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Spiritual Legacy, Sufi Identity, and Mystical Knowledge in *Taṣliya* formulae

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Abstract

The tradition of *taṣliya* texts and practices in Sufism constitute an important source of Muslim intellectual and religious history. Previous studies have argued that these texts were more than mere cultural expressions of devotion to Prophet Muḥammad. Following this line of thought, this article seeks to deepen our grasp of the significance of *taṣliya* formulae in Sufi contexts. Emphasis will be placed on their role in popularizing various mystical-philosophical teachings and prophetical doctrines that shaped Muslims' imaginations of the Prophet throughout the centuries.

Keywords

Introduction[1]

Over the centuries, the act of invoking blessings upon the Prophet (*al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī* or *taṣliya*) became one of the most important acts of devotional piety in Islam. The concept of *taṣliya* applies in principle to any invocation that begins with the sentence "*allahumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammad*" ("Oh God, send Your blessings upon Muḥammad"). Such prayers are not conceived as an

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"intercession" by the believer on behalf of the Prophet, but are rather understood as "pleas that Muḥammad's intercession be accepted by God on behalf of his followers".[2] Much like the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*), *taṣliya* has a strong scriptural foundation both in the Qur'ān and the hadith literature. The Qur'ānic verse "truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!"[3] (Qur'ān 33:56), has been understood by many exegetes as a divine command (*amr*) to send blessings upon the Prophet.[4] On the other hand, the most important hadith regarding the *taṣliya* practice is the one in which Muḥammad was asked about the proper manner to invoke blessings upon him. His response gave birth to the first *taṣliya* formula (*ṣīghat al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī*) in Islamic history, which later became commonly known as *al-ṣalāt al-ibrāhīmiyya* (the Prayer of Abraham). It reads as follows:

> O God, bless Muhammad and the family (*āl*) of Muḥammad, as You blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham; and grant Your blessings to Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, as You granted your blessings to Abraham and the family of Abraham. Truly, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.[5]

Following the example of the Prophet, numerous Muslims authored their prayers of blessing, giving rise to hundreds of personal formulae over the centuries.[6] This evolved into an important point of contention in Islamic law during the formative period, especially as the *taṣliya* came to constitute the second half of the *tashahhud*, i.e., the closing invocation of obligatory ritual prayers. In this regard, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820), the eponymous founder of the Shāfiʿī school of law, is famous for considering it a *conditio sine*

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2   Andrew Rippin, "Taṣliya", in *EI²*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs, consulted online on 01 December 2021: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7436.

3   For the translation, see *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York: Harper One, 2015).

4   For an example, see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Ḥikmat b. Bashīr b. Yāsīn (Riyadh: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2010), VI/225.

5   Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, *Majmūʿ al-arbaʿīn arbaʿīn min aḥādīth sayyid al-mursalīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2010), 179–80. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

6   The famous hadith scholar Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1355) reports forty different versions of the *ṣalāt al-ibrāhīmiyya*. Cf. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Shifāʾ al-siqām fī ziyārat khayr al-anām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2008), 490–502.

qua non for the validity of the obligatory ritual prayer.[7] By placing the *taṣliya* at the center of the Islamic worship of God, al-Shāfiʿī may have laid the legal ground for the exponential growth of this particular prayer in Islam. During later centuries, it became not only a rich Islamic literary genre of its own but also a pillar of Islamic spirituality, as will be shown below.

It is important to stress that the *taṣliya* as text and practice is but one component of a crucial phenomenon in Islamic history, namely the devotion to the Prophet. The latter takes various cultural, political, spiritual, and material expressions that have deeply shaped the religiosity and cultures of numerous Muslim communities across time and space. Recent scholarship is right to insist that there is still a great scholarly need for a comprehensive study of devotional expressions of veneration to Muḥammad in Islam.[8] The prayers of blessing are one the main pieces in this larger puzzle, as they can offer us a better understanding of how Muslims imagined the Prophet at different moments of their history and how these images have shaped their spirituality. Aside from marking sectarian and spiritual differences between Muslim groups, strong textual evidence suggests that *taṣliya* formulae were perceived in several Sufi communities as the fruit of a mystical encounter with the "Muḥammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*).[9] This concept refers to the Prophet's primordial pre-existent entity pertaining to the idea of the "perfect man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) which conceives Muḥammad as the archetype of the universe and humanity.[10] Against this backdrop, it is not surprising to observe that

7   For a detailed discussion, see Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Qawl al-badīʿ fī l-ṣalāt ʿalā l-ḥabīb al-shāfīʿ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAwwāma (al-Madīna: Muʾassasat al-Rayyān, 2002), 59–70. Western scholarship insists that the importance given to the *taṣliya* was a later historical development, as Muḥammad's centrality itself is questioned in early Islam. Ignaz Goldziher argued in this regard that the *tashahhud* was introduced into the prayer ritual around the beginning of the Abbasid period; cf. Ignaz Goldziher, "Ueber die Eulogien der Muhammedaner", *ZDMG* 50 (1896), 102.

8   Nelly Amri, Rachid Chih, Denis Gril, "Introduction: la dévotion au Prophète de l'Islam, une histoire qui reste à faire", *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 178 (2017), 11–22.

9   A similar argument can also be made about the praise poetry in the Western parts of the Muslim world. In his latest book, Oludamini Ogunnaike offers a study on the link between Arabic praise poetry and the mystical doctrines that shaped Western African Sufism. See Oludamini Ogunnaike, *Poetry in Praise of Prophetic Perfection: A Study of West African Arabic Madih Poetry and Its Precedents* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2020).

10   The concept of the "Muḥammadan Reality" appears in Sufi literature as a replacement for the earlier concept of the "Muḥammadan light", which has its parallels in Jewish, gnostic, and neo-platonic philosophy. For more information, see U. Rubin, "Nūr Muḥammadī", in *EI²*, consulted online on 01 December 2021: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM:5985; see also: Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 205–11.

many of these prayers display a strong doctrinal and mystical-philosophical character. For the users this proves the depth of their author's mystical knowledge (*maʿrifa*). Eric Geoffroy explains in this regard that the famous prayer collection of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī's (d. 1465), known as *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt,* "reflects the doctrine of the Universal Man (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*) through the cosmic dimension that it attributes to the Prophet".[11] This understanding applies not only to other *taṣliya* formulae and collections but also to several commentaries upon them as well.

This article is divided into six main sections: the first is a brief discussion of the most important contributions to the study of *taṣliya* in Western scholarship. Here, special attention will be given to Fritz Meier's crucial observation that some of the *taṣliya* texts were believed to contain "hidden secrets" available only to the initiated Sufis. The second section examines the role played by Muslim authors from North Africa and al-Andalus in the development of the *taṣliya* as Sufi texts and practices. The third offers a typology of *taṣliya* writings by shedding light on the main categories that constitute this literary genre – an element often overlooked in previous scholarship. While the fourth section shifts the discussion to the role of these prayers as markers of sectarian and spiritual identity, the fifth focuses on their function in Sufi contexts. This part argues that for several Sufi brotherhoods, *taṣliya* formulae were considered a main component and indicator of a shaykh's spiritual rank and legacy. Accordingly, producing a personal *taṣliya* or a commentary on one attributed to an influential shaykh was sometimes understood as proof of spiritual maturity in later centuries. In the sixth and last section, the emphasis will be laid on the perceived importance of *taṣliya* formulae and commentaries as expressions of a high level of mystical-philosophical knowledge of the "Muḥammadan Reality".

Western Studies on *Taṣliya*

Ignaz Goldziher was probably the first to draw the attention of Western scholars to the significance of *taṣliya* in Islam. In his study (1896), the Hungarian Orientalist presented strong textual evidence demonstrating the divergence of opinions among early Muslims regarding the meaning of *taṣliya*. One important point of contention was whether the prayer of blessing can be used upon other prophets, companions, and even "normal" Muslims.[12] Goldziher

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11   Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2010), 111.

12   Goldziher discussed convincingly that the *taṣliya* was said for other people besides Muḥammad. Thus, the idea that the prayer of blessing was exclusively dedicated to the

also noted the role of *taṣliya* formulae in marking theological differences and sectarian divides between Muslim groups. According to him, the doctrines introduced by Sunni "orthodox" theologians in the context of *taṣliya* were an attempt to shift the focus of these prayers away from the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*, i.e., the descendants of ʿAlī). However, this doctrinal difference did not diminish the widespread veneration that the family of the Prophet enjoyed among Muslims of all denominations.[13] Besides other observations on some of the legal and linguistic aspects of the *taṣliya* prayers, Goldziher made two important arguments that are relevant for the present study: firstly, the growing historical importance given to *taṣliya* formulae by Muslims, which spurred the emergence of an independent Islamic genre dedicated to them, i.e., *taṣliya* collections; and secondly, the special status given to formulae attributed to "holy" men, including the prevailing belief in their spiritual benefits for their users – both of these points will be discussed below in more detail.

After Goldziher, only few scholars paid attention to the topic of *taṣliya* in Islam. Cristina De La Puente focused on the religious significance of the *taṣliya*, its purposes, and its value for hadith transmitters.[14] A noteworthy contribution was Annemarie Schimmel's monograph *And Muhammad is His Messenger*. Although the book is not focused on *taṣliya* per se, it contains important passages in which the author insists upon the aesthetic value of the *taṣliya* formulae and their importance as expressions of love for and devotion to Muḥammad. The doctrine of the living presence of the Prophet, she argues "whose ubiquity was felt with increasing strength by the believers, led to ever more beautiful embellishments of the formula of blessing".[15] Schimmel agrees with Constance Padwick about the centrality of these prayers in Muslim devotional practices, i.e., that "the *taṣliya* has become an essential, sometimes it would seem *the* essential of the life of salvation and devotion."[16] In recent

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Prophet is refuted through undeniable textual evidence. Goldziher, "Ueber die Eulogien der Muhammedaner", 110–11.

13   Ibid., 113.

14   Cristina De La Puente, "The Prayer Upon the Prophet Muḥammad (*taṣliya*): A Manifestation of Islamic Religiosity", *Medieval Encounters* 5:1 (1999), 121–29.

15   Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 93.

16   Ibid., 96; cf. Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: SPCK, 1969), 154. The topic of devotion to the Prophet has garnered attention from scholars over the last few years. There is currently an ongoing Franco-German research project investigating the various forms of attachment to the Prophet in Muslim cultures. For more information, see https://prophet.hypotheses.org/ (last access 13 March 2020). For a good bibliographical overview of some important works written about the devotion to the Prophet in Islam, see Amri et al., *Introduction*, 20–22.

years, there has been a rising awareness among scholars regarding the limitations of traditional text-centered approaches in the study of religion. The current scholarly consensus holds that the material and artistic dimensions (e.g., visual culture, material culture, music, art history, and food) are as important, if not more, in grasping the depth of religious beliefs and practices.[17] Recent studies have shown the unexpected insights that could be gained from focusing on the role and function of the Qur'ān as an "object" in Muslim cultures.[18] Following this line of thought, Hiba Abid has offered a significant contribution to the material dimension of booklets of *taṣliya* in the Maghreb between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. Her study shows the high demand that once existed for these manuscripts in pre-modern times, a clear indicator of their broader religious and cultural importance as objects. Furthermore, the widespread use of these benedictory prayers as talismans for protection suggests that their material dimension may be deemed equally important to their textual dimension, i.e., theological content, because of the spiritual and healing powers that were believed to be contained in them.[19]

In the light of the existing Western studies on the *taṣliya*, there is no doubt that when it comes to the role of *taṣliya* in Sufi contexts, the studies authored by Fritz Meier remain the most important ones, especially his *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung*.[20] Already in 1986, Meier had published an article on the topic stressing the role of these formulae as personal invocations addressed to God and highlighting the protective function ascribed to them in

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17   Several anthropologists have offered valuable stimuli regarding the significance of visual culture, material culture, archeology, music, and nutrition in understanding the depth of religious beliefs and practices. For more information, see Birgit Meyer, "There is a Spirit in that Image. Mass Produced Jesus Pictures and Protestant Pentecostal Animation in Ghana", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:1 (2010), 100–30; eadem, "Remapping Our Mindset. Towards a Transregional and Pluralistic Outlook", *Religion* 50:1 (2020), 113–21; eadem, "Religion as Mediation", *Entangled Religions* 11:3 (2020), 1–21.

18   See, for instance, Natalia K. Suit, *Qur'anic Matters. Material Mediations and Religious Practice in Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); see also Hanna Nieber, *Drinking the Qur'an. Healing with Kombe in Zanzibar Town* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Utrecht University, 2020).

19   Hiba Abid, "La vénération du prophète en Occident musulman à travers l'étude codicologique de livres de piété (xıᵉ/xvııᵉ – xıııᵉ/xıxᵉ siècles)", *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 178 (2017), 158.

20   Fritz Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung, Teil I: Die Segenssprechung über Mohammed* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); and ibid., *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung, Teil II: Die Taṣliya in Sufischen Zusammenhängen* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). It is important to mention that during my research for this article, I came across an unpublished doctoral thesis on the topic of *taṣliya* by Amine Hamidoune, *La pratique de la "prière sur le Prophète" en islam: Analyse philologique et implications doctrinales* (unpublished doctoral thesis), University of Aix-en-Provence. Unfortunately, I could not get access to a copy of this study.

Muslim cultures against natural calamities.[21] In the same piece, he also shed light on the diverse linguistic uses of *taṣliya*, such as asking someone of higher authority for worldly favors or ending an argument. Yet, his posthumously published *Bemerkungen* offered important insights on the role and purposes of benedictory prayers in Sufism throughout the centuries. Here we learn that later Sufi communities used specific *taṣliya* formulae to obtain rewards, open spiritual channels of communication with the Prophet, and help novices find a shaykh.[22] Meier contends that there is a strong link between the presence of *taṣliya* and the broader discussion about the place and centrality of the Prophet in Islamic history, a phenomenon known in scholarship as the "idealization of Muḥammad".[23] For him, Sufism in the first centuries was based on a "God-centered" approach in contrast to a "Prophet-centered" one, which became dominant much later. Meier's most striking example is Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 932), a Sufi shaykh from Baghdad, who explicitly warned his disciples not to focus on Muḥammad or any other prophet, since one could be led astray from God.[24] According to al-Wāsiṭī, *taṣliya* must be only said out of respect for the prophets but should not be given any importance within the heart of the spiritual seeker.[25]

Against this background, Fritz Meier contrasts al-Wāsiṭī's position with that of later Sufis, for whom the Prophet became so central that the prayer of blessing rose to be regarded as the most crucial means to initiate novices. To describe this trend Meier introduces the concept of *Mohammedmystiker*, i.e., Sufi shaykhs who placed the Prophet at the center of their spiritual endeavor. His main examples of these "Muḥammad mystics" are: Aḥmad al-Tijānī

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21   Fritz Meier, "Die segenssprechung über Mohammed im bittgebet und in der bitte", *ZDMG* 136 (1986), 364–401.

22   For the possibility of visionary encounters with the Prophet after his death, see Shahzad Bashir, "Muḥammad in Ṣūfī Eyes: Prophetic Legitimacy in Medieval Iran and Central Asia", in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 201–25.

23   This trend started to manifest itself as early as the ninth century and was accompanied by the rise of the *sīra* and *maghāzi* literature. It can be summed up as a gradual transition in the collective remembering of Muḥammad not only as a human messenger but increasingly as a supernatural hero. Uri Rubin, "Muḥammad's Message in Mecca: Warnings, Signs, and Miracles", in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, 57–58.

24   For a more detailed discussion of al-Wāsiṭī's Sufi approach, see Laury Silvers, *A Soaring Minaret: Abu Bakr al-Wasiti and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 17–60. al-Wāsiṭī must not be confused with ʿImād al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī (d. 1311), a Sufi shaykh in his own right and student of the famous Ibn Taymiyya. For more information on him and his work, see Arjan Post, *The Journeys of a Taymiyyan Sufi: Sufism through the Eyes of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 728/1311)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

25   Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 287–88.

(d. 1815), Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sanūsī (d. 1859), Aḥmad b. Idrīs (d. 1837), and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī (d. 1909). All four are founders of important Sufi movements in North Africa who emphasized the *taṣliya* in both their doctrines and rituals.[26] As a matter of fact, Meier used the centrality of *taṣliya* in Sufi doctrines and rituals as a yardstick for studying the Muḥammad-centered shift in Sufi history, which results into two historical phases: a "classical phase" until 1100, in which the Prophet was not, or hardly, the ultimate goal of the mystical encounter; and a so-called "post-classical phase", in which he emerges as the center of all mystical attention.[27] Meier names a multitude of possible reasons for this shift, such as the weakening of the one-dimensional pursuit of *tawḥīd*, the influence of Fāṭimī doctrines, the Crusades, or the preference of a political power for a more human-like entity other than God.[28] Fritz Meier was right to insist that there is no strong textual evidence showing the importance of the *taṣliya* for early Sufi communities. However, this should not be interpreted as an indicator for the "unimportance" of the Prophet in early Sufi doctrines and practices per se. Indeed, examples of the so-called "*imitatio Muhammadi*" (imitation of the Prophet) as well as the presence of central Sufi concepts that will later be systematized into the doctrine of the "Muḥammadan Reality" were already part and parcel of Sufi writings during the ninth and tenth centuries.[29]

One of Meier's most important observations in the Sufi context is the fact that *taṣliya* formulae of influential shaykhs were believed to contain "hidden

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26 Ibid., 357–68. For more information on Aḥmad b. Idrīs, see Rex Sean O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990); Bernd Radtke, John O'Kane, Knut S. Vikør, and Rex Sean O'Fahey, *The Exoteric Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs: A Sufi's Critique of the Madhāhib and the Wahhābīs* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). For al-Sanūsī, see Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al- Sanūsī and his Brotherhood*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995). For al-Kattānī, see Sahar Bazzaz, *Forgotten Saints: History, Power, Politics in the Making of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2010). For al-Tijānī, see Zachary Valentine Wright, *On the Path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani (1737–1815) and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya* (Atlanta: Fayda, 2015).

27 Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 290.

28 Ibid., 290–91.

29 See Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 199; Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism*, 45. Two Sufi counterexamples to al-Wāsiṭī's God-centered approach in the early Islamic period are Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). Both Sufi authors gave immense importance to the Prophet and expressed probably the earliest documented Sufi view on the doctrine of the Muḥammadan Light and Reality, which was later systematized by Ibn ʿArabī in the thirteenth century. For more information, see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl At-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 149–53. For Tustarī's conception of

mystical secrets". These secrets, he explains, can only be unveiled with the help of someone of a higher spiritual rank who has the sufficient knowledge to explain the sense, value, and use of these formulae to other Sufi disciples.[30] The same idea was confirmed in an article by Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirtenstein (2003) on the prayer attributed to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī (d. 1221), a Tunisian Sufi who had a significant influence on Ibn ʿArabī during his formative years. The authors explain that the prayer of blessing of al-Mahdawī:

 "[…] forms not only a devotional prayer of great power and beauty, but also a series of expositions that draw the listener or reader into a vast universe of contemplation. Each blessing becomes an invitation to contemplate the all-embracing Reality in a particular mode. In this respect, it bears a striking similarity to the work of Ibn ʿArabī himself, especially in its wide-ranging and comprehensive treatment of the Reality of Muḥammad as the Reality of Man, its cosmological and metaphysical approach to the theme of the divine human form, and its use of the language of symbolic allusion."[31]

Against this background, it seems that the mystical-philosophical value attached to these "texts" in Sufi contexts deserves more attention. Such an approach brings a deeper focus on the content (*matn*) of these prayers, which not only distinguishes them from each other but also sheds light on their authors' views and understandings of the Prophet. In other words, as "texts on Muḥammad," these prayers can help us grasp the various nuances of the Muslim devotion to the Prophet and offer us invaluable insights into how different Muslim communities imagined him at different points in time.

Taṣliya and the Muslim West

Meier's examples of the "Muḥammad mystics" for whom the *taṣliya* played a central role stem all from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Sufi

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the heart of the Prophet as the seat and source of mystical union, see ibid., 157–65. For al-Ḥallāj's veneration for the Prophet and his use of the light terminology, see Carl W. Ernst, "Muḥammad as The Pole of Existence", in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, 127.

30   Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 324.

31   Pablo Beneito, Stephen Hirtenstein, "The Prayer of Blessing [upon the Light of Muhammad] by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mahdawī", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 34 (2003), 11.

revival during this period has often been referred to as "neo-Sufism" or the "Muḥammadan path" (*al-ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya*).[32] What is noteworthy is the fact that all four "Muḥammad mystics" of Meier were connected to the Maghrebi Sufi tradition, especially the one that emerged in the city of Fez. As a reaction to what they perceived as a "weakening" of spiritual life in the country, these shaykhs reinvented their brotherhoods by reformulating old teachings and introducing new methods of initiation. Their goal was to infuse Sufism with a new vitality without cutting the ties with the spiritual tradition of their Sufi predecessors. Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino explains in this regard that the notion of *al-ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya* as it appears in the local Moroccan context, reflects the will of Sufi shaykhs to gather the multiple spiritual affiliations under one universal Islamic banner, namely the Prophet's. According to him, their intention was to "reorient Sufism towards a more direct attachment to the spiritual reality of the Prophet as it was developed by medieval authors such as Ibn ʿArabī, al-Jīlī, and al-Jazūlī".[33] In this attempt to make a direct

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32   Fazlur Rahman is regarded as the first one to have introduced the concept of "neo-Sufism" to describe a "reformed" or "rationalized" Sufism that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to emphasize its compliance with the shariʿa and departure from the dominance of Akbarian doctrines and the cult of saints. Cf. Rex S. O'Fahey, Bernd Radtke, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered", *Der Islam* 70:1 (1993), 55. The concept as well as its usefulness to find rationalistic elements for an Islamic modernity were passionately debated among scholars such as Reinhard Schulze, Rudolph Peters, Bernd Radtke, and others. However, recent scholarship has problematized the idea of a "neo-Sufism" that emerged to guarantee God's transcendence and break with the dominance of Akbarian doctrines. In her latest study, Rachida Chih contends that the "Muhammadan path" is not a Sharia-based rejection of the union with God. It represents rather the ideal modality of the union with the divine by returning to the source of all light (cosmic and metaphysical), which is the Prophet's primordial light (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*). Rachida Chih, "Discussing the Sufism of the Early Modern Period: A New Historiographical Outlook on the Tariqa Muhammadiyya", in *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World*, ed. Jamal Malik, Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 121. The same argument was emphasized in an earlier study authored by Valerie Hoffman who also disagrees with the idea that the focus on the Prophet was an attempt to depart from Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. Cf. Valerie Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice", *IJMES* 31 (1999), 365. Ahmad Dallal also offers an interesting discussion of the Sufi developments in the eighteenth century. Although his study does not take into consideration the Sufi trends that appeared in Morocco during that period, he comes to similar conclusions. Cf. Ahmad Dallal, *Islam Without Europe: Traditions of Reform in the Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 94–139.

33   Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino: "Penser la voie muḥammadienne: Le renouveau soufi à fès au XIIIᵉ/XIXᵉ siècle", *Studia Islamica* 111 (2016), 111.

connection with the spiritual reality of the Prophet, the *taṣliya* became one of the main tools of initiation that shaykhs recommended to their novices.[34]

It seems likely that the Maghrebi spiritual affiliation is not a mere coincidence when it comes to understanding Meier's "Mohammedmystiker". The later importance of the prayers of blessing for initiation practices in North and West African Sufism is but a reflection of a deep theological shift that had a lasting impact on the spiritual identity of numerous groups in this part of the Muslim world. Annemarie Schimmel observed that the Maghreb was very "fertile in producing eulogies and prayers for the Prophet", including *taṣliya* formulae that became "classics in their own right".[35] There seems to be a close link between the Maghrebi and Andalusian parts of the Muslim world and the historical development of devotional doctrines and practices centered around the Prophet. The impact of Muslim authors from this region is undeniable when it comes to understanding the growth of Prophet-centered doctrines and practices. Of course, the first author who comes here to mind is *al-shaykh al-akbar*, Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), whose influence in this regard is indisputable. His Western biographer Claude Addas contends that it was him who structured and organized the scattered statements found in Sufi literature about the exceptional nature of the Prophet.[36] Ibn ʿArabī's historical context, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, coincides with the period that Meier identified as the transitional period in Sufi history when the *taṣliya* started to emerge increasingly as an important practice in Sufi manuals. This historical phase in the Maghreb was marked by a chain of events that prepared the ground for the adoption of both Ashʿarite theology and institutionalized transregional Sufism.[37] Investigating this period in-depth with regard to its impact on the

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34　Ibid., 122. The focus on Morocco here is simply an answer to Fritz Meier's examples of 'Mohammedmystiker', because all four had a connection with the city of Fez during that period. This renewal of Sufism was a global phenomenon, and therefore, not limited to Morocco. It also included India, the Middle East, Indonesia, and Western Africa. For more information, see Rachida Chih, *Sufism in Ottoman Egypt: Circulation, Renewal and Authority in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), chap. 3. For the Sufi renewal in Fez, see Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté, de la fondation à lʿavènement du Protectorat (808–1912): Hagiographie, tradition spirituelle et héritage prophètique dans la ville de Mawlay Idrīs* (Rabat: Centre Jacques-Berque, 2014).

35　Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 188.

36　Claude Addas, *La maison muhammadienne: aperçus de la devotion au Prophete en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), 17.

37　One of the main events worth mentioning in this context was the introduction of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* in Andalusia. The "*Iḥyāʾ* controversy" is regarded as one of the main factors that laid to the acceptance of Sufism as a distinctive category of religious discourse, and more importantly, to the fusion between Sufism and Ashʿarism in

Prophet-centered turn would necessitate an independent study. Nevertheless, a working hypothesis could be that the nature of the Ashʿarite creed itself may explain some of the drastic shifts in Muslim attitudes towards the Prophet that occurred in the Maghreb during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As discussed above, one of the reasons advanced by Fritz Meier as an explanation for the Prophet-centered turn was the preference of a political power to attach itself to a more accessible supranatural entity other than God. Without disagreeing with Meier on the influence of politics on religious affairs, I would like to make a different argument and propose that this growing idealization of the Prophet may have its roots in Ashʿarite theology itself: the insistence on God's absolute distinctness from His creation, on the one hand, and the severing of the ties between the transcendent and the immanent, on the other, could both offer a plausible explanation for the increasing demand for a more human-like entity to which Muslims could relate and feel closer.[38] This tendency to humanize the divine, i.e., the supranatural, has been observed in almost every religious tradition known to us, including Islam.[39] In his book *Faces in the Cloud*, Stewart Guthrie contended that all forms of religiosity "consist of seeing the world as humanlike." Scanning the world around us and recognizing otherworldly human beings (e.g., in the form of gods, demons, spirits, etc.) is an unconscious but reasonable way that allows us to navigate the uncertainty and ambiguity we face in nature.[40] In this light, the radical Ashʿarite "de-anthropomorphization" of God could probably not fulfill the need for a divine entity to which believers could relate. Thus, we may assume that one way to close this insurmountable gap imposed by Ashʿarite theology was the reinvention of a more idealized, a more God-like image, of Muḥammad. The Maghrebi theological context, in which Neoplatonizing treatises of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*) and Fāṭimī Ismāʿīlī cosmological doctrines shaped much of the mystical and philosophical thought, seemed to be a particularly fruitful soil for such a transition.[41]

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the Muslim West. Cf. Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barrajān and Islamic Thought in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50–57.

38   On the distinctness of God from his creation in Ashʿarism, see Omar Farahat, *The Foundation of Norms in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 87–92.

39   For more information on anthropomorphism in the Islamic tradition, see Livnat Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism in Islam: The Challenge of Traditionalism (700–1350)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

40   Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Cloud: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3–4.

41   Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, 79. For an in-depth discussion on the influence of the Brethren's and Ismāʿīlī doctrines on leading Andalusian mystics, see Michael Ebstein,

In the case of al-Andalus, the Ashʿarite creed found itself in negotiation with a diversity of local theological and mystical currents. The latter included also anthropomorphist doctrines that prevailed among Mālikī scholars.[42] Yet, even in Mālikī circles, the picture is more diverse than often assumed. In the twelfth century, we have strong textual evidence that Western Mālikism was shifting towards a gradual adoption of a more Prophet-centered doctrine. The role played by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's (d. 1149) book *al-Shifā bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafā* was crucial in this regard. ʿIyāḍ's work captured the imagination of numerous generations of Muslims and contributed heavily to the solidification of a Muhammad-centered theology (in Tilman Nagel's words a "Mohammeddogmatik") which de-historicized Muḥammad in the eyes of many Muslims and made him into a meta-historical entity.[43] On the mystical level, it is important to mention that the marriage between Ashʿarism and Eastern Sufism in the Maghreb was also influenced by the continuous presence of local Andalusian mystical traditions. A good example is the *iʿtibārī* school whose teachings contained a variety of Neoplatonic, Ismāʿīlī, and Fāṭimī elements. Ibn ʿArabī, for instance, is known to have integrated many *iʿtibārī* doctrines into his own.[44] In this light, the theological gulf between creator and creation advocated by Ashʿarism might have just increased the need for a more personal connection with a more approachable and relatable being. The Prophet as an intermediary entity with one face turned towards God, the transcendent, and the other turned towards His creation, the immanent, seemed probably to be a good compromise at that time.

Interestingly, it was precisely in al-Andalus and the Maghreb that several important Sufi prayers of blessing made their appearance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which had a lasting impact on Sufi initiation rituals. It was also during this very period that Ibn ʿArabī authored his own formulae (such as his famous *al-ṣalāt al-akbariyya*) which received a great deal of attention from Sufi authors throughout the centuries. Yet, a crucial figure for the integration of these prayers in the litanies and rituals of the nascent *ṭarīqa* Sufism is his contemporary from Morocco, ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 1227), who is no other than the spiritual teacher of the eponymous founder of the Shādhilī order, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258). The various Shādhiliyya branches, which trace their spiritual lineage to him, made an undeniable contribution to the rise to

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Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

42 Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 14–15

43 Cf. Tilman Nagel, *Allahs Liebling: Ursprung und Erscheinungsformen des Mohammedglaubens* (Munich: R. Oldenburg, 2008), 358.

44 Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, 83.

prominence of both his *ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya* and *taṣliya* literature and practices in general. Furthermore, in the fourteenth century, one can also observe a strong theorization of the *taṣliya* practice and its gradual integration into the main initiatory arsenal used by Sufi shaykhs. Besides the Shādhilī example of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1310), whom Meier sees as early evidence for the incorporation of the *taṣliya* in Sufi initiations,[45] one should also mention the work of the Andalusian shaykh Muḥammad al-Sāḥilī (d. 1353) entitled *Bughyat al-sālik* (The Aspiration of The Wayfarer). In this book, al-Sāḥilī advises Sufi shaykhs explicitly to personalize and adjust the *taṣliya* formulae according to the spiritual needs of each and every wayfarer on the path.[46] Yet, in terms of long-lasting influence, the most important work that cemented the *taṣliya* genre and practice for Muslim generations to come was *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt*. Its author, the Moroccan Sufi Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 1465), was considered by many as a revivalist of the Shādhiliyya in the fifteenth century. The *Dalāʾil* contributed to establishing the *taṣliya* as pillar of Sufi initiation practices and litanies.[47] Furthermore, it was translated into many languages and received a great deal of attention across the Muslim world in the form of commentaries and Islamic art. Until the nineteenth century, the *Dalāʾil* is even believed to have been the most widespread book after the Qurʾān.[48]

After al-Jazūlī, the dominance of *taṣliya* as a central initiatory practice became undeniable in Moroccan Sufism. The seventeenth century offers plenty of examples in that regard. In Fez, the remembrance of God alone (*dhikr*), cherished by early God-centered Sufis such as al-Wāsiṭī, became increasingly perceived as a danger for novices. Prominent Moroccan shaykhs, such as Abū al-Maḥāsin al-Fāsī (d. 1614), argued, therefore, that *taṣliya* was more superior to mere *dhikr*, because the first contained the latter, but not the other way around.[49] The same idea is confirmed by the Moroccan Sufi traveler Abū Sālim al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 1679) who insisted on the importance of the *taṣliya* for realizing

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45 Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 293.

46 Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ṣāḥilī, *Bughyat al-sālik fī ashraf al-masālik*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Books Publishers, 2019), 76–77.

47 Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 290–91. On al-Jazūlī, see Jan Just Witkam, *Vroomheid en activisme in een islamitisch gebedenboek: De geschiedenis van de Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt van al-Ǧazūlī* (Leiden: Legatum Warnerianum, 2002); Jaafar Kansoussi, "al-Jazūlī, auteur des Dalāʾil al-khayrāt", *Horizons Maghrébins* 23–24 (1994), 57–61.

48 Amri et al., *Introduction*, 19.

49 Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 76; 310. For a very detailed Sufi discussion of the *taṣliya* as a means to arrive at the divine presence and the necessity of the Prophet for guaranteeing the safe passage of the seeker to God, see Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kattānī, *Jalāʾ al-qulūb min al-aṣdāʾ al-ghayniyya bi-bayān iḥāṭatih ʿalayh al-salām bi-l-ʿulūm al-kawniyya* (n.p, n.d.), III/295–318.

the union with the Prophet and reaching the highest spiritual levels.[50] At the turn of the nineteenth century, the famous Darqāwī Shaykh Aḥmad b. ʿAjība (d. 1809) presented the prayer of blessing in his commentary of the Qurʾān as "a ladder and an ascension (*miʿrāj*) by which the seeker arrives to God" and "a means to get pulled into the divine presence".[51] This trend seems to have gained so much momentum in Maghrebi Sufism, that we find two influential Sufi movements, namely the Tijānīs and the Kattānīs, which placed the *taṣliya* not only above the traditional Sufi *dhikr*, but also above the Qurʾān recitation itself. At the end of nineteenth century, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī was tried in Marrakesh for heresy. One of the main accusations levelled against him was a statement in which he insisted that his personal *taṣliya* formula was "more efficacious than sixty recitations of the Qurʾān".[52]

These positions on the *taṣliya* offer a stark contrast to that of early Sufis like al-Wāsiṭī. They remind us of the numerous shifts in Islamic theology and mysticism through which the place of the Prophet in Islam has been constantly renegotiated. The role played by Sufis from al-Andalus and North Africa in anchoring the *taṣliya* as a central practice in later Sufism is noteworthy in this discussion. As argued, this trend was carried not only by Sufis, such as Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Mashīsh, or al-Jazūlī, but also by famous Mālikī jurists such as al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, who by reinforcing the centrality of the Prophet in theology and jurisprudence, cemented the importance of these prayers for many generations to come.

Taṣliya as an Islamic Genre

The importance of *taṣliya* in Muslims' religious life is confirmed by the existence of a whole genre, exclusively dedicated to prayers upon the Prophet. In the following, I would like to discuss the typology of the *taṣliya* literary genre and highlight some of the main differences between the various sub-genres contained therein. In his introduction to a recently published eighteenth-century commentary on the *taṣliya* formula of ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh, the editor of the book, Ḥishām b. Muḥammad Ḥayjar al-Ḥasanī, offered an interesting

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50 Chih, "Discussing the Sufism of the Early Modern Period", 117–18.

51 Aḥmad b. ʿAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-qurʾān al-majīd*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd Allāh Qurashī Raslān (Cairo: n.p., 1999), IV/458.

52 Sahar Bazzaz, "Heresy and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Morocco", *Arab Studies Journal* 10–11:2 (2003), 82. For the Tijāniyya, see Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 318–21.

typology of the *taṣliya* literature.[53] He identified seven sub-genres that constitute the *taṣliya* literary genre. These are:

1. General books on the *taṣliya* and its benefits (*kutub ʿāmma*): this type is mainly focused on enumerating the benefits of prayer on the Prophet, its importance for the believer, and its legal ruling in Islamic jurisprudence.

2. The so-called "Books of the Forty" (*kutub al-arbaʿīniyyāt*), which either include forty hadiths on the importance and benefits of the *taṣliya* or a collection of forty formulae attributed to the Prophet and other Muslim figures of the past.

3. Collections of prayers following the Jazulite example of *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt* (*kutub al-dalāʾil*): these booklets comprise relatively long collections of formulae generally designed and structured primarily for daily and weekly recitation.

4. Books containing *taṣliya* formulae attributed to famous Sufi saints (*kutub ṣalawāt al-awliyāʾ*): these works are often collections of prayers attributed to past Sufi shaykhs, explaining their spiritual benefits and advising users on the daily or weekly frequency of their recitation. Unlike the *dalāʾil*-type, works in this category are not designed to be read like a litany.

5. Books of Prayers with specific didactic goals (*al-kutub al-latī wuẓẓifat fīhā l-ṣalawāt li-aghrāḍ muʿayanna*), such as highlighting or teaching certain events from the *sīra* or commenting upon the "perfections" of the Prophet (*al-kamālāt al-muḥammadiyya*).

6. Commentaries on the *dalāʾil*-type of books (*shurūḥ al-dalāʾil*) to explain the mystical-philosophical doctrines behind their formulae.

7. Commentaries on the prayers of the saints (*shurūḥ ṣalawāt al-awliyāʾ*), either in the form of an exegetical commentary (*sharḥ*) or a sub-genre known as *mazj al-ṣalāt* (literally: the blending of the prayer). The latter is basically a *taṣliya*-cum-commentary, i.e., a *taṣliya* divided into different sections which are commented upon with a *taṣliya* formula. These texts are intended to explain the spiritual meanings of formulae attributed to famous Sufi shaykhs by mixing them (*mazj*) with a new prayer of blessing written by the commentator himself. Their primary goal is to show the achieved spiritual mastery of the author and to prove to the readers that he may now be seen as a great Sufi saint himself.

All these sub-genres show the centrality of the Muslim devotion to the Prophet, which also finds expression in other literary genres and practices, such as the

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53   Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Zakrī, *al-Ilmām wa-l-iʿlām bi-nafthat min buḥūr mā taḍammanathu ṣalāt al-quṭb mawlānā ʿAbd al-Salām*, ed. Ḥishām b. Muḥammad Ḥayjar al-Ḥasānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2010), 27–37.

mawlid celebrations and literature and the praise poetry (*maḍh*).[54] It is important to mention here that a whole aesthetic and artistic dimension flourished through the *taṣliya* genres. During the pre-modern period, the symbolic significance of owning an illustrated manuscript copy of *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt* was immense.[55] These elements express a passionate love for the Prophet, which characterized the religious experiences of many Muslims in past centuries. However, these domains of devotional piety became contested in the modern period and were increasingly associated with an "incorrect" religious practice, often perceived as part of the superstitions and heresies that allegedly caused the decline of the Islamic civilization.

8. Against this background, one could argue that a new literary trend and an eighth sub-genre of the *taṣliya* literature made its appearance, mostly amongst modern reformist and Salafi scholars of the twentieth century. This sub-genre consists essentially of writings contesting the *taṣliya* texts and practices of the past and re-claiming the field of the prayers upon the Prophet in the name of a more "authentic" Islam. The Algerian reformist ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Bādīs (d. 1940) wrote a book on the *taṣliya*, where he clearly departed from all the contested formulae and hagiographical elements that characterized this genre in the past.[56] The influential Salafi figure Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999), on the other hand, published one the earliest books dedicated to the prayer of blessing in Islamic history, attributed to the Mālikī scholar Ismāʿīl b. Isḥāq al-Qāḍī (d. 895–6). In his introduction, al-Albānī explains his decision to print this specific manuscript by his eagerness to make available a book on the prayers of blessing that "did not contain any of the topics and superstitions that normally characterize the hagiographical and spiritual books".[57] Today, this trend continues to be strongly reflected in numerous

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54 An important study on the mawlid is Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007). For the praise poems, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems in Praise of Prophet Muḥammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

55 Jan Just Witkam, "Manuscripts Relating to the Prophet", in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ed. Coeli Fitzpatrick, Adam Hani Walker (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2014), 361–64. On the emergence of Medina as a holy city of Islam, see Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

56 ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Bādīs, *al-Ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī*, ed. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Maḥmūd (n.p., 2006), 70–71.

57 Ismāʿīl b. Isḥāq al-Qāḍī, *Faḍl al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), 4.

fatwas circulating online produced by influential Saudi scholars, includ-
ing al-ʿUthaymīn (d. 2001) or Ibn Bāz (d. 1999).[58]

Taṣliya as Identity Marker

The prayers of blessing upon the Prophet have another important function,
i.e., to express sectarian and spiritual identities of their authors and users.
Ignaz Goldziher drew attention to the fact that one of the main points of con-
tention between Muslim groups from the very beginning was the meaning of
the word *āl* (*ālihi*) in the *taṣliya* formulae attributed to the Prophet (*ālihi*: "*ʿalā
Muhāmmad wa-ālihi*").[59] In Arabic, *āl* is a reference to a clan, a genealogical
group between the family and the tribe. Shia Muslims restricted the concept to
ahl al-bayt, Muḥammad's nearest relatives and descendants (Fāṭima, ʿAlī, and
their sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn). On the other hand, Sunni groups enlarged its
meaning to include all companions.[60] Thus, the addition of "*wa ṣaḥbihi*" (and
his companions) to the recipients of the blessing asked for in these prayers
emerged in early Islam as a statement to mark the "non-Shia" identity of those
who rejected the idea of the God's chosen imams. To this day, *Taṣliya* formu-
lae continue to be an important marker of Islamic identities. The formula "O
God, bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and hasten their relief
(*wa-ʿajjil farajahum*)" clearly expresses the Twelver's doctrine on the reappear-
ance of the "occulted" Imām al-Mahdī. A Sunni Muslim would not choose this
version to pray upon the Prophet.[61] In this regard, the contemporary Saudi
scholar Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān (b. 1935) insists that *taṣliya* formulae containing only
blessings upon Muḥammad and his family are a "slogan for the Shia" and must
be avoided, even if this means the disregard of a sound tradition.[62]

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58   See Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn, *Ṣifat al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-nabī*, http://binothaimeen.net/
      content/332 (accessed 19 May 2020); see also Ibn Bāz, *Ṣiyagh al-ṣalāt ʿalā rasūl Allāh*,
      https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/14255/صيغ-الصلاة-على-رسول-الله (accessed 19 May 2020).

59   Goldziher, "Ueber die Eulogien der Muhammedaner", 114ff.

60   This is also the point of view of Ibn ʿArabī: Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne*, 144–45.

61   The original Arabic version: "allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammad wa-āli Muḥammad wa-ʿajjil
      farajahum".

62   Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, *Lā tuṣallū ʿalā āl Muḥammad fī l-tashahhud li-annahā aṣbaḥat min shiʿār
      al-shīʿa,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBJCkiSlPgQ (accessed 06 June 2020) One
      could also add here the discussion about the *tasyīd* in the *taṣliya* prayers, i.e., adding the
      title *sayyidinā* (our master) to the name of the Prophet. This element does not appear in
      the formulae attributed to the Prophet himself but was added later on by Muslims as a
      sign of respect.

In fact, the inclusion of the Prophet's companions among the receivers of blessings bears an unmistakable Sunni allusion to the doctrine of *ʿadālat al-ṣaḥāba* (the integrity of all the Prophet's companions), which is central to the trustworthiness of the Sunni chains of transmission of prophetic traditions.[63] Shia theologians accuse their Sunni counterparts of introducing a blameworthy innovation (*bidʿa*), because the companions were not explicitly mentioned in the formulae attributed to the Prophet. Interestingly, the same argument was echoed in the twentieth century by certain Sunni scholars, such as the Moroccan ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1993). The latter stated that most Sunni Muslims commit an error by including the companions of the Prophet in the prayer of blessing. In this case, al-Ghumārī insisted that the Shiites were indeed following the "real" sunna of the Prophet.[64] His point of view resulted in an intense exchange of accusations between him and al-Albānī who explained that the formulae attributed to the Prophet concerned only the use of *taṣliya* during the obligatory prayer in the *tashahhud*.[65] All these technicalities regarding the inclusion, or not, of the companions of Muḥammad amongst the recipients of blessings in the prayers dedicated to him show the importance of the *taṣliya* formulae in claiming the "real" prophetic praxis and marking sectarian identities. The fourteenth-century Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) insisted that it is reprehensible, and almost forbidden, to make a *taṣliya* upon someone other than the Prophet and the "people of obedience", i.e. the angels, prophets, etc., especially if this prayer becomes a slogan (*shiʿār*) used to highlight someone's superiority over others.[66] The same argument continues to appear in contemporary Salafi fatwas online today.[67]

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63   For more details, see Amr Osman: "*ʿAdālat al-Ṣaḥāba*: The Construction of a Religious Doctrine", *Arabica* 60 (2013), 272–305. The fact that prayers attributed to the Prophet in Sunni literature do not explicitly mention his companions among the receivers of blessings in the *taṣliya* has also led to several intra-Islamic disputes–not only between Shia and Sunna but with Sunnis themselves.

64   ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, *Mawsūʿat al-ʿallāma al-muḥaddith al-mutafannin Sayyidī al-Sharīf ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī*, ed. Maḥmūd Saʿīd b. Muḥammad Mamdūḥ (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2017), XIV/602–05.

65   Cf. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍaʿīfa wa-l-mawḍūʿa wa-atharuhā l-sayyiʾ fī l-umma* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 2004), III/8–14; see also ibid., XII/415–17.

66   Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Jilāʾ al-afhām fī faḍl al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām ʿalā khayr al-anām*, ed. Zāʾid b. Aḥmad al-Nashīrī (Jiddah: Dār ʿĀlam al-Fawāʾid, 2004–05), 574.

67   See Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid, *Ḥukm al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām ʿalā ghayr al-anbiyāʾ*, https://islamqa.info/ar/answers/96125/حكم-الصلاة-والسلام-على-غير-الانبياء (accessed 27 June 2020).

Another important aspect of the *taṣliya* is its role in cementing Sufi identities, particularly in later centuries, as certain prayers became increasingly regarded as "slogans" – to use Ibn al-Qayyim's terminology – of Sufi communities. The formulae in question are often those attributed either to the founder of the order or to a venerated shaykh within it. This does not necessarily imply that Sufi groups exclusively use the prayers of their founding shaykhs. However, it is often the case that the prayers which emerged within a particular *ṭarīqa* – or a sub-branch thereof – are given a special status. The *taṣliya* formulae used in the Tijāniyya order, for instance, are primarily those attributed to its founder Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Annemarie Schimmel observed that "the Tijaniyya recommends the prayer called al-Fātihiyya (sic) more than any other prayer to its followers. The Sanūsiyya, on the other hand, prefers the so-called ʿAẓīmiyya prayer".[68] This remark applies to other Sufi orders, especially those that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the case of the Tijāniyya, the exclusive use of the prayers of the founder, such as the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* or the prayer known as *jawharat al-kamāl* (The Jewel of Perfection), is strongly associated with Aḥmad al-Tijānī's claims of sainthood, distinguishing him from others in the eyes of his followers.[69] Another telling example of this development are the formulae of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī used to this day in the Kattānī order. His prayers became a distinctive element of his spiritual teachings and Sufi path. Among his numerous *ṣalawāt* the one called the "Prayer of the Unmūdhuj" (*al-ṣalāt al-unmūdhujiyya*), a name he chose himself, triggered several polemics and attacks against his person, ultimately leading to his trial in Marrakesh for heresy. al-Kattānī insisted that the word "unmūdhuj" was not a typo of the Arabic word *unmūdhaj* (sometimes pronounced *anmūdhaj*), but rather the expression of a new understanding of high-mystical truths. The term *unmūdhaj* in Sufism is often translated as a prototype and is closely associated with ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī's (d. 1424) doctrine of the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Titus Burkhardt explains that this "prototype" sums up the totality of creation and contains the reflection of all divine qualities.[70] Bending a central mystical-philosophical concept of Sufism

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68   Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 226; for an English translation of al-Tijānī's prayer see ibid., 100.

69   There is strong evidence that *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* was not authored by Aḥmad al-Tijānī himself. For a detailed discussion, see Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 322–25. For an overview about the litanies used of the Tijānī order and the continuous presence of *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in them, see https://tidjaniya.com/ar/أوراد-الطريقة-التجانية/ (accessed 18 February 2020).

70   Titus Burkhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrines* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 66.

in such a manner and making it part of his personal *taṣliya* was for al-Kattānī a way to distinguish his *ṭarīqa* from those of his Sufi predecessors and competitors. Like the Tijānī prayers, the Kattānī formulae became associated with his brand of Sufism and served as a summary of his mystical teachings on the Muḥammadan Reality.[71] Thus, there are many examples that show the importance of *taṣliya* formulae in defining Sufi identities and distinguishing one group's *mashrab* (lit. "drinking place", meaning a mystical inspiration that defines a Sufi shaykh or an order) from the other.

Having said this, it is important to mention that sometimes the adoption of new prayers upon the Prophet often marks the emergence of a new Sufi order, such as the Kattāniyya and the Tijāniyya in the nineteenth century, or a new branch within an existing one. In the fifteenth century, al-Jazūlī was responsible for the emergence of a whole movement of devotion to the Prophet in Morocco and beyond. Today, he continues to be remembered as an important reformer of the Shādhiliyya, mainly because he positioned the Prophet at the center of the mystical endeavour – a doctrinal contribution that was carried to a great extent by his *dalā'il al-khayrāt*.[72] Thus, evidence exists that *taṣliya* formulae have been sometimes used to implement and strengthen new mystical-philosophical doctrines in Sufism. However, this does not always mean that the prayers of the predecessors had to be completely abandoned. In the Shādhilī order, the most popular *taṣliya* formula continues to be *al-ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya*. Holding to the prayer of Ibn Mashīsh was at times a way to maintain the soundness and the authenticity of the Shādhilī tradition, especially in times of great competition between old and Sufi brotherhoods. This was specifically the case during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Morocco, where Shaykh al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1823), another prominent reformer of the Shādhiliyya, chose to preserve the *taṣliya* canon and not to write his own *taṣliya*. Instead, he authored a commentary on the *mashīshiyya* in the form of a *mazj* (see sub-genre 7 above).[73] Fritz Meier stated that he came across a report about al-Darqāwī's alleged advice to one of his disciples, with instructions to profess the second half of the declaration of faith in secret

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71   al-Kattānī authored a long commentary on his *taṣliya*, which became a pillar of his Sufi order. See Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī, *Khabīʾat al-kawn: sharḥ al-ṣalāt al-unmūdhujiyya fī l-maʿārif al-ilāhiyya wa-l-aḥmadiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamza b. ʿAlī al-Kattānī, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2009).

72   Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 269, 273.

73   Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-Tamsamānī, *Adhkār al-darqāwiyya al-shādhiliyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2017), 241–43.

during *dhikr*. Although Meier himself acknowledged that this was very "untypical of the Moroccan shaykh", he listed it as one of the arguments for what he named the "Sufi reservation with regard to the *taṣliya*".[74] The *mazj* of the *ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya* written by al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī must be seen as a defense of the old Shādhilī way and its mystical preeminence in Morocco in the face of powerful newcomers, like the Tijānīs, who put forward a new canon of *ṣalawāt* authored by the founder of the order, Aḥmad al-Tijānī.[75] This is confirmed by Aḥmad b. ʿAjība, a second-generation student of al-Darqāwī, who also encouraged his disciples to follow the same approach and restricted himself to writing a commentary on the *mashīshiyya* instead of authoring his own *taṣliya*.[76]

Taṣliya as the Main Component of Sufi Legacies

In later Sufi sources, a trend seems to have escaped scholars' attention, namely that certain *taṣliya* formulae became identified as a crucial component of a saint's spiritual legacy and a gift to later generations of Muslims.[77] The exact date of this transition is very difficult to determine, but many elements confirm this hypothesis. A very telling example is a story narrated by the fifteenth-century scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/ 1497) and attributed to ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥakam (d. 214/ 829), who is said to have met al-Shafiʿī in one of his dreams. In this story, al-Shāfiʿī is asked about his fate in the afterlife, to which he responds that God had not only granted him mercy and forgave all his sins, but that He also celebrated his arrival in paradise like a "bride is celebrated on her wedding day." ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥakam then wonders about the reasons that earned al-Shāfiʿī such a prestigious reward. The answer he receives is that all of these honors were but the reward for a prayer upon the Prophet contained in al-Shāfiʿī's *al-Risāla*, one of the most influential books of Islamic legal philosophy.[78] The formula in question reads: "Oh God, pray upon Muḥammad as much as (ʿadada) he is being remembered by those who

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74   Meier, *Bemerkungen zur Mohammedverehrung II*, 286.

75   Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 410.

76   Aḥmad b. ʿAjība, *Kitāb sharḥ ṣalāt al-quṭb Ibn Mashīsh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām al-ʿUmrānī al-Khālidī (Casablanca: Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadītha, 1999), 10.

77   One of many examples for this *is al-ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya*, which will be discussed later. This *taṣliya* formula appears in the hagiographical sources clearly as a gift given to Ibn Mashīsh by the Prophet. See Muḥammad al-Marūn, *Shumūs al-anwār wa-maʿādin al-asrār ʿalā ṣalāt al-quṭb mawlānā ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh*, ed. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-Tamsamānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2008), 31.

78   For more information, see Joseph E. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The* Risāla *of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

remember (*al-dhākirūn*) and pray upon Muḥammad as much as the heedless people (*al-ghāfilūn*) are in heedlessness of his remembrance".[79] Similar dream visions confirming the importance of the *taṣliya* are innumerable in Islamic literature. They broadly constitute independent chapters referred to as "*al-marā'ī wa-l-ḥikāyāt*" (dream visions and stories) or "*manāmāt fī faḍl al-ṣalāt*" (dream visions about the benefits of the prayer [upon the Prophet]). The most crucial aspect of this example is that, for later hagiographers, al-Shāfiʿī's legacy was not determined by his contributions to Islamic law or other disciplines, but rather by the importance of his *taṣliya*. Thus, al-Shāfiʿī's "real" legacy was him authoring a personal prayer and gifting it to the *umma*.

Another important factor that might have contributed to the growing importance given to *taṣliya* formulae is the elevation of these prayers into a crucial salvific and transformative practice in Sufism during later centuries. This is manifested through numerous hagiographical stories which present the prayer of blessing as the secret weapon given only to a few people in order to help others on their spiritual journey. Many Sufis claimed to have received this jealously guarded secret either in dream visions or even in an awake state from mystical supernatural figures. *Taṣliya* was the remedy recommended by the king of Jinn, Shamharūsh, considered by some Muslims to be a companion of the Prophet, to change a man's destiny from eternal damnation (*shaqā'*) to eternal felicity (*saʿāda*). It was also the most cherished advice given by al-Khiḍr himself, the mystical companion of Moses in the Qur'ān, to some spiritual seekers.[80] In other cases, *taṣliya* was ascribed the power to transform an illiterate man, such as the Moroccan ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1720), into one of God's most "knowledgeable" saints.[81] Finally, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *taṣliya* becomes in several Moroccan

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79 al-Sakhāwī, *al-Qawl al-badīʿ*, 466. The same vision (with a slight difference) is recounted in another collection of *taṣliya*. This time it is the Prophet himself who personally recounts that he asked God to grant al-Shāfiʿī paradise, because no one before had ever used such a unique formula to pray upon him; cf. Shaʿbān b. Muḥammad al-Qurashī, *Shifā' al-siqām fī nawādir al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām* (n.p., n.d.), 36.

80 For the hadith attributed to Shamharūsh, see Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās wa-muḥādathat al-akyās bi-man uqbira min al-ʿulamā' wa-l-ṣulaḥā' bi-Fās* (Casablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 2004), III/54. For the advice given by al-Khiḍr, see al-Sakhāwī, *al-Qawl al-badīʿ*, 277, 279; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qasṭalānī, *Masālik al-ḥunafā ilā mashāriʿ al-ṣalāt ʿalā l-muṣṭafā ṣallā Allāh ʿalayh wa-sallam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2009), 183–84.

81 Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 377. For more on al-Dabbāgh, see ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold From the Words of Sayyidī ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh*, ed. John O'Kane, Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129.

brotherhoods the undisputed tool to help disciples achieve full immersion into the Muḥammadan Reality.[82]

Against this background, the impression gained from sources is that several Muslim figures of the past have either produced their prayers or have been attributed one, or many, posthumously. Thus, we find that not only companions of the Prophet, members of his family (*ahl al-bayt*), and famous Muslim jurists have had or were ascribed a personal *taṣliya*, but also various Muslim theologians, Sufi saints, and surprisingly, pre-Islamic prophets as well. The following story recounted by Ibn ʿAjība illustrates this trend:

> God had revealed to Mūsā (*awḥā*): O Moses! Do you wish that I become closer to you than your speech to your own tongue; and [closer than] the whisper of your heart to your heart, and your soul to your body, and the light of your sight to your eyes? He replied: Yes Lord. [God] said: You must pray more often upon Muḥammad.[83]

In the text above, it seems that not only "normal" Muslims need to pray as often as possible for their Prophet, but also pre-Islamic prophets are seemingly dependent on the blessings of the *taṣliya* as well. Interestingly, the formula used by Moses can be easily found in some prayer collections.[84] In fact, every great Sufi shaykh and founder of an order seems to have left his personal prayer of blessing: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Rifāʿī (d. 1181), ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 1227), Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿArabī (d. 1240), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Sabʿīn (d. 1271), Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 1389), Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815) – just to name a few –have all left or have been assigned a *taṣliya*.[85] Their formulae are distinguished from each other in appellation, length, terminology, and spiritual benefits. Historicity of texts aside, the large number of existing formulae may be interpreted as a constant effort to claim a privileged relationship with the Prophet. It is in this context that *taṣliya* prayers constitute a main

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82   Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 434.

83   Aḥmad b. ʿAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-qurʾān al-majīd* (Cairo: n.p., 1999), IV/459.

84   The judge and Sufi author Yūsuf al-Nabhānī (d. 1932) includes it in his collection of *taṣliya* formulae under the title "*ṣalāt sayyidinā Mūsā*". He comments that Shaykh Abd Allāh al-Hārūshī, another collector and author of *ṣalawāt* upon the Prophet insisted that this particular formula stems directly from Moses, who wished to become part of Muḥammad's community and started to use his own *taṣliya* formula to achieve that goal. Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, *Saʿādat al-dārayn fī l-ṣalāt ʿalā sayyid al-kawnayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 236.

85   These prayers are available in a variety of *taṣliya* collections; cf. ibid.

component of a shaykh's spiritual legacy.[86] The doctrines expressed in them offer valuable insights on claimed relationships between Sufi masters and the Prophet as the source of mystical knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising that even in present times many shaykhs continue to be remembered primarily for their *taṣliya* formula. The prayer of ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh is a good example.[87] The very fact that the *ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya* received enormous attention from spiritual seekers, both within and beyond the Shādhilī Sufi family, makes it a pillar of his spiritual legacy. Several commentaries have been written to explain its meanings, and an important number of Sufi shaykhs, mostly Shādhilī, have composed a so-called *mazj al-ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya* (see *taṣliya* sub-genre number 7) to connect themselves to his spiritual legacy.[88] Another example is the above-mentioned fifteenth-century collection of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 1465), *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt*. In Marrakesh, where al-Jazūlī is buried, he is considered as one of the seven patron saints of the city (*sabʿatu rijāl*). Many people today continue to gather weekly in his mausoleum to read collectively his *taṣliya* collection. They are known in the cities' Sufi circles as *aṣḥāb al-ḍalīl* or *mmālīn al-dalīl*, which in Moroccan colloquial Arabic means the people of the *dalīl* (singular of *dalāʾil*). Here we have the example of a Sufi community socially identified and referred to by others not on the basis of its *ṭarīqa's* or shaykh's name, but rather according to the *taṣliya* collection its members are attached to.

All these examples are an acknowledgement of the significance of the prayers of blessing and them being perceived as an integral part of the spiritual legacy of their authors. This trend is by no means restricted to the two examples discussed above. On the contrary, many other prayers have received similar attention, such as *al-ṣalāt al-akbariyya* attributed to Ibn ʿArabī. Furthermore, some of these shaykhs have left personal commentaries on their own prayers, an indicator of the importance they attached to them.

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86   Cf. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 167.

87   See Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kamashkhānawī al-Naqshabandī al-Mujaddidī al-Khālidī, *Majmūʿat al-aḥzāb al-shādhiliyya li-l-quṭb Abī al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī wa-li-sāʾir shuyūkh al-ṭarīqa al-ʿaliyy*a. (Beirut: Kitāb Nāshirūn, 2013), 97–98; and see "*al-ṣalāt al-mashīshiyya al-mamzūja*", ibid., 102–05.

88   For a list of some of the commentaries dedicated to the *mashīshiyya*, see Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-Tamsamānī, *Riyāḍ al-raqāʾiq wa-ḥiyāḍ al-ḥaqāʾiq ʿalā ṣalāt al-quṭb al-fāʾiq mawlānā ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2017), 507–09. The list is not exhaustive as many commentaries are still in manuscript form, buried in oblivion in public and private libraries across the Muslim world.

Taṣliya as Expression and Vector of Mystical Meaning

One of the main arguments of this article is *that taṣliya* formulae are often seen as the expression of mystical-philosophical teachings. In other words, they are perceived as proofs of the high levels of mystical knowledge (*maʿrifa*) claimed by their authors. To better understand this aspect, it is important to discern how some Sufi authors described the process that brings about these prayers, like a gift, from the invisible into the visible realm. In this regard, the sixteenth-century Algerian author al-Kharrūbī al-Ṭarābulsī (d. 1555/56) writes:

> The lights of love overflow their [the authors of *taṣliya* formulae] hearts and souls. Their tongues start expressing the meanings of what their inward dimensions have experienced from the Muhammadan light, and what has been unveiled to their souls from the perfection of the Aḥmadan secret (*al-sirr al-aḥmadī*). Yet, no one among them can attain the ultimate goal, even if his verbal expression did. Because the Prophet's rank cannot be reached, no matter how polished and sophisticated the mystical knowledge of the mystic is.[89]

The prayer of blessing is presented here as the fruit of the mystical unveiling that occurs when a Sufi encounters the depths of the Muḥammadan Reality. Thus, the *taṣliya* formula is the verbal expression of the mystical encounter claimed by its author. This understanding of the nature of *taṣliya* is crucial to comprehending its later importance in Sufi milieus. Previous studies have confirmed that *taṣliya* formulae are bearers of mystical doctrines associated with the idealization of the Prophet. In this regard, Vincent Cornell explains that al-Jazūlī's *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt* contains abundant proof of his reliance on both al-Jīlī's doctrine of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and Ibn ʿArabī's concept of the Muḥammadan Reality. al-Jazūlī's description of the Prophet as "the person who is the quintessence of existence and the cause for all that exists" as well as his deconstruction of the Arabic root of the name Muḥammad (*ḥmd*) as "the *ḥāʾ* of divine mercy (*raḥma*), the *mīm* of creation (*mulk*), and the *dāl* of everlastingness (*dawām*)" are for Cornell a clear indication that the author of the *Dalāʾil* was relying on the mystical-philosophical concepts of his Sufi predecessors.[90]

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89   al-Marūn, *Shumūs al-anwār*, 487.

90   Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 212.

There is strong textual evidence that several Sufi communities read the prayers of blessings of their shaykhs with the intention of exploring the spiritual meanings hidden in them. This type of reading has a long history in Sufism. It is referred to as *al-tafsīr al-ishārī* (allegorical exegesis).[91] The same approach is also known in biblical scholarship as the anagogical reading of the text, meaning it focuses primarily on the vertical spiritual dimension of biblical literature.[92] In Islamic studies, the French Orientalist Louis Massignon insisted that the words used by Sufis to describe their "goût expérimental incomparable" are not some, in his own words, "images décalquées d'objets sensibles, ou des schémas de charpente des concepts rationnels," but rather "des allusions indiquant des réalités spirituelles, des 'vertus' sanctifiantes que seule la pratique persistante d'une règle de vie concertée permet de découvrir, de savourer; en les acquérant graduellement".[93] Massignon continues: "Le mystique attentif saisit en toute phrase, en toute action, même la plus minime en apparence, le sens anagogique (*moṭṭalaʿ*), un appel divin. Et le dialogue peut alors commencer entre l'âme humble et recueillie, et la transcendante Sagesse divine."[94] Following this line of thought, the impression gained from the sources is that the terminology used in the prayers of blessing was thoughtfully chosen to open a channel of communication for the disciples with the Muḥammadan Reality. This point of view is confirmed by various commentators. The seventeenth-century Moroccan author al-Ḥasan al-Zayyātī (d. 1614/15) described his meditation on the *mashīshiyya* as follows:

> During my recitations [of the *mashīshiyya*], I often meditated on its composition (*tarkībahā*), in order to bring the heart in agreement with the tongue. This meditation continued for a while. Then, I decided to write down what I was revealed about it in the following few pages to help me understand it even more and make it easier [for me] to access in my note-

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91   For a good overview, see Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), especially chapter 3.

92   The four levels of meanings of the text in biblical exegesis are: the literal, the allegorical, the moral (or tropological), and the anagogical. Throughout the Middle Ages, the anagogical meaning was often restricted to the eschatological interpretation of the Bible or a text. However, scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that the concept of "anagogical sense" has a much broader meaning primarily referring to the spiritual dimension of a text. Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–2.

93   Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1922), 97.

94   Ibid., 99.

book. So, I obeyed the order given to me by this spiritual inspiration (*al-wārid*) and I wrote [this commentary] not to take off some of its veils, or penetrate one of its jealously guarded secrets,[95] but rather to gather what my imagination was letting me think about it.[96]

The anagogical dimension of these texts is further confirmed by the mere existence of a rich commentary tradition. It includes not only commentaries authored by Sufi disciples and later masters, but also some attributed to the authors of the prayers themselves.[97] In several cases, we find textual evidence that certain Sufi communities held *taṣliya* formulae in high esteem because they believed that they contained a hidden mystical knowledge. Two examples suffice here: the first is from Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥamūmī (d. 1849/50), a Moroccan Sufi commentator of the *mashīshiyya*, who insisted that "the words of the shaykh [Ibn Mashīsh] in his prayer are a proof of his high spiritual rank, his deep mystical knowledge, his sincerity in love, and the mastery he achieved in the spiritual station of unity and nearness".[98] The second one is from Ibn ʿAjība, who explains in his commentary dedicated to one of the *taṣliyas* attributed to Ibn ʿArabī that these prayers are composed by two types of men: the people of the outward reality (*ahl al-ẓāhir*) and the great saints. The main difference, he explains, is that while the first group praises the Prophet's outward appearance, the second sees only his "inward secret and primordial light".[99] For Ibn ʿAjība, the prayers of Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Mashīsh express mystical encounters with the hidden reality of Muḥammad, i.e. his supra-historical persona. The latter remains inaccessible to those focusing on his historical persona alone. The idea that the secrets of certain *taṣliya* formulae are unreachable for the non-initiated is indeed a leitmotif encountered in several commentaries on these prayers. This is probably the reason why someone like Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī, who in the same fashion as Ibn ʿArabī claimed to be a "seal of the saints" (*khatm al-awliyāʾ*) in his own

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95   Literally: "to break the quality of her hymen" (*iftiḍāḍ li-jawdati bakāratihā*).

96   al-Marūn, *Shumūs al-anwār,* 473.

97   For a good overview on the commentaries written on the *mashīshiyya*, see al-Tamsamānī, *Riyāḍ al-raqāʾiq*; see also al-Marūn, *Shumūs al-anwār*. Examples of commentaries dedicated to the *ṣalawāt* of Ibn ʿArabī are Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Qādirī, *Sharḥ al-ṣalāt al-akbariyya li-l-shaykh al-akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 2009); ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī, *Sharḥ al-ṣalāt al-kubrā li-l-shaykh al-akbar Ibn ʿArabī*, (Beirut: Nāshirūn, 2012); Ibn ʿAjība, S*harḥ ṣalāt al-quṭb Ibn Mashīsh*, 41–47. An example of a shaykh who wrote commentaries on his own *ṣalawāt* is al-Kattānī, see al-Kattānī, *Khabīʾat al-kawn.*

98   al-Tamsamānī*, Riyāḍ al-raqāʾiq*, 65.

99   Ibn ʿAjība, *Sharḥ ṣalāt al-quṭb Ibn Mashīsh*, 41.

right, took it upon himself to comment his own prayers – perhaps as a way of saying that no one would ever reach his spiritual level and be able to unlock the secrets of his *taṣliya* formulae.[100]

The idea that mystical-philosophical doctrines expressed in prayers of blessing are a confirmation of the deep mystical knowledge and advancement of their authors has already been addressed in previous studies.[101] However, the fact that commentaries on famous *taṣliya* formulae were also used to prove the commentators' mystical maturity is an element that seems to have escaped the attention of scholars. In his commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ*, the eighteenth-century scholar al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791) stated about the *taṣliyas* attributed to Ibn ʿArabī that: "only the one who comes close to his spiritual taste and mystical knowledge can encompass all their secrets".[102] The same al-Zabīdī was keen to indicate that he had written commentaries on some of the Akbarian *taṣliyas* in his book *Raḥīq al-mudām al-makhtūm*.[103] We can see here that commentaries on famous *taṣliyas* were sometimes used to cement an author's mystical claims. Other commentators mentioned that they had to ask their shaykhs for permission (*idhn*) before embarking on such an exegetical journey. An example for that is Ibn ʿAjība who explained that he had to ask his shaykh, Muḥammad al-Būzīdī (d. 1814), to grant him permission, in order to unlock the complex spiritual meanings of Ibn ʿArabī's prayer. For him, this permission was a spiritual authorization allowing him to grasp the terminology, meanings, and hidden secrets of the *taṣliya* in question.[104] The same argument can be found in other commentaries. Muḥammad al-Khalānjī (d. 1866/67) and Abū Bakr al-Bannānī (1867/68), both Sufi commentators of the *mashīshiyya*, also emphasized the importance of the permission needed from the shaykh and his spiritual support to make the hidden secrets of the prayer of Ibn Mashīsh accessible to them.[105] What is interesting here is that the commentary on the prayer does not always need to be in written form. The illiterate eighteenth-century saint ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh is reported to have given an oral commentary of certain difficult verses of the *mashīshiyya* and al-Jazūlī's

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[100] His most important commentary: *Khabīʾat al-kawn*.

[101] Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 173.

[102] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1994), III/289. For more information on al-Zabīdī's life and work, see Stefan Reichmuth, *The World of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1732–91): Life, Networks and Writings* (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009).

[103] al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda*, III/289.

[104] Ibn ʿAjība, *Sharḥ ṣalāt al-quṭb Ibn Mashīsh*, 41.

[105] al-Tamsamānī, *Riyāḍ al-raqāʾiq*, 43; al-Marūn, *Shumūs al-anwār*, 45.

Dalāʾil.[106] It was his claimed mystical insight into Muḥammadan Reality that qualified and allowed him to comment on his predecessor's prayers.

Conclusion

This article is an attempt to draw attention to the unexplored potential of *taṣliya* texts and genres as an invaluable source for the study of Sufi doctrines and practices. While previous studies have noticed the importance of the prayers upon the Prophet and their different uses in Muslim religious life and culture, their essential value, especially in later Sufi contexts, has been mostly overlooked. These *taṣliya* formulae and the different genres that evolved around them are first and foremost texts on the Prophet. As such they offer valuable insights into how Muslims at various points in time imagined, experienced, conceived, and talked about Muḥammad. Consequently, in the realm of Sufism, these *taṣliya* formulae represent much more than just an invocation or a means given by a shaykh to his disciples to achieve or obtain something. As texts, they are in fact the verbal expressions of the mystical encounters claimed by their authors with the Muḥammadan Reality. This element is clearly reflected in the Sufi approaches and genres that evolved around them. Furthermore, it also explains the importance given by various Sufi communities to hagiographical accounts that narrate their genesis, commentaries dedicated to them, their role in shaping Sufi identities, and lastly, their contribution to centuries-old discussions about the cosmic importance of the Prophet and the importance of his spiritual heirs.

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106   ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Lamaṭī, *Pure Gold*, 747–49.