

## Reviews

*Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*. By ALEXANDER KNYSH. Princeton: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017. Pp. xiv + 389, illus. \$29.95 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

*Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* is a welcome addition to a collection of relatively recent overviews of Sufism. Most notable in that grouping are Nile Green's *Sufism: A Global History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) and Ahmet T. Karamustafa's *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2007). Sharing the same title, all three books approach the study of Sufism chiefly from a historical perspective. While Green's wide-ranging survey focuses on power dynamics, Karamustafa's pointed study of Sufism's origins and earliest period takes special interest in textual genealogies, Alexander (Sasha) Knysh's book approaches Sufism and the study of Sufism in an interdisciplinary manner, one that draws from religious studies but returns to historical questions most often. His central argument is that constructions of "Sufism," as an imagined group identity, serve both insiders and outsiders. The book is a masterful display of Knysh's extensive study of Sufi history and sources. It will be of immediate use to instructors within Islamic and religious studies, as well as to specialists in need of a summary of the state of Sufi studies and its major points of contention.

Knysh's presentation of the history of Sufism is, at the same time, an extended consideration of "Sufism" as a mode of classification. Throughout the book Knysh employs Hayden White's conception of history as an imagined, constructed variety of knowledge, acknowledging White's influence in the very epigraph that begins his book. A conspicuous strength of the book, which appears as early as chapter one, lies in Knysh's framing of Islam's early history as a matter of study, focusing more on the variety of prevailing theories than on any substantiated version of them. Indeed, chapter one provides a lucid review of historical theories about the development of Sufism. The book's second chapter, on defining "Sufism," takes up a relationship that often does not receive sufficient attention in discussions of Sufism, namely, the relationship between Sunni and Shi'i responses to Sufism. It continues to an assessment of the academy's privileging of "gnoseological" and "metaphysical" dimensions of Sufism over "the quotidian, ritualistic, and routine," which I will address below. Chapter three offers a detailed study of Sufism's most salient hermeneutical traditions, its contributions to quranic commentary, and the contributions of thinkers such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, and their interpreters. Knysh's distinct ability to link past and present, to shift from canonical texts of theoretical Sufism to a living interpretive tradition, shines here. Chapter four traces Neoplatonic and Hellenistic philosophical strains in Islamic thought, focusing on Sufi and Shi'i receptions of theories of emanation, psychology, allegory, and love that circulated in the Mediterranean and Western Asia before Islam. In chapter five, Knysh addresses Sufi practices, from the relationship between esoteric readings of the Sharia to the shaykh–*murīd* relationship and the formation of orders. Here he addresses the predominance of the Weberian thesis in the study of Islamic and Sufi history, especially the shift from charisma and authentically transformative modes of teaching and practice to formalized institutions. The fact that premodern Sufis noted a similar spiritual decline leads to a consideration of the extent to which conceptions of premodern religious history in Islam predated Western scholarship. Chapter six addresses Sufism as a cohesive and prevalent element in Muslim societies, whether in the *baraka*-based political sway of shaykhs, or in communal and institutional ways. Knysh then turns his attention to contemporary anti-Sufi sentiments, especially within Salafism, as well as ways in which geopolitical factors might influence Sufi versus Salafi loyalties, taking as a case study shifts and tensions in Daghestan, Chechnya, and Yemen.

In its attention to imagined iterations of Sufism (imagined by both insiders and outsiders), Knysh's book is designed to stimulate a reappraisal of the field of Sufi studies, and, in that sense, seems to antic-

ipate debate. One point of discussion will certainly concern Knysh's seeming leveling—early on in the book—of insider and outsider constructions of Sufism. By this I mean, more specifically, Knysh's description of early orientalist studies of Sufism as flawed and yet also a momentarily necessary act of cultural translation, offered in response to more squarely critical accounts, specifically that of Carl Ernst and Rob Rozehnal. The idea that orientalist (European and Russian) scholarship has bias much in the same way that Muslims writing about Sufism have had bias succeeds in de-essentializing any reified conception of "Sufism." Nevertheless, Knysh's discussion would benefit from greater consideration of power dynamics that do indeed render these biases unequal in terms of obfuscating categories of Muslim piety and learning. The issue that Ernst, Rozehnal, and others take with orientalist scholarship of Sufism is not with specific facts or groups of facts, nor is it to deny the validity of these earliest European-language introductions to the subject. Rather, it is the creation of oppressive paradigms and categories that must now be painstakingly undone. As Gregory Lipton's "Secular Sufism: Neoliberalism, Ethnoracism, and the Reformation of the Muslim Other" (*The Muslim World* 101 [2011]: 427–40) has shown, the contemporary image of a peaceful, Protestant-like Sufi in opposition to a dangerous, Sharia-abiding Muslim, even in popular media, derives from paradigms embraced by earlier orientalist scholars—even those who were, as Knysh rightly notes, "under no immediate pressure to produce actionable or ideologically driven analyses" (p. 6). Indeed, Knysh seems to come to this conclusion himself in chapter five, with an enlightening discussion of the ways in which premodern Muslim historians (such as al-Qushayrī, Ibn 'Abbād, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-Shāṭibī) might themselves be considered "scholars of religion," and to assume the impossibility of thinking about religion—in their own terms—before the tools and terms of Western religious studies arose is the "worst kind of Orientalism" (pp. 166–67). It is not until here that the reader has a clear sense that Knysh advocates a perspective that he describes using Charles Taylor's phrasing, namely, that social scientists "cannot by-pass the agents' self-understanding" (p. 166). One might say, then, that it is a matter of emphasis: In seeming to place insider and outsider imaginations of Sufism on one conceptual plane earlier in his book, especially in the book's introduction and chapter two, Knysh risks the dismissal of a designation that was self-imposed and gained currency because it described what was perceived to be not just a tradition, but also a science. Knysh rejects the term "tradition" because it allows for a false sense of continuity, a constructed narrative. As a self-designated narrative, however, it seems to allow for meaning in the way that all self-imposed narratives allow for humans to have meaningful lives.

After "tradition," Knysh seems to recognize the second demarcation—the *science* of Sufism—in his discussion of exegesis, metaphysics, and gnoseology in chapter three. From a historical perspective, that science—often embraced as an intellectual and even textual activity, whether or not it was paired with an active and practical Sufi affiliation—had a tremendous effect on the course of Islamic thought. Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam?* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2016) outlines the prevalence of the postclassical development of "high" Sufism, its adoption of philosophical language, and its centrality to meaning-making in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, and, one might add, well beyond that region. For that reason, again, Knysh's presentation of the construction of Sufism, from within and without, would benefit from greater consideration of the difference between being within and without, which is, in part, the difference between meaning-making and orientalist imposition. Knysh's criticism of textual and philosophical emphases in contemporary Western studies of Sufism, by Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and William Chittick, encounters a similar issue. Knysh highlights Chittick's description of Ibn al-ʿArabī as "the greatest of all Muslim philosophers" as indicative of the endeavor to unearth a "sophisticated," philosophical Sufism (p. 39). Yet the relationship between *falsafa* and Sufism was more entangled than chapter two suggests, for, as Knysh himself later acknowledges, Ibn al-ʿArabī's own top pupil and stepson Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī played arguably a greater role than anyone else in accentuating his master's philosophical interests. To invite readers to appreciate Ibn al-ʿArabī as a "philosopher" in the Western sense of the word, that is, as advocating "original philosophical thinking," not as a peripatetic *ḥaylasūf*, seems to me to be more an act of translation than one of appropriation (p. 52). It need not be divorced from "quotidian, disciplinary regimens and routine devotional practices," which, in fact, are referenced throughout Chittick's writings on Ibn al-ʿArabī, to the extent that Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses them (*ibid.*). Moreover, as is most evident in the case of Shihāb

al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and addressed by Mohammad Azadpur (*Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy* [Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2011]), the Islamic philosophical traditions—like their Greek, Syrian, and Alexandrian antecedents—had their own share of quotidian, spiritual practices, often ignored by contemporary scholars. This makes it more difficult to draw a discerning line between “rational” philosophy and “ritual” Sufism.

None of this is to detract from the importance of Knysh’s larger objective, which is to describe the state of the study of Sufism as paying insufficient attention to the occult sciences and performative practices. The lacunae he notices cannot be denied. Moreover, he is certainly right that, just as Sufism was imagined to suit the needs of its premodern Muslim advocates, it became reimagined by Western scholars who required neat boundaries to have an object of study. His presentation of Sufism has echoes of Russell T. McCutcheon’s observation that, while scholars of religion might describe an insider/outsider dichotomy, in fact, “the world is full of insiders, all proclaiming their territorial rights over truth and justice,” for “all we seem to have are competing insiders” (“The Ideology of Closure and the Problem with the Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion,” *Studies in Religion* 32.3 [2003]: 337–52, at 340). It is likely that this challenge to the ways in which we identify Sufism will render *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* grounds for discussion and scholarly self-reflection in Islamic studies.

CYRUS ALI ZARGAR  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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*The Qurʾān and the Bible: Text and Commentary.* By GABRIEL SAID REYNOLDS. New Haven: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018. Pp. xviii + 1008. \$40.

This is not your parents’ Quran. Previous English translations of the Islamic sacred text have usually been arranged in a standard fashion—the text of the Quran is presented in an unbroken format on most of the page, with brief notes at the bottom of some pages that provide explanations of potentially confusing words or phrases and cross references to other passages. A recent exception to this arrangement is *The Study Quran* (HarperOne, 2015), translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and his colleagues, which contains extensive notes summarizing Muslim scholarship that sometimes take up more of the page than the text of the Quran. The notes allow the reader to eavesdrop on some fascinating debates among scholars about what the Quran is and what it means.

*The Qurʾān and the Bible* extends that approach by bringing new voices to the conversation that open up equally fascinating debates about the nature of the Quran. Gabriel Said Reynolds’s name is on the book’s spine, and deservedly so because he is the one who tracked down those voices and introduced them to their quranic conversation partners. But the person responsible for this conversation’s setting is not Reynolds but Ali Quli Qarai, an Indian-born writer whose translation of the Quran is used throughout. His translation is presented in a somewhat different format here because Reynolds frequently puts the Quran on pause so he can let one of its conversation partners have its say before yielding the floor back. And what a wide and varied group of interlocutors they are. Other reviewers have noted that the book’s title does not capture the scope of Reynolds’ project because, while the great majority of the comments and references relate to the Bible, a significant number cite nonbiblical Jewish and Christian writings as well as other ancient sources. This review will focus almost exclusively on Reynolds’s use of the biblical material, which is noteworthy for its breadth and depth. There are more than seven hundred citations of passages from thirty-two Old Testament books (including Tobit and Wisdom of Solomon, which are among the apocryphal works in some Bibles), and over 450 references from twenty-two New Testament writings. The most frequently cited biblical books are Exodus (142 times) and Genesis (131) in the Old Testament and Matthew (132) and Luke (89) in the New Testament. This makes for one crowded conversation, and as in any group of that size some voices are worth listening to more than others.