The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325, by Nathan Hofer, (Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 320 pp., ISBN: 978-0-7486-9421-1, £70.00 (hb)

Sufism as we know it today – the Sufism of organized brotherhoods and the veneration of saints – was formed in the later Middle Ages, specifically during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was then that Sufism became also a mass movement, not on the margins of the religious and social landscape of medieval Muslim societies but capturing a central role in the experiences of Islam for a majority. In the context of Egypt and Syria, it was under the Ayyūbids and the early Mamlūks that Sufism truly became popular.

But, as Nathan Hofer rightly asks in the introduction, what does popularisation mean? Was Sufism popular because it was non-elite, or was it popular because everyone was involved? The main argument of this book is that Sufism was produced and consumed at all levels of society. The argument that the masses somehow found in Sufism an antidote to the dry legalism of the *ʿulamāʾ* is rejected outright, and replaced by an emphasis on the collective and social aspects of Sufism over the theological and the spiritual.

The book is very neatly divided into three parts, each with a particular Sufi collectivity as its focus. Perhaps the best thing about this very valuable book is the plurality it brings into our understanding of medieval Egyptian Sufism. All the subjects here are Sufis, in the sense they were engaged with larger tradition of discourse and praxis, but "[w]hat it meant to be a Sufi at the *khānqāh* often differed substantially from what it meant to be a Sufi in Qūṣ or a follower of al-Shādhilī" (p. 25).

Part one is a study of the state-sponsored Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ *khānqāh* in Cairo, established by Saladin in 1173. This *khānqāh* provided an organisational setting for the influx of immigrant Sufis from the eastern and western parts of the Islamic world, specifically non-Egyptians educated in the Shāfiʿī or Mālikī legal schools. Most of the rank-and-file Sufis at the *khānqāh* were traditional scholars travelling in search of knowledge, and not

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associated with any mystical order. They represented what Hofer calls juridical Sufism, grounded in the law, and overseen by an official position at the top hierarchy of the *khānqāh*, the *shaykh al-shuyūkh* or Chief Sufi.

The main responsibility of the Sufis at the state *khānqāh* was weekly public processions, offering blessings to the sultan and to the ruling elite. The Sufis also distributed water to the crowds attending these public processions, another form of blessing. While some authors, like al-Udfūwī or Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, viewed these state-sponsored Sufis as insincere, the Cairene crowds and the ruling elites definitely saw their public processions as producing holiness, or *barakah*. As Hofer insightfully explains, the *barakah* was not created by the state, or by the individual Sufis of the *khānqāh*, who were not considered holy in and of themselves, but by the engagement with the crowd in a formalised and reproducible setting.

Part two is focused on the Shādhiliyyah, which emerged in this period as the largest mystical order in Egypt. Hofer rejects simplistic accounts of the rise of mystical orders at this period as a reactive response (to disasters, to dry legalism, or the declining influence of the Shīʿah), and emphasizes the active agency of the Sufis themselves. Sufi authors and leaders created the Shādhilī, as well as other orders, as an institutionalised identity, where social praxis that is reproduced by means of texts and repeated rituals. These Sufi authors retroactively identified aspects of group identity with the eponymous master.

For the Egyptian Shādhiliyyah, this consolidation of institutional identity was achieved through the hagiographic treatises of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, at least fifty years after the death al-Shādhilī himself in 1258. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh uses the biographies for the necessary "textualisation of collective practice and the idealisation of the eponymous identity" (p. 129), so that Shādhilī identity be distinguished form that of other Sufis, and legitimized by means the acknowledgements made by legal scholars. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh was also a political figure, leading protests against Ibn Taymiyyah's doctrinal rejection of saintly intercession.

The Shādhiliyyah was different from other orders because it required no *silsilah* for the sanctity of the eponym, nor dress requirements in the form of a *khirqah*. This, and their attachment to mainstream juridical discourse, meant that Shādhilī followers would

be part of society, work, and live in the world. There could also be relations of reciprocity with the political authorities – they were not state-sponsored like the Sufis of the Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ, but were "state-sanctioned." These pragmatic approaches are the ones that most probably made the Shādhilīyyah so popular in medieval Egypt.

Part three is devoted to the Sufis of Upper Egypt, which are seen as a coherent collectivity that did not coalesce into a Sufi order. Upper Egypt was different because it was far away from the capital and from state patronage, a centre for pilgrimage and trade, and a Shīʿī and Christian stronghold. Upper Egypt also maintained close links with the Maghreb, and the same Sufis were known in both regions.

The Sufism of Upper Egypt was therefore largely in aggressive opposition to state power, and its ideology articulated as a criticism of the moral failures of the ruling elites. The practice of Sufism in Upper Egypt relied on the miracles of saints, and left its mark through the veneration of the tombs of saints – it was the miracle rather than the *silsilah* that legitimated the Sufi in Upper Egypt, "objects of veneration and not of emulation" (p. 225). The main source for this characterization of the Sufis of Upper Egypt comes from the fascinating treatise by Ibn Nūḥ, who places belief in miracles as one of the fundamentals of Sufi identity, and regards miracles as unintentional by-product of access to the realm of the unseen.

I found this book a very valuable addition to the history of Sufism during a critical juncture in its history. It is exceptionally clear, while also maintaining a thorough engagement with theoretical literature. The mapping of the different Sufi paths is particularly constructive. The exclusive focus on the social sphere can, however, be restrictive. There is not enough attention to the material evidence of the *khānqāh*s and tombs in and around which these different forms of Sufism were experienced. I was also intrigued to know how much the social was informed by the development of philosophical Sufism at precisely the same time. The concluding remarks about the emergence of Jewish Sufism promise more to come from this author.

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