CHAPTER FOUR

MARIFA DISCIPLINED AND INSTITUTIONALIZED

There were, of course, no Sufi brotherhoods as we know them today in the early-7th/13th century, no self-identified groups of individuals looking back to an eponymous founder under whose name a particular teaching lineage might differentiate itself from others based on an inherited body of practices, texts, foundational narratives, and accoutrements. This would come later, and in the case of the earliest teaching lineages—the Suhrawardiyya being among the first—was invariably the work of a particular eponym’s disciples and their successors and never that of the eponym himself. As with ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166), Aḥmad al-Rifā‘ī (578/1182), Mu‘īn al-Dīn Chishwī (d. 633/1236), Abū ‘l-Hasan al-Shādhili (d. 656/1258), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) neither Abū ‘l-Najīb nor ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī ‘founded’ an order or brotherhood as such. In many cases, the particular teaching lineages which bore the names of such eponyms did not come to be construed as distinct orders (tariqah) as such until subjected to the centralizing pressures and institutionalizing policies of the Mamluk, Ottoman, and Mughal imperial projects. What these eponyms did do, however, is bring a certain measure of closure to a long and complex period of transition characterized by the progressive routinization of Sufism as a distinct mode of religiosity, identity, and social affiliation by championing, or at least setting into motion, an institutionalizing vision of organization, accoutrement, and praxis which was self-regulating, self-propagating, and most importantly, reproducible. It was during this age of transition—underway by middle of the 5th/11th century and finding a certain measure of consummation in the latter 6th/12th through the

1 The literature on the development and diffusion of the early tariqah lineages is widely scattered, and much research remains to be done before any broad synthetic conclusions can be offered. Overviews and further references in Trimingham, The Sufis Orders, 31–104 (dated); Gramlich, Derwischorden, 1:4–18; Popovic and Veinstein, eds., Les voies d’Allah, 44–67, 104–120, 205–212, 451–517 and esp. the bibliography 636–672; Eric Geoffroy, Le soufisme en Égypte et Syrie sous les derniers Mamlouks et les premiers Ottomans (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1995), 205–282; idem, et al., “Tarīqa,” EF, 10:243–257; and, Knysh, Islamic Mysticism, 169–244.
late 7th/13th centuries—when certain particularly well-positioned Sufi masters such as Abū l-Najīb and 'Umar al-Suhrawardī began to codify the collective theoretical, practical, and institutional weight of the past which they had inherited into discrete, self-regulating, and replicable forms of organization and praxis which would eventually come to characterize transregional forms of institutional organization and praxis associated with ʿarīqa-based Sufism from North Africa to Iraq, and from Anatolia to India during the centuries which followed.

It is only at the end of this transitional period, occurring somewhere between the late-7th/13th and mid-8th/14th centuries where the shift from the precedence of particular self-referential methods (ʿarīq/madhhab)² of individual Sufi shaykhs as primary loci of spiritual authority and group identity to the beginnings of the precedence of a formally definable institutional entity, the organized Sufi brotherhood (ʿarīqa, pl. ʿuruq), took place. Generally this shift is understood to have been one of the outcomes of a much earlier transition from the generic pattern of the ‘teaching-shaykh’ or ‘master of instruction’ (shaykh al-taʿlīm) to the ‘directing-shaykh’ or ‘master of training’ (shaykh al-tarbiya) and the concomitant proliferation of the physical institutions which sustained them, namely the Sufi ribāṭs and khānqāḥs. In no small number of cases (as with Abū l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī’s Tigris ribāṭ for example), such institutions were underwritten by powerful political patrons, supported through the instrument of pious endowment (waqf), constructed with living quarters and, in some cases, supplied with adjoining madrasas.³

Living as he did in the heart of this transitional period, we find in Suhrawardī an individual who exemplifies the role which such directing-shaykhs played in this process, individuals who in their endowed ribāṭs and khānqāḥs trained students along the lines of a specific ʿarīq which, if they happened to become eponyms such as Suhrawardī, would later be replicated, in progressively more self-identified and institutionalized ways, under their name by future generations who envisioned

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² On the connotations of the term ʿarīq (way, road, path; pl. ʿuruq; fem. ʿarīqa [way, method, course]; pl. ʿarīq [rare in this sense]) as it came to be used in Sufism, see: Eric Geoffroy, “ʿArīq,” EI², 10:243–246.