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Textual Dimensions of the Public *Ḥaḍra* in Egyptian Sufism

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the crucial role of text in Sufism, especially in the central corporate ritual, *ḥaḍra*. Using Egypt as a case study, and thoroughly analyzing one particular *ḥaḍra* performance, the article uses concepts of intertext and interauthor to demonstrate how text supports socio-spiritual relationships.

Keywords: Sufism, Islam, ritual, poetry, mysticism

IZVLEČEK

Članek proučuje ključno vlogo besedil v sufizmu, predvsem v osrednjem obredu, ki se imenuje *ḥaḍra*. Na podlagi Egipta kot študije primera in s poglobljeno analizo izbrane izvedbe obreda *ḥaḍra* razprava s pomočjo konceptov medbesedilnosti in medavtorstva prikaže, kako besedilo podpira družbeno-duhovna razmerja.

Ključne besede: sufizem, islam, obred, poezija, misticizem

How do textual dimensions of the public *ḥaḍra* – Egypt’s most socially salient musical ritual – express and maintain mystical Islam – Sufism – in Egypt? And what is the crucial role of the *ḥaḍra* text, particularly poetry in performance? I answer these questions in three steps: first, an overview of Egyptian Sufism; next, an interpretation of Sufi music and poetry; finally, a close analysis, transcription, and translation of a typical *ḥaḍra*, showing how its performed text both reflects and supports Sufism’s web of socio-spiritual and intertextual connections.

I. Egyptian Sufism: Theology and Ritual

“What is Sufism?” This was the question I continually asked while performing ethnomusicological fieldwork in Egypt, from 1992 to 1998. Tersely, many Sufis merely replied “Sufism is love (*ḥubb*),” or “Sufism is the essence (*ḡarwḥar*) of Islam.” A deeper answer required patience and long-term immersion in their socio-spiritual world.

Sufism (*taṣawwuf*, or *al-ṣūfiyya*)¹ offers a highly personal and experiential approach to religion, emphasizing sincere intention and heartfelt devotion. Participation is buttressed, guided, and deepened by camaraderie in connections: socio-spiritual solidarity, linking contemporary seekers (*murīdīn*) and spiritual leaders (*murshidīn*, or shaykhs), as well as the great teachers and holy men and women of the past (the *awliyāʾ*, those “close” – *walī* – to God), especially the Prophet Muhammad’s family (*Āl al-Bayt* or *Ahl al-Bayt*: literally, “the kin of the house”; also *Āl Bayt al-Nabi*, “the kin of the Prophet’s house”), as well as the Prophet himself (see Hoffman-Ladd 1992).

At its core, Sufism in Egypt is a quest for spiritual closeness, a desire to connect to beloved holy figures – as well as like-minded seekers – in order to experience the Divine Realities (*al-ḥaqīqa*, literally “Truth”) in this life, driven by Divine love (*al-ḥubb al-ilāhi*) in the present (*al-waqt*), rather than fear (*khawf*) of God’s wrath, or hope (*rajāʾ*) for His Paradise in the future. Such Realities are beautiful, as attested by a famous saying of the Prophet, “God is beautiful and loves beauty” (Nawawi 2014, hadith #389).

As Rabiʿa ʿAdawiyya (d. 801), the famous female mystic, wrote:

Oh Lord! If I worship Thee on account of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee with the hope of Paradise, exclude me from it, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine eternal beauty. (Qadri 2006, 29)

Thus many Sufis regard earthly beauty as Divinely sanctioned, a pale reflection of the Divine. Consequently, *taṣawwuf* often incorporates the arts

1 Several of the best general introductions to Sufism are by William Chittick (2000), Carl Ernst (1997), Alexander Knysh (2019), Martin Lings (1999), Annemarie Schimmel (1975), and J. Spencer Trimingham (1998). For Sufism in Egypt, see Frishkopf (1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2013), Gilsenan (1973), Hoffman (1995), Jong (1976, 1978, 2000), and Waugh (1989).

– visual, auditory, or literary. Yet such arts are never ends in themselves. Spiritually, they are functional, a means to a higher purpose, a lodestar for the spiritual path.

Literally, Islam means “submission” to God, affirming His unity and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), through worship, the purpose of our creation. As God says in the Qur’an, the message (*risāla*) vouchsafed to mankind through the Prophet Muhammad: “I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me” (51:56).² Towards that end the Qur’an often underscores the importance of “remembering God” (*dhikr Allah*). Remembrance through submission is performed daily in obligatory prayer (*ṣalāh*), especially at the moment of prostration (*sujūd*), as well as during the other legal pillars of Islam, including the Ramadan fast (*ṣawm*), almsgiving (*zakāh*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), and when uttering the testimony of faith: “there is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet” (*lā ilāha illa Allah, Muḥammad rasul Allah*).³

While many Muslims submit out of fear and hope, in deference to law (*shari‘a*), the Sufi is drawn to Divine beauty, submitting out of love. Only the spiritually advanced Muslim submits fully, out of a love and longing springing from inner faith (*imān*). To reach this state, the ego, governed by worldly desires (*shahawāt*), must be purified, for this fallible self (*al-naḥs al-ammara bi su’*), straining towards the objects of its desire, barely restrained by fear and hope, can never submit fully. Only the serene self (*al-naḥs al-mu’ma’inna*), drawn by Divine love, and remembering the Primordial Covenant (*mīthāq*),⁴ can perform *islām* completely. For the ordinary Muslim, as for the Sufi novice, the outward (*ẓāhir*) performance of obligatory prayer is a physical remembrance that promotes inner (*bāṭin*) faith and remembrance, taming the self. By contrast, for the mature Sufi the outward act of prayer simply *expresses* inner faith and remembrance.

Thus, the Sufi progresses along a spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*) from outward *islām* to inward *imān*, culminating in *iḥsān* (excellence): continual remembrance, through continuous love sustained by the constant felt presence of the Divine.

2 All Qur’anic references are given numerically as X:Y meaning *sūra* (chapter) X, *āya* (verse) Y (with translations from Abdel Haleem 2011). In Islamic cosmology, the jinn are invisible beings created from “smokeless fire,” whereas human beings are created from clay. See Qur’an 55:14, 55:15.

3 E.g. Qur’an 62:9–10: “Believers! When the call to prayer [*ṣalāh*] is made on the day of congregation [Friday], hurry towards the reminder [*dhikr*] of God and leave off your trading – that is better for you, if only you knew. Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God’s bounty. Remember God often so that you may prosper.”

4 That moment in pre-creation (*al-‘ālam al-azālī*), sometimes called the “Day of *Alastu*” (Schimmel 1975, 24), when God asked all the future descendants of Adam: “Am I not your Lord?” (“*Alastu bi rabbikum?*”), to which they replied “Indeed you are, we testify” (“*Qālū balā shahidnā*”) (Qur’an 7:172). All *dhikr* harkens back to this moment, sometimes understood as a musical exchange, and an archetypal memory music can reawaken (perhaps in *ḥadra*). See line 21 in the *ḥadra* text transcribed below, alluding to this crucial moment of *alastu*.

In another common formulation, the Sufi path leads the seeker (*murīd*) from law (*sharīʿa*) to Divine Reality (*ḥaqīqa*). That journey proceeds through purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-naḥs*), raising the spirit (*tarqiyat al-rūḥ*) towards its source in God, under the guidance of a spiritual teacher (*murshid* or shaykh). The path traverses a series of stations (*maqāmāt*)⁵ punctuated by moments of intense emotional insight (*aḥwāl*, singular *ḥāl*), culminating – for the spiritual elect – in the annihilation (*fanāʿ*) of the ego-self and subsistence (*baqāʿ*) with God. Others may aim instead for annihilation in the Prophet, saint, or shaykh (Hoffman 1999). In any case, with the dissolution of the self’s boundaries comes intensified spiritual connection.

Over time, this guided journey led to the formulation of various supererogatory forms of ritual devotion, beyond daily obligatory prayer (*ṣalāh*), designed to accelerate spiritual progress, starting with self-purification (e.g. asceticism, *zuhd*; requests for forgiveness, *istighfār*; repentance, *taḥbā*) and centered on remembrance (*dhikr*) in a direct form: the chanting of God’s Names, accompanied by recitation of religious poetry, as a form of worship enabling one to experience God’s closeness, as affirmed in Qur’an 50:16: “We are closer to him than his jugular vein.” Throughout, one’s guides and exemplars are the Prophet, his family, and the *awliyāʿ*, all spiritually active – as well as one’s contemporary shaykh.⁶

From the early thirteenth century or so, formal Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*; singular *ṭarīqa*) arose, linking Sufis, synchronically and diachronically, in new sodalities (Trimingham 1998, 10). Members (also called *murīdīn*; singular *murīd*) join with an oath (*ṣubḥ*) of allegiance to a living shaykh or *murshid*, thereby linking to a spiritual lineage (*silsila*, literally “chain”) stretching back to the Prophet himself. These socio-spiritual networks are tightly woven, and infused with affection. A form of fictive kinship applies to spiritual relationships, modeled as familial love (Frishkopf 2003b). The shaykh is the spiritual parent (usually father, rarely mother); ascendants are grandparents; fellow *murīdīn* are siblings. Sometimes the *silsila* diverges, as a charismatic follower starts a new branch; sometimes branches converge, when a Sufi receives spiritual guidance from more than one shaykh. But the orders are (ideally at least) not competing. Rather, they harmoniously coexist, different paths for different people, with a single objective. I often heard the *ṭuruq* likened to spokes of a wheel (*sharīʿa*) all leading to the hub (*ḥaqīqa*). Some seventy-two such orders are officially registered in Egypt today (ʿAbd al-Hadi 2022); many others exist informally but they are all interconnected through the branching *silsila* (see Figure 1).⁷

5 Confusingly, the word *maqām* (plural *maqāmāt*) carries three different meanings in this paper: (a) a spiritual station, (b) a saint’s shrine (not always the burial location), and (c) a melodic mode.

6 On saints in Egypt, see Jong (1976), Gilsenan (1973), Hoffman (1995), Reeves (1995), and Taylor (1998).

7 For a general introduction to Sufism and saint veneration in Egypt, see Hoffman-Ladd (1992), Hoffman (1995) and Waugh (1989).

Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (1196–1258)⁸ – as well as the Prophet Muhammad and his family (the *Āl al-Bayt*, especially Imam al-Husayn and Sayyida Zaynab), are alive, interacting with the *muḥibbīn*, who develop deeply personal relationships with many of them, mediated by a visit (*ziyāra*) to the shrine (also called *maqām*), a vision (*ruʿya*, waking or in dreams), recounting a miracle story (*karāma*), entreating spiritual assistance (*madaḍ*), blessing (*baraka*) or intercession (*tarwassul*), sometimes through a vow (*nadhr*) to be fulfilled upon delivery (and thereby extending and deepening the relationship), attending festivals (*maʿwālid*), and reciting sacred texts (poetry and prose). Non-Muslims may regard the authors of Sufi poetry as mere poets, but for the Sufi, they are saints first and foremost; poetry is merely a side-effect, an overflowing (*ḥayḍ*) of spirituality into language, and a guide for the seeker. Authorship of Sufi poetry is distributed – as a linked interauthor – insofar as their texts are linked as intertext (Frishkopf 2003a; Homerin 2001; Schimmel 1982).

The primary corporate Sufi ritual is called *ḥaḍra* (literally, presence). Overtly, the *ṭarīqa ḥaḍra* (i.e. the *ḥaḍra* liturgy as performed within each Sufi order) is populated by the physical presence of members, including shaykhs and their disciples (*murīdīn*), but it is understood also to include invisible spiritual presences, including angels, the Prophet, and saints from the *ʿālam al-arwāḥ* (spirit world). Typically following ordinary congregational prayer (Sufism in Egypt extends, never replaces, mainstream Islam), the *ḥaḍra* centers on language performance (Frishkopf 2013), including recitation of prayers particular to the order (*ḥizb*, *awrād*), supplications (especially *ṣalarwāt*, requests for blessings upon the Prophet); recitation of the Qurʾān; religious lessons or sermons; *dhikr*: chanting the Names of God (sometimes with movements, bowing or swaying); and melodic chanting of Sufi poetry (*inshād*), performed by a *munshid*. Often *dhikr* and *inshād* are combined, generating the *ḥaḍra*'s most emotionally intense, unified moments.

Most *ṭuruq* perform *ḥaḍra* twice weekly, under the direction of the shaykh who controls *inshād* and *dhikr*, carefully regulating its range and emotional amplitude, so as to maintain propriety and avoid ecstatic excess. Sung poetry is composed, selected, or at least authorized by the shaykh or *ṭarīqa* founder. Expression of extreme mystical ideas (such as union with God, *ittiḥād*) and excessively emotional behaviors, are either concealed or forbidden, in favor of that which overtly conforms to *sharīʿa*.⁹ Musical aspects of the

8 In Egypt the first four of these are known as the “four axes” (*aqṭāb*; sing. *quṭb*), and the latter three are buried there. According to medieval Islamic hagiography, in each era an “axial” saint presides over the entire saintly hierarchy. All but ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani are invoked in the *ḥaḍra* described below.

9 Most Egyptians Muslims consider certain acts, e.g. ecstatic sayings (*shatḥiyāt*) or trance behaviors (*jadbb*), to constitute *bidʿa* (heresy) or even *kufr* (unbelief), violations of religious law. Most famously, al-Hallaj (857–922), mystic of Baghdad, expressing his sense of self-annihilation and union with the Divine, exclaimed “Ana al-Haqq” (I am the Truth, tantamount to saying “I am God”) and was thereafter executed for heresy (see Ernst 1994; Salamah-Qudsi 2018).

ḥaḍra are also constrained. For instance, instruments other than the voice are usually proscribed, improvisation is constrained, and length is limited. Often *inshād* is reduced to intoning the text in a narrow ambit, using a simple repetitive melody, and a slow, steady pulse. The typical *ḥaḍra* lasts only an hour (Frishkopf 1999, 2013).

But Sufi ritual extends far beyond the *ṭarīqa ḥaḍra*, flourishing in the free-wheeling realm of popular religion, beyond the control of *ṭarīqa* shaykhs. This broader *taṣawwuf* of the *muhibbin* finds its most spectacular expression in annual saint festivals (*marwālid*) centered on a saint's shrine (*maqām*), which can attract over a million pilgrims.¹⁰ The public *ḥaḍra ʿamma*, sometimes called *laila diniyya* (religious night) or simply *laila*, is central at these festivals, and is also performed for public life cycle events attended by the *muhibbin*, such as circumcisions, weddings, and memorials.

Unlike the private *ṭarīqa ḥaḍra*, with its complex liturgy, the public *ḥaḍra* centers entirely on *inshād* and its accompanying music, together with *dhikr* chant and movement. Here, the *munshid* presides as if shaykh, assuming full control over the proceedings, including selection and arrangement of poetry, and controlling musical variables, especially tempo, meter, and *maqām* (melodic mode), directing a musical group comprising percussive and melodic instruments. The *munshid* of the *ṭarīqa ḥaḍra* is typically an ordinary member, performing in service to his *ṭarīqa* organization, and drawing on poetry associated with it. By contrast, the *munshid* of the public *ḥaḍra* is a professional, often dedicated full-time to *inshād*, with a vast, ecumenical repertoire. *Muhibbin* (affiliated with a variety of *ṭuruq*) attend to be moved, and the *munshid* aims to move them, using all the spiritual-aesthetic resources at his disposal, including familiarity with the principal *ṭuruq* and their liturgies.¹¹ Poetry, music, and *dhikr* induce states (*ahwāl*) of intense emotion – *wajd* or *nashwa* (ecstasy) – thought to offer a taste (*dhawq*) of the Divine Reality. The generation of emotion is paramount in the public *ḥaḍra*, which may last for many hours, often beginning late in the evening and continuing until dawn, providing plenty of time for the emotional buildup.¹²

Some participants sway and chant *dhikr* while others simply listen, as in the medieval *samāʿ* (spiritual audition). Unlike the *ṭarīqa ḥaḍra*, with its relatively fixed liturgy, limited participation, constrained texts and behaviors, and comparative brevity, the public *ḥaḍra* is open, free and flexible in nearly every way. A popular *munshid* such as Shaykh Yasin al-Tuhami can gather and move

10 The largest is the *marwālid* of Sayyid al-Badawi in Tanta (Schielke 2006, 125).

11 The public *ḥaḍra munshid* performs gratis for religious festivals (e.g. *marwālid*), though the lesser ones may accept *nuqūṭ* (tips); they take a performance fee when performing for life cycle rituals (mostly weddings).

12 Sometimes the secular term for musical emotion, *ṭarab*, is also used (see Racy 2003). For an extensive discussion of Sufism, music, and *ṭarab* in Egypt see Frishkopf (2001a).

tens of thousands of people through the affective power of his performance (Frishkopf 1998, 2002, 2009; Waugh and Frishkopf 2011).¹³

The *munshid* selects poetry, often of the most intensely mystical sort, from multiple sources, weaving a new text out of old threads, curating and collaging his repertoire to express his state and intensify emotional responses (by reading his audience), culminating in *madad*, towards the mass generation of *nashwa* (spiritual ecstasy).¹⁴ Meanwhile *dhakkīra* (those performing *dbikr*) and listeners are free to express themselves in their own language: through chant and exclamation, combined with postures, movements, gestures, and countenances. These expressions, reaching the *munshid*, complete an expressive feedback loop, promoting the interactive development of intensive emotion adapted to the context. The *munshid* develops his text in response to his perception (physical and spiritual) of those arrayed before him, and they respond to him and to each other.¹⁵ The text of the public *ḥaḍra* is thus highly conducive to generation of spiritual emotion, which also serves to bind the group. That text is woven, spontaneously, as a consequence, reflecting and shaping both the participating group, and the long intertwined history of Sufi poetry. It is an intertext, assembled by, and reflecting, what I have termed the “interauthor”: Sufism’s socio-spiritual network, invoked by every *ḥaḍra*, in which every attendee participates.¹⁶

II. Sufi Music and Poetry

The Centrality of the Word

Generally speaking, ritual use of *mūsīqā* (approximately “music”) is highly controversial in Islam (Al Faruqi and Qaradawi 1994). But if “music” is defined

13 I spent several years attending and recording Shaykh Yasin’s *ḥaḍra* performances, as well as visiting his home, where I conducted interviews. I present and analyze one such performance below.

14 *Madad*, a noun meaning “spiritual assistance,” abbreviates a verbal phrase (“I entreat [someone] to grant us *madaad*”) in an illocutionary speech act invoking and supplicating one of the many spiritually omnipresent saints. To take a frequent example, Egypt’s Sufis often say: “*madad ya Sayyidna al-Husayn*,” literally: “I implore you to help us, oh Sayyidna al-Husayn,” invoking and petitioning the Prophet’s grandson Husayn. On the Sufi practice, see Hoffman-Ladd (1992, 626). For more on the illocutionary speech act, including its five-fold classifications, see John L. Austin’s *How to do Things with Words* (1962, 155), where in “Lecture XII” he defines “entreat” as an instance of the “exercitive” class.

15 A note on pronouns: women certainly participate in Egyptian Sufism, but mainly in private spaces. The overwhelming majority of *munshidin* are men. The female *munshida* usually performs *qışaṣ* (religious stories) rather than leading *dbikr*. While some women serve as highly respected spiritual leaders for other women in all-female gatherings, all *ḥaḍras* I ever attended – public or private – were led by men as shaykhs and *munshidin*. (Similarly, women never lead prayer in public.) On occasion women do participate freely in the public *ḥaḍra*, but only in lower Egypt (the Delta), or if very elderly. On the other hand, there are many female saints whose shrines are frequently visited; most of these are members of the *Āl al-Bayt*.

16 For a fuller analysis of this phenomenon see Frishkopf (2003a).

etically as referring to the use of pitch and time to clarify and emotionally heighten texts (rather than be reflexively translated by its cognate *mūsīqā*), then it is pervasive within the broader sphere of Islamic language performance (Frishkopf 2013), though religious performance types are conceptually isolated through the use of specialized terms, scrupulously avoiding the words *mūsīqā* or *ghināʾ* (singing).

In Egypt, metric *inshād* is common in many mainstream Muslim contexts (i.e. when celebrating the Prophet's Birthday, or the two Eids); ametric, melodic, poetic supplications (*ibtihālāt*) are performed before dawn prayers, and the recitation of Qurʾan (*tilāwa*), call to prayer (*adhān*), even the prayer rite itself (*ṣalāh*), are almost universally performed using melodic vocalizations (Frishkopf 2008, 2018, 2021). Purely vocal forms are most acceptable; accompanying percussion less so – and only for *inshād* – and use of melodic instruments least of all. But even with a full orchestra, it is always text that remains central.

However within the sphere of Islamic language performance, Sufi contexts undoubtedly provide more musical freedom than any others. In contrast to mainstream Islam, music (as an etic concept) plays a key role in many Sufi traditions, as a form of worship; as a means of developing and expressing mystical experience; and as spiritual pedagogy (*tarbiya*), rendering teachings more memorable, affective, and participatory. Finally, music develops socio-spiritual solidarity within the participating group, strengthening the socio-spiritual network. This latter function is especially important in informal settings where there is no shaykh or *ṭarīqa* to constrain the proceedings, especially in the public *ḥadra*.

Sufi music has recently enjoyed a considerable popularity among outsiders, mainly world arts and culture *aficionados*. These non-participants in Sufi beliefs and practices nevertheless resonate with the music's sonic contours: its entrancing beats, chants, movements, melodies, and timbres (particularly that of the plaintive reed flute, the *nay*), conditioned by a general understanding of its spiritual ethos. But for the Sufi these non-linguistic sounds merely provide the affective base upon which is laid the core of musical meaning. As Shaykh Yasin affirmed for me again and again, the semantic core of this music is language, in Arabic: *al-kalīma*, the word.

The centrality of “the word” extends far beyond Sufi music, and in two directions. Beyond Sufism it is a general characteristic of Islam, with its ritual focus on language performance (Frishkopf 2018). Beyond Sufi music of Egypt it is also characteristic of Arabic music generally, to the point that wordless instrumental music is often called *mūsīqa ṣāmīta*, silent music.

But poetry is far more crucial in Sufi music than in either Islam or Arabic music generally, due to its range, significance, sincerity, and central function. Mainstream Islamic *inshād* is less prominent within ritual practice, and limited

to conventional, unambiguous themes, mainly glorification and supplication of God, praise and blessings for the Prophet, religious or moralistic stories (*sira nabawiyya, qiṣaṣ*), and exhortations to proper belief and practice. Most of mainstream Islam centers on fixed, lucid texts specified by, and reflecting, the dictates of *sharīʿa* (though some Qurʾanic passages are esoteric and open to interpretation), contrasting sharply with the ambiguous, evocative poetry of Sufism.

For Sufi *inshād*, the word – its form, its ambiguous meaning, its infinite potency, its authenticity, its authority through the *silsila* – is absolutely central to experience. Shaykh Yasin underscores the importance of “living with the words” (*muʿaysha maʿa al-kalima*) before he can perform them. “These are the words that express my life,” he told me. For this reason, the *munshid*’s words are heard not as ritual repetitions, but rather as authentic projections of inner feeling, from the heart. In this way, they develop greater affective power, for, as the Sufis always say, “that which comes from the heart, reaches the heart.”

The Idiosyncratic Power of Sufi Poetry

In many interviews and informal conversations, Sufis explained to me the nature of meaning and emotion in Sufi poetry. Such poetry is always novel (*bikr*; “a world of meaning in every word” said one), and this unbounded reservoir of meaning is there for the listener to discover, quite independent of what the putative author intended. Such interpretation is affective more than cognitive, intimation more than denotation. As Shaykh Yasin told me, the poetry of the great Sufis (*asyādnā*, “our masters”) is felt, rather than explained (*yuhass la yufassar*). For Sufis, its semiotic mechanism is evocation rather than communication, hinging on symbolism (*ramz*) and allusion (*ishāra*), authorized and emotionally powered by the author’s high spiritual station (*maqām*), not literary skill, proficiency, or stature. Such poetry thus arouses variegated meanings in its hearers, conditioned by individual relationships to the putative author or reciter (*asyādnā*), rather than transmitting a literary message.¹⁷

These attitudes are long-standing. Writing on Sufism, the eleventh century theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (one of whose poems is performed in the *laila* transcribed below) noted seven reasons why “singing is more powerful than Qurʾan in arousing to ecstasy...” (MacDonald and al-Ghazzali 1901, 738–745), enumerating them as follows:

17 In an effort to help a friend and respected shaykh, ʿAbd al-ʿAlim al-Nakhayli, publish his Sufi poems (widely performed by *munshidin*, but never printed), we brought his *dirwān* (poetry collection) to the al-Azhar University Research Division for official approval, a necessary condition for publication in Egypt. There an editor corrected many small technical errors in *ʿarūd* (meter). Such “mistakes” were irrelevant to the many Sufis who had performed and listened to them for years! In the end we ignored the “improved” version and the book was never published, though his poetry continues to circulate orally to this day.

(1) Because the Qur'an must be understood as God intended and cannot be interpreted by the listener to suit his own state, as in the case of poetry. (2) Because the Qur'an is fixed and well-known. That which is new makes a greater impression. (3) Because poetic meters create an impression on the soul; the Qur'an lacks meter. (4) Because poetry is sung with variable melodies, whose application depends on being able to shorten and lengthen words, which is forbidden for the Qur'an. (5) Because sung poetry may be accompanied with beaten drums. (6) Because poetry can be tailored by the singer to the audience, and its meaning can be interpreted. According to the listener's whim; these things are disallowed for the Qur'an. (7) Because poetry being created can be understood by the created, whereas the Qur'an is uncreated.¹⁸ (Paraphrased in Frishkopf 1999, 745)

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali adds that "it is not incumbent on the hearer that he should consider what the poet intended in his words. For every saying has different aspects, and every man of understanding has his own fortune" (MacDonald and al-Ghazzali 1901, 707).

Meanings are felt to be authentic expressions of mystical experience, but also infinitely adaptable to the individual. For example, the ambiguous pronouns strewn throughout Sufi poetry referencing the universal "beloved" may be instantiated in many different ways to match the listener's inner state (*ḥāl*): as one's shaykh or saint; as the Prophet or some member of the Prophet's family; or as the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*).

Likewise, the impossibility of casting ineffable mystical-emotional experience into language means that ambiguous, even paradoxical, tropes are often deployed, rendering the poem both more powerful and more flexible; since meanings of such expressions are not clear-cut, each listener can apply them to his own *ḥāl*. While texts are full of convention, meanings are infinitely variable.

Sufi poetry is thus at once emotionally powerful, highly personal and personalizable, and interpreted in the context of one's relation to the putative author or reciter.

Sufi Poetry, Sufi Poets, and Connection: Intertext and Interauthor

Yet, processes of composition and reception in Sufi contexts also both reflect and promote an interconnected collective as well. Sufi poetry is a literary art, but is never art for art's sake. Rather, its aim is functional: the expression and evocation of mystical feeling, towards spiritual advancement. There is thus no

18 This point references a long-standing debate between theological schools in Islam. The Mu'tazila held that the Qur'an is created by God, whereas the dominant Ash'ari school, to which most Sunni Muslims adhere today, considered the Qur'an as one of God's attributes, and hence uncreated.

premium on originality. Rather, authors seek to express and to move by deploying a common vocabulary, reiterating thoughts and feelings in a conventional form capable of touching many people simultaneously, if differently. Further, this common vocabulary is not simply a conventional literary style, but emerges from Sufism's very essence, including a socio-spiritual fabric that tends to erase individuality.

In its essence, Sufism transcends the myriad details of Islamic belief to express deeper, more universal truths at the inner (*bāṭini*) core of Islam, beyond superficial outward (*ẓāhiri*) differences of sect or tradition. Moving towards this core, multiplicity disappears, like Divine Unicity itself. Inner knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is unified and affective, preverbal and essentially ineffable, but finds limited expression in poetry, which also serves to evoke it. Sufi poetry expresses these universal mystical ideas and, not surprisingly, has developed a core vocabulary of symbols, metaphors, and images for doing so.

This vocabulary has flowed down to the present through the centuries-long socio-spiritual network of Sufis, each putative author inspired by others (sometimes in dreams, sometimes following *ḥaḍra* performance) to re-express feeling in similar words, the process culminating in the *munshid* himself, who lives the words and makes them his own before releasing them into the *ḥaḍra*. He too is a kind of author. Yet in a sense there are no individual authors – such texts are original to no one, but rather emerge as a collective product of the entire tradition, the socio-spiritual network itself, blessed and authorized by the great spiritual figures who forward it through the ages.

Many stories exist of Sufis spontaneously reciting a poem while in an intensive emotional state (*ḥāl*, *wajd*, *nashwa*), following *ḥaḍra*, inspired by their experiences of connection to the Beloved in the world of spirit ('*ālam al-arwāḥ*), while disciples memorize it, or hastily copy it down, perhaps reworking it in the process. Such poems may even be attributed to a temporary state of “union” (*ittiḥād*) with the Divine.

Furthermore, various genres of poetic commentary emerged, such as *tashfīr* and *takhmīs*, enabling a poet to weave one poem around another, thereby producing complex multiauthorial texts, and the same line may therefore be found in multiple versions.¹⁹ There is also a tendency to imitate poems, maintaining meter, rhyme, and theme, using a technique called *nahj*.²⁰ For all these reasons, ascertaining an “author” can be difficult, in theory as well as practice.

19 For instance, in *tashfīr* (literally “bisecting”) a poet weaves a new poem into an existing one by separating the hemistiches of each line, and inserting new poetic material between them.

20 An example is the *Nahj al-Burda* (sung by Egypt's greatest singer, Umm Kulthum), composed by Ahmed Shawqi (1870–1932), based on the medieval poem in praise of the Prophet by al-Busiri (1213–1294), a celebrated Sufi saint of the Shadhili order and a disciple of Mursi Abu al-'Abbas (a saint mentioned in the *ḥaḍra* described below). Busiri's *Burda*, recited globally, and often heralded as the most famous poem in Islam, has inspired *tashfīr* and *takhmīs* as well as *nahj* imitations (see Stetkevych 2010).

What all this means is that Sufi poetry is intrinsically intertextual; repetition and ambiguity are paramount, and considerations of authorship, originality, artistic greatness, or literary authority secondary. The goal of Sufi poetry is Islamic mystical expression and training (*tarbiya*), not art, and if the Sufi poet seeks any status it is not as poet *per se*, but rather as teacher. In Egypt I met many shaykhs who composed poetry but did not care for literary recognition; in several cases (as for Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Alim al-Nakhayli) their fragments were distributed and sung without attribution. Indeed this negation of the authorial self is consistent with Sufi values of humility, *khushū‘* reaching its extreme in *fanā’*, the dissolution of the ego-self.

Clearly the intertextuality of Sufi poetry – a network of texts – reflects a corresponding socio-spiritual network. But the intertextual network also *induces* socio-spiritual connectivity, through its invocation of a spiritual spectrum of referents: God, the Prophet, the *Āl al-Bayt*, and the *awliyā’*, as well as the putative authors, entering the *ḥaḍra* through their texts, each of whom bestows a particular mystical fragrance: the theosophical ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili (disciple of the “greatest shaykh,” Ibn ‘Arabi), the theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali.

Sufi Poetry in the Public Ḥaḍra

The public *ḥaḍra* enables an additional layer of dense textual collaging, the reweaving of a textual tapestry (to use a slightly different, equally apropos, visual metaphor), as the *munshid* – free to adjust text to suit his spiritual mood and that of his listeners, intercalates poetic excerpts from multiple sources, jumping from one to another, and sometimes back, permuting lines, as well as introducing his own textual modifications and commentary. In performance the *munshid* spontaneously weaves an intertext, addressing his own spiritual state (*ḥāl*) as well as those of other participants, who react not only to the text but also to the portion of the socio-spiritual network it invokes: its putative (or assumed) authors, and its referents. This performative intertext thus reflects the long Sufi spiritual tradition as well as addressing the here-and-now of *ḥaḍra*, not only those physically present but also the whole world of spiritual participation evoked by text and context.

These idiosyncratic interpretations are nevertheless connected, through collective participation in the social reality of performance, as well as the observable fact of meaningfulness: everyone is moved (albeit differently), and everyone understands that this is so. If the identity of the Beloved is private and personal, the emotion of love is shared. Participants express their inner states through a reverse flow of signs rooted in individual experience – a continuous series of gestures, verbal expressions, movements, cries – signifying connections throughout the socio-spiritual network. Whether actively moving

and chanting in *dhikr* or merely listening, *ḥadra* participants are effectively writers as well as readers. To use a term introduced by literary theorist Roland Barthes, the Sufi intertext is “writerly.”²¹

The *munshid* reads these texts and responds, closing a feedback loop, and drawing everyone closer together; ego-boundaries are dissolved (at least ephemerally) through this shared affective experience, amplified by the theoretical mystical objective, *fanāʿ*. As they write and read each other, the intertext shapes, as well as reflects, the socio-spiritual network in real time, drawing it together in cohesive solidarity. Intertext and interauthor are intricately, intimately interlocked.²²

Due to the importance of poetry in the expressions and communications of saints and shaykhs, along with their spiritual influence on one another, Sufi poetry emerges, across the centuries, as an intertext mirroring Sufism’s socio-spiritual network. Now we see that this intertext is also (re)produced in performance itself, through feedback, and so the concept of interauthor can be extended to include all participants in such events. At the same time the intertext shapes the socio-spiritual network, by conditioning Sufis’ relationships with each other, particularly in performance, and so we come to the conclusion that an intertext and an interauthor exist in a mutually constitutive, dynamic and dialectical relationships, each shaping the other.

In sum: Sufi poetry is both personal, and collective. Its idiosyncratic meanings are a key source of its connective power. It is also highly intertextual, and its intertextual network reflects the socio-spiritual network at the heart of Sufi life and practice, a network which underlies poetic generation and which I therefore term the interauthor. Further, the intertext actively conditions that interauthor, and indeed the socio-spiritual network as a whole. Intertext and interauthor are logical duals: Sufis connect texts, and texts connect Sufis, both outside and within performance. Language binds Sufis in solidarity, and Sufis glue together myriad textual fragments into an intertextual whole. The emergent text is an expression of the socio-spiritual network, as read by the *munshid*. But it is also imprinted on the assembled group, moving them individually (emotionally), and moving them together (socially).

By carefully analyzing the collaging of a performed text – the poetic tapestry of performance – we may gain a deeper understanding of Sufism as both a textual and a socio-spiritual reality. These facts motivate the detailed consideration of a particular *ḥadra* in what follows.

21 “Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (Barthes 2006, 4). Despite its medieval roots, the Sufi tradition is surprisingly “postmodern.”

22 I have analyzed the paradoxical connection between individual and collective aspects of Sufi authorship, in and out of *ḥadra* performance, in an extended article (Frishkopf 2003a).

III. A Typical Public *Ḥaḍra*: Shaykh Yasin al-Tuhami Performs for the Fortieth Day Memorial (*Arbaʿīn*) of Shaykh Abu Shama, 8 February 1996²³

In the second half of this paper I unpack the dynamic construction of intertext and interauthor, through an analysis of a particular performance by Egypt's most celebrated public *ḥaḍra munshid*, Shaykh Yasin al-Tuhami.

Hailing from the village of Hawatka, near Assiut in Upper Egypt, Shaykh Yasin has been performing the *ḥaḍra ʿamma* at *mawālīd* and life cycle occasions throughout the country since the mid-1970s, and has become widely known and imitated as the primary exponent of an Upper Egyptian style of *inshād* centered on classical Arabic poetry.²⁴ Rather than affiliate to a specific Sufi order, Shaykh Yasin is a *muḥibb*, singing for them all.

The *ḥaḍra* took place on February 8, 1996, on the occasion of the 40th day memorial (*arbaʿīn*) for a locally celebrated shaykh of the Rifaʿīyya²⁵ order, Shaykh Abu Shama, in Bedari, a small town not far from the large city of Assiut in Upper Egypt (the *Ṣaʿīd*). I had been visiting Shaykh Yasin at his home in nearby Hawatka, and he brought me with him to this *laila*. As Shaykh Abu Shama was greatly beloved, and due to the profusion of Sufi *munshidīn* in Upper Egypt, this particular *laila* was somewhat unusual, comprising a sequence of different performers taking the stage in sequence, each performing a shorter than usual *ḥaḍra*. Several thousand men were in attendance (women appear rarely in *ḥaḍra*, especially in Upper Egypt).

I recorded Shaykh Yasin's eighty-minute performance using a single video camera, doing my best to capture scenes of the *dhikr* as well as the performers, and later obtaining a complete textual transcript from my research assistant, Taha Gad Salim. Subsequently I tracked down nearly every line of poetry to its putative source, though the task is practically difficult and, in some sense, doomed to failure in principle, due to the interauthorial origins of the Sufi intertext. Shaykh Yasin performs only classical (*fushḥa*) Arabic poetry, together

23 The video is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgRDDPTiue8> (Frishkopf 1996); timing information in the table below (see Table 1) enables the reader to navigate to each poem.

24 Other styles of *inshād* center on colloquial poetry, but Shaykh Yasin performs only in classical Arabic (*fushḥa*). Besides traditional contexts in Egypt, since the latter 1990s he has also performed for a world-music crowd at festivals and concerts in Europe and the Middle East, and he has published many dozens of recordings, including a high-end production on the French Long Distance label (al-Tuhami 1998). Information about Shaykh Yasin, as well as recordings, is available on the internet as well as in scholarship (see Frishkopf 2000, 2001a, 2002, 2009; Waugh 1989).

25 Egyptians consider Sidi Ahmad al-Rifaʿī (1106–1182) an “axial saint” (*ḡuṭb*), and his order is widespread throughout rural Egypt, though highly ramified through dozens of subsidiary orders, each tracing to Sidi Ahmad through their *silsila*. A large Rifaʿī mosque in Cairo centers the saint's *mawlid*, but his burial place is Iraq, and Rifaʿī Sufis can be found throughout the Muslim world, from South Asia to the Middle East and Balkans, as well as in western diasporas. As a whole, the order enjoys a reputation for ecstatic ritual (Campo 2009).

with *madad* (supplications to the saints). Most classical poetry follows the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* form,²⁶ each ode featuring a single meter and rhyme, and thus it is not difficult to detect the boundary between poems, even if the mystical content is more continuous (though the *munshid* can also create textual continuities by maintaining meter and rhyme between juxtaposed poems; see video stills in Figure 2, and the video in Frishkopf 1996).

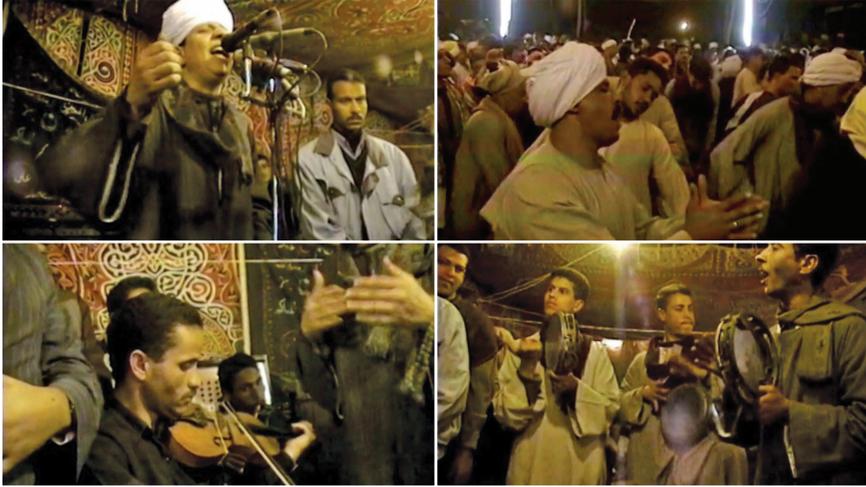


Figure 2: The Shaykh Abu Shama *laila*, February 8, 1996.

Clockwise from top left: (a) Shaykh Yasin performs, (b) thousands of *dhakkīra*, (c) percussionists playing frame drum, *riqq*, and hourglass drum, *ṭabla*, and (d) melodic instrumentalists (violin and, in the background, a reed flute, called *karwala*).

26 The *qaṣīda* is the essential form of classical Arabic poetry. While in contemporary contexts the word simply means “poem,” since pre-Islamic times it also has a more restricted definition: a series of lines (*abyāt*; sing. *bayt*), each divided into two hemistiches (*aṣṭur*; sing. *ṣaṭra*), in a single meter (*baḥr*), each line terminating in the same end rhyme (*qāfiya*), a construction centered on a primary rhyme letter (*ḥarf al-rāwī*) (Wright et al. 1996, 352). All poetry performed in the *laila* and transcribed below is in the *qaṣīda* form. As an example, consider lines 20 and 21, excerpted from al-Ghazali’s lengthy *Tā’iyya* (poem rhyming in the letter “t”) in his *Ma’arij al-Quds* (al-Ghazali 1988, 196), here presented in transliteration. A dash follows the first *ṣaṭra* of each line, and the end rhyme in “tī” is apparent. In line 21, Shaykh Yasin transforms *fanā’* (annihilation) into the morphologically equivalent *ghinā’* (song), in a self-referential move consistent with the meaning of the poem (*ṭarab*, musical ecstasy; *naghāmāt*, melodies) and the *ḥaḍra* performance itself. See Table 3 below for further context and explanation.

Line 20: “Arā kulla dhi sukrin sa yashū mini-l-hawā – illā anā fasaḥwi fika ‘illatu sakrati” (“Every drunkard will awaken from love – except me, for my wakefulness in you intoxicates me”)

Line 21: “Mā aṭraba-l-arwāḥa minna ladā-l-ghinā’– siwā naghāmātin adrakathā qadimati” (“What enraptures the spirits when there’s singing – but melodies they knew in ancient times?”)

*Poetic Sources in Shaykh Yasin's Ḥadra for Shaykh Abu Shama*²⁷

As I have already explained, Sufi poetry is notoriously difficult to source, for both practical and theoretical reasons. Even assuming that a poem can reasonably be attributed to a single original author, it is difficult to ascertain who that author may be. One finds written sources providing different authorial attributions, “traditional” attributions (“from some of the *muhibbin*”), lacking any attribution, or implicitly attributed to the author of a book. Sometimes attribution is only implied; often a poem is included in a larger prose work to illustrate a theme, but in such cases it is not clear if the prose author is claiming authorship of the poem or simply quoting from it. Sufi poems are often generated and transmitted orally, evolving through the transmission process, and perhaps only later written down, by which time many others have contributed and the original author’s identity has been lost.

Making the process even more complex, the poem may have developed collaboratively across multiple authors or performers, each of whom may introduce small variations or permutations, which commonly appear as differences between printed collections. Inspiration blurs authorship as well. Another form of collaboration is metaphysical. Miraculous stories emerge of poets being inspired by other figures, who convey poetry “on the tongue” (*‘ala lisan*) of someone else, such spiritual inspiration – by one’s shaykh or *qutb* (“axial” saint; see Footnotes 8 and 25) – being enabled by the belief system in which such poetry is embedded. Was a poem really written by Ibn Sab‘in, or did he inspire one of his disciples to write it in his name?

The Poetic Collage: A Schematic

Shaykh Yasin’s eighty-minute performance comprises eight different mystical poems (in the *qasida* form) thought to be composed by seven different poets, connected both through their *silsilas* and their literary ideas. Though these poems present different meters and rhyme schemes, semantically they are woven together in a continuous brocade. In the following schematic, each shade or color represents an excerpt from a different poetic source, though all the sources are connected through the single Sufi intertext and interauthor, reflecting a unified meaning and socio-spiritual tradition. In performance Shaykh Yasin repeats lines in different improvisational settings, and frequently jumps back in the sequence, sometimes even returning to a previous poem (as at line 15) before resuming (as at line 19). (See Table 1.)

27 Many thanks to my friend Taha Gad who transcribed the text in full, and to my wife Iman Mersal who assisted in the translation.

Table 1: A schematic of the poetic collage for the Shaykh Abu Shama laila Shading or color matches to poems. Sources are provided in Table 2, and poetry itself in Table 3. Times indicate the first occurrence of each line (most lines are repeated, often following recitation of subsequent lines) and refer to the video (Frishkopf 1996).²⁸

Line	Time	Poem	Rhyme letter	Author
1	4:36	1	R	Unknown
2	7:30	2	L	Ibn Saba'in
3	9:14			
4	9:36			
5	14:16			
6	15:25			
7	15:41			
8	18:09	3	B	al-Mulla Hasan al-Bazzaz al-Mawsili
9	18:43			
10	22:59	4	H	'Abd al-Karim al-Jili
11	23:49			
12	24:17			
13	32:06	5	B	'Abd al-Karim al-Jili
14	32:44			
15	43:38	4	H	
16	48:26			
17	50:31			
18	51:07			
19	1:01:14	5	B	
20	1:01:07	6	T	Abu Hamid al-Ghazali
21	1:08:11			
22	1:11:18	7	N	Abu Madyan
23	1:12:25			
24	1:13:05			
25	1:16:32			
26	1:17:03	8	M	Abu al-Mawahib
27	1:17:47			
28	1:18:13			
29	1:18:34			
30	1:18:47			

28 The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgRDDPTiue8>.

The Interauthor and Its Authors

All the presumed authors are Sufis, hailing from many different places and eras, and yet interconnected through intersecting Sufi lineages, influencing each other directly or indirectly through their writings and oral teachings. Several are widely known as saints or scholar-teachers. Poetry (whether to guide or to express) and authorship was secondary to their spiritual mission and socio-spiritual connections, as reflected in their writings. It should be noted too that predominantly prose Arabic works often contain poetic excerpts, providing a different register for communication to the reader; such is the case for instance for poetry by al-Jili and al-Ghazali (see below). Below they are presented in temporal order, by year of birth.

Yet, though I spent an inordinate amount of time hunting through the internet in search of the poetic lines assembled by Shaykh Yasin in performance, I could never be sure that these are really *the* authors, only that the poems appear in books (sometimes websites) with their names on them. Who really wrote these poems? Do they truly have unique authors? Or are these figures best considered merely as prominent nodes within a broader interauthorial network? All of this poetry is part of the Sufi tradition, a reflection of the interauthor, the literary aspect of a socio-spiritual network generating, and supported by, the Sufi intertext.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali²⁹ (1058–1111) was born in Khurasan. Trained in Islamic law, he eventually moved to Baghdad where he taught at the famous Nizamiyya until suffering a nervous breakdown that caused him to leave his professorship and seek a deeper truth through Sufi teachers in Syria, before returning to his academic role. He is widely revered as the greatest theologian of Sunni Islam, the singular figure to reconcile law (*shariʿ*) and mysticism (*ṭasawwuf*), as formulated in his massive and renowned *Ihyaʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), a powerful influence upon Islam to the present. However it is another substantial writing (he is credited with hundreds), *Maʿarij al-Quds fi Madarij Maʿrifat al-Nafs* (*The Ascent to the Divine Through the Path of Self-Knowledge*) that concludes with his lengthy *tāʾiyya* (poem rhyming in the letter “t”) from which Shaykh Yasin draws two lines (al-Ghazali 1988, 182–199; Watt 2012).³⁰

Abu Madyan Shuʿayb “al-Ghawth” (1126–1197) was born in Cantillana, near Seville, and represents a crucial figure of western Sufism, as he taught the founders of multiple Sufi *silsilas*. Memorizing the Qurʾan at an early age, he moved to Fez (Morocco) where he studied with local Sufi masters. Later he moved eastward, meeting Ahmad al-Rifaʿi in Baghdad, then continued

29 Sometimes written “Ghazzali”; there is no agreement as to whether the letter “z” carries a *shadda*.

30 This rhyme came to possess intertextual significance in itself, being chosen for ʿUmar ibn al-Farid’s long *Nazm al-Suluk* (*The Poem of the Way*), and many subsequent emulators.

onwards to perform the *hajj* in Mecca, where he studied al-Ghazali and appears to have met the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi line, ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, at Mecca. Abu Madyan is known as patron saint of Tilimsān (Tlemcen) (Marçais 2012; Trimmingham 1998, 46–48). The entire Shadhili tradition also connects to Abu Madyan, via ‘Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish (d. 1228), spiritual guide (*mursbid*) for Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258) himself. Ibn ‘Arabi also bears Abu Madyan’s influence (Schimmel 1975, 250; 1982, 46; Tourneau 2012; Trimmingham 1998, 47).

Ibn Sab’in (1217–1279). Born in Murcia (Spain) and died in Mecca, he was a scientist (medicine, alchemy), Aristotelian philosopher and Sufi, who gathered a group of ascetic followers called al-*Sab’iniyya* (the Seventy). Exiled from his homeland due to his monist inclinations, he sought refuge in Ceuta, but was again forced out for his teachings. Moving to Bougie (Bijaya, Algeria) he met al-Shushtari, who became a disciple. He finally found refuge at Mecca. His disciple al-Shushtari praised him in poetry, including a *qaṣīda* presenting the *silsila* of his *ṭariqa*, which included al-Hallaj and Abu Madyan. All three (al-Shushtari, al-Hallaj, and Abu Madyan) wrote poetry sung by Shaykh Yasin, including a poem by Abu Madyan in this *laila* (Faure 2012). Authorial attributions to Ibn Sab’in are particularly weak, however, as I found them only online.

‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili (1365–1428) was a Sufi who lived in many parts of the Muslim world, including Yemen and India. A descendant of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, he likely participated in the Qadiriyya order. Mainly, he is closely associated with the “Shaykh al-Akbar” (greatest shaykh), Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240), writing a commentary on the latter’s *Futubat al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), and devoted to the concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, the Unity of Being. He wrote numerous books, most notably the influential *al-Insan al-Kamil* (*The Perfect Man*), i.e. one who has realized oneness with God (including prophets and saints), including prose and poetry (al-Jili 1997). al-Jili was highly connected, spiritually: he spoke with angels, through auditions and visions, and even met the Prophet Muhammad, as well as other prophets and saints (Nicholson 2005, 57–124; Ritter 2012).

Abu al-Mawahib al-Shadhili al-Tunisi (1417–1477), was born in Tunisia and died in Cairo. He was a follower of Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili and an influential member of the Shadhiliyya *tariqa*, and his poetry has often been recited at saints’ festivals (*marwalid*) and mosques. His influential treatise, *Qawānin Hikam al-Isḥraq* (*The Laws of Illumination*), a largely prose work containing several poems, has been translated into English (Abu al-Mawahib and Jurji 1978; Ahmed [n. d.]; Ghanem 2019).

Hasan al-Bazzaz (1845–1887) was born in Mosul (Iraq). He memorized the Qur’an as a child, and wrote poetry in the local Sufi tradition, focusing on love for the Prophet, his family, and the Sufi saints. He is said to have joined

both the Rifāʿiyya and the Naqshabandiyya Sufi orders. In the *laila* documented below, Shaykh Yasin recites several lines from one of Hasan's poems praising Sidi Ahmad al-Rifaʿi, connecting both author and *munshid* to the Rifāʿiyya Sufi tradition of Shaykh Abu Shama (ʿAllaf 2021; "Hasan Al-Bazzaz" [n. d.]; "Qalbi Ilaykum" [n. d.]).

Scattered across more than eight centuries, these authors, representing only a small sampling of Shaykh Yasin's corpus (especially because the *laila* was relatively short), are closely linked to the *awliyāʾ* (saints) mentioned in the *madad* sections, either as disciples or teachers (e.g. Abu Madyan as the spiritual progenitor of the Shadhiliyya tradition; Mulla Hasan Bazzaz as the follower of Sidi Ahmad al-Rifaʿi), as well as to other authors represented in Shaykh Yasin's repertoire, and in this way are closely linked with each other as well. On the other hand, it can never be said, definitively, that these are the authors at all, for they merely participate in the intertext, borrowing each other's ideas, symbols, metaphors, and phrases, even entire poems, collaging ideas, and quoting without attribution, linked as interauthor.

The Poetic Tapestry

Shaykh Yasin weaves together eight poetic sources, differing in formal structure (rhyme and meter) but constantly reiterating the same intertextual themes, consistently deploying ambiguous metaphors and pronouns ("you," "they," "he" or "she") referring to the spiritual Beloved (whose identity remains unclear: God? Prophet? Prophet's family? Saints? Shaykhs?), enabling each listener to interpret the lines idiosyncratically, according to their individual experience. Poetry expresses this experience, centering upon the persistent, painful longing for reunion with the Beloved (often as female: God's *dhāt*, or Essence, beyond attributes (*ṣifāt*), is grammatically feminine, whereas Allah is grammatically masculine), and obstacles and ecstasies of the spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*). The powerful experiences of spiritual intoxication are expressed through metaphors of drink, drunkenness, music, and dance; estrangement from those who (remaining on the exoteric path of Law) cannot understand; the desire or experience of self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*) and ultimately union (*wuṣūl*) with the Beloved. Throughout Shaykh Yasin takes liberties with the printed (original?³¹) poems (whether spontaneously or as planned in advance one cannot be sure): excerpting lines, permuting their ordering, and through small variations by which he can better express himself and reach his listeners (see Tables 2 and 3).

31 We do not know whether the printed poems are "original," or even if it is possible to identify an "original" given the complexities of the intertext.

Table 2: Poetic sources, by line number in the performed text
 Every source is in the *qasīda* form. Shaykh Yasin draws only a few lines from each one.

Lines	Poem	Source
1	1	Unknown
2–7	2	Many websites cite poetry of Ibn Saba‘in (“Qasa’id li-l-Hallaj [...]” 2015; “Ahabab Sidi Ahmad...” [n. d.]; al-Tariqa al-Hashimiyya [n. d.]; “Allah rabbi wa al-islam dini” [n. d.]; “Atef Elhawa” [n. d.]; “Dirasat fi al-Turath” [n. d.]). But one book cites al-Damrawi as the author (Maqrizi and Ghalili 2002).
8–9	3	From a poem by al-Mulla Hasan al-Bazzaz al-Mawsili (1845–1887) (The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs 2018; “Qalbi Ilaykum” [n. d.]; Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi 1980, 243–244; “Hasan Al-Bazzaz” [n. d.]).
10, 11, 12, 15–18	4	From the fifth chapter of ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili’s <i>al-Insan al-Kamil</i> , on Unity (<i>fi al-Ahadiyya</i>) (al-Jili 1997, 48; “al-Jili 5” [n. d.]).
13–14, 19	5	From the thirteenth chapter of ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili’s <i>al-Insan al-Kamil</i> , on the manifestation of the Names (<i>fi tajalli al-asma’</i>) (al-Jili 1997, 65; “Al-Jili 13” [n. d.]).
20	6	From al-Ghazali’s <i>Tā’iyya</i> in his <i>Ma‘arij al-Quds</i> (al-Ghazali 1988, 196).
21		From al-Ghazali’s <i>Tā’iyya</i> in his <i>Ma‘arij al-Quds</i> (al-Ghazali 1988, 194).
22–25	7	From the <i>dīwān</i> of Abu Madyan (Abu Madyan 2011, 37).
26–30	8	From a poem by Abu al-Mawahib al-Tunisi, as cited in Ibn Ajiba’s <i>Iqaz al-Himam</i> , lines 5–9, with slight modifications (Ibn ‘Ajibah 1985, 299); the (original?) poem in Abu al-Mawahib’s <i>dīwān</i> is slightly different and Shaykh Yasin sings a permuted version of it (corresponding to lines 7, 8, 9, 4, and 5; see Abu al-Mawahib 1998, 116–117).

Table 3: Poetry as presented in performance
 Words in parentheses are recited as alternatives when the line is repeated.

Translation		Second hemistich	First hemistich
Your ³² memory is a fingerprint, inscribed by needlepoint beyond the horizons of vision	1	فنون الإبر فوق آفاق البصر	ذكراك بصمات نقشتها
He who hinted about reaching him is not like the one who walked with him until he arrived	2	كالذي سير به حتى وصل	فليس من نوه بالوصل له
No, and the one who reaches me is not like the one who knocked on the door, and entered the house	3	كالذي طرق الباب وللدار دخل	لا ولا الواصل عندي
No, nor is the one who entered like the one they seated at the beginning	4	كالذي أجلسوه عندهم في المستهل	لا ولا الداخل عندي
No, nor is the one they seated among them like the one they confided in, for it is a place for the secret	5	كالذي سارروه فهو للسمر محل	لا ولا من أجلسوه عندهم
No, nor is the one who they confided in like the one who confided in them, so leave that argument	6	كالذي سار إياهم فدع ذاك الجدل	لا ولا من سارره
This is a matter to which the heart is attached; as soon as any of it appears, it kills ³³	7	ما تبدى بعضه إلا قتل	فذاك أمرٌ علق القلب به
O my heart, be patient with the abandonment of loved ones, do not be afraid of that, for some abandonment is discipline	8	تجزع لذلك فبعض الهجر تأديبٌ	يا قلبي صبرًا على هجر الأحبة لا

32 Note that throughout “you” is ambiguous, as is typical of Arabic poetry; the pronoun could refer to God, the Prophet, the Prophet’s family (*Āl al-Bayt*), the saints (*awliyāʾ*), or the spiritual world (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ*) generally. Pronominal antecedents are often left for the listener to fill in, flexible connectors enabling poetry to resonate simultaneously with a diverse audience on many levels, their meanings depending on spiritual state.

33 I.e. kills the ego-self (*nafs*), producing *fanāʾ* (self-annihilation).

Translation		Second hemistich	First hemistich
The soul and the heart, indeed all of me is a gift for them, and how can something gifted be lost?	9	وكيف يضيع ³⁴ شيءٌ وهو موهوب	فالروح والقلب بل كأي لهم هبةٌ
My eyes for you are purified in her, and sanctified in her name and attributes	10	وتقدست في اسمها وصفاتها	عيني لنفسك نُزّهت في ذاتها
So recognize her as she deserves, and do not say that I deserved her goodness	11	نفسى استحقت حسنها بثباتها	فأشهد لها ما تستحق ولا تقل
Fill your glasses with wine (drink your wine in glasses) ³⁵ and do not say “leave the wine in her tavern”	12	يوماً بترك الراح في حاناتها	واملاً كؤوسك بالمدام (واشرب مدامك بالكؤوس) ولا تقل
First madad section (see the section below)			مدد ١
And what can that mean but that we are one spirit, that heals us in two bodies – how wondrous!	13	تداوى لنا جسمان وهو عجيب	وما ذاك إلا أننا روح واحدٍ
My essence is for her, my name is her name, and my state is with her in a strange union	14	وحالي بها في الاتحاد غريبٌ	فذاقي لها ذاتٌ واسمي اسمها
Jili, my unveiling [<i>jakwati</i>] is burnished [<i>yunjala</i>] so I praise him [<i>ujilluhu</i>] ³⁶			جيلي يُنجلي جلوتي فأجلُهُ

34 Shaykh Yasin skips the preceding line and changes *yarja'* (return) to *yaḍī'* (be lost).

35 Shaykh Yasin repeats the line substituting the text in parentheses. Wine is a frequent metaphor for the path to mystical intoxication in love.

36 This line is not poetry, but Shaykh Yasin's interjection: a metacommentary referencing the poem's author, 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, disciple of *al-shaykh al-akbar* (the greatest shaykh), Muhiy al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, using the fact that Jili's name (literally "from Jil") resembles several words carrying mystical significance: unveiling (*jakwati*), the moment of Divine connection), being burnished (*yunjala*; burnishing better reflects the Divine), and praising (*ujillu*). Such an exclamation underlines authorial authority in the performed text, and also constitutes a *de facto* invocation of the author, regarded as a spiritual presence in the *ḥadra*. But the pronoun in "praise him" is ambiguous and could also refer to God, the Prophet, or any saint.

Translation		Second hemistich	First hemistich
What is the harm in making her name your metaphor and preserving the sanctity of her essence? ³⁷	15	عنك اسمها وحفظتْ حُرمة ذاتها	ماذا يضرك لو جعلت كنايةً
And You revealed the Essence of Your Name, and Glory is the manifestation of Her Name and attributes (features)	16	والعز مظهر اسمها وصفاتها (سماتها)	وجعلت مجلى الذات لاسمك مظهرا
And you built (erected) its stones over your treasure, so that the ignorant one would not see its sanctities	17	كي لا يشاهد جاهل حرمانها	وبنيتْ (وأقمتْ) فوق الكنز منك حجارها
Be the best protector of this trust, and do not let its secrets slip away	18	ولا تدع أسرارها لوشاتها	هذي الأمانة كن بها نِعمَ الأمين
Second madad section (see the section below)			مدد ٢
As a person who has two names and one self, which one does the self call from in order to reach [the other]?	19	بأي تنادى الذات منه تصيب	كشخصٍ له اسمان والذات واحد
Everything has a door, and the door to God is Muhammad, God's Prophet ³⁸			لكل شيء باب وباب الله محمدٌ رسول الله

37 There follows a *lazima* (plural *lawāzim*; a musical interlude featuring instruments, though all may sing along on “ah”), the beautiful opening to a religious song *Khushūʿ* (*Humility*), originally performed by Egyptian singer Yasmine El Khayam. All may sing this and other *lawāzim*. Shaykh Yasin adds “Allah”, turning the song into a *dhikr*. This particular song was composed by popular artists ‘Amar al-Shariʿi with lyrics by ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad. The Egyptian singer Yasmine El Khayam, daughter of the famous Qur’an reciter Shaykh Muhammad Khalil al-Husari, was well-known for religious and nationalistic songs, performed with a respectable comportment. In 1990 she retired from music for religious reasons. By the same logic of musical respectability, *lawāzim* from Umm Kulthum’s songs are also a frequent choice for *inshād*.

38 Another instance of the *munshid’s* non-poetic interjections. Some are non-lexical exclamations, such as “ah,” to be interpreted as emotional expressions; others, such as this one, are absolutely clear in meaning. Either type can quickly raise the emotional level, providing a respite from more abstruse, even paradoxical Sufi poetry, as in the preceding line.

Translation		Second hemistich	First hemistich
Every drunkard will awaken from love except me, for my wakefulness in you intoxicates me ³⁹	20	إلا أنا فصحوي فيك علة سكرتي	أرى كل ذي سكر سيصحو من الهوى
What can enrapture ⁴⁰ the spirits when there's singing ⁴¹ except melodies they knew in ancient times? ⁴²	21	سوى نغماتٍ أدركتها قديمية	ما أطرب الأرواح منا لدى الغنا
We awaken by remembering you; though we do not see you, the remembrance of loved ones refreshes us	22	ألا إن تذكّار الأعبة ينعشنا	نحيا بذكراكم إذا لم نراكم
We are moved by remembrance of <i>hadiths</i> about you, and had it not been for your love in our hearts, we would not have moved	23	ولولا هواكم في الحشا ما تحركنا	يحركنا ذكر الأحاديث عنكم
If souls are shaken with longing for the meeting, yes the spirits dance, oh you who are ignorant of the meaning ⁴³	24	نعم ترقص الأشباح يا جاهل المعنى	إذا اهتزت الأرواح شوقاً إلى اللقا

39 Again we see two features typical of Sufi poetry: the metaphor of love as intoxication (interpretable in a deeper sense as *fanā'*: self-annihilation), and paradox, fracturing reason in search of a deeper non-discursive truth, like a Zen *koan*. Sufi theorists often distinguished binary oppositions along the mystical path, such as intoxication (*sukr*) and wakefulness or sobriety (*sabw*), arising following an ecstatic mystical experience (al-Qushayri 2011, 93); here the latter is held to cause the former.

40 Literally, "causes to feel *ṭarab*" (musical emotion).

41 Here is an instance of transformations wrought by the *munshid* tradition, if not Shaykh Yasin himself. What appears to be the original poem, as published in a modern edition, has the word *fanā'*, the mystical state of self-annihilation. The *munshid* sings the morphologically equivalent, rhyming word *ghinā'*, singing.

42 This line, explicitly invoking *ṭarab*, references the time of the Primordial Covenant, *mithāq* (here *qadīma*, "ancient times") using the metaphor of song to represent *dhikr* as remembrance of a prior communion with the Divine. This line also acts deictically, pointing to the unfolding *ḥaḍra* and self-referentially referring to Shaykh Yasin's unfolding performance.

43 Shaykh Yasin permutes the lines; this one would be the last of those recited, according to the published poem (though establishing an authoritative form is admittedly difficult).

Translation		Second hemistich	First hemistich
Tell the one who forbids his people: if you do not taste the meaning of God's drink (love's drink) then leave us	25	إذا لم تذق معنى شراب الله (الهو) دعنا	قل للذي ينهي عن الوجد أهله
If I spoke, I would not speak to anyone but you, and all my heart is occupied ⁴⁴ with your love	26	وكل قلبي مشغول بحبكم	أنا إن تكلمت لم أنطق بغيركم
You took my soul from me gently, for I have not known others since I have known you	27	فلمست أعرف غيراً مذ عرفتكم	أخذتم روحي مني في ملاطفةٍ
I forgot every path I knew except for the path that leads me to your quarter	28	إلا طريقاً تؤديني لربعكم	نسيت كل طريق كنت أعرفها
What use are houses if you do not occupy them? What use are homes, abandoned places, tentsites? ⁴⁵	29	ما الديار ما الأطلال ما الخيم	ما المساكن لولا أن تحلوا بها
Were it not for you, ⁴⁶ I would have yearned for neither neighborhood nor ruins, nor would my legs have carried me to the sanctuary	30	ولا سعت بي إلى نحو الحمى قدم	لولاكم ما شاقني ربعٌ ولا طلل
Third (final) madad section (see the section below)			مدد ٣

44 The printed edition has *masbghūf*, possessed; Shaykh Yasin may have felt *masbghūl* (preoccupied) would be easier to understand, less controversial, or both.

45 The implication is “Nothing has meaning without your presence.” Abandoned ruins of old encampments (*aṭlāl*, a common trope of pre-Islamic poetry as site of nostalgia for the absent beloved) are frequented by Sufi ascetics, and thus acquire a spiritual significance as places of retreat (*kbilwa*), for contemplation and remembrance – but even they have no meaning. Here he exchanges *manāzil* (homes) for *masākin* (houses), perhaps to emphasize the point, though the two words are close in meaning and morphology.

46 Shaykh Yasin uses the plural form, implying (for many Egyptian Sufis) the *Āl al-Bayt*, while the original poem has the more ambiguous singular “you.”

Madad: A Spiritual Journey in Time, Space, and *Silsila*

At the culmination of each poetic segment a *madad* section occurs, performed at the fastest tempos, offering an ecstatic interlude through a readily comprehensible text, its lucidity contrasting sharply with the preceding esoteric poetry. *Madad* evokes an outpouring of emotion, both because it is an explicit and deeply-felt prayer, entreating spiritual assistance and blessing, and because it invokes familiar, beloved spiritual personages. In each *madad* section, Shaykh Yasin petitions a series of saints (*awliyāʿ*) in the form “*Madad yā X*” (help us, oh X), where X is replaced by the name of a *walī* or saint, often implicitly praised by the addition of an epithet (*laqab*). Unlike the opacities of Sufi poetry, these invocations are completely transparent. Every *laila* concludes with *madad*.

Textually, the names and epithets of invocation are clear. While some listeners may not be familiar with all of them, most are recognized, and their mention also invokes a personal relationship to those they know, particularly the primary saints – and especially the *Āl al-Bayt*, who are universally beloved and deeply embedded in Sufis’ lives. The impact of mentioning a very local saint may be more limited, but they are important in connecting with the local population. The *munshid* prepares himself with hagiographic knowledge (sometimes through consultations with the *laila*’s hosts) in order to perform *madad* relevant to the *ḥaḍra* location.⁴⁷

The mention of these spiritually charged names and epithets serves immediately to evoke emotion, particularly for followers of the named saint, or those from his or her spiritual lineage, or who live in his or her precinct (*riḥāb*), and who thus enjoy the saint’s *baraka* (blessing) and protection as “patron saint.” Relationships with saints are highly individual, and listeners are affected in very personal ways, depending on the particular history of their spiritual relationship with the figure named, often mediated through *ziyāra*, attendance at *marwālid*, or appearance in dreams. But even if everyone is not equally affected by a particular *madad*, emotion released into the shared performance space serves to raise the general emotional level, intensifying the *dhikr*, and feeding back to performers.

The epithet, signifying stature or personal qualities, may also amplify the effect, for instance Sayyida Nafisa (the Prophet’s great-granddaughter) is invoked as *Sitt al-Karima* (the generous lady), and her Cairo shrine is one of the most oft-visited by *muḥibbīn* seeking spiritual or material support. At a *laila*, mention of her name invokes her presence, evoking and amplifying the love *muḥibbīn* feel for her, while recalling prior visits, as well as the positive outcomes that followed, underscoring her generous nature.

47 Shaykh Yasin told me that sometimes he is unsure about which local shaykhs and saints to mention in the course of the *laila*; local organizers hand him slips of paper with their names.

Saints are believed to inhabit the world of spirits (*‘alam al-arwāḥ*), free to instantly move anywhere (or be present everywhere). At the same time, they are strongly linked to their shrines⁴⁸ where they are thought to be more strongly present,⁴⁹ and thus there is always an emphasis on those with Egyptian shrines, who are frequently visited, whose *marwālid* are well-attended, and whose mention thus evokes memories of such events and all the people involved.

The *munshid* presents *madad* in a logical spiritual-chronological-geographical sequence that traces the spiritual lineages (*silsilas*) of Islam, from their origins in the Prophet’s family and companions, to the saints who founded primary *ṭarīqa* lines (*aqṭāb*), to lesser known local saints who are nevertheless deeply meaningful for attendees interacting with them on a daily basis. Reciting *madad* for these saints thus traces a journey across a spiritual topography, through branching *silsilas* that lead, ultimately, to the particular locale and community of performance. Those with Egyptian shrines are marked with an asterisk in what follows (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: The spiritual topography of *madad*. Shaykh Yasin begins with several of the *Āl al-Bayt* (green) before proceeding to remember and petition *awliyā'* (saints), following lines of descent, genealogical (*nasab*) or spiritual (*silsila*). Shaykh Abu Shama is in blue.⁵⁰

48 Usually, but not always, the shrine marks the gravesite.

49 One Egyptian Sufi explained this paradox of saints being both “here” (at the shrine) and “everywhere” as analogous to a quantum mechanical wave function!

50 See online map available at the following link: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1ro--TB-4XyFkVlzMOLiqmXaDTvCtytRL&ll=28.066548005158964%2C37.09885490000002&z=7>.

Madad 1

This first section focuses on the Prophet's family (*Āl al-Bayt*) and companions (*ṣaḥāba*), some of whom have Cairo shrines, before concluding with three local saints, including Shaykh Abu Shama himself, and a major saint of Upper Egypt, Sidi Farghal of Abu Tig (see Table 4).

 Table 4: *Madad* section 1⁵¹

Supplicating	Meaning	Supplicating
<i>Āl Bayt al-Nabi</i>	The Prophet's family, including his immediate family members and descendants	آل بيت النبي
Sayyidna al-Imam 'Ali	Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law	سيدنا الإمام علي
Sayyidna al-Hamza	Hamza, the Prophet's paternal uncle	سيدنا الحمزة
Sayyidna al-'Abbas	'Abbas, the Prophet's paternal uncle	سيدنا العباس
Sittina <i>al-zabrā' ya batūl</i>	The Prophet's daughter, Fatima, referred to by her nicknames <i>zabrā'</i> (shining) and <i>batūl</i> (pure)	ستنا الزهراء يا بتول
<i>Ahl al-ṭahāra ahl al-'affa</i>	The people of purity (addressing the Prophet's family generally)	أهل الطهارة أهل العفة
Mawlana Sayyidina al-Hasan	Hasan, the Prophet's grandson	مولانا سيدنا الحسن
Mawlana Sayyidina al-Husayn	Husayn, the Prophet's grandson*	مولانا سيدنا الحسين
Sitt al-Karima <i>ṣāhibat al-shūra ya karimat al-dārayn sittina al-Sayyida Nafisa</i>	Nafisa, the Prophet's great-great-granddaughter, referred to here also as "possessor of wisdom," "generous lady," "generous one of the two abodes"*	ست الكريمة صاحبة الشورى يا كريمة الدارين ستنا السيدة نفيسة
Yā Sīdī 'Alī <i>murabbi al-aytām</i>	'Alī Zayn al-'Abidin, the Prophet's great-grandson, referred to as "the one who raises orphans"*	يا سيدي علي مربي الأيتام

51 Beginning at 24:33 of the video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgRDDPTiue8> (Frishkopf 1996).

Supplicating	Meaning	Supplicating
Sitt Fātima al-Nabawiyya <i>bint al-Imam</i>	The Prophet's great-granddaughter, Fatima (Husayn's daughter)*	ست فاطمة النبوية بنت الإمام
<i>Ya ṣāḥib al-dḥikrā shaykhanā yā</i> Abu 'Umar	Shaykh Abu Shama, in whose honor the <i>ḥaḍra</i> is held*	يا صاحب الذكرى شيخنا يا أبا شامة يا أبو عمر
Sayyidna al-‘Aryan	A local saint*	سيدنا العريان
‘Amm yā Farghal	A great saint of Abu Tig, a nearby town, about 17 km away*	عم يا فرغل

*The saint has a shrine in Egypt.

Madad 2

In this sequence Shaykh Yasin traces the main spiritual *silsilas* via the four “axes” (*aqṭāb*), the axial saint (*qutb*) being the highest of his age. (A similar station is that of “*ghawṭh*” (savior), attributed to Abu Madyan; see Table 5.)

Table 5: *Madad* section 2⁵²

Supplicating	Meaning	Supplicating
Sīdī yā abā al-‘ālamayn ‘amm yā Rifa‘ī	Ahmad al-Rifa‘ī (“possessor of the two worlds”), founder of the <i>Rifa‘īyya tariqa</i> *	سيدي يا أبا العلمين عم يا رفاعي
Sīdī yā abā al-‘aynayn sīdī Ibrahīm ‘amm ya Dasuqi	Ibrahim al-Dasuqi (“possessor of two eyes”), founder of the <i>Burhamiyya tariqa</i> *	سيدي يا أبا العينين سيدي إبراهيم عم يا دسوقي
Shaykh al-‘Arab ‘amm yā sayyid yā abā <i>majāhid</i>	Ahmad al-Badawi, “shaykh of the Arabs,” founder of the <i>Badawiyya tariqa</i> , originally initiated as a Rifa‘ī*	شيخ العرب عم يا سيد يا أبا مجاهد
Sīdī abā al-Hasan ‘amm ya Shadhili	Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, founder of the <i>Shadhiliyya tariqa</i> *	سيدي أبا الحسن عم يا شاذلي
Sīdī abā al-‘Abbas ‘amm yā Mursi	Abu al-‘Abbas al-Mursi, disciple of Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili*	سيدي أبا العباس عم يا مرسي

52 Beginning at 51:40 of the video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgRDDPTiue8> (Frishkopf 1996).

Supplicating	Meaning	Supplicating
Sīdī abā al-sibā ^ʿ <i>abā al-dayfan</i>	A local saint*	سيدي أبا السباع أبا الضيفان
Saʿd al-Din yā Jibali	A local saint*	سعد الدين يا جبالي
Shaykh ʿAbd al-Naʿim	A local saint*	شيخ عبد النعيم
Yā shaykh ʿAlwan shaykh ʿAbdallah	A local saint*	يا شيخ علوان شيخ عبد الله
Sayyidna al-Duwayli	A local saint*	سيدنا الدويلي
Yā Abā ʿAbd al-Daʿim	A local saint*	يا أبا عبد الدائم

*The saint has a shrine in Egypt.

Madad 3

The concluding *madad* section is very short, focusing on Shaykh Abu Shama, and introducing two other local saints (see Table 6).

Table 6: *Madad* section 3⁵³

Supplicating	Meaning	Supplicating
<i>ṣāḥib al-dhikrā shaykhanā yā Abu ʿUmar</i>	Shaykh Abu Shama, in whose honor the <i>ḥaḍra</i> is held*	صاحب الذكرى شيخنا أبو شامة
Sidi ʿAbd al-Nabi	A local saint*	سيدي عبد النبي
Sayyidina al-ʿAryan	A local saint*	سيدنا العريان

*The saint has a shrine in Egypt.

Conclusion

A close analysis of the *ḥaḍra* text provides a fascinating glimpse into the nature and meaning of Egyptian Sufism, as well as suggesting how its spiritual-social and ideational structures are maintained through ritual.

This complex, compound text, woven through performance in response to a socio-spiritual dynamic, reflects the relationships of those present – whether physically or spiritually, invoking the entire socio-spiritual network. Meanwhile the text also serves to shape that network, injecting and conditioning meaning and Sufis' relationships to one another. Words of a shaykh or *munshid* trigger meaning at multiple levels: for what they say, for whom they reference, and to whom they are attributed. Sufis interpret them as authentic,

53 Beginning at 1:19:03 of the video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgRDDPTiue8> (Frishkopf 1996).

representing genuine mystical experience (including the *munshid's* own), rendered in linguistic form, and applied to their own. This fact adds to their idiosyncratic potency. Yet they act on the gathered company in multiple ways. Abstract symbols can address many people at once, linking them, while allowing each to bring a unique interpretation, whereas the more transparent segments of *madad* evoke personal relationships. The triggering of listeners' *ḥāl* is somewhat unpredictable; as the *munshid* sings, it is as if he trips landmines of spiritual emotion, each invisibly affecting only a particular group of people, different each time, in different places throughout the performance space, whose passion pours forth to enliven the gathering.

But ultimately everyone is moved, and the resulting emotion – expressed in various ways: words, gestures, or movements – pours back into the collective context, gathering everyone together as one. Through potent but ambiguous and hence highly adaptable and polyvalent Sufi symbols and allusions, and a recognition of the collective generation of the performed text, combined with the feedback process guiding its assembly, Sufis are united spiritually and socially. The performed text, an instance of the larger intertext, thus reinforces the interauthor that inspired it. Just as the author disappears into the interauthor in a kind of self-annihilation (*fanā'*), so the text disappears into the intertext, as the drop into the ocean. Both author and text are suspended in webs, socio-spiritual, or semantic, their individuality revealed as illusory, dissolved in a larger collectivity, a higher unity. This is the essence of *taṣawwuf*, Sufism. And, as Egyptian Sufis say, Sufism is the *garwhar* (essence) of Islam.

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POVZETEK

Besedilne dimenzije javnega obreda *ḥadra* v egiptovskem sufizmu

Članek preučuje ključno vlogo besedil v sufizmu, predvsem v njegovem osrednjem obredu, ki se imenuje *ḥadra*. Na podlagi Egipta kot študije primera in s poglobljeno analizo izbrane izvedbe obreda *ḥadra*, ki ga vodi *munshid* (obredni pevec), članek s pomočjo konceptov medbesedilnosti (»intertext«) in medavtorstva (»interauthor«) prikaže, kako besedilo podpira družbeno-duhovna razmerja. Natančna analiza besedila obreda ponuja fascinanten vpogled v naravo in pomen egiptovskega sufizma, obenem pa poskuša razložiti, kako se slednji ohranja skozi ritual.

Kompleksno zgrajeno besedilo se v izvedbi obreda odziva na družbeno-duhovno dinamiko in odraža razmerja med navzočimi – naj bodo fizična ali duhovna – ter tako prikljče na plano celotno družbeno-duhovno mrežo. Obenem besedilo s tem, ko dodaja in pogojuje pomene ter medsebojne odnose sufijev, mrežo tudi oblikuje. Besede šejka ali *munshida* vzbujajo pomene na več ravneh: o vsebini sporočanega, na koga se besede nanašajo in komu so pripisane. Vedno se jih razlaga kot avtentične besede, ki predstavljajo pristno mistično izkušnjo (vključno z *munshidovo*), podano v jezikovni obliki. To dejstvo krepi njihovo moč. Pa vendar na zbrano družbo vplivajo na različne načine. Abstraktni simboli lahko naenkrat nagovorijo veliko število ljudi, od katerih si jih vsakdo razlaga po svoje, medtem ko bolj neposredni deli rituala *ḥadra*, imenovani *madad*, govorijo o medosebnih odnosih. Sprožanje notranjih čustvenih stanj (*ḥāl*) med poslušalci je nekoliko nepredvidljivo; ko *munshid* poje, je, kot bi stopal med minami duhovnih čustev, ob različnih časih za različne ljudi. A nazadnje so vsi ganjeni, končno čustvo – izraženo na različne načine, naj bo v besedah, z gestami ali gibi – pa se zliva nazaj v kolektivni kontekst in vse združi v eno.

Sufiji se povezujejo duhovno in družbeno z močnimi, obenem pa dvoumnimi in zato zelo prilagodljivimi in večpomenskimi sufijskimi simboli in aluzijami ter s prepoznavanjem kolektivnega ustvarjanja besedila, ki ga soustvarja tudi proces odziva poslušalcev. Izvedba besedila, ki je primer širšega medbesedila, tako krepi medavtorstvo, ki ga je navdihnilo. Kakor avtor v neke vrste samoizničanju (*fanāʿ*) »izgine« v medavtorja, tako tudi besedilo izgine v medbesedilo. Avtor in besedilo obvisita v družbeno-duhovnih ali pomenskih mrežah, identiteta obeh pa se izkaže kot iluzorna, razpršena v širši kolektivnosti in višji eno(vito)sti, ki je bistvo *taṣawwufā*, mistične tradicije sufizma.

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O AVTORJU

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