

Sufism in Ottoman Egypt: Circulation, Renewal and Authority in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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This book examines Sufism in Ottoman Egypt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Contrary to the traditional historiography that interpreted these two centuries as a period of stagnation and/or decline for Sufism and Sufi scholars, Rachida Chih argues that these centuries were fruitful, productive, and dynamic for Sufism in Ottoman Egypt. Chih builds her narrative around the mobilization and interaction of ideas, people, and institutions, focusing her thesis on the Khalwatiyya Sufi order.

In the first chapter, the author describes how Ottoman Egypt of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a lively destination for ethnically and socio-economically diverse religious scholars from various Ottoman provinces. Al-Azhar served as a significant meeting point for scholars both in the formation and function of this intellectual network, which was notable as al-Azhar was dominated both intellectually and administratively by scholars who were followers of the Khalwatiyya Sufi path. The author also shows that this dynamic circulation was

enriched by the mobility of scholars and students in al-Azhar, together with the service of mushrooming religious institutions such as madrasas, mosques, and zawiyas.

In the second chapter, the author outlines the spiritual and practical principles of the Khalwatiyya Sufi order through examination of three handbooks written by Qāsim al-Khāni (d. 1697), Muḥammad al-Munīr al-Samanūdi (d. 1785), and Aḥmad al-Dardīr (d. 1786). While al-Khāni's work was more concerned with the spiritual aspect of the Sufi path, such as methods of the spiritual journey towards God (*sulūk*), the other two works focused on practical principles such as dhikr ceremonies and mutual responsibilities of master (shaykh) and disciple. By indicating the commonalities of these works, specifically where it comes to the propagation and pedagogy of the Sufi order, Chih also points out the increasing popularity of the handbook genre and transmission of knowledge in the Sufi environment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Ottoman Egypt.

The third chapter of the book is devoted to a discussion of a particular concept, the Muhammadan path (*ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*), and the conceptualization of the term by contemporary Sufis. The chapter begins with discussion and critique of the term 'neo-Sufism', a term invented by Fazlur Rahman. Chih then illustrates how the concept 'Muhammadan path' was formulated by Sufis and evolved through scholarly circulation. For this purpose, the author scrutinizes various genres and practices interrelated with the Muhammadan path such as *taṣliya* (the invocation of God's blessing upon the Prophet Muḥammad), *mawlid* (the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad) and *mi'raj* (celestial ascension of Prophet Muḥammad) narratives.

In the final chapter, the author discusses the sainthood cult through the examination of the hagiography of Shaykh al-Hifnī (d. 1767), who was one of the most influential Khalwatiyya sheikhs in eighteenth-century Ottoman Egypt. Chih provides a detailed examination of al-Hifnī's hagiography composed by 'Alī Shamma al-Fuwwī al-Makkī (d. 1763). She shows that the sainthood cult was highly embedded in the Prophetic heritage, as al-Hifnī's hagiography constantly draws parallels between the paradigmatic life of the Prophet and al-Hifnī. The chapter continues

with analyzing al-Hifni's social and political authority and his influence on political elites. The rest of the chapter focuses on reactions to Sufism as it was exemplified by the *Kadızedeli* movement (an anti-Sufi and puritanical religious movement) in the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Wahhabism on the Arabian Peninsula.

Given the scarcity of studies in Western languages on the topic, this book fills a gap in the literature. It will prove an invitation for further research not for only researchers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but also for researchers of the long nineteenth century. The high number of primary sources in Arabic that the author utilized constitutes another factor that makes this study valuable. Nevertheless, there are a few shortcomings that need to be addressed. Although Chih attempts to reveal the relationship between Sufis and political elites in the final chapter, these efforts lack detail. A more thorough analysis of the relationship would have better supported the purpose of the study. Another deficiency, considering the abundance of archival materials on the subject in Ottoman archives, is that the author does not utilize primary sources in Turkish. This inhibits a fuller understanding of how Sufi scholars of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Egypt were interrelated with the rest of the Ottoman world. These shortcomings aside, this book is well-structured and rich. It will remain a significant reference for those who conduct research on Egyptian Sufism.

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