Introduction

Islam has a solid intellectual tradition that has debated Islamic doctrines, the nature of the Sharīʿa and its applicability to society, the concepts of belief (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufr*), thorny questions about the Resurrection and the existence of heaven and hell, and whether one's piety should be based on the fear of God or on passionate love for God. However, over the past fifty years, in scholarly publications and in public debates, discourse on Islamic piety has focused mainly on normative and orthodox Islamic thinking, on correct behaviour according to a precise interpretation of the Sharia. This perspective has been so dominant that some have asked whether more fundamental criticism of Islamic tenets is even possible within Islam. Such views on Islam are simplistic, incorrect, and often politically motivated. From the ninth century onwards, there have been highly influential movements rooted in asceticism that have raised fundamental issues, questioned even the holiest doctrines, and criticised the Sharia. For instance, why did God create Satan if He wanted mankind to be saved? How can practices such as public prayer and fasting be obligatory if true piety is necessarily inward? Should reason be used to gauge Islamic principles and doctrines or should the believer strictly focus on the Quran and the prophetic tradition? Keyvani is right when he writes, in this volume: "Less than two centuries after its establishment, Islam faced numerous forms of opposition from various areas of the lands it had swept through, each with its own historical-cultural background, promoting its specific ideological, religious or political orientations. Over time, the increasing opposition led to factional rivalry, discordance and even physically bloody encounters among people who all professed Islam. The result was the creation of a good number of opposing denominations, and so-called heretical coteries and deviant orders, some minor and short-lived and others relatively powerful and persistent."

These denominations include influential non-conformist movements such as the Karrāmiyya and Malāmatiyya, which go back to tenth century Persia and impressed their influence on Islam in the Persianate world in subsequent centuries. These renunciant movements were partly a reaction to the worldly power and economic gains that Muslim Arabs experienced following the early Islamic conquests of the Persian and Byzantine empires. Melchert suggests using the term 'renunciation' to translate the term *zuhd*, which is often rendered as 'asceticism.' He argues that 'renunciation' more precisely captures the meaning of *zuhd*, indicating "*unconcern*, mainly with the world." The early renunciants revolted against luxurious lifestyles and promoted practices such as fasting, self-flagellation,

withdrawal from society, celibacy, and dressing in coarse woollen cloaks. The renunciant movement was a demonstrative rejection of what they considered to be a corrupted society, and a way of protecting their own piety from the danger of hypocrisy, by attracting blame (*malāma*). Convinced that blame had a positive and purifying effect on one's piety, they concealed their religiosity. From the twelfth century onwards, these ideas were perpetuated by several antinomian groups such as the *qalandar*s, who spread over the area from India to Anatolia and Egypt.

This book deals with nonconformist aspects of Sufism, and other antinomian movements in the Persianate cultural tradition. It ranges from gender and the role of women in mystical Islam, to doctrinal concepts such as belief and unbelief, the notion of metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) in the works of the mystic Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, the question of genuine piety, and the influential role of the Persian sage ʿUmar Khayyām in religious discussions on piety in twelfth century Persia, and his reception history. The book also deals with the religious practices associated with antinomian tenets and how Western scholars connected with such traditions.

The content of the book

This book introduces a critical face of Islam which has been partly overlooked in recent decades. The chapters cross several core subjects in Islamic intellectual tradition such as gender, heresy, piety and impiety in Sufism. In several of these chapters, the authors rely on Persian poetry as a means of critical reflection, theorising themes such as belief and unbelief, and centre and periphery.

A central topic which has been addressed in scholarship from the twentieth century onwards is the place and role of women in Sufism. In recent years, studies on women in Sufism have highlighted women's lack of equality in Sufi literature. Lloyd Ridgeon examines the notion of gender in Sufism from the eleventh to thirteenth century, first in Sufi manuals and hagiographies and then in three case-studies, showing how women feature in the works of three mystics. These are Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī (d. 1111), Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 1238) and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273). Ridgeon's approach is novel as it seeks to understand how these authors discussed women's piety and participation in Sufi activities, and whether their participation would violate the Sharia. As Ridgeon states, the chapter "argues that male Persian Sufis did not trespass "beyond shariah," but they embraced an interpretation of *sharīʿa* that endorsed the complementarity of the sexes, although the idealised version of women offered chances of "spiritual" equality with men."

It can be argued that Islam cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of its "deviant" movements such as the *qalandari*, anarchist or libertine dervishes, whose practices deliberately violated the Sharia to condemn the behaviour of the

representatives of the religious establishment in society. The *qalandariyya* is a Sufi antinomian movement, combining the ascetic principles of early Islam with shocking forms of social deviance in protest against urban society, the conventions of mainstream religion, institutionalised Sufism, and the political establishment. The *qalandar*s flouted Islamic rituals such as pilgrimage, prayer and fasting, while praising Christianity, Zoroastrianism, wine-drinking and homo-erotic love. To provoke people, they shaved their beards, eyebrows and heads, had genital piercings and appeared (half-)naked in public. They were deviant not because they were disbelievers, but because they believed that this was the way to attain unity with God. They were condemned as heretics, but at the same time they had an enormous appeal in particular among ordinary people and intellectuals and even for some political actors. Some of the extremist mystic movements attained political power themselves. The legacy of the deviant movements is still affecting Islamic thinking and has shaped Islam as it is lived today.

Three chapters examine the qalandar. Zhinia Noorian's excellent contribution deals with an important verse treatise, entitled *Qalandar-nāma* by Khatīb-i Fārsī ("Persian preacher"). This hagiography introduces the life and philosophy of Jamāl al-Dīn Sāvī (d. about 1232/3), who is considered the founder of the qalandariyya movement. Noorian examines concepts such as "renunciation" (*tajarrud*), "spiritual poverty" (*faqr*) and piety (*pārsā'ī*). Although Sāvī appears as an influential figure in various sources dealing with the qalandariyya, information about him and his mystical philosophy is meagre. The *Qalandar-nāma* was composed long after Sāvī's death. In addition to hagiographical information, the *Qalandar-nāma* imparts information about the *qalandarī* ritual of shaving the facial hair. This tradition is called *chahār żarb* or "four blows," alluding to shaving the skull, eyebrows, beard and the moustache. Qalandari mystics usually removed all their facial hair as a contrast to the beard valued by representatives of the religious establishment as a sign of piety. As Noorian observes, "With the close reading of this hagiographical text and situating it within its historical, religious and political context, this study sheds light on the activities of Sāvī as an Iranian leader in shaping the intellectual-spiritual history of non-conformity in Islamic mysticism."

Keyvani provides a systematic analysis of the concept of qalandar in the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ, the grand lyrical poet of Persia, whose *Dīvān* ("collected poetry"), as Shahab Ahmed says, has been central "to the constitution of a paradigm of identity for Muslims in the world" from the Balkans to the Bengal, being "the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely-invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history—a book that came to be regarded as configuring and exemplifying ideals of self-conception and modes and mechanisms of self-expression in the largest part of the Islamic world for half-a-millennium … ."[2] It is remarkable how often Ḥāfiẓ refers

to qalandars and various libertine hierarchies in his poetry, to criticise the sham piety of the religious establishment, questioning their religiosity and revealing their hypocrisy. Ḥāfiẓ creates a system of profane and religious ethics, using the contrast between the antinomian conduct of the qalandars and the hypocritical behaviour of religious representatives to define true piety. Keyvani's contribution is indispensable in understanding concepts such as piety and heresy in the Islamic world. It examines how Ḥāfiẓ's poetry introduced a new type of piety, decentring the religiosity of the representatives of the Islamic establishment in society.

A prominent figure to whom various qalandari and nonconformist ideas, and even blasphemous principles, are knitted is the Persian mathematician and astronomer ʿUmar Khayyām. From the twelfth century, various theologically thorny issues were integrated in the quatrains attributed to this sage. Seyed-Gohrab examines the uneasy relationships between Khayyām's provocative statements about the Creator, creation, death and the Hereafter, and the religious beliefs of several Persian scholars. This chapter also elaborates on the scholars' strategies to interpret Khayyāmic themes and motifs such as Bacchanalia to make them acceptable for a Muslim audience. It is fascinating to see that after eight centuries, Khayyām's unorthodox ideas are still used to discuss various aspects of piety and heresy in modern Iranian society.[3]

Seyed-Gohrab's contribution also deals with the theme of qalandari antinomianism. In the concluding part of the chapter, he briefly discusses the authenticity of several quatrains attributed to Khayyām in early sources such as the thirteenth-century collection *Nuzhat al-majālis* by Jamāl Khalīl Shirvānī. One quatrain in this collection mentions the concept of qalandar. Khayyām's earliest poems exhibited hostility toward religious beliefs, questioning the futility of creation, denying the existence of the Hereafter, and emphasising doubt rather than certainty in faith. The attribution of such quatrains to Khayyām reflects a growing antinomian genre in Persian poetry, a trend that emerged as early as the end of the eleventh century.

ʿUmar Khayyām's ideas were regarded by scholars such as Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Qifṭī (1172–1248) as serpents for the Sharia. Quatrains attributed to Khayyām are cited in theological and mystical texts to condemn him. An early example is in an exegesis of the Quran, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb,* by Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Rāzī (d. 1209), who cites one of Khayyām's quatrains to criticise his ideas about the concept of *maʿād* or "the place of the soul's return." Similarly, the mystic theoretician Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, better known as Dāya (1177–1256) cites two of Khayyām's quatrains to condemn him as an atheist and material philosopher.[4] In his *Ilāhī-nāma*, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d.c. 1221) recounts an anecdote about Khayyām in his grave. Such instances show the impact of Khayyām's ideas and how, by citing such quatrains, scholars of religion discussed key Islamic concepts such as piety, resurrection, the hereafter, and the existence of heaven and hell.

Arash Ghajarjazi's chapter is an excellent example of how Persian religious intellectuals discussed their ideas through quatrains. His chapter deals with a dispute elaborated in two Persian quatrains in a manuscript from 644/1256 that is preserved in the Shahīd ʿAlī Pashā Library in Istanbul. These quatrains deal with the use of reason, as opposed to tradition, to understand doctrinal religious issues. This is an allusion to the animosity between philosophers, who preferred discursive reasoning to explain religious doctrines, and those whose approach to religious principles was theological and based on prophetic tradition. The two approaches are indicated in each poem by a different term: *rāy* or "opinion," and "reason," and *khabar* or "tradition," in both its general sense and as a term for the prophetic traditions, i.e., *ḥadīth*.

Khayyām's legacy extends to Europe and the present day. Amir Theilhaber's chapter studies how Khayyām's quatrains (*rubāʿiyyāt*) were canonised in the German-speaking world through the translation of Friedrich Rosen (1856–1935), *Die Sinnsprüche Omars des Zeltmachers*. Rosen was a diplomat and scholar of Oriental studies, who had an impact on Khayyām studies in Europe. Theilhaber examines Rosen's life and the role Khayyām played in his intellectual and religious life. One of the many interesting topics that Theilhaber examines is how Rosen sees in Khayyām the ideas of a freethinker openly challenging Islamic religious orthodoxy, seeing in the Persian scientist an "Aryan-Indo-Germanic spirit that seeks cognisance, in a cultural war against the dogma of Semitic 'Arabianness.'" Theilhaber demonstrates how such perverse antisemitic ideas were rightly refuted by scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher. The discussion shows how scholars in modern times treated nonconformist mediaeval ideas to explain the rise and popularity of antinomian movements. Aside from such original insights, Theilhaber's chapter elaborates upon Rosen's collaboration with Persian intellectuals such as Taqī Arānī in Berlin.

Colin Imber examines how the notions of faith and unbelief were treated in the Ottoman empire. Here he studies how an Ottoman sultan, as the promulgator of the sharīʿa, had to appoint a religious divine from the hierarchy of the ʿulamā to determine heretic and pious behaviour. In this chapter, we see how apostasy laws shaped the ʿulamā's understanding of heresy and heretics and how they distinguished between the heretic and the pious. External behaviour and words determine whether someone was a heretic; inner beliefs are legally irrelevant. Using historical cases and a range of arguments from original sources, Imber demonstrates how an apostate was judged on the basis of external behaviour. Accusations of apostasy had far-reaching consequences as the penalty was death: the question was whether an apostate should be offered a chance to repent. Imber also shows that there were other definitions, by referring to al-Taftazānī (d. 1390), according to whom a *zindīq* ("heretic") "is someone who is inwardly an unbeliever while outwardly professing belief."[5]

Martin van Bruinessen's invaluable chapter offers original insights into antinomianism in modern times, by analysing perhaps one of the most antinomian community in the Iranian world, the Ahl-i Ḥaqq of Gūrān, and also examining the scholarly works of two of his friends, who are famous scholars of Persian Studies: Peter Lamborn Wilson, aka Hakim Bey (d. 2022), and Vladimir A. Ivanow (d. 1970). While Wilson is known for his interest in Sufism and Sufi poetry, which he also translated, Ivanow is commonly known for his studies on Ismāʿīlism and the Ahl-i Ḥaqq in Kurdistan.[6] Van Bruinessen offers a novel analysis of the "place of Satan and the Peacock Angel in the cosmology and anthropology of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and the Yezidis." He elaborates on the intricate system of these communities such as "the place in their pantheon of seven angelic beings (*haft tan*) who appear in human incarnations in each cycle of history, and the social and ritual role of holy lineages (*khānadān*) in Ahl-i Ḥaqq communities." Van Bruinessen demonstrates how Zoroastrian ideas have survived "beneath a thin Islamic veneer," among the Kurds in Gūrān, arguing that "there is a much more pervasive influence of early Islam in Ahl-i Ḥaqq religion (as well as Yezidism and Alevism) … ."

Aside from the communities adhering to Ahl-i Ḥaqq, Yezidism, Ismāʿīlism and various mystical nonconformist groups such as the qalandaris, there are also Islamic mystic philosophers who raised issues which were considered by Islamic orthodoxy to be problematic and even blasphemous. Cornelis van Lit devotes his attention to the reception of the twelfth century Persian philosopher Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) during the Safavid era (1501–1722). Suhrawardī was popular among various intellectuals ranging from philosophers to theologians, and mystics, who applied his philosophy in their writings and wrote commentaries on his writings. In this chapter, Van Lit discusses the opinions of various scholars, sometimes opposed to one another, to show Suhrawardī's importance in the Persian intellectual tradition. Van Lit concentrates on one unpublished commentary, an eighteenth-century Persian treatise that defends Suhrawardī against accusations of defending "the doctrine of metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) instead of affirming bodily resurrection (*maʿād-i jismānī*)." Such ideas were discussed from an early period: the fact that such discussions were also conducted with reference to Suhrawardī shows the centrality of the theme for philosophers and theologians.

Certain terms used in this book may be familiar to scholars in the field, while others may require clarification due to their complexity. One such term is "Persianate," which was introduced by Marshall Hodgson in his book *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. Scholars in Middle Eastern Studies and related disciplines have employed this term in various contexts. It generally refers to the geographic area in which Persian language and culture exerted a significant influence. This influence could manifest itself through the use of Persian as an administrative, religious, or literary language, or as a model

for other languages. The term encompasses regions spanning from the Balkans to present-day Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Shahab Ahmed introduced the term "Balkans-to-Bengal complex," in which he emphasises the enduring impact of Persian poets such as Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī across this vast geographic area.[7]

Notes

1   Christopher Melchert, *Before Sufism: Early Islamic Renunciant Piety*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, p. 10.

2   Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 32–33.

3   This chapter was previously published in *Iran-Namag*, Volume 5, Number 3, 2020, pp. 68–93. I am grateful to the editor of the journal Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi for granting permission to republish this research here. The reason for its republication is that it perfectly fits with several other chapters on Khayyām, complementing them in terms of literary background, critical religious treatment, and Khayyām's reception history in modern times.

4   Muḥammad-Amīn Rīyāḥī in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Dāya, Najm-al-Dīn Abū Bakr ʿAbd-Allāh. www.iranicaonline.org/articles/daya-najm-al-din. For an overview of these mediaeval critics on Khayyām, see Aminrazavi, *Wine of Wisdom*, pp. 40–66.

5   Quoted in Kemālpaşazāde, *al-Risāla fī mā yataʿallaqu bi-lafẓ al-zindīq*, trans. A.Y. Ocak in *Osmanlı Toplumunda zındıklar ve mülhidler*, Istanbul Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınlar (1998), 350–351.

6   For secondary literature on these authors see the bibliography of Martin van Bruinessen in this volume. Among the well-known publications of these authors, we can refer to Nasrollah Pourjavady, and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Kings of Love: The History & Poetry of the Niʾmatullahi Sufi Order of Iran*, Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978; and W. Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan*. Leiden: Brill for the Ismaili Society, 1953.

7   Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?* Also see N. Green, (ed.), *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, California: University Of California Press, 2019; B.G. Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalitat, Identitat und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999; and Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Evolution of the Persianate Polity and Its Transmission to India," *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 2 (2009), pp. 115–36.