

Studies in Islamic Mysticism

Volume II

Reynold A. Nicholson



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PREFACE

As was explained in the preface to my *Studies in Islamic Poetry*, the following essays conclude a series of five, which fall into two groups and are therefore published in separate volumes. While mysticism, save for a few casual references, found no place in the studies on the *Lubābu 'l-Albāb* of 'Awfī and the *Luzūmiyyāt* of Abu 'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī, in these now brought together it has taken entire possession of the field. Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ, indeed, is an exquisite poet; and the picture of Abú Sa'íd ibn Abi 'l-Khayr, drawn by pious faith and coloured with legendary romance, may be looked upon as a work of art in its way. But on the whole the literary interest of the present volume is subordinate to the religious and philosophical. I have tried to make the reader acquainted with three Ṣúfis famous in the East and worthy of being known in Europe. Most of what has hitherto been written concerning Abú Sa'íd begins and ends with the quatrains passing as his, though (for the chief part, at any rate) they were neither composed nor recited by him. As to Jīlī, the masterly sketch in Dr Muḥammad Iqbāl's *Development of Metaphysics in Persia* stands almost alone. Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ had the misfortune to be translated by Von Hammer, and the first intelligent or intelligible version of his great *Tá'iyya* appeared in Italy four years ago. It will be seen that the subjects chosen illustrate different aspects of Ṣúfism and exhibit racial contrasts, of which perhaps the importance has not yet been sufficiently recognised. Abú Sa'íd, the free-thinking free-living dervish, is a Persian through and through, while Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ in the form of his poetry as well as in the individuality of his spiritual enthusiasm displays the narrower and tenser genius of the Semite. Nearly a third of this volume is concerned with a type of Ṣúfism, which—

as represented by Ibnu 'l-'Arabí and Jílí—possesses great interest for students of medieval thought and may even claim a certain significance in relation to modern philosophical and theological problems. Mysticism is such a vital element in Islam that without some understanding of its ideas and of the forms which they assume we should seek in vain to penetrate below the surface of Mohammedan religious life. The forms may be fantastic and the ideas difficult to grasp; nevertheless we shall do well to follow them, for in their company East and West often meet and feel themselves akin.

I regret that I have not been able to make full use of several books and articles published during the final stages of the war or soon afterwards, which only came into my hands when these studies were already in the press. Tor Andrae's *Die person Muhammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde* (Upsala, 1917) contains by far the best survey that has yet appeared of the sources, historical evolution and general characteristics of the Mohammedan Logos doctrine. This, as I have said, is the real subject of the *Insánu 'l-Kámil*. Its roots lie, of course, in Hellenism. Andrae shows how the notion of the *θεῖος ἄνθρωπος* passed over into Islam through the Shí'ites and became embodied in the Imám, regarded as the living representative of God and as a semi-divine personality on whom the world depends for its existence. Many Shí'ites were in close touch with Šúfism, and there can be no doubt that, as Ibn Khaldún observed, the Shí'ite Imám is the prototype of the Šúfistic Qutb. It was inevitable that the attributes of the Imám and Qutb should be transferred to the Prophet, so that even amongst orthodox Moslems the belief in his pre-existence rapidly gained ground. Particularly instructive to students of the *Insánu 'l-Kámil* is Andrae's account of the Logos doctrine of Ibnu 'l-'Arabí, whose influence is manifest in every page that Jílí wrote. In this connexion another book by another Swedish scholar—H. S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabí* (Leiden, 1919)—provides new and valuable material. The introduction, to which I have now and then referred in the footnotes, not only elucidates the mystical philosophy of the *Insánu 'l-Kámil*

but enables us to trace in detail the indebtedness of Jilí to his great predecessor. In the 16th and 17th centuries the *Insánu 'l-Kámil* exerted a powerful influence upon Indonesian Šúfism, which has been studied by the Dutch Orientalists D. A. Rinkes, B. J. O. Schrieke, and H. Kraemer. I should like to call attention to the account given by the last-named scholar in *Een Javaansche primbon uit de zestiende eeuw* (Leiden, 1921), p. 40 foll. and p. 83 foll.

Some months after my work had gone to the press, I received from Prof. C. A. Nallino an off-print of his article *Il poema mistico arabo d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ in una recente traduzione italiana*¹, from which I learned that a prose translation by Sac. Ignazio Di Matteo of Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ's most celebrated ode, the *Tā'iyyatu 'l-Kubrā*, had been published in 1917 at Rome. As this book was reproduced in autograph for private circulation, it would have been inaccessible to me, if the author had not kindly presented me with a copy. He replied to Nallino in a paper entitled *Sulla mia interpretazione del poema mistico d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (RDSO., 1920, vol. VIII. 479-500), which was immediately followed by a second article from Nallino, *Ancora su Ibn al-Fāriḍ e sulla mistica musulmana* (*ibid.* vol. VIII. 501-562). Having myself attempted to translate the *Tā'iyya*, I am impressed with the merit of Di Matteo's version rather than inclined to dwell on its faults. He has given us, for the first time, a careful and tolerably correct rendering of the original; and that is no slight achievement. The articles by Nallino, which include a critical examination of numerous passages in the poem, are the most important contribution that any European Orientalist has so far made to the study of Ibnu 'l-Fāriḍ. In an essay consisting largely of translations, I could but indicate (pp. 193-5 *infra*) my views on the main question which he has discussed in his friendly controversy with Di Matteo. To him, as to me, it seems clear that the view put forward by Di Matteo is erroneous. Neither the form nor the substance of the *Tā'iyya* suggests that it was inspired by Ibnu 'l-'Arabí, though some traces of his influence may perhaps be found in

¹ Published in *Rivista degli studi orientali* (1919), vol. VIII. 1-106.

it¹. It differs in kind from poems indubitably so inspired, such as the *'Ayniyya* of Jílí. Above all, it is a mystic's autobiography, a poet's description of his inner life, and the terms which it employs belong to the psychological vocabulary of Šúfism, with few exceptions. I have no quarrel with those who call Ibnu 'l-Fárid a pantheist; but his pantheism (unlike that of his commentators) is essentially a state of feeling, not a system of thought. The poem, however, requires explanation, and I do not think it can be interpreted without reference to the corresponding philosophical doctrine. In other words, if we are to elicit any definite meaning from the symbols which shadow forth a consciousness of mystical union, we must somehow connect them with metaphysical propositions. But although mysticism is not an allegory, still less is it a theology or philosophy. Hence the sayings of "God-intoxicated" men will not serve as a sure criterion of their attitude towards religion. Moslems themselves, as a rule, want better evidence of heresy than this.

I desire to express my gratitude to Prof. C. A. Nallino and Sac. Ignazio Di Matteo for their gifts of books and for the courtesy which accompanied them; to Mr A. G. Ellis for the loan of his copy of the *Insánu 'l-Kámil*; and to the authorities of the India Office Library for placing at my disposal the manuscripts mentioned on p. 77 *infra*. Especial thanks are due to Mr Rhuvon Guest, who most generously sent me his unpublished translation of the *Tá'iyya* of Ibnu 'l-Fárid and allowed me to use it for the purpose of correcting and improving my own, before the latter was in print. Mr Guest's version, while keeping very close to the original, is thoughtful and judicious, and I found it of great service in dealing with passages which to me seemed obscure. If I have sometimes preferred my interpretation to his, he has at least as often

¹ There is no trustworthy basis (cf. p. 164 *infra*) for the statement that Ibnu 'l-Fárid was acquainted with Ibnu 'l-'Arabi. The latter is said to have asked the poet's permission to write a commentary on his *Tá'iyya*, and to have received the reply that the *Futúḥátu 'l-Makkiyya* was a commentary on it (Maqqarí, Leiden ed., I. 570, 16-18); this, however, is the kind of story that could scarcely fail to be invented. The *Futúḥát* was completed in A.H. 629, only three years before the death of Ibnu 'l-Fárid.

convinced me that his was more likely to be the right one. Besides thanking the scholars who have helped me in the second part of these studies, I wish to acknowledge the appreciative criticism which the first volume has received. Both Nöldeke and Goldziher have declared their agreement with the view there taken of the character of Ma'arrí. The remarks of my old teacher, Prof. Nöldeke, are so interesting that I cannot refrain from quoting them:

In der Gesamtauffassung des Dichters und Denkers muss ich Ihnen durchweg beistimmen. Zunächst darin, dass M. kein Muslim mehr war, sondern als einzigen, allerdings festen Punct aus der religiösen Ueberlieferung das Vorhandensein eines allmächtigen Gottes behielt, der in seiner Willkür so ziemlich dem koranischen gleich. Dabei halte ich es immerhin für möglich, dass M. hie und da auch sonst an Einzelheiten der Lehre Muhammeds festhielt, je nach verschiedenen Zeiten und Stimmungen. Dass die Widersprüche innerhalb der Sammlung nicht alle auf absichtliche Täuschung herauskommen, möchte ich damit betonen. Welche Weltanschauung und welche Dogmatik ist ohne innere Widersprüche? Das christliche Dogma habe ich hier vor Allem im Auge; ich meine die Dogmatik aller christlichen Confessionen. ...Was man auch an M. aussetzen mag, man muss vor seiner Selbständigkeit doch die grösste Achtung haben. Wie eigen berühren uns nr. 117-119, worin die Fürsten als Diener und Besoldete des Volkes erscheinen, bei einem Orientalen! (Friedrich der Grosse dachte wenigstens *theoretisch* auch so.) So fern uns oder mir (da ich mich doch als strenger Rationalist ihm verwandt fühle) seine übertriebene Askese liegt, die z. B. nicht berücksichtigt, dass "Die grossen Fische fressen stets die kleinen," dass die Singvögel grösstenteils von Insecten leben und dazu, dass wir Menschen von den Tieren direct oder indirect aufgefressen würden, wenn wir sie nicht vielfach töteten, so muss man doch auch in der Hinsicht vor ihm Achtung haben. Wenn er den Wein verabscheut, so muss man bedenken, dass dieser damals wie jetzt (namentlich bei den Persern) ganz besonders dazu diente, rasch sinnlos betrunken zu werden (cfr. Gen. xliii. 34, וישכרו). Der Standpunct war also vernünftiger als der der americanischen Gesetzgebung, die das Kind mit dem Bade ausschüttet. Wie verständig ist M. auch darin, dass er nicht an dem fast zum Dogma der islamischen Ueberlieferung gewordenen Satze festhielt, dass die Menschen in früheren Zeiten besser gewesen wären als die Zeitgenossen (nr. 162, 4 als zweifelhaft, 146, 3 bestimmt ausgesprochen)! Vermutlich wollte er damit besonders den Vorzug der "Genossen des Propheten" treffen.

Prof. Nöldeke laid me under a further obligation by reading the text of the pieces selected from the *Luzúmiyyát* and proposing a number of emendations. These are given below, together with some which I owe to the kindness of Prof. Bevan. Misprints are included, and the English version has been corrected in a few places where, as Prof. Bevan pointed out, the original was mistranslated or not fully understood.

P. 66, No. 20, first line. *Read*

"Ah, let us go, whom nature joined of old in friendship fast."

P. 79, No. 52, eighth line. *Read*

"With blackness of stony wastes, parched desolate highlands."

P. 101, note 4. "The dark raiment" (شبة العظم) refers to Death. "Er (Abú Muslim) hatte der Dynastie treu gedient: darauf bekleidete die ihn mit der Farbe der Finsterniss" (N.).

P. 109, No. 124. Although I have deliberately rendered الكلام كلوم by "words are wounds," that rendering gives too wide an application to the Arabic phrase. As the context shows, الكلام has here its technical meaning and refers to the dialectic of the *mutakallimún* (scholastic theologians).

P. 116, No. 144, lines 5-6. *Read*

"Be just and live on earth what can?
And none is more unjust than Man."

In the original, فوق الارض stands for فوقها (B.).

P. 121, No. 163, third line. *Read*

"Thou deem'st thy being here calamity."

P. 123, No. 171, third line. *Read*

"If nonsense be all the coin we exchange, then better."

P. 132, No. 192, last line. *Read*

"To succour, and shall surpass in excellence Hájb's bow."

Note 2 should be deleted. For "Hájb's bow" see *Naqá'id*, 462 (B.).

P. 141, seventh line from foot. By an oversight, "Jáhibz" has been written instead of "Abú 'Abdallah al-Khwárizmí."

P. 145, note 1. The animal called by the Arabs الفهد and by the Persians يوز is not the lynx but, as Prof. Nöldeke reminds me, the hunting-leopard (*cynaelurus*), commonly known in Europe as the cheetah.

P. 157, note 2, last line. *Read* قُبْلَهُ for قَبْلَهُ.

P. 165, note 2, first line. *Read* فَبِيحَ for قَبِيحَ.

P. 167, No. 240, first verse. *Read*

"Say to wine, which is a foe to (men's) understandings, ever drawing against them the swords of a warrior."

Nöldeke writes: "240, 1 ist **سَيُوفٌ** doch wohl richtig, da **نُضًا** schwerlich als Intransitiv gebraucht werden kann. **نُهي** wird als Fem. gebraucht, Ibn Qotaiba, 'Uyūn, 277, 2, wie es ja regelrechter Plural von **نُهْيَةٌ** ist (Baidāwī zu Sūra XX, 56, 128); und so passt das **لها** gut."

P. 178, No. 264, first verse. For "my nose" read "noses."

P. 191, No. 301, second verse. Read "howbeit akin to them are stones that were kicked."

P. 192, No. 303, second verse. Read

"But pardon me, O my God! At Mecca shall I throw off

Amongst pilgrims newly come the weeds of a widowed frame."

Prof. Bevan justly observes that **سَلِيبٌ** in conjunction with **ثِيَابٌ** can scarcely have any other meaning than "a woman who is wearing the black garments of mourning." Moreover, although **طَرَحَ**, when followed by **على**, can be used of "throwing on (a garment)," it properly means "to throw off." I suggest that **سَلِيبٌ** denotes here the poet's body, which—as bereaved of sight, strength, and all its pleasures—he compares to a woman clad in mourning, while **ثِيَابٌ** refers to the garments which would be laid aside on assuming the *iḥrām*.

P. 204, No. 326, lines 3–4. The general sense is given correctly, but I should have noticed that the words **بالحمد والإخلاص** allude to two short Sūras of the Koran, viz. Sūra 1 (cf. the Commentary of Baydāwī, ed. Fleischer, p. 3, l. 6) and Sūra CXII. These are contrasted with the two long Sūras mentioned in note 1.

P. 216, No. 30, v. 8. For **الخلقُ** read **المخلوقُ**.

P. 220, No. 40, v. 16. For **يُعَدِّي** read **يُعَرِّي** (B.).

P. 228, No. 69, v. 3. For **حَلِيلَهَا** read **خَلِيلَهَا** (B.).

P. 229, No. 72, v. 8. **خَامِلٌ** (B.) is better than **خَامدٌ**.

P. 237, No. 107, v. 5. Read **على غَضَبٍ**, "im Zorne" (N.).

P. 240, No. 115, v. 3. For **قَبْلُ** read **قَبْلُ**.

P. 246, No. 143, v. 2. For **لَا قَبْحُ** read **أَقْبَحُ** (N.).

P. 248, No. 149, v. 4. For **الْفَتْحُ** read **الْفَتْحُ**.

Ibid. For **وَالْمَرْعُ** read **وَالْمَرْعُ**. Cf. Wellhausen, *Scholien zum Diwan Ḥuḡaīl*, 277, 5 (ZDMG., xxxix, 479) and *Lisān*, x, 211, 4 fr. foot and foll. "Die Bedeutung scheint 'Wachtel' zu sein" (N.).

P. 251, No. 163, v. 2. For **وَيَعْدُ** read **وَتَعْدُ** (B.).

P. 251, No. 167, v. 1. For *بِخِلَاصٍ* read *بِخِلَاصٍ*.

P. 253, No. 174, v. 6. For *سَقِيًّا* read *سَقِيًّا*.

P. 255, No. 181, v. 3. For *جَلَّى* read *جَلَّى*, "ihre Geheimnisse mit Wissen aufdeckt = klar erkennt. *جَلَّى* und *سَرَّ* bilden ja natürliche Gegensätze" (N.).

P. 262, No. 210, v. 4. For *مَنْصَبٌ* read *مَنْصَبٌ* (B.).

P. 265, No. 225, v. 2. For *يَاذُنْ* read *يَاذُنْ*.

P. 266, No. 229, v. 6. For *مُتَوَاقِفِينَ* read *مُتَوَاقِفِينَ*.

P. 268, No. 238, v. 1. For *كُتِبَ* read *كُتِبَ*.

P. 269, No. 240, v. 1. For *سُيُوفٌ* read *سُيُوفٌ* (N.).

P. 274, No. 262, v. 2. For *الْخِذْمُ* read *الْخِذْمُ*.

P. 274, No. 264, v. 1. For *الْأَنْفُ* read *الْأَنْفُ* (N.).

P. 277, No. 274, v. 7. There is, of course, a word-play here, as *ظَلِيمٌ* can also mean "the male ostrich" and *نَعَامَةٌ* "the female ostrich." Nöldeke suggests that the sense may be, "Fear the prayer of an oppressed man on behalf of his wife."

P. 279, No. 284, v. 1. Read *تَقْلُ* for *تَقْلُ*.

P. 282, No. 302, v. 4. Read *قَرَاهَا* for *قَرَاهَا* (the rhyme-word).

P. 286, No. 318, v. 1. If *يَجْزَى* be retained, its subject is the individual implied by the preceding words. The reading *تَجْزَى* gives an easier and more natural sense.

Even the minutiae in this list will be carefully noted, I hope, by students of the *Luzûmiyyât*. Success in mastering the difficulties of Arabic poetry depends on the conviction that no detail is small enough to be neglected.

REYNOLD A. NICHOLSON.

March, 1921.

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CHAPTER I

ABÚ SA'ÍD IBN ABI 'L-KHAYR

ABÚ SA'ÍD and Omar Khayyam are associated in the history of Persian literature by the circumstance that each of them is the reputed author of a famous collection of *rubá'íyyát* in which his individuality has almost disappeared. That these collections are wholly, or even mainly, the work of Abú Sa'íd and Omar no one who examines the evidence is likely to assert: they should rather be regarded as anthologies—of which the nucleus, perhaps, was formed by the two authors in question—containing poems of a particular type composed at various periods by many different hands. It is possible, no doubt, that Omar's view of life and his general cast of thought are more or less reflected in the quatrains attributed to him, but we can learn from them nothing definite and distinctive. The same considerations apply with equal force to the mystical *rubá'ís* passing under the name of Abú Sa'íd. In his case, however, we possess excellent and copious biographical materials which make us intimately acquainted with him and throw a welcome light on many aspects of contemporary Persian mysticism.

The oldest of these documents is a short treatise on his life and sayings, which is preserved in a manuscript of the British Museum (Or. 249). It bears neither title nor indication of authorship, but Zhukovski in his edition of the text (Petrograd, 1899) identifies it with the *Hálát ú Sukhunán-i Shaykh Abú Sa'id ibn Abi 'l-Khayr*, a work composed about a century after Abú Sa'íd's death by one of his descendants whose name is unknown. He was a cousin of Muḥammad ibnu 'l-Munawwar, the great-great-grandson of Abú Sa'íd.

Using the *Hálát ú Sukhunán* as a foundation, Muḥammad ibnu 'l-Munawwar compiled a much larger biography of his ancestor which he entitled *Asráru 'l-tawḥíd fī maqámāti 'l-Shaykh Abi Sa'id* (ed. by Zhukovski, Petrograd, 1899) and dedicated to the Ghúrid prince, Ghiyáthu'ddín Muḥammad

ibn Sâm (ob. A.D. 1203). The author, like Abú Sa'íd himself, was a native of Mayhana or Mihna in Khurásán. From his earliest youth it had been a labour of love for him to gather the sayings of the Saint and to verify the records and traditions which were handed down in his family and were still fresh in the minds of his fellow-townsmen. The task was undertaken not a moment too soon. In A.D. 1154 the Turcoman tribe of the Ghuzz swept over the borders of Khurásán and carried fire and sword through that flourishing province. Everywhere the population was massacred; the author tells us that 115 descendants of Abú Sa'íd, young and old, were tortured to death in Mayhana alone, and that no memorial of him was left except his tomb. Religion, he says, fell into utter ruin; the search after Truth ceased, unbelief became rampant; of Islam only the name, and of Šúfism only the form survived. Impelled by divine grace, he complied with the request of some novices that he should write an account of the spiritual experiences and memorable sayings of Shaykh Abú Sa'íd, for the encouragement of those who desired to enter upon the Path (*tariqa*) and for the guidance of those who were travelling on the road of the Truth (*haqíqa*)¹. Abú Sa'íd died in A.D. 1049, and the *Asráru 'l-tawhíd* was probably completed not less than 120 or more than 150 years later. As Zhukovski points out, it is almost the first example in Persian of a separate work having for its subject the life of an individual mystic. The portrait of Abú Sa'íd amidst the circle of Šúfis and dervishes in which he lived is drawn with extraordinary richness of detail, and gains in vividness as well as in value from the fact that a great part of the story is told by himself. Although the Mohammedan system of oral tradition by which these autobiographical passages have been preserved forbids us to suppose that we have before us an exact transcript of Abú Sa'íd's words as they were spoken to the original reporter, there is no reason to doubt that in most cases the substance of them is given correctly. His own veracity is not incontestable, but this question, which leads at once into the darkest abysses of psychology, I must leave in suspense.

¹ *Asrár*, 4, 16—6, 5.

The *Hálát ú Sukhunán* and the *Asráru 'l-lawḥid* render the more recent biographies of Abú Sa'íd all but superfluous¹. A certain amount of new material is found in the Supplement to Faridu'ddín 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkiratu 'l-Awliyá* (vol. II of my edition, pp. 322-337) and Jámí's *Nafahātu 'l-Uns* (ed. by Nassau Lees, No. 366)².

For the sake of clearness, I have divided the following study into three sections, of which the first deals with the life of Abú Sa'íd, the second with his mystical sayings and doctrines, and the third with miracles and other matter belonging to his legend.

I.

Abú Sa'íd Faḍlu'llah was born at Mayhana, the chief town of the Kháwarán district of Khurásán, on the 1st of Muḥarram, A.H. 357 (December 7th, A.D. 967). His father Abu 'l-Khayr, known in Mayhana as Bábú Bu 'l-Khayr, was a druggist, "a pious and religious man, well acquainted with the sacred law of Islam (*sharí'a*) and with the Path of Šúfism (*ṭaríqa*)³." He and other Šúfís were in the habit of meeting every night in the house of one of their number. Whenever a strange Šúfí arrived in the town, they would invite him to join them, and after partaking of food and finishing their prayers and devotions they used to listen to music and singing (*samá'*). One night, when Bábú Bu 'l-Khayr was going to meet his friends, his wife begged him to take Abú Sa'íd with him in order that the dervishes might look on him with favour; so Bu 'l-Khayr let the lad accompany him. As soon as it was time for the music to begin, the singer (*qawwál*) chanted this quatrain:

God gives the dervish love—and love is woe;
By dying near and dear to Him they grow.
The generous youth will freely yield his life,
The man of God cares naught for worldly show.

¹ In referring to these two works I shall use the abbreviations H = *Hálát* and A = *Asrár*. Since A includes almost the whole of H, I have usually given references to the former only.

² The oldest notice of Abú Sa'íd occurs in the *Kashf al-Mahjúb* of his contemporary, Hujwírí, who mentions him frequently in the course of that work. See especially pp. 164-6 of the translation.

³ A 13, 4.

On hearing this song the dervishes fell into ecstasy and kept up the dance till daybreak. The *qawwāl* sang the quatrain so often that Abú Sa'íd got it by heart. When he returned home, he asked his father the meaning of the verses that had thrown the dervishes into such transports of joy. "Hush!" said his father, "you cannot understand what they mean: what does it matter to you?" Afterwards, when Abú Sa'íd had attained to a high spiritual degree, he used sometimes to say of his father, who was then dead, "I want Bábu Bu 'l-Khayr to-day, to tell him that he himself did not know the meaning of what he heard on that night¹."

Abú Sa'íd was taught the first rudiments of Moslem education—to read the Koran—by Abú Muḥammad 'Ayyárí, an eminent divine, who is buried at Nasá². He learned grammar from Abú Sa'íd 'Ayyárí and the principles of Islam from Abu 'l-Qásim Bishr-i Yásín, both of Mayhana. The latter seems to have been a remarkable man.

I have already referred to the mystical quatrains which Abú Sa'íd was fond of quoting in his discourses and which are commonly thought to be his own. Against this hypothesis we have his definite statement that these quatrains were composed by other Ṣúfís and that Bishr-i Yásín was the author of most of them³. From Bishr, too, Abú Sa'íd learned the doctrine of disinterested love, which is the basis of Ṣúfism.

¹ A 13, 9.

² H 8, 10. A 14, 16.

³ H 54, 3. The following is a translation of the text as it stands in Zhukovski's edition: "Whenever I have addressed poetry to any one, that which falls from my lips is the composition of venerable Ṣúfís (*'azizán*), and most of it is by Shaykh Abu 'l-Qásim Bishr." I am not sure that instead of the first clause (ما هرگز شعر نگفته ایم) we ought not to read ما هرگز شعر نگفته ایم. The statement will then run: "I have never composed poetry. That which falls from my lips, etc." In another passage (A 263, 10) it is stated on the authority of the writer's grandfather (Abú Sa'íd's grandson) that of all the poetry attributed to Abú Sa'íd only one verse and one *rubá'í*, which are cited, were his own composition, the remainder being quoted from his spiritual directors. The credibility of this is not affected by the explanation that he was too absorbed in ecstasy to think about versifying. In addition to the single *rubá'í*, of which Abú Sa'íd is expressly named as the author, H and A contain twenty-six which he is said to have quoted on different occasions. Of the latter, two occur in Ethé's collection (Nos. 35 and 68).

One day Abu 'l-Qásim Bishr-i Yásín (may God sanctify his honoured spirit!) said to me: "O Abú Sa'id, endeavour to remove self-interest (*tama'*) from thy dealings with God. So long as that exists, sincerity (*ikhlás*) cannot be attained. Devotions inspired by self-interest are work done for wages, but devotions inspired by sincerity are work done to serve God. Learn by heart the Tradition of the Prophet—*God said to me on the night of my Ascension, O Mohammed! as for those who would draw nigh to Me, their best means of drawing nigh is by performance of the obligations which I have laid upon them. My servant continually seeks to win My favour by works of supererogation until I love him; and when I love him, I am to him an ear and an eye and a hand and a helper: through Me he hears, and through Me he sees, and through Me he takes.*" Bishr explained that to perform obligations means "to serve God," while to do works of supererogation means "to love God"; then he recited these lines:

Perfect love proceeds from the lover who hopes naught for himself;
What is there to desire in that which has a price?
Certainly the Giver is better for you than the gift:
How should you want the gift, when you possess the very
Philosopher's Stone¹?

On another occasion Bishr taught his young pupil how to practise "recollection" (*dhikr*). "Do you wish," he asked him; "to talk with God?" "Yes, of course I do," said Abú Sa'id. Bishr told him that whenever he was alone he must recite the following quatrain, no more and no less:

Without Thee, O Beloved, I cannot rest;
Thy goodness towards me I cannot reckon.
Tho' every hair on my body becomes a tongue,
A thousandth part of the thanks due to Thee I cannot tell.

Abú Sa'id was constantly repeating these words. "By the blessing which they brought," he says, "the Way to God was opened to me in my childhood." Bishr died in A.H. 380 (A.D. 990). Whenever Abú Sa'id went to the graveyard of Mayhana his first visit was always paid to the tomb of the venerated teacher who had given him his first lesson in Súfism².

¹ A 16, 9.

² A 16, 20.

If we can believe Abú Sa'íd when he declares that in his youth he knew by heart 30,000 verses of pre-Islamic poetry, his knowledge of profane literature must have been extensive¹. After completing this branch of education, he set out for Merv with the purpose of studying theology under Abú 'Abdallah al-Ḥuṣrī, a pupil of the famous Sháfi'ite doctor, Ibn Surayj. He read with al-Ḥuṣrī for five years, and with Abú Bakr al-Qaffál for five more². From Merv he moved to Sarakhs, where he attended the lectures of Abú 'Alí Zāhir³ on Koranic exegesis (in the morning), on systematic theology (at noon), and on the Traditions of the Prophet (in the afternoon)⁴.

Abú Sa'íd's birth and death are the only events of his life to which a precise date is attached. We know that he studied at Merv for ten years, and if we assume that his *Wanderjahre* began at the usual time, he was probably between 25 and 28 when he first came to Sarakhs. Here his conversion to Ṣūfism took place. He has described it himself in the following narrative, which I will now translate without abridgement. I have relegated to the foot of the page, and distinguished by means of square brackets, certain passages that interrupt the narrative and did not form part of it originally.

Abú Sa'íd said as follows⁵:

At the time when I was a student, I lived at Sarakhs and read with Abú 'Alí, the doctor of divinity. One day, as I was going into the city, I saw Luqmán of Sarakhs seated on an ash-heap near the gate, sewing a patch on his gaberdine^a. I went up to him and

^a [This Luqmán was one of the "intelligent madmen" (*'uqalā'u 'l-majānīn*)⁶. At first he practised many austerities and was scrupulous in his devotions. Then of a sudden he experienced a revelation (*kashf*) that deprived him of his reason. Abú Sa'íd said: "In the beginning Luqmán was a man learned

¹ H 8, 20. A 17, 16.

² H 9, 1. A 17, 18; 22, 6.

³ Died A.H. 389 (A.D. 999). See Subkī, *Ṭabaqātu 'l-Sháfi'iyya al-Kubrā*, Cairo, A.H. 1324, II. 223. Yáqūt, *Mu'jamu 'l-Buldán*, IV. 72, 12.

⁴ A 22, 14.

⁵ H 10, 14—12, 7. A 23, 6—26, 10. There is not much to choose between the two versions. I have generally preferred the latter, which adds some interesting details, although it is not quite so tersely and simply written.

⁶ Concerning this numerous class of Mohammedan mystics see Paul Loosen, *Die weisen Narren des Naisābūrī* (Strassburg, 1912).

stood looking at him, while he continued to sew^b. As soon as he had sewn the patch on, he said, "O Abū Saʿīd! I have sewn thee on this gaberdine along with the patch." Then he rose and took my hand, leading me to the convent (*khānaqāh*) of the Ṣūfīs in Sarakhs, and shouted for Shaykh Abū ʿl-Faḍl Ḥasan, who was within. When Abū ʿl-Faḍl appeared, Luqmān placed my hand in his, saying, "O Abū ʿl-Faḍl, watch over this young man, for he is one of you^c." The Shaykh took my hand and led me into the convent. I sat down in the portico and the Shaykh picked up a volume and began to peruse it. As is the way of scholars, I could not help wondering what the book was. The Shaykh perceived my thought. "Abū Saʿīd!" he said, "all the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets were sent to preach one word. They bade the people say 'Allah' and devote themselves to Him. Those who heard this word with the ear alone, let it go out by the other ear; but those who heard it with their souls imprinted it on their souls and repeated it until it penetrated their hearts and souls, and their whole being became this word. They were made independent of the pronunciation of the word, they were released from the sound and the letters. Having understood the spiritual meaning of this word, they became so absorbed in it that they were no more conscious of their own non-existence¹." This saying took hold of me

in the law and pious, but afterwards he ceased to perform the duties of religion. When he was asked how this change had come to pass, he replied: 'The more I served God, the more service was required of me. In my despair I cried, "O God! kings set free a slave when he grows old. Thou art the Almighty King. Set me free, for I have grown old in Thy service." I heard a voice that said, "Luqmān! I set thee free."' The sign of his freedom was that his reason was taken away from him. Abū Saʿīd used often to say that Luqmān was one whom God had emancipated from his commandments.]

^b [Abū Saʿīd was standing in such a position that his shadow fell on Luqmān's gaberdine.]

^c [Shaykh Abū ʿl-Faḍl was exceedingly venerable. When, after the death of Abū ʿl-Faḍl, Abū Saʿīd became an adept in mysticism, he was asked what was the cause of his having attained to such a degree of perfection. He answered, "The cause was a look that Shaykh Abū ʿl-Faḍl gave me. I was a student of theology under Shaykh Abū ʿAlī. One day, when I was walking on the bank of a stream, Shaykh Abū ʿl-Faḍl approached from the opposite direction and looked at me out of the corner of his eye. From that day to this, all my spiritual possessions are the result of that look."]

¹ This rendering of Abū ʿl-Faḍl's admonition agrees with H 11, 5 foll., where the text is given most fully.

and did not allow me to sleep that night. In the morning, when I had finished my prayers and devotions, I went to the Shaykh before sunrise and asked permission to attend Abú 'Alí's lecture on Koranic exegesis. He began his lecture with the verse, *Say Allah! then leave them to amuse themselves in their folly*¹. At the moment of hearing this word a door in my breast was opened, and I was rapt from myself. The Imám Abú 'Alí observed the change in me and asked, "Where were you last night?" I said, "With Abu 'l-Faḍl Ḥasan." He ordered me to rise and go back to Abu 'l-Faḍl, saying, "It is unlawful for you to come from that subject (Ṣúfism) to this discourse." I returned to the Shaykh, distraught and bewildered, for I had entirely lost myself in this word. When Abu 'l-Faḍl saw me, he said: "Abú Sa'id!

*mastak shuda'i hami nadāni pas u pish*².

Thou art drunk, poor youth! Thou know'st not head from tail."

"O Shaykh!" I said, "what is thy command?" He said, "Come in and sit down and devote thyself wholly to this word, for this word hath much work to do with thee." After I had stayed with him for a long time, duly performing all that was required by this word, he said to me one day, "O Abú Sa'id! the doors of the letters of this word³ have been opened to thee. Now the hosts (of spiritual grace) will rush into thy breast, and thou wilt experience diverse kinds of self-culture (*adab*)." Then he exclaimed, "Thou hast been transported, transported, transported! Go and seek a place of solitude, and turn aside from men as thou hast turned aside from thyself, and behave with patience and resignation to God's will." I abandoned my studies and came home to Mayhana and retired into the niche of the chapel in my own house. There I sat for seven years, saying continually, "Allah! Allah! Allah!" Whenever drowsiness or inattention arising from the weakness of human nature came over me, a soldier with a fiery spear—the most terrible and alarming figure that can possibly be imagined—appeared in front of the niche⁴ and shouted at me, saying, "O Abú Sa'id, say Allah!" The dread of that apparition used to keep me

¹ Kor. 6, 91.

² Though printed as prose in both texts, this line appears to belong to a *rubá'i*, since it is written in one of the metres peculiar to that form of verse.

³ According to H: "the doors of the spiritual gifts (فتوح) of this word."

⁴ H has merely: "a terrible figure appeared in front of the niche."

burning and trembling for whole days and nights, so that I did not again fall asleep or become inattentive; and at last every atom of me began to cry aloud, "Allah! Allah! Allah!"

Countless records of mystical conversion bear witness to the central fact in this description—the awakening of the soul in response to some unsuspected stimulus, by which, as Arnold says,

A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,

opening a way for the flood of transcendental consciousness to burst through. The accompanying ecstasy is a normal feature, and so is the abandonment of past occupations, habits, ambitions, and the fixing of every faculty upon that supreme reality which is henceforth the single object of desire. All these phenomena, however sudden they may seem, are the climax of an interior conflict that perhaps only makes itself known at the moment when it is already decided. Probably in Abú Sa'íd's case the process was at least to some extent a conscious one. He had been long and earnestly engaged in the study of theology.

I possessed many books and papers, but though I used to turn them over and read them one after the other, I was never finding any peace. I prayed to God, saying, "O Lord, nothing is revealed to my heart by all this study and learning: it causes me to lose Thee, O God! Let me be able to do without it by giving me something in which I shall find Thee again¹."

Here Abú Sa'íd acknowledges that he sought spiritual peace, and that all his efforts to win it from intellectual proofs ended in failure. The history of that struggle is unwritten, but not until the powers of intellect were fully tried and shown to be of no avail, could mightier forces drawn from a deeper source come overwhelmingly into action. As regards the perpetual iteration of the name Allah, I need hardly remind my readers that this is a method everywhere practised by Moslem mystics for bringing about *faná*, *i.e.* the passing-away from self, or in Pascal's phrase, "oubli du monde et de tout hormis Dieu."

¹ A 50, 12.

We have seen that the first act of Abú Sa'id after his conversion was to enquire of Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl what he must do next. That is to say, he had implicitly accepted Abu 'l-Faḍl as his spiritual director, in accordance with the rule that "if any one by means of asceticism and self-mortification shall have risen to an exalted degree of mystical experience, *without having a Pír to whose authority and example he submits himself*, the Şúfís do not regard him as belonging to their community¹." In this way a continuous tradition of mystical doctrine is secured, beginning with the Prophet and carried down through a series of dead Pírs to the living director who forms the last link of the chain until he too dies and is succeeded by one of his pupils.

Abú Sa'id's lineage as a Şúfí is given in the following table:

Mohammed, the Prophet
'Alí (ob. A.D. 661)
Ḥasan of Baṣra (ob. A.D. 728)
Ḥabíb 'Ajamí (ob. A.D. 737)
Dáwud Ṭá'í (ob. A.D. 781)
Ma'rúf Karkhí (ob. A.D. 815)
Sarí Saqaṭí (ob. A.D. 867)
Junayd of Baghdád (ob. A.D. 909)
Murta'ish of Baghdád (ob. A.D. 939)
Abú Naṣr al-Sarráj of Ṭús (ob. A.D. 988)
Abu 'l-Faḍl Ḥasan of Sarakhs
Abú Sa'id ibn Abi 'l-Khayr

¹ A 55, 15.

The appearance of Mohammed and his son-in-law at the head of a list of this kind fits in with the fiction—which was necessary for the existence of Šúfism within Islam—that the Šúfís are the legitimate heirs and true interpreters of the esoteric teaching of the Prophet. Ḥasan of Baṣra, Ḥabíb 'Ajamí, and Dáwud Ṭá'í were ascetics and quietists rather than mystics. Even if we take the ninth century as a starting-point, it must not be supposed that any fixed body of doctrine was handed down. Such a thing is foreign to the nature of Šúfism, which essentially is not a system based on authority and tradition, but a free movement assuming infinitely various forms in obedience to the inner light of the individual soul. Before the time of Abú Sa'id, certain eminent theosophists—Junayd, for instance—had founded schools which owed their origin to controversies over particular questions of mystical theory and practice, while at a later period Šúfism branched off into great organisations comparable to the Christian monastic orders. Everywhere we find divergent tendencies asserting themselves and freely developing a vigorous life.

There is no difficulty in believing that Abú Sa'id, after passing through the spiritual crisis which has been described, returned to Mayhana and spent some time in solitary meditation, though doubts are suggested by the statement, which occurs in the two oldest biographies, that his seclusion (*khalwat*) lasted for seven years. According to the *Hálát ú Sukhunán*, at the end of this period—Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl having died in the meanwhile—he journeyed to Ámul in order to visit Shaykh Abu 'l-'Abbás Qaṣṣáb¹. The *Asrār*, however, mentions a second period during which he practised the most severe austerities, first at Sarakhs under the care of Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl and then, for seven years², in the deserts and mountains of Mayhana, until at the age of 40 he attained to perfect saintship. These numbers can only be regarded as evidence of a desire to make him exemplify a theoretically symmetrical scheme of the mystic's progress towards perfection, but it is none the less probable that for many years

¹ H 12, 7.

² A 41, 3.

after his conversion Abú Sa'id was painfully treading the *via purgativa*, which Súfís call "the Path" (*taríqa*). His biographers give an interesting account of his self-mortification (*mujá-hada*). The details are derived either from his public discourses or from the testimony of eye-witnesses¹.

The author of the *Asrár* relates that after seven years of solitary retirement Abú Sa'id came back to Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl, who gave him a cell opposite his own, in order that he might keep him always under observation, and prescribed such moral and ascetic discipline as was necessary². When some time had passed, he was transferred to the cell of Abu 'l-Faḍl himself and subjected to still closer supervision (*muráqabat-i aḥwál*). We are not told how long he remained in the convent at Sarakhs. At last Abu 'l-Faḍl bade him return to Mayhana and take care of his mother. Here he lived in a cell, apparently in his father's house, though he also frequented several cloisters in the neighbourhood, especially one known as "The Old Cloister" (*Ribát-i Kuhan*) on the Merv road³. Among the ascetic exercises in which he was now constantly engaged the following are recorded⁴:

He showed excessive zeal in his religious ablutions, emptying a number of water-jugs for every single *wuḍú'*.

He was always washing the door and walls of his cell.

He never leaned against any door or wall, or rested his body on wood or on a cushion, or reclined on a couch.

All the time he wore only one shirt, which gradually increased in weight because, whenever it was torn, he would sew a patch on it. At last it weighed 20 maunds.

He never quarrelled with any one nor spoke to any one, except when necessity forced him to do so.

He ate no food by day, and broke his fast with nothing more than a piece of bread.

He did not sleep by day or night but shut himself in his cell, where he had made an excavation in the wall, just high and broad enough to stand in, which could be closed by means

¹ H 18, 17. About 200 of Abú Sa'id's discourses were in circulation when the *Hálat u Sukhúnán* was written (H 55, 21).

² A 26, 10; 27, 2.

³ A 27, 17; 30, 7.

⁴ A 27, 18.

of a door. He used to stand here and close the door and occupy himself with recollection (*dhikr*), stuffing his ears with cotton-wool in order that no disturbing sound might reach him, and that his attention might remain concentrated. At the same time he never ceased to watch over his inmost self (*muraqabat-i sirr*), in order that no thought except of God might cross his mind¹.

After a while he became unable to bear the society or even the sight of men. He wandered alone in desert and mountainous places and would often disappear for a month or more. His father used to go in search of him and find out where he was from labourers or travellers who had seen him. To please his father, he would come home, but ere long he would feel the presence of human creatures to be unendurable and would again flee to mountains and wildernesses, where he was sometimes seen roaming with a venerable old man clad in white raiment. Many years afterwards, when Abú Sa'id had risen to eminence, he declared to those who questioned him that this old man was the prophet Khadir².

Although he was carefully watched, Abú Sa'id contrived to escape from his father's house night after night. On one occasion his father (who felt a natural anxiety as to the object of these nocturnal excursions) followed him, unperceived, at a little distance.

My son (he relates) walked on until he reached the Old Cloister (*Ribât-i Kuhan*). He entered it and shut the gate behind him, while I went up on the roof. I saw him go into a chapel, which was in the *ribât*, and close the door. Looking through the chapel window, I waited to see what would happen. There was a stick lying on the floor, and it had a rope fastened to it. He took up the stick and tied the end of the rope to his foot. Then, laying the stick across the top of a pit that was at the corner of the chapel, he slung himself into the pit head downwards, and began to recite the Koran. He remained in that posture until daybreak, when, having recited the whole Koran, he raised himself from the pit, replaced the stick where he had found it, opened the door, came out of the chapel, and commenced to perform his ablution in the middle

¹ A 28, 8.

² A 28, 15.

of the *ribât*. I descended from the roof, hastened home, and slept until he came in¹.

The following passage illustrates another side of Abú Sa'íd's asceticism. He said,

One day I said to myself, "Knowledge, works, meditation—I have them all; now I want to become absent from them (*ghaybatî az in*).” On consideration I saw that the only way to attain this was by acting as a servant to the dervishes, for *when God wishes to benefit a man, He shows to him the path of self-abasement*. Accordingly I made it my business to wait upon them, and I used to clean their cells and privies and lavatories. I persevered in this work for a long time, until it became a habit. Then I resolved to beg for the dervishes, which seemed to me the hardest thing I could lay upon myself. At first, when people saw me begging, they would give me a piece of gold, but soon it was only copper, and by degrees it came down to a single raisin or nut. In the end even this was refused. One day I was with a number of dervishes, and there was nothing to be got for them. For their sake I parted with the turban I had on my head, then I sold one after the other my slippers, the lining of my *jubbâ*, the cloth of which it was made, and the cotton quilting².

During the period of ascetic discipline which he underwent at Mayhana, Abú Sa'íd sometimes visited Sarakhs for the purpose of receiving spiritual guidance from Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl. His biographer says that he travelled on his bare feet, but if we may trust 'Abdu 'l-Ṣamad, one of his disciples, he usually flew through the air; it is added that this phenomenon was witnessed only by persons of mystical insight³. According to the *Asrâr*, he returned to Abu 'l-Faḍl for another year's training and was then sent by him to Abú 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Sulamî, who invested him with the patched frock (*khirqa*) that proclaims the wearer to be a recognised member of the brotherhood of Ṣúfîs⁴. Al-Sulamî of Nîshâpûr (ob. A.D. 1021), a pupil of Abu 'l-Qâsim al-Naṣrâbâdî, was a celebrated mystic. He is the author of the *Ṭabaqâtü 'l-Ṣúfiyya*—biographies of the early Ṣúfî Shaykhs—and other important works.

On Abú Sa'íd's return, Shaykh Abu 'l-Faḍl said to him,

¹ A 32, 4.

² A 34, 5.

³ A 35, 4.

⁴ A 35, 15.

“Now all is finished. You must go to Mayhana and call the people to God and admonish them and show them the way to the Truth.” He came back to Mayhana, as his Director enjoined, but instead of contenting himself with Abū ʿl-Faḍl’s assurance that all was now finished, he increased his austerities and was more assiduous than ever in his devotions. In the following discourse he refers to the veneration which the people began to manifest towards him at this time¹.

When I was a novice, I bound myself to do eighteen things: I fasted continually; I abstained from unlawful food; I practised recollection (*dhikr*) uninterruptedly; I kept awake at night; I never reclined on the ground; I never slept but in a sitting posture; I sat facing the Kaʿba; I never leaned against anything; I never looked at a handsome youth or at women whom it would have been unlawful for me to see unveiled; I did not beg; I was content and resigned to God’s will; I always sat in the mosque and did not go into the market, because the Prophet said that the market is the filthiest of places and the mosque the cleanest. In all my acts I was a follower of the Prophet. Every four-and-twenty hours I completed a recitation of the Koran. In my seeing I was blind, in my hearing deaf, in my speaking dumb. For a whole year I conversed with no one. People called me a lunatic, and I allowed them to give me that name, relying on the Tradition that a man’s faith is not made perfect until he is supposed to be mad. I performed everything that I had read or heard of as having been done or commanded by the Prophet. Having read that when he was wounded in the foot in the battle of Uḥud, he stood on his toes in order to perform his devotions—for he could not set the sole of his foot upon the ground—I resolved to imitate him, and standing on tiptoe I performed a prayer of 400 genuflexions. I modelled my actions, outward and inward, upon the Sunna of the Prophet, so that habit at last became nature. Whatever I had heard or found in books concerning the acts of worship performed by the angels, I performed the same. I had heard and seen in writing that some angels worship God on their heads. Therefore I placed my head on the ground and bade the blessed mother of Abū Ṭāhir tie my toe with a cord and fasten the cord to a peg and then

¹ A 36, 8.