Syria before moving to Egypt.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, relations between Egyptian and Syrian Sufis during this period were quite close, a situation embodied by Abū l-Hasan al-ʿAnsī (d. 436/1045, #10). Al-ʿAnsī had studied with Ahmad al-Rūdhabarī (d. 369/980), the most important Sufi of Syria in his day and the maternal cousin of Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdhabarī.\textsuperscript{53} This Sufi community remained relatively small through the Fatimid period. The movement in Iraq and Khurasan was much more robust and widespread than it was in Egypt. While there were certainly more Sufis living in Fatimid Egypt than those I have identified, the socio-political conditions necessary for widespread popularization did not yet obtain. It was only in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that we begin to see such conditions in Egypt.\textsuperscript{54} We get some indication of the small size of this early movement from Ibn al-FAQİ (d. 416/1025). In his short necrology of Sunni scholars in Egypt he includes only two men with the epithet ṣūfī.\textsuperscript{55} He provides us with no information about these men except that he knew and heard ʿAdh from one personally, and that the other related ʿAdh to al-ʿAns Ibn Rashīq (d. 370/980), more on whom below. Ibn al-Ṭahhan also mentions quite a number of individuals who knew and transmitted ḥadith on the authority of Dhū l-Nūn, whom he categorized as a renunciant. He does not consider any of Dhū l-Nūn’s

\textsuperscript{51} By informal title I mean that this was not a bureaucratic position nor a stipendiary post (mansib), like the later shaykh al-shuyukh in Cairo, but rather an honorific bestowed by his followers.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibn ʿAsākir (Taʾrikh Dimashq, lii. 345–7) begins his entry by calling al-Ghazzī shaykh ʿabl al-taṣawwuf bi-l-Shām (master of the Sufis in Syria). However, he subsequently quotes an earlier source describing al-Ghazzī as shaykh al-taṣawwuf bi-diyyār Misr wa-l-Shām fi waqtiḥ (the master of Sufism in the lands of Egypt and Syria during his time).


companions to be Sufis either. In all, out of 538 entries, Ibn al-Taḥḥān has seven pious men (ṣāliḥ), two renunciants (zāhid), and two Sufis. By the next generation, however, in the necrology of Ibrāhīm al-Ḥabbāl (d. 482/1089), we find 18 pious, four renunciants, and six Sufis, out of a total of 411 entries. Now this method is by no means airtight. Each author had his own idiosyncratic (unenunciated) criteria of inclusion and description, in addition to the fact that Ibn al-Taḥḥān’s Taʿrīkh is incomplete. But the numbers are suggestive, indicating the increased visibility of Sufis in Egypt by the late eleventh century, at least among the hadith experts.

The transmission of hadith and the pursuit of scholarship more broadly played a critical role in the dissemination of Sufism in Fatimid Egypt. Many of the early Sufis in Egypt were embedded within the densely interconnected networks of hadith scholarship, particularly around the Sufi Abū Saʿd al-Mālinī (d. 412/1022, #5). This historical

56 Ibn al-Taḥḥān does not have an entry for Dhū l-Nūn, only mentioning him in connection with his students. In almost every instance he describes Dhū l-Nūn and his students as zāhid.


59 al-Ṣarīfīnī (d. 641/1243) notes quite specifically al-Mālinī’s reputation in Nishapur for Sufism and, even more important, that he had seen al-Mālinī’s collection of forty hadith, each of which was transmitted by a Sufi master. Al-Ṣarīfīnī, al-Muntakhab min al-siyāq li-Taʿrīkh Naysābūr (ed. Muhammad Ahmad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʾIlmiyya, 1989), 89. Al-Mālinī’s work is still extant: al-Mālinī, Kitāb al-Arbaʾin fi shuyūkh al-ṣūfiyya (ed. ʿĀmir Hasan Sābī; Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-ʾIlmiyya, 1997).
image is, of course, a reflection of the available sources, which are overwhelmingly focused on hadith scholars. But it is nevertheless evident that the pursuit to hear hadith from as many different teachers as possible drew large numbers of scholars to Egypt, including Sufis. In fact, quite a few Sufis visited Fatimid Egypt specifically to study with non-Sufis like the afore-mentioned Ibn Rashiq, whom al-Dhahabi describes as ‘the muhaddith of the lands of Egypt in his time’. Delia Cortese has documented how scholars like Ibn Rashiq drew individuals from the East, Sufi and non-Sufi alike, to Egypt during this period. Many of these Sufis likely passed through a Sufi hospice known as the duwayrat al-fuqara in the Palestinian city of Ramla (thus also known as duwayrat al-Ramla). This duwayra was perhaps the first Sufi hospice in Syria-Egypt, for which there is evidence from as early as the mid-tenth century. Ramla was then under Fatimid control and served as a critical link between Eastern and Western Sufis from the time of al-Rudhabari.

It is also clear that women played a role in the development of Sufism in Fatimid Egypt. This is not surprising given what we know of other early Sufi women and their participation in Sufi circles. In the case of Egypt, the most famous examples are several anonymous women whom Ibn al-Jawzi connects with Dhul-Nun. Less well known, but on surer

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60 On Ibn Rashiq, see Tadmuri’s references in al-Dhahabi, Ta’rikh al-Islam, xxvi. 437–8, quotation on 438. Ibn al-Tahhan was one of Ibn Rashiq’s students, see the entry in the former’s Ta’rikh, 52.


62 Thaqaf al-Habashī (d. 383/993–4) was the khādīm at the duwayra for a short time before moving to Makka (al-Dhahabi, Ta’rikh al-Islam, xxvii. 62). Abū l-Hasan al-Hamadhānī (d. 393/1002), a student of Ja’far al-Khuldi, moved into the duwayra before travelling to Egypt to study with Abū ‘Ali b. al-Kātib (d. 343/954), one of al-Rudhabari’s students (Ibn ‘Asakir, Ta’rikh Dimashq, liv. 304–5 [citing al-Sulami’s Ta’rikh al-ṣūfiyya]). Muhammad al-Asadābādī died at the duwayra in 467/1074 (Ibn ‘Asakir, Ta’rikh Dimashq, lli. 330).


64 Silvers, ‘Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women’, 45. I am much more skeptical about these accounts than Silvers. The narrations linking Dhū l-Nun to
historical footing, is the fact that al-Rüdhabäri’s wife Fāṭima was also a Sufi. Although it is not possible to say this definitively, I suspect that Fāṭima inaugurated a long tradition and notable community of Sufi women in Fustat. Note, for example, the case of Muhammad Ibn Shujā‘ (d. after 430/1038, #8), who lived briefly in Egypt. When he decided it was finally time to get married the locals directed him to an unnamed Sufi woman and her daughter. He married the latter and they settled together in Egypt before separating amicably (see Appendix C for the quite moving account). This anecdote suggests that when Ibn Shujā‘ sought marriage there was an established group of Sufi women to whom he could turn. Furthermore, female Sufis also visited Egypt to learn hadith. Malika bint Dawūd al-Šūfiyya (d. 507/1114, #37) visited Egypt in 452/1060 to learn the Sunan of al-Shāfi‘ī and later settled at the Sumayṣāti khānqāh (known as a duwāyra at the time) in Damascus. There were surely other Sufi women who visited Egypt at this time.

Delia Cortese has argued that the Fatimids contributed, even if indirectly, to Sunni scholarship in Egypt by fostering favourable economic conditions and keeping the trade routes to Syria and the Hijaz open and safe. These conditions undoubtedly fostered the growth and development of Sufism in Egypt as well. But while Sufism continued to develop in Egypt locally, these ideal conditions would not last. An examination of Appendix B suggests a rapid drop in the number of visitors to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem in 1099 and the establishment of the Crusader states. Indeed, al-Maqrīzī writes that during the roughly 200 years of Crusader rule along the Levantine coast, travel through the Sinai was cut off, forcing all trade and pilgrimage to reroute through Upper Egypt. Incidentally, this diversion would be a major factor in the growth of Sufism in Upper Egypt during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Furthermore, these events underscore the anonymous women seem to me a literary trope designed to depict him as a marginal figure. It is surely not a coincidence that his meetings with them often take place at crossroads or outside urban centres.

68 On this khānqāh, see al-Nu‘aymī, al-Dāris fi ta’rīkh al-madāris (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2 vols., 1990), ii. 118-126.
70 al-Maqrīzī, al-Khitat, i. 549–50.
significance of the anti-Crusading efforts of Nūr al-Dīn Zengī and Saladin for the subsequent growth and popularization of Sufism in Egypt and Syria. It was the re-establishment of the northern travel routes in combination with Zengid and Ayyubid state sponsorship of Sufism that facilitated the mass ingress of Sufis into their realms.

I should stress that we can say very little about the fine contours of Sufism in Egypt during this early period. We can reconstruct the Sufis’ scholarly networks and some of their activity, but these reconstructions reveal very little of their actual ideas or praxis. Nevertheless, by the end of the Fatimid period Sufism was much more diverse and broadly based socially than it was at the beginning of that era. This growth and diversification had much to do with the increasing numbers of immigrants escaping political instability in the Maghrib and al-Andalus as well as the growing sophistication and diversity of the local Sunni community. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qinā’ī (d. 592/1196, #23), for example, was a Sufi from the Maghrib who had studied in the same circle as Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb (d. 594/1198). But he eventually left his home because of the turmoil of the Almohad revolution, settling in Upper Egypt during the last decades of Fatimid rule. A number of other Sufis from the West began to appear in Alexandria at precisely this time as well. This fact owes much to the social geography of Alexandria, known as the Gateway to the West (bāb al-magrib), as well as to several Sunni viziers who used Alexandria as a staging ground for the development of Sunni—especially Mālikī—thought and practice. Simultaneously, we see the development of an increasingly diverse and local form of Sufism in Cairo-Fustat. This development was closely connected to Sufi currents in the East, particularly the elaboration of distinctly Shāfi‘i and Hanbalī forms of Sufism. Emblematic of this trend in Egypt are three individuals


all connected by strange circumstance: Muhammad Ibn al-Kızâni (d. 562/1166), Úthmân Ibn Marzûq al-Qurashî (d. 564/1168–9, #20), and Najm al-Dîn al-Khabûshâni (d. 587/1191, #22).

Ibn al-Kızâni was a Shâfi’î renunciant, pious devotee, and poet, with a large following in Egypt; he was not a Sufi as far as I can tell. Ibn Marzûq was a Hânbalî scholar who came to Egypt in the early twelfth century. He was a Sufî who belonged to that school of Hânbalî Sufism exemplified by his contemporary ‘Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî (d. 561/1166), from whom he supposedly took the khirqa. According to Ibn Rajab he was famous for discoursing on Sufi knowledge and realities (al-ma‘arîf wa-l-ḥaqâ‘iq) and was in charge of ‘training novices in Egypt’ (intahat ilayhi tarbiyat al-muridîn bi-Miṣr). What is of interest here, besides the presence of a Hânbalî Sufi in late Fatimid Cairo, is the controversy that erupted between these two men. Nearly all the biographies of Ibn al-Kızâni report that he held the unusual theological position that the actions of pious devotees are eternal (afâl al-‘ubdâd qadîma), that is, uncreated. However, Ibn Rajab, citing eyewitness testimony, claims that it was actually Ibn Marzûq who held this position and that Ibn al-Kızâni held the opposite, that pious devotions are eternal. Ibn Rajab is incredulous that a good Hânbalî would believe such a thing, although he allows that Ibn Marzûq may have been forced into avowing it because of his similar position that the pronunciation of the Qur‘an is eternal (al-lafz bi-l-qur‘an ghayr makhlûq). At any rate, a nasty public controversy


77 This attribution begins with Śiḥ Ibn al-Jawzî’s Mi‘rât al-zamân, which is then cited by all later biographical literature.
(fitna) erupted between the followers of Ibn al-Kīzānī and Ibn Marzūq over this issue. As an indication of just how arcane the dispute was, the community in Egypt had to write to scholars in Baghdad for help. But their answer was so confusing that Ibn Marzūq’s son Sa’d had to travel to Baghdad himself and seek counsel. Unfortunately, Ibn Marzūq died before the question was settled and his son remained in Baghdad permanently, living at the ribāṭ of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. But the story does not end there.

Both Ibn Marzūq and Ibn al-Kīzānī were buried near al-Shāfi’ī’s tomb in the Qarāfa. Enter al-Khābūshānī, a Shāfi’ī Sufi from the East who arrived in Egypt in 565/1170 and began agitating aggressively for the elimination of the Fatimid regime. Al-Khābūshānī’s wish was soon realized and he held several important posts in Saladin’s new polity, including teaching fiqh at the Shāfi’ī mausoleum. But the close proximity of Ibn al-Kīzānī’s grave was too much for al-Khābūshānī to bear; he demanded that Saladin exhume the body and destroy it. Accounts of the body’s fate differ, but it was eventually exhumed and most likely re-interred at the base of the Muqattam Hills. The entire episode is an odd and macabre one, but is critical for understanding the history of Sufism in Egypt. The enmity between Ibn al-Kīzānī and Ibn Marzūq was less about the ontological status of devotions than about their attempts to speak for and wield authority on behalf of the Sunni community in Egypt. That the dispute and its aftermath involved at least two Sufis (three if we count Ibn al-Kīzānī) indicates the growing prominence and authority of Sufis in Egypt by the end of Fatimid rule. At that point Sufism in Egypt was much more diverse, including persons from all over the Muslim world representing all four Sunni legal schools, and their influence more broadly based socially. Ibn Marzūq indexes this increasing popularity across the socio-economic spectrum. Ibn Rajab describes him as finding ‘wide acceptance among both the elites and the masses’. This broad appeal to large and multiple segments of society will increase during the Ayyubid period and become a hallmark of Sufism during the Mamluk era.

Finally, there is evidence that Fatimid rulers cultivated patronage ties with some Sufis. There was no official Fatimid position on Sufism or in their dealings with Sufis. Rather, the Fatimids were nearly always pragmatic and developed patronage ties across the ideological spectrum.

78 Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl, ii. 417–21, detail about the ribāṭ on 419.  
80 al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’īyya, vi. 90.  
81 Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl, ii. 223.
and with all the religious communities under their rule. One of the more interesting and enigmatic accounts on this front occurred during the reign of al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021). Al-Ḥākim is famous for his alleged mental problems and capricious politics; his reign was marked by a series of unusual anti-dhimmī and anti-Sunni acts and decrees. The Maghribī anthologist Ibn Saʿīd (d. 685/1286) records a series of remarkable anecdotes concerning al-Ḥākim’s behaviour in his political history of Cairo, one of which sheds direct light on this issue. ‘Al-Ḥākim used to ride a donkey named Moon, upon which he would travel among the people. He had Sufis who would dance before him and for which they were given a regular stipend (jārr mustamirr). This account is corroborated by the eleventh-century Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma (Epistles of Wisdom), a collection of letters and treatises explicating Druze theology and history. The Rasāʾil describe al-Ḥākim as the incarnation of divinity and his actions the object of esoteric speculation. The author of the eleventh Risāla, Ḥamza b. al-Labbād, d. 412/1021–2, argues that al-Ḥākim’s odd and often licentious behaviour signifies his transcension of the exoteric law and embodied performance of the


84 Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, al-Nujūm al-zāhir fī hulā ḥadrat al-Qāhirah: qism al-khāṣṣ bi-l-Qāhirah min kitāb al-Mughrīb fī hula al-Maghrīb (ed. Husayn Naṣṣār; Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub, 1970), 59. Al-Maqrīzī also relates this anecdote on Ibn Saʿīd’s authority in Ittiʿāz al-Hunafāʾ, ii. 121. It is unclear from the context whether these Sufis accompanied him on his rides or if the performances occurred elsewhere.
esoteric law.85 ‘And as for what they relate about [al-Hākim] stopping to listen to the Sufis’ songs and to watch them dance, this is an indication (dalil) concerning [his] practice of the Shari’a, which involves ornamentation, amusement, and play (al-zukhruf wa-l-lahw wa-l-la’b).’86 While I am not qualified to wade into the nuances of Druze theology, the witnesses of Ibn Sa’d and Ibn al-Labbād offer compelling evidence not only of Sufi activity in Fatimid Cairo, but of royal patronage as well. While we can say nothing about the identity or character of these Sufis, they were clearly known for their performance of samā’. We get a better sense of this phenomenon from another report.

In al-Maqrīzī’s topography of Egypt he devotes several pages to a structure in the Qarāfa cemetery known as the qaṣr al-qarāfa, the Qarāfa Palace (also known as the Andalusian Palace [qaṣr al-Andalus]).87 Taghrīd, the mother of the Fatimid Caliph al-ʿAzīz (r. 365–386/975–996), commissioned its construction in 366/976. The Caliph al-Āmir (r. 495–524/1101–1126) then renovated it in 520/1126. He whitewashed the walls and attached a maṣṭaba—here meaning some kind of assembly area or lodging place—on the east side of the door.88 Al-Maqrīzī relates that al-ʿĀmir had this maṣṭaba built specifically for Sufis so he could watch them dance when he visited the palace:

[al-ʿĀmir] would sit above the parapet at the highest point while the Sufi folk of the path (ahl al-ṭariqa min al-ṣūfiyya) would dance while carrying poles attached to lanterns in which many candles would shine. And they would spread out mats beneath them, upon which were carpets, and a meal cloth would be spread out

85 See Daniel De Smet’s introduction to this Risāla in his critical edition and translation, Les épîtres sacrées des Druzes: Rasā’il al-Hikma Volumes 1 et 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 224. He notes that while the canonical version of the letter does not have a date, one of the manuscripts has a note that the work was completed in 410/1019-1020. On Ḥamza b. al-Labbān, see al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffa, iii. 659–62, and De Smet, Les épîtres sacrées des Druzes, 17–37.

86 De Smet, Les épîtres sacrées des Druzes, 547 (Arabic) and 238 (French).

87 A description of this palace occurs twice in al-Maqrīzī’s topography: al-Khiṭat, ii. 580–1, and again at iv. 876–7.

88 It is difficult to tell from the context what the word means exactly. It originally meant an anvil (miṣṭab), a bench attached to a building, or a raised area for sleeping. Thus it came to mean ‘a meeting place for people, resembling a bench upon which one sits’. Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), iv. 2443 (ṣ-t-b, but see also s-t-b for more). A late but useful witness, Butrus al-Bustānī (d. 1883), describes it as ‘a lodging place for foreigners and it is said “it is a place in which the fuqara’ and sā’ilin gather”, al-Harīrī used it this way in a maqāma’: al-Bustānī, Muḥīṭ al-муḥīṭ qāmūs muṭawwal li-l-lughā al-ʿarabiyya (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1987), 409 (ṣ-t-b).
for them upon which was every kind of delicious and desirable type of food and sweets—all spread out across the entire cloth.\textsuperscript{89}

Al-Maqrīzī continues with a remarkable description of one of these
ceremonies:

It happened once that shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Jawhari the preacher was overtaken with ecstasy (\textit{tawājada}). He ripped up his cloak (\textit{muraqqa‘a}) and the pieces were distributed according to the custom. The shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, known as the wounding Qur‘ān reciter (\textit{al-qāri‘ al-muqri}),\textsuperscript{90} asked him for a piece (\textit{khirqa}) of it, which he then placed upon his head. When [Ibn al-Jawhari] was through tearing it up, the Caliph al-‘安庆 bi-Ahkām Allāh called out from the parapet, ‘shaykh Abū Ishāq!’ He replied, ‘Here I am master!’ (\textit{labbayka mawlānā}). [Al-安庆] asked, ‘Where is my \textit{khirqa}?’ and [Abū Ishāq] replied, ‘Here it is on my head, Commander of the Faithful!’ Al-安庆 was pleased by this and the whole scene delighted him. So he immediately ordered that 1000 \textit{nisiyya} be brought from the treasury of cloth, and it was brought right away. [The cloth] was divided up for those present and for the renunciants of the Qarṣā. The overseer of the treasury then showered them from the arch with 1000 dinars and those present snatched them up. The sievers (\textit{al-mugharbalīn}) who were there scoured the ground for days for the [coins] that the dust had covered.\textsuperscript{91}

I believe I can identify both of the individuals named here. Elsewhere al-Maqrīzī notes that the leader (\textit{muqaddam}) of these Sufis was the same Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm.\textsuperscript{92} This is very likely Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī (#15), about whom there is very little in the sources. Al-Munawwī has him dying in 486/1093, which is much too early for him to have been present here. However, al-Munawwī’s sources do not provide a date of death for al-Qurashi and it is likely that al-Munawwī’s date is incorrect. The other named participant, the ecstatic dancer al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Jawhari (d. 528/1134, #16), was from an influential family of preachers whose burial plot

\textsuperscript{89} al-Maqrīzī, \textit{al-Khitaṭ}, ii. 580–1. Al-Maqrīzī includes this same basic description in his account of the fiscal excesses of al-安庆’s reign in \textit{Ittiḥād al-Humafrā‘}, iii. 131, adding that they also burned a great deal of incense at these ceremonies.

\textsuperscript{90} This odd locution may be a reference to his ability to recite the Qur‘ān to devastating effect. Or there may be a problem with the text, for in a separate entry, al-Maqrīzī (\textit{al-Khitaṭ}, iv. 876–7) describes him simply (and more clearly) as \textit{al-mādhī}, the panegyrist.

\textsuperscript{91} al-Maqrīzī, \textit{al-Khitaṭ}, ii. 580. Again, a shorter version can be found in id., \textit{Ittiḥād al-Humafrā‘}, iii. 131, where he says that those present ‘fought to grab [the coins] from each other’.

occupied a large footprint in the Qarāfa cemetery.93 None of the early sources describe the family as Sufis, although their reputation for piety and preaching was legendary.94 Al-Munāwī does describe the family as Sufis, a characterization I would normally be inclined to discount, but for the ecstatic dancing at the palace and that Ibn al-Jawhari’s father, Abū l-Fadl Ibn al-Jawhari (d. 480/1087–8), turns up in Ibn al-Zayyāt al-Tādīlī’s prosopography of Maghribī Sufis.95 This would suggest, at the very least, that the family were well known by and associated with Sufis more broadly. And here is Ibn al-Jawhari at the Andalusian Palace dancing with them, ripping up his cloak in ecstasy, and distributing it to the crowd.

This latter point is especially suggestive. Ripping and distributing the cloak during sessions of sama‘ is a well known Sufi practice.96 Al-Maqrizī’s brief description chimes perfectly with the practice as Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and Abū l-Najib al-Suhrawardī describe it. For example, during a communal session the leader of the group decides what to do with the ripped khīrqa, not the one doing the ripping.97 Thus al-Āmīr asks Abū Ishāq for a piece and not Ibn al-Jawhari. Al-

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94 Obituaries for many members of the family are scattered across al-Maqrizī’s history of the Fatimids, Ittī’āz al-Hunafa‘.
97 al-Qushayrī, Waṣīyya, 587; Knysh, al-Qushayrī’s Epistle, 413; al-Suhrawardī, K. ʿĀdāb al-muridīn, 68.
Suharawardī also counsels that if a non-Sufi admirer (*muḥibbi*) is in attendance, he may ‘redeem’ the *khirqa* with an appropriate sum, although it should not be sold outright.98 This whole scenario—ransoming the *khirqa* and the construction of the *maṣṭaba*—suggests that at least some Sufis enjoyed the Fatimids’ largesse. In this connection it is worth noting that al-Maqrizī also says that Saladin destroyed the Qarāfā palace in 1171. This destruction was almost certainly part of Saladin’s project to recast the Fatimid cityscape into an overtly Ayyubid (Sunni) space. It was less than two years later that Saladin founded and endowed his own Sufi hospice, the *khānaqāh* Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, at a former Fatimid palace in Cairo.99 While Fatimid support of Sufis was nowhere near as focused, institutionalized, or widespread as Ayyubid and Mamluk support would be, it does appear that some Fatimid rulers sought to subsidize the local Sufi population through gifts and payments. There is even evidence of this kind of financial support prior to the Fatimids. The Ikhshīdīd governor of Egypt, Kāfūr (r. 355–357/966–968), apparently patronized members of the early Sufi community in Fustat.100

I should stress here that I am not arguing there was a massive, hidden movement of Sufis in Fatimid Egypt. Again, the mass popularization of Sufism in Egypt did not occur until Ayyubid and Mamluk rule. But I am confident that during the Fatimid years there were significant numbers of Sufis in Egypt, some of whom enjoyed state patronage. This may explain why Saladin explicitly stipulated that the Sufis who lived at his *khānaqāh* in Cairo must be foreigners and not Egyptians.101 He wanted to bring in ideologically sympathetic (Ashʿarī–Shafi‘i) Sufis not associated with the Fatimid regime. Furthermore, this evidence makes sense in light of what we know of Fatimid rule in this period, wherein Fatimid rulers made a concerted effort to curry the favour and support of influential Sunnis.102

Another example of this effort dates to this same era. In his history of


Egypt, Ibn al-Ma’mūn (d. 588/1192) records that in 512/1118 al-Āmir’s vizier al-Afdal (d. 515/1121) convened a special majlis al-ʿatāyahā (Convocation of Gifts), which normally involved a large feast and public display of generosity to certain ranks of notables during ‘Āshūrā’.103 But in this particular year al-Afdal convened the majlis in Rajab and extended his generosity to ‘the jurists of Egypt, the ribāṭs in the Qarāfa, and their fuqarā’’.104 While the referents of these terms are by no means certain, the passage does indicate that there were already multiple Sufi hospices in the Qarāfa during the late Fatimid period and that the Sufis who lived there accepted gifts from Fatimid officials.

III. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SUFISM IN FATIMID EGYPT

If there were significant numbers of Sufis in Fatimid Egypt, and I hope to have shown that there were, why do they not appear in the medieval Sufi historiography? And why do they continue to be conspicuously absent in the contemporary historiography? A brief survey of several Sufi prosopographies will help to answer these questions. The relevant universal Sufi prosopographies came in two waves: those produced during Fatimid rule and those produced during the Mamluk and early Ottoman period. By ‘universal Sufi prosopography’ I mean those texts that comprise multiple biographies that treat the Sufis as a distinct and coherent social group (ta’ifa) with a shared history linking them to the earliest generations of Muslims. We must distinguish between the function of universal prosopography and that of more narrowly construed regional and eponymous Sufi prosopographies. The difference is not temporal but generic. Both al-Sulami’s early Ṭabaqāt al-ṣuḥḥiya and al-Sha’rānī’s sixteenth-century al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā are universal prosopographies in that they present a more or less comprehensive vision of Sufi history. By contrast, two fourteenth-century works, Ibn Nūh al-Qūshi’s (d. 708/1309) al-Waḥīd fī sulūk abl-at-tawḥīd and Taqī l-Dīn al-Wāṣiti’s Tiryāq al-muḥibbin, are narrowly focused on the history of one particular group of Sufis among others, Upper Egyptians and the

104 Ibn al-Ma’mūn, Nuṣūṣ min akhbār Mīṣr, 102. See also al-Maqrīzī, al-Khīṭat, ii. 575.
Regional and eponymous Sufi prosopographies present idiosyncratic histories of particular social formations linked to earlier Sufi masters and are almost wholly a product of post-thirteenth-century Sufism; these collections are of little help to the enquiry here.

A fascinating consensus emerges from a schematic survey of the universal prosopographies. Al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) organized his ʿatabaqāt into five generations, the fifth reaching into the late tenth century. He includes one Egyptian Sufi in the first generation, one in the second, two in the third, four in the fourth, but none in the fifth. The Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ, attributed to Abū Nuʿaym (d. 430/1038), includes only nine Sufis associated with Egypt, all of whom died before the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969. However, it includes Sufis from the East who died as late as 414/1023. Al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) did not organize the biographical section of his Risāla into generations, but his presentation follows the plan of al-Sulamī’s ʿatabaqāt quite closely. Al-Qushayrī completed the Risāla in 438/1046 and he includes a total of ten Egyptian Sufis, all of whom died before 969. But he does include six non-Egyptians who all died well into Fatimid rule. Al-Hujwīrī (d. ca. 465/1072–3) and al-Anbārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) are unique cases given that they wrote in Persian. The ʿatabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya attributed to al-Anbārī expands on and adds a sixth generation to al-Sulamī’s five; the sixth generation includes no Egyptians. The only Egyptian to appear in al-Hujwīrī’s Kashf al-maḥjūb is Dhū l-Nūn. More promisingly, al-Hujwīrī includes a short section devoted to his eleventh-century contemporaries organized by region, but he does not include an entry for these Egyptians of earlier generations who were obviously not Sufis.


I only counted the tenth volume of the Ḥilya. My total thus does not include those Egyptians of earlier generations who were obviously not Sufis.

Abū Nuʿaym, Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ, x. 408. He is Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Māshāḥadh; for more see al-Dḥahabi, Siyar al-lām al-nubalāʾ, xvii. 297–9.


for Egypt (or anywhere west of Egypt). A clear and suspiciously uniform picture thus emerges from all these texts: a small but growing community of Sufis in Egypt who disappear precisely at the point of Fatimid rule, while those from other regions persist well beyond it. One might explain this disappearance by these authors’ lack of concern for, or knowledge about, Egypt. After all, they were writing from and for the East (indeed, most show little interest in the Maghrib and al-Andalus). Regional chauvinism is a plausible explanation and certainly played a role in the selection and arrangement of biographies. But it is not entirely satisfactory, for if that were the case, why include the pre-Fatimid Egyptians at all? Furthermore, post-Fatimid Sufi historiography from Egypt depicts this same basic image despite a marked Egypt-centric bias.

Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401), who wrote his *Tabaqat al-awliyā* in Mamluk Egypt, includes ten Sufis who lived in Egypt before the Fatimids, four who lived in Egypt during Fatimid rule, and 47 who lived there afterwards. The *Husn al-muhādara* of al-Suyūṭi (d. 911/1505) is an interesting case. While he was affiliated with the Shādhilī order, even writing a treatise in defense of al-Shādhili, his prosopography is not a work of Sufism, but contains a subsection devoted to ‘the pious, renunciants, and Sufis’ who lived in Egypt from the conquest up to his own time. In that section al-Suyūṭi includes 91 individuals: 19 predate the Fatimids, five lived during the Fatimid period, and 67 postdate the Fatimids. Many of these individuals were not Sufis, but the glaring dearth of Fatimid-era individuals is nevertheless telling. Equally instructive is Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umari’s monumental encyclopedia, *Masālik al-abshār*, an entire volume of which is devoted to a biographical survey of Sufi history. As one might expect of a bureaucratic


111 I could include several other early works, but the result is the same. The one exception to this uniformity is that al-Qushayrī (*al-Risāla*, 128; Knysh did not translate this paragraph) includes a list of his contemporaries whom he had not met and did not include in the biographical section because of space. In that list he includes Abū Saʿīd al-Mālinī (d. 412/1022, #5).


treatment of Sufism, al-‘Umarī’s survey looks quite odd in comparison with the others; he organizes it by region: the East, the West, and Egypt.115 Al-‘Umarī’s account includes 81 Sufis from the East, 20 from the West, and 10 from Egypt, beginning with Dhū l-Nūn and ending with Abū l-Hasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258).116 Of these ten, not a single individual appears from the Fatimid period; there are four Sufis prior to it and six after it.

With al-Sha‘rānī (d. 973/1565) and his al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā we are back in familiar Sufi territory. For the sake of space, if we begin counting from Dhū l-Nūn, al-Sha‘rānī’s Tabaqāt includes 99 individuals who lived before the Fatimid period. Of these 99, eight lived in Egypt, the rest were primarily from Iraq or Khurāsān. If we move to the Fatimid era, al-Sha‘rānī includes 30 individuals who lived during that time; 28 have no connection to Egypt. If we continue the survey to the end of the first volume (the second consists of Mamluk and early Ottoman figures), we find 21 more individuals who lived during the Ayyubid/early-Mamluk period, 18 of whom lived in Egypt. The second volume is overwhelmingly focused on Egypt. Schematically, then, it is quite clear how post-Fatimid prosopographers from Egypt understood the history of Sufism.117 There were some Sufis in Egypt before the Fatimids, but the centre of gravity was in the East, where it remained until the end of Fatimid rule. At that point the centre of Sufi gravity shifts dramatically and decisively to Egypt. This is the same narrative that al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) suggests in his prosopography, al-Kawākib al-durriyya. Like al-Sha‘rānī (who was his teacher), al-Munāwī presents a history of Sufism rooted in the East until the end of the Fatimid period. Of the 166 individuals appearing in his fourth, fifth, and sixth generations (corresponding to the fourth–sixth centuries AH), only 24 are from Egypt. But even this number is misleading because almost all of these are either from the pre-Fatimid period or were clearly not Sufis. Beginning with the seventh generation (the seventh century AH), al-Munāwī’s focus swings noticeably toward Egypt. While al-Munāwī offers a much more comprehensive image of the history of Sufism than do the others, he is still, like his predecessors, extraordinarily biased when it comes to the Fatimid period.

117 Again, there are many more we could enumerate, but the results are the same.
Again, what happened to all the Fatimid Sufis? And why have modern historians continued to ignore them? The second question is the easier to answer. As experts in and readers of Sufi history and historiography, contemporary scholars have reproduced the framework, content, and lacunae of their source material. While this is regrettable, it is certainly understandable. As for the Sufi historiography itself, I believe the omission is due primarily to two factors. We can partially attribute the lack of interest in Egypt to the fact that Sufism began in Iraq and grew from there, particularly into the East. We should expect that early Sufi historiography would focus its energies in that direction. Early Sufi authors were writing from and for an Eastern audience; they wrote to their own constituency.\footnote{Karamustafa, Sufism, 67–71.} But that Eastern focus does not explain the missing Sufis. It is only and quite specifically during Fatimid rule that Sufi authors lost interest in Egypt. Note, for example, the Manāqib al-abrār of Ibn Khamīs (d. 552/1157), wherein he explicitly criticizes the earlier tabaqāt for being incomplete.\footnote{Ibn Khamīs, Manāqib al-abrār, i. 4–5.} He set out to correct this deficit by expanding the standard biographies with additional reports, traditions, and sayings. Furthermore, he concludes his Manāqib with a lengthy appendix of certificates (masmūʿāt) containing ‘rare anecdotes concerning those pious individuals whose names I did not include in my book’.\footnote{Ibid, ii. 885–941, quotation on 885.} None of these additions connect to Fatimid Egypt in any way. Despite Ibn Khamīs’s explicitly expansionist intervention he presents the exact same image of Sufi history.

We must remember that Sufi historiography—like all historiography—is not a transparent reflection of the past but a carefully selected and curated image tailored to address present concerns.\footnote{R. J. Collingwood’s ‘Epilegomena’ to his The Idea of History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. edn., 1994, 205–334) is still one of the clearest and most detailed expositions of this idea.} Whether it takes the form of chronography, biography, or prosopography, Sufi historiography will reproduce the ideology of the particular social formation that produces it.\footnote{I include my work here in that statement. I am not so naïve as to suppose I alone have cast the ideological scales from my eyes. Rather, I would stress that the questions, biases, and purposes of medieval Sufi historiography are quite different from mine. My image of the past will thus necessarily look different from theirs (as will future images from mine). The tripartite division of Islamic historiography is from Chase Robinson, Islamic Historiography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55–79.} Furthermore, as Michael Cooperson has argued, medieval ‘Arabic biographers did not see their task as consisting primarily in the

\footnote{\textit{Karamustafa, Sufism}, 67–71.} \footnote{\textit{Ibn Khamīs, Manāqib al-abrār}, i. 4–5.} \footnote{\textit{Ibid}, ii. 885–941, quotation on 885.} \footnote{R. J. Collingwood’s ‘Epilegomena’ to his \textit{The Idea of History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. edn., 1994, 205–334) is still one of the clearest and most detailed expositions of this idea.} \footnote{I include my work here in that statement. I am not so naïve as to suppose I alone have cast the ideological scales from my eyes. Rather, I would stress that the questions, biases, and purposes of medieval Sufi historiography are quite different from mine. My image of the past will thus necessarily look different from theirs (as will future images from mine). The tripartite division of Islamic historiography is from Chase Robinson, \textit{Islamic Historiography} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55–79.
commemoration of individual lives. Rather, they used life-stories to
document and perpetuate traditions of authority based on knowledge
borne and transmitted, or merely claimed, by groups (tawâ‘if, sing. 
tâ‘ifâ) of specialized practitioners’. The most detailed statement on
this issue as it impinges on the history of Sufism is Jawid Mojaddedi’s
work on early Sufi tâbaqât literature. Mojaddedi argues forcefully and
convincingly against treating these texts as simple repositories of
historical fact and transcriptions of Sufis’ statements. Rather, these
tâbaqât are carefully and deliberately constructed ideological statements
reflecting their authors’ concerns, social milieux, and political contexts.
As such, they require careful methodological attention to determine
what, exactly, a particular compiler wants to convey through the
presentation of collective biography.

What, then, did our Sufi compilers wish to convey? The historiogra-
phical hole I have attempted to fill here is the result of the specific
ideological projects and biases of these Sufi authors. Fatimid Egypt did
not fit that project. That is, they were committed to promoting an
account of Sufism explicitly grounded in the Qur’ân and Sunna of the
Prophet as interpreted through an Ash’ârî (and mostly Shâfi’î) lens. This
ideological framework is readily apparent throughout these works.
There is in fact evidence in the texts themselves that this ideology lies
behind the choice to downplay or erase Fatimid-era Sufis. For example,
al-Sulamî quotes ‘Alî al-Sirawânî (d. 396/1005, #25), a companion of
Ibrâhîm al-Khawwâṣ (d. 291/903–4), three times in his Tâbaqât but does
not count him among the generations. One particularly interesting

123 Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography, xii.
125 This obviously holds true for all Islamic prosopography, on which see M. J.
L. Young, ‘Arabic Biographical Writing’ in Cambridge History of Arabic
Literature: Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period (Cambridge:
between ‘biography in the strict sense’ and prosopography. The former ‘seeks to
understand the individual and those features of character which make him or her
unique; prosopography seeks to record a group of individuals having certain
features in common, and these individuals are viewed in relationship to the
prevailing characteristics of the group’ (Young, ‘Arabic Biographical Writing’,
170). For an in-depth overview of the sheer variety and scope of Islamic
prosopography, see Claude Gilliot, ‘Prosopography in Islam: An Essay of
126 Karamustafa, Sufism, 96–108.
127 al-Sulamî, Tâbaqât al-sâfiyya, 51, 259, 343. According to Yâqût, Mu‘jam
al-buldân, iii. 296–7, Sirawân is the name of several different villages in Iran.
Likewise, al-Sulamî relates a large number of anecdotes on the authority Abû l-
case is al-Hujwiri’s *Kashf al-mahjub*. For al-Hujwiri, writing at the height of Fatimid power, there were simply no Sufis in Egypt at all except for Dhū l-Nūn. He does not even connect al-Rūdhabārī to Egypt!\(^{128}\) In fact, for al-Hujwiri Egypt exists only as the mysterious milieu of Dhū l-Nūn and, in one very telling passage, the home of ‘the present day Shi’ites of Egypt, who are the remnant of [the heretical] Magians’.\(^{129}\) This remark quite clearly betrays what I suspect was a widespread attitude among early Sufi authors: Egypt, the home of Isma‘ili Shi‘ism, is currently out of play for Sufis. This attitude comes across clearly in treatments of another early Egyptian Sufi, Abū Bakr al-Zaqqāq, a contemporary of al-Rūdhabārī.\(^{130}\) Al-Qushayrī relates an anecdote in the *Risāla* (reproduced by subsequent biographers) that is quite revealing: ‘When al-Zaqqāq died, the reason for the *fuqara*’ to go to Egypt was cut off’.\(^{131}\) This statement underscores the notion that while there had been Sufis in Egypt in the past, Fatimid Egypt had nothing to offer Sufis from the East. We find the same ideological commitments in Mamluk-era historiography. Note the obviously polemical statement Ibn al-Mulaqqin attributes to al-Hujwī: ‘The Sufis of Khurāsān are all action and no speech. The Sufis of Baghdad are all speech and no action. The Sufis of Basra are all speech and action. And


\(^{129}\) Ibid, 404.


the Sufis of Egypt have neither speech nor action’. I think it safe to say that for our Sufi authors, early or late, all ideologically opposed to the Ismā‘ili polity, Sufism in Fatimid Egypt was simply not an option.

Laury Silvers has characterized the work of the early Sufi authors as ‘drawing the boundaries of what they understood to be normative Sufism ... The boundaries they drew are quite broad and inclusive, but still serve to expurgate practices and ideas they understood to be outside what is permitted by the Qur‘ān and Sunnah’. I would add to Silvers’ astute description that Sufi authors not only expurgated practices and ideas but also people, specifically, people living in Fatimid Egypt. To be clear, I am not claiming that this was some massive conspiracy on the part of these authors to wipe Egyptian Sufism off the map. Rather, I simply suggest that their constructions of Sufism as a historical tradition were informed and shaped by certain ideological frames, that led them to cordon off the Ismā‘ili state from their historical imagination. Unlike historians of the hadith movement, like al-Baghdādī and Ibn ʿAsākir, whose subjects were by definition engaged with the Prophetic Sunna regardless of locale, the early Sufi biographers had to craft their subjects’ bona fides very carefully. Indeed, we can see how this ideologically inflected image determined to a great extent the contours of post-Fatimid Sufi ṭabaqāt compilations, albeit less drastically. By that point Sufism had become a more or less accepted branch of knowledge. Even Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) did not reject Sufi thought and praxis tout court. Rather, he counted it among the legitimately licit pursuits, rejecting only what he saw as certain extravagances and innovations incompatible with the Sunna. Thus, post-Fatimid Sufi prosopographies are concerned less with legitimizing Sufism itself and more with presenting and promoting a particular narrative of Sufi history. These narratives portray Egypt as the home and haven for Sufis after the death of the last Fatimid caliph and the triumph of state-sponsored Sunnism under Salādīn. This narrative no longer required the complete expurgation of Fatimid-era Sufis but rather an account of Sufi history in which the total geographical and temporal scope of the movement moves inexorably toward Egypt. Thus we see a few references to Fatimid-era Sufis in these late prosopographies. But in all these cases we are dealing with images, not of an objective historical

133 Laury Silvers, ‘The Teaching Relationship’, 76.
134 Ibn Taymiyya, al-ṣūfiyya wa-l-fuqārā’ (ed. Muhammad Rashīd Rīdā; reprint with new introd. by Muhammad Jamīl Ghāzī; Jeddah: Dār al-Madānī, n.d. [Cairo, 1348/1928]).
reality, but of an idealized Sufi past that authorizes and gives meaning to various Sufi presents. And ultimately, despite their tenacity and longevity, they are still just that, carefully curated images. In these pages I hope to have offered not only a counter-image to those constructions, but a counterweight to the historiographical inertia that has facilitated the continuous reinscribing of that same ideological image, over and over again, into the present.

APPENDIX A:
SUFIS WHO LIVED IN FATIMID EGYPT

4. 'Atīq b. Ahmad, Abū Bakr (d. 412/1022).138
5. Ahmad b. Muhammad, Abū Sa'd al-Mālinī (d. 412/1022).139
6. Abū Ahmad al-Harawī al-Ṭīnī (d. 419/1028).140
8. Muhammad b. Shujā', Abū 'Abd Allāh (d. after 430/1038).142

135 al-Dhahabī, Taʿrīkh al-Islām, xxvi. 529; al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffā, vi. 530.
137 al-Maqrīzī, al-Muqaffā, v. 60.
140 al-Habbāl, Wafayāt al-Miṣriyyin, 64.
141 Ibid, 69.
143 Same sources as previous note.
10. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿAnsī (d. 436/1045). 144
12. ʿAlī b. ʿUbayd Allāh, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Hamadhānī (d. 445/1053). 146
15. Ibrāhīm b. Ismāʿīl, Abū Ḥishāq al-Qurashī al-Hāshimi (d. 486/1093?). 149
16. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAbbās l-Faḍl, Abū ʿAbbās Allāh Ibn al-Jawhari (d. 528/1134). 150
17. Abū Bakr al-Juwaynī (517–?1123). 151
18. Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl, Abū Saʿīd (530–1135/6). 152
19. Sālim Abū l-Najā (d. ca. 563/1167–8). 153
20. ʿUthmān b. Marzūq, Abū Ṭāmr al-Qurashī (d. 564/1168/9). 154

148 Ibn ʿAsākir, Taʾrīkh Dimashq, lii. 345–7; Ibn Manzūr, Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh Dimashq, xxx. 117; al-Dhahabī, Taʾrīkh al-Islām, xxx. 188–9; id., Siyar ʿalām, xviii. 50–1; al-Suyūṭī, Ḥusn al-muḥādara, i. 515.
152 Ibid, vi. 524.
23. ‘Abd al-Râhîm b. Ahmad al-Qinâ’î (d. 592/1196).  

APPENDIX B: SUFIS WHO VISITED FATIMID EGYPT  
25. ‘Alî b. Ja’far, al-Sirawâni (d. 396/1005).  

156  The medieval sources for al-Khabûshânî are vast. Rather than reproduce them all here I would direct the reader to Tadmuri’s editorial notes in al-Dhahabi, Ta’rikh al-İslâm, xli. 233–49, and Lev, ‘Piety and Political Activism’, 302–19.  
160  al-Bâghdâdî, Ta’rikh madinat al-salâm, 6:140; al-Subkî, Ṭabaqât al-Shâfiyya, iii. 42–3; al-Fâsî, al-‘Iqd al-thamîn, iii. 137–8; al-Maqrizî, al-Muqaffâ, i. 644.


34. Yāsīn b. Ṣahl, Abū l-Rūḥ al-Qāyānī (d. 491/1098). 

35. Ṣahl b. Bishr, Abū l-Faraj al-Isfārāyīnī (d. 491/1098). 


164 al-Dhahabī, Taʾrikh al-ʾIslām, xxxi. 219. 


166 Ibn ‘Asākir, Taʾrikh Dimashq, x. 408. 


169 Ibid, lxiii. 5–6; al-Dhahabī, Taʾrikh al-ʾIslām, xxxiv. 93–4; al-Dhahabī, Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ, xix. 162–3; Ibn Manzūr, Mukhtaṣar taʾrikh Dimashq, x. 220. 


172 Ibid, xxxxi. 418–5; Ibn Manzūr, Mukhtaṣar taʾrikh Dimashq, xvii. 258–9; al-Dhahabī, Taʾrikh al-ʾIslām, xxxvi. 147–8 and xxxvi. 194 (both entries refer to the same person).
39. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurashī (d. 599/1203).\textsuperscript{173}

**APPENDIX C: MUḤAMMAD IBN SHUJĀ‘ AND HIS WIFE**

Muḥammad al-Humaydī (d. 488/1095) met Muḥammad b. Shujā‘ in 430/1038–9 when the latter was in the Maghrib. Al-Humaydī relates the following story in the voice of Ibn Shujā‘:\textsuperscript{174}

I was in Egypt during the days of my wandering when my nafs yearned for a woman. I mentioned this to one of my brothers who said to me, ‘There is a Sufi woman here who has a beautiful daughter just like her and who has reached maturity’. So I betrothed her and married her. But when I went to her [to consummate the marriage], I found her facing the qibla, praying. I was embarrassed that a young woman of her age would be praying while I was not. So I turned to the qibla and prayed as intensely as I could until my eyes got the better of me. She ended up sleeping in her prayer spot and I slept in mine. The exact same thing happened the next day. This continued for some time until I said to her: ‘Hey you! Does our union have any purpose?’ She said to me, ‘I am in the service of my Lord and Master. Any man with a legitimate claim (ḥaqq) [against that service], I will not prevent him [from exercising it]’. I was embarrassed by her words so I continued about my business for another month.

However, soon I felt compelled to travel so I said to her, ‘Hey you!’ ‘Here I am! (labbayka)’, she said. I told her I wanted to travel and she said, ‘Have a safe trip!’ I got up to leave, but when I reached the door she stood up and said, ‘Sir, there is a vow (ʿabd) between us in this world that has not yet been fulfilled, perhaps in heaven, God willing’. ‘Perhaps’, I said to her. Then she said, ‘I entrust you to God for safekeeping [until then]’. So I bid her farewell and left. Years later I returned to Egypt and asked about her. Someone told me that ‘she is even more virtuous in her devotion and dedication than when you left her’.


\textsuperscript{174} al-Humaydī, \textit{Jadhwat al-muqtabīs}, 95.
Abstract
Modern historians typically narrate a seamless history of Sufism in Egypt that begins with Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859), continues through the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman eras, and extends up to the present day. However, that smooth narrative arc obscures a glaring lacuna in the medieval and contemporary historiography: Sufism during the 200 years of Shi‘i Fatimid rule (358–567/969–1171). In this article I address that lacuna from two directions. First, I demonstrate that there were Sufis in Fatimid Egypt and reconstruct the broad historical contours of the movement. Second, I argue that early Sufi historians created the lacuna by ignoring Fatimid Egypt because of their ideological commitment to the construction of a normative Sunni Sufism. This ideological construction was taken up nearly whole cloth by subsequent Sufi authors through the Mamluk and Ottoman periods and then, in turn, by modern historians.