Hacı Bayram Başer. *Şeriat ve Hakikat: Tasavvufun Teşekkül Süreci* [*Sharia and Ḥaqīqa: The Formative Stage of Sufism*]. Istanbul: Klasik, 2017. 320 pages. ISBN: 9789752484030.

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Hacı Bayram Başer, whose studies mostly concentrate on theoretical mystical thought, takes the formative stages of Sufism as his subject matter in the framework of problems generated by disputes concerning the relation between Sharia and *ḥaqīqa* (truth). To a great extent, this book is based on his PhD dissertation (Istanbul University, 2015): "The Problem of the Relation of Sharia-*Ḥaqīqa* in Sunnite Sufism's Course of Formation."[1] Recently, despite the frequent appearance of analyses by researchers of Sufism on the problems, as a result of which mysticism became a religious science, the available literature is clearly far from satisfactory. Başer identifies Sufism's main problematique as the continuum of the relation of Sharia and truth, which he analyzes throughout the study.

An overview of contemporary studies on Sufism reveals that the binomial conceptualization in the form of Sharia-truth is basically employed to indicate a relation of polarity. This presumption makes it harder for us to understand in what respect the two concepts are juxtaposed and lends a certain ambiguity to the "Sharia-truth" dichotomy. Clarifying the related elements can be regarded as the primary goal of Başer's study, for he deals with the main issues, namely, the place of the debates during Sufism's formative stage within the Muslims' conception of religion as a whole, the after-influence of Sufi views on this subject in terms of the Muslims' understanding of religion and religious sciences, the validity of the asserted need to expand the field of religious sciences and, if yes, what course Sufism took.

Sharia-truth and the usages that this dichotomy gave birth to, like external (*ẓahir*)-internal (*bāṭin*) and shell-sap, can be made sense of only by relating them

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[1]   Hacı Bayram Başer, "Sünnî Tasavvufun Teşekkül Sürecinde Şeriat-Hakikat İlişkisi Sorunu (Hicri. III. ve IV. Yüzyıllar)" (Unpublished PhD diss., Istanbul University, 2015).

to the aforementioned questions. This study, which takes into consideration the themes of substance-accident, matter-form, and truth-trope, leads to research in more than just Sufism and other fields with respect to its contribution to the literature. In fact, it seeks to shed light on the greatest question in the holistic form of religious thought. In other words, this study should be of interest not only to researchers in Sufism, but also to those in philosophy and *kalām* as well.

The work consists of a preface, an introduction, and three chapters: "The Development of Sufism as a Critical Discourse on the Social Life," "The First Theoretical Trends in Sufism and Crisis with Religious Sciences," and "The Formation of Sunnite Sufism as Esoteric Discernment," respectively. The chapters are sorted chronologically into three periods, namely, asceticism (*zuhd*), synthesis (*tadwīn*), and Sunni Sufism/esoteric (*fiqh al-bāṭin*) discernment.

The introduction comprises a critical discourse advanced by Sufis against the corruption of social life. In the author's opinion, this discourse orients one toward asceticism. Contemporary researchers commonly adopt the distinction between the period of asceticism and that of Sufism when periodizing its history.[2] Başer, however, draws our attention to such a scheme's irrelevance to the mystical texts as a type of classification (31-41). The main thesis presented here is that the goal of establishing a critique of asceticism against the extremist views of asceticism prevailing in society indicates an attempt to dissociate Sufis from the pertinent parties toward a search for identity.

The basic problematique nuanced around asceticism at the beginning of the study is concerned with the validity of this asceticism-Sufism distinction in the latter's history and if an appropriate ground can be established for it. The author notes that such a periodization is historically precarious (35-36), for this distinction gives rise to certain predicaments and interrupts Sufism's continuity. And, continuity is needed if Sufism is to be verified as a legitimate field of study. Also, if we take into account that asceticism remained significant over time and steady as a concept viewed as inextricable from Sufism, the importance of Başer's statement becomes even more relevant. Even though contemporary researchers base this periodization upon classical authors like al-Sarrāj (d. 378/998), al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), and al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1072), one notes that the background for an exact periodization of their works is regarded as a product of twentieth-century Orientalist studies (36-39).

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2   Abū al-'Alā 'Affīfī, *al-Taṣawwuf: al-thawrah al-rūḥiyyah fī al-Islām* (Alexandria: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963); Mustafa Kara, *Tasavvuf ve Tarikatler Tarihi* (İstanbul: Dergah, 1985); Hasan Kamil Yılmaz, *Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf ve Tarikatler* (İstanbul: Ensar, 1997).

The studies that came after the books of asceticism (*kitāb al-zuhd*) are counted among the first sources of mystical literature. The first work to go beyond being a single chapter in the books of traditions by actually inaugurating an independent genre is ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak's (d. 181/797) work, which is also significant for attributing Sufism to an earlier age. Hence, morals first found parity with asceticism and conduct. According to Başer, the number of works on asceticism stated to decline after the fourth Islamic century because the mystical classics were being composed around the same time. Nevertheless, the basis of the terms employed by the classical works rests on the aforementioned ascetic literature (51-65).

Another important issue Başer deals with is that due to asceticism, Sufis received greatest criticism as regards establishing the relations of Sharia to the truth. The author emphasizes that the Sufis suggested, in turn, that asceticism was misunderstood and exploited by various milieus. Those groups who misinterpreted asceticism and went to extremes were called "licentious" (*ibāḥī*). Notably, such thought led to social discontent rather than personal problems like begging or avoidance of being appointed to an office. In this context, the Sufis tried to clarify the meanings of abject (*miskīn*), want (*faqr*), humility (*maskana*), and liability (*mukallafiyya*) and identify who these people were (i.e., the "licentious" to distinguish themselves from them).

The confidence-attainment (*tawakkul-kasb*) relation was brought to notice in connection with this, and the issue of gains (*makāsib*) also appeared as an internal criticism of Sufism. In this way, classical Sufi authors benefited greatly from Imām Muḥammad al-Shaybānī's (d. 189/805) *Kitāb al-Kasb* and developed their views on confidence-attainment by building on this work. Aside from this, Başer excluded certain subjects that can be regarded as central to early Sufism, like the Sufis' view of married life or whirling and dancing, in order to retain the study's coherence.

The Sufis' main concern in developing a critical discourse remained the relation of knowledge-faith-action, which they used to identify their interlocutors and opponents. In theoretical disputes, their main interlocutors were Muʿtazilites, Jabriyyas, Ashʿarites, and jurists, and their major opponents were Bāṭiniyya, Shiites, the "licentious," and atheists. While the Sufis steered close to Ashʿarite thought, the Muʿtazilites criticized them on matters of justice, piety, and divine attributes. They were also not content with the dull religious sense of the jurists.

The second chapter, "The First Theoretical Trends in Sufism and Crisis with Religious Sciences," tackles the counter-position against Sufism as a method of knowledge and the crisis engendered in its relation with the religious sciences. In order to foreground the compilation of the mystical classics in the so-called age

of reference or the period of commentary, the author dwells upon their effort to "develop a scholarly idiom" and thereby examine their views on the soul/spirit, the nature and certainty of knowledge, and the method for determining its verity.

The main thesis developed in this chapter is that although Sufis adopt individual stances on subjects like soul/spirit and humanity's primordiality, they generally adopt Ashʿarite perspectives and thus have more original views with respect to knowledge (109-51). In this regard, one of the author's notable attempts is the scrutiny of Sufism's connection to other religious sciences. According to Başer, Sufism is a field of study that claims the domain of mores for itself while being linked to jurisprudence, theology, and other sciences with respect to its verification of knowledge obtained from the religious sciences. In other words, it does not assume an alternative position against any religious science, but rather is a separate discipline connected with all of them (171-92). Başer points out two important elements with regard to Sufism's developmental course: the integrity of knowledge-practice and the relation of prophethood-sanctity (*nubuwwa-wilāya*). Another subject discussed in this chapter is Sufism's need for a "scholarly idiom" and putting it on the agenda.

Self-edification is not a subject and method peculiar to the Sufis, who incline toward the Ashʿarites on subjects like spirit, soul, and knowledge. Their views of the self never emerge in a systematic unity. Rather than incorporating the scattered narratives that have come down to us, the author regards them as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and focuses on distinct theoretical approaches. In this context, he makes use of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 255/869), and Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911) on the matter of soul and spirit reaching out from abstinence (*riyāḍa*) to knowledge (*maʿrifa*). The author takes account of the debates about the soul in two groups: the perspective that refrains from making theoretical comments about the soul and its malignancy and chastisement, and the perspective that presents a theory about the soul and places it in the middle of its conception of knowledge and existence. Başer relates the Sufis' inclination to develop a theory of self that is related to divine incarnation (*ḥulūl*). Hence, with no response to divine incarnation until al-Sarrāj and al-Hujwīrī, it also partially spread among the Sufis.

Another issue taken up here is humanity and the spirit's primordiality, both of which are analyzed with respect to three Sufis: Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 277/890[?]), Junayd al-Baghdādī, and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). The author mentions the similarity of the views held by the first two. Al-Baghdādī not only stresses the self-edification, but also epistemologically expounds on what sort of benefits will be derived from it. He argues that the soul will be freed from bad

attributes with struggle, but that the spirit will congregate with the unity of God (*tawḥīd*). Al-Kharrāz and al-Baghdādī identified the condition before a spirit was assigned to a body as "primordial." The study approaches both the conception of the self as a source of evil and the accompanying notion of abstinence, as well as those aspects of a primordial human being that are problematic in the relation to Sharia-truth. In addition, he subjects authors like al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, and al-Hujwīrī to a novel reading.

Such topics as the Sufis' conception of knowledge, along with its possibility, verification, and moral value, are also situated in this chapter. In the author's opinion, Sufis have a particularly distinguished perspective on knowledge (192-213). To put it differently, they agree with orthodox Sunnite scholars about the soul and spirit, but nevertheless diverged from them greatly on knowledge. The Sufis' central concept of the knowledge-practice relation is conduct. Thus al-Sarrāj calls Sufism, in which knowledge is raised to action in the acquisition of the authority advanced by the jurists and theologians. Sufis employed concepts like gnosis (*maʿrifa*), wisdom (*ḥikma*), and discernment (*fiqh*) in the framework of the knowledge-practice relation. They used gnosis, which is more comprehensive and encompassing than the science, in the sense of verifying the knowledge acquired through the religious sciences, not as a method of acquiring knowledge that was alternative to that of other sciences (171-81). For instance, Sufis defined jurisprudence as being synonymous with gnosis and wisdom by incorporating into it the sense of acting in line with a particular knowledge, rather than a sheer cogitative process, and concluding the act later on with another particular knowledge. Asserting that these concepts underwent a semantic narrowing, they forwarded a critique of science at the same time.

In the third chapter, "The Formation of Sunnite Sufism as Esoteric Discernment," Başer discusses Sufism's place within the religious sciences by taking into account the views of classical authors like al-Sarrāj, al-Kalābādhī, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Qushayrī, and al-Hujwīrī. Here, he tries to determine this discipline's subject matter, problematique, and method. He contends that Sufism focuses on changing one's mores (*taḥawwul*), that its problematique is states and stations, and that its method is purification (*taṣfiyya*) and inference (*istinbāṭ*) (236-45). Ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*), which became a crisis while trying to reconcile Sufism with the religious sciences, is investigated in detail, along with the Sufis' critical discourse that drives the tendencies of licentiousness and divine incarnation away from Sufism.

The book's last chapter establishes a connection between Sufism and annihilation (*fanāʾ*), as concept analyzed via the faith-union-annihilation axis to

explain the Sufis' views of religious life. Contrary to common opinion, annihilation is not the ultimate state but rather the basic characteristic of the course of spiritual journey (*sayr wa sulūk*) from its very start. Another concept analyzed here is ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*). Başer states that the Sufis developed a scholarly framework during the above-mentioned reconciliation effort. He emphasizes that early Sufis like al-Sarrāj related ecstatic utterances to an internal criticism presented in a reconciliatory language while defining the notion of ecstatic utterances (245-67).

As a matter of principle Başer did not confine his study to a particular geography. And yet the subjects analyzed necessarily took him to the region of Baghdad during the third and fourth Islamic centuries, for this is where the development of Sufism was studied, first as a critical attitude and then as a religious science. According to the author, the view that Sufism was a religious science flourished for the most part in the cosmopolitan structure of Baghdad's scientific and cultural life. For this reason, the study should be regarded as a "Baghdad-centered" interpretation (217-22). Therefore, it becomes clear that "Khorasan-centered" studies are also needed in order to provide clearer lines on Sufism's course of formation.

Consequently, Sufism arose out of the formation of the Sharia-truth relation and is evaluated in three stages: critique, crisis, and reconciliation. The determination of these stages presents a new vista and also closes an important lacuna in theoretical Sufism. Moreover, by claiming that Sharia-truth dichotomy is a relation of integrity and completion where truth fulfills Sharia, the relation of this dichotomy to Sufism and the religious sciences is debated. This book identified important points of connection between the literatures of asceticism and Sufism, a connection that the author regards as quite significant for the transmission of Sufism from the age of Prophet in an uninterrupted course.