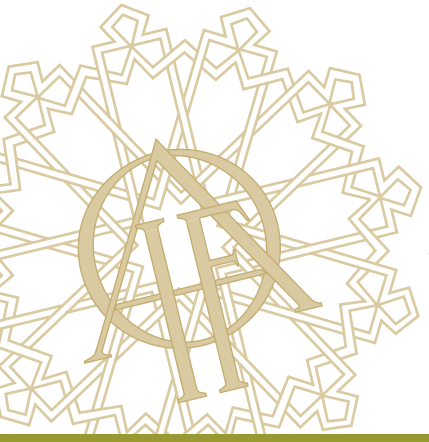
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Adam Sabra

The Age of the Fathers. Gender and Spiritual Authority in the Writings of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī

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ADAM SABRA*

The Age of the Fathers

Gender and Spiritual Authority in the Writings of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī

◆ RÉSUMÉ

Dans la littérature soufie du Moyen Âge, on rencontre fréquemment le terme « lignage » employé de manière métaphorique pour qualifier une relation de dépendance spirituelle. Le cheikh était représenté sous les traits d'un père spirituel, parfois même sous ceux d'une mère, pour ses disciples. Dans l'Égypte de la fin du Moyen Âge, cependant, de plus en plus de cheikhs soufis associaient lignage spirituel et lignage biologique : le soufisme était devenu une affaire de famille. À ce titre, les écrits de ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī montrent à quel point la communauté tout entière d'une *zāwiya* était pensée comme une maisonnée. Le cheikh était devenu le chef de cette maisonnée et présidait à l'existence de ses disciples masculins, lesquels gouvernaient à leur tour leurs familles. À partir du XVI^e siècle, les cheikhs exercèrent ainsi une autorité patriarcale sans précédent sur leurs disciples et leurs familles.

Mots-clés : soufisme – genre – ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī – lignage – autorité patriarcale – *zāwiya*

◆ ABSTRACT

In medieval Sufi texts, one often encounters the term "lineage" used in a metaphorical sense to indicate a relationship of spiritual dependence. The shaykh is portrayed as the spiritual father, or even mother, of his disciples. In late medieval Egypt, however, it was increasingly the case that Sufi shaykhs combined spiritual and biological lineage. Sufism was a family affair.

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Moreover, the works of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī demonstrate that the entire community of a *zāwiya* was conceptualized as a household. The shaykh became the head of this household, and presided over the male disciples, who in turn governed their families. By the 16th century, shaykhs held unprecedented patriarchal authority over their disciples and their families.

Keywords: Sufism – gender – ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī – lineage – patriarchy – *zāwiya*

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Introduction

The Egyptian Sufi shaykh and writer ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī (898 or 899-973/1493 or 1494-1565) tells the story of how an *amīr* whom he had befriended and offered spiritual advice was experiencing difficulties. In solidarity with his friend, al-Šaʿrānī deprived himself of sweets and other licit pleasures for a period of fifty days. This practice, known as seeking God's protection (*iḥtimā'*), involved renouncing worldly pleasures in the hope that one's prayers on behalf of troubled individual would be answered. Finally, the shaykh's appetitive soul (*nafs*) induced him to give in to his desires once again. Al-Šaʿrānī then noticed that his wife, Umm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, had deprived herself of worldly pleasures for five months on behalf of their infant child. Saying to himself "Shame on one whom women exceed in spiritual ambition (*himma*) and chivalry (*futuwwa*)," he returned to self-denial until the *amīr* was relieved from his suffering.[1]

This anecdote raises a number of important questions about the nature of spiritual leadership and its connection to ideologies of gender and the family. The Sufi shaykh appears in the role of the concerned parent of his friend. Self-denial is associated with masculinity, here referred to as chivalry (care for women, children, and the weak in general), and elsewhere in al-Šaʿrānī's writings as manliness (*muruwwa*).[2] Yet it is a "virile woman," to borrow Barbara Newman's phrase, who shows greater self-denial and willingness to sacrifice in her role as mother.[3] Although a number of scholars have noted the importance of gendered language in medieval Sufism, the connection between the discursive changes and social and organizational changes remains unexplored.[4]

1. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 38; *id.*, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 115-116.
2. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 65.
3. Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*. The fact that Sufi women are often described in masculine terms has already been noted in Dakake, "Walking upon the Path of God Like Men?"
4. Two important studies on the role of gender in medieval Sufism, especially its theological component, are Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, and Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*.

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No historian of Islam can fail to notice the increased significance of the family in the practice and rhetoric of Sufism in the late Middle Ages (roughly the 13th to early 16th century). Increasingly, Sufi shaykhs were succeeded by their sons, and the control over Sufi networks (*ṭarīqa*) and convents (*zāwiya*) was passed within families. This shift was enabled by the use of pious endowments (*waqf*) to finance the construction of lasting Sufi institutions. The *zāwiya* in particular grew in importance in the 15th century as a Sufi institution organized around a specific shaykh, his family, and his disciples.[5] Accompanying this change in the social organization of Sufism was an increased emphasis on the role of the shaykh as the spiritual father of his disciples and on the organization of these people into spiritual households. One can also observe an increased use of gendered language in Sufi sources in this period. Shaykhs are said to exhibit both paternal and maternal qualities, and there is a clear distinction between gender as a social and discursive category and biological sex.

The increased emphasis on familial relations is also evident in the visibility of domestic life in many Sufi works, especially in works of hagiography. Since Sufi shaykhs were regarded as models of emulation in all aspects of life, even the most pedestrian affairs of their daily life were relevant to the hagiographers. In this respect, Sufi hagiography was influenced by the genre of *Sīra*, or prophetic biography, and by the *ḥadīṯ* literature. Just as the Prophet was an example to be followed in the minutest affairs of daily life, so too was the saint. Since the Sufi saint was increasingly seen as an heir to the Prophet, this development is logical.[6] As a result, the hagiographical literature reveals much more about domestic life than the more conventional biographical literature, which is often silent on the private lives of scholars and powerful people.

There is a reciprocal relationship between Sufi concepts of the ideal family and widely held assumptions about family roles. Sufi writers drew on existing ideas about fatherhood, motherhood, childhood, and other family relationships to construct their concept of a holy family. We can expect, therefore, that Sufi texts reflect familial concepts whose resonance extended well beyond the limits of literate Sufi circles. This implies that Sufi sources may be able to tell us a lot about how medieval Islamic societies viewed the family and that the literature on gender and the family can help us understand Sufi discourse.

This article principally draws on Sufi works written in Egypt from the mid-13th to mid-16th century. These texts include religious manuals and hagiographical works, among others. Most originated in or were influenced by the Šāḏilī Sufi network, which produced some of the earliest and most influential works on Sufism in medieval Egypt. All of these texts were produced by men. This fact makes it extremely difficult to recover distinctively feminine modes of piety, in the manner done by Western medievalists for late medieval Catholicism,

5. Little, "The Nature of *Khānqāh*s, *Ribāṭ*s, and *Zāwiya*s under the Mamluks."

6. On the relationship between prophecy and sainthood in Ibn al-ʿArabī's highly influential theory, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*. The idea that the saints are the heirs to the Prophet has a long history. See Gril, "Prophetic Model;" Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, addresses the debate over who should be identified as the Prophet's heirs.

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for example. Nonetheless, by reading carefully, we can detect certain gender distinctions in the modes of piety adopted by medieval Muslims, but we must never lose sight of the fact that these modes of piety are mediated by the male authors of the texts available to us. In particular, the figure of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Šaʿrānī looms large over the Sufi literature of this period. He is its most prolific author, and he has a lot to say about gender roles and the family. There is a risk, therefore, of exaggerating the significance of his ideas. On the other hand, al-Šaʿrānī was the most influential writer of the period and he has continued to exercise a dominant influence over Egyptian Sufi thought up to the present time.[7]

Sex and Gender in Medieval Sufism

As we have seen, medieval Egyptian Sufi writings describe Sufi shaykhs and their relationships with their disciples using both paternal and maternal language. In addition, these texts sometimes present the Sufi shaykh as males, while disciples are described as behaving in a feminine manner. The use of gendered language is quite flexible, however, and at times shaykhs display feminine, especially maternal, characteristics, while some women are the exemplars of self-denial, a quality usually seen as masculine by our authors. Let us examine each of these gender roles in turn, beginning with some commonly held theories about sex and gender which were often taken for granted in medieval Islamic society.

Medieval Muslim authors, like their Christian contemporaries, inherited a number of theories of the physical and intellectual capacities of men and women from the philosophical and scientific literature of Antiquity.[8] It is not my intention to examine this literature in detail, but the basic parameters can be defined as follows. Both men and women possess bodies which generate physical desires. They also both possess intellects which, properly utilized, restrain the influence of these physical desires. Men, however, possess stronger intellects, and can be expected to exercise greater control over their bodies. In so doing, men are better able to free themselves from the inferior world of matter and concentrate on the superior world of the intellect or spirit, including the contemplation of God. Thus, not only are men better qualified to act as religious leaders, they exercise a natural precedence over women based on their superior rational faculty.

In Sufi thought, this gender distinction is often theorized as a struggle between the appetitive soul (*nafs*) and the spirit (*rūḥ*) or intellect (*ʿaql*). Although both sexes possess both parts of the psyche, women are supposed to be dominated by the appetitive soul, and men by the upper soul or intellect. Thus, men are characterized by greater self-denial, and women by greater selfishness or materialism. For this reason, al-Šaʿrānī warns men against consulting women.[9] Husbands and fathers are tasked with teaching religion to their wives and children, and to seeing that they obey the dictates of religious law. There is an obvious parallel between

7. For an introduction to al-Šaʿrānī's life and thought, see Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*.
8. The basics can be found in Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women."
9. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Baḥr al-mawrūd*, p. 84.

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the shaykh as a spiritual guide, especially for men, and the role of the husband/father as the religious guide of his family.

The role of spiritual guide was understood to be derived from the Prophet. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī's system, the saints are the heirs to the Prophets.[10] Ibn al-ʿArabī, following Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba allowed for the possibility of female prophets.[11] In part, this position is a product of Ibn al-ʿArabī's extension of the concept of prophecy to include any inspired individual, including a saint. As such, prophecy (*nubuwwa*) is distinct from messengerhood or legislative prophecy (*risāla*). Women could receive divine inspiration, but not act as legislative prophets. This distinction is also derived from the active role of the masculine and the passive role of the feminine.[12] Nonetheless, the positive assertion that women could receive prophecy is unusual among medieval male authors. Other interpreters of his system were less generous in their assessment of women's spiritual capabilities. The Persian Sufi ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Kāšānī explicitly rejected the idea of female prophets, thereby seemly precluding the existence of female saints.[13]

> The birth of the form of the male derives from the form of the Universal Spirit, but mixed with the attributes of the Soul. The birth of the form of the female derives from the form of the Universal Soul, but mixed with the attribute of the Spirit. Hence no prophet was sent in the form of a woman, for prophecy is related to masculinity because it controls human souls and exercises effects within the World of Creation. Moreover, the means of manifestation of the prophets is the Spirit, and the Spirit gives rise to the masculine form. But God knows best.

In al-Šaʿrānī's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, there are virtually no female saints. The few he acknowledges all belong to the early period of Islam.[14] These women fall into one of two categories: women ascetics and female members of the Prophet's family, of whom two, Sayyida Nafīsa and Sayyida ʿĀ'iša, were widely revered in al-Šaʿrānī's Cairo. It is indicative of al-Šaʿrani's attitude towards women that he includes no women among the saints whom he knew personally. There does not seem to have been a Cairene parallel to the Tunisian female saint ʿĀ'iša al-Mannūbiyya, who is said to have received the Muḥammadan Reality (*Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*).[15] Nor does al-Šaʿrānī, or any other Egyptian Sufi hagiographer to my knowledge, produce a list of pious women similar to that of al-Sulamī for 11th century Khurasan.[16] The fact that al-Šaʿrānī did not write about contemporary female saints in *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* does not necessarily mean that they did not exist, but their virtual absence from contemporary writings suggests diminishing prestige in the eyes of the male arbiters of sanctity. The space that existed in early Sufism for women to play a role as spiritual leaders and exemplars seems to have narrowed considerably by the time al-Šaʿrānī wrote.

10. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*.
11. Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, p. 180.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ibid*., p. 309 translating ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Kāšānī, *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāya*, p. 96.
14. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* 1, p. 56-58.
15. Amri, *La sainte de Tunis*, p. 113-114.
16. Al-Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*.

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The Shaykh as Father

Given the importance of masculinity to sainthood it is not surprising to see the Sufi shaykh portrayed as a father and head of a family which includes his worldly relations, but also his spiritual children, his disciples. The question, "whose child are you" could be interpreted as "whose disciple are you?"[17] When Muḥammad al-Šinnāwī authorized al-Šaʿrānī to initiate and teach disciples, he referred to him as "my son."[18] Al-Šaʿrānī expected a disciple to reciprocate the shaykh's paternal love and care by loving him more than a son or obedient wife.[19] Biological children are physical and spiritual extensions of their fathers, while mothers are noticeably absent from the discussion.[20] Al-Šaʿrānī quotes the tradition where the Prophet says "Fāṭima is a piece of my own flesh" as evidence that the *ašrāf* must be treated with the same respect that one would reserve for the Prophet himself.[21] A wife from a šarīfian family must be treated with special respect. It is particularly heinous to mistreat her, be miserly with her, or deprive her of any licit wish, much less to take a second wife.[22]

When encountering the children of one's shaykh, one must honor them as one would honor their father. One should even prefer them to one's own wife and children.[23] All of the shaykh's family are due deference, even after the shaykh's death. Although it is licit to do so under Islamic law, one should never marry one's shaykh's widow.[24] Al-Šaʿrānī does not explicitly compare the shaykh's widow to the Mothers of the Believers, the Prophet's widows who were forbidden to remarry after his death, but the parallel is implied. At very least, such a marriage would violate the proper *adab* between a disciple and his shaykh. One should not even go to greet one's relatives without one's shaykh's permission, although al-Šaʿrānī makes an exception for the disciple's mother.[25] For the shaykh, the respect accorded to his family posed certain problems. For example, al-Šaʿrānī forbade his children to accept gifts from his admirers since this would be interpreted as his having received the gifts himself.[26]

Although al-Šaʿrānī often expresses respect for the descendants of prominent Sufi lineages, he also takes the view that spiritual parentage takes precedence over biological parentage. He is critical of the almost universal tendency for sons to succeed their fathers as shaykhs; one's true shaykh is given to one by God, not one's father or grandfather.[27] This argument does not preclude the two roles being combined in a single exceptional individual. He quotes

17. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Baḥr al-mawrūd*, p. 230.
18. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Minan al-wusṭā*, p. 417.
19. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 137.
20. Given that all of the *ašrāf* are descended from Fāṭima, this omission is particularly glaring.
21. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 330.
22. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Baḥr al-mawrūd*, p. 144.
23. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 327; *id.*, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 156.
24. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 336.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 340-341.
26. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 60.
27. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Kawkab al-šāhiq*, p. 29.

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Yūsuf al-ʿAǧamī to the effect that a shaykh's son must first prove his worthiness before assuming his father's spiritual position. Regrettably, al-ʿAǧamī says, most are too proud to receive the path from their father's disciples. Increasingly, in the later Middle Ages, spiritual and biological succession merged in figures of heirs to Sufi family lineages. Among the early examples of this phenomenon were the Wafā, Ḥanafī, and Bakrī lineages.[28] These lineages departed from the previous practice of the Šāḏilī network, which emphasized that spiritual heirship is distinct from physical heirship. Non-hereditary heirship never died out among Sufis, but it lost ground to the powerful families who came to dominate Egyptian Sufism in the 15th and 16th centuries. The pattern began with purely spiritual heirship and was quickly translated into the realm of biological heirs. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh describes how the spirit of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Šāḏilī entered the body of his disciple Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī. One author, in a hagiographical work dedicated to ʿAlī Wafā and his sons, suggests that both sons were manifestations of their father's spirit.[29] Sacred lineage also played an important role in the Bakrī family in the 16th century. Muḥammad al-Bakrī emphasized the existence of a Bakrī lord (*sayyid*) in every generation who would possess intercessory powers.[30] In this version of hereditary sainthood, sons are not merely substitutes for their fathers, they literally are their fathers (or forefather) in another physical guise, derived from the same metaphysical archetype. The analogy between spiritual adviser and intercessor on the one hand, and father on the other, is complete.

Al-Šaʿrānī describes the spiritual progress of a disciple under the direction of his shaykh as a passage from childhood to adulthood. The disciple "flowers" under the Shaykh's instruction, and the assignment of a *ḏikr* through *talqīn*.[31] Although it is possible for an unusual individual to progress through self-cultivation, most disciples require the cultivation of a shaykh. One must restrict oneself to a single master. Just as the universe can only obey one God, a woman can only obey one husband, and a patient can only obey the instructions of a single physician, the disciple can only obey a single physician of the soul.[32] This stark assertion of the absolute authority of a spiritual advisor and of a father reflects a normative discourse, but is nonetheless quite remarkable. Al-Šaʿrānī often compares a disciple to a child or woman who is under legal interdiction (*ḥaǧr/taḥǧīr*), meaning that he is not capable of acting independently of supervision.[33] In particular, he compares the disciple to a wife, whose actions are subject to her husband's supervision and education (*tarbiyya*).[34]

28. See McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*; Sabra, "From Artisan to Courtier;" and *id.*, "Household Sufism."
29. Abū al-Laṭāʾif Fāris al-Wafāʾī, *al-Minaḥ al-ilāhiyya*, 3b.
30. Sabra, "Household Sufism," p. 116-117.
31. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 63.
32. *Ibid*, p. 93; *id.*, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 71-72.
33. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 134.
34. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 244.

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Margaret Malamud has suggested that we interpret this assignment of gender roles, a way of establishing and reinforcing social hierarchies.[35] Males should dominate females and fathers children; thus, by analogy, gendered language can be seen as way of assigning dominant and subordinate roles in a variety of social situations. Although Malamud's emphasis on gender as a language of hierarchy has its merits, I do not think that this interpretation exhausts or fully explains the significance of paternal (and paternalistic) language and its increased frequency in late medieval Sufism. As we have already noted, family was not just a metaphor for spiritual hierarchy in late medieval Egypt, it was crucial for the creation of stable social networks of spiritual leadership. In some families, fathers literally were sacred, and sons derived their spiritual precedence from their biological ancestors.

Of equal importance is way in which shaykhs, acting as spiritual fathers, provided for and nurtured their disciples and the disciples' families alongside their own. In many ways, this was the ultimate responsibility of a father as the head of a family and of a larger household. In her study of marriage and slavery in early Islamic law, Kecia Ali notes that men received what she calls dominion over their wives, in exchange for the dower and the right to financial maintenance (*nafaqa*).[36] This dominion gave the husband certain rights, such as exclusive sexual access to his wife, but only so long as he provided her with financial support at a certain level. Similarly, the head of the household was also responsible for providing for other dependents, such as servants and slaves.

The Spiritual Household

In the Sufi sources, the role of the shaykh is closely related to the practice of providing for one's dependents (*infāq*), an obvious parallel to the husband/father's obligation to provide for his wife and children, among others. Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī al-Manṣūr describes one shaykh as the "father of the poor" because he distributed alms to both Sufi mendicants and other poor persons.[37] Providing for one's disciples placed the shaykh in a paternal relationship to them and to their families. As a result, the *zāwiya* became more than just a ritual space or an educational institution; it took on aspects of a domestic space, with the shaykh at the head of a spiritual household. The best example of this phenomenon was al-Šaʿrānī's *zāwiya* in Cairo's Bāb al-Šaʿriyya neighborhood.[38] The residents of the *zāwiya* included old women, widows, unemployed blind persons, and orphans. Some of these people were no doubt the relatives of al-Šaʿrānī's disciples, but others were persons in need of charity. The spiritual household that al-Šaʿrānī headed numbered dozens and, at times, hundreds of persons.[39]

35. Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning."
36. Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, p. 50-51, 168.
37. Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī al-Manṣūr, *Risāla*, p. 70.
38. For a pioneering study of this subject, see Garcin, "L'insertion sociale de Shaʿrānī".
39. Al-Dālī, *al-Zāwiya wa al-muǧtamaʿ*.

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The transformation of the *zāwiya* into a multi-faceted institution meant that it came to play the role of a number of different charitable institutions. A number of scholars have noted the tendency for *waqf* institutions in the 15th century to consolidate into multi-functional institutions that are hard to differentiate from one another.[40] The *zāwiya* was a Sufi residence and place of worship. Orphans and the children of disciples received a basic education there, just as they would have in the *maktab* (Qurān school, where reading and writing and other basic skills were taught). Food was prepared and distributed to the residents and their families, but also to poor people from outside the *zāwiya*. Peasants visiting from the countryside used the *zāwiya* as a place to shelter while in the city. Among the inhabitants of the *zāwiya* were blind persons, the lame, and widowed women.[41] The presence of the latter suggests that the *zāwiya* performed the same function as the female religious house (*ribāṭ*) in providing a shelter for unmarried, especially elderly, women.[42] An important distinction, however, is that in the female *ribāṭ*, spiritual leadership was provided by a female teacher (*šayḫa*). Even if in the religious education offered there was of a more limited character than in a madrasa or *ḫānqāh*, the *ribāṭ* provided an opportunity for women to assume spiritual leadership over other women. Yossef Rapoport has noted that the number and size of female *ribāṭ*-s declined in the 15th century.[43] To my knowledge, *ribāṭ*-s were no longer built in the 16th century, although institutions such as the *tekke* or *ʿimaret* had similar charitable functions, minus the female spiritual leadership.[44] If women continued to found charitable and religious institutions in early modern Egypt, the opportunity to lead them seems to have disappeared. The fact that *zāwiya*-s led by male shaykhs took on some of the functions associated with a female religious house suggests that the patrimonial turn in Sufism amplified the role of men as spiritual leaders and mediators of charitable giving at the expense of women.

To maintain a household of the size and complexity of al-Šaʿrānī's *zāwiya*, a shaykh needed help. His *naqīb*, in addition to assisting in religious functions, organized the domestic chores of the *zāwiya* on a daily basis. Among the tasks that had to be assigned were fetching firewood, gathering kindling, taking wheat to the mill to be ground, and taking the uncooked loaves to the bakery to be baked.[45] The blind, in particular, required daily care, including cleaning their clothes, removing lice from their beards, escorting them to the bathroom, and cooking for them.[46] Other important chores included cleaning the bathrooms and fountains.[47] All of these chores had to be assigned to specific mendicants (*faqīr*), although some tasks, such as bread making, were undertaken by the mendicants' wives. Among a father's responsibilities

40. An obvious example of this is the consolidation of the madrasa, *ḫānqāh*, and mosque into a single institution in some cases. See Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*.
41. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Taṯhīr ahl al-zawāyā*, p. 208.
42. On the female *ribāṭ*, see Rapoport, *Marriage, Money, and Divorce*, chapter 2.
43. *Ibid*., p. 42.
44. See in particular, Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*.
45. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p, 349, 417.
46. *Ibid*., p. 437.
47. *Ibid*., p. 450.

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was to provide for the marriage of his children. Al-Šaʿrānī reports that he married off some forty residents of his *zāwiya*.[48] He provided the men with the dower (*mahr*) and he paid for the marriage feast for each couple. The children of his disciples he treated as if they were his own.

Within the *zāwiya* community, people were expected to work together as a family, insofar as this was possible. This meant that basic goods such as food were to be shared among all inhabitants of the *zāwiya* and all work was to be done without expectation of receiving remuneration.[49] Even the children being educated in the *zāwiya* were forbidden to conceal any private property such as an inkwell, pen, or needle.[50] Since work was shared among the members of the community, al-Šaʿrānī writes, a mendicant or his wife who was ill or whose child was ill should receive help. It is unacceptable to expect the mendicant's wife to serve in her husband's place when he is ill; to do so would show a lack of manliness or chivalry (*muruwwa*).[51] In any case, every mendicant must be prepared to perform another's tasks. It is not acceptable to say, "This is someone else's job."[52] Similarly, well-to-do mendicants and their wives must continue to perform their duties for the collectivity. They cannot use their wealth to avoid sharing in the common labor.[53]

The religious hierarchy within the *zāwiya* took the form of a pyramid. The shaykh was at the top, of course, followed by his *naqīb*, and then the male heads of each nuclear family. It is these family heads who referred to in al-Šaʿrānī's works as *muǧāwir*-s, although not all of the latter married. Thus, when the shaykh received alms on behalf of the *zāwiya*, it was the responsibility of the *naqīb* to distribute these alms to the *muǧāwir*-s in accordance with the number of persons in each *muǧāwir*'s family.[54] Within each nuclear family, each *muǧāwir* must instruct his wife to perform the *zāwiya*'s household chores.[55]

The responsibility to raise and discipline children differed in that it was shared between the parents and the officials of the *zāwiya*, especially the *naqīb*. The children of the *zāwiya*, some of them orphans, others children of the *muǧāwir*-s, were expected to be educated to a higher standard of religious observance and ethics than ordinary people. In the space of the *zāwiya* and outside it, however, they came into contact with the children of peasants and other ordinary people. It was up to their teacher (*faqīh*) to make sure the children of the *zāwiya* were taught to perform their ablutions and to pray.[56] Al-Šaʿrānī is concerned that contact with children from outside the "household" of the *zāwiya* will corrupt the morals and habits of the *zāwiya*'s young residents. He instructs the *naqīb* to accompany the children, especially orphans, when they leave the *zāwiya* to take part in holiday celebrations. He is worried that

48. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Minan al-wusṭā*, p. 363; *id.*, *Taṭhīr ahl al-zawāyā*, p. 249, where the number is fifty.
49. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Taṭhīr ahl al-zawāyā*, p. 254, 335.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 99-100.

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otherwise the children may be exposed to such sins as drinking, gambling, and prostitution.[57] In the case of orphans, the *zāwiya* is responsible for their upbringing as they are "in God's care" (*fī kafālat al-Ḥaqq*).[58] If a boy is corrupted by the company of dandies (*ʿā'iq*), leading him to visit places where drinking and prostitution take place, it is the responsibility of the shaykh to expel him permanently from the *zāwiya*. Apparently, al-Šaʿrānī assumes that the boy in question is orphaned of his father because he comments that if the mother is unhappy with this decision, she can leave the *zāwiya* too and arrange for the boy to take up a trade.[59] In general, al-Šaʿrānī advises the *zāwiya*'s teachers (*faqīh*) against allowing the children of the *zāwiya* to come into contact with the children of financial officials (*mubāšir*) and artisans because such children do not adhere to the superior conduct (*adab*) of the Sufis.[60]

The fact that so many families lived in close proximity within the *zāwiya* created certain problems. The expectation of privacy that a family would have in a private home would be difficult to maintain in the common residence of the *zāwiya*. Still, such an expectation of privacy was largely a privilege of the upper classes. Poor, and even lower middle class, people must have been used to sharing access to lavatories, wells, and other utilities. Al-Šaʿrānī worries about the consequences of the close interaction between men and women in the domestic space of the *zāwiya*. He instructs the resident mendicants to avoid gazing at their neighbor's wife. The wife may prefer the appearance of a young handsome mendicant over her husband, which could lead to illicit sex.[61] The pious *muǧāwir* should not even recognize his neighbor's wife's voice, much less her face.[62] Although he does not say so explicitly, al-Šaʿrānī clearly envisages the women of the *zāwiya* performing household tasks together. He worries that their gossiping will cause disputes among their husbands. In particular, women tend to repeat what their husbands say about their fellow mendicants, which can lead to a man being informed of another man's unflattering comments about him. Al-Šaʿrānī instructs the mendicants to avoid listening to their wives' gossip.[63] Should a dispute occur, it should be referred to the shaykh to mediate a resolution.[64]

If the shaykh as father is characterized by dominion and patronage, his disciples are expected to be the passive recipients of his gifts. Al-Šaʿrānī warns against reversing the relationship. The shaykh should never allow an *amīr* to feed or clothe him; this would put him in the role of the wife. In addition to being a feminine role, accepting such support is cause for humiliation (*iḏlāl*).[65] Similarly, no *amīr* should rely on his shaykh to perform important tasks on his behalf. Placing one's burden on another is characteristic of women, who live a life

57. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
65. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 10.

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of laziness and ease.[66] In all of these examples, the feminine is associated with passivity and dependence. Although dependence on one's shaykh for spiritual guidance is regarded as the lot of a disciple, al-Šaʿrānī has little respect for "feminine" men who become burdens on their shaykh, the paragon of masculinity and paternal care.

The Shaykh as Mother

If the use of paternal language to describe the master-disciple relationship is unexceptional in Sufi texts, the use of maternal language is more unusual. In her study "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother," Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that the increased use of maternal language and imagery in 12th century Cistercian writing results from a need to temper spiritual authority as to distinguish between false dependency on the material world and true dependence on God.[67] In both cases, maternal language is associated with the idea of nurturing and with what she calls "affective spirituality." The Cistercian authors demonstrate a deep ambivalence towards feminine gender roles, associating them both with weakness and materiality and with spiritual nurturing and a more emotionally satisfying relationship with God.[68] There are many parallels between the Cistercian writings described by Bynum and the Sufi writings in late medieval Egypt and the Middle East. For the Sufi writers, the mother is an important figure entitled to love and respect, but she can also symbolize the hold that worldly attachments, including family, have over young men whose proper task is to devote themselves totally to their spiritual development under a master. Mothers are both nurturers and impediments to spiritual development.

This ambivalence towards motherhood has been noted by Shahzad Bashir in his recent study *Sufi Bodies* where he points out that on the one hand, a shaykh could be described as a mother who nurtures his spiritual children by having them suckle at his breast, while on the other hand, mothers hesitated to turn over their sons to spiritual masters.[69] It is not uncommon for Sufi texts to describe a struggle between the earthy father and the spiritual father, that is, between the biological father and the Sufi shaykh, but here we can see the struggle between matter and the spirit envisaged as a struggle between two competing mothers.[70]

The image of the shaykh breastfeeding his disciple reflects this tendency to describe the master-disciple relationship in maternal language.[71] Under Islamic law, breast feeding a child not one's own results in the creation of a relationship of fictive kinship. Mothers who nurse other women's children acquire the status of a second mother, with the accompanying status of *maḥram*, a subject about which there has been considerable discussion in the contemporary

66. *Ibid*., p. 67-68, 84.
67. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 162-165.
68. *Ibid*., p. 129.
69. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, p. 152. For similar language, see al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya*, p. 221; al-Šaʿrānī, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, 156b, uses the imagery of a lioness protecting her cub, p. 143.
70. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, p. 153.
71. Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning," p. 96.

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juridical literature. Al-Šaʿrānī notes an additional aspect to this relationship, namely that the children breastfed by the same mother acquire the status of milk brothers.[72] Applied to the Sufi master-disciple relationship, this implies that the "children" of a single shaykh become brothers through their common source of spiritual nurture.

The attitude of the Sufi literature to maternal love is ambivalent. The love of a mother for her child is unconditional, as a shaykh's love for his disciple should be.[73] As such, mothers forgive their children's slights and missteps. This refusal to be angered by a child's misdeeds is presented by al-Šaʿrānī as a model for the Sufi who refused to be angered by or retaliate against someone who has done him harm. A mother's love for her child can also be synonymous with over-indulgence. Mothers are known to make excuses for their sons' bad behavior.[74] Interestingly, this quality of mercy is also portrayed as a paternal characteristic. A mendicant should be more merciful to his fellow human beings than a father is to his child.[75] Similarly, al-Šaʿrānī councils Sufis to forgive their enemies, and be more merciful towards them than a mother with her child.[76] This is not to say that mercy is always equivalent to tolerance. A mother whose child is disobedient may be forced to punish him to save him from a greater harm.[77] According to al-Batanūnī, Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī's son-in-law and successor, Ibn Katīla, struck the perfect balance. He treated his companions with a father's kindness, was merciful towards all people, but never ignored a violation of *šarīʿa*.[78]

Patriarchy and Spiritual Authority

We have seen that it was not uncommon for male Sufis to be described with feminine characteristics. The use of female tropes in a gendered discourse does not necessarily imply increased opportunities for women to express their spirituality or to act as religious leaders.

Holy women do appear in the late Medieval hagiographical literature on occasion, and it is important to ask what function they play in the discourse on sainthood. At times, the presence of women among the saints is portrayed positively. Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī Manṣūr writes that he and his children experienced his wife's *baraka*. He describes her as a true saint who was at times able to predict the future. Since she was the wife of Ṣafī al-Dīn's shaykh and predecessor, attributing saintly status to her reaffirms the continuity within the Sufi lineage, something that could be passed on to the couple's children.[79] Although Sufi authors show a clear preference for patrilineal descent, holy mothers are not uncommon characters in hagiographical narratives.

72. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Kawkab al-šāhiq*, p. 44.
73. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Muḫtaṣar iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 98.
74. Al-Šaʿrānī, *Iršād al-muġaffalīn*, p. 9.
75. Al-Šaʿrānī, *al-Minan al-wusṭā*, p. 213.
76. *Ibid*., p. 176.
77. *Ibid*.
78. Al-Batanūnī, *al-Sirr al-ṣafī* 2, p. 64.
79. Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Abī Manṣūr, *Risāla*, p. 18.

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One can cite another example from a 17th century source, which describes an event which is supposed to have taken place in the early 16th century. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bakrī was accustomed to wearing fine clothes and performing the pilgrimage in a litter, among other displays of luxury. His mother, a pious ascetic in the model of the early Sufi women, spent some 18 years living in a cell on the roof of the White Mosque, which was controlled by the Bakrī family. The hagiographer does not refer to her marital status, but it is probable that she was a widow during this time. She disapproved of his luxurious lifestyle and frequently censured him for it. Finally, she experienced a dream in which saw her son, decked out in his finery, in the Prophet's mosque in Medina facing the Prophet himself. Realizing that the Prophet disapproved of her criticism of her son, she immediately repented.[80] The son whose authority is derived from the Prophet and ultimately from God himself is not subject to his mother's rebuke, even if she is a pious ascetic in her own right. The contrast between the mother who practices years of self-denial and her son who enjoys God's favor and lives a luxurious, yet saintly, life could not be greater.

The theme that is common to the numerous anecdotes we have cited from the late medieval hagiographical literature is that of male authority. Another anecdote from al-Batanūnī's hagiography of Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī reaffirms this authority and spells out the consequences of challenging it. In a series of passages, the reader learns that al-Ḥanafī's *zāwiya* contained a pious serving woman named Baraka, who practiced her religious rituals with uncommon devotion.[81] One then learns that she was a slave.[82] Another anecdotes indicates that al-Ḥanafī secretly married her, and instructed her not to reveal this fact to the other inhabitants of the *zāwiya*. When she grew old, he divorced her. Angry at being treated in this manner, she informed the women of the shaykh's household of what had happened. As punishment for her violating her promise of secrecy, she found herself unable to rise, and remained immobilized until she died. The shaykh turned away entreaties from Baraka's friend Maryam al-Ṭawīla to intercede on her behalf and restore her health.[83]

Here we see the patriarchal authority of the shaykh over his household on full display. He marries whom he wishes, without informing his existing wife and family. Then, when the second wife is too old to be attractive, he divorces her. From the hagiographer's point of view, none of this is cause for censure. Indeed, al-Batanūnī takes it for granted that the shaykh has every right to behave as he does. When Baraka revolts against this high-handed treatment by telling the truth to the women of the household, her act of rebellion is brutally punished. The shaykh even refuses the requests of Maryam that he intercede on Baraka's behalf. Since intercession on behalf of the weak is exactly what al-Ḥanafī is known for, the absence of mercy in this case is particularly shocking. The reader cannot help but feel sympathy for Baraka's plight, yet her sin of rebellion against the sacred patriarchy of the *zāwiya* leads her to a terrible fate.

80. Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī, *al-Kawkab al-durrī*, 14a-b.
81. Al-Batanūnī, *al-Sirr al-ṣafī* 1, p. 30.
82. *Ibid*. 1, p. 32.
83. *Ibid*. 1, p. 33.

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One senses that al-Batanūnī may have been shocked by Baraka's fate himself. In a subsequent anecdote, he relates that sometime later Muḥammad al-Ḥanafī arranged for Baraka's grandson to serve al-Šarīf al-Nuʿmānī. When al-Nuʿmānī died without a son, Baraka's grandson became his successor (*ḫalīfa*).[84] Al-Batanūnī seems to want to assure the reader that the shaykh was not a vindictive man. If Baraka was fated to suffer for her rebellion against his authority, al-Ḥanafī made sure that her grandson found his way in the world.

There was nothing new in late medieval Egypt about male authority, whether familial or religious. The power of a man to rule over his family and household members, and of the inspired religious teacher to rule over his disciples, were enshrined in the portrayals of the person of the Prophet Muḥammad. Islamic law gave dominion to a man over his wife, children, and household slaves, while encouraging him to temper this authority with mercy and forgiveness. In rare cases, men recognized the exceptional "masculinity" of spiritually devoted women, who rejected the material world and placed their trust in God. What changed in late medieval Egypt (and likely in other parts of the Muslim world) was the combination within Sufism of paternal authority with a patrimonial system of social organization that gave the heads of sacred lineages the resources to govern large spiritual communities as if they were families and households. This power was often passed down hereditarily, creating a religious aristocracy. Shaykhs became fathers, and occasionally metaphorical mothers, to dozens or even hundreds of men, women, and children. Although individual women continued to be recognized as spiritual exemplars, participation by women in religious leadership diminished significantly. It would not be wrong to call this the age of the fathers.

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84. *Ibid.* I, p. 43.

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