

Philosophical Theology in Islam

Later Ash'arism East and West

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Ash‘arism through an Akbarī Lens

The Two “Taḥqīqs” in the Curriculum Vitae of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī
(d. 1019/1690)

Harith Ramli

يا هذا ما في الكون أقل من الذرة، وأنت لا تدركها، فمن لا يعرف الذرة كيف
يعرف ما هو أدق منها بتحقيق؟

Oh you! What in Creation is slighter than the smallest particle? And you can't perceive it! Thus, how can one who does not know the atom know something which is more subtle than it, with full verification?

MANṢŪR AL-ḤALLĀJ, *Tāshīn al-tanzīh*



The relationship between the Sufi tradition and the different schools of Islamic theology is one of the more challenging terrains of Islamic intellectual history.¹ This is especially the case for the post-Mongol period, when the teachings of the Ishrāqī and Akbarī traditions spread across the vast reaches of the Muslim world, and Sufi shaykhs occupied well-endowed institutions that had world conquerors as their patrons. More significantly, the language and concerns of Sufism had infiltrated most corners of the intellectual sphere, and we find eclectic Sufi-scholars such as Mulla Jāmī (d. 871/1492), “employing a single philosophical idiom to express ... disparate strands of thought” and integrating them into the formation of “a single philosophical discourse”, building on the merging of *kalām* and *falsafa* after the Avicennan turn.² The difficulty of unpacking the complex writings of such *ḥukamāʾ*, as James Morris has pointed out, is due to the missing first and third of three elements which are crucial to understanding advanced Sufi texts: (a) the experiential Sufi ground, (b) doctrinal and theoretical elaboration and (c) its broader dialectical context (i.e. “competing or ostensibly opposing doctrines, methods and

1 So far, there have been few attempts to build on the comprehensive approach of Louis Massignon in this field. For more recent studies, see the contributions in Shihadeh (ed.), *Sufism and Theology*.

2 Spannaus, “Theology in Central Asia”, 595.

interpretations, usually expressed in the shared technical vocabulary of post-Avicennan kalām”).³

Khaled El-Rouayheb's recent ground-breaking work *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* has presented a revised picture of intellectual life in Arabic-speaking Ottoman provinces during the pre-modern era, which now allows us a much better toolkit with which we can approach the third element. In contrast to the predominant view that has characterised this period as stagnant and devoid of originality, he demonstrates that this was a period enriched by the introduction of new books in various intellectual disciplines from North Africa and Persia and a strong emphasis on the idea of verification (*taḥqīq*). El-Rouayheb's choice of the term “verification” to translate “*taḥqīq*” allows us the possibility of understanding at multiple levels of discourse, not only relating to the rationalist dimension of intellectual life in this period, but also the equal importance of a bold and open espousal of mystical teachings and practice among many leading figures, particularly the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī and his commentators. In other words, *taḥqīq* could as easily mean “spiritual verification” or “realisation” in some circles as it would mean “intellectual verification” in others.⁴ In many cases, the two seem to go hand in hand, with the path of the rational verification playing the role of a preparatory training ground alongside spiritual practice and initiation, leading the way to spiritual realisation.

3 Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters, Part II (Conclusion)”, 110.

4 It should be noted that the translation of the term *taḥqīq* as “verification” can be contested. In his *Doubts on Avicenna*, 57–58, fn.49, Ayman Shihadeh has argued that this is a mistranslation (verification should more correctly be rendered as *tahaqquq*) and that it should be understood as the arrival at knowledge of some truth of reality through critical and investigative means, in contrast with adherence to the truth-claim of an authority (*taqlid*). I agree that there is the risk attached here of restricting it to a narrower idea of verifying of an existing proposition, and hence misleading readers who might not be familiar with the broader range of meanings encompassed by the Arabic term. This not only involves applying critical investigation to a broader question (*mas’ala*—see Jurjānī’s definition in his *Ta’rīfāt*, 48), but also establishing the truth of the matter through empirical or (in the case of Sufism, experiential) methods. In his *What is Islam?* (338–39) the late Shahab Ahmad briefly touched upon this topic, using the word “Truth-ification” to try to bring out the full meaning of the term into English, and recognized the amalgamation of critical scholarly and Sufi uses of the term, as encompassed in Chittick’s definition of *taḥqīq* as aiming at “the discovery of the *ḥaqq* within the seeker’s own intelligence”. See Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos*, 45. Chittick’s Akbarian reading, of course, sees *ḥaqq* both as “truth” as well as a primary name of God. However, since this study already proposes a broad and multifaceted appreciation of *taḥqīq*, I will continue to go along with the common rendering of “verification” or “realization” (in the Sufi context), bearing in mind its limitations. I would like to thank Ayman Shihadeh for drawing my attention to this issue.

But how do intellectual *taḥqīq* and spiritual *taḥqīq* go hand in hand? The unification of these two forms of *taḥqīq* can be seen culminating in the life and career of one of the most colourful figures explored in El-Rouayheb's work, the Kurdish scholar Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1091/1690), designated by the biographer al-Murādī with the lofty title of “the seal of those who attain realisation” (*khātam al-muḥaqqiqīn*).⁵ Building on the work of Alexander Knysh and Basheer Nafi, who respectively highlighted the pro-Ibn 'Arabī and Taymiyyan influence on his works,⁶ El-Rouayheb places al-Kūrānī at the intersection between apparently contradictory trends: fideistic Ḥanbalism, late Ash'arī rationalism, and the mystical monism of the Ibn 'Arabī tradition. According to him, al-Kūrānī's teachings represented a shift from the “non-monistic Sufism” that was prevalent in the Arabic speaking world in the eighth/fifteenth and ninth/sixteenth centuries, which had largely made its peace with Ash'arism, and an emerging movement of “monistic Sufism” opposed to established Ash'arī theology on a number of core doctrines, often siding with their traditionalist Ḥanbalī opponents:

Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī played an important role in this process. Widely esteemed not just as a mystic but also as an exoteric scholar and teacher, al-Kūrānī launched a comprehensive assault on established Ash'arī theology—the kind of Ash'arism represented by Ījī, Taftāzānī, Jurjānī, Sanūsī, and Dawānī—and advocated a return to the more traditionalist Ash'arism of the *Ibāna*. He went out of his way to find and read the works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and on a number of occasions defended them from the charge of anthropomorphism. He also cultivated close personal ties with prominent Ḥanbalī scholars in his own

5 Al-Murādī, *Silk al-durar*, 5.

6 Knysh, “An apologist for Ibn 'Arabī”; Nafi, “Tasawwuf and Reform”. Nafi (338) analysed al-Kūrānī's treatise on *kasb* (explored later below) as well as a number of other of al-Kūrānī's writings, concluding that his advocacy of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings was based on a selective reading which, in his words: “does not search for the inner contradictions of Ibn 'Arabī's system of thought, as a typical Salafi 'ālim might be expected to do, nor does it seek to highlight the superiority of the esoteric-mystical understanding of scripture: it is rather a conciliatory, syncretic reading.” Nafi's description of al-Kūrānī as a reformist Sufi is echoed in Azyumardi Azra's *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, a study of the impact of networks of Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian 'ulamā' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through an analysis of *ḥadīth* chains of transmission, Azra demonstrates not only the growing importance of *ḥadīth* study among reformist Sufi scholars such as al-Kūrānī, but also the central role of *ḥadīth* chains going through Ibn 'Arabī.

time, for example, asking the leading Damascene Ḥanbalī of his day, ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Ba‘lī, for an exposition of the Ḥanbalī creed.⁷

We cannot discount the significance of this development, as strange as it might be given the vast gap today between supporters of Ibn Taymiyya on the one hand, and advocates of Akbarian Sufism on the other. According to El-Rouayheb, the continuing impact of al-Kūrānī can be seen in leading reformist figures over the succeeding centuries, directly influencing the rise of a reformist trend that would increasingly distance itself from established Ash‘arism and align itself more with a “neo-Ḥanbalī” outlook, leading up to the rise of Salafism in its modern form.⁸

While El-Rouayheb has provided a concise summary of this development, there are still significant questions that remain unanswered. Why did a “monistic Sufi” like al-Kūrānī try to align himself with a figure such as Ibn Taymiyya, rather than a more simple form of Ḥanbalī fideism? At the same time, why did he try to fit his approach also—as we will see—within a modified form of Ash‘arism?

The aim of the following discussion is to explore this trend—which El-Rouayheb characterised as “paradoxical”⁹—in more detail, by looking more closely at al-Kūrānī’s intellectual affiliations as presented in his work *al-Amam li-iqāz al-himam*. This work can be classified under the *thabat* or *mashyakhah* genre, functioning as a sort of “curriculum vitae”, providing extensive details about the works the author has studied, his teachers, and most crucially, the chains of transmission authoritatively linking him to the original composers of such works.¹⁰ The *Amam* was al-Kūrānī’s most comprehensive *thabat* work and generally provides more details about the author’s views and affiliations than the average work of this type.¹¹

7 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 307.

8 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 310–11.

9 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 311.

10 For a more general discussion on this understudied genre, see Stewart, “Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography”, 345–62, esp. 345–46. See ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris*, 1:166–67. For some comparisons, see Arberry, “The Repertory of Ibn al-Anṣārī”, 247–63; Vajda, “La transmission de la mašyāḥa”, 55–74; Du Grandlaunay, “La liste d’authorités de Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī”, 81–98. Sabine Schmittke, “Forms and Functions of Licences to Transmit (*ijāzas*) in 18th century Iran”, mentions *thabats/mashyakhahs, mu’jams* among those works used to document the transmission of learning, and at times, how the description of one’s studies can form part of an *ijāza* (95–96).

11 al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris*, 1:166–68. The significance of this work warranted the composition of a gloss on it by al-Kattānī’s colleague, the Meccan-based Indian scholar Aḥmad

In what follows, we will take a close look at the *Amam* in order to establish al-Kūrānī's different intellectual affiliations and his broader perspective on the relationship between various traditions and disciplines. First, we will explore his discussion of works related to the rational sciences, then proceed to an investigation of the hierarchy of sciences as presented in the overall structure of the work. Finally, the discussion will revisit al-Kūrānī's controversial position on the Ash'arī doctrine of human acquisition of action (*kasb*), seeing to what extent a more nuanced understanding of his theological method guided by a close reading of the *Amam* might help us understand his complicated relationship with Ash'arism.

1 The Rational Sciences and “the Books of Persians” in al-Kūrānī's *Amam*

El-Rouayheb includes al-Kūrānī among a list of predominantly Kurdish scholars involved in the seventeenth century “reinvigoration of the rational sciences” in the Ottoman lands through their introduction of “Books of the Persians” that were generally unknown at the time, such as those of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 918/1502) and 'Iṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 942/1537). According to the biographer al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699), the arrival of Kurdish scholars fleeing the Safavid conquest of Western Azerbaijan from the turn of the seventeenth century CE led to what he called “the opening of the gate of verification (*taḥqīq*)”, which allowed students not only to study and teach these new works, but also approach theological and philosophical subjects in a new critical manner through exposure to Timurid and post-Timurid developments in “dialectics” (*munāẓara*) and “the rules of inquiry” (*adab al-baḥth*).¹² The effect this might have had on the development of Ash'arī theology in Iran and Central Asia is unclear, as El-Rouayheb's book is generally concerned with its more general implications on the Ottoman world of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, he points out that even a significant contributor to this development, such as al-Dawānī, was able to depart from the Ash'arī creed on significant issues such as the divine attributes (in this case, arguing that Ash'arī arguments against the Mu'tazila were too inconclusive to deem them heretical).¹³ To a lesser extent, the same could be said of al-Dawānī's slightly older contemporary, al-Jāmī,

b. Abī l-Khayr al-Aḥmadī (d. 1926–27). See also El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 252–53.

12 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 26–29.

13 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 32–34.

whose works also occasionally reflect a tendency to depart from standard Ash'arī doctrine (or at least its standard exposition) when they differed from the mystical philosophy of the Ibn 'Arabī school.¹⁴

Based on al-Kūrānī's *Amam*, El-Rouayheb makes the case that his scholarly formation fits into the general pattern of Kurdish scholars being trained in this new critical approach in their homeland, then bringing this expertise westwards to the lands of the Ottoman empire (in this case, the Ḥijāz).¹⁵ However, a closer look at this book as well as supplementary sources challenges this linear interpretation of al-Kūrānī's intellectual formation.

Alongside the study of core subjects such as Arabic and Islamic law, the first phase of studies undertaken by al-Kūrānī also included the study of introductory texts in the rational sciences (*ma'qūlāt*), such as the *Hidāya* of al-Abharī.¹⁶ The first teacher mentioned by al-Kūrānī, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1050/1645), studied in Shīrāzī circles that circulated al-Dawānī's teachings.¹⁷ His mentorship of al-Kūrānī was likely focused on foundational studies. Al-Kūrānī tells us that he studied parts of two classical textbooks by Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) under al-Ḥusaynī: *Sharḥ al-'Aqīda al-Nasafiyya* (theology) and *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-talkhīṣ* (linguistics), with numerous glosses by other leading regional scholars and Shīrāzī transmitters of al-Dawānī's works.¹⁸ The fact that he hardly mentions this earlier figure elsewhere in the *Amam*, not least under the section on his study of al-Dawānī's works, tells us that his studies under al-Ḥusaynī were only preliminary and came to an abrupt end with the death of this teacher in 1050/1640. At this stage, al-Kūrānī was around 25 years old.

Following al-Ḥusaynī's death, al-Kūrānī came under the supervision of a new teacher at Shahrazūr, Sayyid Muḥammad Sharīf b. Yūsuf al-Ṣiddīqī

14 See especially his well-known *al-Durra al-fākhira*, edited and translated by Nicholas Heer as *The Precious Pearl*, 1979.

15 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 51 (see 52 for a general diagram representing al-Kūrānī's main intellectual lineages connecting him to al-Dawānī).

16 al-'Ayyāshī, *Rihla*.

17 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 129. See also al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 2:474, where the information is likely taken from the former source. The biographies mention that al-Ḥusaynī studied the following texts of al-Dawānī: *Risāla fi ithbāt al-wujūd*, *Sharḥ hikmat al-'ayn*, *Sharḥ al-'Aḍuḍ li-mukhtaṣar Ibn Ḥājib*, but al-Kūrānī was only to study these texts later on with other scholars such as al-Qushāshī. Al-Kūrānī also tells us that he studied under al-Ḥusaynī's father, Abū Bakr al-Muṣannif (d. 1014/1605–6), who was considered a leading Shāfi'ī scholar of the region.

18 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 101–2.

al-Kūrānī (d. 1078/1667).¹⁹ Al-Kūrānī's tutorship under this teacher—whom he referred to as “*ustādhi al-muḥaqqiq*”²⁰—was to leave a strong imprint upon him for the rest of his life, although it seems more likely that what he meant here by *taḥqīq* was intellectual verification rather than spiritual realisation. Al-'Ayyāshī describes him as “the shaykh that he (al-Kūrānī) referred to often and depended upon in the exoteric sciences (*'ulūm al-zāhir*)” and under whom “he studied many books in the rational sciences” (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*).²¹ Al-Ṣiddīqī's first task as a teacher was to aid his student in continuing his uncompleted studies of al-Taftāzānī's abovementioned *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-talkhīṣ* (completed in 1050/1641).²² Under al-Ṣiddīqī, al-Kūrānī was introduced to advanced studies in a wider range of topics and works: Quran commentary (the famous commentary of al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl*),²³ logic (glosses by al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentaries on al-Urmawī's *Maṭālī' al-anwār* and al-Kātibī's *al-Risāla al-shamsiyya*),²⁴ *kalām* (al-Jurjānī's commentary on the *Mawāqif* of al-Ījī and al-Dawānī's commentary on al-Ījī's *Risāla fī l-'aḡā'id*)²⁵ and philosophy (al-Jurjānī's gloss on Shams al-Dīn al-Bukhārī's commentary on al-Kātibī's *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*, al-Dawānī's *Risālat al-zawrā*).²⁶

Under al-Ṣiddīqī, there is a clear shift of focus towards the works of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī and al-Dawānī, and a move away from the writings of al-Taftāzānī, which al-Kūrānī would not revisit until later on in his intellectual career. Thus, his curriculum of study for al-Kūrānī was aimed towards mastery of the legacy of these two masters, in particular, al-Taftāzānī's rival al-Jurjānī. What these two figures have in common (and as opposed to al-Taftāzānī) is sympathy towards the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, and it comes as no surprise that even before embarking for Mecca, al-Kūrānī had already studied al-Dawānī's famous defence of the Akbarian teaching on the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), *Risāla fī ithbāt al-wujūd*.²⁷ Without more detailed studies of the competing streams

19 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 128–29; al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 4:280–81 (again, probably relying on the former as a primary source).

20 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 3.

21 al-'Ayyāshī, *Ithāf*, 130.

22 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 102.

23 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 73; al-Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 479. Al-Siddīqī was the author of two glosses on this work. At some point before this, al-Kūrānī was able to study some parts of al-Bayḍāwī's commentary under al-Siddīqī's teacher, who was also an expert in Quran commentary and logic.

24 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 102, 128.

25 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 104–5, 128. Parts of this work were studied in Medina around the time of a second visit to Arabia.

26 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 102.

27 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 105.

of curricula and the impact al-Taftāzānī's criticism of the Ibn 'Arabī tradition might have had on the reception of his works (specifically in theological circles), it is hard to draw conclusions about the extent to which the focus away from al-Taftāzānī had more to do with differences in theological viewpoints, or simply reflected the natural progression from introductory textbooks to more advanced works. Considering the abrupt end to al-Kūrānī's study of al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ al-'aqā'id* after the death of his earlier teacher al-Ṣiddīqī, it seems that the former explanation is at least plausible.

However, what is more surprising is that—contrary to what one would expect, based on El-Rouayheb's thesis that the reinvigoration of the rational sciences was an East-West movement—the intellectual lineages through which al-Ṣiddīqī transmitted to al-Kūrānī most of the abovementioned works almost all go through Syrian, Yemeni and Egyptian teachers, rather than Kurdish-Iranian ones. Al-Ṣiddīqī's chains of transmission for all the works of al-Dawānī go through the Yemeni Shāfi'ī jurist 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥakamī (d. 1041/1632), where the line continues through several scholars of Yemen and the Ḥijāz for over the course of a century before arriving at scholars of Persian-speaking lands:²⁸

'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥakamī (Yemen)²⁹ < 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fahdī al-Makkī (d. Mecca, 995/1587)³⁰ < Jārullāh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fahdī al-Makkī (b. Mecca, 891/1486, d. Mecca, 954/1547)³¹ < Sharaf al-Dīn Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm al-'Alawī al-Zabīdī (b. Zabīd, Yemen, 804/1401–2, d. Zabīd, Yemen, 888/1483–84)³² & Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Umar al-Hamadhānī al-Shar'abī³³ < 'Afif al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ījī³⁴ < al-Dawānī

28 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 105.

29 al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 3189.

30 al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris*, 734.

31 al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 3:52; al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris*, 296–97, 911–12. His studies brought him to Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Anatolia. See al-Hila, *al-Tārikh wa-l-mu'arrikhīn bi-Makka*, 196.

32 al-Kattānī, *Fihris al-fahāris*, 1:203, which discusses the transmission of a *thabat* text by al-Dawānī, *Anmūdḥaj al-'ulūm*; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*, 2:281 (no. 889). Note that unless the birth/death dates are wrong, al-Zabīdī's death took place before Jārullāh al-Makkī is born, so there is either a missing link, the birth/death dates are wrong, or al-Kattānī has provided us with the wrong name.

33 It is unclear who this figure is, although the *nisba* "al-Shar'abī" indicates that he either was born or settled in the Shar'ab region of Yemen.

34 Pourjavardy, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran*, 16.

In addition to al-Dawānī, El-Rouayheb also names the master of grammar and *ʿilm al-bayān*, ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī (d. 951/1537) as one of the important authors of “the Books of Persians” that were introduced in the eleventh/seventeenth century.³⁵ Al-Kūrānī also studied the works of this figure, under a Meccan scholar, Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ṭabarī al-Makkī (d. 1078/1668),³⁶ whose chain goes back through several other scholars of Mecca until arriving at the first transmitter, Muḥammad Amīn b. Maḥmūd Amīr Bādishāh (d. 987/1579), a Bukhāran Ḥanafī scholar and Sufi who settled in Mecca.³⁷

Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ṭabarī al-Makkī < his father, ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī al-Makkī (b. Mecca 976/1568, d. Mecca, 1033/1625)³⁸ < Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī al-Makkī³⁹ < Muḥammad Amīn b. Maḥmūd Amīr Bādishāh al-Bukhārī (d. 987/1579)⁴⁰ < ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī

In this second case, one could add that all the scholars involved in this chain have Iranian or Central Asian origins. What is common to both chains of transmission is the important role of Mecca as a central node, no doubt due to its importance as a pilgrimage site, but also an intellectual centre. This challenges El-Rouayheb’s account of transmission taking place from East to West during the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries. If we take al-Kūrānī’s given intellectual lineages here at face value, it appears that there was already a transmission of new *ʿaqliyyāt* works by figures such as al-Dawānī into the Arabic-speaking lands of the Ottoman Empire a century earlier than suggested. In addition, it seems that these lineages follow a similar pattern to that of the earlier transmission of works by figures such as al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (and possibly, al-Taftāzānī) via intellectual networks of mainly Shāfiʿī scholars in Egypt, Yemen and the Ḥijāz.⁴¹

Without a more in-depth investigation of the intellectual links between Iran, Central Asia and the Ḥijāz in this period, it is hard to establish to what extent al-Kūrānī’s chains of transmission represented a more general trend. What we

35 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 31–32.

36 al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 2:195–96.

37 Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʿallifīn*, 3:148; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 6:41.

38 al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 1:371–72.

39 I have not found any information on this figure, although it is clear that he was the grandson of ʿIṣām al-Dīn. It is unclear whether he was born or settled in Mecca.

40 Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʿallifīn*, 3:148.

41 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 103–4.

can establish from this information is that al-Kūrānī's studies under al-Ṣiddīqī were not only a conduit to gaining access to "the Books of the Persians", but also a wider intellectual network of scholars that had already been circulating this body of knowledge in the Ḥijāz. Thus, it is unsurprising that he then felt motivated to pursue further studies abroad, especially in two areas of knowledge he did not feel he had access to: *ḥadīth* and Sufism. As he told his student al-'Ayyāshī:

I did not think there was anyone left on the face of the Earth who still said "it was narrated to me" (*ḥaddathanā*) and "it was reported to me" (*akhbaranā*) until I came to the Arab lands of Syria, Egypt and the Ḥijāz. As for Sufism, similarly, I did not think anyone was still circulating it in reading or writing, other than what could be found in notebooks, nor bothered to act upon it, other than hermits on mountain peaks.⁴²

Around 1055/1645, following the death of his father, al-Kūrānī set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca together with his teacher al-Ṣiddīqī and accompanied by his brother 'Abd al-Raḥmān. His brother fell ill and al-Kūrānī was forced to stay in Baghdad for around two years. At Baghdad, he began to explore Sufi writings in the vicinity of the tomb of the famous Sufi of Baghdad, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī. After a vision of the saint telling him to go West to seek his guide, al-Kūrānī moved to Damascus, where he lived for four years, a period in which he began to delve more seriously into the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī.⁴³ Here he also studied under the famous *ḥadīth* master and historian Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī (d. 1061/1651)⁴⁴ and came into contact with the Ḥanbalī scholar 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Ba'ī (d. 1071/1661), who, significantly, was a teacher of al-Kūrānī's former mentor, al-Ṣiddīqī.⁴⁵ Interestingly, while al-Kūrānī studied books of Ḥanbalī law under al-Ba'ī, he does not seem to have been introduced to Ḥanbalī theology at this stage, not least to the teachings of the Taymiyyan circle that he was to become associated with.⁴⁶

The real turning point in al-Kūrānī's intellectual and spiritual journey took place after he came under the guidance of the Palestinian Sufi Aḥmad al-Qushāshī (d. 1071/1660), who had been settled in Medina for many years.⁴⁷ Al-'Ayyāshī tells us that it was as a devoted reader of Ibn 'Arabī that al-Kūrānī

42 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 480.

43 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 480–81.

44 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 3; 129–30.

45 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 103–4. On these two figures, see al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 4:189–200, 2:283–85.

46 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 100.

47 al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 1:343–46.

first encountered the name of his future guide. This took place during a discussion about problems related to certain statements made by Ibn 'Arabī in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* about the unity of being and the unity of attributes (*waḥdat al-ṣifāt*). Al-Kūrānī was directed to a treatise by al-Qushāshī which convinced him that the latter was the spiritual pole of his time. Al-Kūrānī first initiated contact with al-Qushāshī through correspondence, and after a brief period in Cairo, arrived in the Ḥijāz where he formally became a disciple of the master. He later married al-Qushāshī's daughter, became his primary disciple, and following the master's death became his successor.⁴⁸

The few studies that have touched upon al-Qushāshī have portrayed him primarily as a Sufi master and advocate of the Akbarian teaching of "the Unity of Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). El-Rouayheb's recent survey is not an exception, presenting al-Qushāshī mainly in the context of the spread of monistic Sufism.⁴⁹ This is unsurprising if we consider the list of works attributed to al-Qushāshī, which are primarily written for Sufi audiences.⁵⁰ Al-Kūrānī's writings, on the other hand, often engaged with subjects such as law and rhetoric.⁵¹ The difference was also a matter of method and style. Al-'Ayyāshī tells us that al-Qushāshī's writings on the controversial issue of the Ash'arī doctrine of human acquisition of action (*kasb*) were less accessible when compared to al-Kūrānī's, as the former hardly employed the method of *kalām* theologians when presenting arguments.

Mullā Ibrāhīm [al-Kūrānī]'s writings on this issue were easier to understand than the writings of our Shaykh al-Ṣafī [al-Qushāshī], as the predominant concern of the latter was spiritual authenticity (*ṣiḥḥat al-kashf*), and therefore he relied a lot on this and on the statements of gnostics such as Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī and his like, and also on the Qur'ān and the Sunna, rarely turning to the proofs of the *kalām* theologians. Therefore his discourse was difficult for many of the formal scholars (*al-mutarassima*) who were not at his level in spiritual unveiling and gnosis concerning the essential truths of the divine names and attributes (*ma'ānī l-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*).

As for our shaykh Mullā Ibrāhīm, due to the strength of his insight in the rational sciences (*ma'qūlāt*), the breadth of his learning in the positions of the *kalām* theologians and the distinction of the false from

48 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 481–85.

49 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 251, 260–61.

50 See the short lists in *GAL*, 2:453 (new English translation) and al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat*, 1:345. Al-Muḥibbī tells us that there are over 50 known works attributed to him.

51 For short lists, see al-Murādi, *Silk al-durar*, 5; El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 252.

the sound (from among these position), he was able to present the issue through the matrix of problems within the science of *kalām* theology, making arguments using its form of proofs, tracing them back to the sound positions of the Ahl al-Sunna and drawing on the proofs they used against the Qadariyya and the Jabriyya.⁵²

Could we deduce from this that al-Qushāshī was simply unfamiliar with the methods of the rational sciences? It is tempting to draw this conclusion also due to his close association with Ḥanbalism, with its historical antipathy towards *kalām* theology and Ashʿarism.⁵³ However, a closer look at al-Kūrānī's *Amam* refutes this view and further reinforces the contention made earlier, that he did not simply bring new knowledge from Iran and Central Asia to Ottoman Arab lands, but rather acquired a large portion of it in the heart of Arabia itself.

Under al-Qushāshī, al-Kūrānī resumed the study of post-classical works in the rational sciences that he had initially started under his former teacher al-Ṣiddīqī, such as the commentary on the *Shamsiyya* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Taḥṭānī (d. 766/1365) and the *Mawāqif* of al-Ījī.⁵⁴ But more importantly for our discussion, al-Qushāshī's mentoring included focused study of the "Books of the Persians" by the abovementioned Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī, with the following lineages that went through al-Qushāshī's own Sufi master, the Egyptian Abū l-Mawāhib Aḥmad al-Shinnāwī (d. 1028/1619).

- a) Al-Qushāshī < al-Shinnāwī < ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd al-Qādir Ibn al-Fahd al-Makkī < Jārullāh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn al-Fahd al-Makkī < Sharaf al-Dīn al-ʿAlawī al-Zabīdī & Shihāb al-Dīn al-Hamadhānī < ʿAfif al-Dīn al-Ījī < al-Dawānī⁵⁵
- b) Al-Qushāshī < al-Shinnāwī < al-Sayyid al-Ghaḍanfar al-Gujarātī al-Nahrawālī al-Madani⁵⁶ < Mullā Sayyid Muḥammad Mīr Kīlān b. Maḥmūd al-Balkhī⁵⁷ < ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī⁵⁸

52 al-ʿAyyāshī, *Riḥla*, 530.

53 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 263–64, 287.

54 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 110–11.

55 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 105. See footnotes 29–32 above for more detailed information on the figures in this chain.

56 al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, 5:599.

57 Who we know that was in Mecca around the mid eleventh century A.H., where he initiated the Meccan scholar Aḥmad al-Nakhli into the Naqshbandiyya and Shaṭṭārī paths. See al-Nakhli, *Bughyat al-ṭālibīn*, 73–76.

58 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 109. The full chain is not given here (al-Shinnāwī is missing), but the full chain can be found earlier on the section.

Note that the transmission to al-Dawānī is more or less identical to the one given by al-Kūrānī's former teacher, al-Ṣiddīqī,⁵⁹ converging on the Meccan scholar 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fahdī al-Makkī. More importantly, this once again demonstrates that the works of al-Dawānī and al-Isfarā'īnī were circulating in the Ḥijāz much earlier than the turn of the eleventh/seventeenth century.

What is interesting about these chains is that they reflect the close correspondence between the transmission of the rational sciences and Sufi *ṭarīqa* affiliation. Al-Qushāshī and his master al-Shinnāwī were of course primarily well-known as adherents of the Shaṭṭāriyya, a spiritual tradition which originated in India and had strong links to monistic Sufism.⁶⁰ However, we must not forget that these multiple *ṭarīqa* initiations were common in this period, and al-Qushāshī was initiated into numerous other *ṭarīqas*, such as the Chishtiyya, Firdawsiyya, Kubrawiyya, Qādiriyya, Khalwatiyya and Shādhiliyya.⁶¹ Al-Qushāshī's chain of transmission for the works of al-Dawānī and al-Isfarā'īnī, however, was closely connected with one of the two chains of initiation he received into the lineage of the Naqshbandī path, which went through al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī.

Al-Qushāshī < al-Shinnāwī < al-Sayyid al-Ghaḍanfar al-Nahrawālī al-Madanī < Tāj al-Dīn al-Kāzarūnī < Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṭalūsī < al-Sayyid al-Jurjānī⁶²

The key figure in both transmissions, the Indian scholar al-Ghaḍanfar al-Nahrawālī, was also the crucial link in the transmission from al-Qushāshī to al-Kūrānī of the works of another well-known Naqshbandī Sufi-theologian, al-Jāmī.

Al-Qushāshī < al-Shinnāwī < al-Sayyid al-Ghaḍanfar al-Nahrawālī al-Madanī < al-Jāmī.⁶³

59 See page 378 above.

60 On the Shaṭṭāriyya in the Ḥijāz, see El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 249–56.

61 On this, see the brief discussion in Azra, *Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 47–49.

62 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 108–9. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī's connection to the Naqshbandiyya is relatively well-known, but 'Iṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarā'īnī too seems to have been affiliated with this lineage. See al-Nakhlī's chain of initiation given in *Bughyat al-ṭālibin*, 73 through Mīr Kilān, where al-Isfarā'īnī is referred to as "Mullā Muḥammad al-'Arab al-Balkhī". Note that, as we have seen earlier, Mīr Kilān was also a transmitter of the scholarly works of al-Isfarā'īnī.

63 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 107–8. Interestingly, this is different to the Naqshbandī initiation chain that went through al-Jāmī (see al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 108).

There is no doubt that al-Kūrānī saw his initiation into the Naqshbandī path and his study of the works of al-Jurjānī, al-Isfarāʾīnī, al-Dawānī and al-Jāmī as closely related. All these works appear closely together with his Naqshbandī chain of initiation in the following order in the *Amam*:⁶⁴

The works of al-Jurjānī
 The works of al-Dawānī
 The works of al-Jāmī
 Naqshbandī chain through al-Jurjānī
 Naqshbandī chain through al-Jāmī
 The works of al-Isfarāʾīnī

Thus, al-Qushāshī's role as a spiritual master to al-Kūrānī went hand in hand with intense mentoring in the rational sciences, including more recent theological and philosophical works produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries CE. What is even more interesting is that this scholarly transmission included works of earlier classical theologians from a wide range of traditions, including the writings of a large number of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī and Ḥanbalī scholars.⁶⁵ However, based on the *Amam*, it seems that priority was given to focused study of a number of key works of the Ash'arī tradition. Al-Kūrānī directly read with al-Qushāshī parts of the *Irshād* and the *Aqīda Niẓāmiyya* of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)⁶⁶ as well as a large number of works by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), including the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, parts of *Qistās al-mustaqīm*, and *al-Maḍnūn*.⁶⁷ It is less clear to what extent he studied closely with al-Qushāshī the works of more transitional figures to post-classical Ash'arism such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and al-Bayḍāwī (d. between 699/1299–705/1306), although he received general certification which authorised him to transmit their works.⁶⁸ Unsurprisingly, the works of early Ash'arīs prior to al-Juwaynī are not included. As is well-known, al-Juwaynī's contributions had made earlier

64 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 102–9.

65 For Māturīdism, this included the founder Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), Burhān al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 650/1252), and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310). See al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 86, 88, 91. For Ḥanbalism, this included Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997), Ibn 'Aqīl, (d. 513/1119) al-Zāghūnī (d. 527/1113), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). See al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 98–100. It is noteworthy that the *Uṣūl al-Dīn* of Bazdawī (d. 482/1089) and the *Ghunya* of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) are mentioned (pp. 88, 97), indicating closer study.

66 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 112.

67 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 112–13.

68 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 73, 110.

works in the tradition redundant, and largely defines what we have come to identify as classical Ash'arism. Likewise, the case could be made that with the arrival of the new form of systematic *kalām* works developed by al-Ījī, the works by earlier figures such as al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī were largely redundant except for the purposes of the most advanced forms of research.⁶⁹

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the works of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī himself were not directly studied or transmitted to al-Kūrānī, and it seems most likely that the frequent references he makes to a work such as the *Ibāna* were taken second-hand from later works.⁷⁰ However, al-Kūrānī mentions one work by al-Ash'arī he transmitted from al-Qushāshī, a short treatise on faith, *Mas'alat al-īmān*, which, tellingly is placed at the end of the *Amam*'s section on Ḥanbalī works.⁷¹ The act of situating al-Ash'arī within the Ḥanbalī school fits with what we already know of al-Qushāshī and al-Kūrānī's partiality towards Ḥanbalism.⁷² But why this specific work? It takes the position, following Ibn Ḥanbal, that claiming that faith is created is tantamount to claiming that the Qur'ān is created. There is some evidence that this was a controversy among Sunni traditionalists in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries, perhaps connected to the more well-known *mas'alat al-lafẓ* (the debate over the createdness of the utterance of the Qur'ān).⁷³ While this might seem like a rather obscure concern, the last few lines of this text indicate why Sufis inclined towards "monism" might take this issue quite seriously.

If it was said: what would prevent you from considering the proclamation of divine oneness (*tawḥīd*) temporal (*muḥdatha*)? Say: because God has proclaimed Himself one in His Book, saying: "I am God, there is no god but Me" (Q. 20:14). If it were permissible to say that the proclamation of God's oneness is temporal, then it would be permissible to say that the statement by which He proclaims His own oneness is temporal, which is unbelief. And if it were impermissible to say that this statement (of God)

69 This is demonstrated by Heidrun Eichner, "Handbooks in the Tradition of Later Eastern Ash'arism", 494–514.

70 See for example, al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 26; al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 613–14. In the beginning of *Maslak al-sadād*, for example, he tells us that while he read he read parts of the *Ibāna* that were quoted al-Qushāshī's work. See MS Arab 251, Houghton Library, Harvard, fols 1–2.

71 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 101.

72 El-Rouayheb, "Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya", 300–2; *Islamic Intellectual History*, 273–90.

73 See Abū Ya'lā, *al-Mu'tamad*, 69; Izutsu, *Concept of Belief*, 250–80.

is temporal, and it is known that God has proclaimed Himself one, then it is established that the proclamation of divine oneness is not temporal.⁷⁴

While there is no extra evidence that al-Ash'arī himself held such an interpretation, the idea that the proclamation of divine oneness itself is not temporal (i.e. uncreated) could be read in a way that corresponds to the view often found within Sufism that true recognition (*ma'rifa*) of the divine transcends mundane intellectual knowledge, and can only take place through the divine itself. As Carl Ernst states,

... the Sufi position of faith was consciously opposed to the more intellectualist and literalist views, and it took an approach, closely akin to that of the Ḥanbalīs, based on a deepened experience of the Qur'ānic revelation. This deepening process not only led to an expansion of the understanding of faith, but also led to an elaboration of the higher forms of faith, which assumed separate positions (*yaqīn, ma'rifa*). By thus making faith at once more important and less ultimate than it was usually considered, the Sufis made the concept of faith much more flexible and all-inclusive. It can mean anything from blind imitative faith (*īmān al-muqallid*) to the general form of human participation in divine reality.⁷⁵

2 The Hierarchy of the Sciences and the Structure al-Kūrānī's *Amam*

The two examples of a) the strategic positioning of the Naqshbandī *khirqā* lineage amidst the scholar-theologian affiliates of the lineage and b) al-Ash'arī's text at the transition point between the transmitted sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya*) and rational sciences (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*) indicate that the arrangement of the *Amam* is far from random. Therefore, we will now turn to the structure of the *Amam* as a way to yield further clues about al-Kūrānī's grand vision of the relationship between the different intellectual traditions he was affiliated with.

The work begins by sticking to the typical mould of a work in the *thabat* genre, its first part essentially a long list of different *ḥadīth* collections and their chains of transmission. As we proceed further on in the list we find not only well known collections but also those produced mainly with the aim of promoting Sunni traditionalism such as a creed of al-Shāfi'ī,⁷⁶ *Kitāb al-Sharī'a*

74 al-Ash'arī, *Risāla fi l-īmān*, 15–16.

75 Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 60–61.

76 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 19.

of Abū Bakr al-Ājurri (d. 360/970) and *Kitāb al-Sunna* of al-Lālakā'ī (d. 418/1027–28).⁷⁷ The final text mentioned at the end of this series is the *Anwār al-tanzīl* of al-Bayḍāwī, not the only Qur'ān commentary al-Kūrānī studied, but indisputably the most widely used advanced work in the genre for his time.⁷⁸

The second section of the *Amam* is concerned with the schools of law and the associated theological traditions. Al-Kūrānī lists works of the different schools of law he studied under different teachers, starting with the Shāfi'ī tradition both he and his master adhered to (the transmission of al-Qushāshī's own works comes at the end of this list). This is followed respectively by those of the Ḥanafī and Mālikī traditions before arriving at the lists of works from the Ḥanbalī school, which, as seen earlier, culminated in the text on faith by al-Ash'arī, a choice which reflects al-Kūrānī's association of this figure with Ḥanbalism.

The following section, consisting of texts in the rational sciences, begins with al-Taftāzānī, who, if we remember, was important at the foundational level of al-Kūrānī's studies. Most of the works listed here are related to the field of logic and rhetoric. This is followed by the works of the triad of Naqshbandī sages (al-Jurjānī–al-Dawānī–al-Jāmī) including the lineages of initiation into the Sufi path.⁷⁹ This is followed by 'Iṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarā'īnī, whose position at this juncture seems to signify the role of logic and rhetoric as necessary gateways for the study of more advanced texts in the rational sciences. Unsurprisingly then, the lineage for al-Isfarā'īnī's works are followed by those of three core figures of Ash'arism: al-Rāzī, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī. With al-Ghazālī, we move into the final section, a list of transmitted Sufi works starting from the well-known practical manuals of 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) and Khwāja Anṣārī (d. 481/1089), then leading higher up through the writings of the Akbarī tradition up to the works of Ibn 'Arabī himself.

The conclusion we can draw from the discussion so far is that for al-Kūrānī and his teacher al-Qushāshī, Ash'arī theology and the rational sciences in general were studied and understood largely mediated through two lenses: that of Sufism (in particular monist Akbarī Sufism) and an interpretation of intellectual history largely founded in Sunni traditionalism and ecumenicism. This was defined primarily, but not exclusively, by the positions of the *Aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, while at the same time recognising the validity of other Sunni schools of law

77 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 51.

78 al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 73.

79 It is significant that while al-Kūrānī and al-Qushāshī were well-known as Shaṭṭārī Sufis, and were initiated into other lineages, the Naqshbandī path is the only one listed in the whole work.

and theology. Thus, while the traditionalist or “fideist” position in theology was legitimised and affirmed as the best approach, recognition is given to the important role of the rational sciences, especially to Ash‘arī theology, as part of a process leading up to the higher metaphysics of the Akbarī tradition. It would not be wrong to say that such an approach largely saw the rational sciences as a means to an end, especially since this did not conflict with the views of theologians held up most highly by al-Kūrānī: al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, al-Jurjānī, al-Jāmī and al-Dawānī. Al-Kūrānī himself indicates this when he describes the sections of al-Jurjānī’s commentary on the *Mawāqif* of al-Ījī that were selected for his student al-‘Ayyāshī to study as “a ladder to the understanding of the science of realities” (*sullaman ilā fahm ‘ilm al-ḥaqā‘iq*).⁸⁰

So far, we have mainly spoken about what the *Amam* tells us explicitly, but it is equally important to understand what the text omits or obscures deliberately. As pointed out earlier, certain omissions are simply due to the sheer fact of redundancy, as in the case of any early Ash‘arī works preceding the classical tomes of al-Juwaynī. More surprising is the omission—with the exception of the Naqshbandī lineage—of Sufi lineages and works associated with them, especially the Shaṭṭārī path which al-Qushāshī and al-Kūrānī are more well-known for. The Shaṭṭārīs transmitted a work called *al-Jawāhir al-khams*, even translating it into Arabic, and we know that al-Kūrānī commented on another text associated with this path, the *Tuḥfat al-mursala* of Faḍlullāh al-Burhānpurī (d. 1029/1620), which is also nowhere mentioned in the text. Finally, one more glaring omission is the Ishrāqī tradition.⁸¹

It is not entirely clear why these works are not mentioned in the *Amam*. Tentatively, the most likely explanation we can put forward is that as a *thabat* work, the *Amam* was tailored for a broader audience which included more conservative readers who might have been scandalised by the inclusion of controversial Sufi and philosophical works. This might seem surprising considering the heavy presence of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers, but we must bear in mind the Shaykh al-Akbar’s respectability within *ḥadīth* circles and the general normativity of the Akbarian tradition within the Ottoman period. In fact, one of the key agendas of al-Kūrānī—not only in this work, but also in many of his other writings—was to promote a version of Akbarī Sufism that appealed to a broader audience of traditionalists, including those who would have been sympathetic to the Ḥanbalī revivalism of Ibn Taymiyya.

80 al-‘Ayyāshī, *Ithāf*, 123; *idem*, *Riḥla*, 1:497.

81 We know from al-‘Ayyāshī that al-Kūrānī taught the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* of Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Riḥla*, 1:494).

3 Applied *taḥqīq*: the *kasb* Controversy Revisited

With a clearer picture of al-Kūrānī's multiple affiliations in mind, we can briefly return again to the most extensively discussed theological controversy that he was involved with. Through a concise analysis of al-Kūrānī's most extensive work on the issue, *Maslak al-sadād fi af'āl khalq al-'ibād*, El-Rouayheb has already summarised the core aspects of this debate, on the issue of the effective power (*ta'thīr*) of human power or capacity to act.⁸² However, two lingering questions remain:

- a) Why did al-Kūrānī take an unusual stance against the established Ash'arī position, i.e. that the effect of a human action was through the power of God, and not through an independent human power?
- b) Why did he frame it within the context of a classical Ash'arī revival? After all, he was likely familiar enough with alternate positions within the Ḥanafī or Ḥanbalī tradition that could have been adopted.

Building on what has been discussed thus far, a number of possible explanations can be suggested. Firstly, one crucial missing element from El-Rouayheb's recent account is the direct influence of al-Kūrānī's master al-Qushāshī on this matter, arising out of the relative obscurity of al-Qushāshī and his writings, and the tendency to view their master-disciple relationship in Sufi terms only. As we have seen, al-Qushāshī's role extended beyond that of the spiritual guide, and a significantly large portion of al-Kūrānī's mastery in the rational sciences took place under his supervision. With this in mind, it is not surprising when we discover that the controversy over *kasb* was originally sparked by al-Qushāshī's publication of three works on the matter.⁸³ Al-'Ayyāshī tells us that these works led to severe criticism from Ash'arī dogmatists who were angry with the way al-Qushāshī's position on *kasb* clashed with the one given in the works of al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490). We know from the recent studies of El-Rouayheb and Spevack that this was a crucial time for the spread of the Sanūsian corpus, which were just beginning to be transmitted further Eastwards around the time of al-Qushāshī's composition of his three works.⁸⁴

Al-Qushāshī had a dream early on in his career, in which the master met Ibn 'Arabī, was clothed by him, and was then given the hand of the latter's sister in marriage. Discussing this dream many years later, we are told by al-'Ayyāshī

82 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 294–305.

83 al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Riḥla*, 1:598.

84 El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History*, 131–47. Spevack, "Egypt and the Later Ash'arite School", 538–40.

that this signified not only a deep genuine spiritual connection to the Shaykh al-Akbar but also his appointment as the age's defender of his teachings.

As for being clothed by him (i.e. Ibn 'Arabī), this is an allusion to his being raised to his (Ibn 'Arabī's) station and displaying his states when commenting on the divine realities, as we do not see or hear any gnostic in our time other than our *shaykh* who possesses the language of Shaykh Muḥyī l-Dīn (Ibn 'Arabī) on the realities, speaking as if he had his tongue. Thus, he is the reviver (*muḥyī*) of his path, the one who clarifies its difficulties and brings out its hidden aspects, as is clear to anyone who possesses sound spiritual taste. As for being married to his sister, this is an allusion to what the Shaykh has granted to him in terms of speaking on the issue of the oneness of attributes (*waḥdat al-ṣifāt*), as well as writing, commenting and providing proofs for it in a manner not given to anyone before him. Before this, this issue only existed in the statements of earlier gnostics through allusion, signs and interpolation through the discourse of others.⁸⁵

In other words, al-Qushāshī was given the full command of the teaching of the oneness of attributes (*waḥdat al-ṣifāt*), symbolised by marriage, as this was the sister of the teaching of the oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Al-'Ayyāshī tells us that in reality, while affirming that the created power (*qudra*) of willed human acts had an effect (*ta'thīr*), al-Qushāshī considered this attribution of created power to be a metaphorical use of language, rather than a statement of ontological reality. This divine power is one, but possesses two aspects (*nisbatayn*), an aspect relevant to the eternal divine essence, and an aspect relevant to the locus of divine manifestation, i.e. created causes. The position of Ash'arīs who denied the power of human acts any effective causality, ascribing the effect of a human act to God's power alone, went against any normal understanding of the word "power", which entails effect, and would be tantamount to saying that one aspect of divine power is lacking in effective causality. From this monistic perspective, in which the human self is ultimately part of divine reality, the intellect is limited in its ability to understand the divine realities, and the proper appreciation of the matter requires spiritual unveiling.⁸⁶

Al-Kūrānī followed in his master's footsteps by also composing three works on the topic.⁸⁷ As mentioned earlier, the key difference between al-Qushāshī

85 al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Riḥla*, 590.

86 al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Riḥla*, 1:528–30.

87 al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Riḥla*, 1:525.

and al-Kūrānī was that the former wrote in a more oblique way addressed mainly to Sufis, while the former expressed himself more clearly in the language of scholarship. Based on what we now know about al-Qushāshī's own mastery of the rational sciences, it is quite clear that the difference between him and his disciple was not so much technical ability, but al-Qushāshī's mission to clarify this aspect of Akbarian teachings and defend their integrity, symbolised by his marriage to Ibn 'Arabī's sister. Al-Kūrānī's role, on the other hand, could be seen as the further clarification and elaboration of al-Qushāshī's teachings for a wider audience, using the technical language of the scholars, much in the same way Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī provided a new philosophical template as a vehicle to disseminate the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī.

While al-Qushāshī's discourse was aimed at the higher levels of Akbarī teachings, as opposed to al-Kūrānī's, which tackled the same issue at the level of *kalām* and philosophy, both essentially promoted the same doctrinal position on *kasb*, weaved within a reformist agenda that appealed to their more *ḥadīth*-focused audiences. This was based on an interpretation of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī that was strongly guided by the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, which saw the *Ibāna* as his final and most representative work, and situated the founding figure of Ash'arism squarely within the *Aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*/Ḥanbalī camp. In al-Kūrānī's view, the Ash'arī doctrine of *kasb* had been misinterpreted by succeeding theologians until al-Juwaynī decided to return to it in his *al-Risāla al-Niẓāmiyya* (going against the position of his earlier writings such as *al-Irshād*). The call for a return to the original teachings of Ash'arism could also have been more motivated by the desire to promote social reform, based on the concern that advocating the lack of any true efficacy (*ta'thūr*) in human power was tantamount to fatalism (*jabr*), and could lead consequently to weakening the moral integrity in the individual and social spheres. In addition, bringing Ash'arīs more in line with Ḥanbalī (and Ḥanafī-Māturīdī) views corresponded with al-Kūrānī's own ecumenical agenda, and a strong conviction in "taking the middle path".⁸⁸ In other words, in this understanding of *taḥqīq* (in both its intellectual and spiritual senses), credal moderation and social reform went hand in hand.

As al-Kūrānī clarifies in his short treatise on the subject, al-Ash'arī's doctrine of *kasb* was formulated as a middle way between the extremes of fatalism (*jabr*) and complete human autonomy of action (*qadar*), and therefore must retain its aim of defending human moral obligation. Otherwise, al-Kūrānī says, echoing Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, "the word *kasb* becomes a signifier without

88 See his statements on this in the short (and possibly first) treatise on *kasb*, *al-Iqnā' al-muḥīt*, in al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1:606.

a signified" (*ism bi-lā musammā*), i.e. meaningless.⁸⁹ Those whose minds are filled with narrow factionalism (*ta'aṣṣub*) or conform to circulated opinion will react negatively when they hear the word "effect" in relation to human action, imagining it to be similar to the position of the Qadariyya/Mu'tazila.⁹⁰ However, the truth of this matter can only be revealed to one who is given divine unveiling. Thus, knowledge of the unification of actions (*tawhīd al-af'āl*), occurs at three different levels. At the highest level, as mentioned, there is the one who has been given divine unveiling of the reality of the matter.

This issue is only known in the fullest sense of verification (*taḥqīq*) by one who travels along the stations of the wayfarers (*manāzil al-sā'irīn*)⁹¹ to the clear Truth (*al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn*), successfully gaining persistence (*baqā'*) from God the most-knowing after complete annihilation (*al-fanā' al-tāmm*). A perception different to his former one is then isolated (*tajar-rada*) for him, and he thus knows himself through a truly verified and witnessed knowing (*ma'rifa muḥaqqqa shuhūdiyya*), knowing his Lord in accordance with his rank and the breadth of his sphere (of being), becoming one of those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm*) through the path of divine grace, not that of the intellectual path.⁹²

After him is "the person of faith" (*ṣāḥib al-īmān*) who believes in the proofs of the Divine law, and, unshaken by the doubts of *kalām* works, looks to God for guidance, as well as the writings of "the *imāms* of true divine unveiling" (*a'immat al-kashf al-ṣāḥih*)—no doubt a reference to the writings of Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī. Such a person affirms all scriptural statements regarding the divine realities, even though in their apparent senses they might contradict themselves. In other words, he practices the way of the *Ahl al-sunna*, as articulated by al-Ash'arī in his final work, the *Ibāna*.⁹³ The third, and lowest type of knower, is the man of intellectual understanding (*ṣāḥib al-naẓar al-fikrī*), who sees things from behind the wall of thinking. Unlike the man of faith, who builds the foundation of his knowledge on the unification of divine attributes and is unafraid to affirm them in spite of apparent contradictions, the man of thought does not manage to do so because he is concerned that doing

89 For a more detailed discussion on this, see Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 39–44.

90 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1:606–8.

91 Incidentally the title of the famous Sufi manual of Khwājā Anṣārī, one of the few Sufi works referred to in the transmissions of the *Amam* from al-Qushāshī (al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*, 113–15).

92 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1:607.

93 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1:607.

so would lead to the affirmation of doubtful beliefs (*shubuhāt*). Therefore, he resorts to metaphorical interpretation in his understanding of scripture. For al-Kūrānī, this approach is acceptable so long as he does not deny that it is within the realm of possibility for God to create real and effective power in a human agent. One does not have to affirm its reality, but to acknowledge it as a possibility.⁹⁴

It is to this third category that the bulk of al-Kūrānī's discussion seems to be addressed. Drawing on a broad array of scholars from the Ash'arī, Ḥanbalī and Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition, the aim of the text seems to be to break down any dogmatic attachment to the opinion that absolute divine power excludes the ability to work through secondary causes. It is no coincidence that al-Taftāzānī is chosen as the target of al-Kūrānī's treatise: the theologian was well known for his attacks on Ibn 'Arabī.⁹⁵ Drawing on the *taḥqīq* tradition he was familiar with here, al-Kūrānī presents the "rationalist" (*ṣāhib al-naẓar al-fikrī*) with an alternative model of the universe to the rigidly atomistic model of standard Ash'arism which would include secondary causes, a model not presented as an end in itself or a definitive statement of the truth, but as an approximation of the Akbarī viewpoint.⁹⁶ Through a deeper investigation into the philosophical model of cause and effect, the seeker of *taḥqīq* would be able to open his mind to the reality of created being as a locus (*mazhar*) for the manifestation of the divine names and attributes.⁹⁷

Essentially, it could be said that while al-Qushāshī was speaking at the level of the oneness of attributes (*tawḥīd al-ṣifāt*), his student's discourse was aimed at the lower but more general level of oneness of actions (*tawḥīd al-af'āl*). Whereas al-Qushāshī's discourse was directed at those who were on the Sufi path, and, perhaps, also those "simple believers" who accepted scripture without question, al-Kūrānī's mode of teaching took into account those who walked the more difficult intellectual path, using intellectual *taḥqīq* as a means to spiritual *taḥqīq*. In doing this, both saw themselves not as outsiders to Ash'arism, but as advocates of what they perceived to be the original teachings of the Ash'arī school.

94 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1:608.

95 Al-Kūrānī's perception of al-Taftāzānī as a *mutakallim* with no understanding of the deeper realities is reinforced in a report he recounts to al-'Ayyāshī, in which al-Jurjānī's piety and spiritual insight is contrasted to al-Taftāzānī's attachment to worldly glory (al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 1: 497–98).

96 al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 612–20.

97 It should be noted here that it was with this purpose in mind that al-Kūrānī taught al-Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, 607).

What this case study tells us is that it is impossible to look at late post-classical Ash‘arism without taking into account the multiple levels of discourse involved, especially between the popular level of creeds and dogmatics and the higher level of philosophical theology which included the insights of mystical theosophy. Although it is debatable to what degree it can be designated as “Ash‘arism” in the sense that the term is generally understood, al-Qushāshī and al-Kūrānī’s interesting syncretic approach aimed at re-articulating the theological school in order to bridge opposing Sunni traditions at the popular level of theological discourse in the name of an ecumenical “middle path”. On the other hand, at the level of higher intellectual discourse, al-Qushāshī’s teaching unveiled a new dimension of the teachings of the Akbarī tradition, which was then fleshed out and articulated in a more approachable language by his student al-Kūrānī. Ultimately, as in the case of their predecessors, the Naqshbandī sages al-Jāmī and al-Dawānī, the primary aim here was the reconciliation of the two poles of intellectual and spiritual *tahqiq*.

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