
This book is a valuable contribution to a field of religion in which not much research has been carried out. The volume is based on papers from an international workshop, “Islamic mysticism in the West”, held in Buxton (Derbyshire, Great Britain, 2001). The contributors are well qualified specialists in this topic, as well as in a variety of other fields. Most of them are scholars of religion, but a few other disciplines, such as anthropology, are represented, too.

The book is written for a wide circle of readers interested in comparative studies of religion. Like most conference volumes, this collection of papers is characterized by a certain diversity. For instance, while some contributions are very broad, others are much more specialized. The introduction, written by Jamal Malik, includes a well-written historical background, summaries of the following chapters and a discussion of a few—more or less—recurring themes. In this review, I will first briefly present and comment on each contribution, and then end with some more general remarks.

Marcia Hermansen, a leading specialist on Sufism in the U.S.A., focuses on a much neglected topic, “Literary productions of Western Sufi movements.” Literature is here understood in a wide sense. As Hermansen notes, the number of publishers and distributors of Sufi publications is impressive—and still expanding. The genres include, for instance, transcribed lectures of Sufi leaders, polemic, hagiography, and novels. Considering the great historical significance of Sufi poetry, perhaps surprisingly little original poetry has been produced by members of contemporary western Sufi movements. In her important chapter, Hermansen highlights particularly significant themes like transformation, travel—a perennial feature of the spiritual quest—and Sufi psychologies. In general, *sharia*-oriented Sufi groups favor translations and instruction manuals, while the more universalist or ‘New Age’-inspired movements tend to produce novels and quest narratives.

In “Persian Sufism in the contemporary West: reflections on the Ni’matullahi diaspora,” Leonard Lewisohn presents the Munawwar ‘Ali Shah branch, lead by Dr Javad Nurbakhsh. It is a broad but well-informed chapter. There are considerable differences between the practices in Iran and in the West. For example, while there is strict gender separation in Iran, this does not exist in Europe and North America. A particularly important feature of Nurbakhsh’s teachings is the “Persianization” of Sufism, which echoes some earlier Orientalist works. There are, also, some Occidentalist attitudes: being too individualistic, Westerners cannot fully become Sufis. Considering the essentialist “Orientalism in reverse” and the “sacred nationalism” found in the movement (terms used by Mehrad Boroujerdi and Ninian Smart, respectively), it is paradoxical that this branch of the Nimatullahi order has attracted considerable numbers of Westerners—without an Iranian background—in several countries.
Gerdien Jonker’s chapter, “The evolution of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi: Sulaymançis in Germany,” is one of several contributions on the Naqshbandiyya or groups with roots in this order. The chapter first provides a more general overview of Sufism in Germany. Sulayman Hilmi Tunahan, who died in 1959, refused to appoint a khalifa in the secular state of Turkey, and the Sulaymançis developed as a lay community or dawa organization rather than as a proper Sufi branch. Instead of mystical experiences, they stress the importance of right personal conduct, inspired by the prophet Muhammad, fervor, and Islamic knowledge. Given the Sulaymançis’ disclaim of a Sufi origin, as well as their current orientation, Jonker’s contribution may seem somewhat out of scope in this volume. However, it is a detailed, knowledgeable, and valuable account of an important Muslim lay community in Germany.

A mainly Philadelphia-based Sufi group, which has gradually become more associated with ‘normative Islam,’ is discussed in Gisela Webb’s chapter, “Third-wave Sufism in America and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship.” The chapter interprets ‘America’ in the narrowest possible sense, since the study concerns the U.S.A. but not other parts of the continent. This community was founded by a Tamil-speaking teacher and healer from Sri Lanka, who came to Philadelphia in 1971 and lived there until his death in 1986. He was influenced by several Sufi orders, and some people first saw him as a guru rather than as a Muslim shaykh. Activities now take place especially in a mosque and in a farm area with a burial place, which has become a pilgrimage site. Inter- as well as intra-religious dialogue and co-operation are significant features, and—with about 1000 members in Philadelphia and some branches elsewhere—the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen community represents a form of ‘traditional Islam’ but is opposed to taqlid, i.e. an unquestioned imitation of tradition.

While Webb’s study presents a considerable amount of novel information, the next chapter, “Transnational Sufism: the Haqqaniyya” by Jorgen Nielsen, Mustafa Draper, and Galina Yemelianova, is one of several contributions on a much more well-known Sufi group. However, their work is new and important in that they compare its characteristics and activities in three countries: Dagestan, where this branch of the Naqshbandiyya originated, Lebanon, and Britain. Due to the divergent contexts, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order has developed differently in these three countries. For instance, the general policy of respecting existing states has been difficult to follow in Dagestan and Lebanon, where the states have been largely disputed. The use of Internet as a means of communication, which is particularly efficient in Britain, does not work in Dagestan due to the highly limited access to this medium. In their valuable comparative study, the authors conclude that the order becomes truly transnational only when Shaykh Nazim, the prime leader, is present.

David D. Damrel’s contribution, “Aspects of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order in North America,” is well-written and interesting but has a more limited news