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AnIsl 59 (2025), p. 173-190

Sheridan Polinsky

Sainthood Among the Šāḍiliyya: The Conception of Ibn Muḡayzil (fl. 895/1490)

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Sainthood Among the Šāḍiliyya

The Conception of Ibn Muḡayzil (fl. 895/1490)

♦ ABSTRACT

Sainthood and saints were theorised at length among Sufis, including the Šāḍiliyya. A number of studies have examined the views of individual Šāḍilī-s, including Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, Ibn Bāḡilā, and the father and son pair, Muḡammad and ‘Alī Wafā. This article aims to build on this research by surveying the ideas of Ibn Muḡayzil, a disciple of the Šāḍilī shaykh Muḡammad al-Maḡribī and author of at least two works. Focusing on four key issues in Ibn Muḡayzil’s writings, I show that he drew on a rich body of Sufi literature to develop his positions, while often engaging in apologetics as he strived to defend certain notions and statements. Ibn ‘Arabī, rather than al-Tirmidī, is an important, albeit limited, source for Ibn Muḡayzil, which reflects the Andalusian master’s eventual domination of the Sufi discourse on sainthood, including among the Šāḍilī-s.

Keywords: Sainthood, saints, Ibn Muḡayzil, Šāḍiliyya, al-Tirmidī, Ibn ‘Arabī

♦ RÉSUMÉ

La sainteté dans les Šāḍiliyya : la conception d’Ibn Muḡayzil (fl. 895/1490)

La sainteté et le saint ont été longuement théorisés chez les soufis, y compris dans les Šāḍiliyya. Un certain nombre d’études ont exploré les opinions de Šāḍilī-s individuels, notamment Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, Ibn Bāḡilā ainsi que Muḡammad Wafā et son fils ‘Alī Wafā. Cet article vise

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à approfondir ces recherches en examinant les idées d'Ibn Muḡayzil, un disciple du cheikh šāḍilī Muḡammad al-Maḡribī et auteur d'au moins deux ouvrages. En me concentrant sur quatre questions clés dans les écrits d'Ibn Muḡayzil, je montre qu'il s'est appuyé sur un riche corpus de littérature soufie pour développer ses positions tout en s'engageant souvent dans une apologétique alors qu'il s'efforçait de défendre certaines notions et déclarations. Ibn 'Arabī, plus qu'al-Tirmidī, est une source importante, quoique limitée, pour Ibn Muḡayzil, qui reflète la domination éventuelle du maître andalou sur le discours soufi sur la sainteté, y compris parmi les Šāḍilī-s.

Mots-clés : sainteté, saints, Ibn Muḡayzil, Šāḍiliyya, al-Tirmidī, Ibn 'Arabī

✦ ملخص

الولاية عند الشاذلية: تصوّر ابن مغيزل (إزدهر عام ١٤٩٠/٨٩٥)

وُضِعَت النظريات المتعلقة بالولاية والوليّ بتعمق بين الصوفية، بما في ذلك الشاذلية. وهناك عدد من الدراسات التي تستكشف آراء أفراد من الشاذلية، وعلى وجه الخصوص ابن عطاء الله وابن باخلا الأب والإبن وفاء، محمد وعلي. ويهدف هذا المقال إلى التعمق في هذه الدراسات من خلال فحص أفكار ابن مغيزل، مُريد الشيخ الشاذلي محمد المغربي، وهو صاحب مؤلفين على الأقل. ومن خلال تركيزي على أربع مسائل رئيسية في كتابات ابن مغيزل، أظهرت أنه استند إلى مجموعة غنية من المؤلفات الصوفية لشرح مواقفه بالتفصيل، في الوقت الذي كان غالبًا ما يخرط في الدفاع عن بعض المفاهيم والمقولات. ويُعد ابن عربي، وليس الترمذي، مصدرًا مهمًا، وإن كان محدودًا، لابن مغيزل، الذي يعكس الهيمنة المحتملة للعلم الأندلسي على الخطاب الصوفي حول الولاية، بما في ذلك بين المنتمين للشاذلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ولاية، أولياء، ابن مغيزل، الشاذلية، الترمذي، ابن عربي

* * *

I. Introduction

The notion of sainthood (*walāya* or *wilāya*) is fundamental to Sufism both theoretically and practically. The root *waliya* and various derivatives connected with the concept appear two hundred twenty-seven times in the Quran with a variety of meanings. The term *walāya* occurs twice, seemingly in the sense of “protection”. In Quran, VIII, 72, it pertains to the relationship between those who emigrated to Medina and those who did not, while

in Quran, XVIII, 44, it is said to belong to God. Quran, X, 62, states that “there shall be no fear upon the friends [*awliyāʾ*] of God nor shall they grieve”, while Quran, IV, 76, records God’s command to the believers to fight “the friends of Satan”. Derivatives of *waliya* are likewise common in Hadiths, especially the *aḥādīṭ qudsī*, or “holy Hadiths”, in which God speaks in the first person through the Prophet. An oft-cited tradition begins with an admonition: “I declare war on whoever shows enmity to My friend [*walī*].”¹

Neither the Quran nor Hadiths, however, offer a systematic or clear exposition of an outstanding and blessed people close to God. Yet, the idea appears to have been embraced by the 2nd/8th century. The earliest work on saints and their extraordinary deeds is the *Kitāb al-Awliyāʾ* of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894), a collection of Hadiths and other anecdotes along with poetry, while one of the earliest theoretical treatments of the topic is found in the *Kitāb al-Kašf wa-l-bayān* by al-Ḥarrāz (d. probably 286/899), who discusses the relation between saints and the Prophet, whether the saint receives inspiration (*ilhām*), and the difference between the miracles of prophets (*āyāt*) and those of saints (*karāmāt*). Around the same time, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidī (d. probably 298/910) discussed these issues in much greater depth and extensively developed the concepts of the saint and sainthood, most notably in his *Sīrat al-awliyāʾ* (also known as *Ḥatm al-awliyāʾ*). Although al-Tirmidī’s ideas, especially his notion of the “Seal of Sainthood” (*ḥatm al-wilāya*), eventually proved influential, for almost three centuries following his death the authors of the major Sufi manuals generally paid little attention to sainthood. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998), for example, went no further than delineating three categories of saints—the “People of the Knowledge of God” (*aḥl al-ʿilm bi-Llāh*), the “People of Love” (*aḥl al-ḥubb*), and the “People of Fear” (*aḥl al-ḥawf*)—while citing a statement ascribed to Jesus that lists the saints’ characteristic virtues.² Al-Sarrāḡ (d. 378/988) devoted only one chapter of his extensive survey of Sufism, the *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, to the saints’ miracles and another to refuting the belief that sainthood is superior to prophethood.³ Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) finally did engage the basic themes introduced by al-Tirmidī and made two major contributions to the discourse: a fundamentally different hierarchy of saints and an expansion of the concept of the Seal in accordance with the various types of sainthood that he posited. His treatment has shaped the discussion of sainthood and saints up unto the present.⁴

Sainthood was discussed at length among the Ṣāḡiliyya, and their views have been studied by a number of scholars. Éric Geoffroy and Geneviève Gobillot have investigated the influence of al-Tirmidī’s ideas on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (d. 709/1309), the order’s first major expositor.⁵ In addition to an article on the conception of sainthood of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh’s disciple Ibn Bāḥilā (d. 733/1332), Richard McGregor has devoted a monograph to the theories of Muḥammad Wafā

1. Al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, p. 1617 (no. 6502). On *waliya* and its derivatives in the Quran and Hadiths, see Chodkiewicz 1993, pp. 23–25; Palmer 2020, pp. 6–9.

2. Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb* I, pp. 318–319.

3. Al-Sarrāḡ, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, pp. 390–408, 535–537.

4. For this history, see Chodkiewicz 1993, pp. 33–38; Radtke, “*Walī*: 1. General Survey”, *EP*, 2002, pp. 109–111.

5. Geoffroy 1998, pp. 60–65; Gobillot 2005.

(d. 765/1363) and his son ‘Alī Wafā (d. 807/1405).⁶ In this article, I aim to build on this literature by examining the treatment of sainthood of Ibn Muḡayzil (fl. 895/1490). This Sufi was a close disciple of Muḡammad al-Maḡribī (d. 911/1505), an illustrious Šāḍilī shaykh who guided a number of important figures, such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ša‘rānī (d. 973/1565),⁷ and a devoted pupil of al-Suyūṭī until their relationship soured as a result of al-Suyūṭī’s failure to invest his student with a post as promised and decision to isolate himself after his initial retirement.⁸ Ibn Muḡayzil was also a resident at a famous *ḥānqāh* called Sa‘īd al-Su‘adā’, where he composed his two known works.⁹ The first and most important of his writings is *al-Kawākib al-zāhira fī iḡtimā‘ al-awliyā’ yaqḡatan bi-Sayyid al-Dunyā wa-l-Āḥira*. While he was inspired to compose this work to offer a detailed discussion and defence of the waking vision of the Prophet Muḡammad, a common miracle among Sufis, this treatment occupies only twenty-five of the roughly four hundred pages that make up the text.¹⁰ In the remainder of the work, he deals with a wide variety of Sufi topics, such as miracles, Sufi epistemology, and Sufi hermeneutics. He is fundamentally oriented by his aim to produce what he describes as “a combination of Law and Reality” (*ḡam‘ bayna al-šarī‘a wa-l-ḥaqīqa*),¹¹ which reflects the relative symbiosis between the “exoteric” sciences, such as law and Hadith, and the “esoteric” science par excellence, Sufism, that prevailed in the late Mamlūk period among the intellectuals of the major cities.¹² Ibn Muḡayzil devotes the first several pages of the *Kawākib* (before even introducing his project) to showing both the superiority of esoteric or mystical knowledge (*‘ilm al-ḥaqīqa* or *‘ilm al-bāṭin*) over exoteric or rationalist and traditionalist knowledge (*‘ilm al-šarī‘a* or *‘ilm al-zāhir*) as well as their essential harmony and complementarity.¹³ The desire to combine Law and Reality manifests in various aspects of his approach in the *Kawākib*, such as his frequent references to scholarly authorities in addition to Sufis, his lengthy chapter devoted to explaining and defending controversial or challenging Sufi teachings,¹⁴ and his defence of controversial Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) in which he strives to demonstrate their orthodoxy and sanctity.¹⁵

6. McGregor 2000; 2004.

7. On al-Maḡribī, see al-Saḡāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’* VIII, p. 252; al-Ša‘rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* II, pp. 211–215.

8. The only source for Ibn Muḡayzil’s biography is al-Saḡāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’* IV, pp. 266–267.

9. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 405 (except for two references, I use the 1999 edition of the *Kawākib* because, of the four editions available, it is the only critical one); *al-Qawl al-‘alī*, p. 87.

10. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 26–27, 30–46, 389–395.

11. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 28.

12. Geoffroy 1995, pp. 149–165, 402–405.

13. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 22–26.

14. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 335–378.

15. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 189–190, 244–245, 249–252.

The *Kawākib* has been important among some Muslims. One manuscript was originally a donation to the Moroccan students at al-Azhar,¹⁶ while two of the four editions of the text were edited by practicing Sufis: ‘Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, a Darqāwī-Šādīlī,¹⁷ and Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī, a Balqāyadī-Šādīlī, who tells us that the head of his order, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Balqāyad, urged him to produce his edition to aid aspirants.¹⁸ Ibn Muḡayzil’s other work, *al-Qawl al-‘alī fi tarāduf mu‘ḡiza bi-karāmat al-walī*, is a brief treatise mainly about the saints’ miracles in which he mostly repeats (often verbatim) material from the *Kawākib*.

Ibn Muḡayzil’s treatment of sainthood in the *Kawākib* is not systematic. He addresses various aspects of the concept at different points in the text. While his discussion in *al-Qawl al-‘alī* is more organised, he, again, mostly repeats the *Kawākib* material. Below, I examine his views in four subsections, each of which covers an important dimension of sainthood: the definition and identity of the saint; the hierarchy of saints; prophetic inheritance, or the transmission of prophets’ qualities and capacities to saints; and the nature of saints, prophets, and messengers, especially the hierarchical relationship between their functions.

2. The definition and identity of the saint

Ibn Muḡayzil attempts to define the saint only in *al-Qawl al-‘alī*. The topic is raised by his discussion of whether a person’s miracles alone are proof of his sainthood. The two definitions that he presents were formulated by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390). According to al-Ġazālī: “A saint among the servants is someone who loves God, His messenger, and His saints. He helps Him and His saints, while he opposes His enemies. Among His enemies are the carnal soul and Satan.”¹⁹ Al-Taftāzānī’s definition is more elaborate:

The saint is he who knows God and His attributes to the greatest extent possible, persists in obedience, avoids disobedience, and shuns engrossment in pleasures and desires. His miracle consists of the appearance of something from him that violates the customary order of things without an accompanying claim to prophecy. That [of a miraculous nature] which is not connected with faith and pious deeds is deceit.²⁰

It appears that whereas al-Taftāzānī requires the saint to perform miracles, al-Ġazālī does not. Ibn Muḡayzil notes that al-Ġazālī’s definition encompasses all the saint’s qualities, thus implying his agreement with his definition. More important to Ibn Muḡayzil, it seems, is the question of whether the saint has knowledge of his own sainthood. He tackles this briefly in an

16. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 15–16.

17. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (c).

18. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (b), p. 11.

19. Ibn Muḡayzil, *al-Qawl al-‘alī*, p. 59; al-Ġazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 130.

20. Ibn Muḡayzil, *al-Qawl al-‘alī*, pp. 53–54; al-Taftāzānī, *Šarḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 134.

excursus in his section on the saints' miracles (*karāmāt*) in the *Kawākib* (and later includes it in *al-Qawl al-ʿalī*). He points out that while the master of Abū al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī (d. 465/1072), Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015), stated that it is possible for the saint to know that he is a saint, al-Quṣayrī added that it is likewise possible for him *not* to know; when he does know, his knowledge is a miracle that belongs exclusively to him. Ibn Muḡayzil agrees with al-Quṣayrī and attempts to refute the view of Aṣʿarī Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) that “it is not possible for him to know that he is a saint, since that would deprive him of fear [of God] and cause him to feel secure [about himself and his destiny].” Ibn Muḡayzil strongly criticises this perspective:

This position is weak, vile, and unworthy of consideration. For someone who is more knowledgeable about God is more fearful of God. The awe and glorification of God of someone whom He causes to know Himself strengthens, while that awe doubles from the fear of the god-fearing. For someone who knows himself knows his Lord and knows what is desired of him. Thus, he occupies himself with that for which he was created. He places himself in the stations of devotion and fulfilment of the rights of Divinity.²¹

For Ibn Muḡayzil, then, a key aspect of sainthood is awareness of one's identity, since it ensures deeper devotion and worship.

3. The hierarchy of saints

Sufi hierarchies of saints elucidate the spiritual structure and functioning of the universe. Al-Tirmidī, for example, formulated a hierarchy consisting of at least eighteen categories,²² while Ibn ʿArabī presented a more complex scheme comprising eighty-four classes.²³ Ibn Muḡayzil's treatment of the notion appears as an excursus in his engagement with Sufi epistemology, situated between his discussions of types of the unseen world (*ḡayb*) related to unveiling (*kaṣf*) and the distinction between intuition (*firāsa*) and inspiration (*ilhām*). The excursus seems to be occasioned by his description of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), al-Šāḍilī's successor, as a “Pole” (*quṭb*), the supreme figure in Sufi hierarchies. He presents his own view of the hierarchy of saints in addition to those of several figures while arguing that the idea is grounded in tradition.

The hierarchy that Ibn Muḡayzil espouses was, according to him, advanced by many scholars, such as Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. c.622/1225), Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Asnawī (d. 772/1370), and Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401):

21. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 150–151; *al-Qawl al-ʿalī*, pp. 53–54. For the views of al-Daqqāq and al-Quṣayrī, see also al-Quṣayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 563–564.

22. Al-Geyoushi 1970, pp. 204–210; Gobillot 2005, pp. 35–36.

23. Chodkiewicz 1993, pp. 106–115.

Know that the numbered saints have known ranks in accordance with their stations. Among them are the Leaders [*nuqabāʾ*], Nobles [*nuḡabāʾ*], Substitutes [*abdāl*], [Excellencies (*aḥyār*)], Pillars [*ʿumadāʾ*], and the Pole [*ḡawt*]. There are three hundred Leaders, seventy Nobles, forty Substitutes, seven Excellencies, four Pillars, and one Pole. The abode of the Leaders is the Maghreb; the Nobles [are in] Egypt; the Substitutes [are in] Syria; the Excellencies travel throughout the earth; the Pillars are in the four corners of the earth; and the Pole is in Mecca. When a need arises among the common people, the Leaders supplicate for it, then the Nobles, then the Substitutes, then the Excellencies, then the Pillars. If they are not answered, the Pole supplicates. His affair does not conclude until his prayer is answered.²⁴

Elsewhere in the *Kawākib*, Ibn Muḡayzil designates numerous Šāḍilī-s along with other Sufis, such as Ibn ʿArabī, as Poles.²⁵ He does not identify representatives of the other categories, though he notes that al-Subkī considered Qaḍīb al-Bān (d. 573/1177), a Sufi of Mosul, to be a Substitute; that al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 260/874) is said to have been a Substitute or Pillar; and that Ibn Masrūq (d. 297/910), a disciple of al-Muḡḥasibī (d. 243/857), is said to have been a Substitute.²⁶ Ibn Muḡayzil is more interested in defending the orthodoxy of the concept of the hierarchy:

Scholars of Law and Reality have always, both earlier and recently, expounded Polehood [*quṭbiyya*], Substitution [*badaliyya*], [and] the numbered saints, the masters of duties and stations, in their books. There is no need to consider the opinion of someone who claims that this has no foundation in the Sunna. For a special characteristic of the Prophet with respect to his community is the presence of Poles, Pillars, Leaders, and Substitutes, which were not found in previous communities.²⁷

As evidence of this special characteristic and the existence of the numbered saints in general, Ibn Muḡayzil adduces many Hadiths:

- “A group from my community is always manifestly upon the truth, until God’s command is realised.”²⁸
- “In every century, there are preeminent individuals in my community.”²⁹

24. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 176. Ibn al-Mulaqqin traces this hierarchy back to Muḡammad al-Kattānī (d. 322/933), a disciple of the early Baghdad Sufis al-Ḡunayd (d. 297/910), al-Ḥarrāz, and al-Nūrī (d. 295/907). See Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ*, p. 146. For a brief account of al-Kattānī, see al-Quṣayrī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 109–110.

25. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 94, 129, 190, 217, 305, 315. Assuming that Ibn Muḡayzil knew that Ibn ʿArabī, al-Šāḍilī, and al-Mursī were contemporaries, his belief that they were all Poles is contradictory. Perhaps he thought that they occupied the post at different times, though that would conflict with his insistence on the Šāḍilī-s’ supremacy (on that, see Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* [a], pp. 208–219).

26. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 176–177.

27. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 177.

28. Cf. al-Buḡārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḡārī*, pp. 895 (no. 3640), 1806 (no. 7311), 1842 (no. 7459); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 925 (no. 1920).

29. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Sunan al-Iṣfahānī* II, p. 356 (no. 2851).

- A Hadith stating that to God belongs creatures upon the hearts (‘*alā qulūb*) of various prophets and an angel: three hundred upon the heart of Adam, forty upon the heart of Moses, seven upon the heart of Abraham, and five upon the heart of Isrāfil. Through these individuals, God enlivens, deadens, causes rain to fall, brings forth vegetation, and ends tribulations.³⁰
- Two Hadiths that mention the Substitutes, one numbering them at forty while another at thirty. Both claim that they are like Abraham, the Friend of the All-Merciful.³¹

Ibn Muḡayzil also finds support from prominent early Muslims. He quotes a treatise by the early mystic Abū ‘Abdillāh al-Anṭākī (d. c.215–239/830–854),³² who reports that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) located the Substitutes in Syria, the Nobles in Egypt, the Troops (‘*aṣṣā’ib*) in Iraq, the Leaders in Khurasan, and the Pillars (*awtād*) throughout the earth. According to Ibn Muḡayzil, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) declared that if the Substitutes did not exist, the earth and what lies thereon would be destroyed.³³

Having outlined his understanding of the hierarchy of saints and justified the concept, Ibn Muḡayzil cites a number of authors who address different aspects of sainthood, such as its necessity and the nature of Polehood (*quṭbiyya*). This material contains three alternative hierarchies, including that of al-Šāḍilī, that which Ḥiḍr and the brother of Elijah communicated to someone in al-Aqṣā mosque, and that of fellow Šāḍilī Abū al-Mawāhib al-Tūnisī (d. 882/1477).³⁴ Ibn Muḡayzil does not dispute or comment on any of these hierarchies. It seems that while he is convinced of his own view, perhaps because of the backing from notable early figures, he is comfortable and even pleased with other ideas, since their presence helps demonstrate the authenticity and popularity of the hierarchy concept.

4. Prophetic inheritance

The idea that saints can “inherit” or obtain qualities and capacities from prophets was already implied by al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), who stated that every prophet has a peer (*naẓīr*) in his community—that is, a friend (*walī*) in his charisma.³⁵ His contemporary al-Ġunayd claimed that the saint inherits the prophets’ “wonders” (*ḡarā’ib*).³⁶ Several centuries later, Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197) enumerated the attributes one must acquire to attain “the rank of the oath of allegiance” and the prophets from whom these attributes derive: constant sadness and wandering

30. Cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* I, p. 9.

31. For the Hadith that mentions forty Substitutes, cf. al-Šāṣī, *al-Musnad* III, p. 215 (no. 1314). For more Hadiths and traditions pertaining to the hierarchy of saints, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī* II, pp. 229–242.

32. Three works have been attributed to al-Anṭākī, though none of his writings are extant. See Shams 2015.

33. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 176–177.

34. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 178–183.

35. Böwering 1980, p. 65. Al-Anṭākī says that he heard al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād (d. 187/803) utter the first part of this statement (i.e. “every prophet has a peer in his community”). See Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 176.

36. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* X, p. 265.

from Jesus, forgiveness and trust from Joseph, yearning and ardent love from Job, sincerity and intimate speech with God from Moses, and knowledge and virtues from Muḥammad.³⁷ The notion became a key element of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of sainthood. As Michel Chodkiewicz explains, being heir to a prophet essentially means, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching, that the saint conforms to the spiritual type embodied by that prophet. M. Chodkiewicz analogises such inheritance to the transmission of genes in that it “confers a precise and visible character on the behaviour, virtues, and graces”³⁸ of the saint.

Ibn Muḡayzil’s discussion of prophetic inheritance, consisting of roughly three pages, is located at the very centre of his main section on miracles in the *Kawākib*.³⁹ His aim is to demonstrate a key teaching that he reiterates throughout the text, which, in beginning his discourse, he describes as “the doctrine of the People of Truth that what was a miracle for a prophet can be a miracle for a saint on condition of the absence of a claim [to prophecy].”⁴⁰ The significance of this demonstration for Ibn Muḡayzil is indicated by his argument earlier in the *Kawākib* that since the *karāmāt*-s are traceable to the *mu‘ğizāt* (because saints inherit them from prophets), one who denies the *karāmāt*-s also rejects the *mu‘ğizāt*-s, which in turn entails a denial of the prophets themselves and thus disbelief.⁴¹

Ibn Muḡayzil begins with al-Maḡribī’s explanation that “a prophet’s miracle becomes a saint’s miracle by virtue of the bond of the secret of sainthood that unites the prophet and saint, even though their ranks differ due to variation in the ranks of their peoples”. In other words, al-Maḡribī seems to suggest that saints and prophets can perform the same miracles because they are both endowed with sainthood. Ibn Muḡayzil next cites Ibn al-Fāriḍ: “What was a miracle on their part became after him a miracle for his friend or successor. By virtue of his family, the Companions, the Successors, and imams, people suffice without messengers.”⁴²

Commenting on these verses, Ibn Muḡayzil identifies more precisely who will continue the prophets’ miracles and until when, while adding key elements of his understanding of prophetic inheritance:

That is, by virtue of the Prophet’s family, like the Banū ‘Abbās, and his Companions, the Successors, and the successors of the Successors among the saints and pure in every age until the Day of Resurrection. With them, people suffice without the messengers. For their [*the messengers*] secrets and miracles were miraculously transferred to them through inheritance because previous communities were too weak to bear the secrets of their prophets, so God preserved them for the elite within the Muḥammadan community. Thus, among them arose heirs of Noah, heirs of

37. Cornell 1996, pp. 86–87.

38. Chodkiewicz 1993, p. 75.

39. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 128–131.

40. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 128.

41. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 91; *al-Qawl al-‘alī*, p. 48.

42. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 128; Nicholson 1921, p. 254.

Abraham, heirs of Joseph, heirs of Moses, and heirs of Jesus, in accordance with the secrets of the prophets and messengers that God granted them. They vary in knowledge and truths according to the stations of those from whom they inherit.⁴³

Ibn Muğayzil suggests here that Muslim saints do not inherit only from Muḥammad. They may inherit from another prophet, such as Noah or Abraham, which causes their knowledge to vary. Ibn Muğayzil sees a reference to this in these verses by Ibn al-Fāriḍ: “Their miracles are part of what He conferred upon them exclusively in bequeathing to them a share of every excellence.”⁴⁴

Yet, in an earlier chapter of the *Kawākib* on the Muḥammadan Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-Muḥammadi*), Ibn Muğayzil claims that all miracles, and in fact all existent things and events, originate from this Spirit: “The water of Noah’s flood, the Friend’s [*Abraham’s*] fire, Jacob’s sadness, Job’s patience, the prophets’ miracles, the saints’ miracles, and everything else that can be spoken of or alluded to [are nothing] but like one of his [*the Spirit’s*] particles. For the prophets are drops of moisture that derive from his drops.”⁴⁵

Again, Ibn Muğayzil derives at least part of this teaching from Ibn al-Fāriḍ, as indicated by these verses “in the words of the Prophetic Spirit” that he quotes to substantiate his claims: “The grief that Jacob expressed is the least of my sorrow/All the trials of Job are but a part of my affliction/The flood of Noah is like my tears when I weep/The ignition of the Friend’s [*Abraham’s*] fires is like my ardour of love.”⁴⁶

In addition, Ibn Muğayzil adduces passages from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Risālat al-Anwār* in which the shaykh explains the process of Muḥammad’s transmission both previously and presently: “Muḥammad is he who gave all the prophets and messengers their stations in the world of spirits, [to be held] until he was dispatched with his body and we followed him [...]. The saints [within the communities] of earlier prophets took from their prophets, while their prophets took from Muḥammad.”⁴⁷ “A saint in the community of Muḥammad, who encompasses all the prophets’ stations, sometimes inherits from Moses, though from the Muḥammadan Light, not the Mosaic Light. His state from Muḥammad is that of Moses.”⁴⁸

Now, how can the indirect bequeathers to saints be identified if Muḥammad is their ultimate, universal source? Ibn Muğayzil proposes two methods. One method is to consider the kinds of miracles that the saint performs:

43. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 129.

44. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 129; Nicholson 1921, p. 254.

45. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 50.

46. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 50; Nicholson 1921, p. 201.

47. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 285–286; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rasā’il Ibn ‘Arabī*, p. 130.

48. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 130, 285–286; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rasā’il Ibn ‘Arabī*, p. 130. Ibn ‘Arabī also applies this teaching specifically to the Pole; see Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 183–184; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rasā’il Ibn ‘Arabī*, pp. 252–253; Chodkiewicz 1993, p. 96.

If the sea miraculously parts for a saint [...] it is known that he is an heir of Moses. If he is graced with entering a fire and exiting it safely without harm [...] it is known that he is an heir of Abraham. If he is graced with reviving the dead or speaking to them, it is known that he is an heir of Jesus. If he is graced with all these [miracles], it is known that he is an heir of [all] the prophets [...]. For it is not to be denied that God may gather the universe in a single person. If he is graced with causing water to well up or sweetening it after it had been salty, it is known that he is an heir of Muḥammad.⁴⁹

In other words, a saint performs the miracle for which his bequeather is well known or, if he inherits from all prophets, the miracles for which they are well known. Ibn Muḡayzil shows that al-Šāḡilī was an heir of Muḥammad by recounting a story in which he sweetened salty water.⁵⁰

The second method, according to Ibn Muḡayzil, is to see whom the saint remembers at death. He quotes the explanation of Ibn ʿArabī: “Sometimes, a saint while dying sees Moses or Jesus. The sinner and someone without knowledge imagines that he converted to Judaism or Christianity due to his remembrance of those prophets during his death. In fact, that is due to the strength of [his] knowledge of his station.”⁵¹

While Ibn Muḡayzil is thus heavily indebted to Ibn ʿArabī for his understanding of prophetic inheritance, he rejects a Hadith that the shaykh cited as proof that saints and prophets share inheritance from Muḥammad: “The knowers of this community are like the Israelite prophets.”⁵² According to Ibn Muḡayzil, the inauthenticity of this tradition is affirmed by all Hadith scholars (lit. *ḥuffāz*).⁵³ In contrast, he validates a well-known Hadith that grounds the concept of prophetic inheritance: “The knowers are the prophets’ heirs.”⁵⁴ His interpretation both supports the notion of inheritance and acknowledges a reference to scholars: “The allusion here is to those who know God, the masters of knowledge, even if the literal sense refers to those who know God’s laws, the masters of the exoteric [sciences]. For there are two types of inheritance from prophethood: outer and inner. The experts of Law inherit acquired, outer knowledge, while the experts of Reality inherit God-given, inner knowledge.”⁵⁵

49. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 129.

50. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 129–130.

51. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 129–130; Ibn ʿArabī, *Rasāʾil Ibn ʿArabī*, p. 130.

52. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 131.

53. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 131. This tradition was indeed rejected by several Hadith scholars, such as Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449) and al-Zarkāšī (d. 794/1392), while others, such as Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), and al-Suyūṭī (in one text), classified it as *marfūʿ*. See al-ʿAḡlūnī, *Kašf al-ḥifāʾ* II, p. 74 (no. 1744).

54. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 131. See also al-Tirmidī, *Ġāmiʿ al-Tirmidī*, pp. 608–609 (no. 2682).

55. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 131.

5. Saints, prophets, and messengers

The exalted status of the saints and their inheritance of knowledge and miracles from prophets naturally raises the question of their standing vis-à-vis their benefactors as well as that of the relationship between sainthood, prophethood, and mission (*risāla*). The need to clarify these issues became urgent due to the prevalence of the claim, often associated with Sufis, that saints or a certain group of privileged people are superior to prophets. In his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, al-Ašʿarī (d. 324/935) mentions a group of renunciants (*nussāk*) who declared that their acts of worship made them superior to both prophets and “the angels drawn close to God” (*al-malāʾika al-muqarrabūn*).⁵⁶ The Māturīdī al-Bazdawī (d. 493/1100) speaks of a group of deviant Sufis known as the *awliyāʾiyya* who sometimes stayed in Bukhara until their presence was detected by the religious authorities. According to al-Bazdawī, they maintained that saints are better than prophets, messengers, and all angels, arguing that whereas messengers lived merely by the Law, saints live by Reality.⁵⁷ Among Sufis, al-Sarrāğ, as noted above, devoted a brief chapter of his manual to refuting the idea of the superiority of sainthood to prophethood. According to him, the proponents of this view argued that the Quranic story of Moses and Hīḍr—in which Hīḍr is portrayed as wiser than Moses—reveals a deficiency in Moses’ prophethood.⁵⁸ Al-Huğwīrī (d. c.465–469/1072–1077) likewise addressed this belief in his *Kašf al-maḥğūb*, ascribing it to two groups of anthropomorphists (*mušabbihā*), one of which was located in Khurasan.⁵⁹

Ibn Muğayzil deals with the relationship between saints, prophets, and messengers in his chapter on controversial or difficult statements and ideas of Sufis.⁶⁰ His discussion, situated between his treatments of the eternity of the world and ecstatic utterances (*šataḥāt*), can be divided into two parts. In the first part, of about two pages, he attempts to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the claim that sainthood is superior to prophethood. In the second part, of about one page, he justifies a statement of al-Bisṭāmī that might be interpreted as a declaration of his superiority to prophets.

Ibn Muğayzil begins by laying out the issue for his readers:

Among them [*the controversial or difficult ideas*] is what some Sufis have asserted: the superiority of sainthood to prophethood. According to the diligent among the experts of Law, not to mention

56. Al-Ašʿarī, *Kitāb maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, p. 289.

57. Al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 255. In his chapter on antinomians (*ibāḥiyya*) in his *Baḥr al-kalām*, al-Bazdawī’s contemporary and fellow Māturīdī Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114) deduces the belief in the saints’ superiority over prophets from the claim that one who has attained the highest degree of love (*ḥubb*, *maḥabbā*) is no longer obligated to abide by religious law, since, he notes, even prophets must follow the law; see al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, p. 301.

58. Al-Sarrāğ, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, pp. 535–537.

59. Al-Huğwīrī, *Kašf al-maḥğūb*, pp. 267–269.

60. Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 351–354.

the experts of Reality, this idea is not tantamount to disbelief. For the proponent of this view does not intend that which is understood from its literal sense. Rather, it is to be interpreted in the manner that we will mention.⁶¹

This manner, in fact, is manifold, as shown by the various explanations of authors whom Ibn Muḡayzil cites. I provide here a summary account of their arguments to illustrate Ibn Muḡayzil's strategic use of texts.

In the *Ta'arruf*, al-Kalābādī (d. 398/1008) writes that Sufis "agree that the prophets are the best humans. There is no human who equals the prophets in merit, neither a truthful person, saint, or anyone else, even if his standing is great and his level is exalted."⁶² In his commentary on this text, the Šāfi'ī author 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 727/1327), while noting that "the prophet's quality as a saint is superior to his quality as a prophet", attributes the superiority of the prophet per se to his possession of two qualities: "The prophet is endowed with sainthood as well as prophethood. Thus, he is greater in station and nobler [than the mere saint]."⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī, in his *Kitāb Maqām al-qurba*, proposes that the superiority of sainthood is due to its permanence. He specifically addresses the claim that sainthood is the "great prophethood" (*al-nubuwwa al-kubrā*) or that the rank of the knowing saint (*al-walī al-ʿarīf*) is superior to that of the messenger:

The prophet holds the ranks of sainthood, knowledge, and mission. The ranks of sainthood and knowledge exist permanently, while the rank of mission ceases [...]. The knowing saint remains, while the messenger departs. Remaining is superior to departure. Therefore, he [*the prophet*] is higher and nobler as a knowing saint than as a messenger [...]. It is not the case that a saint among us is superior to a messenger—we take refuge in God from failure!⁶⁴

Ibn 'Arabī's follower al-Qāṣānī (d. c.730–736/1329–1335) exalts sainthood as intimate knowledge of God's oneness, while implying that the prophet is superior to the saint because he has two qualities while the messenger is supreme because he has three:

The distinction between the messenger and the prophet is that mission involves the transmission of laws—"O Messenger, transmit!" (Q 5:65)—while prophethood involves instruction about knowledge and truths that pertain to the particulars of the Attributes and Acts. Prophethood is the outer dimension of sainthood, which is absorption in union and annihilation in the Essence. Its knowledge is that of the oneness of the Essence and the obliteration of the Acts and Attributes.

61. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 351.

62. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 352; al-Kalābādī, *Kitāb al-ta'arruf*, p. 42.

63. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 351. Cf. al-Qūnawī, *Husn al-taṣarruf* II, p. 329: "The prophet has two qualities: sainthood and prophethood. The prophet's quality of sainthood is better than the quality of his prophethood. For his sainthood is his orientation towards God, while his prophethood is his orientation towards creatures, and the first orientation is better than the second."

64. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 352; Ibn 'Arabī, *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī*, p. 73.

So, every messenger is a prophet, and every prophet is a saint; but not every prophet is commissioned, even though the rank of sainthood is nobler than [that of] prophethood and prophethood [is nobler] than mission.⁶⁵

Muḥammad Wafā, finally, likewise links sainthood to mystical experience and knowledge while attributing two dimensions to sainthood and applying his teaching to the Prophet:

Sainthood has an outer dimension and inner dimension. Its outer dimension is the facilitation of the servant to befriend God by obeying His commands and prohibitions and pursuing His contentment. Prophethood is above that; that is, above the rank of sainthood, while mission is above that. [This is] due to the information, acquaintance with unseen matters, and unveiling of the heavenly realms that God granted exclusively to prophets, and to God's assistance of the messengers with regard to the descent of the Holy Spirit, aid with wisdom, strength to call [people] to God, splendid miracles, apparent signs, and so forth. Now, inner sainthood is when God takes charge of His servant through his essence, acquaints him with the hidden aspects of His names and attributes, and brings him into the presences of the holiness of His manifestations. He seizes him from himself, annihilates him from himself, and sustains him through Himself. He is no longer he; there is no "he" but "He". This sainthood is that which Muḥammad reached when Gabriel parted from him at Sidrat al-Muntahā, where he was in the station of "two arms-lengths away or closer".⁶⁶ In this respect, prophethood is inferior to the station of his sainthood, while mission is inferior to the station of his prophethood.⁶⁷

By arguing that sainthood, whether by virtue of its permanency or its basis in sublime mystical experience and knowledge, is superior to prophethood and mission, while nonetheless maintaining the superiority of prophets and messengers to saints, these authors preserve the high value and authority of mystical offices as well as traditional Islamic reverence for founding figures. In this way, they help Ibn Muḡayzil demonstrate that the conviction about sainthood's superiority to prophethood is not disbelief.

Ibn Muḡayzil now moves on to tackle al-Biṣṭāmī's statement: "I dived into a sea; the prophets stopped on its shore."⁶⁸ Al-Mursī, according to Ibn Muḡayzil, interpreted this to mean that "the prophets dived into the sea of divine unity and stopped on the shore of immersion, calling people to dive [in themselves]; that is, [*al-Biṣṭāmī meant*], 'If I were perfect, I would have stopped where they stopped.'"⁶⁹ Ibn Muḡayzil relates the approval of al-Mursī's exegesis of his disciple Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, who points out that it suits al-Biṣṭāmī's station, given

65. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 353; Ibn 'Arabī [al-Qāṣānī], *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī* I, p. 124. This edition of the commentary, like the first one published at the end of the 19th century, is wrongly attributed to Ibn 'Arabī. On this attribution and al-Qāṣānī's authorship of the text, see Lory 1980, pp. 23–24.

66. See Quran, LIII, 1–14.

67. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 353; McGregor 2004, p. 113.

68. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 353.

69. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 353. See also Dunlop 1945, p. 189.

his “respect for the law and perfect etiquette”. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh advises that statements and acts of great, upright figures whose literal sense is objectionable must be interpreted. In line with this principle, Ibn Muḡayzil remarks: “How could anything else be thought about this statement [*of al-Biṣṭāmī*]? Abū Yazīd himself said, ‘Everything that the saints took in relation to what the prophets took is like a skin filled with honey from which some leaked out. What is contained in the skin belongs to the prophets, while that leak belongs to the saints.’”⁷⁰

Despite his apparent agreement with al-Mursī, Ibn Muḡayzil next cites al-Maḡribī’s different understanding. Instead of inviting others to dive, al-Maḡribī suggests that the prophets stopped because they were permitted only to command their communities to adhere to the law; as God says, “Now we have set you upon a clear law, so follow it” (Quran, XLV, 18). The saint, on the other hand, is permitted to call people to the truth directly through God (*yad’ū al-ḥalq ilā al-ḥaqīqa bi-l-ḥaqq*). Ibn Muḡayzil contends that Ibn al-Fāriḍ affirmed the same in verses that appear to be a less provocative version of al-Biṣṭāmī’s assertion: “Below you is a sea that I dived into. The novices stopped on its shore preserving the station of service.”⁷¹ Commenting on these verses, Ibn Muḡayzil distinguishes between the difficult path of the gnostics and the easier way of ordinary worshippers:

That is, “How deep I have dived into the sea of knowledge, seeking the station of the gnostics”, which is witnessing the Real through the Real with the annihilation of creation. Before it stopped the novices, who are the communities setting out on the path to God, those who worship according to what their prophets have permitted. For laws are clear, simple, straightforward, and founded on facilitation and alleviation, in contrast to Reality, whose foundation is resoluteness and intensification.⁷²

6. Conclusion

Drawing on a wide range of sources and authors to tackle critical aspects of sainthood, Ibn Muḡayzil produced a nuanced and rich discourse. His apologetic orientation is marked and reflects his overall aim in the *Kawākib* to “combine Law and Reality”. Most notably, he defends the notion of a hierarchy of saints, which seems to engender his tolerance for different conceptions despite professing his own, and he insists on the orthodoxy of the belief in the superiority of sainthood to prophethood while vindicating al-Biṣṭāmī from the impression that he considered himself higher than the prophets. Furthermore, Ibn Muḡayzil interprets the Hadith that grounds the notion of saints’ inheritance in a way that both validates it as a proof and honours the achievements of scholars.

70. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 353. See also Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, *Laṭā’if al-minan*, p. 152.

71. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), pp. 353–354; Nicholson 1921, p. 226.

72. Ibn Muḡayzil, *Kawākib* (a), p. 354.

Whereas al-Tirmidī is not even cited in Ibn Muğayzil's discussion, Ibn 'Arabī is an important reference. This reflects Bernd Radtke's observation of the eclipse of al-Tirmidī by Ibn 'Arabī in the discourse on sainthood and sets Ibn Muğayzil apart from early members of his order, such as Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh and Ibn Bāḥilā, who were considerably influenced by the sage of Tirmid. ⁷³ Yet, the approach of Ibn Muğayzil cannot also be equated with that of Muḥammad Wafā and 'Alī Wafā, for whom Ibn 'Arabī remained central. As R. McGregor explains, "the Akbarian corpus was not a passive object of study [...] rather, having taken it to heart, they used it as a vehicle for their own mystical speculations on sainthood."⁷⁴ For Ibn Muğayzil, Ibn 'Arabī is only one of many sources for his teachings on sainthood. Moreover, Ibn Muğayzil's view that the saint who inherits from Muḥammad can be recognised by his performance of certain physical miracles contradicts Ibn 'Arabī's conviction that his miracles are only spiritual knowledge and states, and thus cannot be detected by ordinary people.⁷⁵

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Abbreviations

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73. Geoffroy 1998, pp. 60–65; McGregor 2004, p. 47; Gobillot 2005. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (*Laṭā'if al-minan*, p. 104) records a story in which al-Mursī miraculously travels to Alexandria to attend al-Šāḍilī's reading of al-Tirmidī's *Sīrat al-awliyā'*.

74. McGregor 2004, p. 7.

75. See Chodkiewicz 1993, p. 73. It is worth noting that the concept of a "seal" (*ḥatm* or *ḥatīm*) of the saints, so prominent in the Sufi discourse on sainthood, is found only once in Ibn Muğayzil, *Kawākib* (a) (p. 152). It is mentioned in a passage from a text by Yemeni Šāḍilī Aḥmad al-Ḥaḍramī, who states that "it has been related" that Jesus will appear (at the end of days) as the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood, confirming and ruling by Muḥammad's law.

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