



A SOARING MINARET

Abu Bakr al-Wasiti and the Rise of Baghdadi Sufism

Laury Silvers

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*As I did when I first wrote this book in the form of my dissertation,
I dedicate this book to my advisor,
William C. Chittick. You learned me up good.*

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Introduction

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti (d. ca. 320 AH/932 CE) was an unpopular shaykh. He had the knack of alienating almost anyone with his exquisitely honest observations on the divine-human relationship. When a man asked Wasiti if his good or bad deeds will matter on the Last Day, Wasiti bluntly informed the man that God creates one's bad deeds and then punishes one for them. Despite being theologically sound in its particulars, Wasiti's explanations for positions such as this one do not make them any more comforting. It is not hard to imagine why he may have been driven out of nearly every town he visited and died with only one known devoted companion. But these same statements are also praised in the classical Sufi literature for their uncompromising eloquence and theological sophistication. Several biographers depicted his habit of calling people to account with his sublime if forceful expressions by naming him "a soaring minaret."¹

Wasiti's legacy is a number of firsts: He was one of the first students of the great Baghdadi Sufis, Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 298/910) and Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 295/907–08). He may have been the first of them to migrate east and establish the Baghdadi Sufi tradition in Khurasan. He was among the first Sufis to articulate a complete metaphysics in keeping with developments in early Ahl al-Hadith theology. Wasiti's thought anticipates important discussions in later Islamic metaphysics, demonstrating that questions concerning ontology and ethics were being explored with subtlety and rigor from the earliest period onward. Moreover, his sayings offer insight into the development of theological norms in the period just prior to the rise of Ash'arism. Finally, he was one of the first Sufis to compose a Qur'an commentary. Although the original text of his commentary is now lost, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) included Wasiti's work

in his compendium of Sufi glosses on the Qur'an, *Haqa'iq al-tafsir* and its appendix *Ziyadat haqa'iq al-tafsir* preserving his thought and establishing his influence for the later tradition.²

Part One is Wasiti's life told as a story about the development of Sufism in the formative period. The account of Abu Bakr al-Wasiti's studies, travels, and teaching—especially the story of his Qur'an commentary and its transmission—takes us through the beginnings of Sufism in Baghdadi Ahl al-Hadith culture, the spread of Ahl al-Hadith culture and Baghdadi Sufism East to Khurasan, the consolidation of Baghdadi Sufism and the Khurasani interiorizing traditions by Sulami's day in the fifth/eleventh century, and finally the contribution of Khurasani Sufism to the rise of the Sufi orders in the sixth/twelfth century.

Sufism developed in an environment that I would argue is best characterized as Ahl al-Hadith *culture*. Scholars typically refer to the Ahl al-Hadith—literally “the Folk of the Prophetic Reports”—as early Hanbali traditionalists or as an even more circumscribed group within the Hanbalis themselves. These Hanbalis were known for taking the position that one should settle ethical, legal, or theological matters by referring to already established principles transmitted from the Prophet through his companions and their followers. But the Hanbali Ahl al-Hadith were not the sole owners of the interpretive conviction that the chief source of religious authority was the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. A myriad of interpretive communities shared this position and thus a common culture of authority grounded in a perceived continuity between the Prophet's community and their own. Scholars considered themselves representatives of the followers of the companions, through them the companions of the Prophet—each to be followed like stars—and through the companions, the scholars saw themselves as representatives of the Prophet himself. Ahl al-Hadith culture scholars taught as if they were transmitting teachings from scholar to scholar back to the followers, then the companions, and ideally resting their positions on the strength of a report (or reports) concerning the Prophet himself. New ideas were presented through already established frameworks and thus established a perceived continuity with the Prophetic mission. While these communities shared a common culture of authority, they could disagree on nearly everything else, including the methodological frameworks they used to establish authoritative interpretations.

The Iraqi community that would become known as “Sufis” grew out

of a ritually scrupulous and theologically uncompromising trend within the broader Ahl al-Hadith movement that included Ahmed b. Hanbal (d. 241/855) and his followers, Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. ca. 184/801), and others, including an odd band of renunciants derisively named "Sufis" for the harsh wool clothing they wore. The wool wearers are reported to have been more than willing to set others straight when their conscience demanded it. In particular, they were well known for being hard-line devotees of the Ahl al-Hadith culture penchant of "enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong."

In his book *Sufism: the Formative Period*, Ahmet Karamustafa writes that Sufism took shape as a distinct social movement challenging the interpretive authority of the more exoterically inclined traditionalists in and around Baghdad.³ He makes the delightful observation that the term *Sufi* may have caught on in Baghdad because it had a hip, cutting-edge quality to it. What better name to adopt in a theologically tough town than one associated with socially unconventional wool-wearing renunciants? The name stood as a challenge to the Hanbalis and others who claimed to be the true inheritors of the Prophet's way. Imagining Wasiti in this light, if Sufism was the avant-garde scene back in the day, then I would describe Wasiti as the guy who was around when the scene was first starting, before anyone knew the scene was a scene, and who ends up producing an edgy body of work that has always been respected by insiders but less appreciated by those not in the know.

Wasiti was educated in Qur'an and Hadith by Hanbali Ahl al-Hadith scholars in his hometown of Wasit. Dissatisfied with the limits of exoteric scholarship, he turned to the interiorizing counterpart of the Ahl al-Hadith coming to be known as "Sufism" in Baghdad. There he became one of the earliest students of Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd and Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri. The Sufis of Baghdad have been called "the lords of *tawhid* (*arbab al-tawhid*)," meaning literally, they were the masters of the doctrine and practice of "declaring God one."⁴ Under the guidance of Junayd and Nuri, Wasiti developed a rigorous and subtle monotheism in keeping with Ahl al-Hadith theology. His contemporaries, as well as commentators in succeeding years, had mixed responses to his thought and provocative style of expression. He typically rubbed Sufis, scholars, and lay folk the wrong way. In some cases, the criticism he received was so harsh that it does us the favor of illustrating significant points of tension during this burgeoning period of Islamic intellectual history.

Wasiti was among the early migration of scholars who transmitted the Ahl al-Hadith tradition to Khurasan from Baghdad. In fact, he may have been the first Baghdadi-oriented Sufi to settle and teach in Khurasan. Khurasan was an important center of scholarship in its own right. It was the birthplace of the madrasa, home to a strong Hanafi tradition, as well as the interiorizing Malamati “Path of Blame.” The lay folk of Khurasan did not care much for Wasiti’s teachings. It seems that no sooner would he begin to teach than they would send him packing. As we will see, he did not get along well with some of the Malamatiyya either. Wasiti ultimately found a home in Marw where the lay people accepted him and often came to hear him speak. Nevertheless, he only had one devoted companion there. One seems to have been enough. Abu al-‘Abbas al-Sayyari (d. 342/953–54) collected and then passed on the bulk of Wasiti’s work through his own companion and nephew, ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Sayyari (d. 375/985–86), to Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, the reknowned Khurasani scholar of Qur’an, Hadith, Sufism, and the Malamati path. Sulami preserved Wasiti’s legacy and passed it on to the later tradition. Taken in this light, Wasiti’s life and work can be seen as a testament of the historical consolidation of the Baghdadi and Khurasani communities over the succeeding centuries.

Part Two turns to an analysis of Wasiti’s understanding of the nature of the divine reality. As is typical of nearly all classical Islamic theology, no matter how intellectually detached or theoretical the language may sound, one primarily seeks to understand the divine reality for the sake of conforming one’s own nature to God and His will. In keeping with the theological trends of his day, Wasiti stresses God’s utter incomparability even as he affirms God’s self-manifestation through creation. Wasiti is at pains to preserve the proper boundaries of God’s incomparable Essence such that even as one recognizes God’s manifestation of His attributes through the creatures, one also affirms that the creatures possess nothing of those attributes. Wasiti’s position is seemingly at odds with the goal to conform one’s nature to divine reality. By denying human agency, he claims all human activities, even worship, are “indecent acts.”⁵ But in Wasiti’s way of looking at things, abandoning agency is nothing other than conforming to the divine nature and will.

First I examine Wasiti’s understanding of God from the perspective of His Essence, or inasmuch as “nothing is like Him.” All of Wasiti’s thought follows from the primary assumption of God’s utter incom-

parability. On the subject of language, Wasiti stresses the impossibility of describing God. Wasiti said, "People have nothing from Him other than a name, a description, or an Attribute. People are veiled by His names from His descriptions, and by His descriptions from His attributes, and by His attributes from His Essence."⁶ In the Formative Period, the theological stress is on God's rights and God's incomparability; and Wasiti is theologically scrupulous on the matter.

Second, I turn to the discussion of God's attributes inasmuch as He can be known and is in relationship to creation. Wasiti describes God's relationship to His creatures as "standing through" them by means of His attributes. For Wasiti, one should pass away from oneself to realize that God stands alone not only through oneself, but also through all of creation. Using Qur'anic language, Wasiti describes God's presence manifesting through the realm of being as "the Standing" (*al-qa'im*) (Q 13:33). "The Standing" is not one of the traditionally accepted names of God; it is more common to use the name of God *al-qayyum* which might be best translated here as "the Self-Standing." I translate the verb "*qama bi*" as standing through, but it also carries the meanings of "undertaking," "standing up for," and "making something one's concern." The existence of all things is by means of God standing through them, in other words by His undertaking their creation, upholding and maintaining their existence, taking care of them, and acting through them.

Third, I discuss Wasiti's understanding of God's acts, which are creation inasmuch as God is manifest through it and acts through it. Wasiti seems to leave no room for human agency and to deny the efficacy of works on the Day of Judgment. Wasiti ultimately offers an account of human agency and judgment, but it is so starkly characterized that one can understand the attraction of Mu'tazili limitations on the divine attributes or the Ash'ari notion of "accrual." For Wasiti, human agency is possible when all claims to it are abandoned. His argument relies on the notion of taking the proper perspective, God's perspective. For example, Wasiti argues that there are no good or ill deeds because human actions have no reality in and of themselves. The acts themselves are ethically neutral. If human beings perceive or experience that a deed or an action—good or ill—originates from them or belongs to them in any way, that act is destitute and damning. If human beings perceive or experience that a deed or an action—good or ill—originates from God and only belongs to God, then that act has power and is salvific.

Wasiti's Works

None of Wasiti's written works have survived as extant texts. His sayings survive through oral and then written transmission as quotes in the works of other Sufis. At least two works were still extant in the fourth/tenth century. Kalabadhi lists Wasiti in his chapter entitled "A List of the Sufis who published the sciences of allusion in books and treatises."⁷ A century later, Sulami made use of Wasiti's *tafsir* for his compendium of Sufi glosses on the Qur'an, *Haqa'iq al-tafsir* and its appendix *Ziyadat haqa'iq al-tafsir*. Gerhard Bowering, the editor of Sulami's *Haqa'iq*, considers Wasiti's contribution to have been a written source for Sulami transmitted from Sayyari, or more likely, his nephew 'Abd al-Wahid, during Sulami's many trips to Marw and to be one of the most important sources for the *Haqa'iq al-tafsir*.⁸ While a number of Sufis and other figures from this period are quoted as commentators of various Qur'anic verses in surviving texts, only three may have had their sayings compiled into commentaries on the Qur'an, Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896), Ibn 'Ata' (d. 309/921), and Wasiti.⁹

Wasiti's commentary on the Qur'an belongs to what Andrew Rippen calls the classical period of *tafsir*, roughly the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. He writes that this was a period of intense development of works of *tafsir* of diverse theological viewpoints, many of which survive and nearly all of which have yet to be studied. The commentary of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari (d. 311/923) is probably the best known from this period. Rippen describes it as "a vast compendium of traditions and analysis in which grammar plays its role as the major arbitrator between rival meanings."¹⁰

Walid Saleh further refines our understanding of Qur'an commentaries from this period by calling attention to their common genealogical method in his important study *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition*.¹¹ Walid Saleh's definition allows us to recognize a common culture of authority shared by Sufis and other Ahl al-Hadith-oriented scholars despite the differences in their method. Sufi commentaries typically appeal to the authority of direct knowledge from God as a source of knowledge complementary to the Qur'an and Hadith. Exoteric commentators argue a point by citing earlier scholars whose authority can be traced back to the early Muslim community, reports of the companions, and, ultimately, the Prophet himself. The Sufis do not deny transmitted knowledge. On the contrary, direct knowledge

affirms transmitted knowledge and offers insight into it that is unavailable to exoteric scholars.

Focusing on the nature of direct experience rather than Sufi claims to authority can result in overemphasizing the “spiritual” elements of Sufi engagement with the Qur’an and deemphasizing the more sober elements. As a result, we may miss the full expression of Sufi experience even as we produce accurate accounts of other phenomena. Gerhard Bowering’s account of Sufi gatherings to plumb the meanings of the Qur’an is an example of the emphasis on ecstasy and immediate expression over sober reflection in the scholarship. He is not wrong. On the contrary, he offers insight into the inward processes of Sufi engagement with the Qur’an. The Sufi shaykh sits with his students listening to the recitation of the Qur’an and responds to what Bowering calls “keynotes.”

The keynote, Qur’anic words or phrases striking the Sufi’s mind, may be taken up in total isolation from the actual context or, less frequently, presuppose familiarity with a wider frame of Qur’anic reference. It is significant to realize that these keynotes are not studied as a text, but aurally perceived by men experienced in listening attentively to Qur’an recital and intent on hearing God, the actual speaker of the Qur’anic word. Listening to the Qur’anic word, the Sufi is captured by a keynote, a fleeting touch of meaning communicated to him by the divine speaker. This keynote signals to the Sufi the breakthrough to God, revealing Himself in His divine speech and opening a way to Himself through and beyond His divine word.¹²

He continues, these “encounters” with the Qur’anic word were taken down as they occurred, sometimes in an abbreviated form.¹³

But in Wasiti’s case, at least, the “text” of the *tafsir* looks to be a transcription of a sober course of study in which individual verses were introduced and then unpacked on the authority of the shaykh’s direct knowledge of God. Again, I do not doubt that many Sufi gatherings held to interpret the Qur’an were ecstatic in tone. I would only suggest caution in taking it as a general rule given the example of Wasiti’s case. As a further observation—entirely unrelated to Bowering’s work—we should keep in mind that knowledge gained through ecstasy should not be thought at odds with sober and rational reflection on the same. I

would suggest thinking in terms of Wordsworth's definition of poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.

Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.¹⁴

In the *Kitab al-luma'*, Sarraj distinguishes Sufi Qur'an interpretations between two modes of language used to express direct experience, "a mode of understanding" and "a mode of allusion." In her book on Sufi Qur'an commentary, Kristin Sands explains that the mode of understanding typically uses straightforward explanations of a verse in light of Sufi concepts. In this method, the apparent meaning of the verse remains recognizable. In the mode of allusion, the apparent meaning of the verse is transformed by a metaphor. If we are overly attuned to the ecstatic in Sufism, we might expect the mode of understanding to be typically straightforward and the mode of allusion to be typically subtle in expression as well as meaning. I would argue that while that may be the case in many examples, the sources on the whole suggest that Sarraj's modes are primarily descriptive. Meaning, the mode of allusion should be understood as the mode in which metaphors or allusions are used. Reading Wasiti's glosses through Sarraj's criteria, they appear soberly argued *and* rooted in the authority of his claim to direct knowledge of God. In the following example of the mode of understanding, Wasiti offers a subtle discussion of what belongs to the human being of his or her existence and what belongs to God. He is saying in the following gloss on the verse *Easy that is for Me, seeing*

that I created you before, when you were nothing that nothing belongs to human beings except for not possessing existence or nonexistence.

Easy that is for Me, seeing that I created you before, when you were nothing (Q 19:9). Wasiti said, “You are with Us in the state of your existence, just as you are in the state of your nonexistence. In your nonexistence and your existence, no state occurs for Us that was not [already there], because the things are not fixed in their state of existence and are not passing away in the state of their nonexistence, for their existence and their nonexistence are the same for the Real, and nothing has fixity in the face of Him.”¹⁵

In the following example of the mode of allusion the slave is a metaphor for the human being. This one is a little more straightforward despite the use of metaphor:

What shall we teach you what is the steep path, [It is] freeing a slave (Q 90:12–13), Wasiti said, Slaves are freed from four things: from their souls, from their actions, from looking at bounty, and seeking nearness.¹⁶

The culled sayings from Sulami’s *Haqa’iq* amount to ninety pages of Arabic text, but should not be considered Wasiti’s reconstituted *tafsir*. First, Sulami’s *Haqa’iq* is not a straightforward compilation of collected glosses and sayings.¹⁷ Sulami used the Sufis’ sayings to construct his own commentary of Qur’anic verses. As a scholar, Sulami handled his sources in an utterly traditional manner. He collected vast amounts of biographical material, sayings, and literature of the early Sufis, Malamatiyya and others. In the *Tabaqat* for example, he collected, organized, and published the biographies and representative sayings exactly as one would do for Hadith transmitters or other traditional scholars. In doing so, he officially established their bonafides. In the *Haqa’iq*, he published the collected glosses in a style that reads to me as a Sufi version of a *tafsir bi’l-ma’tthur* (commentary by transmitted report). Sulami’s *tafsir* seems consistent in style with the genealogical commentaries typical of Ahl al-Hadith culture described by Walid Saleh in *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition*. In other words, the author buries his voice by arguing through the citations of authorities who represent the authority of an earlier community that can be traced back to the Prophet. Only in Sulami’s case, the authorities are the Sufis whose

knowledge goes back directly to God through the Prophet. The author's voice is absent or in the background while others' opinions make his case for him. In this light, Sulami's editorial approach seems more likely to be a commentary itself rather than a straightforward compilation of glosses. In the introduction to the *Haqa'iq*, Sulami explains that he excluded all biographical material, anecdotes, or sayings from his sources that did not specifically address the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an.¹⁸ Moreover, he uses his collected sources wherever he decides they might be relevant. In Wasiti's case, Sulami partially quotes a gloss to comment on one verse and then quotes it more fully elsewhere.¹⁹ In these situations, it is not always easy to tell which verse Wasiti was originally commenting on. Second, Sulami indicates that a number of the glosses are oral sayings transmitted to him distinct from the material he received directly from Wasiti's community.

If Sulami had not used Wasiti's sayings commenting on the Qur'an in his collection, the bulk of them would probably have been lost. None of his works seem to have been widely known outside of Khurasan or Sufi circles. In the late fourth/tenth century Wasiti is not found listed in the Baghdadi bookseller Ibn Nadim's *Kitab al-fihrist* in any capacity.²⁰ If any one of the writings mentioned by Kalabadhi and Sarraj remained in Marw, they would have certainly been destroyed in 618/1221 when the Mongols laid waste to the city, including, of course, all of its libraries. The geographer Yaqut describes the extraordinary libraries in Marw, including a small but valuable collection held in a khanqah library. He said it carried only two hundred volumes, but each was unique and worth two hundred gold pieces.²¹

There is some evidence that by the eleventh/seventeenth century there were no longer any extant copies of Wasiti's works even outside of Marw. In 1057/1656, Ibn Miskin made a collection and translation of Wasiti's sayings from the various sources into Persian for Dara Shukoh/Shikoh (d. 1059/1659), which possibly indicates the lack of complete works available to him.²² Thus, all that remains of Wasiti's legacy are his sayings found quoted in the biographies, treatises, and manuals, and in his *tafsir* preserved by Sulami.

Wasiti in Western Scholarship

There has only been one piece of published scholarship devoted to Wasiti; Richard Gramlich's chapter on him in *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums, Zweiter Teil: Scheiche des Ostens*.²³ The chapter is long and

amounts to a short book. It includes an abbreviated biography and a topical summary of Wasiti's thought. The biography provides an overview of the basic outline of Wasiti's life and a review of the biographical sources. Gramlich takes Wasiti's sayings from the biographical works, other sayings sources, and Sulami's *Haqā'iḳ al-tafsir* and organizes them according to themes found in Wasiti's sayings. I build on Gramlich's work by broadening the discussion of the historical context in which Wasiti lived and taught as well as offer a more in-depth analysis of Wasiti's thought.

Wasiti is only mentioned in passing in other contemporary studies on Sufism, such as Annemarie Schimmel's *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Ernst's *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, and Massignon's *The Passion of al-Hallaj* and his *Recueil de textes inédits*.²⁴

But Massignon incorrectly identifies Wasiti as one of the main disciples of Hallaj, his literary executor and editor, and the author of the prologue to Hallaj's *Tawasin*, the *Ha' mim al-qidam*.²⁵ Massignon was aware that there was no historical record linking Hallaj and Wasiti. He writes, "As it stands, the work of Wasiti raises a question: how does it happen that none of the biographical accounts studied above mention this devoted disciple of Hallaj, whose *Ha' Mim al-qidam* was at times attributed to his master [Hallaj]?"²⁶ In defending his identification he conflates Wasiti with both Abu Bakr al-Rabi'i, the disciple and editor of Hallaj's works, and another of Hallaj's disciples, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Farghani (d. 331/942–43). Many of Massignon's proofs for the identification of the three as one man, Wasiti, rely on interpretative leaps that would require lengthy and tedious unraveling. Thankfully, the historical evidence quickly undermines his claims.

With regard to Abu Bakr al-Rabi'i he writes, "I believe Abu Bakr al-Wasiti to be identical to Abu Bakr al-Rabi'i, called 'Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah Hashimi,' the enigmatic 'prophet,' that is to say, the publisher of the last works of Hallaj, the probable publisher of the *Tawasin* . . ." ²⁷ In 308/920–21, al-Rabi'i is found as the leader of a group distributing Hallaj's books in Baghdad and is cited by one of Hallaj's opponents as being among those whom Hallaj has led astray.²⁸ The timing and location are highly unlikely for Wasiti, since all available evidence shows that he had long been established in Marw. Likewise the timing is unlikely with regard to Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Farghani (d. 331/942–43).²⁹ Massignon's authority for the identification of these two is based upon the wrong opinion of Ghulam Muhammad Sarwar b. Mufti Rahim Allah Lahuri (1837–1890).³⁰

Massignon describes this Farghani as escaping to Marw with those Hallajians who found refuge in Khurasan and Transoxiana because the Samanid government refused to track them down in and after the year 309/921–22.³¹ Although it is possible that Wasiti was traveling back and forth between Marw and Baghdad, stirring up trouble in the streets of Baghdad and keeping company with Hallaj, there is no positive evidence for it. It would be surprising if there were such a strong relationship between the two without one surviving anecdote connecting them. All positive evidence points to Wasiti leaving Baghdad long before, and having been well settled and teaching in Marw during this time.

Other factors add to the frailty of Massignon's evidence identifying Wasiti as the three men above. On the authority of Muhammad b. Dushm Jagir (d. 591/1195) Massignon claims that Wasiti is the author of *Ha' mim al-qidam*, the prologue of Hallaj's *Tawasin*.³² Baqli also remarks that Wasiti is the author of a text by this name.³³ I have seen no other attributions to Wasiti of a work by this name, and I suspect that Baqli was quoting Jagir on this matter.³⁴ Most probably, then, we are left with only one attribution of the prologue to Wasiti with problems remaining. Massignon plausibly maintains that the author of that text is also the editor of Hallaj's works. Yet it is not likely that Wasiti was his editor, Abu Bakr al-Rabi'i. The dictation and collection of the *Tawasin* was done while Hallaj was in prison sometime between 301/913 and his execution in 309/922.³⁵ Again, although it is possible that Wasiti was traveling from Marw to be with Hallaj during his final years, there is no positive evidence to support it. The most likely scenario following from the available evidence points to him being in Marw during this time. The attribution to him of any text by this name is most unlikely.

The Primary Sources Used in This Work

In general, I have used four types of texts for biographical information: (1) *Tabaqat* works or hagiographies on important Sufis, consisting of short biographical sketches followed by samples of their sayings; (2) Sufi treatises, which define Sufi technical terms and concepts; (3) Sufi manuals, which discuss practical matters of the path. Manuals also include some elements found in *Tabaqat* literature, such as short biographical sketches, and elements from treatises, such as technical definitions; and (4) Sulami's collection of Sufi comments on Qur'an

mentioned above.³⁶ All these texts are also sources of Wasiti's sayings, which, while not explicitly biographical, reveal his attitude toward various issues. The most important of these sources are Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma'*, Kalabadhi's *Kitab al-ta'arruf*, Sulami's *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, *Haqa'iq al-tafsir*, and *Ziyadat haqa'iq al-tafsir*, oral transmissions from Abu Sa'id b. Abu al-Khayr recorded in various texts, Qushayri's *Risala*, Hujwiri's *Kashf al-mahjub*, Ansari's *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, and 'Attar's *Tadhkirat al-awliya'*, which contain original biographical material. Most of the material is quite early and transmitted from Wasiti's foremost companion and the inheritor of his tradition, Abu al-'Abbas al-Qasim b. al-Qasim b. Mahdi b. bint Ahmad al-Sayyari al-Marwazi (d. 342/953–54), or his followers. Other sources give either biographical information of minor importance or information that derives from the sources mentioned above. Since it is not my intention to establish the lines of transmission for the various statements made in the biographical sources I will not be describing these texts.³⁷

The treatise *Kitab al-luma'* by Abu Nasr 'Abd Allah b. 'Ali al-Sarraj (d. 378/988) is the earliest source.³⁸ In addition to the biographical information he gives, Sarraj provides insight into the manner in which Wasiti was perceived only fifty years after his death.

Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ishaq al-Kalabadhi's (d. 380/990 or 385/995) treatise *Kitab al-ta'arruf li-madhhab Ahl al-tasawwuf* gives little information about Wasiti, but the few facts it does provide are significant on account of its early date of composition.³⁹

The entry on Wasiti in Sulami's *Tabaqat*, while brief, gives useful data about Wasiti's life.⁴⁰ Sulami often traveled to Marw, the city in which Wasiti taught, and received his transmissions directly from those who were well informed about Wasiti. It is possible that he received the transmission of Wasiti's glosses on the Qur'an from Wasiti's foremost companion Sayyari. It is more likely that Sulami received his transmissions after Sayyari's death from Sayyari's own companion and nephew, 'Abd al-Wahid b. 'Ali al-Naysaburi al-Sayyari (d. 375/985–86). He also received transmissions of sayings and individual glosses that stand apart from Sayyari's collection from Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Shadhan Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 376/986–87) who often visited Wasiti's circle in Marw and passed on the greatest number of his sayings in general.⁴¹ Moreover, it is Sulami's text that contributes much of the basis for the later biographies. Although Wasiti's commentary on the Qur'an, preserved by Sulami in the *Haqa'iq* and the *Ziyadat*, does not contain explicit biographical information, it does provide insight

into Wasiti's life. Wasiti commented on the meanings of the verses while sitting with his companions and sometimes in response to questions from them. Thus, his commentaries can indicate his interactions with his companions, his use of language with them, and his character.

Abu Sa'id b. Abu al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) lived near Marw and visited it often. His few transmissions concerning Wasiti were most likely passed on to him by Sayyari's later followers during his visits to Marw. Two of these transmissions are preserved in *Asrar al-tawhid*, a biography of Abu Sa'id compiled by his descendant Muhammad b. al-Munawwar (d. 598–99/1202).⁴²

Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri's (465/1072) Sufi manual *al-Risala fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf* contains almost no biographical information with the exception of one interesting anecdote not found in any earlier texts.⁴³

Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri's (469/1077) treatise *Kashf al-mahjub* gives some important anecdotal information that he collected during visits to Marw. He received his information directly from the later followers of Wasiti's companion Sayyari and his nephew and companion 'Abd al-Wahid.

The main source for the *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* of Abu Isma'il 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Ansari al-Harawi (d. 481/1089) was Sulami's own *Tabaqat*.⁴⁴ It was compiled as lecture notes with Sulami's work most probably serving as the textbook.⁴⁵ Ansari's *Tabaqat* has been called "an enlarged Persian version" of Sulami's work, but this assessment does not adequately take into account the nature of Ansari's contribution.⁴⁶ For example, Ansari built upon the bare bones of Sulami's account of Wasiti with numerous anecdotes, a letter in his possession from Wasiti's shaykh, Junayd, to Wasiti, and his own incisive comments.

Farid al-Din Muhammad b. Ibrahim 'Attar (d. 627/1230) had numerous sources for his information on Wasiti in the *Tadhkira*—Sulami's *Tabaqat*, Qushayri's *Risala*, and Hujwiri's *Kashf al-mahjub*, to name a few.⁴⁷ But the sources of the larger part of his information are unknown. One source on Wasiti can be traced to transmissions ultimately derived from Abu Sa'id b. Abi al-Khayr. At least a few of his sources, such as Sulami, Hujwiri, and Abu Sa'id, provided him with information gathered from Sayyari or his followers. As for 'Attar's other unknown sources, we can take these anecdotes as supporting evidence despite his well-known habit of elaborating and dramatizing some of his source material.

PART ONE

Wasiti and Early Sufism



Wasiti's Intellectual Heritage

There is nothing known of Wasiti's family other than the small clues his name offers. The name Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti, also known as Ibn al-Farghani, indicates that his father was a man named Musa from the Persian dominated region of Farghana (presently, eastern Uzbekistan and western Tajikistan). His family probably relocated from Farghana to Wasit. Wasit was dominated by the Arabs who founded it in 84/703, but it would have been a comfortable city for migrants from culturally Persian lands to the East. The descendants of the original Persian inhabitants of the town continued to live in the eastern embankment of the city even into Wasiti's day. Persian was spoken in the city. Wasit was also no doubt attractive as a vibrant educational and commercial transportation hub for its surrounding cities. The city was well placed, nearly equidistant between Kufa, Basra, and Ahwaz across land and between Basra and Baghdad on the Tigris, hence its name "Middletown."¹ Students of all the religious sciences sought out and were companions of individual Hadith scholars, and traveled broadly for the sake of study. Wasit attracted many of those students. It was the site of two important Hanbali Ahl al-Hadith schools of Qur'an recitation and Hadith, which produced enormous numbers of reciters and Hadith transmitters.²

The term Ahl al-Hadith can refer to a broad interpretive movement within early Islam or a particular group associated with teachings of Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241/855) within this larger movement. The broader movement was made up of a diverse group of Muslims who shared the conviction that the chief source of religious authority was the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. Although only four schools

of law survive to this day in Sunni Islam, there were in the early period a myriad of schools centered around particular scholars.³ In general, the Ahl al-Hadith Movement opposed the Mu'tazilites who argued for the primacy of human rationality in this interpretive hierarchy. Those associated with the Ahl al-Hadith Movement distrusted the role of human rationality to different degrees. No one was "antirationalist" in any literal way. Rather, the difference of opinion rested on how human rationality should be brought into play in extracting knowledge from the two primary sources. For instance, those who followed Abu Hanifa felt comfortable using analogies drawn from already accepted interpretations to determine a new application of a verse if there were no sound Hadith or only a singly narrated sound Hadith (*ahad*) to rely on for clarification. By contrast, the followers of Ibn Hanbal preferred to take any solitary sound Hadith over risking a possible error in making an analogy. Because of their interpretive devotion to Hadith, some circles of Ibn Hanbal's followers were known specifically as the "Ahl al-Hadith." I typically refer to the larger movement in this work, but to distinguish between the two I will use the terms "Ahl al-Hadith Movement" and "Hanbali Ahl al-Hadith."⁴

Sufis shared the movement's commitment to the primary authority of the Qur'an, and Sunna and like others in this movement can be distinguished by their particular attitudes toward the nature and scope of supplemental sources of knowledge.⁵ A Sufi may have been a student of any school of interpretation, but as a Sufi would consider direct knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) to be a complementary source of knowledge alongside the Qur'an and Sunna. In keeping with the Hadith, "The heart has the last fatwa," direct knowledge of God gained through experiences of the unseen or inward states of unveiling confirmed and directed Sufi interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The followers of the Ahl al-Hadith Movement were deeply concerned with establishing an authoritative continuity between the Prophet's community and their own transmission of knowledge, which included using the Prophet as their pedagogical model.⁶ George Makdisi writes that early scholars modeled themselves consciously on the community of the Prophet and his companions. He writes, "Just as the Prophet was the leader with followers, each school consisted of a leader, imam, with followers, sahib, pl. ashab."⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman argues that the adherence to the Sunna displayed by traditional scholars served to convey the authority of continuity reaching back to the Prophet's

community. These scholars believed that they alone represented and guaranteed this continuity.⁸ Scholars were transmitters of what they understood to be the Sunna in both the subjects taught and the manner in which they were taught.

Likewise, the early Sufis also saw their small, diverse teaching communities as variegated reflections of the Prophet's community. The follower of a shaykh was also called a *sahib*, companion, during this period in contrast to the later usage of *murid*, aspirant. The term is not neutral; rather, it is employed with the community of the Prophet and his companions in mind. It is not unusual in later Sufism for shaykhs to claim to be the '*ulama*' of the non-canonical Hadith, "The '*ulama*' (literally, those who have knowledge) are the inheritors of the prophets." Sarraj is already reading it this way by the mid-fourth century. But when he refers to this Hadith in the *Kitab al-luma'* he includes the Sufis alongside the Hadith scholars and the jurists as the inheritors of the Prophets.⁹ Like students of Hadith, Sufis traveled widely for the sake of study. They collected the sayings of the great Sufis in the same way that Hadith students collected the sayings of the Prophet. The Sufi shaykhs, then, can be seen as the transmitters of what they understood to be the Prophet's inward Sunna to his community, whereas the jurists and Hadith scholars, *qua* jurists and Hadith scholars, concerned themselves with the outward Sunna. In imitation of the Prophet, the shaykh would teach through discussion, example, instruction, and daily interaction in the lives of his companions. Likewise, the companions of a shaykh would seek him out for guidance in both spiritual and mundane matters.

A Learned Shaykh

Wasiti was learned in the religious sciences although he never became a professional scholar such as his teacher Junayd or his student Sayyari. Wasiti received his education in the highly regarded institutions of his home town. Wasiti is cited as a transmitter of a Hadith by his contemporary Bashal in *Ta'rikh wasit*. Bashal became the director of Wasit's Hadith school itself.¹⁰ Wasiti's mastery of the Qur'an in his *tafsir* suggests he was a student of Qur'an recitation and interpretation. More significantly, his surviving work on the whole testifies to his theological sympathy with the thought of the Ahl al-Hadith Movement.

The Learned Shaykh in the Biographical Literature

Biographers characterize Wasiti as a deeply knowledgeable and eloquent teacher in the inward science of Sufism who was also learned in the principles of the outward sciences of Qur'an, Hadith, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Wasiti was learned in the outward sciences, but was not himself a teacher of the Qur'an, a Hadith scholar, nor a practicing jurist such as his teacher Junayd or his own student Sayyari. The only standard biography of religious scholars of the outward sciences to mention Wasiti is *Ta'rikh al-islam* compiled by Shams al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. 'Uthman al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1347–48).¹¹ All other records of him are found in texts cataloging Sufis and only mention his life after leaving Wasit.

A comparison between Wasiti and Sayyari's entries in the biographical literature clearly marks the difference between what I am calling a learned shaykh and a shaykh who is a professional scholar. Wasiti is consistently described as a Sufi shaykh and a scholar, whereas Sayyari is described more specifically as a Sufi shaykh, a jurist (*faqih*), and a Hadith scholar (*muhaddith*). Sulami writes of Wasiti, "He belonged to scholars of the shaykhs of the Tribe [i.e., the Sufis]. No one spoke on the principles of Sufism as he did. He was a scholar of the principles (*usul*) and the outward sciences (*'ulum al-zahir*)."¹² Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 430/1038) writes in his *Hilyat al-awliya'*, "He was a scholar of the principles (*usul*) and the branches (*furu'*)."¹³ Dhahabi writes, "He was a scholar of the revealed Law of Islam (*al-shari'a al-islam*) and his language was beneficial."¹⁴

In contrast, Sulami writes of Sayyari, "He wrote down and transmitted many Hadith."¹⁵ Abu Nu'aym describes Sayyari as "the shaykh of the people of Marw, their Hadith scholar, and jurist."¹⁶ Dhahabi writes of him, "In his age, he was the shaykh of the people of Marw in Hadith and Sufism, and the first of those who spoke with them concerning states. He was a jurist, an imam, and a Hadith scholar." Marking a clear distinction between education in Sufism and in the outward sciences, Dhahabi records Sayyari's companionship with Wasiti, then separately lists some of the scholars of the outward sciences from whom Sayyari had received his knowledge. Following that, Dhahabi lists a number of the companions Sayyari taught in the outward sciences.¹⁷

However, Wasiti's entry in Dhahabi's *Ta'rikh al-islam* has no such list of teachers and students of the outward sciences, but does describe

him as one of the greatest students of Junayd and Nuri. In his biographical dictionary of early notable Muslims, *al-Muntazam*, Ibn al-Jawzi does not even describe Wasiti as learned, whereas in Sayyari's case, Ibn al-Jawzi writes, "He belonged to the people of Marw. He was a knowledgeable jurist. He wrote down and transmitted many Hadith."¹⁸

Wasiti's Theological Sympathy with the Ahl al-Hadith

Besides grounding his thought in the Qur'an and Hadith, Wasiti's thought was consistent with many theological positions associated with the Ahl al-Hadith Movement. Wasiti did not share the literalism of the interpretations found among some sympathizers of the thought of Ahmad b. Hanbal. Instead, Wasiti's positions on the nature of the Qur'an and God's attributes are similar to those that would ultimately be associated with the school of his contemporary Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 323/935). Wasiti could not have been influenced by him or have associated with him at that time. Ash'ari's conversion from Mu'tazilism did not occur until 299/912, and the school that grew out of his tradition was not to gain broad influence until long after his death. The positions common between Wasiti and Ash'ari most likely reflect beliefs developing in the wider Ahl al-Hadith Movement that would later be articulated and systematized by Ash'ari and his followers.¹⁹ Moreover, Wasiti's positions were commonly held by other Sufis including his shaykh, Junayd.²⁰

With certain exceptions that will be discussed, all of Wasiti's positions cited below are in accord with the broadly held beliefs of the Ahl al-Hadith and in direct contrast to that of the Mu'tazilites. Unlike the Mu'tazilites, Wasiti holds that God completely determines the actions of His creatures, including their misdeeds. Wasiti contrasts the Mu'tazilites with Pharaoh—infamous for his unwillingness to recognize God's lordship over his own—and gives Pharaoh a favorable review. Wasiti said, "Pharaoh claimed lordship on account of unveiling and the Mu'tazilites claim lordship on account of covering. Because they say, 'What we will, we do. Thus we are the creators for our actions.'"²¹ Wasiti does not find the Qur'an to be a created thing, apart from God, as do the Mu'tazilites.

What, do they not ponder the Qur'an (Q 4:82) Wasiti said, "The Qur'an is named the Qur'an because it is an attribute of God. The Qur'an is never separate from Him, rather it is conjoined with Him.

It is called the Qur'an, because the attribute is not separate from what is attributed."²²

As mentioned in the previous saying and also in contrast to the Mu'tazilites, Wasiti considered there to be no distinction between the divine attributes and God Himself. In other words, there is no difference between God and the quality of being God.

The Real knows the one who deviates concerning the names and the attributes and those who make a distinction between the attribute and What is attributed, so He says, "He." There is no distinction between His He-ness and He. If there is no distinction between His He-ness and He, there is no distinction between His names and His attributes.²³

With regard to descriptions in the Qur'an concerning God, Wasiti rejected the literal interpretations that were common in the Hanbali movement among the Ahl al-Hadith, but neither did he resort to the metaphorical substitutions of the Mu'tazilites. For example, concerning God's throne, he makes it perfectly clear that the throne is not a place where God's Essence can be found. But instead of giving it a straight metaphorical meaning, such as "throne equals power," he understands the throne to be an actual manifestation, the meaning of which is power. He explains that the throne is not the place of His power because the Essence is beyond being encompassed by any place including the throne of God.

Lord of the magnificent throne (Q 27:26). Wasiti said, "God makes manifest the throne as a manifestation belonging to His power, not as a place belonging to His Essence since His Essence is withheld from being encompassed by it and taking up a position at it."

The possessor of the glorified throne (Q 85:15). Wasiti said, "He is higher than that which belongs to Him, concerns Him, or is in need of Him. Rather, He makes the throne manifest as a manifestation belonging to His power, not as a place belonging to His Essence."²⁴

This explanation is reminiscent of Ash'ari's position concerning the throne. "Allah existed ere there existed anything. Then He created the

throne and what encompasses it, yet He did not need any place, and after the creation of the place He was just as He had been before.” Likewise, Ash‘ari describes God’s sitting on His throne as a quality, not a literal anthropomorphic sitting, but also not a metaphorical sitting referring to God’s power.²⁵ In commenting on the chapter of *Ikhlās*—one of the key chapters of the Qur’an expressing God’s oneness—he seems to be stating the Ash‘ari doctrine, received through Ahmad b. Hanbal, *bi-la kayf*, “without asking how.” According to the doctrine of *bi-la kayf*, one accepts the literal descriptions of God, such as God having hands and a face, given in the Qur’an, but without asking how it is possible or by saying or what those literal attributions might actually be.

Wasiti said, “[In this chapter] He negates the realities and being encompassed, then He assures him with His words, *and no one is equal to Him* (Q 112:4). There is no allusion to what has no equal from the perspective of how one speaks about that which has no equal and no likeness, except to affirm without whatness and howness of the attributes.”²⁶

While Wasiti was widely learned in the religious sciences, the path of his education led from the outward sciences to the inward. Wasiti’s commentary on the following Hadith suggest that he did not think the outward sciences produced knowledge of the highest order.

Question the scholars with regard to what is lawful and unlawful. *Befriend the Wise* who wayfare by means [of wisdom] on the path of truthfulness and clarity. *Sit with the Great ones* who speak of God, allude to His lordship, and perceive by the light of His nearness.²⁷

Coincidentally, al-Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/921) also lived for a time in Wasit (249/863–258/871). Louis Massignon thinks he was an irregular student at the same Hadith school attended by Wasiti.²⁸ One may be drawn to imagine Hallaj and Wasiti meeting up at school with Hallaj directing Wasiti to study what Sarraj calls “the science of the realities of faith.”²⁹ Despite Hallaj’s anti-traditionalist views, he respected the Baghdadī Sufis and might have encouraged Wasiti to study with them.³⁰ But there is no evidence that Wasiti and Hallaj were schoolmates. In any case, after leaving Wasit the surviving reports put Wasiti only in the company of the Sufis.

2

Wasiti in Iraq

While still a young man, Wasiti traveled to Baghdad where he became one of the earliest companions of Junayd and Nuri.¹ Junayd was his primary guide on the Sufi path. The traditional sources identify Wasiti as a companion of both Junayd and Nuri or only of Junayd. Most likely, Wasiti did not have the opportunity to sit with Nuri as often as he did with Junayd. While in Baghdad, Nuri often isolated himself from the community. He also endured two exiles from the city itself.² Junayd, on the other hand, consistently held gatherings with his students and corresponded with his companions outside of Baghdad. In fact, Junayd continued to advise Wasiti through correspondence even after he was established in Marw.³ After leaving Baghdad, Wasiti became a teacher himself and began to instruct others in the path of Sufism.

There is almost no explicit information about Wasiti in Baghdad. But as a companion of Junayd and Nuri he would have been at the center of the birth of Sufism. Some of the greatest names associated with the development of Sufism, such as Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 243/857), Sari al-Saqati (d. 253/867), Abu Sa‘id al-Kharraz (d. 279/892), Junayd, Nuri, Abu al-Hasan Samnun (d. 300/913), Ibn ‘Ata’ al-Adami (d. 309/921), Hallaj, and Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946) lived or visited there during that time. Not all those who influenced the development of Sufism and whose work continues to inform Sufi life and thought were Sufis themselves. For instance, Muhasabi and Hallaj have been named “Sufi” by later generations, but at that time they either did not consider themselves Sufis or were not considered Sufis by others.

The Sufis of Baghdad have been called “the lords of declaring God one (*arbab al-tawhid*).”⁴ Trimingham warns that great caution should be taken in considering them as a distinct school with a specific doctrine.⁵ As with the development of the religious sciences in other areas, different teachers or schools developed distinct methods and terminologies in accordance with their own experiences on the Path. Sufi technical terms that would come to be agreed on by the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were still being defined during this period. Moreover, many Sufis traveled, just as the Hadith compilers did, in search of the sayings of different shaykhs in addition to seeking guidance on the spiritual path.⁶ Students were not bound to receive their spiritual education under a single shaykh as would be common in succeeding centuries. Typically, Sufis of this era took their spiritual guidance from several shaykhs, each one contributing to their education in a particular way.⁷ Keeping Trimingham’s warning in mind, Karamustafa rightly stresses the unity of their methods and goals over their particular differences.⁸ They were all, to greater and lesser degrees, colleagues and companions of one another, as the relationships documented in Sulami’s *Tabaqat* show.

On the whole the Sufis of Baghdad enjoyed good relations with the exoteric scholars, but their claim to a singular knowledge of God antagonized some of the them. Karamustafa characterizes the different attitudes toward the Sufis as ranging from curious and sympathetic to skeptical, and in some cases, contempt.⁹ Gerhard Bowering writes of the Sufis,

They couched their mystical insights in phrases and paradoxes that startled the scholars. From the moment of their *tawba* [repentance], they believed themselves to enjoy a direct access to God which other human beings were not privileged to possess. In this manner the Sufis entered upon a course of conflict with the ordinary believers. They consciously provoked the learned in society with their claims to be a chosen elite.¹⁰

During this time the Hanbalis were forming as a school in Baghdad and elsewhere out of the broader Ahl al-Hadith Movement.¹¹ As H. Laoust points out, although the Hanbalis had the reputation for being opposed to Sufism, this was not necessarily the case. However, what Laoust calls the Hanbalis’ “intransigent rigidity” with regard to the Qur’an and the Sunna also led some of them to be hostile toward any

expressions of intimate knowledge of God, let alone the ecstatic statements of some of the Baghdadi Sufis.¹²

The Hanbali ascetic Ghulam Khalil (d. 275/888–89) was extremely hostile to this element of Sufism. Bowering writes that he “represented the people of *al-amr bi’l ma’ruf* who watched over public conduct and enjoined the good and forbade evil.” He also observes that Ghulam Khalil may have represented an ascetic movement in Baghdad opposed to the “more gnostic and mystically inspired spirituality” of the Sufi community there.¹³ Ghulam Khalil denounced several of the Sufis of Baghdad, chiefly Nuri and Samnun, accusing them of heresy and other charges in 264/877–78.¹⁴ Karamustafa writes that Khalil was disturbed by reports of sexual promiscuity, mixing of genders, and association between older men and boys.¹⁵ Unfortunately for the Sufis, he had the ear of the caliphal regent al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/891). It was an unstable time, and Ghulam Khalil seemed to have little trouble convincing al-Muwaffaq of the political threat hidden in these “heretics” words.¹⁶ In this way, his concerns found their voice and means of attack, and Khalil was able to bring the case to a quick hearing. But the judge who ultimately heard their case released Nuri and the others after interrogating them on matters of religious practice and having them explain the meaning of their statements. One of Nuri’s companions, Abu Sa’id b. al-‘Arabi (d. 341/952–53), reports that after this close call Nuri fled Baghdad and went to al-Raqqa in Syria.¹⁷ Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader reports in his study on Junayd that he was also brought before the court, but was excused by claiming to be only a jurist.¹⁸ The atmosphere in Baghdad must have been tense for the Sufis, as the whole of their community would have been touched by these charges through their various associations with the accused group. Abdel-Kader asserts that after this time Junayd withdrew from public life.¹⁹ The accusations against the Sufis were far from over; they would culminate in the trial and horrific executions of Hallaj and Ibn ‘Ata’ al-Adami in 309/921 and ultimately divide members of the Sufi community in Baghdad.²⁰

His Shaykhs

While Wasiti’s shaykhs, Junayd and Nuri, were friends, they represented the opposite ends of the spectrum of Sufism in Baghdad at the time and likewise reacted differently to its religious and political atmosphere. Junayd was well known for his “sobriety” and Nuri for

his “intoxication.” Sober and intoxicated Sufis disputed over which was the higher stage on the Sufi path. William Chittick writes that the intoxicated Sufi is drunk with his intimate experience of God and “boldly confident of God’s mercy.” He openly declares his experience of God’s oneness and often finds himself at odds both with the sober Sufis and with the scholars of the outward sciences. The sober Sufi claims to have experienced this stage of intoxicated knowledge and moved beyond it. As Chittick points out, “This does not imply that the sober are no longer drunk. What it means is that the true Sufi, having realized fully the pattern and model established by the Prophet, is inwardly drunk with God and outwardly sober with the world.”²¹

The teaching relationship in early Sufism can be understood—in the broadest sense—to be the transmission of a shaykh’s outward and inward knowledge of God in order to bring about his companion’s own realization (*tahqiq*) of knowledge of God. The transmission involved guiding his companion’s spiritual life through commands, suggestions, and advice concerning spiritual discipline, explanations of what is experienced on the path, the assigning of litanies, disclosures of the inward meanings of the Qur’an and Hadith, as well as the clarification and explanation of more mundane matters in all areas—all of which might to a lesser or greater degree apply to an infrequent visitor of a shaykh.

The texts show that aspirants were typically close companions of more than one shaykh. But it was not unheard of for a single meeting with a shaykh to inspire a profound transformation of the soul. The degree to which non-aspirants were included among a shaykh’s companions in his circle would vary from shaykh to shaykh according to his level of circumspection. There could be both public assemblies and more private gatherings held by the same shaykh. Women were among the companions of some the shaykhs, and in some cases became teachers themselves of both female and male students.²² Shaykhs also taught and advised through the composition of books and letters on spiritual matters. In some cases, a student went on to be a teacher himself.

The entries and sayings quoted in the early *Tabaqat* literature, Sufi treatises, and manuals illustrate this inclusive definition. Companions and less regular visitors would frequent the circle of a shaykh to sit and hear his discourse on knowledge of God and take general and personal instruction on spiritual discipline. Spiritual disciplines such

as fasting, late night prayer vigils, seclusion, close observation of the soul to root out shortcomings, and the repeated recitation of sacred formulae such as “There is no god but God,” might be required or suggested by the shaykh. The shaykh might advise his students on proper company and proper conduct. The shaykh would also explain and offer advice on the states, stations, and hazards experienced on the Path. The texts record that instruction was often inspired by direct questions from companions or others. Much of the teaching of the early Sufis comes in the form of relatively short sayings, rather than in extended discussions bearing the mark of a sermon or lecture. This suggests that in many cases a shaykh’s sayings were responses to the particular needs of the student before him, either expressed by the student or perceived by the shaykh. Letters written by shaykhs likewise suggest guidance in response to the needs of the correspondent. Instruction might also involve the transmission of Hadith, a text, or the sayings of other Sufis; these, as well as verses of the Qur’an, might be commented upon by the shaykh. Some companions might memorize the teachings and instructions of the shaykh and repeat them to others with a chain of transmission; likewise, their writings might be collected and copied. Many Sufis were companions of several shaykhs, each of whom contributed to their spiritual growth in a particular way. Less often, a Sufi would be attached to one shaykh alone. In some cases, the spiritual development and character of a companion would call for the student to go on and be a teacher himself.²³

Junayd

A. J. Arberry reflects the traditional view calling Junayd “[t]he greatest orthodox exponent of the ‘sober’ type of Sufism.” Many Sufi orders sought to trace their chains of authority (*salasil*) through him.²⁴ He was a student of Qur’an and Hadith, and was a jurist according to the school of his teacher Abu Thawr Ibrahim b. Khalid al-Kalbi al-Bagh-dadi (d. 240/854–55).²⁵ On the path of inward knowledge, he was the student of his uncle Sari al-Saqati, al-Muhasibi, and Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Qassab (d. 275/888).²⁶ According to the traditional accounts, he quickly surpassed Sari in spiritual station. Sari urged him to begin teaching, but Junayd refused to do so in the presence of his shaykh. It is said that it was not until the Prophet himself commanded Junayd in a dream to begin teaching that he did so.²⁷ He taught no more

than twenty or so students at a time.²⁸ Junayd consistently warned of the dangers of revealing the knowledge experienced by them in their intimacy with God. He taught in public, at the Shunuziyya mosque in Baghdad, but only according to the intellectual and spiritual capacity of his audience, unlike Nuri and others—most famously Hallaj—who declared their knowledge openly whether the one hearing them understood them or not.

Junayd was well known for his teachings on *tawhid*, declaring God one. *Tawhid* is at the very center of Islam as stated in its first pillar, the first half of the *shahada*, “There is no god but God.” The claimed goal of Sufism can be said to be coming to know exactly what this statement means on the most inward level of human experience, and Junayd was one of the most important expositors on the subject during his time. Some of his famed companions include Shibli, Abu Muhammad Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Jurayri (d. 311/923–24), who succeeded Junayd as shaykh of his community, and Hallaj.

There are several reports of Junayd’s instructions to his companions, which indicate the practices Wasiti would have undertaken with him. Junayd emphasized spiritual struggle over discussion. In the following saying, Junayd emphasizes the importance of a sincere struggle with one’s soul on the Sufi path over discussion in order to purify one’s interactions with God.

We do not take Sufism from idle talk, but rather from hunger, abandoning this world, cutting off all that is familiar and agreeable, because Sufism is making [one’s] interactions with God limpid. Its root is turning away from this world just as Harith [al-Muhasibi] said, “My soul turned away from this world, so I stayed awake at night and fasted during the day.”²⁹

Junayd is also reported to have said, “Our affair in this is built on four things: We do not speak except from finding [God] (*wujud*), we do not eat except from need, we do not sleep unless it overcomes us, we are not silent except out of reverential fear.”³⁰ Wasiti is reported to have been fasting and keeping night prayer vigils daily from puberty, and so would have been well prepared for Junayd’s demands on his companions.³¹ The “eight rules” later attributed to Junayd give specific instructions and delineate the rigorous spiritual discipline that may have been required of his companions.

Maintaining ritual purity constantly; fasting constantly; keeping silent (*sukut*) constantly; keeping secluded (*khalwa*) constantly, remembering [God] constantly, that is, mentioning there is no god but God; attaching the heart to the shaykh constantly and benefiting from his knowledge of spiritual events by one's free will passing away in that of the shaykh; rejecting passing thoughts constantly; abandoning resisting God in whatever God desires for one, good or evil, and asking questions about Paradise and taking refuge from the Fire.³²

Likewise, Wasiti would have been under similar strictures from Nuri, who said, "Sufism is the abandonment of all the soul's gratifications."³³

Nuri

Nuri was also a student of Sari and Muhammad al-Qassab. It is said that he was called al-Nuri on account of the light he radiated from within. He said, "I looked into the light until I became that light myself."³⁴ He was known for abstinence (*zuhd*), preferring others over himself (*ithar*), outspokenness, and enigmatic expressions. But it should be made clear that despite Nuri's moments of intoxicated outspokenness, by most accounts he was in conformity with Islamic Law. He required the same of his students and forbade them to keep company with those who claimed a spiritual state that placed them beyond the Law.³⁵ He was quite vocal in public and with those who visited him, and he felt the consequences. His most famously scandalous statements are those that brought him to the attention of Ghulam Khalil, such as, calling out, "Labayk! (Here I am!)"—Abraham's answer to the call of God and what pilgrims say on the Hajj—when he heard a dog bark, cursing when he heard the call to prayer, and his claim to reciprocal love with God.³⁶ It is unclear if the following anecdote refers to public or private teaching, but it is an indication of Nuri's manner of speech all the same. Kalabadhi reports that one day when Nuri passed by Junayd and some of his companions he said to Junayd, "O Abu'l-Qasim, thou hast deceived them, and they have set thee in the pulpits; I have counseled them and they have cast me on the dunghills."³⁷ Nuri is portrayed in the sources as acting with little regard for his self-preservation. It is reported that

not long after he returned from his sojourn in Syria, he smashed wine jars being delivered to the Caliph al-Mu'tadid (279/892–289/902) and was exiled from Baghdad.³⁸

Wasiti took the practice of self-sacrifice (*ithar*) and his outspoken manner from Nuri. Only one anecdote of Wasiti can be traced back to his time in Baghdad. The anecdote describes Wasiti's generosity toward an old woman.³⁹

Abu Bakr al-Farghani's name used to be written down along with other poor people who took the daily food ration during the month of Ramadan. But he used to take the portion every night and bring it to an old woman in his neighborhood. They did not write down her name along with the others taking their portion from the daily rations during Ramadan.⁴⁰

Once his name was written, he could not return for another portion. He went hungry. This is a fine example of the prophetic ideal of self-sacrifice which was a special concern of Nuri. Likewise, Wasiti's outspokenness in public once he left Baghdad may have been inspired by Nuri's frank manner of speech; it certainly was not a result of Junayd's teaching. In fact, as I will discuss later, Junayd became concerned when he heard about it long after Wasiti left Baghdad.

Leaving Baghdad

Wasiti kept silent regarding his own opinions on spiritual matters while in Baghdad. Sulami remarks that none of Wasiti's sayings derive from his time in there.⁴¹ Sulami interprets the lack of sayings from Wasiti in Baghdad to be due to the fact that his teachers were still alive.⁴² It is never considered proper conduct to teach in the presence of one's shaykh. Recall that Junayd would not speak in the presence of his teachers until he was urged to do so by the Prophet in a dream. The only record of Wasiti's speech that can be possibly traced to Baghdad is not his own but rather transmissions of another shaykh's instruction, several sayings of Sahl al-Tustari.⁴³

No one reported why Wasiti left Baghdad, but the hostile atmosphere must have been at least part of the reason. When he eventually spoke his mind, he typically did so in a manner that confused and angered the more literal-minded. 'Attar writes that when Wasiti spoke

from his direct experience of union with God (*sahib al-nafas*) he began to make enemies.⁴⁴ Ghulam Khalil would not have been any more sympathetic to him than he was to Nuri. Wasiti probably wanted to begin teaching and would not do so in Junayd's presence, nor could he do so safely in the religious and political climate of Baghdad. He certainly seems to have raised the ire of nearly everyone he spoke with after he left Baghdad in 295/907–908.⁴⁵

3

Wasiti in Khurasan

Wasiti traveled from Baghdad through Khurasan in search of a town to settle down in to teach. He said about that time, “I turned from city to city, seeking someone to hear [me].”¹ Judging from existing reports of his travels and the known trunk roads at that time, he would have passed through Kirmanshah and Hamadan prior to stopping in Naysabur and Abiward and then the cities of Nasa, Mashhad, or Tus before finally arriving in Marw.² When stopping in a city, Wasiti most likely visited a mosque, or some other gathering place, began teaching and waited to see if any students were interested. Unfortunately, according to ‘Attar, he was thrown out of nearly every city almost as soon as he arrived.³ Like Nuri, Wasiti never minced his words about the nature of the divine, no matter how intellectually or spiritually difficult it would be for a person to hear. Sarraj writes that his words fell on uncomprehending ears in his travel through Khurasan, “He did not find people broad enough in understanding in Khurasan to grasp his knowledge and to discover the meanings of his sayings and his virtues.”⁴ Hujwiri reports that “[h]is abstruse manner of expression caused his sayings to be regarded with suspicion by formalists (*zahirīyyan*).”⁵

Passing through Naysabur, Wasiti called out the followers of Shaykh Abu ‘Uthman al-Hiri (d. 298/911). Their confrontation nicely illustrates some of the theological and pedagogical differences between the Baghdadis and Khurasanis at the time. According to Ansari, when Wasiti arrived in Naysabur Abu ‘Uthman himself had left, but his companions were there.⁶ They explained Abu ‘Uthman’s doctrine on interactions with others and God (*mu‘amala*). Wasiti was disturbed to

find that Abu ‘Uthman treated the soul *as if* it existed independently of God’s will. Abu ‘Uthman took the position that the soul was both corrupt and indestructible. As such, he directed his followers to undertake minute observation of one’s soul and actions in order to root out any shortcomings. Wasiti considered Abu ‘Uthman’s position on the soul and his guidance as nothing short of associating others with God (*shirk*). Because nothing exists independently of God, it would be *shirk* to direct one’s attention toward it. He shared his view of the matter with Abu ‘Uthman’s companions in his typically uncompromising manner. Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq (d. 412/1021) reports,

When Wasiti entered Naysabur, he asked the companions of Abu ‘Uthman, “What has your shaykh commanded you with?” They replied, “He has commanded us with adherence to the acts of obedience and looking at how we fall short in them.” Wasiti said, “He has commanded you with pure Majianism [dualism]. Why did he not command you to become absent from them by looking at their place of origination and flowing?”⁷

Ansari relates that in Marw, Wasiti again disparaged Abu ‘Uthman’s doctrine, telling his companions it was “Majianism.”⁸

The greater part of Wasiti’s legacy was preserved thanks to the proximity of Naysabur to Marw. The two most important preservers of Wasiti’s sayings were residents of Naysabur who often visited Marw. Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Shadhan Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 376/986–87), a resident of Naysabur, often visited Wasiti’s circle in Marw and passed on the greatest number of his sayings. Sulami visited Marw often. While still a young man, he may have received the collected glosses making up Wasiti’s *tafsir* from Sayyari (d. 342/953–54). More likely, he received the text from Sayyari’s companion and nephew ‘Abd al-Wahid (d. 375/985–86).⁹ Sulami also played the greatest role in preserving those sayings transmitted by Ibn Shadhan.

Khurasan and the Development of the Sufi Orders

The mystics of Khurasan were Malamati following a “Path of Blame” by hiding their pious practices from society in order not to bring any attention to themselves. Abu ‘Uthman was the dominant Malamati shaykh in Naysabur during that time. He is known to have paid careful

attention to his companions' lives and taught them to scrupulously observe the rules of proper conduct (*adab*). In the Sufi communities of Baghdad, companions were free to take guidance from any number of shaykhs. This meant companions were encouraged to rely on their own judgment when differences in doctrine or practice would arise. In contradistinction, *adab*-oriented shaykhs stressed unqualified submission to their guidance. Rather than being an extreme position, Abu 'Uthman's pedagogy and practice was typical of moderate Malamati spiritual education (*tarbiya*) practiced in Naysabur. Sulami reports that Abu 'Uthman's influence was such he is considered responsible for the spread of this path throughout the area.¹⁰

Despite the differences in doctrine and practice, there was significant common ground between the moderate Malamatis and the Baghdadi Sufis. It looks to me that as the influence of Ahl al-Hadith theology grew in Khurasani, Ahl al-Hadith-oriented scholars and Sufis absorbed Khurasan modes of pedagogy. The Khurasani notion of *adab* seems to have lent itself best to new patterns of authority that came with the political and social shifts brought by the Seljuks. I do not want to give the impression that the process of consolidation was straightforward, doctrinally motivated, or without hostility.¹¹ Nevertheless, the situation was such that by Sulami's day, the Malamatiyya had taken on the name "Sufi" as well as the major doctrines of Baghdadi Sufism for themselves.¹² As the Baghdadi influence grew in the East, Naysabur became an important center for Sufism in Khurasan. By the fifth/eleventh century, not only would the numbers of those identifying themselves as Sufis increase, but Malamati-oriented Sufis such as Sulami and Qushayri would become members of the ruling elite of the scholars.¹³

Richard Bulliet's and Michael Chamberlain's insights on this period of so-called "Sunni Revival" and "institutionalization" shed light on the concurrent rise of the Sufi orders.¹⁴ Bulliet writes that when the Seljuks pushed west in the early fifth/eleventh century, they were able to displace the 'Abbasids' regional power by consolidating support among the already established scholars of the Ahl al-Hadith Movement in the East. The Seljuks understood the political and social capital these scholars had among the people in contrast to the social elitism of the Mu'tazilites who were favored by the 'Abbasid caliph Ma'mun. Scholars of Islam, including me, have incorrectly characterized this time as the "institutional period." In this interpretation, we assumed the Seljuks established a state-subsidized curriculum grounded in

Ahl al-Hadith-oriented Islam and taught in Khurasani-style madrasas. In this way of thinking, institutions were both “curriculums” and “buildings.” As I characterized the change with respect to the Sufis, “Ultimately, Sufism followed the general trend in all the religious sciences and became more formal and hierarchically institutionalized, a trend that culminated in the systematization of Sufi orders.”¹⁵ Other scholars have argued wrongly that as the Seljuks administratively displaced scholars of opposing convictions concerning the primary authority of the Qur’an and Hadith they brought about a “Sunni Revival.”

Michael Chamberlain has persuasively argued that what we have termed “institutionalization” and the establishment of a Sunni curriculum should be seen instead as a shift in authority due to changes in political and social power. As the Seljuks pushed west in the early fifth/eleventh century, they displaced the ‘Abbasids’ regional power by shifting the way in which political and social power was acquired and maintained. The center of power had previously been invested in elite households who positioned themselves in service to the Caliphal authorities in return for economic and social power. The Seljuks pulled support from these elites and subsidized the popular Ahl al-Hadith scholars instead. The elite households had to adapt quickly to the new power structures that put the Ahl al-Hadith scholars at the center of authority. Thus, they began to trade in knowledge as social, political, and economic capital. Elite households would align themselves with a scholar or his school of thought, provide space and materials for study, and manage the government or private stipend set aside to support him and his students.

In this view, as social and political capital became invested in knowledge, pedagogical authority became more self-interested. Loyalty to a particular teacher or “school” ensured continued financial subsidization. Students were still free to learn from other teachers, but there was a greater and greater tendency for scholars to press their singular authority over their students. I would argue that Baghdadi Sufism may have dominated in technical language and important doctrinal matters, but Khurasani pedagogy became the basis of the normative teaching relationship in Sufism. The biographical material shows that as this shift progresses, students are much more likely to “love” and loyally serve their teachers. The gradual establishment of exclusive Sufi orders was not far behind. The shift in emphasis is nicely illustrated by

the significant change of expression of the well-known saying, “The servant is in the hands of God like the corpse in the hands of the washer.” Karamustafa writes,

This new emphasis on training manifested itself also in new expressions on the significance of obedience to one’s shaykh. Perhaps the most striking example of this new rhetoric of obedience was the application of Tustari’s saying ‘The first stage of trust is when the servant is in the hands of God like the corpse in the hands of the washer, turning him as he wishes while he has neither motion nor control’, a statement that was patently about the lowest level of trust in God, to the aspirant’s relationship to his master at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century. In this manner, the Sufi aspirant now appeared as the corpse in the hands of the Sufi master, who had unquestionable authority over his novices.¹⁶

Marw

By Wasiti’s day, Marw was the weakened economic capital of Khurasan, but no longer its imposing political center. Like many cities, it was affected by the numerous struggles for power among those seeking the governorships of Khurasan and other outlying areas. At various times the city was held by the Tahirids, the independent governor Abu Talha, the Saffarids, and finally the Samanids. Wasiti either arrived during the time of the Saffarids, who took Khurasan from the Tahirids in 259/873, or during the rule of the Samanids, who finally took and held Khurasan in 287/900. Wasiti was well settled in Marw by the time violent internal revolts hit the cities in that region in 301/914.¹⁷ While some transfers of power amount to no more than mentioning the new ruler’s name in the Friday sermon and the minting of new coins, this was not the case in Marw.

The geographer Shams al-Din Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad al-Maqdisi (d. ca. 380/990) arrived in Marw some fifty years after Wasiti’s death. The city still had not recovered from the unrest decades earlier. Maqdisi found one-third of the suburbs, as well as the citadel on the hill in the center of the inner city, in ruins. He remarks that some of the buildings that were still standing were tall and beautiful, but most were in great disrepair.¹⁸ Although the city was in the midst of a long historical trend toward economic prosperity, the earlier political battles

fought in Marw had taken an immediate toll on its stability.¹⁹ Maqdisi remarks that the earnings of the people of Marw were very low at that time, and that the population had dwindled.²⁰ The city had always had a reputation for being “notoriously unhealthy” due to its humid climate and resident diseases such as that caused by the parasitic guinea worm.²¹ All the same, its situation does not seem to have been entirely desperate, as Maqdisi also praises Marw’s fine, clean markets, and the abundance of goods.²² The surrounding fertile land kept the city well fed during its years of upheaval. In better times, Marw was a grand city famous for the quality of its silk, cotton, and dried melons, all of which were important exports. It was also praised then for “its cleanliness, its good streets, the divisions of its buildings and quarters among the rivers and gardens. . . , their city is superior to the rest of the cities in Khurasan.”²³ Maqdisi remarks that the scholars of Marw were well respected and that there were three Friday mosques in the city, two of which were in active use. The citadel mosque was in ruins, but the Old Mosque just inside the City Gate in the inner city was in the possession of “Ashab al-Hadith,” The Companions of Hadith. This could possibly refer to a group of Hanbalis. The New Mosque outside the City Gate to the west on the great square was in the possession of the Hanafis who were dominant in Khurasan at the time. The Hanafis also taught in their mosque and could afford to provide the students with a daily allotment of food.²⁴ Other groups likely to have been present in Marw at the time were Shi‘a and Karramiyya. There might also have been Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians there.²⁵ But by the early part of the third/ninth century most of the inhabitants of Khurasan had already converted to Islam.²⁶ Maqdisi remarks that upstanding Muslims would meet in the New Mosque in the evenings.

Maqdisi was not impressed by the people of Marw, though. It should be kept in mind that Maqdisi’s opinion on the people of any one town was typically affected by how good a deal he could strike at the local market. He must have have paid too much for some local melon, since he describes Marw’s population as sly, mocking, and lazy. Worse, he suggests, vice and disorder were much in evidence.²⁷

Wasiti in Marw

Before reaching Marw, Wasiti stopped in Abiward where people seemed to respond to him positively. However, ‘Attar’s account suggests it was Wasiti, this time, who was not happy. Despite the good reception,

Wasiti felt the people there did not understand him. Then, ‘Attar notes, there was some sort of “incident” and he left Abiward for Marw.²⁸ By contrast, the people of Marw saw Wasiti as a virtuous man and he in turn felt it was a good match. Wasiti considered them to possess a keen understanding.²⁹ Perhaps people who are clever enough to best an experienced traveler such as Maqdisi in the marketplace and who also respect their religious leaders had the right combination of character traits to welcome a man like Wasiti. In any case, Hujwiri writes, “He found peace in no city until he came to Merv. The inhabitants of Merv welcomed him on account of his amiable disposition—for he was a virtuous man—and listened to his sayings; and he passed his life there.”³⁰ Wasiti also appreciated the fertility of the land that was key to the area’s continued survival during its years of upheaval. Abu Sa‘id b. Abu al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) mentions that Wasiti held that the earth of Marw was “alive.”

In Marw many people came to hear Wasiti teach, but he had few close companions. A late report remembers his great popularity there with flourish, saying, “The group of those attending the recitation of his litany (*wird*) everyday numbered five thousand.”³¹ One frequent visitor was Ibn Shadhan, mentioned above as one from whom Sulami received the greatest number of Wasiti’s sayings. He traveled widely to collect biographical material and sayings of the Sufis. His *Ta’rikh*, also known as *al-Hikayat al-Sufiyya*, was an important source for Sulami, Abu Nu‘aym and others.³² Although he kept company with many Sufis from different circles, reporting the sayings of numerous Sufis directly, as well as second and third hand, he seems to have been in closest contact with companions of Junayd, from whom he transmits the greatest number of sayings.³³ This includes Wasiti, and Gramlich calls Ibn Shadhan the most important transmitter of his sayings.³⁴ Although he spent a great deal of time with Wasiti and clearly recognized the value of his teachings, he never became Wasiti’s close companion. With one exception, it seems that none of Wasiti’s direct transmitters were close companions.³⁵ The only known close and constant companion is Abu al-‘Abbas al-Sayyari (d. 342/953–54).³⁶

Ansari said that Wasiti had only one teacher and one student, that is, Junayd and Abu al-‘Abbas al-Sayyari respectively.³⁷ Sayyari was his only known devoted companion. Ansari writes that he could only claim this one student because Wasiti would not speak to the capacities of those who frequented him.³⁸ There will be an opportunity to contextualize and refine his assessment later, but he is correct in saying

that Sayyari was foremost among Wasiti's circle who could follow his teachings. Marking his devotion to Wasiti with strong language, Ansari quotes Sayyari as saying, "If I had not met Wasiti, I would have died a Majian [a dualist]." ³⁹

Wasiti died in Marw sometime after 320/932 in the company of his companions. Those attending his deathbed asked him for parting advice. He said, "Preserve what God desires in yourselves." ⁴⁰ He was buried in Marw and Ansari (d. 481/1089) reports that his tomb there was well known. ⁴¹

Abu Nu'aym reports that Sayyari was "the shaykh of Marw, their scholar of Hadith, and jurist." ⁴² Qushayri extols him as "The shaykh of his time." ⁴³ Hujwiri visited Marw and Nasa and was impressed with the later generations of Sayyari's circle he met there. ⁴⁴ It is possible he received the following account of Sayyari from them:

He belonged to a learned and influential family of Merv. Having inherited a large fortune from his father, he gave the whole of it in return for two of the Apostle's hairs. Through the blessing of those hairs God bestowed on him a sincere repentance. He fell into the company of Abu Bakr Wasiti and attained such a high degree that he became the leader of a Sufi sect. When he was on the point of death, he gave directions that those hairs should be placed in his mouth. His tomb is still to be seen at Merv, and people come thither to seek what they desire; and their prayers are granted. ⁴⁵

Sayyari passed Wasiti's teachings on to his own companions and others, as his transmission of Wasiti's commentaries on the Qur'an and his sayings show. Unlike other communities of Sufis, Hujwiri reports that the later generations of Sayyari's circle of followers preserved their shaykh's doctrine. Hujwiri attributes this to the constant presence of a representative in Marw and in the nearby city of Nasa. ⁴⁶ It is tempting to judge whether a doctrinal line can be traced from Junayd through Wasiti to the Sayyaris. However, undertaking an analysis of Junayd's writings for the sake of the question is beyond the scope of this study, whereas too little of Sayyari's own sayings survive to make a proper comparison. ⁴⁷

Sayyari's nephew and companion 'Abd al-Wahid continued the tradition in Marw and transmits the sayings of both shaykhs. ⁴⁸ Ansari reports that 'Abd al-Wahid gave his house to the Sufis. He invited them over to dance and as they were dancing one of them rose up into

the air and disappeared.⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Wahid’s wife, ‘A’isha bt. Ahmad al-Tawil, was also a well-known Sufi in Marw. Her reputation was such that Sulami included her in his selective biography of Sufi women, *Dhikr al-niswat*. He reports she was known for her spiritual struggle and her great generosity to the Sufis.⁵⁰ On his visit with the later Sayyaris, Hujwiri read the correspondence maintained by the groups in Marw and Nasa and found it to be very fine. Thus, at least as late as Hujwiri’s visit sometime in the early eleventh century the Sayyaris, as Hujwiri names them, were still a cohesive community.⁵¹

4

Wasiti and Sufi Discourse

Wasiti's reputation in the classical sources lies with his more difficult statements. Wasiti is best remembered for his eloquent and uncompromising sayings concerning *tawhid*, his lack of circumspection in expressing his understanding of *tawhid* to lay people, and his overall discontent with the state of the Sufis. These sayings are the most interesting and naturally the most often repeated. Although many of the same sources will also quote equally unambiguous sayings or anecdotes portraying a temperate personality, the focus is typically on his more outspoken side. The emphasis on the outspoken side of his personality is most prominent in the accounts of Sarraj and Ansari, neither of whom appreciated Wasiti's pedagogical style. Nevertheless, Sarraj still conceded that he was eloquent. Abu Nu'aym, for his part, found his allusions to be sublime.¹ Perhaps the most apt praise was given him by later biographers who nicely summed up his eloquence as well as his ethical impatience exhibited when he called others to account by describing him as a "soaring minaret."² One cannot, though, be a "soaring minaret" all the time. There are a few, less controversial, sayings and reports that soften the outspoken and abstruse representations that dominate the biographers' memory. Despite the relative paucity of this material, it is not difficult to use them to reconstruct a fuller picture of Wasiti's character. To take one of Sarraj's observation about Wasiti's language in a less charitable context, "A little of it indicates a lot."³

To be sure, Wasiti's language is typically subtle and provocative. When quoted in treatises and manuals his statements often have to be explained. For Wasiti, language is not adequate to express direct

knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of the reality of God. He said, “Whoever has direct knowledge of God is cut off. He is rendered mute and impotent.”⁴ While this is generally the first sort of thing a mystic says before he sets out to detail his intimate knowledge of God at length, it nevertheless accurately describes Wasiti’s position on the inadequacy of language to describe the reality of God. Wasiti said, “People have nothing from Him other than a name, a description, or an attribute. People are veiled by His names from His descriptions, and by His descriptions from His attributes, and by His attributes from His Essence.”⁵ His solution to the impotence of language seems to have been the use of deliberately provocative statements to prod his listeners out of their mundane and rational understanding of God. But it seems that the intellectual and spiritual capacities of his audience were not always equal to his efforts. As ʿAttar noted, many were so provoked that they threw him out of town.

Shath and Objectionable Language

Ruzbihan al-Baqli (d. 606/1209) considered Wasiti among those who spoke in *shathiyyat* (ecstatic expressions) and included him in his *Sharh al-shathiyyat*, written nearly three hundred years after Wasiti’s death.⁶ Perhaps following Baqli’s assessment, ʿAttar described Wasiti as a “possessor of the breath” (*sahib al-nafas*).⁷ The possessor of the breath speaks out of his or her ecstatic experience of union with God. Sarraj, the earliest known expositor on the subject, described *shathiyyat* as “a strange-seeming expression describing an ecstasy that overflows because of its power.”⁸ A person may, for instance, claim identity with God or make some equally paradoxical or offensive statement. The most famous example of this particular type is Hallaj’s exclamation, “I am the Real!”

But Wasiti’s sayings do not fit into the understanding of *shath* at his time. His language could be paradoxical and could offend, but it was not, as Sarraj further describes *shathiyyat*, language which is like a river that has overflowed its banks.⁹ Not all expressions of direct knowledge of God are *shath*. As Sarraj points out, *shathiyyat* are distinguished by their unusual and dramatic expression. *Shathiyyat* could be immediately expressed, or as Carl Ernst has observed, they could be composed statements of an earlier ecstatic experience.¹⁰ But they all share the same unusual dramatic quality of expres-

sion. For example, compare two statements of identity with God by Abu Yazid (Bayazid) al-Bistami (d. 261/875) and Hallaj to two sayings by Wasiti making similar points, namely that only God has the right to say “I” and there is nothing in creation other than God. Wasiti’s statements are significantly different in their lack of dramatic expression.

Abu Yazid (Bayazid) al-Bistami said, “My ‘I am’ is not ‘I am,’ because I am He, and I am ‘he is He.’”

Hallaj said, “I wonder at You and me. You annihilated me out of myself into You. You made me near to Yourself, so that I thought that I was You and You were me.”

Wasiti said, “Whoever says ‘I’ surely contends with the Power. The angels only said *while we glorify You with your praise* owing to their distance from direct knowledges (Q 2:30). They are the lords of objecting to Lordship by their words, ‘*What, will you place in it one who will work corruption in it?*’ (Q 2:30).”

We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in their souls (Q 41:53). Wasiti said, “He is manifest in every thing through that which He makes manifest from Himself. His manifestation of the things is His own manifestation through them, thus if you examine things thoroughly, you will not find anything other than God.”¹¹

Sarraj, writing fifty years after Wasiti’s death, did not consider Wasiti among those who spoke in *shathiyyat*. Sarraj addresses the major forms in a long part entitled, “The book on the commentary of *shathiyyat* and words that are outwardly objectionable but inwardly sound and straight.”¹² As the title of this part suggests, he first discusses the phenomena of *shath*, then turns to discuss language that is sound in meaning yet objectionable in form. Sarraj does not use the word *shath* in connection with Wasiti. Rather, Wasiti serves as the representative of the second type: “Chapter mentioning Muhammad b. Musa al-Farghani and an explanation of what is mentioned about him with regard to speech that is outwardly offensive and inwardly sound and straight.”¹³ It may seem obvious to say so, but not every abstruse saying is *shath*.¹⁴

Wasiti was infamous for his criticism of the Sufis. In some cases, criticism and boasting are a type of *shath*, but Wasiti's criticism of others does not seem to enter into that category.¹⁵ Criticism such as this and boasting are a strong component of oral culture and should not be automatically considered to be *shath*. Walter J. Ong explains that agonistic word play is a form of intellectual combat common to oral or residually oral cultures.

Many, if not all, oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic in their verbal performance and indeed in their lifestyle. Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle. Proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in verbal and intellectual combat.¹⁶

In classic *amr bi'l-ma'ruf* style, Wasiti held that pointing out the faults of the eminent was as much of an obligation as admonishing the common folk. Moreover, these sorts of criticisms are hardly rare even among the most circumspect Sufis. One could offer a good deal of Sarraj's *Kitab al-luma'* as an example of criticism of the errors of other Sufis.

Over all, Sarraj complains about the trouble such language causes when directed to the community at large instead of being kept within Sufi circles. *Kitab al-luma'* is, in part, a defense of the Sufis against past and future slander by clearly explaining their doctrines and actions with ample proof-texts from the Qur'an and Hadith.¹⁷ Wasiti's manner of expressing himself is a good example of why he needed to do so. Sarraj states that a man engaged in a public diatribe against the Sufis used a saying by Wasiti to make his point that the Sufis never talk about Muhammad.¹⁸ An ironic complaint to be sure given the richness of Wasiti's comments on the character of the Prophet. Nevertheless as Bowering observed, the Sufis' claim to a privileged knowledge and their often startling expressions of it brought them into conflict with ordinary believers and scholars of the outward sciences.¹⁹ Sarraj writes that Wasiti's sort of speech only serves as fodder for "the people of contention" who make of it what they will to attack the Sufis even though its meaning is sound.²⁰ He writes of Wasiti's work, "I find within his

discourse an opening for the quarrelsome to defame and deny [the Sufis]. Otherwise, I find his import and goal to be sound and his aims are those found in the Principles [of the Religious Sciences].”²¹

Ansari likewise disliked Wasiti’s outspoken style. He adds the further charge that Wasiti was an undisciplined guide because he lacked humility. He quotes a letter, in partial Persian translation, from Junayd to Wasiti, written after news of Wasiti’s difficult style of speech had reached Junayd in Baghdad. Junayd sharply warns Wasiti to speak to people’s capacities. He scolds Wasiti saying that he speaks to people in a language that comes easily to him but is hard for others to understand. Junayd sensibly points out that the proper attitude for a teacher is to speak in order to be understood. Ansari quotes the opening lines and then skips to the end of the letter. Ansari’s words are in parentheses:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Peace be upon you, O Abu Bakr, and God’s mercy and His blessings, may God pardon us. Be wary of being esteemed! (In the last part he said), Those who have knowledge and those who are wise are a mercy from God for the people. So be likewise in your speech. In order that you should be a mercy for the people and a trial for yourself, come out of your own state to their state, so that when you speak with them you speak in their state, measure, and capacity. And address them in that situation, in accordance with how you find them. Thus I speak penetratingly to you. And to them, *Say to them penetrating words about themselves* (Q 4:63).²²

Ansari treats Wasiti as a cautionary tale, concluding that Wasiti might have reached his own spiritual stature if it were not for this very problem.²³

Along with his outspokenness, Wasiti had a reputation for being impatient with the shortcomings he perceived in his contemporaries. In a poem lamenting the loss of the great Sufis of the past, Baqli pairs each Sufi with the feature for which he is well known, such as Junayd’s steadfastness or the martyrdom of Hallaj. According to Baqli, Wasiti was characteristic for his “unrest.” He writes, “Where is Wasiti’s unrest (*ashub*)?”²⁴ The following two sayings are often quoted in the sources, strengthening the impression that Wasiti was disappointed by his fellows. But put in historical context, Wasiti simply echoes the complaint common among Sufis of every period, namely that one’s

peers had lost the original insight that drove those of earlier periods. Wasiti thought that many of those on the inward path in his own day were simply going through the motions. Wasiti said, "We are afflicted by a time without the propriety of Islam, the character traits of the Jahiliyya, or the forbearance of the chivalrous."²⁵ Likewise, he said, "The Tribe had allusions (*isharat*), then the allusions became movements (*harakat*), then nothing remained but regrets (*hasarat*)."²⁶ Ansari quotes Wasiti as having called Abu 'Abd Allah al-Jalla "half a man" for eating food bought from the possibly tainted wealth of others.²⁷ In other words, the money may not have been earned in accordance with Islamic Law. Wasiti likewise did not look well upon the early renunciants who he considered kept their attention on their states rather than the Creator of those states.

He was asked about Malik b. Dinar, God be well satisfied with him, and Dawud al-Ta'i and Ibn Wasi', God be well pleased with them and other servants like them. "The Tribe said [about them], 'They did not depart from themselves except to themselves, they abandoned the blessing (*na'im*) that passes away for the blessing that subsists.' But where is the Creator of passing away and subsistence?"²⁸

As mentioned above, he criticized the followers of Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri for paying attention to their states and actions instead of God. One of his sayings may even imply a criticism of Muhasabi for his practice of careful self-accounting.²⁹ Ansari comments about him, "Abu Bakr al-Wasiti did not approve of anyone."³⁰ Wasiti would perhaps rejoin—no doubt earnestly—that he did not approve of anyone whom he considered to have taken a protector apart from God.

A Little of It Indicates a Lot

But the sources also suggest that Wasiti understood the necessity of speaking to people according to their states. He said, "Turn away from the ignorant, admonish the average people, and report the faults of the eminent. Address each according to the measure of his capacity."³¹ More mundane reports and sayings such as this one give a more complex picture of Wasiti than the trope of him as the uncompromising "soaring minaret." His sayings suggest that he also spoke plainly, offered basic clarifications and guidance. I cannot date

Junayd's letter, but perhaps it came early enough to affect Wasiti's presentation.

While the majority of his explanations of Qur'anic verses are complex, a number of them are simple and show a concern that those who sat with him understand the most basic meanings of the Qur'an. Consider his explanation of this verse about Jesus, *He will speak to men in the cradle and of age, and righteous he will be* (Q 3:46).

Wasiti said, "[It is] a reply to those who disagreed that Jesus spoke in the state of infancy, a state in which another would have been incapable of it. When he was 'of age' there was neither the recklessness of youths nor the weakness of the elderly in him."³²

His sayings on fear of God (*khawf*) demonstrate that he perceived the different needs of his companions. There are sayings such as, "Fear and hope are two reins holding back lack of proper conduct."³³ But where fear of God is appropriate for one, it can be a veil for another. He said, "Fear is a veil between God and the servant," and, "When the Real is manifest to the secret hearts, not a bit of fear or hope remains in them."³⁴

We might also consider that Wasiti's uncompromising approach with his companions was not necessarily a lack of sensitivity toward their needs. As far as Wasiti was concerned, turning toward God was his companions' primary need. In any case, reports show him comforting his students in difficult moments with difficult truths. In one anecdote, he helps a companion understand the difficult truth of bearing up under suffering. He explains to the companion that trials are evidence of God's care.

The shaykh [Wasiti] had a disciple. One day he acquired the major ablution for the congregational prayer without any problems. Then he started out for the mosque and fell in the street. His face was wounded so that he had to return and do another major ablution. He told this to the shaykh. The shaykh said, "Be happy to acquire hardship, if He neglects you, He will be rid of you."³⁵

In another anecdote, Wasiti is sitting with a group of companions and uses a simple example to illustrate that there is nothing to fear in leaving the self behind for a total regard for God. He assures them they will find a tranquil heart in the affirmation of God alone.

Abu Bakr al-Wasiti said, "The rays of the sun are coming through a window of the house so that dust motes become visible. The wind arises and sets the dust motes in motion in the midst of the light. Are you afraid of that?"

They said, "Of course not!"

He said, "Before the heart of the servant who declares God one, the entire realm of being is like the dust mote that the wind sets in motion."³⁶

For Wasiti, one's attention should be on God entirely and not on one's actions or the passing states of one's experience. One should not think that works have any effect on God's treatment of a person. Good works do not bring about a reward, nor do bad works bring about a punishment. Likewise, one should not pay attention to one's states since feeling intimacy with God does not mean one is near to Him, and desolation does not mean one is distant from Him. One should not look at reality from one's own perspective, the vantage point of works and states, but instead from God's perspective, that all is One and under His command. In an interesting turn on a Qur'anic verse, Wasiti urged his companions, "Do not witness your states, nor your actions, *God suffices as a witness* against them and for them (Q 4:79)."³⁷ Wasiti commonly warns against considering actions or states as a means to reach God. The only means to God is God Himself. The following saying points out that neither actions nor states are a path to God. God does what He wills. Wasiti said, "How can someone who declares God one have recourse to the means of pious works after His words, *He singles out for His mercy whom He wills* (Q 3:74)? Be certain that there is no path to Him through witnessings, arrival places, habitual actions, and giving benefit."³⁸

Wasiti taught his companions that they should give no consideration to changes in their states because they are not "real." No one is separated from or brought into union with God, for there is no separation and no union, only God. He said, "Whoever is changed by a state is someone who has turned away from declaring God one (*tawhid*), [in other words,] whoever is cut off by being cut off, whoever is united by being united. In reality, there is no separation and no uniting."³⁹

Although Wasiti is well remembered for his criticism of others, some also depict him as being just as hard, if not harder, on himself. He is shown as taking great care with his own practice and caring for

others. Like many Sufis of his day, he was scrupulous about eating only permissible food, including avoiding food that may have been purchased with ill-gotten gains, as shown in his criticism of Jalla above.⁴⁰ In the following story, Wasiti interprets the strap of his sandal breaking as an omen pointing to his own wrongdoing.

Abu Bakr al-Wasiti passed by the door to my shop one Friday on the way to the mosque. His sandal strap broke, so I said to him, "Permit me to mend your sandal strap."

He replied, "Mend it." So I mended his strap, then he said to me, "Do you know why my sandal strap broke?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Because I did not perform the major ablution for the congregational prayer."

I said to him, "Sir there is a bath house right over there, would you go in there?"

He replied, "Yes," and he went in and bathed.⁴¹

He is remembered for having that extraordinary sense of his own wrongdoing common to the Sufis. What people regularly call good deeds are unacceptable to the Sufis, who could be far more scrupulous in their actions. As Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. ca. 180/796) said, "The ugly deeds of those brought near are the good deeds of the pious."⁴² One anecdote depicts him as deeply sensitive and critical of his own heedlessness (*ghafla*) when he acts without thinking of the consequences and accidentally kills a bird. The anecdote is unlikely to have any basis historically, given its detail, but it nevertheless demonstrates that some people perceived Wasiti's character as such.

We were present in a garden for religious duty and a little bird kept flying above my head. I caught the bird out of heedlessness and for no purpose and held it in my hand. Another little bird came flying and was screeching over my head. I thought it could be the little bird's mother or spouse and I regretted what I had done and let it loose from my hand. As it happened, it was dead. My heart became extremely tight and an illness began and I remained in that sickness a whole year. One night I saw the Prophet in a dream.

I said, "It is a whole year that I have been sitting instead of standing for the ritual prayer. I have become sick and the illness has left a serious effect on me."

He replied to me that the reason for this was that a little bird had complained about me in the Presence. Apologizing would not be of any use.

Later a cat had a kitten in our house. At that time, I was leaning back and meditating, a snake came and seized the kitten with its mouth. I threw my cane at its head. It threw the kitten down and the mother came and picked up its own baby. In that hour, I became better and began standing in the prayer again. That night, I saw the Prophet in a dream.

I said to him, "Today I became completely healthy again."

He said that had happened because a cat had thanked me in the Presence.⁴³

His care for others and the depth of his practice is shown in the anecdote about his *ithar* to the old woman during Ramadan mentioned above. He is remembered for having great humility and shame before God, and for accepting God's will without question. In the following anecdote, he recites the Qur'anic supplication made by Jonah inside the belly of the whale while bearing up under physical pain.

There was a pustule on his shoulder, and another came out on his back opposite it, light began to become manifest from it. In spite of that he said, "God, increase me with Your trial if it pleases You. *There is no god but You, Glory be to You! Surely, I am among the wrongdoers* (Q 21:87)." ⁴⁴

Wasiti's reputation in the literature does not always reflect his actual practice. As mentioned above, Sarraj reports that Wasiti was cited in a diatribe against the Sufis as an example of those who never speak about the Prophet. Neither Sulami nor Abu Nu'aym give any of Wasiti's sayings concerning Muhammad in their biographical works, nor does Sulami report any Hadith that he may have passed on, as Sulami does with many others. Moreover, Wasiti's focus on *tawhid* gives the impression that he paid little attention to the Prophet. Such sayings as the following support this view of him:

Whoever magnifies the sacred things of God (Q 22:30). [Wasiti] also said, "Part of magnifying that which is sacred is that one does not observe anything from the realm of being, nor from the misfortunes

of trials, and that one does not observe the Friend (Abraham), nor the Speaker (Moses), nor the Lover (Muhammad) as long as one finds a way to observing the Real.”⁴⁵

For Wasiti, the Prophet was the exemplar for all human beings. But Wasiti warned that Muhammad was not to be so exalted that one's attention would be overly fixed on him rather than on God. Wasiti considered the Prophet to be the most exceptional of all human beings because everything he did or said was through God's permission. Thus, one should turn one's attention to God by following the Prophet, in other words by recognizing God as the source of the Prophet's actions. Wasiti says one should seek permission through God rather than through the Prophet.

Those who believe in God and the last day do not ask leave of you [O Muhammad], that they may struggle with their possessions and themselves (Q 9:44). Wasiti said, “How should they ask permission from the one who is permitted with complete permission? If he stands, he stands with permission, if he sits, he sits with permission. The courses he takes, and the movements he makes make manifest what was already permitted for him by His words, *He does not speak from caprice, it is only a revelation revealed (Q 53:3–4).*”⁴⁶

Another way of describing the Prophet's actions and words as being through God is to say that his attributes were not his own, but instead God's attributes were manifest through him, making him the highest example of all humanity. “Wasiti said, ‘His words, *Surely you are upon a magnificent character (Q 68:4).* It is the dress of the descriptions and assuming His character traits since not a thought for passing existence remained with him.’”⁴⁷ It is significant that out of the thirteen different Sufis Sulami quotes commenting on this verse praising Muhammad, most are represented by one saying each, with the exception of Hallaj, who has four sayings, and Wasiti, whom he quotes nine different times. The relatively large number of times Wasiti turned his attention to this verse on the noble character of the Prophet, in comparison with others quoted by Sulami, suggests that Wasiti did not disregard Muhammad but rather that these sayings were not well-known. In the following saying, Wasiti describes the Prophet as the most noble sign of God's address and guidance to people.

Why does God not speak to us or give us a sign (Q 2:118). Wasiti said, "It is as if He said, 'I spoke to them when I sent down my Address upon them; but, they did not understand. Which sign is more noble than Muhammad, and I have already made him manifest to them.'"⁴⁸

Wasiti makes the point that one's attention should not be overly focused on the Prophet, since one turns away from God in doing so. The following saying concerns Abu Bakr's reaction to Muhammad's death. Abu Bakr is well known for having addressed the grieving and confused community by saying, "Those of you who worshipped Muhammad know that Muhammad is dead. Those of you who worship God, know that He is the Living Who does not die." Using Abu Bakr's example, Wasiti urges that the Prophet be seen in his proper context as the highest among human beings, but not the source and sustainer of their worship, which is God alone.

They did not flag due to what struck them in God's way (Q 3:146). Wasiti said, "Be like Abu Bakr, since his relationship was to the Real, the loss of a [secondary] cause did not affect him. Since their relationship was weak, 'Umar b. al-Khattab affected them. He said, 'Whoever says Muhammad died I will strike his neck!' Abu Bakr perceived that which Mustafa had pointed out to him, thus he recited, *Muhammad is nothing but a messenger; messengers have passed away before him* (Q 3:144)."⁴⁹

Concerning the verse, *Those who answered God and the Messenger* (Q 3:172), Wasiti said that the proper answer to God and Muhammad is to declare God one, and follow the commands of His prophet "as a cherished obligation." He said, "They answered God by His oneness, they answered the Messenger by following his commands, avoiding what he prohibited, and accepting the revealed law from him as a cherished obligation."⁵⁰

Public Perception and Its Risks

Sarraj and Ansari seem to be responding more to Wasiti's reputation than his actual practice. I would characterize him as ethically impatient and so sometimes reckless or insensible to the needs of others. On the whole, he seems to have been unwilling to bend to the needs of others

if he thought the needs of God were not being served. But as we saw in the case of the Sufis in Baghdad, public perception is no small matter. It is enough to destroy a reputation or convict on charges of heresy. Nuri and some of the others seemed not to care for conforming outwardly to socially acceptable religious norms. Junayd, on the other hand, was very careful not to share the highest level of his teachings with anyone who might misunderstand it. He publicly claimed to be no more than a jurist. Despite the overall “cordial relations” between the Sufis and scholars of the other religious sciences, Junayd’s caution would remain warranted over the years. Sarraj and Ansari’s apologetics are, quite literally, a defense of the Sufis from their critics.

PART TWO

Wasiti's Theology



5

Theological Principles

Theology is practiced with the goal of setting the boundaries of correct belief concerning the nature of the divine and the divine-human relationship. Among the Ahl al-Hadith, the Qur'an and the Sunna were the primary sources of knowledge from which theological statements were derived. Sufis added their own insights to the discussion of correct actions and belief, as well as their own source of knowledge to that of the Qur'an and the Sunna, what the Sufis understood to be direct knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the divine itself. For the Sufis, *tawhid*—meaning literally declaring God one—is not simply a question of correct belief, but also a question of the transformation of the soul. Wasiti's elder contemporary, Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz (d. 279/892), said that declaring God one means that one perceives that all things are manifest through God, so much so that one's sense of self-possession passes away and God makes the soul belong to Him alone.

Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz said, "The first mark of declaring God one is that the servant leaves behind all things and sends all things back to the One who looks after them; so that the one who is looked after should be through the One who looks after, [the One who] gazes upon the things, stands through them, and is firmly fixed in them. Then He hides them in their souls from their souls, and He makes their souls die in their souls, and *He makes them for Himself* (Q 20:41). This is the first entry into *tawhid* with respect to the manifestation of *tawhid* perpetually."¹

I will examine Wasiti's theology in keeping with his own perspective in three sections corresponding to the Essence, the attributes, and the acts. The Essence is God with respect to His incomparability, inasmuch as nothing is like Him. The attributes are the diverse ways in which God is understood in relationship to creation. The acts constitute creation in respect of the fact that God is manifest through it and acts through it.

Wasiti consistently turns his listeners' attention to the fact of God's incomparability and His overwhelming command and determination of all things. His approach does not result in a complete and desolate incomparability; Wasiti's understanding of the incomparability of God never excludes God's similarity. He keeps incomparability and similarity in what may be termed a "complementary" relationship. But in keeping with the emphasis on God's rights in the formative period, for Wasiti, incomparability remains primary in this complementary relationship. Wasiti describes these relationships by taking up each perspective on its own terms and in doing so gives his understanding of the whole of divine reality as incomparable and all-encompassing.

From the perspective of total incomparability, everything points to the fact that God alone is real and all else, compared to Him, is nothing. God is ultimately beyond all language, thought, and ascription. Wasiti affirms God's total incomparability from every vantage point, even from those perspectives that typically demonstrate God's relationship with creation. For Wasiti, whether one examines the Essence, attributes, or acts, everything makes evident His incomparability. The Essence is evidence of God's incomparability because language is inadequate to express It. Although the attributes are in relationship with creation, they are nevertheless beyond comprehension because language and creaturely understanding are inadequate to them. In respect of the acts, God's presence blots out any possibility of there being an "other." So while God's self-manifestation demonstrates His similarity, it primarily affirms His total incomparability.

For Wasiti, nothing can express the reality of the Essence of God or even adequately allude to It. Moreover he asks, how is it possible consider that God would have descriptions and attributes, when God is beyond all that. Such a perspective incapacitates the human understanding of God. Wasiti says that the only attribute one can engage with is praise. In other words, in the face of incomparability one can only acknowledge Him through praise.

Call on God or call on the Merciful, whichever name you call on, to Him belong the most beautiful names (Q 17:110). Wasiti said, “His names are innumerable. Nothing alludes to His Essence, nor is It described by a true attribute except the attribute of laudation. The Real is outside powers of imagining (*awham*) and understanding. So how should He have descriptions and attributes?”²

Wasiti explains that although people think they come to understand God through attributes and descriptions, in fact these all veil Him. “People have nothing from Him other than a name, a description, or an attribute. People are veiled by His names from His descriptions, and by His descriptions from His attributes, and by His attributes from His Essence.”³

As for the acts, Wasiti says God makes Himself known through creation, yet at the same time creation veils Him. He makes Himself known because creation points to His “handiwork” (*sunʿ*) and His command, but it remains a veil because the veil is known and not God Himself. In a representative saying, Wasiti declares first that God is known through creation, but then he follows this statement with a list of negative assertions that express God’s incomparability.

Through His creation He veils Himself from His creatures, then through what He has made He acquaints them with His handiwork, and through His command He drives them to His [final] command. It is not possible for the powers of imagining (*awham*) to deal with Him, for intellects to imagine (*takhtaluhu*) Him, for eyesight to picture Him, for hearing to embrace Him, or for wishes to put Him into service. He is that which has no before or no after; nothing falls short of Him and nothing is equal; there is no goal beyond Him and no respite (*mahl*). He has no period, end, goal, time, or conclusion. No veil covers Him, and no place diminishes Him, no air surrounds Him, no space encompasses Him, no void contains Him. *There is nothing like Him, He is the Hearing, The Seeing* (Q 42:11).⁴

Commenting on the verse, *We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in their souls* (Q 41:53), Wasiti states that nothing becomes manifest in creation other than God. All of that which points to God’s similarity, points, in turn, to His incomparability. The verse is a source for the notion that all things both outwardly, on the horizons, and inwardly, in their souls, communicate about the nature of

the divine. Hence, for Wasiti, God makes the signs manifest and is the Manifest (*al-zahir*) through them. Wasiti is referring to a verse in the Qur'an when he uses the word "to find" (*wajada*); a word related by its Arabic root to what will become an important technical term in Sufism and Philosophy that signifies the identity between "finding" and "being" (*wujud*). The following verse suggests that only God is found in the world, everything other than God is a mirage. *Those who disbelieve, their works are like a mirage in the desert. The one who is thirsty reckons it is water until when he comes to it and does not find (lam yajidhu) anything, but he finds (wajada) God with Him (Q 24:39).* Wasiti says that if one examines things thoroughly, one will not find (*wajada*) anything other than God manifest in creation.

He is manifest in everything through what He makes manifest of Himself. His making the things manifest is His own manifestation through them. Thus if you examine [things] thoroughly, you will not find anything other than God.⁵

Just as God makes His own attributes and signs manifest in each thing, so also He makes His own Self manifest in each self. Hence, in the last analysis, nothing possesses a self for and by itself. In other words, no one has the right to say "myself," "yourself," or "itself," because God's Self encompasses all of reality. "Wasiti said, 'He left no self for the creatures after He reported about Himself that *He is the First, the Last, the Manifest (al-zahir), and the Non-Manifest (al-batin)* (Q 57:3).'"⁶

Wasiti finds the point of reference for the term *self-disclosure (tajalli)* in the verse of God's self-disclosure to the mountain for Moses (Q 7:143). Wasiti is in agreement with the opinion prevalent among the Ahl al-Hadith at the time who denied the possibility of self-disclosure or any type of direct vision (*ru'ya*) of God either with the heart or the eye.⁷ In typical fashion, Wasiti sees talk of disclosure as affirming an "other" to which God discloses Himself. Wasiti's explanation centers on looking at God's self-disclosure from the perspective that nothing other than God is manifest in creation. If something other than God were manifest, then He could disclose Himself to it. But if there is nothing other than God, disclosure is impossible. The opposite of God disclosing Himself is veiling Himself from the creatures. By the same logic, if there is nothing other than God, veiling is also impossible. God's complete presence by being all that is manifest through creation

negates the possibility of there being an “other.”⁸ Nevertheless, as Wasiti does in general, at the end of the saying he turns the discussion back to the human perspective and declares—also in accord with prevalent Ahl al-Hadith positions—that self-disclosure will happen after this world has ended. Wasiti was typically careful to point out the errors of the Mu‘atazili. Perhaps Wasiti adds the clarification at the end lest his position in this saying be mistaken for the Mu‘tazili notion that there will be no vision of God—of any sort—in the afterlife.

They said, “Why do you deny self-disclosure when God says, *When his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain* (Q 7:143)? And Muhammad said, ‘surely when God discloses Himself to a thing, it is humbled before Him.’”

I replied, “This is in accordance with common usage and the measures of capacities. Is it not impossible to say that the air disclosed itself to a single dust mote? Were the air to remain veiled to the dust mote, it would be equal, and were it to disclose itself, it would be in conjunction with it. He is too majestic to be hidden and curtained and He is too mighty to disclose himself or be seen until the time of the Meeting. He is incomparable to their inquiring glances falling on Him or their expectations held back with bated breath.”⁹

If nothing but God becomes manifest in the cosmos, and no self can stand up before His Self, then God has absolute power over all of which is ultimately nothing other than He. Wasiti defines “God’s Handful,” mentioned in a verse stating that everything will be in God’s hand on the Last Day, as His absolute power.

Wasiti said concerning His words, *To Him belongs whatever inhabits the night and the day* (Q 6:13), “Whoever claims either in thought or deed that anything of His kingdom—which is whatever inhabits the night and the day—belongs to him, then he has contended over *the Handful* (Q 39:67) and has disdained the [divine] exaltation. *Do not creation and the command belong to Him* in an absolute sense (Q 7:54)?”¹⁰

Elsewhere Wasiti refers to the “Handful” as an allusion to the fact that the realm of being is in God’s power and so the realm of being amounts to nothing more than dust. “The realm of being is in the

Handful, and it is dust (*haba'*) next to Power. God says, *We will surely make all that is on it a barren dust (sa'id) (Q 18:8).*"¹¹ God's power over all things negates the claims of the creatures to possess anything, including their own existence. All are made manifest by Him and manifest the signs of His attributes and names.

To Him belongs whatever inhabits the night and the day (Q 6:13). [Wasiti] also said concerning this verse, "He does away with kingdoms. Rather, He nullifies them when He ascribes them to Himself, looks after them with His power, and makes them manifest with His will. He makes them found (*awjadaha*) after He made them lost. He owns them in reality."¹²

Moreover, God is beyond any relationship with the creatures in that He does not act in response to human activity; He only acts according to His will. The cause (*'illa*) and effect (*ma'lul*) relationship that exists in this world does not impinge on God. Ibn Shadhan Abu Bakr al-Razi who transmitted many of Wasiti's sayings to Sulami reports the following saying in which Wasiti says that nothing a creature may or may not do affects God because He creates all causes and effects.

Abu Bakr al-Razi said, I heard Muhammad b. Musa al-Wasiti say, "God does not bring the poor one near because of his poverty, nor does He put the wealthy one far away because of his wealth. He has no thought of transitory things such that He should join them or cut them off. If you were to give to Him this world and the next, that would not join you to Him. If you were to take hold of all of both of them, He would not cut you off because of that. He makes near whomever He makes near without cause, and He cuts off whomever He cuts off without cause. Thus He says, *When God does not appoint a light for someone, he has no light (Q 24:40).*"¹³

Wasiti criticizes the Mu'tazilite doctrine that the actions of created things cause effects in creation and that divine qualities may be judged by criteria outside that of revelation. In a saying on trust in God (*tawakkul*), Wasiti states that God is the Cause of all things and one should trust Him for this reason alone. The Mu'tazilites held that God initiates a "newly begun power" (*qudra haditha*) in created things through which their actions cause effects in the world. In short, the Mu'tazilites affirmed the creatures' power, albeit initiated by God, to

be causes in themselves. For Wasiti, and for the early Ahl al-Hadith Movement in general, the creatures' acts are in and of themselves ineffectual. God directly causes all things, on all levels, and at all moments.¹⁴ The Mu'tazilites also hold that the divine qualities can be judged by criteria outside revelation such as human reason. They argue that God's attributes are known through evidence of those attributes in this world. But what they consider evidence is determined through human judgment. For Wasiti, and for the Ahl al-Hadith Movement in general, divine qualities are defined by God as He describes Himself in the Qur'an and as the Prophet has elaborated on those descriptions. Those descriptions determine the boundaries of human judgment concerning God. For Wasiti, there is no cause outside of God to inspire trust in Him; one trusts God because He is the Cause of all things. Hence, if one trusts God due to a false cause, in other words a cause other than God, that is not trust. "Wasiti said, 'Whoever trusts in God due to a cause other than God is not someone who trusts God.'"¹⁵

The Mu'tazilites denied the eternity of God's attributes in keeping with what they understood to be the boundaries of His justice. God could not be properly just if, as the Ahl al-Hadith argued, God willed all things, which would necessarily include taking innocent life and other harsh realities. Wasiti seems to be speaking to the Mu'tazilite charge in the upcoming saying on justice when he ends the discussion acknowledging God's solicitude to His creatures. First he turns his listeners' attention away from their own perspectives and self-centeredness so that they may recognize that all things come from God's side. He reminds his listeners of God's encompassing reality and command in every context. But then he returns this discussion to the perspective of creation and God's solicitude toward His creatures. It is through God's solicitude that human beings are brought near to Him, given direct knowledge of Him, taken care of, and watched over by Him.¹⁶

Commenting on the verse, *God commands justice, doing what is beautiful, and giving to the nearest one; and He prohibits indecent acts, objectionable acts, and outrage. He admonishes you so perhaps you will remember* (Q 16:90), Wasiti teaches that each of these commands involves understanding that God is the criterion, source, and possessor of all things. The boundaries that define "justice" are set by God, and not by human beings. "Doing what is beautiful" is knowing that beauty finds its source in God alone. "Giving to the nearest one" is typically interpreted as a command to give to family relations. But

here, Wasiti states that God is nearest of all to human beings. He is the one to Whom they belong, through Whom they are manifest, and to Whom they will return. It would be an “indecent” and “objectionable act” to consider that anyone other than God possesses anything. It would be an “outrage” to think that God’s attributes are many and bring about effects individually and in themselves, because then they would be distinct from God. God “reminds” and “admonishes” people about these matters only so that they might remember that God’s complete power over them and possession of them is nothing more than His blessing upon them.

Justice is that the servant be in agreement with none but his Lord and behold His limit. *Doing what is beautiful* is that he see beauty from God. *Giving to the nearest one*: Now, there is no one nearer to you than the one to Whom you belong, through Whom you [are manifest], and to Whom you [return]. The most *indecent acts* are to ascribe things by possession and taking to other than Him. The most *objectionable act* is seeing things from other than Him and belonging to other than Him. The ugliest outrage is seeing the [divine] descriptions as variegated and as causes. *He admonishes you so perhaps you will remember* knowledge of His bounty upon you through the admonishing; so that perhaps you will remember, in other words, perhaps you will remember His blessing upon you.¹⁷

While Wasiti considers incomparability primary, in many sayings he shifts his perspective to show how incomparability can point to similarity as well. This discussion of God’s incomparability and similarity is common in Sufism and came to be discussed by the sixth/twelfth century in terms of incomparability (*tanzih*) and similarity without howness (*tashbih bi-la kayf*). But during Wasiti’s day, the term *tanzih* was used by the Mu‘tazilites to express their central position of utter incomparability without possibility of similarity, and the term *tashbih* was typically used by some to describe God anthropomorphically. It would be anachronistic to use the particular terms *tanzih* and *tashbih* in reference to his thought. At that time, even prior to the establishment and spread of Ash‘ari thought, the Ahl al-Hadith understood the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur’an in terms of “without howness” (*bi-la kayf*), or as Josef Van Ess translates its meaning, “without further comment.” In other words, God must have

these qualities that are similar to human beings since He describes them as such in the Qur'an, but they are to be accepted "without further comment."¹⁸ As discussed in Part One, a number of positions that would later be articulated by Ash'ari and his followers were held by the wider Ahl al-Hadith Movement, which included numerous Sufis such as Wasiti and his shaykh, Junayd.¹⁹

Keeping Wasiti's notion of the complimentary relationship between incomparability and similarity in mind, note that Wasiti describes God's presence manifesting through the realm of being as "the Standing" (*al-qa'im*) (Q 13:33). The Standing is not one of the traditionally accepted names of God; it is more common to use the name of God *al-qayyum*, which might be best translated here as "the Self-Standing." "*Qa'im bi*" was used with closely related meanings among Sufis, theologians, and philosophers from the formative period onward, most famously in the work of Ibn Sina.²⁰ Wasiti's position on this matter seem to be in keeping with the early Ahl al-Hadith theologian Ibn Kullab (d. ca. 240/855) who stated that the attributes are neither identical to God nor other than He.²¹ For Wasiti, God stands through Himself eternally and by means of His attributes through the things created in time. In later theological and philosophical texts it is common to distinguish between God and creation by saying that God "subsists through His Essence" (*qa'im bi-dhatihi*) and the creatures "subsist through God" (*qa'im bi'llah*). I choose to translate the term as "standing" rather than "subsistence" because "standing" more accurately reflects Wasiti's use of language from the Qur'an, the context of his thought on this matter (for example, his discussion of "bearing the attributes" below), and the shifting definitions of terms in the formative period. The verb "standing through" (*qama bi*) also carries the meanings of undertaking, standing up for, and making something one's concern. The existence of all things is by means of God standing through them, in other words by His undertaking their creation, upholding and maintaining their existence, taking care of them, and acting through them. The sense that God "stands through" the creatures and not "in" them is brought out where Wasiti says that God's attributes "flow" (*jara*) through the creatures.²² God stands through the creatures by means of His attributes, which flow through them. The following sound Hadith *qudsi* is a point of reference in Islamic thought for the divine-human relationship and is a point of reference for Wasiti's understanding of God's attributes, such as Hearing and Seeing, standing through His creatures.

I love nothing that draws My servant near to Me more than [I love] what I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through superogatory works until I love him. Then when I love him, I am the hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks.²³

Wasiti emphasizes the care implicit in the meaning of the term *qama bi* that God shows to His creatures by standing through them when he links it directly with God's mercy. Wasiti says in a gloss on the verse *He singles out for His mercy whom He wills* that when God singles a person out for mercy, that person passes away from himself and is aware by means of God's standing through him (Q 3:74). Nothing has any existence of its own on any level of reality, outwardly or inwardly, but few people perceive this. Most people experience themselves and the rest of creation as "standing" on their own.

He singles out for His mercy whom He wills (Q 3:74). "Wasiti says, 'It is that you should be as you are without you and He should be the Standing. He belongs to you through His Essence and His attribute.'" ²⁴

6

God's Essence

The Essence is God without relationship to anything else. Any language used to talk of the Essence is considered an allusion or a pointer (*ishara*) to that which is unfathomable and incomparable and infinitely transcends everything that can be understood about God in His creative activity. In other words, “Essence” designates God as the object of apophatic theological thinking.

The Letter *ha'*

In several sayings, Wasiti states that the letter *ha'*, the short form of the pronoun “He” (*huwa*), points to the Essence. He argues that of the parts of speech in Arabic, verb (*fi'l*), noun (*ism*), and particle (*harf*), “He” is not a noun or a name (also represented by the word *ism* in Arabic). Nothing names the Essence, so Wasiti says that “He” is, rather, a particle that points to It. In other words, the Essence is the particle's antecedent.

People become confused by the diverse relationships that God strikes with creation through His names and attributes, and, in error, may assume that this makes Him many. Wasiti takes the position that the Essence and God's attributes are identical. He further stresses this point by stating there is no distinction between the names and attributes either. Again, Wasiti opposes the Mu'tazilites who resolved this matter in a extreme affirmation of the oneness of the Essence by denying that attributes, such as Knowledge, were in relationship with creation at all. It was generally held by the Mu'tazilites that, for instance, God does not know through His attribute of Knowledge but rather through His

Essence. But as will be discussed below in the section on the attributes, Wasiti affirms God's relationship with creation through His names and attributes. While the attributes are experienced as diverse from the side of creation, from the side of incomparability they are identical with the Essence. As Wasiti says, there is no distinction between God, His attributes, or His names. Referring to the occasion of revelation, the Real's response to those who err in their understanding of the names and the attributes is to say "He is God." By using "He," God points to the identity of what cannot be said with the expression "God."

Wasiti said concerning His words, *Say He is God, One* (Q 112:1). "He is a particle, not a name, nor an attribute; rather it is an indirect expression and an allusion. It is an indirect expression for the Essence, and an allusion to the Essence. The Real teaches those who deviate concerning the names and the attributes and those who make a distinction between the attribute and What is attributed. Thus He says, "He" is not a distinction between His He-ness and He. If there is no distinction between His He-ness and He, there is no distinction between His names and His attributes."¹

In another saying commenting on the same verse, Wasiti further discusses the pronoun "He." If someone asserts there are other gods alongside God, the answer to this person is "He." One does not dispute with the person by denying it. To enter into a dispute over what is impossible, that is, a defect in God, would itself be a defective response. The answer is "He," an allusion to and affirmation of the oneness of God that passes beyond the domain of the intellect. For Wasiti, the intellect acquires knowledge by recognizing differences. It defines what a thing is by stating what the thing is not. But the heart acquires knowledge through the power of imagining (*wahm*), which knows by recognizing what is similar between things; in other words, it recognizes the signs of the One manifest through the many. Wasiti often uses the term "secret heart" (*sirr*) as a synonym for heart (*qalb*). Elsewhere, he distinguishes the secret heart as that aspect of the heart which manifests the divine, a meaning that bears on the famous Hadith *qudsi* expressing the unlimited capacity of the heart to know God: "My heavens and My earth embrace Me not, but the heart of My gentle and meek servant with faith does encompass Me."² Hence, Wasiti says to the person who denies the oneness of God, the allusion and affirmation "He" is "the answer the secret hearts imagine and thus

embrace,” whereas disputation through denial is “the answer the intellects pounce on,” and so the answer eludes the intellect’s grasp.

Wasiti said concerning His words, *Say He is God, One* (Q 112:1). “‘He’ is the answer to the one who asserts that there is a god alongside Him. Because negating an impossible defect is a defective [response]. [That is] the difference between the answer the secret hearts imagine (*tawahhama*) and the answer the intellects pounce on.”³

According to another saying, Wasiti says that the possessive pronoun *ha’* tells about the reality of the Essence. It refers to the Essence without singling out any relationship over another or making any distinctions; again it is an allusion to and an affirmation of the oneness of the Essence.

The Real does not appoint anything a means to Himself other than Himself, nor single out anything other than His Essence, since He says, *Peace upon His servants whom He has chosen* (Q 27:59). Here He did not place the name of an attribute, but He put the name of a reality, because the “His” (*ha’*) tells about the reality of the Essence and no other.⁴

The Impenetrable Essence

Wasiti states that the Essence is beyond supposition in a saying about the impossibility of arriving at God—in other words, achieving union with Him or being separated from Him. The discussion in early Sufism of “joining” (*wasl*) and “separation” (*fasl*), or their synonyms “joining together” (*jam’*) and “dispersal” or “division” (*farq*), tends toward straightforward definitions and issues such as the possibility of works bringing about arrival at God, or describing the qualities of the one who is truly in union with God and the one who is in error.⁵ Whereas, in later Sufism, the question of the possibility of union will be more prevalent in the debate concerning the terms.⁶ For Wasti, “joining” is when one perceives that there is no other than God manifest in the world. “Separation” is when the otherness of oneself and all things in the world are apparent. In this saying, Wasiti turns the discussion beyond these definitions by denying that joining and separation are at all possible when seen from the perspective of the Essence. Wasiti

may be responding to early claims that one can be annihilated in the Essence. For Wasiti, people suppose that they can join with or be separated from the Essence, as if the Essence is out there to be joined with or to be separated from. This is impossible, for the Essence is God inasmuch as He is outside any categories that pertain to creation. There can be no joining with or separation from that which is exclusively One and without relationship.

Most of them follow only supposition (Q 10:36). Wasiti said, “Only supposition that they have joined and that they were at the locus of separation, since in reality there is no joining or separation, because the Essence is withheld from joining together, just as it is withheld from separation.”⁷

Recognizing God through the Essence

Like many other Sufis, Wasiti distinguishes between the common people and the elect—those who have the aspiration and ability to know God through direct experience. The common people recognize God through His attributes and acts, while he says the elect recognize God through His Essence. But the particular ways in which the elect, the elect of the elect, meaning the prophets, and finally Muhammad recognize God through the Essence must be qualified. Wasiti only considers Muhammad to have had the capacity to have unmediated knowledge of God through His Essence.

Wasiti sometimes relies on the structure of a verse for his interpretations. For example, Wasiti states that God addresses the common people in the Qur'an by urging them to recognize Him through first looking at His signs in the world. These verses are structured such that the created thing is mentioned first so the fact of their creation will point to the Creator. *Do they not look at the camels, how they are created?* (Q 88:17); and, *Do they not look at the heaven above them, how We built it...?* (Q 50:6). But God addresses the elect by urging them to recognize Him first, and through Him, then, know His signs in the world. In these verses, God is mentioned first and the created things second; it should be noted that Wasiti sometimes uses the name “The Lord” as an equivalent term for God in many different contexts. *Do you not see that God drives on the clouds?* (Q 24:43); and, *Do you not see your Lord, how He has stretched out the shadow?* (Q

25:45).⁹ Hence, the common people come to recognize God through the attributes and acts—including their own souls—that are His signs manifest in creation; whereas, the elect recognize God without the mediation of the acts.

He lets Himself be recognized by the common people through His attributes and His acts; and it is His words, *And in yourselves, will you not see?* (Q 51:21). He lets Himself be recognized by the elect through His Essence; thus His words, *Do you not see your Lord, how He has stretched out the shadow?* (Q 25:45)¹⁰

Perhaps the elect are those mentioned in the following saying who love God for Himself and not for any attribute or recompense. “*God will bring a people that He loves and who love Him (ha’)* (Q 5:54). Wasiti said concerning this verse, ‘Just as He loves them through His Essence, likewise they love His Essence. The *ha’* refers to the Essence without descriptions or attributes.’”¹¹

But God does not allow the elect to perceive His Essence through an unmediated self-disclosure. In early Sufism, God’s self-disclosure (*tajalli*) was commonly discussed in terms of the possibility of seeing God directly.¹² As mentioned above, the early texts show that most Sufis of Wasiti’s day denied the possibility of any type of vision (*ru’ ya*) of God in this world, either with the heart or the eye.¹³ Seeing with the heart was only acceptable when it is understood as witnessing (*mushahada*) the manifest evidence (*shahid*) of the Real rather than the Real Itself.¹⁴ In this sense, Wasiti affirms God’s self-disclosure to human beings in this world. Wasiti agrees with his contemporaries that self-disclosure, in the sense of the direct vision of God Himself, will happen in the next world after one dies. In this world, only indirect self-disclosure is possible.

Wasiti says that God always discloses Himself to people according to their individual measures—in other words, their particular capacities—not in His own measure. Every self-disclosure of God is in accordance with the measure or capacity of the one receiving it. Wasiti interprets the verse concerning God’s self-disclosure to the mountain witnessed by Moses to include all creation. *When He disclosed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble into dust, and Moses fell down thunderstruck* (Q 7:143). In the Qur’anic account God denies Moses’s request to see Him directly and instead discloses Himself to the mountain. If the mountain is able to bear the self-disclosure of God, then

Moses will be permitted to see Him. But the mountain is destroyed, and Moses loses consciousness at the sight of God's self-disclosure to it. Hence, Wasiti understands the verse to mean that God only allows people to see Him according to their measure, not His own. "Wasiti said, 'His attributes and descriptions arrive at the creatures in their measures, not the entirety of the attributes, just as the self-disclosure is not the entirety of the Essence.'" ¹⁵

In one saying describing the "elect of the elect"—who are superior not only to the common people but also to the elect—he suggests that God mediates the unveiling of the Essence through the attributes for their sake. "The fourth are the elect of the elect. They are those for whom God unveils His Essence and to whom He teaches the knowledge of the His attributes. So for them, He includes the attributes in the Essence." ¹⁶

The exception to these cases seems to be Muhammad who is reported to have passed into the presence of God Himself during the Ascension (*al-miraj*). For Wasiti, all messengers bear (*ihimal*) the attributes of God, but only Muhammad was able to bear the direct disclosure of the Essence. God only bears His attributes through a person to the extent to which the person has given up their claim to bear the attributes themselves. Hence, for Wasiti, one does not bear anything of the divine attributes oneself, rather God bears His attributes through a person. I will return to this issue below where I discuss "bearing" in greater detail, but in this context Wasiti claims that God bore Himself in His entirety—in other words, His Essence—through Muhammad. In this matter, Wasiti contrasts Muhammad to Moses. As discussed above, Wasiti says that Moses did not have the capacity to bear the direct self-disclosure of God (*tajalli*), in other words, His Essence, but bore the attributes instead.

God's bounty to you is magnificent (Q 4:113). Wasiti said, "You [Muhammad] are only magnificent through direct contact [i.e., during the *miraj*], for [Muhammad] bore the Essence after bearing the attributes. Moses bore the attributes but not the Essence." ¹⁷

Wasiti explains the Prophet's ability to bear the Essence is due to God's opening his heart to be broad enough to embrace It after he had borne the attributes. Wasiti quotes the verse *The heart did not lie about what it saw*, which is understood to confirm Muhammad's account of his ascension into the presence of God (Q 53:11). But there

was disagreement over some of the elements of his account, in particular whether or not he saw God directly while in His presence; and if he saw God directly, was it with his eyes or his heart?¹⁸ It is problematic to claim that a transcendent God can be encompassed by bodily perception, even if only by a prophet's eyes. While there is support to claim that the heart is able to see the divine—such as the verse just mentioned and the Hadith *qudsi* quoted above stating that the heart of the believing servant encompasses God—the question remains as to whether or not the heart's vision of God is a direct or indirect perception. Moreover, is the Prophet's heart permitted to have a direct vision where others may only perceive indirectly through witnessing (*mushahada*) the manifest evidence (*shahid*) of God and not God Himself? Kalabadhi claims that the majority of Sufis deny that the Prophet saw God at that or any other time either with his heart or with his eyes.¹⁹ Sarraj does not comment on the general opinion among the Sufis, but gives his own view that the Prophet saw God both with his eyes and his heart.²⁰ Wasiti maintains the Prophet saw God directly, but with the eye of his heart. He may be the one about whom Kalabadhi reports, "One of them has proposed that Muhammad saw God with his heart, and not with his eyes, citing as evidence the verse, *The heart did not lie about what it saw*."²¹ From the context of the following saying and others discussed in this chapter, Wasiti understands "seeing with the heart" to mean that God opened the Prophet's heart to permit bearing the direct disclosure of His Essence.

God has opened his breast (Q 39:22). In other words, God caused the breast of the Prophet to embrace. So he bore the Essence after bearing the attributes. *The heart did not lie about what it saw* with the eye, meaning, the eye of the heart (Q 53:11).²²

7

The Attributes

In contrast to the Essence, the attributes can be known, experienced, and expressed in language to varying degrees. The attributes mediate between the Essence—God inasmuch as He is unknown and independent of creation—and the acts—everything other than God or, from another perspective, God as He is manifest and acts through existence.

The Identity between God and His Names and Attributes

As mentioned above, Wasiti opposed the Mu‘tazilite position denying the eternality of the attributes. In keeping with the positions accepted by the broader Ahl al-Hadith Movement, for Wasiti there is no difference between God and His names and attributes from the perspective of that which unifies them. Wasiti states that there is no difference between the attribute and the One to whom the attribute is ascribed, nor is there any difference between the names and attributes themselves. In other words, there is no difference between a quality of God and God Himself. The attributes are not separate from God as if a quality of who He is were in some way other than Him, nor do they make the One many.¹

Wasiti makes the same point in a saying concerning the attribute of God’s speech, that is, the Qur’an. The question of the eternality of the attributes was famously posed in terms of the eternality or createdness of the Qur’an. In opposition to the Mu‘tazilites, Wasiti describes the attribute and the One to whom the attribute is ascribed as “in conjunction with” (*qiran*) one another because it is God’s word

(*kalam*), and God is the Speaker (*mutakalim*). Wasiti's reading relies in part on making a connection between the *Qur'an* and *qiran* by deriving the word *Qur'an* from the same linguistic root as *qiran*, *q r n*—rather than *q r '* meaning “to recite”—thereby giving the name of the Book the related meaning of “being in conjunction” through its root. While this derivation is questionable linguistically, it is discussed by some lexicographers and certainly has a symbolic significance.

What do they not ponder the Qur'an? (Q 4:82) Wasiti said, “The *Qur'an* is named the *Qur'an* because it is an attribute of God. Hence it is never separate from Him, but rather is in “conjunction” (*qiran*) with Him. So it is called the *Qur'an* because the attribute is not separate from the One to whom the attribute is ascribed.”²

The Attributes as Relationships between the Essence and the Acts

From the perspective of the distinction between God and the attributes, the attributes are relationships between the Essence and the acts. They take their meaning through their relationship with creation. God ascribes attributes to Himself that designate His relationship to creation in particular ways. For instance, God ascribes to Himself the attribute of creating in respect of the created things, or forgiving in respect of those whom He forgives. The attributes cannot be understood on their own, but only through the particular contexts of their relationships between God and creation. Yet Wasiti makes it clear that while the attributes are only meaningful through their relationships with creation, those relationships and meanings flow from the divine to creation and not from creation to God.

Wasiti affirms this relationship of the attributes to creation and their determination by God in a gloss on the famous light verse:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that neither of the East nor of the West whose oil would well nigh shine, even if no fire touched it; light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will. And God strikes similitudes for men, and God has knowledge of everything (Q 24:35).

Following a typical line of interpretation identifying God's light and His guidance, Wasiti states that the "light" is the Qur'an and a relationship of guidance between God and the faithful. God takes on the ascription of light with regard to the faithful, in other words, those who recognize the light of the Qur'an. In the same saying, he quotes other verses in which God affirms His attributes through their relationships with creation. For instance, he mentions God's will, desire, mercy, and singling out, all of which require an object to be acted upon. Yet those same verses likewise affirm that God does not act according to the demands of creation but according to His desire and will alone. Although the attributes are only meaningful through their relationship with creation, those meanings flow from God to creation which receives them.

[*The oil*] is success-giving, the *fire* is directing, and the *light* is the Qur'an. *God guides to His light whomever He wills*. So, here the relationship is made to the faithful. He affirms His singling out, His mercy, and His will with His words, *He singles out for mercy whomever He wills* (Q 3:74). [His words], *He does whatever He desires* affirm desire (Q 2:253). Having affirmed desire, He says, *God is the light of the heavens and the earth*. In other words, "I illuminate My servants' hearts through their declaring Me one, and delight them in their declaring Me solitary, and look after them through bounty, mercy, singling out, will, and choosing."³

The divine attributes are ascribed to particular acts in existence, but those acts do not bring about the ascription. In glossing the verse, *God will be angry with them* (Q 5:80), Wasiti says that disobedience does not make God angry; instead His wrath is ascribed to disobedient acts. Wasiti quotes an unknown sage who says that the disobedient acts are ascribed to the attribute and governed by the attribute, but do not cause the attribute to be what it is. Created beings do not act on God that He might react to them. For God, all that He has created is the same. He does not hate anything He has created or praise Himself over a thing's beauty.

He ascribed the mark of detestable acts—that He made manifest over His creation—to His wrath and His anger without any of it leaving a trace in Him. Do you not see the words of the sage? "How does what He has made happen leave a trace on Him? How does

what He has made appear make Him wrathful?" As for Him, wrath does not come over Him as it comes over the children of Adam. He does not detest a thing which He has created and undertaken to be made manifest, even if the very thing He made manifest is detestable in itself, because there is no loss for Him in anything that He creates, just as there is no adornment for Him in anything that He creates.⁴

Wasiti shifts his point of view to look at the issue from the side of creation. In respect of His unity, God looks after His creatures in one way, but it is experienced differently by people due to their different natures. God looks after all His creatures, but the righteous experience His looking after them as sheltering and the ungodly experience His looking after them as being led astray. Consistent with Wasiti's thought, it could be argued that being led astray is an opportunity for repentance and turning toward God. But it is equally consistent to argue that the natures of the ungodly are entirely opposite to the righteous, so they experience the same attribute in an opposite way. "*My Patron (al-wali) is God Who sent down the Book* (Q 7:196). Wasiti said, 'He looks after (*tawalla*) the righteous with His protective sheltering, He looks after the ungodly with His leading astray.'" ⁵

Because the names and attributes are the relationship between God and the creatures, God can be known and approached through them. God lets people know that He is the Creator of the universe and its movement; thus through recognizing creation as the work of the Creator they in turn affirm Him. Wasiti seems to be saying, though, that the common people are limited to this manner of affirming the divine. *Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are signs for the possessors of hearts* (Q 3:190). "Wasiti said concerning this verse, 'He affirms for the common people what is created, and by it they affirm the Creator.'" ⁶

We have seen that for Wasiti the attributes are a "rayment" for creation.⁷ Part of the role of the attributes is to act as a veil between God and Creation. They maintain the distinction between God and everything other than Him, and they mediate between the Essence and existence. Moreover, existence "is" by means of God's manifestation of Himself through creation, or as Wasiti says, His "standing through" it. Nothing has existence outside of God's being, nothing stands on its own in any way on any level. So how is it that the One is both other than creation and manifest through it, and diversely so, at the same time? In the following quote, Wasiti makes the point that the attributes

keep the division between the Essence and existence in place and are responsible for the diverse manifestation of God through existence. The division between God and creation and the diverse manifestation of God through it is by means of the ranking in degrees of existence. The “ranking in degrees” (*tafadul*) are the extent to which God is manifest by means of His attributes through a particular thing, or seen from the other side, the extent to which a particular thing takes part in the various attributes. For instance, an animal has a greater degree of life than a stone, and one person may have a greater degree of compassion or wrath than another. The varying degrees delimit the variations of life in creation. One way of understanding the ranking in degrees is through Wasiti’s use of the term “to be variegated” (*talawwana*, from the word *lawn*, color) to describe the diversity in creation.⁸ Because variegation has the meaning of being many-colored, it suggests that the one light of God is refracted through the attributes into a spectrum of colors. From the side of God, the light is one, and from the side of creation the light is variegated. If the attributes did not transmute the one light into the spectrum, the ranking in degrees would collapse into the One and there would be nothing other than God. For Wasiti this is all due to God’s solicitude for His creatures and the meaning of the verse, *Whoever is guided is only guided for the sake of his soul* (Q 10:108). He states that the purpose behind the division and ranking is all for the sake of humanity to bring about guidance to God and beautiful deeds. If there were nothing other than Him, there could be no guidance to Him, no knowledge of Him, nor any relationship struck with Him.

If He removed ranking in degrees [which comes about] by the descriptions and the attributes, then the Essence would be affected by what [the ranking in degrees] makes manifest. He only makes It manifest for your sake. In other words, if He makes doing what is beautiful flow over you, that is for your sake. Hence He said, *If you do what is beautiful, you do it for the sake of your souls* (Q 17:7). If He makes guidance flow, that is for your sake. Hence He said, *Whoever is guided is only guided for the sake of his soul* (Q 10:108). If He makes thankfulness flow, that is for your sake. Hence He said, *Whoever is thankful is thankful for the sake of his soul* (Q 27:40).⁹

Nothing temporal comes to be from the Essence, and nothing eternal comes to be from existence. The Essence is aloof from time;

nothing is new to It. Wasiti says that creation is diverse and constantly changing because the attributes originate in time for creation's sake. The attributes are eternal in respect of God—as Wasiti states, the attributes are identical to the Essence—but they are temporal in respect of creation.

There is nothing like Him (Q 42:11). Wasiti said, “No essence is like His Essence, no name is like His name with regard to meaning, and no attribute is like His attribute in any respect except as to the agreement of the word. Just as an eternal attribute is not permitted to be manifest from created things, likewise it is impossible that a temporally originated attribute would become manifest from the Essence like which there is nothing. The repetition is on the part of the temporal origination of the attribute. Our Lord is far too majestic for an attribute or a name to originate in time for Him, for He has always been One through all of His attributes, He will remain forever so.”¹⁰

Without the attributes there would only be the Essence, and creation could have no reality in the face of Its reality. As mentioned earlier, the creatures do not come to know the attributes in their entirety, let alone the Essence.¹¹ The attributes make existence and knowledge of God possible because they veil God to accommodate the limited measures of human capacity. The entirety of the attributes do not have a direct relationship with creation. God only turns toward creation that which it can bear.

Wasiti said concerning His words, *Not a leaf falls but that He knows it* (Q 6:59). “In other words, that the leaf will fall but not before the time it unfurls and becomes green or after it decomposes until nothing of it is found. The attributes He conceals and those He makes manifest are one, because all of that is according to the measure of the realm of being. He speaks only in our measure and alludes only to our thinking. Were it His measure, that would be destruction.”¹²

In order for there to be a creation, God as such—the Essence—must be hidden from the creatures. God can only appear in the limited and confined measures that are designated by His attributes. He appears as Himself only to Himself. He appears to the creatures in their diverse

measures through the attributes. God as the Merciful manifests Himself differently from God as the Vengeful. Only in the Essence is God fully present and that necessarily excludes the presence of the attributes, not to mention the creatures. Hence, the creatures know the attributes in respect of their particular experiences of them as they are manifest to them both in themselves and in the world. The “reality” of the attributes—that is, the reality in respect of the Essence—is concealed. Wasiti explains this while discussing the name the Everlasting Refuge (*al-samad*). He says that the name the Everlasting Refuge makes the meaning of the attributes clear. Elsewhere he defines this name as, “The Everlasting Refuge is the one needed by the creatures, because He is their refuge, their place of rescue, and their retreat.”¹³ The Essence is beyond the creatures, but the attributes are the eternal made manifest in their measures and hence act as the creatures’ refuge, rescue, and retreat.

Making manifest the quality of being the Everlasting Refuge is to eliminate hope of beholding anything of the realities of the attributes because God makes manifest the attributes as a covering and a veil for the Essence. The quality of being the Everlasting Refuge makes the meaning of the attributes clear because they are only made manifest in the measures of creatures.¹⁴

While the attributes are a necessary veil between the Essence and existence, they are also the means to It. But they are only a means in respect of being identical to the Essence. Inasmuch as the attributes are temporal and ascribed to the creatures they cannot be a means to Him. Thus, as Wasiti states in the two sayings quoted below, one should not imagine that one’s own creaturely sincerity or love for God is a means to Him. There is no created thing that can serve as a means. There is no means to God except God Himself, and His attributes are none other than Himself. Therefore, it is God’s attributes, inasmuch as they are present in the human being, that take one to God.

Who is there that will intercede with Him except with His permission (Q 2:255). Wasiti said, “If He had made anything other than Himself a means to Himself, He would be an effect. Whoever adorns himself with sincerity towards Him, love for Him, and satisfaction with Him has sought the means through His attributes to the One to whom there is no means except through Him.”

O you who have faith, be wary of God and seek the means to Him (Q 5:35). Wasiti said, “The aforementioned means are the attributes. Whoever employs a means to Him to whom there is no means except through Him is not seeking the means to Him. Whoever uses as a means that which has no weight in [God’s] Kingdom has suffered loss.”¹⁵

The Determining Shares of the Names

A person’s share of a name is established by the particular way God is manifest through him by means of His names and attributes. As discussed above, God is “the Standing” inasmuch as He stands forth and is made present through giving existence to creation, upholding and maintaining it, and acting through it. God does not stand through creation unmediated; He stands through creation by means of His names and attributes. A person’s share of a name is another way of expressing the “ranking in degrees”; that is, the degrees to which a thing takes part in the various attributes. God stands through each thing in a different way, so each thing has differing shares of names. In keeping with a common division of the divine names into merciful and wrathful, or beautiful and majestic, Wasiti states that the spirits of people are divided into two categories, those who are determined by the names of His beauty, and those who are determined by the names of His majesty. The names or attributes are also known as the “divine character traits” (*akhlaq*). Whichever divine names or attributes dominate in people determine their character. The names of beauty—such as Generous, Merciful, and Compassionate—are generally understood to suggest nearness and caring. But in this saying, Wasiti says that God makes manifest the positive characteristics of perception, cleverness, and astuteness through cloaking the spirits in His beauty suggesting that knowledge arises from beauty. The names of majesty—such as Wrathful and Compeller—suggest distance and awe. The spirit cloaked by one of these names will inspire awe in all those who witness it in someone.

He made the spirits manifest from between His majesty and His beauty as garmented with two garments. If He had not concealed them, then everything that He made manifest in the realm of being would have prostrated before them. So whenever He cloaks one [of the spirits] in the gown of beauty, nothing is more beautiful than its being in

concealment; every perception, cleverness, and astuteness becomes manifest from it. Whenever He cloaks one in the gown of Majesty, awe falls upon him who witnesses it. Everyone who encounters it is in awe of it. There are two marks of the soundness of the spirits: the soundness of godwariness and the realization of the character traits, and walking on the path of proper conduct (*adab*).¹⁶

In a gloss on the verse, *Who remember God standing, sitting, and on their sides*, Wasiti explains that the Qur'an is alluding to the differing capacities of people in remembering God. Depending on the "share of the names" that dominate over people, they will "behold" God in differing configurations (Q 3:191). He uses the word *beholding* (*mutala'a*) in the sense of one's view of the Real, oneself, and the world. Thus, one's beholding—i.e., one's view of the Real through a name or names—defines one's experience of It, oneself, and one's world. But Wasiti says that the door of remembrance is shut fast against the one who beholds God Himself who is the "One Remembered." In other words, he does not remember God in terms of this name or that name, but in terms of the Essence Itself who comprehends all names. He does not remember God because God remembers Himself through him.

Wasiti said, "Everyone who remembers does so in the measure of his heart's beholding. Whoever beholds the kingdom of His Majesty remembers Him by that. Whoever beholds the kingdom of His Mercy remembers Him by that. Whoever beholds the kingdom of His knowledge remembers Him in accordance with that. Whoever beholds the kingdom of His anger and wrath, has a more awe-inspiring remembrance. And, whoever beholds the One Remembered, the door of remembrance is shut fast against him."¹⁷

"Realizing the character traits" is central to Wasiti's discussion of the attributes as they are manifest in the human being. The attributes as divine character traits are manifest in the human being as one's own character traits. For Wasiti, realizing the character traits means that one passes away from considering one's attributes as one's own. One realizes that, for instance, the mercy one feels and acts upon is not one's own but instead "stands" or subsists through God.

The point of reference in the Qur'an for the concept of passing away from one's own character traits and subsisting through God

is the verse, *Everything passes away (fan), but the face of your Lord subsists (yabqa)* (Q 55:26–27). By the fifth/eleventh century, passing away (*fana'*) and subsistence (*baqa'*) will become the standard terms denoting the disappearance of illusion in the vision of Reality.

In Wasiti's sayings, passing away (*fana'*) is the annihilation of the self in respect to one or more of the attributes. One experiences an attribute or attributes of God standing through one and no longer claims those attributes as one's own. One comes to realize that God has always stood through oneself. For Wasiti, the term *fana'* means a process in which one passes away from the attributes one or more at a time.

Wasiti uses the term subsistence (*baqa'*) to describe both the stage before each passing away when one is living in ignorance of the actual state of things, and the stage after one passes away and realizes God standing through oneself. He sometimes uses "standing through" (*qa'im bi*) as a synonym for *baqa'*. In other words, one either understands oneself to subsist or stand independently through oneself or realizes that one is entirely dependent and subsists or stands through God alone.

The goal of realizing the character traits is to become "complete" (*tamm*) and perfect (*kamil*). The point of reference in the Qur'an for the concept of the complete or perfect human being are the verses designating the human being as God's representative (*khalifa*) who accepted the trust (*amana*) (Q 2:30, 33:72). The Islamic intellectual tradition has commonly understood these verses to indicate that the human being possesses all God's attributes potentially within him, in contrast to all other creatures who only possess one or more of the attributes but not all. In this way, the human being encompasses all the possibilities of the cosmos within him. The goal of the human being is to actualize these attributes in a proper and harmonious balance by following the examples and guidance sent with the messengers. Many early Sufis held that one becomes complete when one has "passed away" (*fana'*) from the particular determining effect of each of the names. One subsists through each name, and yet no one specific name dominates over the others. This concept would reach its most famous expression in later Sufism in the thought of Ibn al-'Arabi as "the perfect human being" (*insan al-kamil*) who achieves "the station of no station."¹⁸

In a gloss on the Qur'anic verse, *The friends of God are those upon whom there is no fear nor do they grieve* (Q 10:62), Wasiti says that

the friends of God (i.e., “the saints”) belong to four types, each corresponding to a name of God mentioned in the verse, *He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Non-Manifest* (Q 57:3). With the exception of those who are complete, each friend of God is dominated by one of these names. The dominating name determines their station on the path. The one who is complete has held his share of each name, and has passed away from them all. He has realized all of the character traits, which is to say that he subsists through all and is dominated by none. He beholds God from an all-encompassing perspective because he holds each perspective, but no perspective holds him.

Wasiti said, “The differences between the shares of the friends of God are from four names. Each band of them stands through one of them. They are *the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Non-Manifest*. Whoever passes away from them after becoming clothed in them is completely perfect. When someone’s share is from His name *the Manifest*, he observes the wonders of His power. When someone’s share is from His name *the Non-Manifest*, he observes His lights flowing within the secret hearts. When someone’s share is from His name *the First*, his business is with what comes before. Whoever observes His name *the Last*, he is linked to what comes. Each is unveiled according to the measure of his nature and his capacity except the one whose piety the Real looks after and for whom He stands by Himself.”¹⁹

Wasiti describes *Those to whom the good has preceded from [God]* as those whose own attributes have fallen away so that only God’s attributes can be found in them (Q 21:101). He says they are “made holy” through His attributes. “To make holy” (*taqdis*) means to purify and to make or declare free of anything pertaining specifically to the created realm. Hence, when they are “made holy” they claim nothing as their own and belong to God totally. Of course, they have always belonged to God totally, but now they have come to realize it. They are present through God’s presence and not their own. In other words, they subsist through Him and so are incapable of turning away from Him.

Wasiti uses the term *fall away* (*suqut*) in the sense that a particular trait or thing passes away from a person. All the distractions of this world, the next world, and the spiritual path fall away so that one’s attention is entirely on God. In mentioning the spiritual path, he means the states that overcome the travelers. One might, for example,

be caught up in witnessing some aspect of reality with such certain knowledge that one is distracted from the Real itself, or become settled into a spiritual station one has acquired on the path and lose the desire to seek the Real beyond that station's particular boundaries.

Because those "who are made holy" cannot turn their attention away from God, one could say that they have realized the meaning of the verse, *Wherever you turn, there is the face of God* (Q 2:115). Wasiti says that the Essence guides these people. Because they subsist through all the names and do not subsist through any specific name or through themselves, they are brought directly into relationship with the Essence.

Wasiti said, "Those are a people whom God has guided. He guides them by His Essence and He makes them holy with His attributes. Thus, He makes witnessings, transitory things, and beholding recompenses fall away from them. They have no way to allude to their secret hearts and nothing to express their places. He veils them from being settled in the homesteads (*mawatin*). They are not they through themselves and they are not present in their presence through their presence."²⁰

Bearing

The subject of passing away from one's own attributes or character traits such that one subsists through God's attributes and character traits returns us to the discussion of "bearing" (*ihimal*) introduced above. Wasiti says in various contexts that no one can bear a particular attribute. Then in other sayings he describes those who bear it. The explanation of this seeming contradiction is that no one bears a name oneself, rather the name bears itself through one. This is another way of saying that as one passes away from the illusion of possessing an attribute, one realizes one subsists through it. Or from another perspective, as one stands down from one's claims to possess an attribute or a divine character trait, one realizes that the attribute or trait stands up through the person on its own.

"Bearing" is perhaps best discussed in the context of bearing the divine name "the Real" since Its all-encompassing nature brings out the difficulty of bearing any name. The name "the Real" encompasses all things because it is manifest in creation as "reality." But Wasiti

says that while It is all-encompassing, It cannot be defined by what It encompasses. One cannot determine the nature of the Real through observing It as It is manifest through the limited measures of the created things, even though the Real encompasses them.

Wasiti comments here on the key verse for the Islamic religious sciences, including Sufism, expressing God's incomparability, *There is nothing like Him* (Q 42:11). He points out that in order to describe an object one must take up a position looking down over it. But it is impossible for creation to take up this position of superiority over the Real, and so language is inadequate to express anything about It.

All of what is at issue in declaring God one (*tawhid*) comes out of this verse. There is nothing like Him, because nothing expresses the Reality without being accompanied by a defect and being curtailed by expression. The Real is not described by [a thing's] measure, because every one who describes has an overview on what is described, and It is far too majestic for creation to look over onto It.²¹

Knowledge is necessarily limited by one's particular capacity or measure. Human knowledge is too narrow and weak to apprehend the Real. The Real can be apprehended only through Its own all-encompassing apprehension.

The Real incapacitates the creatures from apprehending It by their own apprehension. It is only apprehended by Its own apprehension.²²

In a gloss on the verse *Some of them look at you; what, will you guide the blind, though they cannot see?* (Q 10:43), Wasiti says that it is impossible for any human being to bear the Real. He makes all human beings the referents in the verse. Just as people are blind, so they do not have the capacity to bear the Real. To have such a capacity would mean having a capacity equal to the Real Itself.

He does not disclose Himself to them as is worthy of Him, since that would be wrongdoing. They cannot bear the Real, for that would make them disappear. It is impossible that they should have the strength to put up with the Real as is worthy of Him, since that would be equality and conjunction.²³

Hence, Wasiti states that only the Real can bear the Real. Those who bear the Real bear It because the Real bears Itself through them. They do not bear It themselves. In all cases, God bears His own attributes or character traits through people. Wasiti says that in fact the Real blots out the souls of people through Itself. Hence people must pass away from their own claims to reality through the Real such that the Real subsists or stands through them. Then the Real bears Itself through them. Such people have passed away from lordship and servanthood, which is to say that they have passed away from all claims to possess or to be the lord of their own attributes, and they have passed away from all claims to be servants to the Lord. They have no claims because they have no selves to make claims. From this perspective, nothing of them subsists that could take on any description. Only the Real subsists and stands through Itself.

Among them are those whom the Real attracts and whom He blots out from themselves through Himself; for He says, *God blots out whatever He wills and makes firm* (Q 13:39). Whoever passes away from the Real through the Real so that the Real may stand through the Real has passed away from lordship, not to mention servanthood.²⁴

The one who has passed away through the Real and witnesses nothing other than the Real standing through him in all his moments has the certainty that nothing other than the Real stands through existence. The person senses or sees nothing other than the Real, and nothing speaks to him but the Real. Here Wasiti is making reference to the well-known Hadith *qudsi* quoted above, "I am the hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks."²⁵

Serve your Lord until certainty comes to you (Q 15:99). "In other words, do not observe other than Him in the moments until *certainty comes to you*, when you will realize certainty such that you do not sense other than the Real, you do not see other than the Real, and that no one speaks to you other than the Real."²⁶

8

The Acts

The acts are what God makes manifest, that is, all of creation. We have already seen that, for Wasiti, creation only has reality inasmuch as God stands through it. No thing and no self stands on its own independently of God. It is God who undertakes its creation, upholds and maintains its existence, takes care of it, and acts through it. Hence, nothing other than the traces of God's names and attributes can be found manifest in creation, which is precisely His acts.

The ontological situation of the acts is the foundation for Wasiti's denial of the possibility of human agency apart from God's agency. Due to God's possession of the acts, all is eternally determined by Him. Wasiti's project is to turn people away from looking at themselves, their works, and the world and to help them witness that they do not act independently of God. But in turning away from themselves toward God, Wasiti says that people's works become effective. Expressed in a slightly different way, human beings do act, but not independently of God. For Wasiti, actions are powerful when people perceive their works to be God's acts manifest through them, and powerless when people perceive their works to originate in themselves.

The Secondary Causes and the Intermediaries

Wasiti calls the acts "secondary causes" (*asbab*) and "intermediaries" (*wasat*). He uses the terms as synonyms to describe creation in respect of being the locus in which God as Cause is manifest. What might be understood as the obvious relationship between cause and effect in this world—one thing acts upon another thing and produces an effect—

is actually a relationship between intermediaries, secondary causes, and their effects. In reality, God acts through the intermediary of the created things, hence the intermediaries are also secondary causes through which the Cause brings about effects in the world.

The intermediaries have no weight or significance in themselves. They only have import through God's manifestation through them. The intermediaries are "causes (*'ilal*) only because of the weakness of the attributes." In other words, the intermediaries are causes inasmuch as the attributes become too weak to display the Cause. The intermediaries thus veil humankind from seeing the attributes and the real Cause. Wasiti uses as an example the tree through which God spoke to Moses. The tree only has significance because God uses it as an intermediary between Moses and Him by manifesting His speech through it. In this instance, the intermediary does not veil the Cause because God removed the intermediary and Moses heard God speak directly through it.

In reality, the intermediaries (*wasat*) have no weight and no import. They are causes (*'ilal*) only because of the weakness of the attributes. Thus, God made the tree an intermediary between Moses and Him. *He called him in the blessed field from a tree, O Moses* (Q 28:30). Then He removed the intermediary, secondly, for He said, *O Moses I have chosen you* (Q 7:144).¹

Given that there is no agency apart from God's agency, the secondary causes or intermediaries do not provide for one in this world nor do they determine one's recompense in the next world. Wasiti compares those who make such assumptions to the "hypocrites" mentioned in the Qur'an. In the Qur'anic worldview, the hypocrites are the worst of humanity because they pretended to be the Prophet's followers but denied him and God in their hearts. They urged that money and goods should be withheld from the Prophet's community in order to drive off the Prophet's companions. Those are they who say, "*Do not expend on them that are with God's Messenger until they scatter off*"; yet unto God belong the treasures of the heavens and of the earth, but the hypocrites do not understand (Q 63:7). The Qur'an responds to the hypocrites by letting them know that God holds the "treasures," which Wasiti understands as attributes that God manifests through the world. He alone determines the degree of their manifestation through the created things, so He alone determines provision and recompense.

Those who assume that their actions have any effect in the world do not understand.

When someone lays claim to the secondary causes (*asbab*) in this world or recompenses in the next world, his heart does not understand and he remains in the veil of his soul and of what he desires. Do you not see how the hypocrites were deceived in this world through stinginess? But they did not know that [their stinginess] would not veil [those who were with God's messenger] from success. [Do you not see] how the Real discloses them with His words, *But the hypocrites do not understand deeply* (Q 63:07).²

In the Qur'an, Moses symbolizes the ideal of righteous adherence to the divine law, and so he is sometimes used as a foil for the necessity of seeing through the law to God's intention. In Wasiti's interpretation of the famous Qur'an story, a person—who is traditionally understood to be the legendary figure Khidr—teaches Moses the inward reality of God's possession of all things (Q 18:65–82). Khidr is said to have been a private in Alexander's army who found the water of life and was taught knowledge directly from God. After that, he travels the earth guiding people at crucial junctures in their lives. Wasiti explains the Qur'an's account of how Khidr repairs a fallen wall near the city even though the people of the city refused Moses and Khidr hospitality. Moses objects, and Khidr tells Moses the hidden reason behind his actions. God had asked him to rebuild the wall to protect a treasure buried beneath it until two orphans would be old enough to retrieve it.

Wasiti's comments on this story focus on the people's refusal to feed Moses and Khidr and the necessity of seeing God as the Cause behind all things. He says that Moses saw only the intermediaries, while Khidr saw God's possession of all things. God is the one who has the power to provide or to withhold, so asking for provision from people is none other than asking from God. If one is refused, it is God who has refused it. Like Moses in the story, people experience anxiety when life does not meet their expectations. Wasiti says that if one witnesses the Cause instead of the secondary causes, such anxieties will subside.

Khidr witnessed the lights of [God's possession of His] Kingdom and Moses witnessed the intermediaries. Khidr told Moses that to

ask from people is to ask from God. Hence, Do not be angry at the prohibition, because the Prohibitor and the Giver are one. Do not witness the secondary causes, but witness the Cause and you will find rest from the anxieties of the soul.³

The Transitory Things

Wasiti describes the secondary causes and the intermediaries in other contexts as the “transitory things” (*‘arad*). This is a Qur’anic term most often found in the negative context of people who seek out the transitory things of “this world” (*dunya*) or “this life” (*hayat*) (Q 8:67, 4:94). The related words of the root *‘ r d* are also generally used in a negative sense in the Qur’an describing people who turn away (*a’rada’an*) from God and His messengers.

Wasiti states that the transitory things do not subsist for two moments. He seems to be articulating a theological principle commonly known as “Atomism,” which was well established among those of diverse theological tendencies as early as the third/ninth century. According to the interpretation of this theory supported by the Ahl al-Hadith, and then later the Ash‘aris, created things are made up of distinct atoms (*dharra* or *juz’*) that subsist through God’s direct creation in each individual moment. Any characteristics or attributes manifest in the atoms are “transitory things,” so the atoms possess nothing of their own. The theologians and philosophers used *‘arad* for the Aristotelian term accident.⁴

In reference to the verse, *Whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever has done an atom’s weight of evil will see it*, Wasiti is asked how it can be possible to “see works,” given that the “transitory things” or “accidents” do not last for more than two moments. Wasiti answers that the situation is analogous to the problem that arises in the claim that the Qur’an is said to be eternal while it is also held to be an attribute of God. Wasiti is referring to the formulae used by the Ahl al-Hadith to explain the Qur’an’s status as an attribute of God uncreated and eternal with Him in contrast to the Mu‘tazilites who held that the Qur’an was created.

The Qur’an is an attribute of God and attributes of God are not separate from Him. Because God’s attributes are not separate from Him, one can see Him manifest through all that He has determined or “written” (*maktub*) including works. All of what God determines points to Him, in the sense that everything is a sign of God when

seen as manifesting His attributes. But, inasmuch as the attributes are ascribed to the created things, they are transitory and point away from Him. One should never mistake what is transitory and passing with the Eternal.

[Someone asked,] “Since it is a principle of Islam that the transitory things are not seen and do not subsist for two moments, then how is it permitted for works to be seen?”

[Wasiti said,] “It is said that the Qur’an is the attribute of God and that the attribute is not separate from the One to whom it is attributed. But the Qur’an is seen in the earth as written, and so also are works.”⁵

Wasiti stresses that one should not assume that because God is manifest through the world, His reality accrues to the transitory things. Later, the Ash‘aris will argue that human beings accrue enough reality to make them responsible for their actions even as God commands all things. But in Wasiti’s view, nothing substantial can be posited about the transitory things, such as assuming that they are fixed in their state of existence (*wujud*)—meaning literally to be found—or that they are passing in their state of nonexistence (*‘adam*). As discussed above, the term *wujud* in the Qur’an serves as a primary point of reference for Wasiti when he says that all that is found or existent in the world is God, and the independence of the created things is a mirage. He defines nothingness (*‘adam*) as the state of a thing prior to its being found in the world.⁶ To posit that the transitory things are either fixed or passing would imply that they possess a continuity that persists from one moment to another. Although the divine is found manifest through the things, the things never possess any of it. They remain unreal.

Easy that is for Me, seeing that I created you before, when you were nothing (Q 19:9). Wasiti said, “You are with Us in the state of your existence, just as you are in the state of your nonexistence. In your nonexistence and your existence, no state occurs for Us that was not [already there], because the things are not fixed in their state of existence and are not passing away in the state of their nonexistence, for their existence and their nonexistence are the same for the Real, and nothing has fixity in the face of Him.”⁷

God's Sole Activity

For Wasiti, God directly commands the transitory things in every moment, so the things have no independent will. The transitory things act by means of God standing through them. Hence, only God truly acts. Wasiti sees God's utter autonomy and control as one of the necessary consequences of *tawhid*. By denying human autonomy he affirms God's oneness: nothing acts other than God. From his point of view, he is restating the first part of the *shahada*, "there is no god but God."

Commenting on the verse, *You do not will except as God wills* (Q 81:29), Wasiti says that God creates human beings such that they are incapable of possessing attributes. Attributes belong to things by virtue of God's manifestation through them. He stands through them with His attributes and descriptions. A creature's will and power to act is only possible through God's Will and Power. Wasiti asks how it is that one can be proud of one's obedience when it is entirely dependent on God.

He makes you helpless before your descriptions and attributes, so you do not will except by His will, you do not act except by His power, you do not obey except by His bounty, you do not disobey except by His abandoning. So what subsists for you? Why are you proud of your acts when nothing of your acts belongs to you?⁸

In its Qur'anic context, the verse, *They do not speak before Him, and they act by His command* (Q 21:27), seems only to refer to the prophets. Read alongside its surrounding verses, it seems to mean that the prophets do not deliver God's message of their own accord; they only speak and act according to God's will. Wasiti understands the verse to refer rather to all creatures, speech, and action. He reads the words, *They do not speak before Him, and they act by His command*, to mean that one's attributes and descriptions, such as the will and power to act precede one's own creation. The notion of precedence (*sabiqa*) is central to Wasiti's understanding of God's determination of all things. In short, God commands the particular measure of one's attributes prior to one's creation. It is impossible that one could be the source of the will and power to act if that will and power are prior to one's own creation. He says that God mentions this precedence in the Qur'an so everyone will know with certainty that one's words and deeds are only by God's command.

Wasiti said, “He mentions the prophets and the rest of the creatures by their attributes and descriptions before He created them so that they will be certain and they will know that *they do not precede Him in speech or action, and they work by His command* (Q 21:27).”⁹

Wasiti comments on God’s sole activity in a saying using several verses from the Qur’an as his sources. The saying concerns the transformation of the soul from being lifeless, blind, and ignorant in itself to living, seeing, and knowing through God’s attributes. Wasiti interprets the “wholesome tree” mentioned in the verse, *Do you not see how God strikes a similitude? A wholesome word is like a wholesome tree, its root is firmly fixed and its branches reach to heaven. It gives its fruit every season by its Lord’s permission* (Q 14:24–25), to be the soul made wholesome by God. In this saying he reads the “permission” to give fruit mentioned in the verse to be God’s command that determines the degree and manner in which His attributes stand through a creature and become manifest as works. Wasiti typically uses the term command (*amr*) to refer to this complete control over all creatures in every moment. The soul possesses no attributes of its own except negative attributes that cannot be ascribed to God, such as lifelessness, blindness, and ignorance. Any positive attributes manifest through the soul belong to God and are determined by His command alone.

But the soul is not given life, sight, and knowledge so that it may come to see and know the world; rather, the purpose of God’s standing through human beings is so they can come to know Him. He cites the verse, *On that day faces will be lustrous, gazing on their Lord* (Q 75:22–23) to demonstrate that God gave sight to the soul so it might see Him and know that He is the source of its attributes.

This is to say that the soul comes to know that it possesses nothing and that only God is real, acts through, and commands all things. Wasiti says the soul is “delighted” with declaring that there is nothing other than Him acting in creation. He ends the saying citing the words of the Qur’an, that *God is the Actor for whatever He desires* (Q 85:16).

It gives its fruit every season by its Lord’s permission (Q 14:25). Wasiti said, “The soul was dead, then brought to life; it was ignorant, then given knowledge; it was blind then made to see by His words, *On that day faces will be lustrous, gazing on their Lord* (Q 75:22–23). The soul was given insight on *tawhid* and it was delighted with

declaring God without second, and *God is the Actor for whatever He desires* (85:16)”¹⁰

Works and Judgment

Wasiti's claim that human beings have no agency apart from God brings us to the question of God's judgment of human acts. The language of the Qur'an insists that there will be a Last Day during which humankind will be judged for their actions in this life. If human beings have no agency apart from God, how can they be judged for what they have done? Wasiti's answer is that God's judgment is not in response to human actions. Out of His mercy, God does not accept our “destitute” acts. He says that if humanity were to rely on their own works to determine their final abode, they would all be lost.

Because human beings have no claim to their works, they will not be able to count on their good deeds in the face of God's judgment. Wasiti responds to a question asking if God permits one's works to fill the scales on the day of judgment. He answers that God makes the scales heavy or light according to His will in “beginninglessness.” The terms *beginninglessness* (*azal*) and *endinglessness* (*abad*) are used to designate “eternity” but with reference to God's relationship with creation. If God makes the scales light in beginninglessness, it was commanded to be so in eternity. But with respect to creation, the command was prior to God's bringing creation into existence.

It was said to Wasiti, “Does He permit the scales to be heavy with our works?”

He said, “If He permitted that then every one whose works are many and limpid would be safe. Rather God makes heavy the scales of whomever He wills, and He makes light the scales of whomever He wills. Do you not see that Prophet said, *The scale is in the hand of God?* He lowers some people and He raises others. He raises them in beginninglessness and He lowers others in beginninglessness prior to the existence of each engendered thing.”¹¹

If God determines all actions, it follows that He also determines good and bad deeds and rewards or “takes vengeance” on what He Himself has commanded. But Wasiti says God's “vengeance” is not reciprocal for human actions. As discussed above, nothing temporal

comes to be from the Essence, and nothing eternal comes to be from existence. None of God's eternal acts can be held to correspond with temporally originated things.

And God is exalted, the possessor of vengeance (Q 3:4). Wasiti said, "[He is] exalted beyond anyone opposing His desire. Rather, He takes vengeance on that which He makes flow to a person, thereby negating that His punishment should be reciprocal for temporally originated actions."¹²

Wasiti says that God, in His mercy, does not judge human beings according to their works. People do not act independently of God, they act inasmuch as God stands through them. Perceived as belonging to the creatures alone, human acts are destitute, no matter how beautiful they may seem to be. In commenting on the verse, *Whoever works righteousness, he does it for his own sake; whoever does what is ugly, it is against himself, and your Lord is not unjust to His servants* (Q 41:46), Wasiti says all works, inasmuch as they belong to the creatures, are performed for their own sake and never reach God. If God were to judge humanity on the basis of these works, everyone would be lost. This is true even of the best of humanity, the messengers and the prophets. God is not unjust to His creatures precisely because He does not accept these destitute works, and instead makes human works beautiful and acceptable by His own bounty alone.

Nothing of His servant's actions arrive at the Real, for whenever someone does a thing beautifully, it is for his own sake; whenever someone is thankful, it is for his own sake; whenever someone remembers, it is for his own sake. However, out of His bounty, God makes foul deeds beautiful then accepts them. Even if He were to accept those acts which were purely for Him or through which He alone was desired, all creatures would meet him in destitution, including the prophets and the messengers. Whoever observes anything of his own actions, has made manifest his own baseness.¹³

Strength in Turning toward God

Despite the fact that Wasiti clearly states again and again that human beings cannot act apart from God, he does not negate the possibility

of human agency. But human agency is dependent on viewing reality correctly. As we have seen, God is incomparable to creation, yet at the same time, similar to it because He is manifest through it by means of His attributes. This opposition is reiterated on the level of God's similarity to the creatures. God's standing through creatures indicates God's incomparability because nothing is manifest in creation other than the traces of His attributes. But, likewise, the fact that God acts through creation lends human beings a reality and agency of their own. For Wasiti, acts are efficacious when one perceives that God is the source of that agency but powerless inasmuch as one perceives oneself to be its source. Human agency is gained when one gives up one's claim to it. When people turn toward God and away from themselves and the world, the world becomes "subjected" to them. As intermediaries and secondary causes for the Cause, human actions are significant, powerful, and salvific.

It might be argued that the acts are neutral and it is people's perception of the acts that determines if those acts are destitute or powerful. If they perceive the acts originating in themselves, the acts are destitute. If they perceive the acts as originating in God, the acts are powerful. Wasiti declares that religious practices are "indecent acts," then he steps back and clarifies that provocative statement by saying that it is not the works themselves that are indecent but looking at them.

Who when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember God (Q 3:135). Wasiti said, "Obedient deeds are indecent acts. No, rather, looking at them in vanity and pride are indecent acts not acts of obedience."¹⁴

In commenting on the verse, *Say, My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying—all belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds* (Q 6:162), Wasiti says if one makes any claim to possess one's life or works, those works will be destructive. But if one observes that one's life and works belong to God, those very same works will be protecting. Relying on works is relying on nothingness, hence they are destructive. But if one relies on God, the works will be protecting as that through which He is manifest in the world. As discussed above, foul deeds become beautiful and accepted by God when one observes they belong to Him.

Say, My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying—all belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds (Q 6:162). Wasiti said, "The

explanation of this verse is in His words *Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God* (Q 10:55), whenever someone observes them from himself, they destroy him, and whenever someone quits himself of them, they protect him. How is it permissible for him who declares God one to observe an action?"¹⁵

Wasiti warns that even if one realizes that God is manifest through the world, it is still possible to become distracted by it. Concerning the verse, *When We confer blessings upon the human being, he turns* (Q 17:83), he says one may be blessed by God, but instead of turning one's attention entirely to Him, one turns one's attention to the blessing. In other words, one may understand that God is the source of the blessing, and take comfort in it and feel that it is what protects one from the Fire. But it is God, not God's blessing, who protects from the Fire. The blessing protects one from the Fire only inasmuch as He stands through the blessing. To look at the blessing is to turn away from God.

Through the blessing he turns from the Blessing Giver (Q 17:83). The most magnificent blessing is guidance, faith, direct knowledge, and sanctity, but the servant does not detach himself from looking at that in his own soul. This is turning away from the Blessing Giver because he finds his obedience sweet, or he takes pleasure in it, or he finds repose in it, or he feels he is shielded by it from the Fire.¹⁶

In the end, those who give up all claims to human agency find agency through God. Those who seek out this world lose God, and those who seek out God find Him and in finding Him, the world becomes "subjected" to them. Wasiti refers here to the Qur'anic principle that human beings are the representatives of God as discussed above. Inasmuch as people recognize that they are only the representatives through which God acts in the world, the world becomes subjected to them. In other words, as God's representatives their actions are meaningful and powerful.

God, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth (Q 14:2). Wasiti said, "All of engendered existence belongs to Him. So whoever seeks out engendered existence, the Bestower of existence passes him by. But, whoever seeks out the Real will find Him and engendered existence will be subjected to him."¹⁷

Conclusion

Wasiti's metaphysics are inextricably tied up with his ethics. Not ethics so much between one human being and another, although he certainly seemed to see honesty as his primary responsibility to others. Rather, his main concern was the ethical relationship between God and human beings. In the Islamic ethical scheme of things, everyone and everything has rights and obligations (*huquq*) over themselves and others. Getting these rights and obligations in their proper balance is the human struggle. For Wasiti, in the divine human relationship, God's rights are primary. Thus, the human being's role is to turn away from his own soul to contemplate God, grasp that the knowledge gained from that contemplation could only ever be provisional, and ultimately give up and give over to God's utter will and power. Wasiti's depiction of God's rights is uncomfortably rigorous. He never seems to blink in the face of a difficult conclusion about the nature of the divine. He tracks his every observation back to God's ultimate power and right over all that He has created. This sort of thinking has the potential to be cold and heavy-handed, yet Wasiti manages to bring out the subtlety in these relationships by focusing on God's kindness and solicitude toward His creatures. For Wasiti, God stresses His own rights only so that He may relieve human beings of their fruitless struggle for false power, false responsibility, and even false worship. If human beings were to fulfill their own obligation to God by contemplating His rights over all things, they would, then, experience God's rights as nothing other than His obligation to care for them.

To my mind, Wasiti's life and work make a useful frame to examine early Sufism in its broader historico-theological context. His "firsts"

offer illuminating views onto significant moments of transition during Sufism's rise in the formative period. As one of the first students of the great Baghdadi Sufis, Junayd and Nuri, he was a figure in the birth of Sufism itself. He was among the first to migrate east and establish the Baghdadi Sufi tradition in Khurasan. He was one of the first Sufis to compose not just a Qur'an commentary, but a commentary of great theological and metaphysical complexity. For all this, though, he was not a "central" figure to those of his day or those who remember names and pass them along in the biographical literature. He was not always well-liked and his work was easily misunderstood. Better for us. Wasiti was not so revered that his hagiographic reports have left the realm of biography entirely. Nor was he so disliked that statements against him bear the mark of exaggerated accusations of impropriety or heresy. Most of what survives gives us a sense of him as a person living in a historical moment rather than a legend. His work leaves us with a sense of ideas in negotiation in history. Thus this is the story of an individual, his concerns, his vision, and his work but told through the historico-theological context of his day.

Scholarship on Sufism tends to examine the fantastic best, but sometimes at the cost of neglecting the historical at work in Sufi phenomena. Sufism certainly encompasses the fantastic, what with impossible to corroborate claims to direct knowledge from God, extraordinary sayings expressing that knowledge, and rigorous meditative and self-reflective practices. But scholars have typically seen these phenomena in terms of a private struggle with the self before God rather than in terms of their historical, let alone social or political, context. Omid Safi comments,

The study of Islamic mysticism continues to borrow theoretical frameworks which relegate mysticism to a privatized realm, focusing on "mystical experience." Many such frameworks are the result of a post-Enlightenment, Protestant worldview in which the realms of "religion" and "mysticism" have been privatized, removed from the public sphere, and defined in opposition to "rational philosophy."¹

Wasiti's mystical experience of God's oneness was private—to be sure—but the structure and expression of his experience was conditioned by the culture of the Ahl al-Hadith. His sayings are expressed as sober reflections of his inward experience in keeping with the broad boundaries of Ahl al-Hadith theological norms. He may have been bit of a

loner, yet his “private” experience introduced Ahl al-Hadith theology to the interiorizing movements of Khurasan. When he insulted the followers of Abu ‘Uthman al-Hiri, he was not acting as a voice in the wilderness but one voice from a larger movement that would ultimately take root among the Khurasanis.

Without taking into account the broad culture of authority of the Ahl al-Hadith, some scholars have imagined the early Sufis as individualistic outsiders resisting the grasp of orthodoxy. But as we know from the work of Walid Saleh, Ahmed El Shamsy and others, there was no orthodoxy for Sufism to reconcile to or resist. Orthodoxy was constantly being claimed and negotiated by religious scholars, political players, and lay people from all directions. Ahmed El Shamsy wrote about the the breadth of input into the construction of orthodoxy:

Orthodoxy as a social phenomenon is not a “thing” but rather a process. For theological doctrines to become established as orthodox, they must find a place in the constantly changing net of social relations and institutions that constitute society. This is a two-way process: ideas can reconfigure these relations and institutions, but the social context also actively receives ideas and promotes, channels and/or suppresses them. Thus the history of orthodoxy cannot simply be a history of ideas, but a history of how, in particular situations, claims to truth came to be enshrined in social practices, such as rituals, and in institutions, such as “the community of scholars.”²

We should consider the Ahl al-Hadith as a broad culture of authority made of up a myriad of interpretive communities, Sufis included, each of whom had varying but *already* legitimate stakes in defining the boundaries of the faith. Wasiti’s life and work illustrate how the boundaries of orthodoxy were constantly moving with the debates of the day and the accidents of history. Sufism—and theology and philosophy—must be seen light of their broader intellectual and historical contexts. So much remains to be studied, not simply Sufism, Theology, and Philosophy as individual areas of interest, but as related interpretive communities.

Notes

Introduction

1. Zakariya al-Ansari (d. 916/1511), *Sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya* (n.p., n.d.); Mustafa al-‘Arusi (d. 1293/1876), *Nata’ij al-afkar al-qudsiyya fi bayan ma’ani sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya*, in the margins of *Sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya*, by Zakariya al-Ansari (n.p, n.d.), I 187; ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Munawi (d. 1032/1622), *al-Kawakib al-durriyya fi tarajim al-sada al-sufiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hamid Salih Hamdan (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Azhariyya li’l-Turath, 1994), I 608; Yusuf b. Isma‘il al-Nabhani (d. 1350/1932), *Jami’ karamat al-awliya’*, ed. Ibrahim ‘Awad, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Thaqafiya, 1991), I 175.
2. Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021), *Haqa’iq al-tafsir*, ms. British Museum, Oriental, 9433; idem. *The Minor Qur’an Commentary of Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman b. al-Husayn as-Sulami* (d. 412/1021), ed. with an introduction by Gerhard Bowering (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1997). Wasiti’s sayings are also found quoted in the early Sufi manuals and treatises such as: Abu Isma‘il ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Ansari al-Harawi (d. 481/1089), *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hayy al-Habibi (Kabul: n.p., 1961); Abu al-Qasim ‘Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri (465/1072), *al-Risalat al-qushayriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud b. al-Sharif (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1972); Abu Nasr ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Ali al-Sarraj (d. 378/988), *Kitab al-luma’ fi tasawwuf*, ed. ‘Abd al-Halim Mahmud (Egypt: Dar al-Kutub al-Hadith bi-Misr, 1970); Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*, ed. Nur al-Din Shariba (Cairo: 1987). A small but valuable source for Wasiti’s sayings about Muhammad is Sulami’s *Subtleties of the Ascension*, introduction and translation by Frederick S. Colby (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2006).
3. Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
4. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma’*, 504.
5. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 33b; Sulami, *Ziyadat*, 165:16.
6. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma’*, 428.
7. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 13.
8. Bowering, “Qur’an Commentary of Sulami,” 53.
9. On Tustari’s commentary see Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Saḥl At-Tustari*

- (d. 283/896), op.cit.; for the commentary of Ibn ‘Ata’ extracted from Sulami’s *Haqa’iq* see Paul Nwyia, *Trois oeuvres inédites de mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1973), 23–182. On the problems of the commentary of Ja‘far al-Sadiq see Bowering, “The Qur’an Commentary of al-Sulami,” 52–55. On the need for substantive work on early Sufi Qur’an commentary see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries of the Qur’an in Classical Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 68. The present work is not intended to be a study on early Sufi Qur’an commentary or even Wasiti’s commentary *qua tafsir*.
10. Rippen, “*tafsir*,” EI².
 11. Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur’an Commentary of al-Tha‘labi* (d. 427/1035) (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
 12. Bowering, “Qur’an Commentary of Sulami,” 51. Also see Sands’s comprehensive analysis of interpretive methods and themes in Sufism from the ninth to the thirteenth century, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur’an in Classical Islam*.
 13. Bowering, “Qur’an Commentary of Sulami,” 51.
 14. William Wordsworth, “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,” In *Selected Poems* (Penguin Classics, 1994), 434–35.
 15. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 169a.
 16. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 370b.
 17. For an account of the commonly held position that Sulami’s work is merely a compilation see Sands, *Sufi Commentaries of the Qur’an in Classical Islam*, 69–71. Kenneth Honerkamp argues for Sulami’s “originality” in the traditional mode in his *The Principles of the Malamatiyya: Study, Critical Edition and Translation of two texts by Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami* (d. 412/1021), Masters Thesis, University of Georgia, Athens, 1995. Marshall Hodgson describes this method of building an argument through citations of authorities in the history of Abu Ja‘far al-Tabari (d. 311/923): “Far from embodying sophisticated historical principles, Tabari’s historical method can seem, at first sight, to rule out any interpretive intent at all—to consist merely in the driest chronicling of data. Tabari rarely speaks in his own voice, except in jejune frame or transition passages. What he has to say is told purely by judicious selection, arrangement, and documentation of verbatim reports which he has received” (Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], I 352, see 352–58).
 18. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 2; Bowering, “Qur’an Commentary of Sulami,” 38.
 19. See for example, Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 338a (Q 59:13); 153b (Q 17:18).
 20. Ibn al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). Wasiti is not found in Kahlala, nor in *Kashf al-funun*.
 21. G. Le Strange. *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), 402.

22. Ibn Miskin, *Tarjuma'i aqwal-i-Wasiti*, ms. Asia Society of Bengal, no. 1273 and Massignon Textes, nos. 71–75; cf., GAL S I 357.
23. Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums, Zweiter Teil: Scheiche des Ostens* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 267–411.
24. Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985); Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'islam* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929), 72–75. In his *Recueil*, Massignon gives brief selections from the unedited texts of one hundred notable Sufis, philosophers, theologians, and literary figures. His section on Wasiti contains eleven quotations from Wasiti's commentary on the Qur'an as quoted in Baqli's *tafsir*, 'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-qur'an.
25. It should be said that it is not my intention to impugn Massignon by disagreeing with him on the identity of one man who is ultimately a peripheral figure in his four volume work on Hallaj. Marshall G. S. Hodgson remarks that Massignon's *Passion* is a masterpiece and that all of his studies "present a profound spiritual perception of what was going on, which, however, must be checked as to detail" (Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, I 409, n. 20).
26. Massignon, *Passion*, III 268. For a translation of the prologue *Ha' mim al-qidam* see *ibid.*, III 285–89. None of the biographical works mention a relationship between the two in any capacity. Nevertheless, Wasiti and Hallaj could have crossed paths somewhere. They seem to have grown up in the same city, Wasit, in which they both possibly frequented the same Hanbali school. Wasiti may have encountered Hallaj in Baghdad in Junayd's circle very early in 264/877–78, when Hallaj came to see Junayd briefly (Massignon, *Passion*, I 22). Moreover, sometime during the years 284/897–289/902 Hallaj traveled through Khurasan and stopped in Marw, where Ansari says he "came, it was said, in secret" (Massignon, *Passion*, I 169, I 26). But there is no evidence to suggest a relationship between the two of the kind that Massignon claims.
27. Massignon, *Passion*, III 268. The description of this person alone as the "enigmatic 'prophet,'" directly identifying him by name with the Prophet of Islam, is enough to give us pause as to his identification with Wasiti. Massignon is also mistaken where he suggests that Wasiti was antinomian. See for example, Massignon, *Passion*, III 230 n. 88.
28. Massignon, *Passion*, I 31, 481.
29. Massignon, *Passion*, III 267 n. 22. Massignon has so totally conflated these two people that there is no separate entry for them in the index and one can only tell who is being discussed when he gives differing dates of death. This makes it even more difficult to assess exactly who is the subject of his comments on Wasiti.

30. Massignon, *Passion*, III 267 n. 22. Their names while similar, indicate that they have different fathers. According to Massignon, citing Sarwar (1837–1890), one of the indications he uses to identify the two is that “both men” were the shaykhs of al-Duqqi, the same man who narrated the saying of Tustari from Wasiti and the story of his feeding a neighbor during Ramadan. Biographies of Duqqi do not mention either man as his shaykh (Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 464; Qushayri, *Risala*, 180; and Nicholson, “Introduction,” xvi). Moreover, Sarwar, according to Massignon, also claims that Duqqi began the Sayyari school along with Sayyari in Marw. This is unlikely as Duqqi is said to have left Baghdad for Damascus where he settled for the rest of his life. There is no available evidence to suggest any relationship with Sayyari or any presence in Marw.
31. Massignon, *Passion*, II 197.
32. Massignon, *Passion*, III 251.
33. Ruzbihan al-Baqli, *Sharh al-shathiyyat*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran, Kitabkhane-i-Turi, 1995), 455.
34. Carl Ernst notes that Baqli only mentions Jagir as the source of his information about the burning of Hallaj’s books (*Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* [Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996], 12 n. 10; cf., Baqli, *Sharh al-shathiyyat*, 455). Thus, it is possible that other information about Hallaj’s books, such as the authorship of the prologue, passed from Jagir to Baqli who then repeated it.
35. Massignon, *Passion*, III 281.
36. On the distinctions between Sufi hagiographies, treatises, and manuals see Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari* (283/896) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 19–20.
37. The following sources contain either insignificant biographical information, such as only his name and date and place of death, or information derived from the above texts, such as material relying directly on Sulami’s account and adding nothing new: Abu Nu’aym Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Isfahani (d. 430/1038), *Hilyat al-awliya’ wa tabaqat al-asfiya’*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988); Zakariya al-Ansari (d. 916/1511), *Sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya* (n.p., n.d); Mustafa al-‘Arusi (d. 1293/1876), *Nata’ij al-afkar al-qudsiyya fi bayan ma’ani sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya*, in the margins of *Sharh al-risalat al-qushayriyya*, by Zakariya al-Ansari (n.p, n.d.); Shams al-Din Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Uthman al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1347–48), *Ta’rikh al-islam wa wafayat al-mashahir wa al-a’lam*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salam Tadmuri, 44 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi, 1987); Abu al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Ali Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200–1201), *al-Muntazam fi ta’rikh al-muluk wa al-umam*, ed. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Ata’ and Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Ata’, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992); Siraj al-Din b. Hafs ‘Umar b. ‘Ali b. Ahmad

- al-Misri Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401), *Tabaqat al-awliya'*, ed. Nur al-Din Shariba (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1986); Nur al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 898/1492), *Nafahat al-uns min hadarat al-quds*, ed. Mahdi Tawhid-i-Pur (Tehran: Intisharat-i 'Ilmi, 1955); Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madarij al-salikin*, ed. Muhammad al-Fuqi, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992); Majd al-Din al-Husayn b. Nasr b. al-Ka'bi b. al-Khamis al-Mawsili al-Juhani (d. 552/1157), *Manaqib al-abrar wa-mahasin al-akhyar*, ms. M. Ahmet III, 2904 (GAL I 434, GAL S I 776); 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1032/1622), *al-Kawakib al-durriyya fi tarajim al-sada al-sufiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Hamid Salih Hamdan (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Azhariyya li'l-Turath, 1994); Yusuf b. Isma'il al-Nabhani (d. 1350/1932), *Jami' karamat al-awliya'*, ed. Ibrahim 'Awa', 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Thaqafiya, 1991); 'Abd al-Wahhab b. Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Hanafi al-Shafi'i al-Sha'rani (d. 973/1565), *al-Tabaqat al-kubra: al-musamma bi-lawaqih al-anwar fi tabaqat al-akhyar*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1988); I have not been able to obtain a copy of Ibn Miskin, *Tarjama-i-aqwal-i-Wasiti*, ms. Asia Society of Bengal, no. 1273 and Massignon *Textes*, nos. 71–75; cf., GAL S I 357.
38. Abu Nasr 'Abd Allah b. 'Ali al-Sarraj (d. 378/988), *Kitab al-luma' fi tasawwuf*, ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud (Egypt: Dar al-Kutub al-Hadith bi-Misr, 1970).
 39. Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ishaq al-Kalabadhi (d. 380/990 or 385/995), *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, trans. A. J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.
 40. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya*, ed. Nur al-Din Shariba (Cairo: Matba'at al-Madani, 1987).
 41. See the section below where I discuss him in detail.
 42. Muhammad Ibn al-Munawwar (d. 598–99/1202), *Asrar al-tawhid fi maqamat al-shaykh Abi Sa'id* (Egypt: al-Dar al-Misriyya li'l-Talif wa Tarjama, 1966), Arabic version; idem., *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness [Asrar al-Tawhid]*, trans. John O'Kane (Costa Mesa, CA and New York: Mazda Press and Bibiotheca Persica, 1992).
 43. Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri (465/1072), *al-Risala al-qushayriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud b. al-Sharif (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1972).
 44. Abu Isma'il 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Ansari al-Harawi (d. 481/1089), *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Hayy al-Habibi (Kabul: n.p., 1961). For a discussion of *tafaqat* works, including Ansari's, and their no longer extant sources see A. K. Alikberov, "Genre Tabakat in early Sufi Tradition," *Actas XVI Congreso UEAI* (Salamanca: Agencia Espanola de la Cooperacion Internacional Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas Union Européenne d'Arabisans et d'Islamisants, 1995): 23–30. Also on *tafaqat* works, see Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).

45. Bowering, *Mystical Vision of Existence*, 35.
46. W. Ivanov, "Tabaqat of Ansari in the Old Language of Herat," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1923): 1.
47. Farid al-Din Muhammad b. Ibrahim 'Attar (d. 627/1230), *Tadhkirat al-Awliya'*, ed. Muhammad Isti'lami (Tehran: Zuwwar, 1346/1967); idem, ed. R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1907). The Isti'lami edition is used throughout this text with parallel citations from Nicholson's edition in parentheses. For a discussion of 'Attar's sources see A.J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Awliya'* (London: Arkana, 1990), 13–17; Nicholson does not discuss 'Attar's sources in his edition, but he does give a table of parallel passages in Qushayri's *Risala* (see pages 27, 29–56).

Chapter 1 — Wasiti's Intellectual Heritage

1. G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1905), 39–41.
2. Massignon, *Passion*, I 60–62.
3. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 2. Makdisi writes that some five hundred schools of law disappeared by the third/ninth century, numerous schools persisted until only four remained in the eighth/fourteenth century. Also see Richard Bulliet's *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) for a discussion of the diversity of early Islamic education.
4. On Hanbalism in the early period, see Nimrod Hurvitz, *The Formation of Hanbalism: Piety into Power* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
5. Marshall G. Hodgson remarks that Sufism in this period was closely associated with the Ahl al-Hadith (Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, I 393).
6. On traditionalist social networks and prestige, see Hurvitz, *The Formation of Hanbalism*.
7. Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 7. Also see Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, 18.
8. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 212–13.
9. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 22 (Nicholson, 5); Also, Meier describes the anonymous manuscript dated to the fourth/tenth century in which he found a citation of this non-canonical Hadith in the article, "Ein wichtiger handschriftenfund zur sufik" *Oriens* 20 (1967): 60–106, see pages 82–91; cf., Fritz Meier, "Khurasan und das Ende der klassischen Sufik," *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul Tema: La Persia nel Medioevo* (Rome: 1971): 131–56. The English translation of "das Ende" can be found in

- John O'Kane's translation of Meier's work *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).
10. Aslam b. Sahl al-Razzaz also known as Bahshal (d. 292/904–05), cites Wasiti as a transmitter of one Hadith (Aslam b. Sahl al-Razzaz al-Wasiti al-Ma'ruf bi-Bahshal, *Ta'rikh wasit*, ed. Kurkis 'Awwad [Beirut: 'alam al-Kutub, 1986], 243). I cannot be certain that this citation refers to him; but the timing and location fit, thus I think it is plausible. There is a second transmission elsewhere in the text which I have concluded cannot be Wasiti (ibid., 238). On *Ta'rikh wasit* see Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), 144–45.
 11. Dhahabi, *Ta'rikh al-islam*, years 321–330, no. 590. He is also listed in Ibn al-Jawzi's *al-Muntazam* which catalogues early notable Muslims who were not necessarily scholars.
 12. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 302. Mawsili in copying over Sulami's biography of Wasiti has corrected "*usul*" with "*usul al-din*" (Mawsili, *Manaqib*).
 13. Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 349.
 14. Dhahabi, *Ta'rikh al-islam*, years 321–330, no. 590.
 15. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 440.
 16. Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 380.
 17. Dhahabi, *Ta'rikh al-islam*, years 341–350, no. 433.
 18. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Muntazam*, years 289–329, no. 2329; ibid., years 329–387, no. 2538.
 19. Montgomery Watt, "*al-Ash'ari*," *EI*².
 20. Abu Nu'aym reports two of Junayd's students heard Junayd say repeatedly that his teachings were only what is found in the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. Moreover, Junayd studied under two well-known scholars aligned with the Ahl al-Hadith. "We heard Junayd say repeatedly, 'We teach what is exactly of the Book and the Sunna.' Whoever does not memorize the Qur'an, nor write down the Hadith, nor study jurisprudence does not emulate him.' In the beginning of his affair he was studying jurisprudence according to the school of the Companions of Hadith such as Abu 'Ubayd and Abu Thawr, so he mastered the Principles (of the Islamic sciences)" (Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 255).
 21. Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, 610.
 22. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 45a.
 23. Ibid., 381b (Q 112:1).
 24. Ibid., 223b, 367b.
 25. A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 92–93.
 26. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 383b.
 27. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 164 (In my translations, Qur'an and Hadith will appear in italics when quoted in a saying). This Hadith is not indexed in Wensink.

28. Massignon, *Passion*, I 61–62.
29. Sarraj, *Kitab al-lumaʿ*, 6.
30. See Karamustafa's *Formative Period* for a discussion of Hallaj's antitraditionalism and for detailed biographies of the early figures discussed in the following pages. Likewise see John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Scarecrow Press, 2005) and Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005).

Chapter 2 — Wasiti in Iraq

1. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 302; Abu Nuʿaym, *Hilya*, X 349; Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 154; Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader *The Life, Personality, and Writings of Junayd: A Study of a Third/Ninth Century Mystic with an Edition and Translation of his Writings* (London: Trustees of the “E. J. W. Gibb Memorial” and Messrs. Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1962), 10; also see the discussion of Junayd below; also see Qushayri, *Risala*, 151; Dhahabi, *Taʾrikh al-islam*, years 321–330, no. 590; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqat al-awliyaʾ*, 148–49. There is no other evidence to show even a lay relationship with another shaykh other than Nuri and Junayd, yet it cannot be ruled out. Wasiti transmits several sayings of Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896), but it is not evidence that he frequented his circle. The transmitter of the sayings related by Wasiti, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Dawud al-Dinawari al-Duqqi (ca. d. 350/961) was well known for his reliability. He states, “I heard Abu Bakr al-Farghani relate about (*yahki ʿan*) Sahl b. ʿAbd Allah,” indicating that Wasiti did not hear the sayings directly from Tustari. For the transmissions and Sulami's entry on Duqqi see Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 210, 464. The text of Shaʿrani cites him as being a companion of al-Thawri, but this is most likely a misprint of al-Nuri (Shaʿrani, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, I 99).
2. This may explain why in the following texts he is mentioned as a companion of Junayd alone: Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 364; Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 154; Z. Ansari, *Sharh al-risala*, I 178; Munawi (d. 1032/1622), *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 608; Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam*, years 289–329, no. 2329.
3. The aforementioned letter from Junayd to Wasiti is quoted in part in Ansari's *Tabaqat* (Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 365).
4. Sarraj, *Kitab al-Lumaʿ*, 504.
5. Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders*, 4.
6. See the example of Ibn Shabban discussed below.
7. For example see Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 133–34.
8. Karamustafa, *Formative Period*, 20. Fritz Meier has shown that formal institutionalized instruction in Sufism was realized in Khurasan by the fifth/eleventh century (Meier “*das Ende*,” 131–56). See Laury Silvers, “The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the shaykh al-tarbiya and the shaykh al-taʿlim,” *Muslim World*

- 93 (2003): 69-97. See also, Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 427-42. Despite this trend, it should be noted, informal bonds between Sufis and shaykhs continue to this day.
9. Karamustafa, *Formative Period*, 22.
 10. Bowering, "Persecution and Heresy," 53-54.
 11. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, I 386-92.
 12. On the Hanbalis in general and their relationship to Sufism in particular, see H. Laoust, "Hanabila," *EI*; idem., "Ahmad b. Hanbal," *EI*².
 13. Bowering, "Persecution and Heresy," 55.
 14. Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam*, XIV 71.
 15. Karamustafa, *Formative Period*, 23.
 16. Ernst sums up the political situation at the time: "The tense political situation in Baghdad doubtless contributed to an atmosphere in which the government acted on accusations of heresy without delay. During these years the Saffari governors of Iran revolted and later tried to conquer Iraq. The Turkish garrisons had brought about anarchy in the caliphate a few years previously, so that four different caliphs ruled in the space of ten years (247/861-256/870). Then for more than a decade, the rebellion of the black slaves (the Zanj) in Basra created further turmoil. Outlying sources of revenue were unreliable, and the authority of the caliph was in question. Under such circumstances it is perhaps natural that strange religious expressions should be suspected of having revolutionary content" (Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 101). For a discussion of the various accusations of heresy and the politics of the day, see part III of Ernst's *Words of Ecstasy*.
 17. Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam*, XIV 71.
 18. Abdel-Kader, *Junayd*, 38. It should be noted that Abdel-Kader does not cite the source of this information, and therefore it could not be checked.
 19. Ibid., 40. It should be noted that Abdel-Kader does not cite the source of this information, and therefore it could not be checked.
 20. During the final trial, Shibli, Abu Muhammad Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Jurayri (d. 311/923-24), and Ibn 'Ata' al-Adami were brought before the court and asked if they agreed with Hallaj's statements. Shibli and Jurayri, Junayd's successor, denied Hallaj publicly, but Ibn 'Ata' agreed and paid with his life. On these trials see Bowering, "Persecution and Heresy"; Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*; and Massignon, *Passion*. Ernst brings to light the political questions behind Hallaj's execution as well as the division in the legal community over the trial.
 21. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, 26, 37; see also pages 26-29, 35, 37-39, 80-81, 93-95.
 22. See Sulami, *Early Sufi Women*; and Silvers, "Early Sufi Women," *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Societies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007); and my work in progress on the women in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Sifat al-safwa*, entitled *Simply*

Good Women: The Lives, Practices, and Thought of Early Pious and Sufi Women.

23. See Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*; and Silvers, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism." Selections from this article are reproduced here.
24. A. J. Arberry, "Djunayd," *EI*²; Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, 4.
25. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 155.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Abdel-Kader, *Junayd*, 10.
28. *Ibid.*, 35. This may seem like many students according to contemporary standards, but the biographical literature often relates that many Sufi shaykhs had public gatherings popular with lay people and more serious students. Wasiti is said to have had students in the thousands, an exaggeration to be sure, but nevertheless it indicates that quite a lot of people came to hear him speak. See below. One may assume that Junayd would have drawn many eager students due to the high esteem in which he was held during his own lifetime, and he limited them to the reported twenty or so.
29. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 158.
30. Abu Nasr 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Subki (d. 771/1370), *Tabaqat al-shafi'iyya al-kubra*, ed. Abd al-Fatah Hamd al-Hulw and Mahmud Muhammad al-Tanahi (Giza, Cairo: Hijr lil-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr wa al-tawzi' al-i'lan, 1992) II 274, entry no. 60.
31. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 732 (266).
32. Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 618/1221), *Kitab fawa'id al-jamal wa fawatih al-jalal*, ed. Fritz Meier (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1957), 2; Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari (d. 709/1309), *Miftah al-falah wa misbah al-arwah*, (Cairo: Maktaba Madbuli, 1993), 36; *idem.*, *The Key to Salvation*, trans. Mary Ann K. Danner (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 101. The earliest report of these rules is relatively late, and so I am hesitant to take them as a record of what Junayd required from his students. But since the rules are not out of character with other accounts of Junayd, with one exception, I am using them provisionally. The exception is passing one's free will into that of the shaykh which indicates a later composition.
33. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 166.
34. Annemarie Schimmel, "al-Nuri," *EI*².
35. Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 252.
36. For a discussion of these statements see Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 97–99.
37. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 148; see also Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 131.
38. Massignon, *Passion*, I 80.
39. The transmitter of this anecdote and the sayings of Tustari mentioned in a preceding footnote, al-Duqqi, lived for a time in Baghdad before settling in Damascus. (Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, "Introduction," in *Kitab al-luma'*

fi' l-tasawwuf of Abu Nasr 'Abdallah b. 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi, ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson [London: Luzac and Co., and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1914], xvi). Of Duqqi's travels, there are no reports of him traveling east toward Khurasan as Wasiti did after he left Baghdad. The only reports of his travels I have found are all west toward the Hijaz and as far as Egypt. Baghdad is the only city in common between the two in their reported travels and therefore is the most likely place that they could have met (Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 273).

40. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 212.
41. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 302.
42. Ibid.
43. For the transmissions see Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 210.
44. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 732 (265).
45. These dates are according to Sulami's account, but other evidence suggests that he left years earlier.

Chapter 3 — Wasiti in Khurasan

1. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 363.
2. Le Strange, *Lands*, maps II, V, VIII. All told, the most direct route from Baghdad in Iraq to Marw in present-day Turkmenistan would have been more than one thousand miles long and would have taken more than four months with short stays along the road.
3. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 732 (266).
4. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 506.
5. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 154.
6. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 363–64.
7. Qushayri, *Risala*, 204–205; see also, Z. Ansari, *Sharh Risala*, I 187; and Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 608.
8. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 363–64.
9. Gerhard Bowering, "The Qur'an Commentary of al-Sulami," 44, 50, 53.
10. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 170.
11. See Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) for a discussion of the disputes between the schools and scholars; and Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
12. Karamustafa, *Formative Period*, 60; also see Christopher Melchert's comprehensive article "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur," *Iran* 39 (2001): 237–247. I take Melchert's analysis by way of Karamustafa's interpretive judgment.
13. On the role of Sufis in the intellectual establishment in Naysabur see Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in

- Medieval Nishapur," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 427–42; and Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*; and Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) for his discussion on the spread of the Islamic sciences from Khurasan to the West.
14. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*; Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
 15. Silvers, "Teaching Relationship," 69.
 16. Karamustafa, *Formative Period*, 117.
 17. For details concerning the history of this period see "Marw," *EI*²; and C. E. Bosworth's various articles on the subject in *EI*², "Khurasan," "Tahirids," "Samanids," "Saffarids"; also see his chapters, "The Tahirids and Saffarids" and "The Samanids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). For information on the greater history of Marw—said to be the largest city in the world at one time—and Unesco's efforts to preserve what remains of the old city see University College of London's website devoted to their archaeological work there <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/merv/index2.htm> and the Unesco site <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/886>. The University College of London's site contains spectacular rotating images of the remains of the city.
 18. Shams al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Maqdisi (d. ca. 380/990), *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, trans. Basil Anthony Collins (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994), 273–74.
 19. During this period Marw was at the beginning of a period of prosperity in which the local aristocracies supported by feudal arrangements had ended and the new wealth and power was found in the hands of prosperous local merchants and officials ("Marw," *EI*²). It would expand such that it would be claimed to be the "largest city in the world." al-Istakhri, c.f. <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/merv/Merv/index.htm>>
 20. Maqdisi, *Best Divisions*, 273.
 21. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 735 (268); "Marw," *EI*².
 22. Maqdisi, *Best Divisions*, 273–74.
 23. Le Strange, *Lands*, 400–401.
 24. Ibid., 399; and Maqdisi, *Best Divisions*, 273–74.
 25. Despite their later importance in the region, the Shafi'is were not yet in control of most the mosques in Khurasan at this time and are not mentioned in the sources as having any presence in Marw.
 26. See Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, 38–43. where he discusses what he calls the "bandwagon" years (175/791 to 250/864) when the greatest number of conversions to Islam took place.

27. Maqdisi, *Best Divisions*, 273–74. Although Maqdisi often had a bad word to say about the inhabitants of many cities, his assessment of the people of Marw is corroborated by the eighth/fourteenth-century geographer Hamd Allah Mustawfi. He writes that the people of Marw were “much given to fighting” (Hamd Allah Mustawfi, *Nuzhat al-qulub*, trans. G. Le Strange [Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1919; reprint, Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1993], 154).
 28. ‘Attar, *Tadhkira*, 732 (266).
 29. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 363.
 30. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 154.
 31. Z. Ansari, *Sharh al-risala*, I 178.
 32. This text is no longer extant, see GAS I 666. Also see Alikberov, “Genre Tabakat,” 25. Fuat Sezgin remarks that Ibn Shadhan’s *Hikayat al-Sufiyya* appears to have been a major source for Sulami (GAS I 666).
 33. See the index in Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 544–45. By far the largest grouping of his transmissions concern the companions of Junayd. Alikberov also remarks on his spiritual affiliation with Junayd (Alikberov, “Genre Tabakat,” 25).
 34. Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder*, II 273.
 35. Neither Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hatim al-Darabajardi nor Abu Ahmad b. al-Hasnuwayyi can be connected to Wasiti as companions. I can find no information on Darabajardi other than linking his *nisba* to the city of Darabajird (‘Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, *al-Lubab fi tahdhib al-ansab* [Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1972], I 495). There is a Hasnuwayyi listed in *Ta’rikh islam* and *al-Lubab* (Dhahabi, *Ta’rikh al-islam*, XXVII 580). His date of death is listed as 375 and 395 respectively; the later death date is just possible if he were ten to fifteen years old when he heard Wasiti speak and he lived at least to ninety. But there is no direct evidence linking them. The entry in *al-Lubab* is as follows: “Abu Ahmad Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Hasnuwayh al-Hasnuwayyi. He was erudite, he heard from Abu Bakr Khuzima. He was among the greatest of the Sufi shaykhs. He died in 395” (Ibn al-Athir, *al-Lubab*, I 366–67). The editor of Sulami’s *Tabaqat* cites this text from *al-Lubab* in a footnote identifying him (Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 306).
- The only other possible companion is al-Duqqi, who seems to have known him only in Baghdad. He relates the Tustari citation from Wasiti and the Ramadan story. Nicholson writes that he spent some time in Baghdad before moving to Damascus, and so he may have encountered Wasiti there. Sulami writes that he frequented many shaykhs, but I have not found Wasiti mentioned anywhere as one of his teachers (Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 464; Qushayri, *Risala*, 180; and Nicholson, “Introduction,” xvi).
36. With regard to Sayyari, there is no positive evidence connecting the other

transmitters to him as devoted companions, with the exception of Sayyari's nephew 'Abd al-Wahid b. 'Ali al-Nisaburi, who was known to be his student. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Hadrami al-Faqih transmits from Sayyari and Muhammad Ibn Musa transmits from Sayyari's nephew, but these transmissions do not constitute evidence of devoted attachment to Sayyari or his nephew. I can find no other entry for a Hadrami other than a story told in the *Hilya*, which seems highly unlikely for a man with the appellation al-Faqih (the Jurist), as it describes a recluse who was silent for twenty years (Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, XI 345). Searching for Muhammad Ibn Musa is impossible given his short name. He transmits a number of sayings to Abu Nu'aym and in one of these Abu Nu'aym names him as al-Najidi (Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 236; for his other transmissions see 237, 238, 240, 247, 251, 348, 354, 358). But of course this does not preclude an error by the editor in preparing the index. Only one other entry seems remotely possible, but the identification cannot be certain. In *Siyar a'lam al-nubala'* there is al-Shaykh al-Thiqqat al-Ma'mun, Abu Sa'id Muhammad b. Musa b. al-Fadl b. Shadhan, al-Sayrafi b. Abu 'Amr al-Naysaburi who died in 421. Many well-known scholars transmitted from him, and the timing makes it possible for them to have known each other (Dhahabi, *Siyar a'lam*, XVII 350–51).

37. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 364.
38. Ibid., 364–65.
39. Ibid., 304.
40. Ibid., 303.
41. Ibid., 363. The Marw of this period, known as Sultan Qal'a, was destroyed by the Mongols in 618/1221 ("Marw," EI²). I understand that there are several tombs in the region that locals presently consider to be Wasiti's grave (Alan Godlas, personal correspondence, 2002).
42. Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 380. On Sayyari see Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder*, II 413–50.
43. Qushayri, *Risala*, 35.
44. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 251.
45. Ibid., 158.
46. Ibid., 251.
47. Hujwiri's account of the Sayyari's doctrine on union (*jam'*) and separation (*tafriqa*) is so intermixed with his own interpretation and the positions of other Sufis on the subject it is not an ideal source from which to judge the relationship between Wasiti and Sayyari's thought (Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 251–60).
48. Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder*, II 272. 'Abd al-Wahid transmits some of Wasiti's sayings to Sulami from Sayyari and is the main transmitter of Sayyari's sayings to him (Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 304–305, 440–47).
49. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 303.
50. Sulami, *Dhikr al-Niswa*, 124; cf., idem., *Early Sufi Women*, 258.

51. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 251; cf., Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder*, II 273. It is not clear if it is Hujwiri who names the group the Sayyaris or if they called themselves by that name.

Chapter 4 — Wasiti and Sufi Discourse

1. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 506; Abu Nu'aym, *Hilya*, X 349.
2. Z. Ansari, *Sharh al-risala*, I 187; Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 608; Nabhani, *Jami' karamat*, I 175.
3. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 506.
4. Qushayri, *Risala*, 603; *The Principles of Sufism*, trans. B. R. Von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990), 319.
5. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 428.
6. Ruzbihan al-Baqli, *Sharh al-shathiyyat*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran: Kitabkhane-i-Turi, 1995), chs. 163–76; idem., *Mantiq al-asrar bi-bayan al-anwar*, al-Maktabat al-Radawiyya, Mashhad, ms. 156, GAL SI 735.
7. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 732 (265).
8. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 453; Ernst, "Shath," EI².
9. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 453.
10. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 48.
11. Ibid., 26; Sulami, *Haqa' iq*, 111a; ibid., 287a.
12. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 453.
13. Ibid., 506.
14. Some two hundred years after Sarraj the definition of *shath* broadened such that Ruzbihan included Wasiti in his commentary *Sharh al-shathiyyat*.
15. For some extreme examples of this phenomenon, which, in most cases, can be described as examples of *shath*, see Ernst's discussion of criticisms and boasting in *Words of Ecstasy in Islam* (Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 37–39).
16. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York and London: Routledge, 1982), 43–44.
17. See Sarraj's introduction where he outlines the purpose of his defense and how he will go about it (Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 18–21).
18. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 509.
19. Bowering, "Persecution and Heresy," 53–54.
20. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 509. Sarraj does not specify who are the "people of contention" who used Wasiti's language against the Sufis. Certainly later, Wasiti aroused the ire of the Hanbali Ibn al-Jawzi, who includes him among those who possess wrong beliefs. Sarraj's attempt to clarify some of Wasiti's statements was lost on Ibn al-Jawzi, who quotes Wasiti directly from Sarraj in order to condemn him (Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi [d. 597/1200–1201], *Talbis iblis* [Cairo: Maktaba Usama al-Islamiyya, n.d.], 165).

21. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 506.
22. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 365 (Q 4:63).
23. Ibid., 363.
24. Baqli, *Sharh al-shathiyat*, 215; cf., Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 298.
25. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 303.
26. Sha'rani, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra*, I 100.
27. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 243-44.
28. Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 608.
29. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 35a-36b (Q 3:175).
30. Ansari, *Tabaqat*, 244.
31. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 44a (Q 4:63).
32. Sulami, *Ziyadat*, 65:16.
33. Ibid., 303. See also the similar saying, "Fear and hope are two reins on the souls so that they are not left to their own frivolity" (Qushayri, *Risala*, 349; idem., *The Principles of Sufism*, 59).
34. Qushayri, *Risala*, 346, 349; Note the similar saying, "When the Real discloses Itself to the secret hearts, fear and hope go away" (Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 609).
35. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 734 (268).
36. Ibn al-Munawwar, *Asrar al-tawhid*, 295; idem., *Secrets*, 395; see also, 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 733 (266-67).
37. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 40a.
38. Ibid., 28a.
39. Sulami, *Tabaqat*, 304.
40. On this subject, see Andrae, *Garden of Myrtles*, 36-40.
41. Qushayri, *Risala*, 152.
42. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 68.
43. 'Attar, *Tadhkira*, 733 (266).
44. Munawi, *al-Kawakib al-durriyya*, I 611.
45. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 192b.
46. Ibid., 90b-91a.
47. Ibid., 348b.
48. Ibid., 14b.
49. Ibid., 34b-35a.
50. Ibid., 36b.

Chapter 5 — Theological Principles

1. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 53.
2. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 159a.
3. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 428.
4. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 288b.
5. Ibid., 287a.
6. Ibid., 328b.

7. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 25–27; Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 544–46; Gimaret, “Ru'yat Allah,” *EI*².
8. On Sufi discussions of the divine-human relationship with respect to the matter of love, see J. E. B. Lumbard, “From Hubb to 'Ishq: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 345–85.
9. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 77a (Ibn Maja, Iqama, 152, with a slightly different wording).
10. *Ibid.*, 59a.
11. *Ibid.*, 160b. Wasiti uses the term *haba'* meaning, for him, dust with no reality of its own
12. *Ibid.*, 59a.
13. *Ibid.*, 207b–208a.
14. Gardet, “'Illa,” *EI*².
15. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 52a (Q 5:23), 227a (Q 27:74) also see 211b (Q 25:58).
16. See for example *ibid.*, 111a–b, 198a, 275a.
17. Sulami, *Ziyadat*, 165:16.
18. Josef Van Ess, “Tashbih wa-Tanzih,” *EI*².
19. Montgomery Watt, “al-Ash'ari,” *EI*²; For a succinct discussion on this topic see Hamza Yusuf's introduction to *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi* (Berkeley, CA: Zaytuna Press, 2007). It should be noted that Wasiti's notion of God is utterly unlike that of the Jahmiyya who also emphasized God's utter control over creation. Their respective notions of pre-destination are based on different principles concerning the nature of the divine attributes. The Jahmiyya denied the eternality of the attributes with the exception of God's will and power. For them, the attributes were metaphors. Further they denied any reality or agency to creation. Whereas we see here that Wasiti takes the Ahl al-Hadith position on the nature of the attributes. While he denies creation any independent reality or agency, he nonetheless affirms it if understood through God's reality and agency. His position on predestination will be addressed in full in the chapter on “Acts.” For a brief overview of the Jahmiyya see Tilman Nagel's *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers), 1999.
20. See Robert Wisnovsky, “One Aspect of the Avicennan Turn in Sunni Theology,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65–100; and Wisnovsky's book *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
21. Wisnovsky, “Avicennan Turn,” 72.
22. “In” would suggest incarnation (*hulul*). On “flow” see for example Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 298b (Q 46:35). The use of the term *flow* and any relationship to Greek philosophical language present in the formative period still needs to be investigated.
23. Bukhari, *Riqaq*, 38; cf., Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 253.

24. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 28a. Brief selections from Part Two have been published in my article "The Presence of Theoretical Sufism in the Early Period," *Studia Islamica* Fasc 98 (2007).

Chapter 6 — God's Essence

1. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 381b.
2. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 142a (Q 15:75); Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 290.
3. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 382b.
4. Ibid., 225b.
5. See for example Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 101; Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 202–205; and Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 549–50.
6. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, 25–26.
7. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 101a.
8. "Do you not see your Lord how He has stretched out the shadow? Wasiti said, 'He affirms what is created to the common people, so by that they affirm the Creator. He affirms the Creator to the elect, so by that they affirm what is created. The address of the common people are His words, *Do they not look at the camels, [how they are created?]*, and His words, *Do they not look at the heaven above them, [how We built it...?]*. The address of the elect are His words, *Do you not see that God drives on the clouds* (Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 210b [Q 25:45, 88:17, 50:6, 24:43]; see also *ibid.*, 36b [Q 3:190]).
9. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 313b.
10. Ibid., 53b.
11. See representative quotations in Hujwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 389.
12. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 25–27; Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 544–46.
13. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 545; Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 25.
14. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 77a.
15. Ibid., 132a–b (Q 13:28).
16. Ibid., 46a.
17. See B. Schrieke and J. Horovitz, Mi'radj, *EP*².
18. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 26–27.
19. Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma'*, 546.
20. Kalabadhi, *Doctrine of the Sufis*, 27; with my changes in the translation of the Qur'anic verse.
21. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 274b–275a.

Chapter 7 — The Attributes

1. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 381b (Q 112:1).
2. Ibid., 45a.
3. Ibid., 205a.

4. Ibid., 54b-55a.
5. Ibid., 81b.
6. Ibid., 36b.
7. Ibid., 147a.
8. Ibid., 129a (Q 13:4), 73a (Q 7:58).
9. Ibid., 104b-105a.
10. Ibid., 288a.
11. Ibid., 77a (Q 7:143).
12. Ibid., 62a.
13. Sulami, *Ziyadat*, 503:6 (Q 112: 3-4). Wasiti further makes this point by interpreting the “common word” between believers of different religions as their common servanthood in respect of God being their Everlasting Refuge. *Say, People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God* (Q 3:64). “Wasiti said, [The common word] makes manifest servanthood at the moment of observing the Everlasting Refuge” (Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 27b).
14. Ibid., 503:7 (Q 112:3-4), 331:8.
15. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 19a, 52b.
16. Ibid., 291b (Q 42:52).
17. Ibid., 37a.
18. “Insan al-kamil,” *EI*, *EI*².
19. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 102b; see also 329a (Q 57:3), 328b (Q 57:3).
20. Ibid., 189a.
21. Ibid., 288a.
22. Ibid., 200b (Q 23:16).
23. Ibid., 101b.
24. Ibid., 133b.
25. Bukhari, *Riqaq*, 38.
26. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 143b.

Chapter 8 — The Acts

1. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 231a.
2. Ibid., 341b.
3. Ibid., 166b (Q 18:77).
4. L. Gardet, “*Djuz’*” *EI*². See Richard M. Frank’s extensive work on the subject *Beings and Their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu’tazila in the Classical Period* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978).
5. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 378a (Q 99:7-8).
6. Wasiti uses the term ‘*adam*’ in only one other passage I am aware of and it specifically refers to *before* being found in creation (Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 310a).
7. Sulami, *Haqa’iq*, 169a (Q 19:9).

8. Ibid., 363a.
9. Ibid., 184a.
10. Ibid., 136b.
11. Ibid., 378b (Q 101:6-7); the hadith is found with a slightly different wording in the Hadith collections (e.g., Bukhari, *tafsir*, 111; Muslim, Iman, 293, 295; Ibn Maja, Muqaddima, 13; Ibn Hanbal, IV, 395, 401, 405; cf., Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 173, 401).
12. Sulami, *Haqa'iq*, 22b.
13. Ibid., 296a.
14. Ibid., 33b.
15. Ibid., 67b. Note that Wasiti unpacks one verse with another here.
16. Ibid., 157b.
17. Ibid., 134b.

Conclusion

1. Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Pre-Modern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 127.
2. El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," 97.

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