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YAḤYĀ IBN MU‘ĀDH AL-RĀZĪ AND HIS DISCIPLES: THEIR INFLUENCE ON EARLY SUFISM

Fateh Saeidi*

Abstract: Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) is a prominent figure of early Sufism in Rayy at the Jibāl region. According to later Sufi biographies and manuals, he was primary among Sufis to preach from a pulpit, which is why he is alluded to as ‘the Preacher’ (*al-wā’iz*). Yaḥyā travelled extensively throughout the Islamic world, disseminating religious teachings while simultaneously earning a livelihood. Some believe Yaḥyā’s followers called themselves Mu‘ādhiyya and refrained from making a definite statement about the punishment of the Hereafter or forgiveness of major sins. This study discusses some of the main elements of the Karrāmiyya attitude, like the issue of God’s forgiveness, true trust in God and the emphasis on hope for God’s beneficence, which can be found in Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh’s preaching. In the following, his ontological and mystical attitudes to the Creation will be examined. The article then focuses on two of his famous disciples, Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Khawwāṣ (d. 291/894) and Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (d. 304/916-7). Al-Khawwāṣ is the best-known advocate of *tawakkul*, who carried the idea of self-abandonment and trust in God to the extreme. The *malāmatī* orientation of Yūsuf al-Rāzī is one of the most significant points that hagiographers underline about his mystical worldview.

Keywords: *Early Sufism, Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī, Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ, Yūsuf al-Rāzī, Karrāmiyya, Malāmatiyya*

INTRODUCTION

Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) is a Sufi figure who was well known in Rayy in the Jibāl region due to his public preaching. Through his fascinated and mystical preaching, Yaḥyā journeyed extensively across the eastern and western regions of the Islamic world. According to ‘Alī ibn ‘Uṣmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. c. 464/1072), Yaḥyā amassed a significant amount of wealth through preaching in Balkh (Khurāsān); he ultimately took up residence in Nīshābūr for a time before passing away there.¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 871/1492) and other Sufi hagiographers have praised his eloquence and therefore called him ‘the Preacher’ (*al-wā’iz*).²

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¹ ‘Alī ibn ‘Uṣmān al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* [Revelation of the Veil], ed. Mahmud ‘Ābedī (Tehran: Soroush Publication, 2014), 188.

² ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds* [The Breaths of Familiarity from the Lords of Sanctity], ed. Mahmud ‘Ābedī (Tehran, Sokhan Publication, 2015), 53. Also see Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-

Al-Hujwārī considers him “the first Sufi” to sit on the pulpit and preach.³ The high mystical status of Yaḥyā during his lifetime is supported by a statement by Ibn al-Jawzī in *al-Muntaẓam*. He points out the epitaph *Ḥakīm al-zamān* (“the Wise One of the Time”) was inscribed on Yaḥyā’s tombstone.⁴

Aiming for a deeper understanding of Yaḥyā’s position in the formation of early Sufism, it is better to look at how Sufism developed in Rayy. During the Islamic Golden Age, Rayy was booming economically due to its location on the Silk Road and being a political capital for regional governments like the Būyid and Ziyārid dynasties in the Jibāl region.⁵ Also, Rayy held a significant position because it connected Anatolia and Mesopotamia to greater Khurāsān and Central Asia. This characteristic of Rayy as a crossroads can be clearly seen in Yaḥyā’s Sufism and his relationship with the Sufis of Baghdad and Khurāsān.

Karamustafa contends that, beginning from the latter half of the 3rd/9th century, Iraq-based Sufism spread to other regions of the Abbasid Caliphate and combined with other trends of native mysticism. It can be argued that

during the days of al-Junayd [d. 298/910], al-Nūrī [d. c. 296/908] and al-Kharrāz [d. after 278/890], Baghdādī Sufis acted as teachers to numerous students from different regions of the Abbasid empire. These students later spread the distinctive teachings and practices of their Sufi teachers.⁶

There is evidence to infer Yaḥyā’s presence in the Sufī community in Baghdad prior to the arrival of al-Junayd. Aḥmad ibn Alī al-Khatīb Al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) reports the *Nūssāk* (pl. *Nāsik*: one who performs holy rites) of Baghdad made a special place for Yaḥyā to preach, while people gathered around him. Apparently, during his sermon, al-Junayd utters a word that provokes a harsh reaction from Yaḥyā: “Be quiet, sheep! It is forbidden for you to speak when humans speak!”⁷

Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* [Generations of Sufis], ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 98; Abū Nu‘aym Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’* [The Ornament of God’s Friends and Generation of the Pure Ones] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1932-8), vol. 10, 51; Abū ‘I-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya* [The Epistle of al-Qushayrī], ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Mamūd and Maḥmūd ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Sha‘b, 1989), 70.

³ Al-Hujwārī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 187.

⁴ Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī ta’rīkh al-mulūk wa-al-umam* [Compilation on the History of Kings and Nations], ed. Muṣṭafā, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiah, 1992), vol. 12, 149.

⁵ Vladimir Minorsky and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, “al-Rayy,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Pearl Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, accessed September 21, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0916; Guy Le Strange, *Mesopotamia and Persia under the Mongols in the Fourteenth Century A.D. (From the Nuzhat-al-Ḳulūb of Ḥamd-Allah Mustawfī)* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1903), 214-17.

⁶ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 56.

⁷ Aḥmad ibn Alī al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Madīnat al-Salām (Ta’rīkh Baghdād)* [History of Baghdad], ed. Bashār ‘Awad Ma’ruf (Beirut: Dar Al-Gharb al-Eslami, 2001), vol. 14, 306. Considering that he died in 258/872 and stayed in Khurāsān for the last years of his life, his meeting with al-Junayd in Baghdad probably took place before 250/864, when al-Junayd was in his late teens and was considered one of his uncle’s (Sarī al-Saqatī; d. 253/867) followers. Ibn Khalikān quotes the same story with the difference that he mentions the word Sufi along with *Nassāk*, see Shams al-Dīn Abū l-‘Abbās Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-*

During this period, young al-Junaid had not yet achieved a prominent position within Sufi circles in Baghdad. Additionally, while the precise nature of their conversation remains unknown, it is plausible that Yaḥyā expressed apprehension regarding the potential for misinterpretation of the beliefs and deeds of ascetics and Sufis. These concerns were not unfounded because the great trial of the Sufis in Baghdad (264/877)⁸ shortly after Yaḥyā's death had severe consequences for Sufis. This is why Yaḥyā guides Sufis in this regard by warning them to “avoid associating with three groups of people: headless servants, hypocritical renunciants, and ignorant pretenders to Sufism.”⁹

Although Yaḥyā's mystical treatises have not been preserved, it is still possible to recover his style of pious living by collating the traditional hagiographical accounts. This can also be seen as the justification for the very limited research that has been done on Yaḥyā's role in the formation of Sufism in the field of Sufi studies. Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of Yaḥyā's spiritual prayers or how he is connected to the Karrāmiyya, an Islamic sect that flourished in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world from the 3rd/9th century until the Mongol invasions. The Karrāmiyya gained notoriety for their belief that a mere verbal declaration of faith was sufficient to confer the status of a believer.¹⁰ Knysh proposes a common characteristic between Ibn Karrām (d. 255/868; founder of the Karrāmiyya sect) and Yaḥyā is their fascination with public preaching, which suggests the possibility of their shared intellectual roots. Furthermore, Schimmel points out that Yaḥyā's scattered words exhibit a distinctive and appealing style in contrast to the utterances of the Sufis from Khurāsān and Baghdad.¹¹

The primary objective of this research is to emphasise the significance of Yaḥyā ibn Mu'adh al-Rāzī, a prominent figure in the development of early Sufism in Rayy during the 3rd/9th century. This is achieved through examination of the mystical view of Yaḥyā and two of his disciples, Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ and Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī.

FRAGMENTED DETAILS ABOUT YAḤYĀ

No information on his early life has come down to us; we know only that he was born in Rayy to a pious and cultured family and was brought up there. The sources record two of his brothers were ascetics¹² and he underwent *samā'* rituals (a Sufi ceremony performed as part of

a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān [Obituaries of Celebrities and News about the (Author's) Contemporaries], ed. Ihsan Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1978), vol. 6, 166.

⁸ For this official inquisition, see Harith Ramli, “Opposition to Sufis in the Formative Period,” in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York: Routledge, 2021), 120-22.

⁹ Al-Hujwārī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 26. Also see al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 104. Of course, in *al-Luma'*, this statement has been attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī (d. c. 283/896); see Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma' fī 'l-taṣawwuf* [Book of Flashes of Light], ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1914), 179. Karamustafa also deals with this issue; see Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 100.

¹⁰ For example, see Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 92-3.

¹¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 51.

¹² Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 98; Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah* [Characteristics of the Pious], ed. Khalid Mustafa Tartusi (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 2012), 744.

the meditation and prayer practice *dhikr*) in Qazwīn.¹³ Al-Hujwīrī mentions Yaḥyā was the author of many books, but these seem to be lost.¹⁴ However, his sayings “are delicately moulded and pleasant to the ear and subtle in substance and profitable in devotion.”¹⁵ According to Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 385/995), Yaḥyā had a book called *Murād al-murīdīn*, about which we know nothing.¹⁶ ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/109) also points out that Shāh Shujā‘ al-Kermānī (d. after 270/883) has a book on the superiority of poverty over wealth, which he composed in response to Yaḥyā’s writings that prioritise wealth over poverty.¹⁷ Yaḥyā was one of the preachers who transmitted spiritual concepts orally. However, oral transmission led some of his sayings to be attributed to other Sufis or vice versa. Apparently, he also used the art of poetry to speak on mysticism in his preaching and his verses were quoted in Arabic.¹⁸ Schimmel believes Yaḥyā’s short sermons have reached us in the form of scattered words and they are “pleasantly different in style from the utterances of the Khurasanian and the Baghdadian Sufis.”¹⁹

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), who devoted part of his book *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah* to the Sufis of Rayy (*Dhikr al-muṣṭafayīn min ahl al-Rayy*),²⁰ mentions Jarīr ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Jarīr al-Rāzī (110-188/728-804) at the beginning of the list, in spite of the fact that he hailed from Kufa.²¹ Al-Jawzī also mentions the names of Muslim scholars such as Abū Ya‘lī ibn Manṣūr al-Rāzī (d. 211/826) and Abū Ishāq al-Dūlābī (Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī; 200-264/816-878),²² who are less referred to as Sufis in other sources. Abū Zur‘a, known as a narrator of *ḥadīth*, made many trips to different parts of the Islamic world.²³ al-Jawzī dedicates most of this section to the famous Sufi of Rayy, Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī.²⁴ In addition, in *Kitāb al-bayād wa l-sawād*, al-Sīrjanī (d. c. 470/1077) places him among the Sufis of Jibāl.²⁵

In *Kashf al-mahjūb*, al-Hujwīrī says God had two Yaḥyās. One was a prophet and the other [Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī] a saint (*walī*). He also says Yaḥyā was one of the first sheikhs to go to the pulpit (*minbar*) and preach after the *Rāshidūn* (‘Rightly Guided’) Caliphs.²⁶ Yaḥyā made many trips to Baghdad, Egypt, and Fārs, apparently went to Khurāsān (Balkh, Harāt and Nīshāpūr) to pay off the loans he owed in Rayy.²⁷ Earning money through preaching and giving

¹³ Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī, *Tarīkh-e guzīda*, ed. Abdolhossein Navaei (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 2015), 791.

¹⁴ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 187.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 51.

¹⁶ Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist* [The Book Catalogue], ed. Reza Tajadud (Tehran: n.p., 1971), 235.

¹⁷ ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* [Generations of Sufis], ed. Muhammad Sarwar Mawlayī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1983), 236; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 84.

¹⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, vol. 10, 59.

¹⁹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 51.

²⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah*, 742.

²¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah*, 742; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 9, 158-59.

²² Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah*, 743.

²³ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 12, 193.

²⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah*, 744.

²⁵ Abū ‘I-Ḥasan al-Sīrjanī, *Sufism, Black and White: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Bayād wa-l-sawād*, ed. Bilal Orfali and Nada Saab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 257.

²⁶ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 187.

²⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 70-71; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 188; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 327-28. Referring to Yaḥyā’s many travels, Meier does not find them compatible with his sayings in praise of

speeches can be compared to the teaching of the Sophists in Ancient Greece. In Shīrāz, he preached with such skill that he could make people laugh or cry whenever he wanted. During his stay there, he earned 7,000 dinars through preaching.²⁸ This approach was not always welcomed and Abū Zur‘a describes Yaḥyā’s preaching as mournful, which he deplores because he did it to accumulate wealth, rather than mourn his sins. Abū Zur‘a said:

Mourning is for when one enters his house and closes the door to mourn for his sins. As for Yaḥyā, he goes to Iṣfahān and Fārs and travels around the cities in mourning, and I will not accept this from him.²⁹

Al-Hujwīrī and especially ‘Aṭṭār (d. 618/1220) have attempted to assign mystical meanings to these trips. ‘Aṭṭār informs us that Yaḥyā owed a hundred thousand dirhams in Rayy and spent this money to help holy warriors, pilgrims, poor men, scholars and Sufis. When the creditors asked for payment of their loans, he could not repay them. His heart was much preoccupied by this. One night he dreamed that the Prophet told him: “O Yaḥyā! Do not worry because I suffer from your anxiety.”³⁰ The Prophet then ordered Yaḥyā to go to Khurāsān, “there, a woman gives you three hundred thousand dirhams.”³¹ Throughout this journey, Yaḥyā preached in various cities of Khurāsān, including Nīshāpūr, Balkh and Harāt, and at the end, found the sign mentioned in the mystical dream. At the end of the journey, he died in a bandit attack and was buried in Nīshāpūr.

The historical association between Yaḥyā and Bāyazīd al-Bastāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) represents a prototypical instance of the interrelations among Sufis in the history of Sufism. Yaḥyā’s correspondence with Bāyazīd is emblematic of the interactions between adherents of the mystical tradition and illustrate the dynamics of the Sufi network in a historical context. In a letter, Yaḥyā wrote to Bāyazīd: “I am intoxicated, having drunk so deeply from the cup of His love.” Al-Bastāmī wrote to him in reply: “Someone else has drunk up the seas of Heaven and earth, but his thirst is not slaked. His tongue is hanging out, and he is crying, ‘Is there any more?’”³² In this anecdote cited by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), the value of intoxication (*sukr*) is attributed to Yaḥyā, while Bāyazīd is depicted as a Sufi who advocated the path of sobriety (*ṣaḥw*).

seclusion; see Fritz Meier, *Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū l-Hayr (357-440/967-1049): Wirklichkeit und Legende* (Tehran: Acta Iranica, Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1976), 182-83. It can be said the famous Sufis of Rayy spent most of their lives outside the city. These Sufis travelled to major cultural centres in the Islamic world to learn science and seek mystical guidance, and this kind of exploration was common and even necessary for seekers of Islamic sciences. The location of Rayy on important economic highways is likely to have increased and facilitated the mobility of educated people.

²⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī ta’rīkh*, vol. 12, 148-49; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa waḥayāt al-mashāhīr wa ‘l-a’lām* [The History of Islam and Deaths of the Famous People and Signs], ed. Umar Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1987–2004), vol. 19, 374-75.

²⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Tahdhīr al-khawwāṣ min akādhīb al-quṣṣās* [A Warning to the Retinue against the Lies of the Storytellers], ed. Muhammad al-Ṣabbāgh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 280-81. His preachings were condemned by some Sufi masters “as a sign of vanity.” See Knysch, *Islamic Mysticism*, 92; Meier, *Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū l-Hayr*, 173.

³⁰ Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā* [Biographies of the Saints], ed. Muhammad Este‘lami (Tehran: Zawwār Publication, 2012), 327.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, 40 cited in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension*, 51.

In accordance with al-Hujwīrī's classification, Bāyazīd's intoxication is juxtaposed with al-Junayd's sobriety, leading to a distinctive interpretation of the anecdote. The core content of the Persian rendition of the anecdote cited by al-Hujwīrī aligns with the Arabic version. However, a notable disparity exists in the utterances of Bāyazīd, which mark the conclusion of this anecdote. Bāyazīd wrote in reply: "What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the wine of love, would drink them all and still cry out from thirst."³³ Al-Hujwīrī asserts to have reversed the customary interpretation of the anecdote. He opines this contrast highlights Bāyazīd's insatiable thirst for the wine of love, ultimately rendering him more intoxicated than Yaḥyā.

In *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 'Aṭṭār reveals other aspects of the correspondence between Yaḥyā and Bāyazīd. Yaḥyā wrote again, "I have a secret to tell you, but our rendezvous is in Paradise. There, under the shadow of Tuba, I will reveal the secret." He sent along with the letter a loaf saying, "The sheikh must avail himself of this, for I kneaded it with water from the well of *Zemzem*." In his reply Bāyazīd al-Baṣṭāmī referred to Yaḥyā's secret, saying,

As for the rendezvous you mentioned, with His remembrance, I enjoy even now the possession of Paradise and the shade of the tree of Tuba. However, I cannot avail myself of the loaf you sent. You indeed stated with what water you kneaded it, but you did not mention how you attained the seed you sowed.³⁴

'Aṭṭār attributes a higher mystical rank to Bāyazīd and notes Yaḥyā visited him eagerly to learn from his pious exemplary behaviour.

YAḤYĀ AND THE KARRĀMIYYA

The Karrāmiyya was originally an ascetic and theological movement that flourished in the eastern parts of the Islamic world from the 3rd/9th century until the Mongol invasions in the 7th/13th century. The founder of the Karrāmiyya, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Karrām, was a famous ascetic preacher to the masses in Khurāsān region. Ibn Karrām's reportedly extreme asceticism was based on a true dependence on God (*tawakkul*) that called for abstaining from actively gaining one's sustenance (*kasb*).³⁵ The level of asceticism practiced by some Karāmīs was so extreme that it forbade any attempts to secure a means of sustenance, whether through labour or even soliciting alms, as they viewed such actions as incompatible with a true trust in God.

The Karrāmiyya's positions generally match the theological school of the Murji'a. For the Karrāmiyya, Islamic belief was no more than verbal confession with the tongue without mental assent (*taṣdīq*) or works ('*amal*). This was not to say, though, that mere formal belief might lead to paradise. The Murji'a believe that only God has the authority to determine whether a

³³ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 283. For more details, see Annabel Keeler, "Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī and Discussions about Intoxicated Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York: Routledge, 2021), 46-7.

³⁴ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 146-47.

³⁵ Aron Zysow, "Karrāmiya," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karramiya>.

Muslim has apostatised. As a result, Muslims should postpone judgment (*'irjā'*) on those who commit severe sins and refrain from making charges of disbelief (*takfīr*) or punishing anyone who claims to follow Islam as their religion. The Murji'a held the opinion that leaves judgement on sinners to God and His reckoning on the Day of Resurrection.³⁶

Massignon, Zarinkub and Knysh believe Yaḥyā probably preached in the Karrāmiyya way³⁷ and Meier links him to the Murji'a.³⁸ The existing evidence can support both views. As mentioned, Yaḥyā's distinguishing feature was his willingness to preach. If this feature is compared to the ascetic movement of the Karrāmiyya, the similarity between the two will reveal itself. However, preaching was not a prevalent practice within early Sufi circles, but "seemingly, one of the reasons for the *Karrāmiyya* movement's success was the very active preaching of its preachers. They would not shy away from instilling fear into the hearts of their audience."³⁹ Yaḥyā's disciples, Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (see below) and Abū 'Uthmān Sa'īd ibn Ismā'īl al-Rāzī al-Ḥīrī (230–298/844–910), were influenced by his eloquent preaching. Yūsuf al-Rāzī mentions the virtue of Yahya's eloquence: "I have been at sermons of scholars, sages, and sheikhs in one hundred and twenty cities, and have not seen anyone who is more capable of speaking than Yaḥyā."⁴⁰ Also, when 'Uthmān al-Ḥīrī reached the state of fascination and spiritual concerns, the answers to his perplexities were revealed to him when he attended Yaḥyā's sermons.⁴¹

Yaḥyā is seldom mentioned as someone who either had a negative view of the Karrāmiyya or endorsed it directly. It is possible, on one hand, that classical hagiographers did not consider the Karrāmiyya sect to be part of Sufism. On the other hand, Islamic governments viewed this widespread movement as centred on north-eastern Iran and neighbouring regions with scepticism. In this context, Madelung highlights a significant point that "by the fifth/eleventh century, the Karrāmiyya were almost universally condemned as a heretical sect by the apologists of Sufism."⁴² Because of this, Yaḥyā probably could not reveal his connection to them. Otherwise, even his mystical positions, which overlapped with Karrāmiyya views, would cause him problems.

In *Kitāb al-bad' wa al-ta'rīkh*, al-Maqdisī considers the Karrāmiyya and Mu'ādhīyya sects to be part of the Murji'a because those who follow the Murji'a refrain from making a definite

³⁶ Wilferd Madelung, "Murjī'a," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Pearl Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, accessed September 21, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0801.

³⁷ Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, tr. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 180-82; Abdol-Hosein Zarrinkoob, *Justajū dar taṣavvuf-i Īrān* [In Search of Iranian Sufism] (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication, 2011), 48-9; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 92-3.

³⁸ Meier, *Abū Sa'īd-i Abū l-Hayr*, 169, 173.

³⁹ Lutz Berger, "al-Karrāmiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart, accessed September 21, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30929.

⁴⁰ Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 53.

⁴¹ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 415.

⁴² Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany: Persian Heritage Foundation, 1988), 39.

statement about the punishment of the Hereafter or the forgiveness of major sins. They leave such judgments to God and His reckoning on the Day of Resurrection. According to him, the Karrāmiyya accepted as valid only the verbal confession of the existence of one God; therefore, a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) can be called a true believer (*mu'min*). In the Islamic context, a *Munāfiq* is an individual who presents themselves as a Muslim to the public and the Islamic community, but harbours rejection of Islam or disseminates anti-Islamic sentiments in their heart or to those who oppose the Islamic faith. However, according to Karrāmiyya doctrine, the hypocrite can be regarded as a member of the Muslim community, despite their insincerity, since they verbally profess to be Muslim.

Also, the Mu'ādhīyya, the followers of Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh, preached that God, by His grace and forgiveness, would not punish anyone for the sins they had committed unless they were unbelievers.⁴³ Al-Dhahabī points out the Karrāmiyya cherished Aḥmad al-Ḥarb (d. 234/849), because he was Ibn Karrām's master,⁴⁴ and Yaḥyā, respectfully, had requested to be buried next to Aḥmad al-Ḥarb's feet, due to his lower-ranking mystical position.⁴⁵ Yaḥyā praised Ibn Karrām's mystical attitude and said that poverty is the rug of ascetics and Ibn Karrām is on the rug of ascetics.⁴⁶

In addition to the major topics discussed above, some of the main elements of the Karrāmiyya attitude, including the issue of God's forgiveness, true trust in God (*tawakkul*) and emphasis on hope for God's beneficence (*rajā'*), are found in Yaḥyā's preachings and prayers. He appraises asceticism if accompanied by trust and it is narrated that a man asked Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh: "When shall I enter the tavern of trust in God, wearing the cloak of renunciation, and be seated with the renouncers?" He answered:

When, in the secret training of your soul, you attain such a degree that, if God were to withhold your sustenance for three days you would not become any weaker than you were [before]. As long as you have not attained this degree, you're seated on the same carpet with the [genuine] renouncers in sheer ignorance. For I cannot guarantee that you will not find yourself disgraced among them!⁴⁷

In several of his prayers, Yaḥyā's piety manifests in his firm belief in the overarching mercy of God that permits even the gravest sins to be pardoned by Him. Schimmel believes his prayers "show the contrast between the helpless sinner and the Almighty Lord who can forgive His miserable creatures out of His inexhaustible treasure of mercy."⁴⁸ The unique formula of Yaḥyā's prayer can be deemed an exemplary instance of mystical invocation, undertaken with

⁴³ Al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa-l-ta'rīkh* [The Book of the Beginning and History] (Cairo: Maktaba al-Sqafat al-Dini, n.d.), vol. 5, 144-45

⁴⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām*, vol. 17, 37; Jacqueline Chabbi, "Remarques sur le Développement Historique des Mouvements Ascétiques et Mystiques au Khurasan: IIIe/IXe Siècle - IVe/Xe Siècle" [Remarks on the Historical Development of Ascetic and Mystical Movements in Khurasan: 3rd/9th Century - 4th/10th Century], *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977), 30.

⁴⁵ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 251.

⁴⁶ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām*, vol. 19, 312.

⁴⁷ Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle of Sufism*, tr. Alexander D. Knysh (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2007), 137.

⁴⁸ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 52.

the objective of attaining closer proximity to the Divine. This mystical expression was indicative of the Sufis' sincere endeavours to discipline base desires or tame the lower soul and ardour for communion with the Divine through prayer.

In his prayer, Yaḥyā demonstrates an innovative refinement of the ascetic tradition that incorporates the dichotomy between fear of God's judgment (*khawf*) and hope in His mercy (*rajā'*) as the foundation of true piety:

O God! Thou hast sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh the rebel and said, "Talk mildly with him"—O God, this is Thy kindness towards one who claimed to be God; how, then, is Thy kindness towards one who is Your servant out of his innermost soul?...O God, I fear Thee because I am a slave, and I hope in You because Thou art the Lord!...O God, how should I not hope in Thee, while Thou art merciful, and how should I not fear Thee because Thou art powerful? O God, how can I call upon Thee, being a rebellious slave, and how could I not call upon Thee who art a merciful Lord?⁴⁹

The faith of a Sufi is situated between fear of and hope in God. Yaḥyā's unwavering hope represents a sign of his profound trust in Divine Mercy, without even the slightest hint of despair. This deeply ingrained faith in forgiveness, which Sufis possess, is owed to the Divine promise that, "for no one loses hope in God's mercy except those with no faith."⁵⁰ Yaḥyā engages in his prayer with the hope of seeking forgiveness for his sins, as he utters:

The hope (*rajā'*) that I place in You when I sin is almost greater than the hope I place in You when I do good works, for, in my good works, I have to rely on sincerity. However, how can I keep them sincere when I am infamous for my imperfection? On the contrary, in my sins I rely on Your pardon, for how can You not pardon me when beneficence is Your [essential] attribute?⁵¹

Those who consider Yaḥyā's attitude to be part of the Murji'a or Karrāmiyya movements seem to cite his prayers that are deeply obsessed with God's forgiveness, which could give absolution for every sin: "O God, though I cannot refrain from sin, Thou canst forgive my sins."⁵² Also, evidence can be provided for Yaḥyā's seemingly extremist views based on the Qur'ān and *hadīth*, which is why his statements are generally not criticised by Sufis. He is also cited as one of the most influential figures in the formation of Sufism. According to the Qur'ān, becoming hopeless of God's mercy is prohibited and it has been declared: "O my Servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls! Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins. He is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."⁵³

As a mystical station (*maqām*), Yaḥyā believes of hope for Divine forgiveness (*rajā'*) in the Sufi path and a Sufi might ultimately be forgiven by God. In the Sufi tradition, Yaḥyā considers the mystical station (*maqām*) of hope for Divine forgiveness to be an integral aspect of the

⁴⁹ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 325-26.

⁵⁰ Qur'ān 12:87.

⁵¹ al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle*, 150.

⁵² 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 326.

⁵³ Qur'ān 39:53.

spiritual path. Accordingly, through His boundless mercy, God assists the Sufi in every possible way to facilitate their journey towards accessing the sanctuary of the Divine.

According to *Hadith Qudsī*, becoming hopeless of God's mercy is prohibited and it declares,

O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it.⁵⁴

The Mu'ādhīyya creed is founded on the principle that individuals who believe in the unification of God (*tawhīd*) are not punished by Him. This tenet forms the cornerstone of the creed. Yaḥyā's supplication underscores the centrality of this principle in his worldview, as he notes his hope in God is greater when he sins than when he does good works. This attitude places Yaḥyā's beliefs in alignment with or close proximity to the perspectives espoused by the Murji'a or Karrāmiyya movements.

MYSTICAL VIEW ON THE CREATION

Yaḥyā believes the delights and sorrows of human beings on earth are caused by (unconsciously) remembering the Covenant (*alast*) that the loins have made with God. He briefly explains that a person may be sad and not know why; the reason is that their soul remembers the Covenant with God when they were 'in a loin' (*al-'ahd wa al-mīthāq fī al-dhurr*) and their grief is due to guilt. They may cry and not know why; this is because they remember the fire they saw on the day of the Covenant. Also, perhaps they hear an ardent song, which is why they are overjoyed and their soul remembers the day of the loin (*yawm al-dhurr*) and recalls the oration they heard.⁵⁵ The Qur'ān often exhorts believers to recall and remember.⁵⁶ This advice is highlighted in Islamic mysticism through a call to remember this particular moment of the covenant in their spiritual history. Hence, attempting to remember through invocations and reflection is regarded in Sufism as remembrance (*dhikr*).

The concept of *alast* is a Qur'ānic term and is better to refer to its theological and mystical understanding in the Islamic context to comprehend it more accurately. In Islamic theology, the primordial Covenant between God and human beings was made at the beginning of creation. This Covenant was made even before the creation of the heavens and earth. God informed humankind of the truth of His existence in a timeless and placeless spiritual realm. This moment is referred to in Qur'ānic verses:

And remember when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam, their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. Allāh asked: "Am I not your Lord?"

⁵⁴ Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davis, trans., *Forty Hadith Qudsī* (Cairo: Dar El Shorouk, 2002), 126.

⁵⁵ Abū Tālib Makkī, *Ilm al-qulūb* [The Knowledge of Hearts], ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2004), 89.

⁵⁶ Qur'ān 2:125.

They replied: “Yes, you are! We testify.” He cautioned, “Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, ‘We were not aware of this.’”⁵⁷

God asked the loins (*dhurriyat*) of Adam the famous interrogation *Alastu bi-rabbikum?* (“Am I not your Lord?”) and some Sufis interpret this verse as the ‘Covenant’ (*mīthāq*) between humanity and God. For example, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. c. 283/896) posits that, on the Day of Covenant, humanity in a state of light particles made a profession of the oneness of God, thereby implying the negation of the affirmation of one’s self (*nafs*). This act of profession of God’s oneness on the Day of Primordial Compact in pre-existence is expressed through man’s confession of God’s Lordship.⁵⁸ The central mystical perspective is that the yet unborn children of Adam testified that God was their Lord and sealed the primordial Covenant of love between the Creator and humankind.

Yaḥyā’s spiritual view about the verse of *alast* is probably due to a *ḥadīth* narrated by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), in which the Prophet explained:

God created Adam. Then He rubbed his back with His right hand and pulled out some loins. So He said, I created these for heaven, and it will act like heavenly people. Subsequently, He rubbed his back again, taking out some more loins, and said, I created these for hell, and they will act like hellish people.⁵⁹

It seems the Platonic perspective of the existence of celestial forms could have been a religious justification for Sufi rites such as *samā’*. This view is supported by al-Junayd, who points out that God, on the day of *alast* or the first Covenant, addressed the loins of human beings: “‘Am I not your Lord?’ The sweetness and burden of those words remained in their souls. Inevitably, whenever they hear a song, they remember those words and dance enthusiastically.”⁶⁰

IBRĀHĪM IBN AḤMAD AL-KHAWWĀŞ AND HIS TRUST IN GOD

The pious style of everyday life based on trust in God is also seen in Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Khawwāş (d. 291/894).⁶¹ He was one of Yaḥyā’s disciples, was originally from Iraq and lived in Rayy for the majority of his life.⁶² Al-Khawwāş is the best-known advocate of *tawakkul*,

⁵⁷ Qur’ān 7:172.

⁵⁸ Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 146.

⁵⁹ Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Ahd-e alast* [The Covenant] (Tehran: Farhang Moaser, 1395 SH/2016), 29.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad Khargūshī, *Kitāb tahdhīb al-asrār* [The Refinement of Secrets], ed. Bassām Muḥammad Bārūd (Beirut: Dār al-Bārūdī, 1998), 336. Pourjavady quotes the translation by ‘Ezzadīn al-Kāshānī (d. 735/1335) from the same passage; see Pourjavady, *Ahd-e alast*, 137.

⁶¹ Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 98; al-Işfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, vol. 10, 325; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 97-8; al-Hujwūrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 233-34; Anşārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 348; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Şifat al-şafwah*, 749; ‘Atţār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, 523; Sirāj al-Dīn Abū Ḥafş ‘Umar b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā’* [The Generations of the Saints], ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharība (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1973), 16; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 138; ‘Abd al-wahhāb al-Sha’rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* [The Major Generations], ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyah (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfat al-Dīniyya, 2005), 176; Zayn al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Manāwī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-şūfiyya* [Generations of Sufis], tr. Muḥammad ‘Adīb al-Jādr (Beirut: Dar al-Şadr, 1999), vol. 1, 497.

⁶² Anşārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 348.

who carried the idea of self-abandonment and trust in God to the extreme.⁶³ On these grounds, ‘Aṭṭār called him the *ra’īs al-mutawakkilīn* (“the head of those who trust in God”).⁶⁴

In hagiographies, some stories have been narrated about his acts of pious devotion and unhealthy exaggeration of *tawakkul*. For example, Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ went to the desert without any provisions to practice absolute trust in God.⁶⁵ Despite Dīnawar’s (located in the Jibāl region) cold weather, he worshipped in the snowy cloister of the mosque without a cover to protect himself from the frost. When asked to put on clothes, he refused to avoid suffering from “Zoroastrian duality.” He considered dressing to be a departure from the true trust as absolute dependence on God and abstraction (*tajrīd*) from anything other than God Almighty as He truly demands, because He will certainly supply believers’ daily needs.⁶⁶ In another mystical story, Mamshad al-Dīnawarī (d. 299/911) was inspired to go to the mosque to see one of God’s friends. There, he saw al-Khawwāṣ with a lot of snow on his head, but he was sweating from the extreme heat and greenery had grown on his seat.⁶⁷ In another interesting example, al-Khawwāṣ refused to accompany Khidr (in Sufi tradition, Khidr receives illumination directly from God without human mediation, so he would not entrust anyone else on the path of truth).⁶⁸

Anṣārī mentions he saw a book by al-Khawwāṣ under the title of *I’tiqād* (belief). However, there is no knowledge available about it now.⁶⁹ A few verses of poetry have also been attributed to him.⁷⁰ Following the Islamic burial rituals, Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (d. 304/916-7) washed his corpse and performed the funeral prayer (*Ṣalāt al-janāzah*).⁷¹

YŪSUF IBN ḤUSAYN AL-RĀZĪ AND HIS MALĀMATĪ ORIENTATION

As a “Sheikh Rayy and of Jibāl”, Yūsuf was one of the Sufis associated with Yaḥyā and Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī (d. 245/859). He is mentioned as a disciple of Dhū ‘l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. c. 245/859 or 248/862).⁷² According to ‘Aṭṭār, the daughter of one of the leaders of the Arab tribes was crazy about Yūsuf and tried to seduce him, but Yūsuf refused. He was frightened

⁶³ Leonard Lewisohn, “Tawakkul,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Pearl Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, accessed September 21, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_744.

⁶⁴ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 523. In the same sense, al-Hūjwūrī used *sarhang-e mutawakkilān*; see al-Hujwūrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 233.

⁶⁵ Abū’l-Ḥasan Daylamī, *Sīrat sheikh kabīr abū ‘Abdūllāh ibn Khaṭf Shīrāzī*, ed. Annemarie Schimmel, tr. Rukn al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Junayd Shīrāzī (Tehran: Bābak, 1363 SH/1984), 105-6; cf. al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 285; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 525, 529-30; al-Sīrjanī, *Sufism*, 621

⁶⁶ Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 349; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 139.

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt*, 18-19; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 140.

⁶⁸ Al-Hujwūrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 234; cf. Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 349; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 524.

⁶⁹ Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 348.

⁷⁰ Al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, 330; al-Sīrjanī, *Sufism*, 220; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt*, 19-20; al-Manāwī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, 504.

⁷¹ Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 283; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 349; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 139.

⁷² Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 175; al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, 238; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 91; al-Hujwūrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 208-9; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 267-69; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah*, 751; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 333; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt*, 379; Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 97-8; al-Sha’rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 164-65; al-Manāwī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, 164.

and anxious of her cajolement. At night, he had a dream in which the angels and Prophet Yūsuf, who highly revered his righteous deed, told him that his pious refusal was even greater than that of Prophet Yūsuf. They recognised the Divine message that he was one of the saintly elect and must go to Dhū 'l-Nūn for sacred guidance.⁷³

The Malāmātī orientation of Yūsuf al-Rāzī is one of the most significant points that Anṣārī underlines about his mystical worldview. He points to Yūsuf's three main characteristics as the cores of his Malāmātī perspective: (1) Stirring up the people against himself; (2) Destroying his reputation and the respect he enjoyed among the people by his own hands; and (3) Deliberately discrediting himself.⁷⁴ The prevailing view in Islamic studies is that the Malāmātiyya movement (the Path of Blame) first emerged in the 3rd/9th century in Nīshāpūr as a Khurāsānian form of spirituality.⁷⁵ However, Yūsuf was a Malāmātī in Rayy and he was also probably an example of such ascetic behaviour among the Malāmātīs of Nīshāpūr.

Yūsuf behaved in such an unusual Malāmātī way that the people of Rayy considered him a *zindīq* ('heretic').⁷⁶ He would go far to keep the secret of his higher spiritual state from probable followers and to avoid slipping into hypocrisy. Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ was surprised that Yūsuf, while not impressed by the recitation of the Qur'ān, wept only by hearing one Arabic verse. While al-Khawwāṣ was sceptical about the mystical state of Yūsuf and thought the defamation about his being a heretic to be true, he confronts Khidr. Khidr removes al-Khawwāṣ' worries and assures him of Yūsuf's high mystical rank.⁷⁷ Yūsuf seems to have attempted to conceal his inner spiritual state and change the popular acclaim into blame by apparent violations of Sharia or Islamic customs. In *Risālat al-malāmātiyya*, al-Sulamī lists many Malāmātiyya principles in such a way that they do not conflict with Sufism:

They [the *Malāmātīs*] pretend to what is blameworthy and conceal what is praiseworthy. This people blame them for their outward [conduct] while they blame themselves for their inward [state].⁷⁸

A close relationship existed between the Malāmātī circle of Nīshāpūr (Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād and Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥīrī al-Rāzī) and Yūsuf. Involuntarily, Abū 'Uthmān (d. 298/910; originally from Rayy but an inhabitant and adherent of the ascetic tradition of Nīshāpūr)⁷⁹ fell

⁷³ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 333-34.

⁷⁴ Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 267.

⁷⁵ Frederick de Jong, Hamid Algar and Colin H. Imber, "Malāmātiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Pearl Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, accessed August 10, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0643; Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 48; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 94-5.

⁷⁶ Al-Ḥafṣānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, vol. 10, 240.

⁷⁷ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 335-36; cf. Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt*, 381-82; al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 165.

⁷⁸ Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, "Risālat al-malāmātiyya" [The Epistle of the People of Blame], in *al-Malāmātiyya wa'l-sufiyya wa ahl al-futuwwa*, ed. Abū 'l-'Alā' al-'Āfīfī (Beirut: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2015), 95. For the relationship between *Malāmātiyya* and Sufism, see Sara Svirī, "Hakim Tirmidhi and the Maliimati Movement in Early Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 605-6.

⁷⁹ Jacqueline Chabbi, "al-Ḥīrī, Abū 'Uthmān," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krāmer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart, accessed September 21, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30482.

in love with a Turkish handmaiden who had been entrusted to him by a merchant to keep her safe. Abū ‘Uthmān did not know what to do with this uncontrollable love and consulted his master Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād (d. c. 270/883; one of the first figures of the Khurāsānian Malāmātī movement in Nīshāpūr). “You must go to Rayy, to consult Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn,” Abū Ḥafṣ told him. When Abū ‘Uthmān reached Rayy, he asked people for Yūsuf. “What business do you have with this heretic (*zindīq*)? You look like a religious man. Talking to him will be bad for you.” They were so upset and continued their condemnation of Yūsuf to stop Abū ‘Uthmān from visiting Yūsuf. The people succeeded. However, when he returned to Nīshāpūr, Abū Ḥafṣ urged him: “Go back and visit him!” Finally, when Abū ‘Uthmān reached Yūsuf’s house, he saw an old man. A beardless and handsome boy was before him, in front of him, a bowl of wine and a goblet. First, Abū ‘Uthmān thought that everything the people said was true. After Yūsuf’s explanation, it turned out the beardless boy was his son who was learning the Qur’ān and the water bowl was his only asset to serve the people. Abū ‘Uthmān cried: “For God’s sake! Why do you behave in such a way to be ridiculed by the people?” “I do it for this reason,” Yūsuf answered, “so that no one may send a Turkish handmaiden to my house as a confidante.” When Abū ‘Uthmān heard these words, he fell at the Sheikh’s feet. He realised the man had attained a high degree.⁸⁰

Two major themes emerge from this long story. Despite his reputation as a Sufi, it seems Yūsuf probably belonged to the same Malāmātiyya school. Although Sulamī, in *Risālat al-malāmātiyya*, did not mention the Malāmātī movement in the Jibāl region, it is clear the Malāmātīs of Nīshāpūr were influenced by Sufis such as Yūsuf. Yūsuf believed in this Qur’ānic guidance: “They [the believers] do not fear the blame of a critic.”⁸¹ His acts were in line with this Malāmātiyya principle that the display of outer worship is *shirk* (the sin of idolatry) and the display of an inner state is *irtidād* (apostasy).⁸²

‘Abdullāh ibn Muḥammad al-Kharrāz (d. before 310/922) is another famous Sufi of this period in Rayy,⁸³ about whom Yūsuf said “neither have I seen anyone like Kharrāz nor he has seen anyone like himself.”⁸⁴ What is generally noticed about him is his attachment to *futuwwa* (chivalry). This is a sign of the connection between the Sufis of Rayy and Nīshāpūr because one of the first definitions of *futuwwa* goes back to Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād, who defined it as part of mystical etiquette (*adab*): “*futuwwa* is morals.”⁸⁵ Kharrāz explicitly introduces his mystical path in Mecca as a *futuwwa* and a delightful story was told about this feature: al-Kharrāz went to Mecca from Rayy with 20 of his followers. When they were only a short distance from Mecca, Kharrāz separated from them and entrusted them to God. His disciples wondered where he was going. In response, al-Kharrāz said: “I have come from Rayy to accompany you here,

⁸⁰ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, 336-37.

⁸¹ Qur’ān 5:54.

⁸² Al-Sulamī, “*Risālat al-malāmātiyya*,” 98.

⁸³ Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 287; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 98.

⁸⁴ Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 396.

⁸⁵ Lloyd Ridgeon, “*Futuwwa* (in Sūfism),” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart, accessed August 10, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27218.

and I was happy with this companionship. Now, I will return to Rayy, and from there, I intend to perform *Hajj*, and I will return to you again.”⁸⁶

Probably when Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥīrī chose al-Ḥaddād as his mentor in Nīshāpūr and later achieved a high mystical position there, this prompted other Sufis of Rayy to go there. Of his high mystical degree it was said there were only three Sufis in the world: al-Ḥīrī in Nīshāpūr, Junayd in Baghdad and Abū ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Jalā’ in Shām.⁸⁷ Al-Ḥīrī was initially a disciple of Yūsuf and for some time he chose Shāh Shujā’ al-Kirmānī as his mystical master.⁸⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī classifies al-Ḥīrī as a Sufi of Rayy.⁸⁹ Al-Sulamī paid special attention to al-Ḥīrī because he was believed to be the master of his maternal grandfather, Ismā‘īl ibn al-Nujayd (d. 366/976-7). Moreover, he had a significant role in spreading the path of Sufism in Nīshāpūr.⁹⁰ Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (or Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Rāzī; d. 376/986) was another Sufi who went from Rayy to Nīshāpūr and apparently behaved as a Malāmatī because he was accused of having an unusual relationship with a teenager. In reality, he was a master of al-Sulamī. According to Anṣārī, al-Sulamī was inspired to write his book, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, by a book of the same name written by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. Unfortunately, there is not much known about this book, but it is likely that parts of it were narrated orally by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī, a preacher from Rayy in the Jibāl region who conveyed spiritual concepts orally, has been identified by scholars such as Massignon, Zarinkub and Knysh as a member of the Karrāmiyya sect, while Meier associates him with the Murji‘a. Yaḥyā’s preaching reflects certain tenets of the Karrāmiyya’s belief system, such as the matter of God’s forgiveness, sincere reliance on God and a focus on hope for God’s grace. Furthermore, his prayers underscore the disparity between the powerless sinner and Almighty God, who can absolve His wretched creatures.

However, Ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī considers the followers of Yaḥyā, Mu‘ādhiyya, like the Karrāmiyya, as part of Murji‘a, i.e. those who refrain from expressing an opinion about the punishment or forgiveness of those who have committed deadly sins (and died without penance) and leave it to God’s judgment. Al-Maqdisī also writes that the followers of Yaḥyā believe that God, because of His infinite generosity and virtue, will not punish anyone for their sins unless they amount to blasphemy (*kufr*).

Yaḥyā’s prayers, primarily canted on anticipation of God’s clemency, have reached us in scattered pieces. Within these prayers, Yaḥyā extols God’s compassion and absolution, while

⁸⁶ Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 160-61.

⁸⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 82.

⁸⁸ Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 159; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, 244; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 203; ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, 414.

⁸⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣiḡat al-ṣafwah*, 752-53. Al-Sarrāj and al-Mustamlī also call him al-Rāzī, see al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma’*, 277; Ibrāhīm al-Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ al-ta‘arruf limadhab al-taṣawwuf* [Description of the Doctrine of the Sufis], ed. Muhammad Roshan (Tehran: Asatir, 1363 SH/1984), vol.1, 236.

⁹⁰ Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 159; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, 205.

⁹¹ Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 525. Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 235.

simultaneously reflecting on his transgressions and imploring for God's mercy. Through his supplications, Yaḥyā seeks redemption and absolution from God, while professing his hope for Divine grace and clemency. Yaḥyā's belief is grounded in the notion that God conceals humanity's imperfections and misdeeds during their earthly existence, ultimately forgiving them in the afterlife.

It is possible to trace the development of early Sufism in Rayy through two of Yaḥyā's disciples, Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ and Yūsuf al-Rāzī. It can be argued that al-Khawwāṣ is the Sufi who respected the mystical concept of *tawakkul* and idea of self-abandonment and trust in God to the extreme in his life. Like many Sufis, he avoided meeting with caliphs and sultans and their wealth.

The ascription of a Malāmatī orientation to Yūsuf al-Rāzī is noteworthy because the term *malāmatī* was originally employed to designate the movement recognised as the "Path of Blame" in Nīshāpūr in the 4th/10th century. Primary sources rarely mention the presence of the People of Blame in the Jibāl region. Moreover, modern scholars generally agree that Malāmatīyya was one of the main mystical trends in Khurāsān before Iraqi-oriented Sufism spread there. Adherents of the Malāmatī movement commonly engaged in a practice of self-critique rather than pursuing renown, aiming to withhold their spiritual condition from the public sphere. They did so by voluntarily and openly transgressing established social conventions, subjecting themselves to public blame in order to maintain their anonymity.

Yūsuf behaved in such an unusual Malāmatī way that the people of Rayy considered him a *zandīq*. Anṣārī identifies Yūsuf's three main characteristics as the cores of his Malāmatī perspective: stirring up the people against himself, destroying his reputation and respect among the people by his own hands, and deliberately discrediting himself.

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